

HEBRON: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND STATISTICS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hebron -- located south of Jerusalem in the Judean hills -- is home to approximately 120,000 Arabs, 500 Jews, and three Christians. An additional 6,000 Jews reside in the adjacent community of Kiryat Arba.

Hebron is the site of the oldest Jewish community in the world, which dates back to Biblical times. The Book of Genesis relates that Abraham purchased the field where the Tomb of the Patriarchs is located as a burial place for his wife Sarah. According to Jewish tradition, the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah are buried in the Tomb.

Hebron has a long and rich Jewish history. It was one of the first places where the Patriarch Abraham resided after his arrival in Canaan. King David was anointed in Hebron, where he reigned for seven years. One thousand years later, during the first Jewish revolt against the Romans, the city was the scene of extensive fighting. Jews lived in Hebron almost continuously throughout the Byzantine, Arab, Mameluke, and Ottoman periods. It was only in 1929 -- as a result of a murderous Arab pogrom in which 67 Jews were murdered and the remainder were forced to flee -- that the city became temporarily "free" of Jews. After the 1967 Six-Day War, the Jewish community of Hebron was re-established. It has grown to include a range of religious and educational institutions.

Hebron contains many sites of Jewish religious and historical significance, in addition to the Tomb of the Patriarchs. These include the Tombs of Othniel Ben Kenaz (the first Judge of Israel) and Avner Ben Ner (general and confidante to Kings Saul and David), and Ruth and Jesse (great-grandmother and father, respectively, of King David). Victims of the 1929 pogrom, as well as prominent rabbinical sages and community figures, are buried in Hebron's ancient Jewish cemetery.

In recent years, Hebron has been the site of many violent incidents, two of which stand out. In May 1980 Palestinian terrorists murdered 6 Jewish yeshiva students and wounded 20 others, who were returning from prayers at the Tomb of the Patriarchs. In February 1994, Dr. Baruch Goldstein opened fire on Muslim worshippers at the Tomb, murdering 29 and wounding 125.

After the signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement ("Oslo II"), authority for most civil affairs regarding Hebron's Arab residents was transferred from the Israeli Civil Administration to the Palestinian Authority and the (Arab) Municipality of Hebron. Those

services which remained the responsibility of the Civil Administration will be transferred following the IDF redeployment from Hebron. The IDF will retain sole responsibility for the security and well-being of Hebron's Jewish community.

I. INTRODUCTION

Hebron (Al-Khalil in Arabic) is located 32 km. south of Jerusalem in the Judean hills, and sits between 870 and 1,020 meters above sea level. The city is built on several hills and nahals/wadis, most of which run north- to-south. Hebron's monthly average temperatures are lower than those of Jerusalem. The city receives approximately 466 millimeters average rainfall annually. Its climate has -- since Biblical times -- encouraged extensive local agriculture.

The Hebrew word "Hebron" is (inter alia) explained as being derived from the Hebrew word for "friend" ("haver"), a description for the Patriarch Abraham, who was considered to be the friend of God. The Arabic "Al- Khalil" -- literally "the friend" -- has a nearly identical derivation, and also refers to the Patriarch Abraham (Ibrahim), whom Muslims similarly describe as the friend of God.

Hebron has approximately 120,000 (Sunni Muslim) Arab residents. Hebron's Jewish population, comprised of 45 Jewish families and around 150 yeshiva students, is about 500. Hebron's three Christian residents are the custodians of the city's Russian church. An additional 6,000 Jews live in the adjacent community of Kiryat Arba.

II. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: BIBLICAL PERIOD TO 1967

Numbers 13:22 states that (Canaanite) Hebron was founded seven years before the Egyptian town of Zoan, i.e. around 1720 BCE, and the ancient (Canaanite and Israelite) city of Hebron was situated at Tel Rumeida. The city's history has been inseparably linked with the Cave of Machpelah, which the Patriarch Abraham purchased from Ephron the Hittite for 400 silver shekels (Genesis 23), as a family tomb. As recorded in Genesis, the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the Matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca and Leah, are buried there, and -- according to a Jewish tradition -- Adam and Eve are also buried there.

Hebron is mentioned 87 times in the Bible, and is the world's oldest Jewish community. Joshua assigned Hebron to Caleb from the tribe of Judah (Joshua 14:13-14), who subsequently led his tribe in conquering the city and its environs (Judges 1:1-20). As Joshua 14:15 notes, "the former name of Hebron was Kiryat Arba..."

Following the death of King Saul, God instructed David to go to Hebron, where he was anointed King of Judah (II Samuel 2:1-4). A little more than 7.5 years later, David was anointed King over all Israel, in Hebron (II Samuel 5:1-3).

The city was part of the united kingdom and -- later -- the southern Kingdom of Judah, until the latter fell to the Babylonians in 586 BCE. Despite the loss of Jewish independence, Jews continued to live in Hebron (Nehemiah 11:25), and the city was later incorporated into the (Jewish) Hasmonean kingdom by John Hyrcanus. King Herod (reigned 37-4 BCE) built the base of the present structure -- the 12 meter high wall -- over the Tomb the Patriarchs.

The city was the scene of extensive fighting during the Jewish Revolt against the Romans (65-70, see Josephus 4:529, 554), but Jews continued to live there after the Revolt, through the later Bar Kochba Revolt (132-135 CE), and into the Byzantine period. The remains of a synagogue from the Byzantine period have been excavated in the city, and the Byzantines built a large church over the Tomb of the Patriarchs, incorporating the pre- existing Herodian structure.

Jews continued to live in Hebron after the city's conquest by the Arabs (in 638), whose generally tolerant rule was welcomed, especially after the often harsh Byzantine rule -- although the Byzantines never forbade Jews from praying at the Tomb. The Arabs converted the Byzantine church at the Tomb of the Patriarchs into a mosque.

Upon capturing the city in 1100, the Crusaders expelled the Jewish community, and converted the mosque at the Tomb back into a church. The Jewish community was re-established following the Mamelukes' conquest of the city in 1260, and the Mamelukes reconverted the church at the Tomb of the Patriarchs back into a mosque. However, the restored Islamic (Mameluke) ascendancy was less tolerant than the pre-Crusader Islamic (Arab) regimes -- a 1266 decree barred Jews (and Christians) from entering the Tomb of the Patriarchs, allowing them only to ascend to the fifth, later the seventh, step outside the eastern wall. The Jewish cemetery -- on a hill west of the Tomb -- was first mentioned in a letter dated to 1290.

The Ottoman Turks' conquest of the city in 1517 was marked by a violent pogrom which included many deaths, rapes, and the plundering of Jewish homes. The surviving Jews fled to Beirut and did not return until 1533. In 1540, Jewish exiles from Spain acquired the site of the "Court of the Jews" and built the Avraham Avinu ("Abraham Our Father") synagogue. (One year -- according to local legend -- when the requisite quorum for prayer was lacking, the Patriarch Abraham himself appeared to complete the quorum; hence, the name of the synagogue.)

Despite the events of 1517, its general poverty and a devastating plague in 1619, the Hebron Jewish community grew. Throughout the Turkish period (1517-1917), groups of Jews from other parts of the Land of Israel, and the Diaspora, moved to Hebron from time to time, joining the existing community, and the city became a rabbinic center of note.

In 1775, the Hebron Jewish community was rocked by a blood libel, in which Jews were falsely accused of murdering the son of a local sheikh. The community -- which was largely sustained by donations from abroad -- was made to pay a crushing fine, which

further worsened its already shaky economic situation. Despite its poverty, the community managed, in 1807, to purchase a 5-dunam plot -- upon which the city's wholesale market stands today -- and after several years the sale was recognized by the Hebron Waqf. In 1811, 800 dunams of land were acquired to expand the cemetery. In 1817, the Jewish community numbered approximately 500, and by 1838, it had grown to 700, despite a pogrom which took place in 1834, during Mohammed Ali's rebellion against the Ottomans (1831-1840).

In 1870, a wealthy Turkish Jew, Haim Yisrael Romano, moved to Hebron and purchased a plot of land upon which his family built a large residence and guest house, which came to be called Beit Romano. The building later housed a synagogue and served as a yeshiva, before it was seized by the Turks. During the Mandatory period, the building served the British administration as a police station, remand center, and court house.

In 1893, the building later known as Beit Hadassah was built by the Hebron Jewish community as a clinic, and a second floor was added in 1909. The American Zionist Hadassah organization contributed the salaries of the clinic's medical staff, who served both the city's Jewish and Arab populations.

During World War I, before the British occupation, the Jewish community suffered greatly under the wartime Turkish administration. Young men were forcibly conscripted into the Turkish army, overseas financial assistance was cut off, and the community was threatened by hunger and disease. However, with the establishment of the British administration in 1918, the community, reduced to 430 people, began to recover. In 1925, Rabbi Mordechai Epstein established a new yeshiva, and by 1929, the population had risen to 700 again.

On 23 August 1929, local Arabs devastated the Jewish community by perpetrating a vicious, large-scale, organized, pogrom. According to the Encyclopedia Judaica:

"The assault was well planned and its aim was well defined: the elimination of the Jewish settlement of Hebron. The rioters did not spare women, children, or the aged; the British gave passive assent. Sixty-seven were killed, 60 wounded, the community was destroyed, synagogues razed, and Torah scrolls burned."

59 of the 67 victims were buried in a common grave in the Jewish cemetery (including 23 who had been murdered in one house alone, and then dismembered), and the surviving Jews fled to Jerusalem. (During the violence, Haj Issa el-Kourdieh -- a local Arab who lived in a house in the Jewish Quarter -- sheltered 33 Jews in his basement and protected them from the rioting mob.) However, in 1931, 31 Jewish families returned to Hebron and re-established the community. This effort was short-lived, and in April 1936, fearing another massacre, the British authorities evacuated the community.

Following the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, and the invasion by Arab armies, Hebron was captured and occupied by the Jordanian Arab Legion. During the Jordanian

occupation, which lasted until 1967, Jews were not permitted to live in the city, nor -- despite the Armistice Agreement -- to visit or pray at the Jewish holy sites in the city. Additionally, the Jordanian authorities and local residents undertook a systematic campaign to eliminate any evidence of the Jewish presence in the city. They razed the Jewish Quarter, desecrated the Jewish cemetery and built an animal pen on the ruins of the Avraham Avinu synagogue.

III. HEBRON SINCE 1967

A. The Re-established Jewish community

Israel returned to Hebron in 1967. The old Jewish Quarter had been destroyed and the cemetery was devastated. Since 1968, the re-established Jewish community in Hebron itself has been linked to the nearby community of Kiryat Arba. On 4 April 1968, a group of Jews registered at the Park Hotel in the city. The next day they announced that they had come to re-establish Hebron's Jewish community. The actions sparked a nationwide debate and drew support from across the political spectrum. After an initial period of deliberation, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's Labor-led government decided to temporarily move the group into a near-by IDF compound, while a new community -- to be called Kiryat Arba -- was built adjacent to Hebron. The first 105 housing units were ready in the autumn of 1972.

Today, Kiryat Arba has approximately 6,000 residents. Its built-up area comprises some 6,000 dunams, and is located about 750 meters from the Tomb at its nearest point. Kiryat Arba has its own elected local council, schools, religious and community institutions, clinics, and industrial/commercial zone. It draws its water from mains coming from the Etzion Bloc and the Herodion area to the north. About half of its residents work in Jerusalem and its environs; 30% are employed in local education, health, and administrative services, and the remaining 20% are employed in local tourism, industry, and commerce.

The Jewish community in Hebron itself was re-established permanently in April 1979, when a group of Jews from Kiryat Arba moved into Beit Hadassah (see page 2 above). Following a deadly terrorist attack in May 1980 in which six Jews returning from prayers at the Tomb of the Patriarchs were murdered, and 20 wounded (see Annex I below), Prime Minister Menahem Begin's Likud-led government agreed to refurbish Beit Hadassah, and to permit Jews to move into the adjacent Beit Chason and Beit Schneerson, in the old Jewish Quarter. An additional floor was built on Beit Hadassah, and 11 families moved in during 1986.

Since 1980, other Jewish properties and buildings in Hebron have been refurbished and rebuilt. Today the Hebron Jewish community comprises 19 families living in buildings adjacent to the Avraham Avinu courtyard (see page 2 above), the area also houses two kindergartens, the municipal committee offices, and a guesthouse; seven families living in mobile homes at Tel Rumeida; twelve families living in Beit Hadassah; six families

living in Beit Schneerson; one family living in Beit Kastel; six families live in Beit Chason; Beit Romano, home to the Shavei Hevron yeshiva, is currently being refurbished.

Local administration and services for the Hebron Jewish community are provided by the Hebron Municipal Committee, which was established by the Defense and Interior Ministries, and whose functions are similar to those of Israel's regular local councils. The Ministry of Housing and Construction has established the "Association for the Renewal of the Jewish Community in Hebron," to carry out projects in the city. The Association is funded both through the state budget and by private contributions. It deals with general development of, and for, the Jewish community.

In addition to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, Tel Rumeida, the Jewish cemetery, and the historical residences mentioned above, other Jewish sites in Hebron include: 1) the Tomb of Ruth and Jesse (King David's father) which is located on a hillside overlooking the cemetery; 2) the site of the Terebinths of Mamre ("Alonei Mamre") from Genesis 18:1, where God appeared to Abraham, which is located about 400 meters from the Glass Junction (Herodian, Roman, and Byzantine remains mark the site today); 3) King David's Pool (also known as the Sultan's Pool), which is located about 200 meters south of the road to the entrance of the Tomb of the Patriarchs, which Jews hold to be the pool referred to in II Samuel 4:12, 4) the Tomb of Abner, Saul and David's general, which is located near the Tomb, and 5) the Tomb of Othniel Ben Kenaz, the first Judge of Israel (Judges 3:9-11).

B. Security, and Hebron and the Peace Process

According to the Oslo accords, the IDF has sole responsibility for the security of the Jewish community of Hebron. However, it is the Israel Police which is responsible for investigating instances of possible violations of the law by Hebron's Jewish residents. Providing security for Hebron's Jewish residents is a particular challenge since Hebron's is the only Jewish community in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza which is situated directly in the midst of a city with a large Arab population. Moreover, the community is not concentrated in a single area or bloc, but is, rather, comprised of dispersed and separated sites. Terrorists could thus threaten one individual site, or isolate one site from the others by creating pressure on the roads (traffic jams, etc.) and thus impede the arrival of Israel security forces should one site be attacked, or could attack the roads joining the sites. Additionally, some of the sites are situated lower than the surrounding areas, and thus face clear threats.

Responsibility for security at the Tomb of the Patriarchs -- in accordance with the recommendations of the committee which investigated the massacre of 29 Muslim worshippers and the wounding of 125 by Kiryat Arba resident Baruch Goldstein on 25.02.94 -- is shared by the IDF (outside the Tomb) and a special Israel Police/Border Police unit (inside). Following the massacre and the publication of the committee's findings, it was decided to establish new prayer procedures which would enable both communities to exercise their religious rights as fully and freely as possible and would

provide for the complete separation of Jewish and Muslim worshippers. In this context, a schedule of the religious holidays of both Jews and Muslims was established in which each community was allocated 10 days annually in which it would have exclusive access to the Tomb.

Following the signing of the Interim Agreement on 28 September 1995, authority over most civilian matters concerning Hebron's Arab residents was transferred from the IDF Civil Administration to the Palestinian Authority and/or the (Arab) Municipality of Hebron. Those services which remained the responsibility of the Civil Administration will be transferred to the Palestinian Authority and the Municipality following the IDF redeployment in Hebron.

The Interim Agreement provides for the stationing of a Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH), whose sole function is to monitor and report on events. On 10 October 1996, Israel and the Palestinian Authority signed a joint letter requesting the Norwegian government to extend the operation of the current TIPH, composed of 30 Norwegian citizens.

ANNEX I: TERRORIST ATTACKS AND VIOLENT INCIDENTS IN HEBRON SINCE 1929

(The following list is intended to provide a representative -- not exhaustive -- summary of terrorist attacks and violent incidents which have occurred in Hebron since 1929.)

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| 23.08.29 | 67 Jews (including women, children, and the elderly) were murdered, and 60 injured in a vicious pogrom which had been well-planned by Arab rioters. In the course of the pogrom, women were raped, homes and synagogues were plundered and burned, and Torah scrolls were desecrated and burned. |
| 09.10.68 | A 17 year-old Arab youth threw a grenade at Jews praying on the steps of the Tomb's main gate. 47 Jews, including an eight month-old baby, were injured. |
| 05.11.68 | A Jewish man and his son, an elderly Arab man, and three Arab children were injured by an explosive charge near the Tomb. |
| 29.12.68 | Terrorists attack a security post near the Tomb. One terrorist was killed; the others fled. No Israeli soldiers were injured. |
| 07.08.76 | Two Jews were wounded when terrorists shot at a tour bus in the city. |
| 03.10.76 | On the eve of Yom Kippur, a mob of Arab youths burst into the Tomb and desecrated several Torah scrolls. Three soldiers fired in the air in an attempt to prevent their entry. 61 rioters were arrested in the Tomb. |

- 02.05.80 Arab terrorists ambushed a group of Jews returning from the Tomb to Beit Hadassah. Six Jews were murdered and 20 wounded.
- 21.05.80 A Molotov cocktail was thrown at an Israeli vehicle in Hebron. A Jewish woman was wounded.
- 02.06.80 11 Arabs, including four schoolchildren, were injured when a booby-trapped grenade exploded in the Hebron market.
- 16.12.80 An Arab resident of Hebron was wounded by a bomb at Glass Junction in Hebron.
- 10.02.81 A Jewish resident of Kiryat Arba was stabbed and wounded in the Hebron casbah.
- 07.07.83 Beit Romano Yeshiva student Aharon Gross was attacked and stabbed by three Arab youths in the market area. He later died of his wounds.
- 25.07.83 Jewish terrorists opened fire at the Islamic College in Hebron. Three students were murdered and approximately 30 wounded.
- 10.08.85 A Jewish resident of Kiryat Arba was stabbed and wounded in the Hebron casbah.
- 25.04.86 A 16-year old Jewish youth was stabbed and lightly wounded in the casbah.
- 06.06.86 A Jewish resident of Kiryat Arba was stabbed and wounded in the casbah.
- 14.09.86 A young Arab woman, the daughter of a local mukhtar, stabbed a soldier at the entrance to the Tomb. She was shot and killed.
- 16.10.86 A Jewish resident of Kiryat Arba was stabbed in the city.
- 25.10.92 Three Arab terrorists shot at soldiers guarding the Tomb's generator. One reserve soldier was murdered; two were wounded.
- 28.05.93 Yeshiva student Erez Shmuel was stabbed to death approximately 500 meters from from the Tomb, while on his way to Friday evening prayers at the Tomb.
- 06.12.93 Mordechai Lapid and his son Shalom were shot to death near Glass Junction in Hebron. Hamas claimed responsibility.
- 25.02.94 Kiryat Arba resident Baruch Goldstein opened fire on Muslim worshippers inside the Tomb, murdering 29 and wounding 125.
- 07.07.94 Sarit Prigal (17) was shot to death in a drive-by shooting, when terrorists opened fire from a passing car near the entrance to Kiryat Arba.

19.03.95

Nahum Hoss (31) of Hebron, and Yehuda Partus (34) of Kiryat Arba, were murdered by shots fired at their bus from a terrorist ambush near Glass Junction in Hebron. Six others were injured.

<https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/Guide/Pages/Hebron%20-%20Background.aspx>