orchards, and dairy cattle. It also established a sewing factory and a metal workshop. Its population in 1968 was 404. In the mid-1990s the population was approximately 665, dropping to 407 in 2002.

[Efraim Orni]

NEGEV (Heb. **נֶגֶב**; from the root **נגב**, "dry," "parched"), an area comprising those southern parts of the Land of Israel which are characterized by a totally arid desert climate, contrasting with the semiarid Mediterranean climate of the country's center and north.

Geography

On the map describing an inverted triangle, with an apex directed to Eilat in the south, the Negev covers an area exceeding 4,600 sq. mi. (12,000 sq. km.), i.e., about 62% of Israel's area. Compared with other regions (Sinai excepted), distances in the Negev are considerable, exceeding 150 mi. (250 km.) from north to south, and 80 mi. (125 km.) from west to east. Whereas the Negev's northern border is a climatic one, roughly following the line of 12 in. (300 mm.) annual rainfall, the eastern border is a topographical one, sharply delineated by the Edom scarps emerging from the Arabah Valley, while in the west and southwest there is a gradual transition into Sinai. Structurally, the main partition of Cisjordan – into the Coastal Plain, the hills and the rift – continues into the Negev, with the following subregions recognizable:

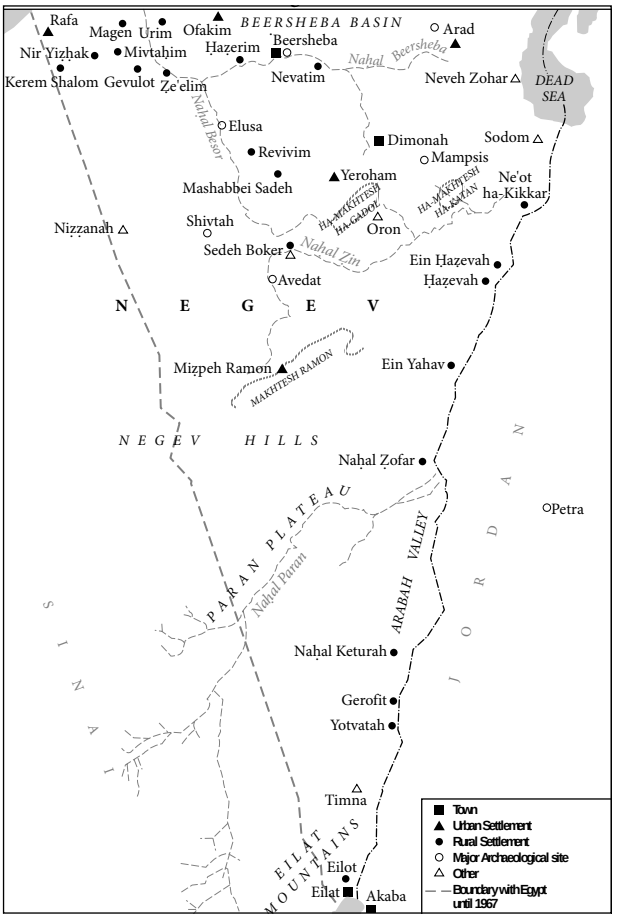
(1) the Negev Coastal Plain, linking up in the east with the Beersheba Basin;

(2) the Negev Hills, composed of the northern and central hill regions, the Paran Plateau, and the Eilat Mountains;

(3) the Arabah Valley.

Geologically, most of the Negev hills resemble the hills of central and northern Israel, where folding constitutes the principal tectonic element, and hard limestones and dolomites, or softer chalks with flint intercalations, are the predominant surface rock strata. Desert weathering, however, has imposed on these rocks dissimilar landscape features, which are mostly sharp and angular. The only exception is the Eilat Mountains, which, with their crystalline rocks and Nubian sandstones, form a continuation of the geological province of southern and southeastern Sinai. With the exception of the Beersheba Basin, arable soil is absent from practically all of the Negev, and wide expanses are covered with sharp flint or limestone gravel.

The Negev lies within the global subtropical desert belt of the northern hemisphere. Its climate is of the "continental" type and has two outstanding characteristics – sharp temperature differences between day and night, and summer and winter, and extremely limited amounts of precipitation, which diminish from an annual 10 in. (250 mm.) on the region's northwestern fringe to 2–4 in. (50–100 mm.) in most of its parts, and 1–2 in. (25–50 mm.) or less in the Arabah Valley and the Eilat area. Solar radiation and evaporation are strong during all seasons, and relative humidity and cloudiness remain low. Whereas the tempering influence of the Mediterranean Sea reaches inland for a score of miles at best, the Red Sea and the Eilat Gulf do not exert any such influence on the adjoining land.



The Negev, ancient sites and modern settlements.

The Negev's vegetation cover is universally sparse, and practically absent over large expanses. Most of the Beersheba Basin, together with the highest reaches of the central Negev Hills, falls within the Irano-Turanian semidesert zone, while the rest of the Negev belongs to the Arabian Zone, which has full desert characteristics. Similarly, the Negev has a desert fauna, including a number of indigenous species; its animal kingdom has somewhat increased in numbers due to nature-preservation measures in force since the 1950s. In the Beersheba Basin, which gradually rises eastward from 350 ft. (less than 100 m.) to 1,650 ft. (500 m.) above sea level, a thick cover of yellowish-brown loess, in sections of the west overlaid by coarse dune sands (the Ḥaluẓah, Shunrah, and Agur dunes), determines both landscape features and farming possibilities. In restricted areas, gullying by flashfloods resulted in a broken badland topography, which, however, has since the 1950s largely disappeared thanks to leveling in the framework of the soil reclamation program. Almost the entire Beersheba region belongs to the drainage basin of Naḥal Besor, which crosses it from southeast to northwest and receives three important