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## Lesson 15: The Negev in Antiquity

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### Text: Chapter 30

To the Bible student of the 19<sup>th</sup> to mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Negev stories of the first book of Samuel seemed strange and hardly plausible. I Samuel tells about events that happen in the Negev, presenting a picture of ancient life in a flourishing area, dotted with numerous settlements and humming with activity. Since, in modern times, before the establishment of the State of Israel, there were only about five big Arab villages between Hebron and Beersheba, while the rest of the surface was actually a huge desert, the Bible student of those days could barely imagine the reality of the Negev of biblical periods. Today, after the resurrection of the Negev that the last two generations have experienced, we are much more qualified to feel the spirit of the biblical story concerning the Negev. Today, the long list of towns mentioned in I Samuel 31, 26-31, as well as the numerous cities of the Negev listed in Joshua 15, 20-32, do not surprise us anymore. A picture of the bristling economic activity in the area is given in the opening verse of the saga of David and Nabal the Carmelite (25, 2):

And there was a man in Maon,  
whose possessions were in Carmel;  
and the man was very great,  
and he had three thousand sheep,  
and a thousand goats;

וְאִישׁ בְּמַעֲוֹן  
וּמַעֲשָׂהוּ בְּכַרְמֶל  
וְהָאִישׁ גָּדוֹל מְאֹד  
וְלוֹ צֹאן שְׁלֹשֶׁת-אַלְפִים  
וְאַלְף עֲגִים

Shepherds worked on the farm in Carmel whilst servants made their way between Carmel and the rich man's residence in Maon, which was a bigger and safer place. Besides sheep and goats, the farmers in the Negev had corn fields and vineyards (25, 18):

Then Abigail made haste,  
and took two hundred loaves,  
and two bottles of wine,  
and five sheep ready dressed,  
and five measures of parched corn,  
and a hundred clusters of raisins,  
and two hundred cakes of figs,  
and laid them on asses.

וַתַּמְהָר אַבְיגַיִל  
וַתִּקַּח מֵאֲתֵים לֶחֶם  
וּשְׁנַיִם בְּבִילִיּוֹן  
וְחֲמִשׁ צֹאן עֲשׂוּיֹת  
וְחֲמִשׁ סָאִים קִלְיִ  
וּמֵאָה צִמְקִים  
וּמֵאֲתֵים דְּבָלִים  
וַתִּשֶׂם עַל-הַחֲמֹרִים:

This was a fairly representative list of food that was grown in the Negev. When David's men came across a starving Egyptian, they fed him with bread, a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins (30, 11-12). The diet of the inhabitants of the Negev consisted of bread, milk, lamb's meat, roasted barley, dried figs and raisins.

Who were the inhabitants of the Negev in David's time?

Several names are mentioned in the book of Samuel. We read about Negev of Judah, Negev of Jerahmeelites and Negev of Kenites (27, 10). And then we hear of Negev of Cherethites and Negev of Caleb (30, 14).

The northern area of the Negev was the territory of the honoured family of Caleb (Joshua 14, 13). Caleb's nephew and son-in-law Othniel took possession of Debir, south-west of Hebron (Joshua 15, 15-17). Nabal the Carmelite was a member of the family of Caleb (Samuel I 25, 3). We can accordingly draw up a map of the Calebite Negev. It covered the area of Hebron, Debir, Maon and Carmel.

South of the Calebites resided the Kenites. The book of Judges relates (Judges 1, 16):

And the children of the Kenite,  
Moses' father-in-law,  
went up out of the city of palm-trees  
with the children of Judah into the  
wilderness of Judah,  
which is in the Negev of Arad;  
and they went and dwelt with the people.

ובני קיני  
חֹתֵן מֹשֶׁה  
עָלוּ מֵעִיר הַתְּמָרִים  
אֶת־בְּנֵי יְהוּדָה  
מִדְּבַר יְהוּדָה  
אֲשֶׁר בְּנֶגֶב עָרָד  
בְּיָלְדָה וַיָּשֻׁבוּ אֶת־הָעָם:

The area of Arad, east of Beersheba, was therefore the Kenite Negev.

Jerahmeel was a big Judean family, mentioned in the genealogical list of the clans of Judah (I Chron. 29, 25) - and it is surmised that its territory was situated in the south of Beersheba. Pharaoh Shishak who invaded Israel and Judah some three generations later, counted (in his great pictorial inscription on the wall of Temple of Karnak) *bt yrhm* "Beth Jeruham" amongst the clans and settlements which surrendered to him in the Negev and it is plausible that this is the same name without the theophoric suffix. The modern Israeli town Yeroham, some 30 km south of Beesheba, is named after this ancient family.

The rest of the Israelite Negev was called the Negev of Judah, and this also included the territory of the tribe of Simeon (Joshua 19, 1):

And the second lot came out  
for Simeon,  
even for the tribe of the children of  
Simeon according to their families;  
and their inheritance was in the midst  
of the inheritance of the children of Judah.

וַיֵּצֵא הַגּוּרָל הַשֵּׁנִי  
לְשִׁמְעוֹן  
לְמִטָּה בְּנֵי־שִׁמְעוֹן  
לְמִשְׁפַּחֹתָם  
וַיְהִי גְּחֻלָּתָם בְּתוֹךְ  
גְּחֻלַּת בְּנֵי־יְהוּדָה:

The coast of the Negev, in the west, was occupied by non-Israelites. This was probably the Negev of Cherethites - נגב הכרתי - (I Samuel 30, 14). The name is connected with the origin

of a Philistine tribe that hailed from Crete= Caphtor and settled in this part of the Negev. The Book of Deuteronomy tells of them (Deuteronomy 2, 23):

And the Avim,  
that dwelt in villages as far as Gaza,  
the Caphtorim that came forth out of Caphtor,  
destroyed them,  
and dwelt in their stead.

וְהַעֲנִים הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּחֶצְרִים  
עַד־עֵזְרָה  
כַּפְתֹּרִים הַיֹּצְאִים מִכַּפְתֹּר  
הַשְּׂמִידָה  
וַיֵּשְׁבוּ תַּחְתָּם:

We can accordingly conclude that the Cherethite Negev included the area south of Gaza, and the modern towns of Kahn-Yunis and Rafah.