

Lesson 4: Shechem a City for All Times



SHECHEM

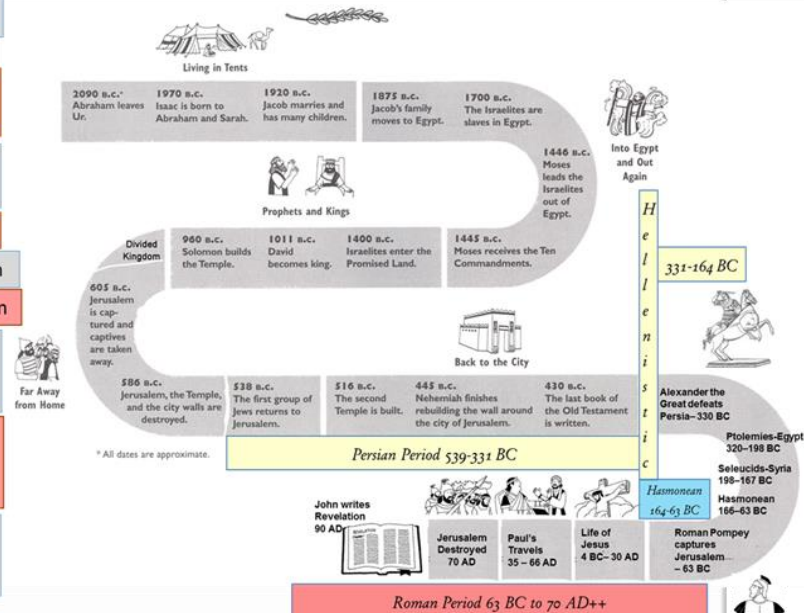
a City for All Times
WHEN IN TIME

PROFILE-EASTON ILLUSTRATED DICTIONARY

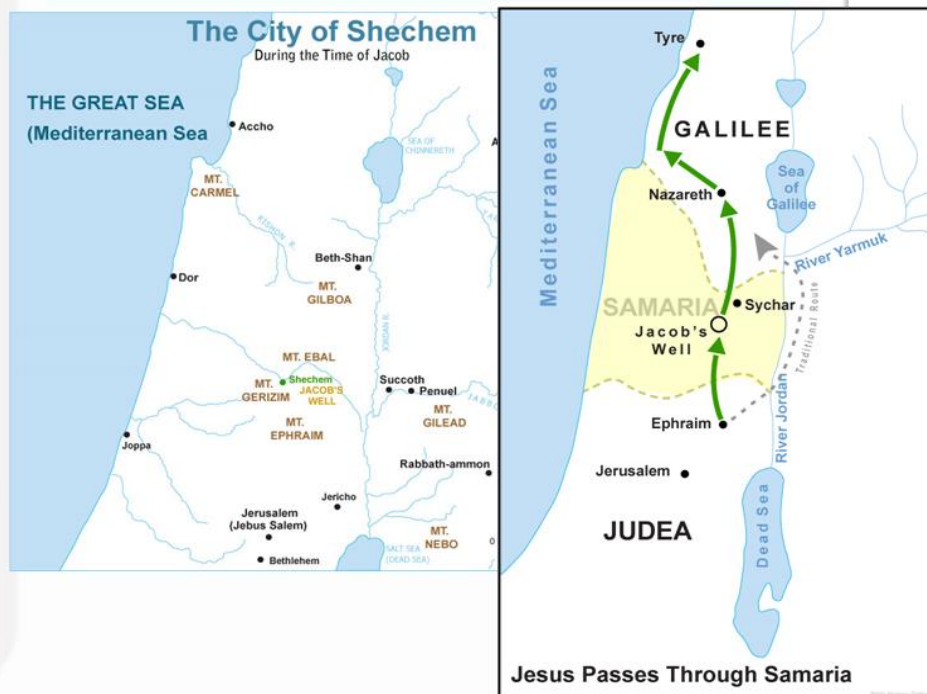
A city in Samaria (Gen. 33:18), called also Sichern (12:6), Sychem (Acts 7:16). It stood in the narrow-sheltered valley between Ebal on the north and Gerizim on the south, with their base being only some 500 yards apart. Here Abraham pitched his tent and built his first altar in the Promised Land and received the first divine promise (Gen. 12:6, 7). Here also Jacob "bought a parcel of a field at the hands of the children of Hamor" after his return from Mesopotamia, and settled with his household, which he purged from idolatry by burying the teraphim of his followers under an oak tree, which was afterwards called "the oak of the sorcerer" (Gen. 33:19; 35:4; Judg. 9:37). and dug a well, which bears his name to this day (John 4:5, 39-42). To Shechem Joshua gathered all Israel "before God," and delivered to them his second parting address (Josh. 24:1-15). He "made a covenant with the people that day" at the very place where, on first entering the land, they had responded to the law from Ebal and Gerizim (Josh. 24:25), the terms of which were recorded "in the book of the law of God", i.e., in the roll of the law of Moses; and in memory of this solemn transaction a great stone was set up "under an oak" (comp. Gen. 28:18; 31:44-48; Ex. 24:4; Josh. 4:3, 8, 9), possibly the old "oak of Moreh," as a silent witness of the transaction to all coming time. Shechem became one of the cities of refuge, the central city of refuge for Western Palestine (Josh. 20:7), and here the bones of Joseph were buried (24:32). Rehoboam was appointed king in Shechem (1 Kings 12:1, 19), but Jeroboam afterwards took up his residence here. Sychar mentioned with conversation of Jesus with the woman of Samaria (John 4:5) is nearby Shechem.

Mark Location on Timeline discussed in the lesson

Creation & Fall & Flood
The Patriarchs
Exodus & Conquest
Judges
United Kingdom
Divided Kingdom
Exile & Return
Between the Testaments
New Testament



WHERE



ABRAHAM & Jacob at Shechem: Genesis 12:1-9, 33:18-35:4

Shechem was a stopping point for Abraham when he came into Canaan from Haran as also for Jacob when he returned to the land after working for Laban in Haran. From the bible passage what archaeology remains might give us further insight into the passage?

Mark what you expected to be added to Bible by archaeology?

Archaeology can add to Bible Event:	
Build confidence in general trustworthiness, historical nature and reliability of Bible	
Confirm events described in Bible	
Clarify/Correct/Provide Understanding about our assumptions and conclusions about the past	
Complement or Enhance our knowledge of events, customs and people	
Prove a given event or people mentioned in the Bible	

Joshua at Shechem: Joshua 8:30-35, 24:1-32

Joshua gathered the tribes of Israel when entering land to renew the law and addressed his final words of counsel and exhortation. It was established as one of the cities of refuge. From the bible passage what archaeology remains might give us further insight into the passage?

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Abimelech and the Men of Shechem: Judges 9:1-6, 22-57

Abimelech, a son of Gideon the Judge declares himself a king with the help of the men of Shechem, but both meet a bad end. From the bible passage what archaeology remains might give us further insight into the passage?

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Rehoboam & Jeroboam: 1 Kings 12:1-17,25

Rehoboam, a son of Solomon goes to Shechem to be made king, but the advice of the young men and the will of the Lord sees the Kingdom divided into two. From the bible passage what archaeology remains might give us further insight into the passage?

Jesus & the Woman at the Well: John 4:1-26, 39-42

Jesus speaks to a woman at Jacob's well from a city called Sychar which was near Shechem. Part of the discussion includes the fact that the Samaritans worshiped on Mt Gerizim. From the bible passage what archaeology remains might give us further insight into the passage?

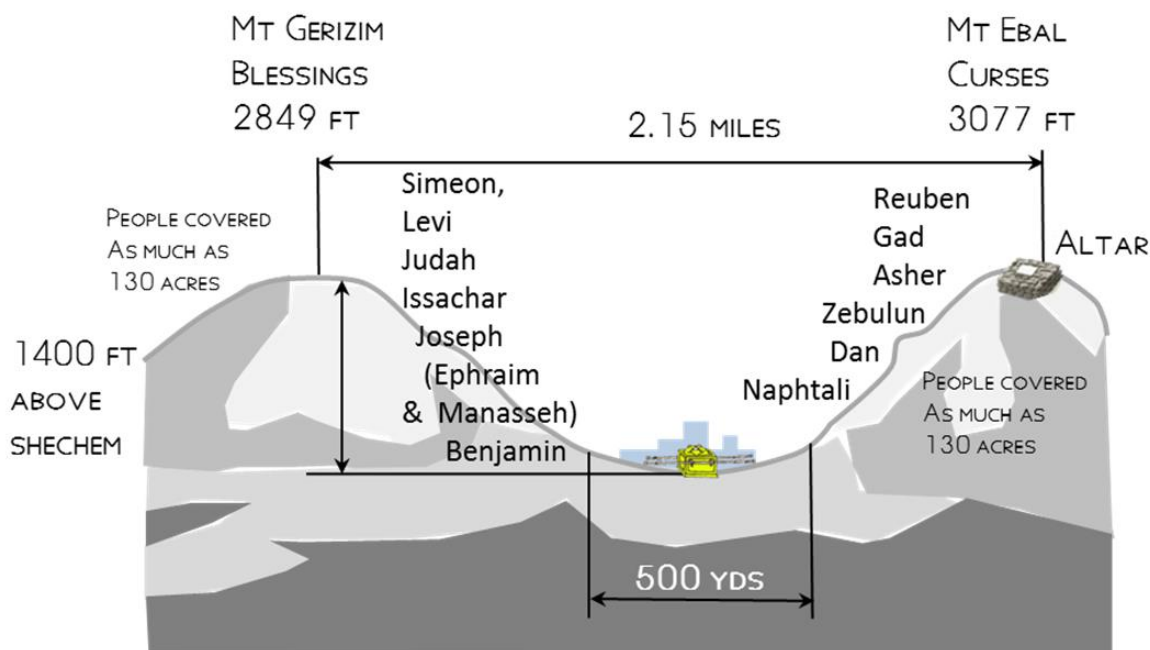


Digging Deeper into Bible and Archaeology – The following material is provided as reference material or as a deeper discussion and is optional for preparation for the class.

Most of the following material comes from articles found at ASSOCIATES FOR BIBLICAL RESEARCH website and the article “Shechem: Its Archaeological and Contextual Significance” in the Spring 2005 Bible and Spade.

Most Bible studies of events at or near Shechem and commentaries on the Book of John omit Shechem's pivotal role in Bible history. As seen in the lesson preparation material Shechem was a location cutting across several Bible events and worthy as a stopping point on our Archaeological Journey through the Bible. The first mention of Shechem is Genesis 12:6, when Abram first entered Canaan. It is succinctly described: “Abram travelled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of Moreh at Shechem.” At that time, God promised Abram, “To your offspring I will give this land” (Gn 12:7). Note that Abram camped in Canaan about 2090 BC and there is no mention of a city. Based on Archaeological results the city was abandoned at this time. The next mention of Shechem is 11 chapters, and about 200 years, later, when the Bible records that Jacob, Abram's grandson, “camped within sight of the city” (Gn 33:18) in 1890 BC the physical records indicate the city was occupied.

The mountains of Ebal and Gerizim overlook the valley of Shechem. The mountains form a natural amphitheater in which the recitation of the Law could easily be heard. Despite the mountains' heights (Ebal is 3,083 ft [940 m] and Gerizim is 2,890 ft [881 m]), there are many contemporary accounts of people speaking from the slopes of the mountains and being heard in the valley below. Even with the noise of the busy modern city of Nablus. David Hansen have been in the park at the top of Gerizim and clearly heard the voices of children playing in the Balata refugee camp at Gerizim's base.



Joshua fulfilled Moses' instructions and led the people directly to Gerizim and Ebal after defeating the stronghold at Ai (Jos 7–8). Assuming an "early Exodus" date (1446 BC), the Israelite entry into Canaan, after 40 years in the wilderness, was approximately 1406 BC, in the Late Bronze (LB) IB period which corresponds with Tell Balata's Level XIV. During the 350 years of the previous MB period, the city had been fortified with earthen embankments and cyclopean wall fortifications. However, Shechem was destroyed around 1540 BC. The ferocity of the destruction resulted in debris covering the city up to a depth of 5.25 ft (1.6 m). It is surmised that the Egyptian armies of Ahmose I or Amenhotep I were the aggressors. About 90 years after that catastrophe the city was rebuilt early in the LB I period, around 1450 BC. Level XIV corresponds to this date and is noted for the reconstruction of the city's defensive walls, homes, and a well built, fortress-type, temple. This Level XIV occupation was the city at which Joshua and the Israelites arrived to fulfill Moses' orders to read the Law before Ebal and Gerizim around 1406 BC.

The discovery of a LB Egyptian library at Amarna has provided additional insights on the LB period. Letters in the library reveal Egypt's relationship with Canaan's rulers in the mid-14th century BC. Some of the letters disclose that the kings of Shechem were independent of Egypt. Further, Shechem's rulers were criticized by other Canaanite rulers for cooperating with an invading group of desert people called the Habiru. The term habiru is a social designation meaning fugitive or refugee, which was in use throughout the ancient Near East for most of the second millennium. While every reference to habiru in the Amarna Letters does not necessarily refer to the Israelites, if the Israelites came into the land at the end of the 15th century, then at least some of the references to habiru in the areas where the Israelites were active must refer to the Israelites. Some scholars believe the Habiru were the Israelites of the early Judges period, but the matter is debated. Stager and Seger places the destruction of the Fortress-Temple around 1100 BC. This would correlate the destruction debris found at Level XI as being from the Iron IA period. Campbell states that there was a "significant" destruction "around 1100 BCE" and guardedly concludes, "connecting Level XI with the story underlying Judges 9 is plausible".

Levels X and IX represent the Jeroboam I period and are noted for carefully built houses of selected stones. The discovery of stone foundations for stairs suggests two-story, four-room houses, typical homes of that period. Campbell concludes that Level IX (920–810 BC) has "tangible evidence of Jeroboam I's rebuilding (1 Kg 12:25) and a return to city status".

The Assyrian invasion of Israel in 724 BC (2 Kgs 17:5–6) brought another destruction to Shechem. The evidence is in Level VII. Toombs noted that in Level VII the city was "reduced to a heap of ruins, completely covered by debris of fallen brickwork, burned beams and tumbled building stones," typical examples of Assyrian thoroughness.

Between the Old and New Testaments, Shechem had a modest recovery and there is an abundance of evidence that excellent buildings were constructed in this, the Hellenistic, period (ca. 330–107 BC). It was during this time that the Samaritans built a large temple and sacrificial platform on Mt. Gerizim, the remains of which were still visible in Jesus' day (Jn 4:20). As fighting between the Ptolemies and Seleucids swirled around the country in the intertestamental period, physical decline again took place at Shechem. This decline culminated when the Jewish leader, John Hyrcanus, took advantage of the temporary absence of outside armies and destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim (ca. 126 BC). He leveled the city in 107 BC. Shechem never recovered from this destruction and lay in ruins.

About 500 yd (460 m) southeast of Tell Balata is an ancient well, venerated to be a well that Jacob, the Patriarch, dug when he lived there. Such a well is not mentioned in the Old Testament. There is a small Arab village, Askar, just north of the well. Most scholars associate Askar with Sychar, the village in John 4 near "Jacob's well" (Jn 4:6).