

What is the importance of Mizpah in the Bible?

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

Mizpah is the name of a couple of cities mentioned in the Bible. The name Mizpah means “watchtower” or “lookout” and is first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 31:45-49. The Mizpah in this passage was located in Gilead, a mountainous region east of the Jordan River. Jacob had fled from his scheming father-in-law, Laban, and was heading back to his father’s homeland (Genesis 31:3, 21). Jacob and his wives and children had traveled for seven days when Laban caught up with them. Jacob did not know that his wife Rachel had stolen her father’s household gods, and Laban confronted them about it. He was angry that Jacob had left secretly, taking Laban’s daughters and grandchildren without saying goodbye. The two men had words, and Laban resigned himself to the fact that they were leaving.

The two men heaped up a pile of rocks to mark the place where they made a covenant and agreed to part on amicable terms. Laban named the place Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. However, Laban’s parting words gave the place its more famous name, Mizpah, when he said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today. . . . May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other” (Genesis 31:48-49). The Jews kept the name Mizpah (“Watchtower”) due to Jacob’s importance in Jewish history.

The Mizpah where Jacob and Laban parted ways is also called Ramath Mizpeh in Joshua 13:26. Another notable event in this Mizpah concerns a man named Jephthah who was persuaded by his countrymen to lead a war against the Ammonites. Jephthah made an agreement with the Gileadites “before the Lord in Mizpah” (Judges 11:11). The wording indicates that the tabernacle and/or the ark of the covenant was at that time located in

Mizpah.

As Jephthah advanced upon his enemies, he made another vow to the Lord: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering" (Judges 11:30-31). It is important to note that the Lord asked no such thing of Jephthah, but his words may have been prompted by fear or an attempt to bargain with God. The outcome of Jephthah's rash vow should be a warning to us about making ill-considered vows to the Lord.

The Lord did give Jephthah the victory, but, when he returned to his home in Mizpah, the first to come out the door of his house was his only child, a daughter who was dancing and rejoicing over her father's triumph (Judges 11:34-35). So Mizpah was the scene of a tragic story that for years was commemorated by young Israelite women in honor of Jephthah's daughter (verse 40).

Another Mizpah of note in the Bible was located in the land of Benjamin, near Jerusalem. When the Israelites gathered to deal with the atrocity concerning the Levite's concubine, they gathered in Mizpah of Benjamin (Judges 20:1; 21:1). Mizpah was used by the prophet Samuel as a home base (1 Samuel 7:5-6), and Mizpah was the scene of a great victory over the Philistines (verse 11). It was near Mizpah that Samuel erected the Ebenezer stone to remind the people of God's help (verse 12). Saul, a Benjamite, was chosen as Israel's first king in Mizpah (1 Samuel 10:17-25). Later, King Asa fortified Mizpah against enemy attack (1 Kings 15:22).