

# What is the significance of the city of Petra in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Petra.html>

The city of Petra is not mentioned in the Bible by that name; rather, it is called by its Hebrew name, Sela in Isaiah 16:1 and 2 Kings 14:7. Both Petra and Sela mean “rock,” an appropriate name, since much of the city is carved into sandstone cliffs. Petra is located about fifty miles south of the Dead Sea and 170 miles southwest of modern Amman, Jordan.

Petra’s main access is via a narrow crevice called the Siq, which winds for about a mile through mountainous terrain. The Siq provided an excellent natural defense for Petra’s inhabitants. Many moviegoers are familiar with the Siq and the treasury building of Petra, which were featured in the 1989 film Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade.

Petra was in the land of the Edomites, who were descendants of Esau. Israel and Edom were constantly at odds, starting with Edom’s refusal to allow Moses and the Israelites passage through their land on their way to Canaan (Numbers 20:18-21). During the kingdom years, King Saul and King David both fought the Edomites (1 Samuel 14:47; 2 Samuel 8:13-14). During the reign of King Jehoshaphat, Edom invaded Judah and was repelled (2 Chronicles 20). Later, King Amaziah fought against Edom, and he took control of Petra, renaming it “Joktheel” (2 Kings 14:7).

When King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC, the Edomites gave aid and comfort to the enemy (Psalm 137:7). For this, they were strongly condemned by the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Obadiah (Isaiah 34:5-8; Jeremiah 49:16-18).

For centuries, Petra seemed secure in its unassailable fortress of rock, but today its ruins lie uninhabited, in fulfillment of the prophetic word: “‘As Sodom and Gomorrah were overthrown, along with their neighboring towns,’ says the LORD, ‘so no one will live there; no people will dwell in it’” (Jeremiah 49:18).