

Heshbon



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Location of Heshbon in modern-day Jordan

Heshbon (also **Hesebon**, **Esebon**, **Esbous**, **Esebus**; Hebrew: חֶשְׁבוֹן; Latin: *Esebus*; Arabic: حشبون) was an ancient town located east of the Jordan River in the modern kingdom of Jordan and historically within the territories of Ammon and Ancient Israel.

1 Biblical references

Ancient Heshbon was beyond, i.e. east of, the Jordan. The city was taken by the Israelites on their entry to the Promised Land, and was assigned to the tribe of Reuben;^[1] afterwards it was given to the Tribe of Gad^[2] and became a Levitical city for the Merarites.

Heshbon is mentioned in the Tanakh in the Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy as the capital of Amorite king, Sihon (also known as Sehon).^[3] The biblical narrative records the story of the Israelite victory over Sihon during the time of the Exodus under the leadership of Moses. Heshbon is highlighted due to its importance as the capital of Sihon, King of the Amorites:

“For Heshbon was the city of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had taken all his land out of his hand, as far as the Arnon.”^[4]

Similar passages appear in Deuteronomy and Joshua, with the primary emphasis being the victory of the Israelites over King Sihon at the site of Heshbon. Moses died soon after the victory, after viewing the “promised land” from the top of Mount Nebo.

Following the death of Moses, Heshbon became a town at the border between the lands allocated to the Tribe of Reuben and the Tribe of Gad. Further biblical evidence suggests that the town later came under Moabite control, as mentioned by Isaiah^[5] and Jeremiah^[6] in their denunciations of Moab.

Heshbon also appears in the Song of Solomon, where the poet likens his love’s eyes to “the pools of Heshbon”, which refers to the magnificent fish-pools of Heshbon.^[7]

2 Historical references

It occurs in Josephus very often under the form *Esbonitis* or *Sebonitis*.^[8] According to Josephus, Heshbon was in the possession of the Judeans since Alexander Jannaeus the Maccabee (106–79 B.C.) took it and made it a Jewish town. Herod the Great is also said to have had jurisdiction over the town and established a fort there.^[9]

After the Great Revolt (A.D. 68–70) the country was invaded by the tribe that Pliny calls *Arabes Esbonitae*, meaning “Arabs of (H)esebon”.^[10] Restored under the name of *Esbois* or *Esboita*, it is mentioned among the towns of the Roman Arabia Petraea by Ptolemy.^[11]

Under the Byzantine domination, as learned from Eusebius' *Onomasticon*, it grew to be a town of note in the province of Arabia; George of Cyprus refers to it in the seventh century and it was from Hesebon that the milestones on the Roman road to Jericho were numbered.

At the beginning of the Arab domination Hesebon was still the chief town of the Belka, a territory corresponding to the old Kingdom of Sihon. It seems never to have been taken by the Crusaders.

The town is believed to have been located at the ruin called **Hesbân** or **Hisban**, about 20 km (12 mi) southwest of Amman, to the north of Mâdaba, on one of the highest summits of the mountains of Moab. A large ruined reservoir is located east of the place, and below the town there is a fountain.