

# Kirjath-jearim

## Names (also known as)

Kir'iath-je'arim (Hebrew).

Also known as Kiriath-Ba'al, Ba'alah and Ba'ale-Judah.

## Etymology

Strong, BDB – “city of forests.” This meaning is confirmed by David’s allusion to it in Ps. 132:6 where the word “wood” – *ya'ar* – is part of the name Kirjath-jearim.

## Location/Description

Eusebius says that the city was located about 15 km (9.3 miles) from Jerusalem. It is now identified with Deir el-Azar (Tel Qiryat Yearim), near the town of Abu Ghosh, on a hill where the Deir El-Azar Monastery currently stands, about 11 km (7 miles) west of Jerusalem.



Today a modern highway makes the uphill journey from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem easy.

## Scriptural references

Joshua 9:17; 15:9,60; 18:14,15,28; Judges 18:12; 1 Sam. 6:21; 7:1,2; 1 Chron. 13:5,6; 2 Chron. 1:4; Neh. 7:29; Jer. 26:20.

## Famous characters

David, Abinadab and Eleazar.  
Uriah the son of Shemaiah of Kiriath Jearim.



Kiryat Yearim today still well wooded

## Brief history

First mentioned as one of the four cities of the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:17), it next occurs as one of the landmarks of the northern boundary of Judah (Josh. 15:9), and as the point at which the western and southern boundaries of Benjamin coincided (Josh. 18:14-15), and in the last two passages, we find that it bore another, perhaps earlier, name — that of the Canaanite deity Baal, namely Baalah and Kirjath-Baal.

The Ark of the Covenant was kept at the house of Abinadab for 20 years (1 Sam. 7:2) until King David transported it to Jerusalem from Kirjath-jearim (2 Sam. 6:2). David failed in his first attempt because he did not transport the Ark as God had commanded, upon the shoulders of the Kohathites (1 Chron. 15:2). Instead, David used the Philistine method of a cart pulled by oxen to transport the Ark (1 Sam. 6:7-8). The cart was led by Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab’s two sons (2 Sam. 6:3). This led to a disaster when the Ark shook precariously and Uzzah reached forth to steady it and was immediately struck dead for his presumption. The disaster at Bethshemesh over two decades before, when the local inhabitants looked inside the Ark and perished in their thousands had not been remembered (1 Sam. 6:19-21). It was the men of Kirjath-jearim who had come and collected the Ark after that tragedy.

The lesson is clear. Good motives and righteous intentions are not sufficient when dealing with Divine things. Conformity with

Divine appointments and principles is the only safe way forward. David learnt this lesson the hard way, as did the family of Abinadab.

The Ark was taken aside to the house of a Kohathite curiously named Obed-Edom while David contemplated his next move. The record is clear – 2 Sam. 6:9 – **“And David was afraid of Yahweh that day, and said, How shall the ark of Yahweh come to me?”**

This declaration reveals that David was still determined to by-pass the Tabernacle of Moses which was at Gibeon (1 Chron. 21:29) and take the Ark and place it in a tent of his own erecting at Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15:1; 16:1). The Scriptural importance of this will be considered in the next section.

### *Later history*

The Scriptures identify at least one prophet of God who came from this town. Uriah the son of Shemaiah was from Kiriath-Jearim and prophesied during an unknown period against Jerusalem (Jer. 26:20). This aroused the wrath of King Jehoiakim (609-598 BC) who sought to put Uriah to death. Uriah escaped to Egypt, where he was apprehended by the king's henchman and extradited to Jerusalem for execution and burial in an unmarked grave (Jer. 26:22-23).

Descendants of Keriath-Jearim were among the Jewish exiles who returned to Judea with Zerubbabel (Neh. 7:29).

The writer of Chronicles suggests that Shobal (possibly a descendant of Caleb) was "the father of Kiriath-Jearim" (1 Chron. 2:50-53), possibly in the sense of being the founder of this town.

The modern town of Kiryat Yearim is named after this town and is situated in its presumed location.

### **Scriptural importance**

As a teenager, anointed to be Israel's king, and keeping sheep on the hillsides of Bethlehem, David contemplated the time when he would be able to bring the Ark of the Covenant to its rightful place – Zion. He knew this from his deep ruminations on the Book of Genesis. He knew from the account of Melchizedek the king

of Salem who was priest of the Most High God (El Elyon) in Gen. 14 that the Shekinah glory between the Cherubim belonged in Jerusalem (or Jebus as it was named in his day), for that was clearly the place where Yahweh would put His name (Deut. 12:5-7) and require all to come and worship and sacrifice.

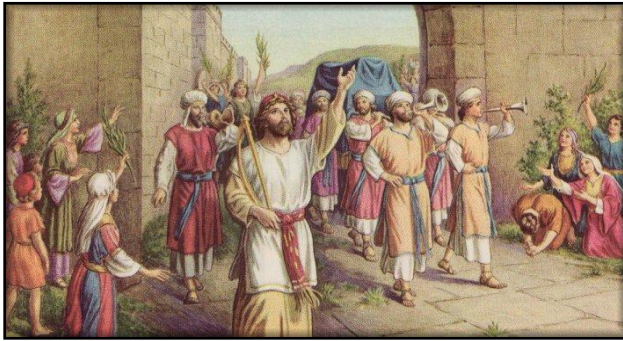
This is why David says in Ps. 132:6 – **“Lo, we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the wood.”** This psalm was written at the time David brought the Ark from Kirjath-jearim to Jerusalem. He 'heard' of it while keeping sheep in Bethlehem, and later, as king, found it at Kirjath-jearim in the house of Abinadab.

David also knew that a particular hill near Jerusalem in the land of Moriah would be the place where Messiah would be crucified, and so after killing Goliath the Philistine (an event he equated with Christ's sacrifice), he carried his head to Golgotha (the place of the skull). He understood this from the account of Abraham offering Isaac in that place (Gen. 22:2), and saw it as a type of Yahweh and His son making the great sacrifice prefigured in Gen. 3:15 and 21 when a male lamb was slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8).



Abraham “rejoiced” to see Christ's day (John 8:56), and so did David. He knew that Abraham's great act of participatory sacrifice saw the promises made unconditional to him (Heb. 6:13-18), and that in his seed Christ (Gal. 3:16) “shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Accordingly, David formed the intention as a very young man to take the Ark to Jerusalem and operate as a Melchizedek king-

priest in so doing. This is why he took off his kingly robes and put on the priest's linen ephod when bringing the Ark up from the house of Obededom, and also distributed to the people (male and female, Jew and Gentile – unlike any ritual under the Law of Moses), bread and wine after the pattern of Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18). Melchizedek presented bread and wine to Abraham's victorious host consisting of home born Hebrews and converted Gentiles (Gen. 14:13,18), all of them as yet uncircumcised (Gen. 17:24-27; Rom. 4:10-11). David had approximately 150,000 converted Gentiles in his kingdom at the end of his reign (2 Chron. 2:17), for the most part uncircumcised, many who had followed him out of the land of the Philistines when he came to Israel to become king after the death of Saul.



It was for this reason that David by-passed the Tabernacle of Moses at Gibeon and placed the Ark in his own round tent (*ohel*) so that uncircumcised Gentiles who came into Israel as believers in Yahweh and the promises He had made to Abraham could worship their newly found God without the strictures of the Law of Moses, particularly in relation to circumcision. This is why “the tabernacle of David” plays such an important role much later in N.T. times.

How did David conclude that Yahweh approved of his intention to place the Ark in his own tent in Jerusalem and not in the logical place – the Most Holy place in the Tabernacle of Moses?

Placing the Ark in the home of Obededom provides the clue. Obededom was a Kohathite from the town of Gath-Rimmon (hence he is called a Gittite – 2 Sam. 6:10). Gath-Rimmon was originally granted to the tribe of Dan by Joshua (Josh. 19:40,45), and then ceded to the

Kohathites as a Levitical city (Josh. 20:20,23-24). His name means – “Slave of Edom”. Somewhere in the family history a Levite strangely named his son this way, and as was the practice, the name was perpetuated in successive generations. David picked up on this in looking for a sign from God that he was not mistaken in his purpose of including Gentiles in the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem outside the strict provisions of the Law under a provisional Melchizedek order.

Within three months David received his answer – 2 Sam. 6:11 – **“And the ark of the LORD continued in the house of Obededom the Gittite three months: and the LORD blessed Obededom, and all his household.”** While we are not told what this blessing was specifically, there is a hint in 1 Chron. 26:4-5 that it had to do with the development of his family – **“Moreover the sons of Obededom were, Shemaiah the firstborn, Jehozabad the second, Joah the third, and Sacar the fourth, and Nethaneel the fifth, Ammiel the sixth, Issachar the seventh, Peulthai the eighth: for God blessed him.”**

For David, it was enough that the blessing of Yahweh fell upon the house of Obededom. He saw this as approval to bring the Ark to Jerusalem but did so acknowledging the provisional nature of his plan. As the Kohathites began their journey towards Jerusalem carrying the Ark on their shoulders, David made them pause after 6 steps while he made sacrifice. In this he acknowledged that there would be six millennial days before, in the seventh, the reality of a Melchizedek order could be realized.

The joy of David as he witnessed Jew and Gentile, male and female participating in the ‘memorials’ of bread and wine (2 Sam. 6:19) after the pattern set by Melchizedek, was curtailed when he arrived home to find his wife Michal, the daughter of Saul furious over him humbling himself before the people. This was too much for the regal princess who was filled with the pride and pomp of royalty, much like her father. In the parable of this remarkable phase of David's reign, Michal represents the Mosaic Covenant. The rift between her and David led to them never cohabiting again and she was to remain barren for the rest of her

days – like the Law of Moses which could not give life – 2 Sam. 6:23 – **“Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death.”**

Stephen provided a revelation to his Judaistic interlocutors when he said of the Ark towards the end of his defence – **“Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Joshua into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands”** (Acts 7:45-48). What was it that changed in the days of David? God had decreed the destruction of Gentiles in the land of Canaan when Israel entered under Joshua. This was never carried out effectively and in the days of David he undertook a new initiative – he converted both those left in the land and those who came for his sake. However, he did not require of them circumcision.

That is why James cites Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:15-18 to bring the Jerusalem Conference in AD 50 to a successful conclusion over the question as to whether converted Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the Law (Acts 15:1,5). It was the reference to “the tabernacle of David” that ended all debate after long accounts of God calling and working among the Gentiles through the Apostles failed to resolve the issue. Yahweh through Amos had placed an incontrovertible imprimatur on David’s actions in placing the Ark in a tent of his own making – Amos 9:11-12 – **“In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: That they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the LORD that doeth this.”**

The context of this passage is illuminating. In verse 7, God says His people were like Ethiopians (Young’s Literal – Cushim – i.e. Babylonians - Gen. 2:13) to Him because of their Nimrudian apostasy. Then He reminds Israel that when He brought them out of Egypt

to fulfil His promise to Abraham (Gen. 15:13-16) He was also bringing the Philistines from Crete and the Syrians from Kir to be Israel’s neighbours. The inference is that He might have had more success with these uncircumcised Gentiles than with Israel His own people.

Careful readers of Amos 9:11-12 would also recognize an allusion to Obbedom the Gittite of Gath-rimmon in the reference to **“the remnant of Edom.”** None of those who heard James citing Amos would have been ignorant of why David had placed the Ark in a tent of his own making. It was clearly to incorporate uncircumcised Gentiles in the promises God had made to Abraham – the father of a multitude of nations.

It is highly significant that the future ‘House of prayer for all nations’ (Isa. 56:7) is also called “the tabernacle of David” in Isa. 16:5.



### Other sources:

Strong’s Concordance  
Bibleatlas.com; Wikipedia

(Compilers – Greg and Yvonne Pipe – Edited and augmented by Jim Cowie)

A few kilometres west of Kiriat-Yearim (“city of forests”) is the Neve Illan Forest region that is typical of the area as it once was

