

The City of Kiriath-jearim

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Preface: The City of Kiriath-jearim is one of the more fascinating cities of Biblical history. It was initially inhabited by the Gibeonites, who, in deceit, forged a bond of peace with the Israelites so that they would not be eradicated by the Israelites on their path of destruction throughout the Land of Promise. When the boundaries of the tribes of Israel were set, Kiriath-jearim was on the border of Benjamin, Dan and Judah (there were about eight points at which three of the Israeli territories intersection). When the Ark of God had been captured by the Philistines, the Philistines were struck by the devastating hand of God, causing them to relinquish their hold of the Ark. The Ark was first taken to Beth-shemesh, where too many of the Israelites there treated it casually, behaving like curiosity-driven rubes looking inside to confirm what was in there. After a substantial portion of Beth-shemesh died, the Ark was shipped northward to the nearest major city, Kiriath-jearim.

It is important that you have a feel for the context of this doctrine. The Philistines captured the Ark of God and brought it to three of their principal cities. In each city, they were invaded by rodents which were probably infected by the bubonic plague. After each city suffered great human loss, they moved the Ark along to another Philistine city until the citizens of Ekron said that the Ark needed to be returned to Israel. The Ark was taken to the city of Beth-shemesh, which was one of the closest Israeli settlement to Ekron, and which was a Levitical city. Then we had a problem. The Israelites of Beth-shemesh first celebrated the coming of the Ark, but then curiosity got the better of them. Scripture told them what was in the Ark, which they may or may not have been aware of. However, despite the fact that the Ark was a holy artifact which was to be seen only once a year solely by the High Priest, several of the Beth-shemeshites decided to open up the Arks top and to look inside. They had completely and totally trivialized the Ark of God, which was probably the single most sacred article the Tabernacle. Therefore, God killed a significant number of them (120), and they decided to move the Ark out of Beth-shemesh. They chose to send the Ark to Kiriath-jearim, and therein is our question? Why was Kiriath-jearim the city to where the Ark was sent. A short study of Kiriath-jearim should tell us why.

- I. English pronunciation: *KIR-jath JĒ-e-rim* or *KIR-i-ath JĒ-i-rim*.
- II. Kiriath-jearim is made up of two Hebrew words:
 1. The first is qir^eyâth (קִּרְיָת) [pronounced *kir-YAWTH*], which simply means *city, town*. Strong's #7151 BDB #900.
 2. The second is the masculine noun ya'ar (יַעַר) [pronounced *YAH-gahr*], which means *wood, forest, thicket*. The *im* ending in the Hebrew simply makes this word plural. Strong's #3293 and #3264 (plural form) BDB #420.
 3. Together, they are qir^eyâth y^egârîym (קִּרְיָת יַעַרִים) [pronounced *KIR-yath y^egaw-REEM*], which is, of course, transliterated *Kiriath-jearim* (or, *Kiriath-jearim*). Therefore, it means *City of the Forests*. Strong's #7157 BDB #900.
- III. Other names:
 1. Kiriath-jearim is called *Baalah* in Joshua 15:9 | Chron. 13:6.
 2. It is called Kiriath-Baal in Joshua 15:60 18:14.

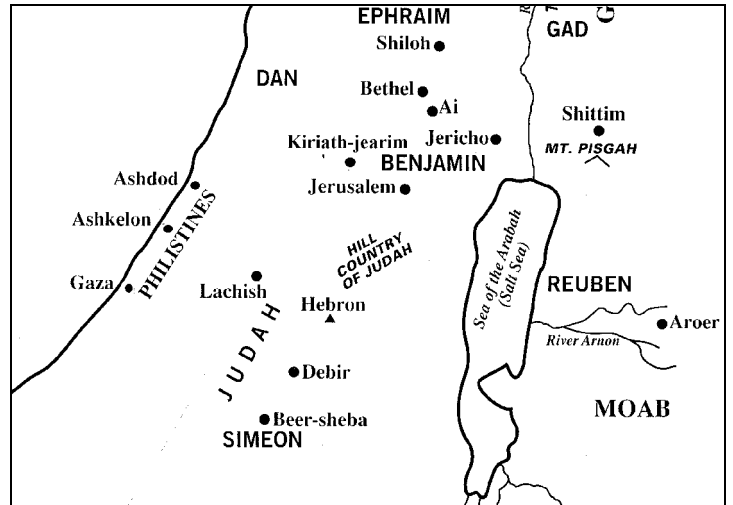
3. Baalah-Judah in II Sam. 6:2 (which could have referred to the general area where Kiriath-jearim was located).
4. These two or three names indicate that Kiriath-jearim was once a city of Baal worship.
5. Kiriath-arim in Ezra 2:25 (compare to parallel passage Neh. 7:29). This is either a slightly abbreviated form of Kiriath-arim or the copyist simply left the *yodh* out in the Ezra passage.

IV. Less likely equivalencies:

1. There is no reason to think that *Kiriath-jearim* of Judah is identical to *Kiriath* of Benjamin (Joshua 18:28). *Kiriath-jearim* is earlier presented as a bordering city for Benjamin which specifically belongs to Judah (Joshua 18:14).
2. ZPEB suggests that Baalath, which was fortified by Solomon, could be another name for Kiriath-jearim.¹ The primary reason for taking this view is the similarity of the names *Baalath* and *Baalah*. We find Baalath mentioned in I Kings 9:18 and II Chron. 8:6. Neither passage gives us any helpful additional information, other than the fact that Solomon fortified the cities named herein.

V. Location:

1. We know by Joshua 15:9 that Kiriath-jearim was one of the bordering cities of Judah.
2. It is given as a bordering city of Benjamin in Joshua 18:14–15 (yet its possession by Judah is affirmed in this passage).
3. Kiriath-jearim was very close to Dan, as this was the first place that they camped when leaving their territory for some territory that would be easier for them to conquer. Actually, they camped right outside Kiriath-jearim (Judges 18:12). This very passage again confirms that Kiriath-jearim was a Judæan city.
4. The great ancient historian Josephus places Kiriath-jearim as in the neighborhood of Bethshemesh, which is rather imprecise and may be based simply upon the movement of the Ark out of Bethshemesh to Kiriath-jearim. Eusebius and Jerome report that there is a village, Cariathiareim, extant in their day 9 or 10 miles from Jerusalem on the road to Lod (Lydda).² Although ISBE reports



s as possibly contradictory, this is all in keeping with the information found in Scripture (and it is possible that Cariathiareim may not be equivalent to Kiriath-jearim).³

VI. The modern location of Kiriath-jearim:

1. Robinson suggests that Kuriel el 'Enab (*the town of grapes*, and more commonly known as *Abu Ghosh*) is the modern location of Kiriath-jearim. This is 9 miles west of Jerusalem on the carriage



Possible site of Kiriath-jearim from Sandals

¹ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 3, p. 827.

² Eusebius first said 10 Roman miles and later corrected himself and revised it to 9 Roman miles.

³ That is, a village in the time of Eusebius and Jerome may have been called Cariathiareim after Kiriath-jearim, supposing that it was in the same place as the ancient Kiriath-jearim. And, just as archeologists disagree today, it may not have been exactly where Kiriath-jearim previously stood. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. III; p. 1812.

road to Jaffa. It is surrounded by heavy woods.⁴ Euty chius, a Patriarch of Alexandria (877–940 A.D.), supports with Robinson in his *Annals*, saying that the Ark was taken from Beth-shemesh to a village known as Qaryet el-Inab, once called Qaryeh but more widely known as Abu Ghosh. According to ZPEB, the Church of the Ark of the Covenant stands upon the mound in this area known as Deir el-Azhar, whom some take as a reference to Eleazar ben Abinadab, in whose custodianship was the Ark during the period of our passage. *Abundant sherds of the Late Bronze and Iron Ages are found on the slopes of the mound.*⁵ ZPEB seems to be fairly adamant that this is the likely location for ancient Kiriath-jearim, discounting both Masterman and Condor (both below), claiming that they placed too much emphasis upon Kiriath-jearim being in the neighborhood of Beth-shemesh.⁶ Apparently, Abu Ghosh has been excavated; however, the excavations have *concentrated on the Roman-Byzantine and the Crusader structures on the one hand and on the prehistoric structures on the other hand.*⁷

2. Another city, Sôba, is suggested, which is in this same general area. According to ISBE, its commanding position is its primarily claim to being the spot where ancient Kiriath-jearim was located.⁸
3. Colonel Conder strongly advocates the site of Khirbet 'Erma, which is on the south side of the rugged Wâdy Ismae'n. Unfortunately, the name is the primary reason for this suggested site. It apparently is not close enough to the other Gibeonite cities nor is it correctly placed in the Judæan-Benjamin border.
4. E. W. G. Masterman (who wrote the article found in ISBE) tells us that if one stands on the hill of Beth-shemesh and looks northwest, where the cities of Zorah and Eshtaol are in view, *a lofty hill crowned by a considerable forest catches the eye.* The village below the summit is called Beit Masîr and the hilltop is a shrine to the local saint, Sheikh el Ajâm, reminiscent of heathen worship of the original settlers of Kiriath-baal. This area is so *holy* that trees are not cut down and fallen brushwood is not removed. *Southward from this site the eye follows the line of Judæan hills—probably the Mt. Jearim of Joshua 15 10—until it strikes the outstanding point of Keslâ (Chesalon), some 2 miles to the south. If the ark was taken here, the people of Beth-shemesh could have followed its progress almost the whole way to its new abode.*⁹



A possible site for Kiriath-jearim from Sandals

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VII. As found in Scripture:

1. Originally (or, at least prior to Israel's taking of the land), Kiriath-jearim was one of the several cities which belonged to the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:17). These cities also included Gibeon, Chephirah and Beeroth. You may recall that when Joshua invaded the land, he was instructed to destroy all of the inhabitants of the land, as they were idol-worshiping and (in some cases) baby-sacrificing heathen. The Gibeonites

⁴ Quoted and paraphrased from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. III; p. 1812.

⁵ Quoted and paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 3, pp. 825–826.

⁶ One of the points that Masterman makes is being able to see the transport of the Ark from Beth-shemesh almost all the way to Kiriath-jearim.

⁷ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 3, p. 826.

⁸ Quoted and paraphrased from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. III; p. 1812.

⁹ Quoted or paraphrased from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. III; p. 1812.

realized that they were doomed. They were soon to be conquered by the Israelites. They knew of how God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt. They knew about how Israel completely destroyed Jericho, including the men, women, and children; and even the animals. Then Israel burned the city to the ground. The Gibeonites feared God and they feared their impending doom. So what they did was to dress up in raggedly old clothes, which made it seem like they came from a long distance away; then they met with the Israelites and forged a formal bond with them. When Israel began to move through the land, they came upon these cities and had to stay their hand, as they had entered into a peace agreement with them. We studied the Gibeonites in great detail in Joshua 9. However, what we are to get from this is, Kiriath-jearim was originally settled by Gibeonites. The Gibeonites became simple laborers for the Jews, and they were assigned to cut wood and to haul water for the Israelites. It is not clear that they moved out of the city. What would be a reasonable outcome is that the Gibeonite males (and possibly women and children) served Israel during the time the Israel swept through the land; and that the Gibeonites returned to their cities once the fighting was over. It is not clear whether or not any Jews moved into the city (it would be reasonable to suppose that a few did, although not for any military purpose).¹⁰

2. Kiriath-jearim was not inhabited solely by Gibeonites. The first Israelites to move into Kiriath-jearim was a son of Caleb by Ephrath, his wife after Aruba died. Shobal was the son of Hur, who was the son of Caleb, and Shobal is called the father of Kiriath-jearim. The families who occupied Kiriath-jearim (apart from the resident Gibeonites) were the Ithrites, the Puthites, the Shumathites, and the Mishraitites. From these, came the Zorathites and the Eshtaolites (that is, those who moved down to settle in Zorah and Eshtaol). I Chron. 2:50–53
3. Kiriath-jearim is a bordering city for Judah (Joshua 15:9). It is at one of the northernmost points of Judah, on the border of the territories of Dan and Benjamin (Joshua 18:14 Judges 18:12).
4. This was one of the many cities given to the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:60).
5. As mentioned, Kiriath-jearim was a bordering city for Benjamin (Joshua 18:15–16).
6. Kiriath-jearim was not a Levitical city (Joshua 19).
7. The Danites, when going to find territory which was easier to conquer, first camped at Kiriath-jearim (Judges 18:12).
8. Of course, Kiriath-jearim is the city of our passage; the city to where to Ark of God was sent. A man by the name of Abinadab, who consecrated his son, Eleazar, took possession of the Ark. Eleazar, his son, was the person who was actually entrusted with the Ark. I Sam. 6:21 7:1–2
9. The Ark remained in Kiriath-jearim until the time of David, who brought the Ark to Jerusalem (I Chron. 13:1–7 II Chron. 1:4).¹¹
10. There is a possibility that Pharaoh Shishak (I Kings 14:25–26 II Chron. 12:1–9) may have taken Kiriath-jearim in his inland march toward Jerusalem. We have no Scripture to confirm this; however, a city called q-d-t-m of No. 25 of Shishak's list could possibly have been q-r-t-m, making its identification with Kiriath-jearim more likely (the *d* and the *r* in Egyptian hieroglyphs are quite similar).¹² Apparently, in the list of cities that Shishak left us, this would have been a logical place for Kiriath-jearim to be. This would have been in the 10th century B.C.

¹⁰ There is, of course, more to this story than this. In Joshua 10, five kings attacked Gibeon, and Israel was forced by treaty to defend them. Later, there was an incident when David continued to honor this treaty between Israel and the Gibeonites (II Sam. 21). The Gibeonites are a marvelous analogy to our salvation. We may be the most unlovely things around, but we are protected by God by treaty. No one else may like us; but God is our Savior and our Protector. The particulars of this treaty make up an incredible tale of grace and honor and are covered in Joshua 9–10.

¹¹ There is a possible time problem suggested by I Sam. 7:2. It appears as though the Ark remains in Kiriath-jearim for a period of 20 years; however, if it is not moved until the time of David, we are actually speaking of about 45–50 years that the Ark is in Kiriath-jearim. But what appears to be the case is that v. 2 does not deal with the time frame that the Ark was kept there, but with Israel and the Philistines and Israel and Jehovah-God. This is covered in greater detail in the **Doctrine of the Ark of God** and in the exegesis of I Sam. 7:2.

¹² The information for this point was paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 3, p. 827.

11. Kiriath-jearim is not mentioned again until the book of Jeremiah, when a prophet, Uriah ben Shemaiah, is said to have come out of Kiriath-jearim (Jer. 26:20). Although we know nearly nothing about Uriah other than he was killed by Jehoiakim, this brief mention seems to be favorable.
12. The final mention of Kiriath-jearim is not until the exiles of Judah return from being carried away by the King of Babylon. There were 743 men who returned who had been from the cities of Kiriath-jearim, Chephirah and Beeroth, all cities originally of the Gibeonites. Ezra 2:25 Neh. 7:14.
13. There is one mention of Kiriath-jearim in the Apocrypha in I Esdras 5:19, a passage which is more or less parallel to the Ezra and Nehemiah passages, where Kiriath-jearim is called *Kirathiarus*.

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VIII. Finally, why was the Ark sent to Kiriath-jearim?

1. This is the question which sent us to study Kiriath-jearim. First of all, Kiriath-jearim was close. It was less than 10 miles up the road from Beth-shemesh. It was the first major city down the road from Beth-shemesh, and this was possibly the primary reason it was sent there. It would have been quick and easy for men of Beth-shemesh to be dispatched to Kiriath-jearim to obtain permission to transfer the Ark, and there would be a quick turn-around time. The permission and final destination of the Ark could have been gotten within 12 hours.
2. Secondly, it was **not** a Levitical city. If you have noticed in any profession, the people of that profession tend to stick together. There is often some form of solidarity. The Levites of Beth-shemesh did not want to send their problems to another city of Levites. They did not want their brothers to suffer as they had.
3. Shiloh was too far away. They could have shipped it to Shiloh, but how many men would they have lost to get it there? The entire purpose was to get this Ark out of town as quickly as possible. They might get volunteers to see that the Ark was moved 10 miles. They would have a very difficult time trying to find a group of men who would transport the Ark 30 miles. Furthermore, we don't even know if there was a road from Beth-shemesh to Shiloh. A more circuitous route could have turned the trip into 40 or 50 miles.
4. If Masterman correctly identified the correct location of Kiriath-jearim, then the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh could view the progress of the movement of the Ark from a *safe* distance.
5. Finally, and this is the main reason that the Ark was sent to Kiriath-jearim: it was a city filled with Gibeonites. These are not Israelites, they were foreigners who deceived Joshua into not killing them. Therefore, the men of Beth-shemesh really did not give a rip whether any of the men of Kiriath-jearim died. So what? They were Canaanites. They had heathen origins. They had deceived Joshua into letting them live. Whether they lived or died was not an issue to the men of Beth-shemesh. And certainly, there may have been some Israelites living there, but they would have assumed some of the prejudice associated with the Gibeonites. Blacks at one time faced great racial prejudice. If a white person chose to side with Blacks or to associate with Afro-Americans, there was a common and vicious epithet which was applied to them. Therefore, those who associated with the Gibeonites and had Gibeonite friends were subject to some of the same prejudices that the Gibeonites were.

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It is clear, when examining the sources of many the articles above that they have examined more ancient and better sources. However, there are so many hours in a day, so that, in order for me to do what I need to do, I need to stand upon the shoulders of hundreds of great Christian men who have preceded me.