

Hebron

The Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature. James Strong and John McClintock; Haper and Brothers; NY; 1880.

(Heb. Chebron', חֶבְרוֹן ., a community; Sept. Χεβρών), the name of an important city and of several men, also (in a different Heb. form) of a smaller town.

1. A place in the south of Palestine, situated 20 Roman miles south of Jerusalem, and the same distance north of Beersheba (Eusebius, Onom. s.v. Ἀρκώ); and still extant, 18 miles south from Jerusalem, in 31° 32' 30" N. lat., 35° 8' 20" E. long., at the height of 2664 Paris feet above the level of the sea (Schü bert). It is one of the most ancient cities existing, having been built "seven years before Zoan in Egypt," and being mentioned even prior to Damascus (**Numbers 13:22**; **Genesis 13:18**; comp. 15:2). Its earlier name was KIRJATHARBA that is, the city of Arba, from Arba, the father of Anak and of the Anakim who dwelt in and around Hebron (**Genesis 23:2**; **Joshua 14:15**; **Joshua 15:3**; **Joshua 21:11**; **Judges 1:10**). It appears still earlier to have been called MANURE, probably from the name of Abraham's Amoritish ally (**Genesis 23:19**; **Genesis 35:27**; comp. 14:13, 28); but the "oak of Mamre," where the patriarch so often pitched his tent, appears to have been not in, but near Hebron. (See below.) The chief interest of this city arises from its having been the scene of some of the most remarkable events in the lives of the patriarchs. Sarah died at-Hebron, and Abraham then bought from Ephron the Hittite the field and cave of Machpelah, to serve as a family tomb (**Genesis 23:2-20**). The cave is still there, and the massive walls of the Haram or mosque, within which it lies, form the most remarkable object in the whole city. The ancient city lay in a valley, and the two remaining pools, one of which at least existed in, the time of David, serve, with other circumstances, to identify the modern with the ancient site (**Genesis 37:14**; **2 Samuel 4:12**). Much of the lifetime of Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob was spent in this neighborhood, where they were all entombed, and it was from hence that the patriarchal family departed for Egypt by the way of Beersheba ([Genesis 37:14](#); [Genesis 46:1](#)). After the return of the Israelites, the city was taken by Joshua and given over to Caleb, who expelled the Anakim from its territories ([Joshua 10:36-37](#); [Joshua 14:6-15](#); [Joshua 15:13-14](#); [Judges 1:20](#)). It was afterwards made only of the cities of refuge, and assigned to the priests and Levites ([Joshua 20:7](#); [Joshua 21:11](#); [Joshua 21:13](#)). David, on becoming king of Judah, made Hebron his royal residence. Here he reigned seven years and a half, here most of his sons were born, and here he was anointed king over all Israel ([1 Samuel 2:1-4](#); [1 Samuel 2:11](#); [1 Kings 2:11](#); [2 Samuel 5:1](#); [2 Samuel 5:3](#)). On this extension of his kingdom Hebron ceased to be sufficiently central, and Jerusalem then became the metropolis. It is possible that this step excited a degree of discontent in Hebron which afterwards encouraged Absalom to raise in that city the standard of rebellion against his father ([2 Kings 15:9-10](#)). Hebron was one of the places fortified by Rehoboam ([2 Chronicles 11:10](#)); and after the exile, the Jews who returned to Palestine occupied Hebron and the surrounding villages ([Nehemiah 11:15](#)).

Hebron is not named by the prophets, nor in the New Testament; but we learn from the Apocrypha, and from Josephus, that it came into the power of the Edomites, who had taken possession of the south of Judah, and was recovered from them by Judas Maccabaeus ([1 Macc. 5, 65](#); Josephus, Ant. 12, 8, 6). During the Great War, Hebron was seized by the rebel Simon Giorides, but was recaptured and burnt by Cerealis, an officer of Vespasian (Joseph. War, 4, 9; 7:9). Josephus describes the tombs of the patriarchs as existing in his day; and both Eusebius and Jerome, and all subsequent writers who mention Hebron down to the time of the Crusades, speak of the place chiefly as containing these sepulchers. In the course of time, the remarkable structure enclosing the tombs of Abraham and the other patriarchs was called the "Castle of Abraham;" and by an easy transition, this name came to be applied to the city itself, till in the time of the Crusades the names of Hebron and Castle of Abraham were used interchangeably. Hence, as Abraham is also distinguished among the

Moslems by the appellation of el-Khulil, "the Friend" (of God), this latter epithet became, among them, the name of the city; and they now know Hebron only as el-Khulil (Robinson's Researches, 2, 456). Soon after the Crusaders had taken Jerusalem, Hebron also appears to have passed into their hands, and in 1100 was bestowed as a fief upon Gerhard of Avennes; but two years after it is described as being in ruins (Wilken, *Gesch. der Kreuz.* 2, 44; Saewulf, *Peregrin.* p. 269). In 1167 Hebron was raised to the rank of a bishopric (Will. Tyr. 20:3), and the title of bishop of Hebron long remained in the Romish Church, for it occurs so late as A.D. 1365. But it was merely nominal; for after the capture of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187, Hebron also reverted to the Moslems, and has ever since remained in their possession. In the modern history of Hebron, the most remarkable circumstance is the part which the inhabitants of the town and district took in the rebellion of 1834, and the heavy retribution which it brought down upon them. They held out to the last, and gave battle to Ibrahim Pasha near Solomon's Pools. They were defeated, but retired and entrenched themselves in Hebron, which Ibrahim carried by storm, and gave over to sack and pillage. The town has not yet recovered from the blow it then sustained. In the 14th century pilgrims passed from Sinai to Jerusalem direct through the desert by Beersheba and Hebron. In the following century this route seems to have been abandoned for that by Gaza; yet the pilgrims sometimes took Hebron in their way, or visited it from Gaza. The travelers of that period describe as existing here an immense charitable establishment, or hospital, where 1200 loaves of bread, besides oil and other condiments, were daily distributed to all comers, without distinction of age or religion, at the annual expense of 20,000 ducats. Hebron continued to be occasionally visited by European travelers down to the latter part of the 17th century, but from that time till the present century it appears to have been little frequented by them. The principal travelers who have been more recently there are Seetzen, Ali Bey, Irby and Mangles, Poujoulat, Monro, Stephens, Paxton, Lord Lindsay, Russegger, Schubert, Dr. Robinson, Dr. Olin, De Saulcy, Stanley, etc. The town of Hebron lies low on the sloping sides of a narrow valley (of Mamre), surrounded by rocky hills. This is thought to be the "valley of

Eshcol," whence the Jewish spies got the great bunch of grapes ([Numbers 13:23](#)). Its sides are still clothed with luxuriant vineyards, and its grapes are considered the finest in Southern Palestine. Groves of gray olives, and some other fruit-trees, give variety to the scene. The valley runs from north to south; and the main quarter of the town, surmounted by the lofty walls of the venerable Haram, lies partly on the eastern slope ([Genesis 37:14](#); comp. [Genesis 23:18](#)). The houses are all of stone, solidly built, flat roofed, each having one or two small cupolas. The town has no walls. The streets are narrow, seldom more than two or three yards in width; the pavement, where one exists, is rough and difficult. The shops are well furnished, better indeed than those of towns of the same class in Egypt, and the commodities are of a very similar description. The only display of local manufactures is the produce of the glass-works, for which the place has long been celebrated in these parts. Gates are placed not only at the entrance of the city, but in different parts of the interior, and are closed at night for the better preservation of order, as well as to prevent communication between the different quarters.

There are nine mosques in Hebron, none of which possess any architectural or other interest, with the exception of the massive structure which is built over the tombs of the patriarchs. This is esteemed by the Moslems one of their holiest places, and Christians are rigorously excluded from it. The only Europeans who, in a late period, have found their way to the interior, were Ali Bey and Giovanni Finati, the Italian servant of Mr. Bankes. The best account of it is that furnished by the Rev. V. Monro, who states that "the mosque, which covers the cave of Machpelah, and contains the patriarchal tombs, is a square building, with little external decoration, at the south end of the town. Behind it is a small cupola, with eight or ten windows, beneath which is the tomb of Esau, excluded from the privilege of lying among the patriarchs. Ascending from the street, at the corner of the mosque, you pass through an arched way by a flight of steps to a wide platform, at the end of which is another short ascent; to the left is the court, out of which, to the left again, you enter the mosque. The dimensions within are about forty paces by twenty-five. Immediately on the right of the door is the tomb of Sarah, and beyond it that of

Abraham, having a passage between them into the court.

Corresponding with these, on the opposite side of the mosque, are those of Isaac and Rebekah, and behind them is a recess for prayer, and a pulpit. These tombs resemble small huts, with a window on each side and folding doors in front, the lower parts of which are of wood, and the upper of iron or bronze bars plated. Within each of these is an imitation of the sarcophagus that lies in the cave below the mosque, which no one is allowed to enter. Those seen above resemble coffins with pyramidal tops, and are covered with green silk, lettered with verses from the Koran. The doors of these tombs are left constantly open; but no one enters those of the women—at least men do not. In the mosque is a baldachin, supported by four columns, over an octagonal figure of black and white marble inlaid, around a small hole in the pavement, through which a chain passes from the top of the canopy to a lamp continually burning to give light in the cave of Machpelah, where the actual sarcophagi rest.

At the upper end of the court is the chief place of prayer; and on the opposite side of the mosque are two larger tombs, where are deposited the bodies of Jacob and Leah" (Summer's Ramble, 1, 245). The cave itself he does not describe, nor does it appear that even Moslems are admitted to it; for Ali Bey (a Spaniard traveling as a Moslem) does not even mention the cave below while describing the shrines of the mosque. John Sanderson (A.D. 1601) expressly says that none might enter, but that persons might view it, as far as the lamp allowed, through the hole at the top, Moslems being furnished with more light for the purpose than Jews. At an earlier period, however, when the Holy Land was in the power of the Christians, access was not denied; and Benjamin of Tudela says that the sarcophagi above ground were shown to the generality of pilgrims as what they desired to see; but if a rich Jew offered an additional fee, "an iron door is opened, which dates from the time of our forefathers who rest in peace, and, with a burning taper in his hands, the visitor descends into a first cave, which is empty, traverses a second in the same state, and at last reaches a third, which contains six sepulchers, those of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah, one opposite the other. All these sepulchers bear inscriptions,

the letters being engraved; thus, upon that of Abraham: This is the sepulcher of our father Abraham, upon whom be peace;' even so upon that of Isaac and all the other sepulchers. A lamp burns in the cave and upon the sepulchers continually, both night and day; and you there see tubs filled with the bones of Israelites; for it is a custom of the house of Israel to bring hither the bones and relics of their forefathers, and leave them there, unto this day" (Itinerary, 1, 77; ed. Asher, Berlin, 1840). The identity of this place with the cave of Machpelah is one of the few local traditions in Palestine which even Dr. Robinson suffers to pass without dispute, and may therefore be taken for granted. M. Pierotti, an engineer to the pasha of Jerusalem, has lately had an opportunity of leisurely examining the building; and in the spring of the year 1862 the prince of Wales and his suite were allowed to visit the interior, of which a description is given in App. 2 to Stanley's Lectures on the Jewish Church, pt. 1: "We reached the south-eastern corner of the massive wall of enclosure.... Up the steep flight of the exterior staircase, gazing close at hand on the polished surface of the wall, amply justifying Josephus's account of the marble-like appearance of the huge stones which compose it, we rapidly mounted. At the head of the staircase, which by its long ascent showed that the platform of the mosque was on the uppermost slope of the hill, and therefore above the level where, if anywhere, the sacred cave would be found, a sharp turn at once brought us within the precincts, and revealed to us for the first time the wall from the inside.... We passed at once through an open court into the mosque. With regard to the building itself, two points at once became apparent. First, it was clear that it had been originally a Byzantine church. To any one acquainted with the cathedral of St. Sophia at Constantinople, and with the monastic churches of Mount Athos, this is evident from the double narthex, or portico, and from the four pillars of the nave. Secondly, it was clear that it had been converted at a much later period into a mosque I now proceed to describe the tombs of the patriarchs, premising always that these tombs, like all those in Mussulman mosques, and, indeed, like most tombs in Christian churches, do not profess to be the actual places of sepulture, but are merely monuments or cenotaphs in honor of the dead who lie

beneath. Each is enclosed with a separate chapel or shrine, closed with gates or railings similar to those which surround or enclose the special chapels or royal tombs in Westminster Abbey. The first two of these shrines or chapels are contained in the inner portico, or narthex, before the entrance into the actual building of the mosque. In the recess on the right is the shrine of Abraham, in the recess on the left that of Sarah, each guarded by silver gates. The shrine of Sarah we were requested not to enter, as being that of a woman. A pall lay over it. The shrine of Abraham, after a momentary hesitation, was thrown open. The chamber is cased in marble. The so-called tomb consists of a coffin-like structure, about six feet high, built up of plastered stone or marble, and hung with three carpets — green embroidered with gold. Within the area of the church or mosque were shown the tombs of Isaac and Rebekah. They are placed under separate chapels, in the walls of which are windows, and of which the gates are grated, not with silver, but iron bars. Their situation, planted as they are in the body of the mosque, may indicate their Christian origin. In almost all Mussulman sanctuaries, the tombs of distinguished persons are placed, not in the center of the building, but in the corners. To Rebekah's tomb the same decorous rule of the exclusion of male visitors naturally applied as in the case of Sarah's. But on requesting to see the tomb of Isaac, we were entreated not to enter... The chapel, in fact, contains nothing of interest; but I mention this story both for the sake of the singular sentiment which it expresses, and also because it well illustrates the peculiar feeling which has tended to preserve the sanctity of the place—an awe, amounting to terror, of the great personages who lay beneath, and who would, it was supposed, be sensitive to any disrespect shown to their graves, and revenge it accordingly.

The shrines of Jacob and Leah were shown in recesses, corresponding to those of Abraham and Sarah, but in a separate cloister opposite the entrance of the mosque... It will be seen that up to this point no mention has been made of the subject of the greatest interest, namely, the sacred cave itself, in which one at least of the patriarchal family may possibly still repose intact the embalmed body of Jacob. It may well be supposed that to this object our inquiries

throughout were directed. One indication alone of the cavern beneath was: visible. In the interior of the mosque, at the corner of the shrine of Abraham, was a small circular hole, about eight inches across, of which one foot above the pavement was built of strong masonry, but of which the lower part, as far as we could see and feel, was of the; living rock. This cavity appeared to open into a dark space beneath, and that space (which the guardians of the mosque believed to extend under the whole platform) can hardly be anything else than the ancient cavern of Machpelah. This was the only aperture which the guardians recognized. 'Once,' they said, '2500 years ago, a servant of a great king had penetrated through some other entrance. He descended in full possession of his faculties and of remarkable corpulence; he returned blind, deaf, withered, and crippled. Since then the entrance was closed, and this aperture alone was left, partly for the sake of suffering the holy air of the cave to escape into the mosque, and be scented by the faithful; partly for the sake of allowing a lamp to be let down by a chain, which we saw suspended at the mouth, to burn upon the sacred cave. We asked whether it could not be lighted now. No,' they said; 'the saint likes to have a lamp at night, but not in the full day-light.' With that glimpse into the dark void we and the world without must for the present be satisfied. Whether any other entrance is known to the Mussulmans themselves must be a matter of doubt.

The original entrance to the cave if it is now to be found at all, must probably be on the southern face of the hill, between the mosque and the gallery containing the shrine: of Joseph, and entirely obstructed by the ancient Jewish wall, probably built across it for this very purpose.' This account is somewhat at variance with the results? of the researches of I. Pierotti, who states, in a letter to the London Times, April 30, 1862, "The true entrance to the patriarchs' tomb is to be seen close to the western wall of the enclosure, and near the north-west corner; it is guarded by a very thick iron railing, and I was not allowed to go near it. I observed that the Mussulmans themselves did not go very near it. In the court opposite the entrance-gate of the mosque there is an opening, through which I was allowed to go down for three steps, and I was able to ascertain by sight and touch that the rock

exists there, and to conclude it to be about five feet thick. From the short observations I could make during my brief descent, as also from the consideration of the east wall of the mosque, and the little information I extracted from the chief santon, who jealously guards the sanctuary. I consider that a part of the grotto exists under the mosque, and that the other part is under the court, but at a lower level than that lying under the mosque." (See MACHPELAH).

The court in which the mosque stands is surrounded ' by an extensive and lofty wall, formed of large stones, and strengthened by square buttresses. This wall is the greatest antiquity in Hebron, and even Dr. Robinson supposes that it may be substantially the same which is mentioned by Josephus (Ant. 1, 14; War, 4, 9, 7), and by Eusebius and Jerome (Ononast. s.v. Arboch), as the sepulcher of Abraham; A common Moslem tomb in the neighborhood of Hebron passes as the tomb of Abner. He was certainly interred in this city ([2 Samuel 3:32](#)); and the head of Ishbosheth, after his assassination, was deposited in the same sepulcher ([2 Samuel 4:12](#)); but there is slight evidence in favor of the tradition which professes to point out this locality to the modern traveler. Besides this venerable wall, there is nothing at Hebron bearing the stamp of antiquity save two reservoirs for rainwater outside the town. One of these is just without the southern gate, in the bottom of the valley. It is a large basin 133 feet square, and 21 feet 8 inches deep. It is built of hewn limestone of very solid workmanship, and obviously of ancient date. The depth of water of course varies at different times of the year: in May it is 14 feet. The descent is by flights of steps at the four corners, by which the water is brought up in vessels and skins, and poured out into troughs for the flocks, or carried away for domestic uses. Just at the north end of the main part of the town is another and smaller pool, also occupying the bed of the valley, and measuring 85 feet by 55, with a depth of 18-feet, containing (in May) 7 feet of water. These cisterns, which are connected with no perennial springs, and which are filled only by the rains, seem (at least in summer) to be the main dependence of the inhabitants for water, although that of the larger pool is neither clear nor clean. As these pools are doubtless of high antiquity, one of them is in all likelihood the "pool of Hebron" over which David hanged up

the assassins of Ishbosheth (2 Samuel 4:12).

The present population of Hebron has not been clearly ascertained, but is probably about 5000. Most of the inhabitants are Moslems, of fierce and intolerant character. There are no resident Christians. The Jews amount to about 50 families, mostly natives of different countries of Europe, who have immigrated to this place for the purpose of having their bones laid near the sepulchers of their illustrious ancestors. They have two synagogues and several schools. As usual, they have a quarter of the city to themselves, where the streets are marrow and filthy, and the houses mean. In a few instances, however, they are in tolerable repair, and whitewashed.

The environs of Hebron are very fertile. Vineyards and plantations of fruit-trees, chiefly olive-trees, cover the valleys and arable grounds; while the tops and sides of the hills, although stony, are covered with rich pastures, which support a great number of cattle, sheep, and goats, constituting an important branch of the industry and wealth of Hebron. The hill-country of Judah, of which it is the capital, is indeed highly productive, and under a paternal government would be capable of sustaining a large population. That it did so once is manifest from the great number and extent of ruined terraces and dilapidated towns. It is at present abandoned, and cultivation ceases at the distance of two miles north of the town. The hills then become covered with prickly and other stunted trees, which furnish Bethlehem and other villages with wood. About a mile from the town, up the valley, is one of the largest oak trees in Palestine. It stands quite alone in the midst of the vineyards. It is 23 feet in girth, and its branches cover a space 90 feet in diameter. This, say some, is the very tree beneath which Abraham pitched his tent; but, however this may be, it still bears the name of the patriarch (Porter's Handbook, p. 67 sq.). (See OAK).

2. The third son of Kohath the Levite, and hence the uncle of Moses (Exodus 6:18; 1 Chronicles 6:2; 1 Chronicles 6:18; 1 Chronicles 15:9; 1 Chronicles 23:12; 1 Chronicles 23:19). B.C. ante 1738. His descendants are called HEBRONITES (Numbers 3:27, etc.).

3. A son of Mareshah, and apparently grandson of Caleb of Judah (1 Chronicles 2:42-43). B.C. post 1612.

4. (Heb. Ebron', עֵבְרוֹן, prob. for עֵבְדוֹן, Abdon, as many MSS. read;

Sept. Εἰβρών , Vulg. Abran.) A town on the northern border of Asher (**Joshua 19:28**); possibly the same (Keil, Comment. in loc.) elsewhere (**Joshua 21:30**) called ABDON (See ABDON) (q.v.).