

# The city of Hebron

## 4. The Judges and beyond

David Green

*The [previous article](#) considered the city of Hebron as the city of the patriarchs and as the city which Caleb inherited. We conclude this short series by looking at Hebron in the rest of Scripture.*

**A**LTHOUGH CALEB inherited Hebron, having captured it from the Anakites, he did not end up in possession of the city. We now go back and consider an important provision in the Law of Moses which explains why this was so.

### City of refuge

The tribe of Levi had no tribal inheritance of its own, but was allocated cities within the inheritances of the other tribes. Together with its surrounding pasture-land, Hebron was given in possession to the descendants of Aaron, who were Kohathites. However, Caleb did inherit the fields and villages in the Hebron area (Josh. 21:10-13). The descendants of Aaron were priests, so it is possible that Hebron, which was in the hill country of Judah (v. 11), was the home town of Zechariah and Elisabeth, the parents of John the Baptist (Lk. 1:39,40).

Hebron was also one of the cities designated as cities of refuge. The Israelites were instructed to appoint cities of refuge, "that the slayer that killeth any person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be your refuge from the avenger of blood" (Josh. 20:2,3). Hebron was one of the three Levitical cities that were appointed for this purpose west of the Jordan. These were "Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the mountain of Judah" (v. 7).

The writer to the Hebrews draws our attention to the typical significance of the cities of refuge when he writes that we "have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (6:18). Christ is the only refuge for sinners from the death-dealing avenger. This being the case, we might expect to see a confirmation of this in the meanings of the names associated with Hebron. These meanings have already been considered in [Part 2](#) of this

study ([Mar. p. 82](#)), but for convenience are set out in the table.

It is suggested that the name of Kirjath-arba points typically to the Holy City, New Jerusalem, that lies foursquare (Rev. 21:16). A believer enters into the *foursquare* city of the future through Christ, in whom he has found refuge, and is then in perfect *union* and *fellowship* (Hebron) with the Father and the Son (Jno. 17:21). He or she can no longer be touched by death, which in turn leads to a perfection of *praise* that is not possible in these days of mortality (Rev. 19:1-6; 21:4,5).

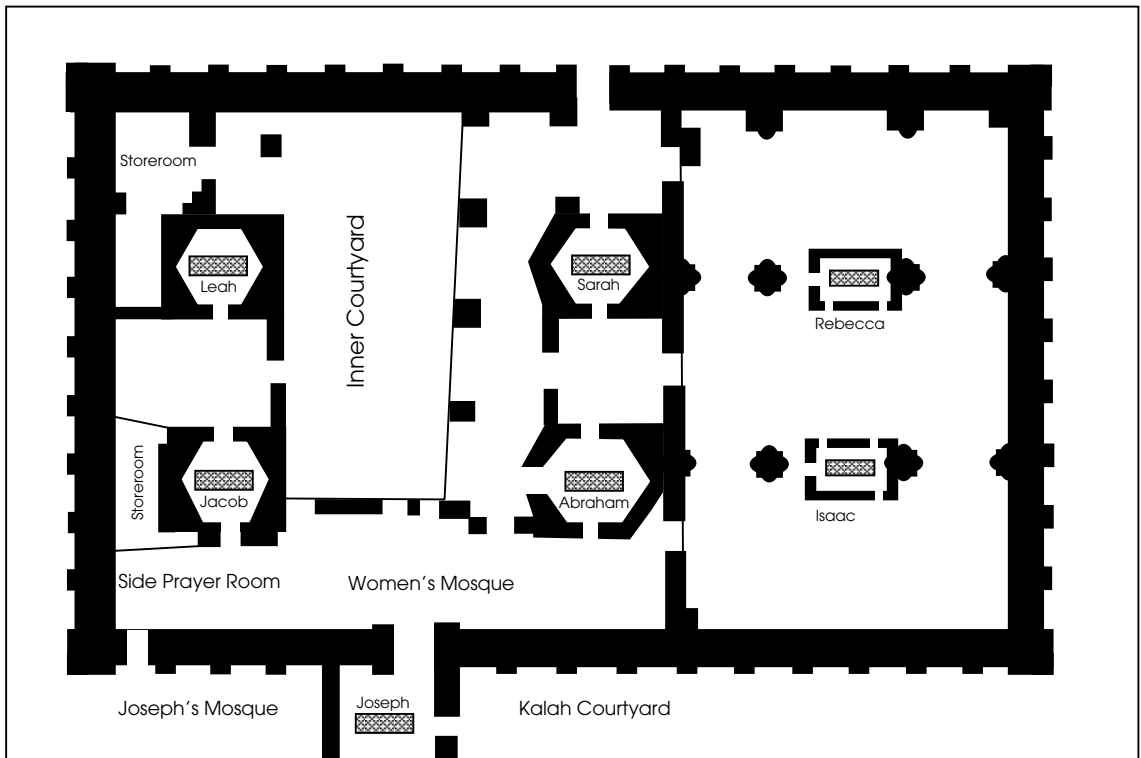
<b>Kirjath-arba</b>	City of four or foursquare city
<b>Hebron</b>	Union or fellowship
<b>Mountain of Judah</b>	Mountain of praise

Hebron and Debir are linked closely in the book of Joshua (15:13-15), so it is interesting to note how the two ideas, already discussed, of fleeing for refuge (Hebron) and entering the inner sanctuary (the meaning of Debir) are linked together in Hebrews 6:18-20.

### The time of the Judges

The only mention of Hebron in the book of Judges, other than those in chapter 1, relates to the days of Samson. When Samson visited Gaza he was recognised, and the Gazites laid wait for him in the night hoping to kill him in the morning. However, Samson surprised them by leaving at midnight: "And Samson lay till midnight, and arose at midnight, and took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron" (16:3).

Hebron was situated about forty miles from Gaza, a travel time of at least two full days. So it seems most likely that Samson took them to the top of the first hill in the direction of Hebron, a distance of about two miles, where he could place them facing the hill country where Hebron and the tomb of Abraham were located. The Hebrew



**Plan of the tombs of the patriarchs in modern Hebron.**

word translated “before” in this passage can carry this meaning; compare the NIV translation, “the top of the hill that faces Hebron”. The highest of the range of hills near Gaza does command a view of the hills around Hebron.

By this deliberate and strenuous action Samson intended much more than just making trouble for his Philistine enemies. It was his expression of faith in the promises of God that Abraham’s seed would possess the gate of his enemies (Gen. 22:17,18), a promise which he fulfilled literally as a type of the Messiah. Would the Philistines be aware of these promises and see that Samson by his actions was pointing out that they would not prevail in their aim to dominate Israel permanently? Surely also the idea of resurrection would be in Samson’s mind, for the absolute fulfilment of the promises depended on the resurrection of Abraham, which could only take place when God raised up a saviour who would prevail against “the gates of hell [the grave]” (Mt. 16:18).

### **The time of the monarchy**

After the death of Saul, David was instructed by God to take up residence at Hebron, and it was

there that he was anointed king over Judah, and two years later king over Israel (2 Sam. 2:1-4; 5:3). He reigned there for a period of 7½ years before Jerusalem became his capital city (2:11).

During that period Absalom was born at Hebron (3:2,3), and he later chose that city to commence his short-lived rebellion: “But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron” (15:10).

Rehoboam son of Solomon fortified a number of cities in Judah, including Hebron, presumably as a defence against Jeroboam son of Nebat, who had taken over control of the ten tribes of Israel (2 Chron. 11:10-12).

### **Hebron after the exile**

Hebron was repopulated after the exile. Nehemiah informs us that the Israelites, including priests and Levites, were in all the towns of Judah, “each on his ancestral property”. He then goes on to say that “some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath Arba and its surrounding settlements”, or villages (11:20,25, NIV).

Sometime later, Hebron appears to have come under the control of Edomites. Judas Maccabaeus, we are told, “marched out with his brothers to fight the Edomites in the country towards the south; he stormed Hebron and its outlying villages, threw down its fortifications and burned its circle of towers” (1 Mac. 5:65, Jerusalem Bible).

### The Muslim occupation of Hebron

From A.D. 635 Muslims ruled the city of Hebron, and in 1250 it came under the control of the Mamelukes, who were slave soldiers enrolled in Muslim armies. The Mameluke generals used

their power to establish an Islamic dynasty that ruled Egypt and Syria from 1250 to 1517.

During the Mameluke period the mosque of ‘The Sanctuary of Abraham, the Friend’ was constructed over the Cave of Machpelah using as a basis solidly built walls that were the work of Herod the Great, together with Byzantine and Crusader additions. In 1267 the Mameluke Sultan Baybars prohibited non-Muslims from visiting the tombs of the patriarchs, a prohibition that lasted for a period of exactly 700 years until 1967, when the tombs were opened to all worshippers.

(Concluded)

## Wine in Scripture

Tony Benson

**A** READER has written as follows: “In talking to some Seventh Day Adventists, they are adamant that wine in Scripture is nothing more than unfermented grape juice. We have explained to them our understanding of Scripture relating to wine, but to them Jesus would never touch wine to his lips. They say that the first miracle Jesus did was to change water into grape juice”. Our correspondent goes on to ask if we could publish something on the significance of wine in Scripture.

Regarding the question of whether wine in Scripture is always unfermented grape juice, there are eleven words in the Hebrew Old Testament translated ‘wine’ by the AV, but only two of frequent occurrence. The main one, *yayin*, is used on a number of occasions of that which makes people drunk, as in the case of Noah (Gen. 9:21) and Nabal (1 Sam. 25:36,37). It is also used, for example, of offerings under the Law (Num. 15:5,7,10).

There are therefore no grounds for saying that the word refers to grape juice, and clearly wine was acceptable to God under the Law. Indeed, under the Law the Israelites were to offer before God the tithe of their produce, then partake of it, or else buy it with their money and partake of it. This specifically included “wine, or . . . strong drink” (Deut. 14:21-26). There is no case for saying that *yayin* sometimes means grape juice and sometimes wine. (Though there is ample evidence that the Israelites partook of wine, those under a Nazarite vow were, of course, forbidden to do so, and the idea that Jesus did not drink

wine may come from a belief that Jesus was a Nazarite, something which has no support from Scripture.)

Likewise the Greek word *oinos* is clearly used in Ephesians 5:18 and Revelation 17:2 of that which makes people drunk, yet believers are not to abstain from it but to avoid drinking “much wine” (1 Tim. 3:8; Tit. 2:3). Paul urged Timothy to “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities” (1 Tim. 5:23). Of what medicinal value would grape juice have been?

In practical terms it is difficult to see how the Israelites could have used unfermented grape juice all the year round with no refrigeration. The Last Supper took place in the spring, and if they used grape juice then, how could it have been prevented from fermenting into wine over eight months or so since the grapes were harvested the previous summer? Also, when Jesus turned water into wine the governor of the feast proclaimed it to be superior to what had been drunk earlier in the wedding feast. Does grape juice vary in quality to the extent that it is so noticeable as to comment on?

When it comes to the Breaking of Bread, the Greek for ‘wine’ is not used. Instead we have the word *potērion*, meaning ‘a drinking vessel’, and in none of the four accounts of the institution of this feast is there any reference to its contents. It is known from Jewish sources that the Passover as it was kept in the time of Jesus involved partaking of four cups of wine, and as the meal which Jesus partook of with his disciples was the Passover