

Joshua 19:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they had in their inheritance Beer-sheba, or Sheba, and Moladah,

Analysis

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The city list begins with Be'er Sheva (ברֵאֶר שְׁבָע, "well of the oath" or "well of seven"), one of the most ancient and sacred sites in Israelite history. Here Abraham made a covenant with Abimelech (Genesis 21:31-33) and called upon "the LORD, the everlasting God" (Yahweh El Olam, יְהָוָה אֱלֹהֶם עֹזֶל). Isaac later confirmed the covenant at the same location (Genesis 26:33). The alternative name "Sheba" (שְׁבָע) may reference this covenant oath (sheva, שְׁבָעָה) or the seven wells dug there.

Beer-sheba's assignment to Simeon, though geographically within Judah's borders, preserved access to this patriarchal shrine for both tribes. The site marked the traditional southern boundary of Israel—the phrase "from Dan to Beer-sheba" (Judges 20:1; 1 Samuel 3:20) defined the nation's full extent. That Simeon held this location shows God's providence in maintaining continuity with patriarchal history even within the constraints of Jacob's judgment.

Moladah (מוֹלָדָה) appears in Judah's original allotment (15:26) and was later inhabited after the exile (Nehemiah 11:26), demonstrating the overlap between Judah's and Simeon's territories. The Hebrew root yalad (יָלַד, "to bear" or "bring forth") in the city's name may indicate a birthing place for livestock, appropriate for pastoral Simeon's economy in the Negev's semi-arid grasslands.

Historical Context

Beer-sheba's archaeological remains span from the Chalcolithic period (4th millennium BCE) through the Iron Age. Excavations reveal a fortified city from the 10th-8th centuries BCE with a massive gate complex, deep well (reaching the water table at 69 meters), and large storehouse. The site controlled trade routes between the coastal plain, the Negev, and the Arabah.

The patriarchal Beer-sheba was likely a smaller settlement or encampment centered on the wells, with the fortified city developing during the monarchy. Genesis records multiple well-digging episodes (Abraham in Genesis 21:30, Isaac in Genesis 26:25, 32-33), suggesting the name and covenant associations accumulated over time. Ancient wells were crucial assets in arid regions, often disputed and requiring treaties to secure access rights.

Beer-sheba later became a center of syncretistic worship denounced by Amos: "they that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, Thy god, O Dan, liveth; and, The manner of Beer-sheba liveth" (Amos 8:14). The sacred patriarchal site had been corrupted into idolatry. Excavations uncovered a dismantled horned altar from the 8th century BCE, possibly destroyed during Hezekiah's reforms (2 Kings 18:4, 22), confirming Beer-sheba's religious significance and the reality of cultic reform.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does God's preservation of Beer-sheba within Simeon's portion show His faithfulness to connect each generation with the faith of their ancestors?

2. What warning does Beer-sheba's later corruption into idolatry provide about how sacred heritage can be distorted when not guarded carefully?
3. In what ways might you be claiming a spiritual heritage without maintaining the living faith that made those places sacred to previous generations?

Interlinear Text

לְהָמִינָה

H1961

בְּתִדְלִית

H5159

And they had in their inheritance

בְּאָרֶץ

H0

שֶׁבַע

H884

וְשֵׁבַע

H7652

וּמָלָדָה:

and Moladah

H4137

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