

Here I am
(Genesis 46)



GIVE ME A LIFETIME - PART 11

"Isra'el took everything he owned with him on his journey. He arrived at Be'er-Sheva and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Yitz'chak. In a vision at night, God called to Isra'el, "Ya'akov! Ya'akov!" He answered, "Here I am." He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Don't be afraid to go down to Egypt. It is there that I will make you into a great nation. Not only will I go down with you to Egypt; but I will also bring you back here again after Yosef has closed your eyes." (Genesis 46:1-4)

Abraham's Well

"And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him. And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah. And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land. And he went up from thence to Beersheba. And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake. And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well."

Genesis 26:19-25 KJV



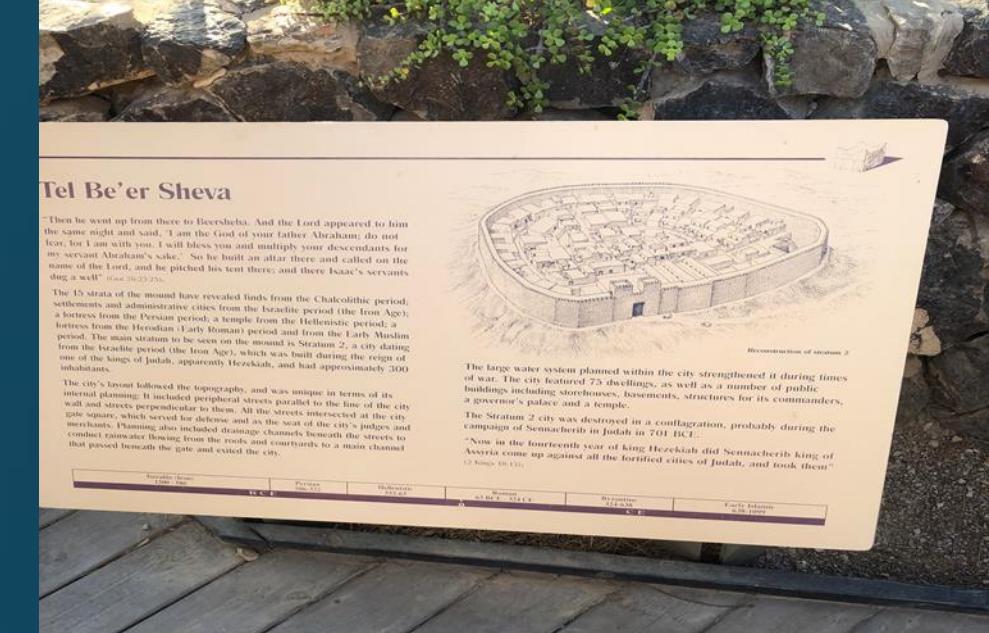
📍 BEERSHEBA, ISRAEL

בר-שבע

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באר-שבע

- Jacob and his family left Hebron (37:14) and traveled for about a week until they came to Beersheba, the southernmost town in Canaan (Josh. 15:21, 28). Beersheba was a very special place to Jacob, for there Abraham had dug a well (Gen. 21:30) and there Abraham lived after offering Isaac on Mount Moriah (22:19). Isaac had also lived at Beersheba (26:23, 32, 33).



באר-שבע

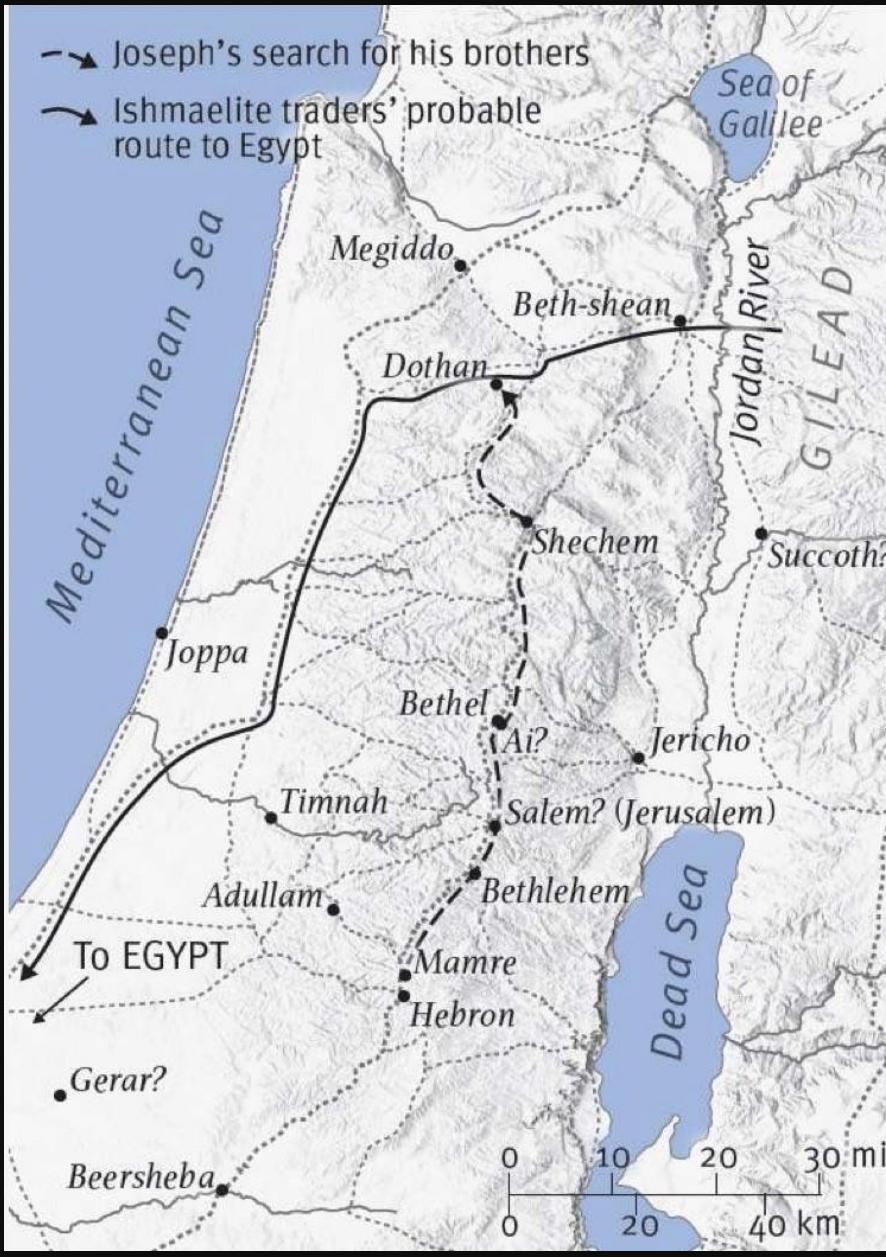
- It was from the home in Beersheba that Jacob left for Laban's house to find a wife. At Beersheba, God had appeared to Hagar (21:17) and to Isaac (26:23, 24), and now he would appear to Jacob.



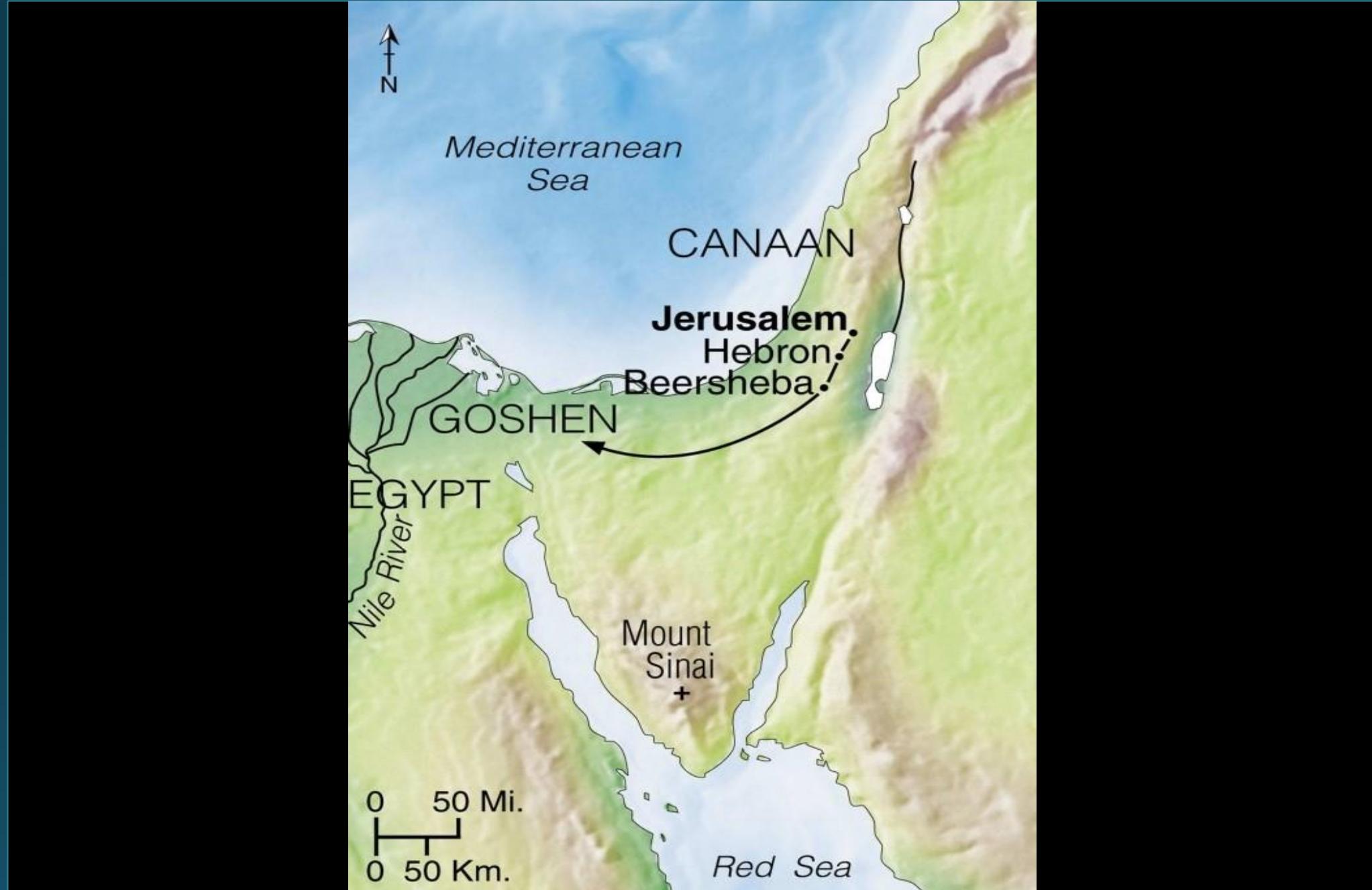
46:2 - “Here I am.”

Here, Yaakov responds the same way
many of his people did to God’s call,
saying Hineni, “Here I am”

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים לְיַשְׁרָאֵל בְּמִרְאַת פְּلִילָה,
וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב יַעֲקֹב; וַיֹּאמֶר, הָנָנוּ



(46:28) That Jacob chose Judah to scout a location in which the family could settle indicates that he trusted his son. In spite of his past failures, Judah now proved himself faithful, and his descendants were eventually named the royal tribe (49:8–12).



FOOTNOTE 1(a):

ESSAY: HOW NOT TO BE AFRAID

(Genesis 46.3) Fear not to go down to Egypt,

In addition to having a natural fear of the unknown, Jacob may have been afraid of dying on alien soil and/or of leaving the Promised Land, especially since God had forbidden his father Isaac from doing so (Genesis 26:1-3). God told Abraham, Isaac, and (later) Moses to "fear not"—though the Torah never states they were afraid. But God knows what we think and feel. God knows us better than we know ourselves. For the decent, that should be reassuring; for the indecent, it ought to be disquieting. But it often doesn't work that way because decent people often think they are worse than they are, and indecent people almost always think they are better than they are. For example, few groups have as high self-esteem as do violent criminals. Three American professors of psychology reported:

"Violent men seem to have a strong sense of personal superiority.... Favorable self-regard is linked to violence in one sphere after another. Murderers, rapists, wife-beaters, violent youth gangs, aggressive nations, and other categories of violent people are all marked by strongly held views of their own superiority.... When large groups of people differ in self-esteem, the group with the higher self-esteem is generally the more violent one."

The influence of fear on the human psyche and on human behavior is too often overlooked. Harold Kushner (author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*) was approached after a speech one night by a man who asked him what sentence God repeats more than any other in the Bible. Kushner guessed it was the verse about being kind to the widow, stranger and orphan. The man shook his head. "Not even close," he said. "The sentence God repeats more than any other is: 'Fear not.'" Kushner went home, looked up the phrase, and discovered the man was right.

Of course, the same Torah and Bible do tell us to fear God—because when people fear a good, moral, judging God, they are more likely to behave properly. This is borne out first and foremost by common sense: fear of punishment is the primary deterrent to crime. A society that meted out no punishments for a crime would be overrun by crime. And common sense is confirmed by academic research. As reported in a major academic study, societies in which people believe in hell have fewer crimes: "In a large analysis of 26 years of data consisting of 143,197 people in 67 countries, psychologists found significantly lower crime rates in societies where many people believe in hell compared to those where more people believed in heaven."

FOOTNOTE 1(b):

ESSAY: HOW NOT TO BE AFRAID

"The key finding is that controlling for each other, a nation's rate of belief in hell predicts lower crime rates, but the nation's rate of belief in heaven predicts higher crime rates, and these are strong effects,' lead author Azim Shariff, professor of psychology and director of the Culture and Morality Lab at the University of Oregon said in a university news release." Another study by Shariff found that "students were more likely to cheat when they believed in a forgiving God than a punishing God."

Shariff concludes, "It's possible that people who don't believe in the possibility of punishment in the afterlife feel like they can get away with unethical behavior. There is less of a divine deterrent." Though one would think that people who believe in heaven also believe in hell, it turns out that many people are certain that they are destined for heaven and have no fear whatsoever they will go to hell; therefore, the threat of hell as a punishment for evil behavior has no deterrent effect on their behavior. There is another benefit that accrues from fear of God: When we fear God, we are less likely to fear people. That not only provides the benefit of living a less fearful life, it also helps to supply people with the moral courage to do what is right at personal risk (see the essay, "The Moral Significance of Fearing God," in the commentary to Exodus 1:17).

When we believe in and fear God (and in an afterlife), we are not only less likely to fear people, we are also less likely to fear anything—even death, the most universal fear. In sum, it is highly significant God says "Fear not" far more often than anything else He says in the Bible. Too many people's behaviors and states of emotional well-being are affected by inappropriate fear.

(Prager, Dennis, *The Rational Bible: Genesis, God, Creation, and Destruction* (Washington, DC, Regnery Faith, 2019), 511-514)

FOOTNOTE 2:

Gen. 46:26 sixty-six persons. The total of vv. 8–25 is 70, from which Er, Onan, Manasseh, and Ephraim need to be deleted. (Gen. 46:27) seventy. Jacob, Joseph, Manasseh, and Ephraim should be added to the 66. The 75 of Acts 7:14 included an additional five people, born in the land, which were added in the LXX reading of 46:8–27 (cf. Ex. 1:5; Deut. 10:22). These five included two sons of Manasseh, two sons of Ephraim, and one grandson of the latter. Ex. 1:5 seventy persons. Cf. Gen. 46:8–27. Acts 7:14 reports 75 with the addition of five relatives of Joseph included in the LXX, but not the Hebrew text. (Ex. 1:6–8) This summary of a lengthy period of time moves the record from the death of Joseph (c. 1804 B.C.), the last recorded event in Genesis, to the radical change in Israel's history, i.e., from favor before Egypt's pharaoh to disfavor and enslavement (c. 1525–1445 B.C.).

FOOTNOTE 3(a):

The traditions of the three 'patriarchs' are followed in Genesis by the Joseph story. Unlike the patriarchal stories, this is a large-scale narrative conceived as a unity from the start and given a novelistic form (Gunkel, cf. Donner). This is matched by the complexity of its themes; here above all the elements of wisdom theology (von Rad 1953) and the theme of 'rule' (Crüsemann 1978, 143ff.; Blum) are significant. The scene of the blessing in ch. 48, inserted at the end of the Joseph story, unites the two main figures of Jacob and Joseph and at the same time points back to the beginning of the story of Jacob in its adoption of themes from ch. 27 and the beginning of the Jacob narrative. Evidently in this way, it serves to bind together the Jacob narrative and the Joseph story into a comprehensive 'Jacob story' (from his birth to his death). The theme of ch. 48 is an aetiology of the pre-eminence of the Joseph tribes in Israel. By contrast, in the collection of tribal sayings in ch. 49, we can see a clearly rival claim, in so far as here Judah is promised dominion over his brothers (49.8-12) a situation made possible by the 'demotion' of the first three sons (49.3-7). Individual traditions about 'sons of Jacob' already point in this direction: the narrative about Simeon and Levi (ch. 34); the note about Reuben's wickedness in 35.21f.; and the narrative about Judah in ch. 38, which was evidently inserted with ch. 49 into a Judaean extension to the 'Jacob story'. The promises increasingly played a role in the formation of larger 'patriarchal narratives' as elements of composition and interpretation.

FOOTNOTE 3(b):

Thus the promises of land and posterity in 13.14-17 and 28.13,14a, formulated in parallel in a characteristic way, serve to link the traditions about Jacob and Abraham. The four divine speeches in 12.1-3; 26.1-3; 31.11,13•, 46.1-5a are related in another way. In the first and the third, Abraham and Jacob are commanded by God to set out from Mesopotamia to the land intended for them (Canaan); in the second Isaac is forbidden with an allusion to Abraham's conduct in 12.10-20 (cf. 26.1!) to leave Canaan for Egypt; finally, in the fourth, with clear references to ch.26 (46.1 Beersheba; the God of his father Isaac), Jacob is encouraged to do precisely that, though this is bound up with the promise that he will be brought back. (Further common features are the promise of becoming a people [12.2a; 46.3b; cf. also 21.13, 181, the promise of God being With the patriarch [12.2a; 26.3a; 46.41, etc.] So in these divine speeches, the paths of the patriarchs are continually directed towards the land of Canaan as their goal, and a deviation to the 'peripheral regions' of Mesopotamia or Egypt proves to endanger this union of the patriarchs (i.e. Israel) with their land. Thus (as with the promise of becoming a people) a concern of the narrative tradition is taken up, but is formulated more explicitly and fundamentally, and with divine authority (Rendtorff, Rolf, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 136,137).