

What is the significance of Shittim in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Shittim-in-the-Bible.htm>

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Shittim is a large area in the plains of Moab directly across from Jericho, immediately east of the Jordan and north of the Dead Sea. Shittim is significant in Israel's history because it is the site of the last encampment of the nation at the end of the wilderness wanderings just before crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land.

Israel remained at Shittim for a long time before traversing into Canaan. While at Shittim, the episode involving Balaam and his donkey occurred. King Balak of Moab hired Balaam, a pagan seer, to curse the people of God and prevent them from entering Canaan. Instead, Balaam ended up blessing the nation of Israel (Numbers 22 – 24).

In Shittim, the Israelites were enticed into idolatrous Baal worship and immoral sexual relations with Moabite and Midianite women. Angered by their unfaithfulness, the Lord sent a plague on the men of Israel, killing twenty-four thousand of them (Numbers 25).

At Shittim, in preparation for entering Canaan, a tribe-by-tribe census was taken of all the men ready for battle (Numbers 26). It was here that the Israelites defeated the Midianites from their headquarters at Shittim (Numbers 31). In Shittim, Moses delivered his farewell speech and final blessing to the people (Deuteronomy 31 – 33). At Shittim, Joshua was declared Moses' successor (Deuteronomy 31:14-29; 34:9). Joshua sent two men secretly from Shittim as spies to scout out Jericho (Joshua 2:1).

The miraculous journey crossing through the Jordan River with the ark of the covenant began in Shittim (Joshua 3:1) and ended in Gilgal (4:19). The event was remembered in

the book of Micah: “My people, remember . . . your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD” (Micah 6:5).

Shittim is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for “acacia trees.” The location was likely named for its great number of acacias. An alternate name for this area is Abel-Shittim, which means “meadow [or stream] of the acacias.” The shortened version is used more frequently in the Bible.

The “Valley of Shittim” or “Valley of Acacias” mentioned in a prophetic vision in the book of Joel is a region that receives water from a spring in the temple: “And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim” (Joel 3:18, ESV).

The exact location of the Valley of Shittim is unknown. Most scholars place it in a different location than the encampment site east of the Jordan. Since the water in Joel’s prophecy flows from the temple in Jerusalem, this valley would seem to be west of the Jordan. The Wadi en-Nar at the lower end of the Kidron Valley is a possibility. That portion of the valley runs through a dry wilderness to the Dead Sea, where acacias trees grow in abundance.

Many scholars consider the reference to the Valley of Shittim in Joel to be symbolic and not an actual geographical location. Joel was figuratively announcing that the water of life, the gospel of grace, would bring newness of life to a desolate and dying world. In this Messianic picture, Christ Himself is the fountain who “shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim.” The flowing streams of living water

will reach far and wide, flowing to the Gentiles and to the most remote regions of the world. God's grace is an overflowing fountain that will never run dry.