

EIN GEDI

THE LOCATION

Ein Gedi is located approximately 10 miles north of Masada, a UNESCO World Heritage Site located in the Judean Desert of southern Israel.

THE BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In 1 Samuel 16:1, 12-14, it is written that David was selected by God as king and anointed by Samuel. Following this, God's spirit came upon David but left Saul. While it is speculative, there were perhaps as many as 15 years between 1 Samuel 16 and 24, where the events at Ein Gedi took place.

The approximately 15-year period ended in 1 Samuel 24. David had a clear opportunity to kill Saul but chose not to. Saul recognized David's righteousness and his own evil, and begged for mercy from David. This was the last recorded act in Saul's life.

The passage also contains the notable and often misused words, "I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the LORD'S anointed" (1 Sam 24:10).

The Song of Solomon mentions Ein Gedi's "cluster of camphire," an unknown plant, possibly Henna but sometimes referred to as Cypress, in Song of Solomon 1:14.

There are other minor mentions of Ein Gedi in Joshua 15:62, 2 Chronicles 20:2, and Ezekiel 47:10 (which we looked at in our study of the Dead Sea).

MATTERS OF HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Excavations at Ein Gedi have uncovered the remains of a significant Jewish settlement, including a synagogue with a beautiful mosaic floor dating from the Byzantine period (4th-7th century AD). The mosaic contains an inscription indicating that the community observed the sabbatical year, as commanded by Jewish law, showing the religious significance of the area during this time.

One of the most significant inscriptions from the mosaic floor curses anyone who reveals "the town's secret" to the "gentiles," without specifying what this secret is. Some scholars suggest that it might refer to the method of cultivating the high-quality persimmons that the area was known for or other agricultural trade secrets. However, the exact nature of this "secret" is unknown.

AMAZING THINGS TO SEE

One of the most striking features of Ein Gedi is its waterfalls, which flow year-round and provide a refreshing sight in the midst of the desert landscape. The falls are surrounded by lush vegetation, including palm trees and other plants that thrive in the oasis environment.

The area is also home to a variety of wildlife, including ibex, hyraxes, and numerous bird species. Visitors can explore the Ein Gedi Nature Reserve, which offers hiking trails and opportunities for wildlife viewing.

The agricultural practices in Ein Gedi are also noteworthy. Despite the harsh desert climate, the area has a long history of successful agriculture, dating back thousands of years. Today, visitors can see the ancient terraced farming methods that were used to cultivate crops such as dates, figs, and pomegranates, and learn about the innovative modern techniques that are used to sustainably farm the area today.

MATTERS OF MODERN SIGNIFICANCE

Kibbutz Ein Gedi is a communal settlement located in the Ein Gedi Nature Reserve. Founded in 1953, the kibbutz is home to approximately 400 residents who live and work together.

The kibbutz operates a variety of agricultural and tourism-related businesses, including a date farm, a spa, and a hotel. Visitors can learn about the kibbutz's history and way of life at the Ein Gedi Museum, which features exhibits on the community's founding and development.

Kibbutz Ein Gedi also plays an important role in conservation efforts in the area. The kibbutz is home to the Ein Gedi Botanical Garden, which showcases the unique flora of the region. The garden also serves as a research center for the study and conservation of desert plants.

Overall, Kibbutz Ein Gedi provides a glimpse into the unique way of life and culture of Israel's cooperative communities, while also contributing to the preservation of the area's natural and cultural heritage.

Ein Gedi is also known for its spring water, which is sold throughout Israel. The water is drawn from the Ein Gedi spring, which is fed by the surrounding hills and provides a source of fresh water in the midst of the desert landscape. The water is considered to be among the purest in Israel, and is prized for its refreshing taste and mineral content.

THE JUDEAN WILDERNESS

THE LOCATION

A beautiful and modern highway runs between Ein Gedi and Jerusalem. Turning east near Jericho, it ascends to Jerusalem with an elevation gain of approximately 5,000 feet from the Dead Sea level. The area is filled with arid hills, deep ravines, and vast open spaces.

THE BIBLICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The wilderness area is significant as the location of the Temptation of Jesus after His Baptism (Mark 1:12-14). It is important to note that the wilderness mentioned in the Hebrew Scriptures is not the same as the wilderness of the temptation.

The story of the Good Samaritan, found in Luke 10:25-37, takes place on the road from Jerusalem to Jericho, which runs through the Judean Wilderness.

Furthermore, King Zedekiah of Judah fled into the wilderness when the Babylonians invaded, but was captured near Jericho and had his eyes gouged out (Jer. 39:1-7).

AMAZING THINGS TO SEE

There are several overlooks that are worth a roadside stop to appreciate the road to Jericho from the Good Samaritan story, or the amazing monasteries in the area (see next section). It is also a great place to stop along the way and contemplate desert life, or reflect on David's writing of the 23rd Psalm.

MATTERS OF MODERN SIGNIFICANCE

The Monastery of St. George is located in Wadi Qelt, a deep valley in the Judean Wilderness. The monastery was founded in the 5th century by John of Thebes, a hermit who lived in a nearby cave. Today, the monastery is home to a small community of Greek Orthodox monks who maintain the site and welcome visitors. The monastery is built into the side of a cliff and features impressive architecture and artwork, including intricate mosaics and frescoes. Visitors can tour the monastery and learn about its history and significance in the region. The surrounding Wadi Qelt is also a popular hiking destination, offering stunning views of the wilderness landscape.

There is ongoing political controversy surrounding Jewish settlements in the West Bank, which includes most of the wilderness area. These settlements, which are considered illegal under international law, are a source of tension between Israelis and Palestinians. Supporters of the settlements argue that they are necessary for Israel's security and that Jews have a historical right to the land, while opponents argue that they are a barrier to peace and a violation of Palestinian rights. The issue remains a major point of contention in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These Jewish villages welcome tourists with pre-arranged visits and give enlightening presentations.