

## 93 Shechem

### Names (also known as)

Sichem, Sychem, and Sychar

Balata al-Balad (Arabic: البلدة لاطة) is a Palestinian suburb of Nablus, in the northern West Bank.

### Etymology

Strong's - H7927 - *Shechem* or *Sichem* - "shoulder"; same as H7926 – neck. BDB - *Shechem* = “back” or “shoulder”.

### Location/Description



Shechem was a city in Manasseh, located in a narrow sheltered valley between Mount Ebal on the north and Mount Gerizim on the south, 54 kms (34 miles) north of Jerusalem.

The mountains of Ebal and Gerizim at their base are only some 500 metres apart.

### Significant Scriptural references

#### Old Testament

Gen. 12:6,7 - First place Abraham comes to in the promised Land.

Deut. 11:29-30; 27:4-7 – Joshua was instructed to take Israel to Shechem so that

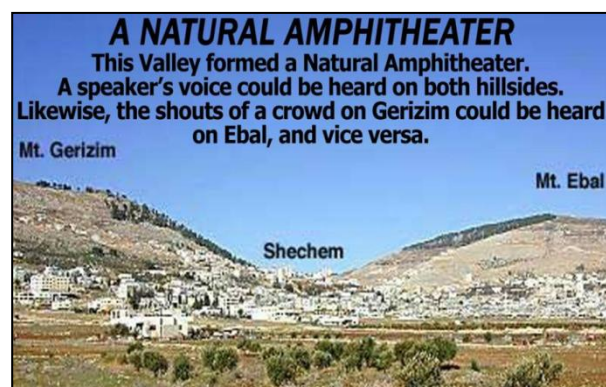
the blessings and cursings of the Law could be shouted from Gerizim and Ebal.

Josh. 8:30-35 – Joshua fulfilled this commission at Shechem.

Jud. 9:1,7 – Abimelech was crowned king here and Jotham (the sole survivor of Gideon's slaughtered sons) delivered his parable against Abimelech and the men of Shechem from Mt Gerizim.

Josh. 24:1 – Joshua called all Israel to Shechem to deliver his final exhortation and to make a covenant at Abraham's oak.

Josh. 24:32 - Joseph was buried there (Acts 7:16).



### New Testament

John 4:5 – The Lord deliberately (“must needs”) came to Shechem to encounter the woman of Samaria and convert her and many Samaritans.

### Brief History

Shechem was a Canaanite city mentioned in the Amarna letters (14<sup>th</sup> century BC). It was here that Abram first came and God appeared to him (Gen. 12:6). He pitched his tent and built an altar under the oak or *terebinth* (not “plain”) of Moreh.

Shechem is also the location of Jacob's Well, where John 4:5–6 describes Jesus' meeting with the woman of Samaria.

Here too Jacob re-entered the promised land (Gen. 33:18-19), and “bought a parcel of a field where he had spread his tent,” from the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, and bequeathed it subsequently to Joseph (Gen. 48:22; Josh. 24:32; John 4:50). It lay in the rich plain of the Mukhna, and its value was increased by the well Jacob dug there.

Under Abraham's oak at Shechem, Jacob buried the family idols (“the strange gods” or “the gods of the stranger”) and amulets (Gen.

35:1-4), carried away by Jacob's sons from Shechem among the spoils (Gen. 35:2; 34:26-29).

When Israel entered the Land under Joshua, Shechem was assigned to the tribe of Manasseh (Josh. 17:7), and Joshua made "Shechem in Mount Ephraim" one of the six cities of refuge (Josh. 20:7).

It ultimately became the first capital of the northern Kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 12:1).

After the Assyrians took the Israelites into captivity and replaced them with people from 5 nations (2 Kings 17:23-24), Shechem became in due time the main settlement of the Samaritans, whose religious centre stood on Mount Gerizim, just outside of the town.

In AD 6, Shechem was annexed to the Roman Province of Syria. Of the Samaritans of Shechem many rose up in arms on Mount Gerizim at the time of the Galilean rebellion (AD 67), which was part of the First Jewish–Roman War. The city was very likely destroyed by Cerealis during that war. Josephus says that more than 10,000 of the inhabitants were destroyed by the Romans.

In AD 72, a new city, Flavia Neapolis, was built by Vespasian 2 kilometers to the west of the old one. This city's name was eventually corrupted to the modern Nablus. Josephus, writing in about AD 90 (Jewish Antiquities 4.8.44), placed the city between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. Elsewhere he refers to it as Neapolis/Nablus.

In Emperor Hadrian's reign, the temple on Mt Gerizim was restored and dedicated to Jupiter. Later, Christians built churches there.

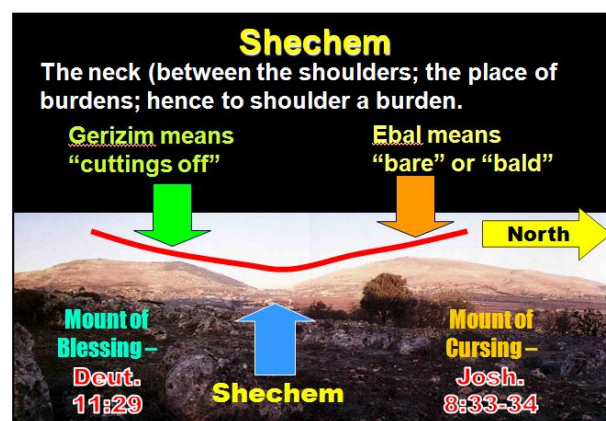
The city of Nablus was Islamicized in the Abbasid and Ottoman periods. In 1903 near Nablus, a German party of archaeologists led by Dr. Hermann Thiersch stumbled upon the site called Tell Balata and now identified as ancient Shechem. Nablus is still referred to as Shechem by Israelis and Hebrew speakers.

## The principles of Shechem

Throughout Scripture Shechem consistently portrays vital lessons for the servants of God. Persistent themes run through almost every reference to it. These themes include:

- Bearing responsibility. The meaning of the name – the neck (where burdens are borne); the shoulder - implies the fundamental principle;

- Government – for the same reason, Shechem is frequently associated with government – the acceptance of responsibility – see Isa. 9:6 – “the government shall be upon his shoulder (*shechem*)”. A number of kings were enthroned here including Rehoboam, Jeroboam and Abimelech.
- Choice – Shechem is the place where people are called upon to make choices usually involving eternal issues and destiny.
- Sincerity and truth – often those at Shechem are called upon to reject false ways and gods and put Yahweh first – Joshua had made his choice - “As for me and my house, we will serve Yahweh” (Josh. 24:14-15). Jotham reminded Abimelech and the men of Shechem of this principle in Jud. 9. Sincerity and truth before God should be seen also in all our dealings with others. That is our responsibility!



## Sources:

Wikipedia  
Faussett's Bible Dictionary  
Josephus Antiquities  
Blunt's Undesigned Coincidences

(Compilers – Ron Leadbetter/Jim Cowie)