

Macpelah

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(Heb. *Makpelah'*, מַכְפֶּלֶה, probably a *portion*, but, according to others, *double*, and so the Sept. διπλοῦς, Vulg. *duplex*), the name of the plot of ground in Hebron containing the cave which Abraham bought of Ephron the Hittite for a family sepulcher ([Ge 23:9](#)), where it is described as being located in one extremity of the field, and in ver. 17 it is stated to have been situated "before Mamre," and to have likewise contained trees. *SEE MAMRE*. The only persons mentioned in Scripture as buried in this cemetery are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with their wives Sarah, Rebekah, and Leah ([Ge 23:19](#); [Ge 25:9](#); [Ge 49:30](#); [Ge 1](#); [Ge 13](#)). "Beyond the passages already cited, the Bible contains no mention either of the name Machpelah or of the sepulcher of the patriarchs. Unless this was the sanctuary of Jehovah to which Absalom had vowed, or pretended to have vowed, a pilgrimage, when absent in the remote Geshur ([2Sa 15:7](#)), no allusion to it has been discovered in the records of David's residence at Hebron, nor yet in the struggles of the Maccabees, so many of whose battles were fought in and around it" (Smith). "It is a remarkable fact that none of the sacred writers refer to this celebrated tomb after the burial of Jacob, though it was unquestionably held in reverence by the Jews in all ages. Josephus, in his short notice of the burial of Sarah, says that both Abraham and his descendants *built themselves sepulchres* at Hebron (*Ant.* 1:14), and in another passage he states that the monuments of the patriarchs 'are *to this very*

time shown in Hebron, the structure of which is of beautiful marble, wrought after the most elegant manner' (*War*, 4:9,7). Jerome mentions the *mausoleum* of Abraham at Hebron as standing in his day (*Onomast.* s.v. Arboch); and in the *Jerusalem Itinerary*, a work of the 4th century, it is described as a quadrangular structure built of stones of wonderful beauty (*Itin. Hieros.* ed. Wessel. p. 599). It is also mentioned by Antoninus Martyr in the beginning of the 7th century (*Itin.* 30); by Arculf towards its close (*Early Travels in Pal.*, Bohn, p. 7); by Willibald in the 8th (*ib.* p. 20); by Sewulf in the 12th (*ib.* p. 45); and by numerous others (see Ritter, *Pal. und Syr.* 3:237 sq.). From these notices, it appears to be certain that the venerable building which still stands is the same which Josephus describes. Hebron lies in a narrow valley which runs from north to south between low ridges of rocky hills. The modern town is built partly in the bottom of the vale and partly along the lower slope of the eastern ridge. On the hill-side, above the latter section of the town, rise the massive walls of the Haram, forming the one distinguishing feature of Hebron, conspicuous from all points. The building is rectangular, about 200 feet long by 115 wide, and 50 high. The walls are constructed of massive stones varying from 12 to 20 feet in length, and from 4 to 5 in depth. Dr. Wilson mentions one stone 38 feet long and 3 feet 4 inches in depth, of ancient workmanship (*Lands of the Bible*, 1:366). The edges of the stones are grooved to the depth of about two inches, so that the whole wall has the appearance of being formed of raised panels, like the Temple-wall at Jerusalem. *SEE MASONRY.* The exterior is further ornamented with pilasters, supporting without capitals a plain molded cornice. The building is thus unique; there is nothing like it in Syria. The style of its architecture, independent even of the historical notices above given, proves it to be of Jewish origin; and it cannot be much,

if at all, later than the days of Solomon. The interior of this massive and most interesting building was described about fifty years ago by a Spaniard, who conformed to Islamism and assumed the name of Ali Bey (*Travels*, 1:232). The Rev. J. L. Porter was assured when at Hebron, and subsequently by a mollah of rank who had visited the tombs of the patriarchs, that there is an entrance to the cave, which consists of two compartments, and that the guardian can on special occasions enter the outer one (*Handbook*, p. 69). With this agree the statements of M. Pierotti, of Benjamin of Tudela, who gives a description of the caves (*Itin.* by Asher, p. 76 sq.), and of others (Wilson, *Lands of the Bible*, 1:364 sq.). We cannot doubt that the cave of Machpelah, in which the patriarchs were buried, is beneath this venerable building, and that it has been guarded with religious jealousy from the earliest ages; consequently, it is quite possible that some remains of the patriarchs may still lie there. Jacob was embalmed in Egypt, and his body deposited in this place (Ge 1; Ge 2-13). It may still be there perfect as an Egyptian mummy. The Moslem traditions and the cenotaphs within the Haram agree exactly with the Biblical narrative, and form an interesting commentary on Jacob's dying command — 'And he charged them... bury me with my fathers... in the cave which is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre... *There they buried Abraham*, and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac, and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah' (Ge 49:29-31). There also they buried Jacob. Now within the enclosure are the six cenotaphs only, while the belief is universal among the Mohammedans that the real tombs are in the cave below. Projecting from the west side of the Haram is a little building containing the tomb of Joseph—a Moslem tradition states that his body was first buried at Shechem, but was subsequently transferred to this place (Stanley, *Jewish Church*, 1:498). The

Jews cling around this building still, as they do around the ruins of their ancient Temple-taking pleasure in its stones, and loving its very dust. Beside the principal entrance is a little hole in the wall, at which they are permitted at certain times to pray." "A belief seems to prevail in the town that the cave communicates with some one of the modern sepulchers at a considerable distance outside of Hebron (Lowe, in *Zeitung des Judenth.*, June 1, 1839). The ancient Jewish tradition ascribes the erection of the mosque to David (*Jichus ha-Aboth* in Hottinger, *Cippi Hebr.* 30), thus making it coeval with the pool in the valley below; but, whatever the worth of this tradition, it may well be of the age of Solomon, for the masonry is even more antique in its character than that of the lower portion of the south and south-western walls of the Haram at Jerusalem, which many critics ascribe to Solomon, while even the severest allows it to be of the date of Herod. The date must always remain a mystery, but there are two considerations which may weigh in favor of fixing it very early.

1. That, often as the town of Hebron may have been destroyed, this, being a tomb, would always be spared.

⇒Bible concordance for MACHPELAH.

2. It cannot, on architectural grounds, be later than Herod's time, while, on the other hand, it is omitted from the catalogue given by Josephus of the places which he rebuilt or adorned." The fullest historical notices of Machpelah will be found in Ritter, *Pal. und Syr.* vol. 3, and Robinson, *Bib. Res.* vol. 2. The chief authorities are Arculf (A.D. 700); Benjamin of Tudela (A.D. cir. 1170); the Jewish tract *Jichlus ha-Aboth* (in Hottinger, *Cippi hebraici*; and also in Wilson, 1:365); Ali Bey (*Travels*, A.D. 1807, 2:232,233); Giovanni Finati (*Life* by Bankes, 2:236); Monro (*Summer Ramble* in 1833, 1:243); Lowe, in *Zeitung des Judenth.*, 1839, p. 272, 288. In a note by Asher to his edition of Benjamin of

Tudela (2:92), mention is made of an Arabic MS. in the Bibliotheque Royale at Paris, containing an account of the condition of the mosque under Saladin. This MS. has not yet been published. The travels of Ibrahim el-Khijari in 166970, a small portion of which, from the manuscript in the Ducal Library at Gotha, has been published by Tuch, with translation, etc. (Leipzig, 1850), are said to contain a minute description of the mosque (Tuch, p. 2). The best description of the interior is that of Stanley, *Jewish Church and Sermons in the East* (the two are identical), in which he gives the singular narrative of rabbi Benjamin, and a letter of M. Pierotti, which appeared in the *Times* immediately after the prince of Wales's visit. A plan of the mosque is attached to Stanley's narrative. The description given by Ali Bey (*Travels*, vol. 2) is substantially the same as that of Dean Stanley. A few words about the exterior, a sketch of the masonry, and a view of the town, showing the enclosure standing prominently in the foreground, will be found in Bartlett's *Walks*, etc., p. 216-219. A photograph of the exterior, from the East (?), is given as No. 63 of *Palestine as it is*, by Rev. G. W. Bridges. A ground-plan exhibiting considerable detail, made by two Moslem architects who lately superintended some repairs in the Haram, and given by them to Dr. Barclay of Jerusalem, is engraved in Osborn's *Palestine, Past and Present*, p. 364. Thomson, *Land and Book*, 2:385 sq., gives some additional particulars; also Tristram, *Land of Israel*, p. 393 sq. SEE [HEBRON](#).