From 1831 to 1918, in addition to malaria, tuberculosis, smallpox and dysentery, the Land of Israel suffered from repeated cholera epidemics with high mortality rates. The Ottoman Government imposed quarantine as the major measure but people repeatedly broke it while trying to escape from affected areas, particularly in walled cities. In the mid-1840s, during an outbreak originating in Egypt and affecting other Mediterranean countries, a quarantine center was created in Chevron. Special living quarters were built just outside the city to house those who were contagious.

The quarantine was referenced by Charles de Pardieu, a French count, who wrote of his experiences in his 1851 book “Excursion en Orient: l’Egypte, le Mont Sinaï, l’Arabie, la Palestine, la Syrie, le Liban.” In it, he describes being confined to the living quarters in October 1849. There were walls, and separate units manned by Turkish soldiers to make sure potentially contaminated people were kept socially distant from one another. De Pardieu describes Chevron as a city in the valley with about 5,000 residents, both Arabs and Jews, with grey, block-like houses surmounted with domes set in the middle of roofs that doubled as balconies.

Such buildings can still be seen today. He described the Tomb of the Matriarchs and Patriarchs, the giant complex built by King Herod the Great to house the Cave of Machpelah, as “a medieval church” surrounded by walls and accompanied by minarets. “This church, converted into a mosque, contains, it is said, the tombs of the six characters of Genesis... The Turks, who have great veneration for the Patriarchs, do not let the Christians enter. They have, because of these traditions, given Chevron the name of El-Khalil (the friend, Abraham the friend of G-d). It was also in Chevron that David was crowned king of Israel.”

He continues, “this city is now renowned for its glassworks. They make a lot of vases, ornaments, and glass bracelets...”

Such is true today, where modern Chevron produces and exports glass, shoes and other items. De Pardieu also complained that the Turkish soldiers were “brutes” and kept him and his entourage for longer than expected: “...to our amazement, the director of the quarantine said... our detention had to be 12 days. We do not go out until November. How is it 12 days?... the health guards had told us seven days. The health guards had been mistaken, the quarantine time was indeed seven days the previous month, but the government decided to raise it to 12 days...”

The quarantined quarters in Chevron were also referenced by L. M. Cubley in her book “The Hills and Plains of Palestine,” published in London in 1860. The author and artist visited the Land of Israel in 1853 and created several paintings and drawings of the scenes she witnessed, including that of the quarantine buildings in Chevron. “We then crossed the bazaar to the wall of the castle (Kalha), above which is the wall of the mosque Haram Sharif, that encloses the cave of Machpelah,” she states. “Here I took the sketch looking over the mosque on the part of the town, Lower Pool, and Jebel Kubbe Janib, on which the quarantine buildings are situated... We then went by the Turkish burial ground to the quarantine buildings, outside of which the Pasha was encamped with his troops. After calling on the Pasha and quarantine doctor, the latter joined us in our ride to Ayin Jedidi, the supposed well of Abraham, and near which it is probable he lived, as it is on the hill opposite the mosque, which, there is little doubt, is on the site of the Cave of Machpelah.”