

What is the importance of Shechem in the Bible?

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

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Shechem was an ancient biblical city in Israel. Today, the area of Shechem is known as Tell Balata, an archaeological site near Nablus in the West Bank. The town was located between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim in central Israel, just southeast of Samaria. The name Shechem means “shoulder” in Hebrew, which is appropriate considering its location as a pass between two mountains.

Shechem was a place of promise. First mentioned in Genesis 12:6-7, Shechem was the location where Abram stopped at the tree of Moreh and received God’s promise of the land. Shechem became part of the Promised Land of Israel, was given to the Kohathites, and served as a Levitical city of refuge (Joshua 21:20-21). Shechem was the place where Joseph’s remains were buried (Joshua 24:32). During the time of the divided kingdom of Israel, Shechem was the capital of the northern kingdom for a while (1 Kings 12:1).

Shechem was a place of commitment. In the area of Shechem, the Israelites were reminded of God’s covenantal relationship to them, which He had first made to Abraham. Before they entered Canaan, the Israelites had been instructed to pronounce the blessings and the curses of the law on Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, respectively (Deuteronomy 11:26-30). They did this under Joshua’s leadership after the battle of Ai (Joshua 8:33). Later, a renewal of the covenant also occurred at Shechem, when Joshua gathered the Israelites to challenge them to follow the Lord (Joshua 24:1, 14-15).

Shechem was a place of worship. When the Lord appeared to him at Shechem, Abram built an altar to God at the site (Genesis 12:7). Abram’s grandson, Jacob, also built an altar at

Shechem, calling it “El Elohe Israel,” or “mighty God of Israel” (Genesis 33:18-20). Even in the time of Joshua, the altar at Shechem was a holy site of the Lord (Joshua 24:26).

Shechem was a place of man’s sin. A Hivite chieftain named Hamor was the father of a man named Shechem, who lived in the city that bore his name. Shechem raped Jacob’s daughter, Dinah, and two of Jacob’s sons avenged their sister by slaughtering all the men in the city, including Shechem and Hamor (Genesis 34:1-29).

In the time of the judges, the Shechemites sided with Abimelek, a son of one of Gideon’s concubines (Judges 9:1-6). Abimelek positioned himself as king among the Shechemites, killing all but one of Gideon’s other sons. Jotham, the surviving son, pronounced a curse on Abimelek and the Shechemites, and after three years the city of Shechem turned against the would-be king (Judges 9:16-20). In response to Shechem’s rejection, Abimelek attacked the city and killed a thousand men and women (Judges 9:48-49; 57).

Shechem is only mentioned in the New Testament in Stephen’s sermon (Acts 7:16). Some scholars identify Sychar in Samaria as the ancient city of Shechem (John 4:5-6), but most believe that Sychar was a distinct place.

Shechem is important in the Bible because the city displayed man’s sinfulness and failure to properly honor God, while at the same time revealing God’s faithfulness.