

What is the significance of Beersheba in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Beersheba-in-the-Bible.html>

Beersheba was a city in ancient Israel in the southern part of the land. To the south of Beersheba was the Negev Desert, so Beersheba marked the southernmost boundary of cultivated land in Israel. The proverbial phrase from Dan to Beersheba is used nine times in the Old Testament to describe whole of the Promised Land—Dan being in the north, and Beersheba in the south (Judges 20:1; 1 Samuel 3:20; 2 Samuel 3:10; 17:11; 24:2, 15; 1 Kings 4:25; 1 Chronicles 21:2; 2 Chronicles 30:5). The distance from Dan to Beersheba was approximately 270 miles.

Beersheba is mentioned in Genesis 21:31 as the place where Abraham made a treaty with Abimelech, king of the Philistines in Gerar. Abraham had moved his family to the “region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a time he stayed at Gerar” (Genesis 20:1). Abimelech saw that Abraham’s wife, Sarah, was beautiful and took her into his harem, not knowing that she was married to Abraham. Because of this, God put a curse on Abimelech’s household and warned him in a dream that Sarah was married (verses 3, 17-18). Abimelech quickly returned Sarah to her husband along with bountiful peace offerings (verses 14-15).

Abimelech and Abraham eventually formed an alliance wherein Abimelech said to Abraham, “God is with you in everything you do. Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you now reside as a foreigner the same kindness I have shown to you” (Genesis 21:22-23). Abraham agreed.

A short time later, Abraham complained to Abimelech that the king's servants had taken over a well in Beersheba that belonged to Abraham's people. So Abimelech gave the well back to Abraham, who gave the king seven ewe lambs as a seal of their covenant. This happened at Beersheba, and it was the treaty that gave the place its name: Beersheba means "the well of the seven" or "the well of the treaty." At that time, "Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called on the name of the Lord, the Eternal God. And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time" (Genesis 21:33-34).

Beersheba also figures into the story of Abraham's son, Isaac. Following in his father's footsteps, Isaac moved into the land of the Philistines when there was a famine in Canaan (Genesis 26). When he began to settle there, he found that all the wells his father's servants had dug had been filled up with dirt by the Philistines. He reopened those wells and dug some new ones (verses 18-22). After that, Isaac went to Beersheba. There the Lord appeared to him as He had done to his father Abraham and made him the same promise of a multitude of descendants (verses 23-24). As Abraham had done, Isaac built an altar and called upon the name of the Lord. In a repeat performance, Abimelech arrived and asked for another treaty with Isaac, identical to the one made with Abraham. Isaac agreed. He prepared a feast for the king, and the two swore an oath of peace to each other (verses 30-31). On the same day, Isaac's servants discovered water in a new well they were digging (verse 32), and Isaac called the place Shibah, which means "oath" or "seven" (verse 33). In this way, Isaac perpetuated the name his father had given the place, and Beersheba became the name of the town that would later be built near the wells that Abraham and Isaac had named.

Years later, in the division of the Promised Land, the area around Beersheba was part of

the inheritance of the tribes of Simeon and Judah (Joshua 15:20-28; 19:1-2). Beersheba was a place where several people came into contact with God. Isaac (Genesis 26:24) and Jacob (Genesis 46:2) both heard from God in dreams they had at Beersheba. Hagar (Genesis 21:17) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:5) were in the wilderness of Beersheba when God spoke to them.

Beersheba was also the place where Samuel's two wicked sons served as leaders (1 Samuel 8:1-3). It was this perversion of the judgeship that led Israel to demand a king (1 Samuel 8:6-9). By the time of the prophet Amos, in the reign of King Uzziah, Beersheba seems to have become a center of false worship, and the prophet warns those who would truly worship the Lord, "Do not journey to Beersheba" (Amos 5:5). Today, the spot where Beersheba once stood is marked by ancient ruins; several ancient wells have been discovered in the area, and they still produce water.

Beersheba can be seen as symbolizing those events in our lives that cause us to call upon the name of the Lord. Tragedy strikes, heartaches happen, and the Lord shows Himself strong on our behalf (2 Chronicles 16:9). The date or place where we experienced a turning point becomes a memorial in our hearts, much as Beersheba's altar, well, and tamarisk tree were to Abraham and Isaac. When God reveals His will to us or rescues us in some way, we can create a personal "Beersheba" in our hearts. Then, when times of doubt or conflict come, we can return there over and over in our hearts for assurance that God is fulfilling His plan.