

What is the significance of Gath in the Bible?

<https://www.gotquestions.org/Gath-in-the-Bible.html>

Gath, along with Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gaza, and Ekron, is one of five major cities belonging to the Philistines before Israel conquered them (Joshua 13:3, 1 Samuel 5:7-10; 6:17). The word Gath means “winepress.” Although scholars are not certain of its exact location, Gath was situated somewhere on the border between Judah and Philistia (1 Samuel 21:10; 1 Chronicles 18:1).

The Anakim, a race of giants left over from the earlier Canaanite population, settled in Gath after Joshua drove them out of the Promised Land (Joshua 11:22). Gath is known primarily as the home of the giant Goliath who was killed by an unlikely hero named David (1 Samuel 17:4). Later in his life, David led a series of battles against the Philistines; in those skirmishes, four giants who lived in Gath were killed (2 Samuel 21:22), including one described as “a man of great stature, who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number, and he also was descended from the giants” (2 Samuel 21:20, ESV).

When the Philistines defeated the Israelites in the time of Eli, they captured the ark of the covenant and took it back to Ashdod and placed it in their pagan temple, next to their image of Dagon. After God broke the image of Dagon and afflicted the people of Ashdod with tumors, they sent the ark of the covenant to Gath, but trouble soon followed: “After they had moved it, the Lord’s hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors” (1 Samuel 5:9). The people of Gath demanded the ark be moved yet again. Eventually, the people of Philistia sent the ark back home to Israel.

Years later, Gath became a refuge for David when he fled from King Saul, who was trying to kill him (1 Samuel 21:10--15; cf. Psalm 56). King Achish of Gath was wary of David, having heard about his accomplishments in battle. Fearing for his life, David pretended to be insane so that the Philistine king would send him away (1 Samuel 21:12-13).

Later, after more confrontations with King Saul, David once again fled to Gath, saying, "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand" (1 Samuel 27:1). David and six hundred men and their families went to Gath and settled there, and Saul stopped his pursuit. David then asked the king to assign him a country town rather than live in the royal city of Gath. The king gave David the town of Ziklag, which became his home base for almost a year and a half as he raided other Canaanite territories. David led the king to believe he was attacking Israelites, and so fostered the king's trust (1 Samuel 27:8-12). Gath is also noteworthy for being the home of a band of Gittites loyal to David in later life (2 Samuel 15:18).

David's connection with Gath is reflected in his words in 2 Samuel 1:20. After learning that King Saul and his son Jonathan had been killed in battle, David cried, "Tell it not in Gath," because he did not want the Philistines celebrating this tragedy. Despite Saul's venom against David, David still respected him as the one God had appointed king over Israel (1 Samuel 24:5-7; 26:8-11). He cried, "Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold" (2 Samuel 1:24). David mourned for Saul's son, too: "I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me" (2 Samuel 1:26). The deaths of Saul and Jonathan were not a moment for celebration, but for grief. This was not news to be spread, "lest the

daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice” (2 Samuel 1:20).

David’s words to “tell it not in Gath” (2 Samuel 1:20) reflect his desire to bring honor, not dishonor, to the Lord and His people. Christians should take this to heart and make sure they are always seeking to glorify the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:31).

While Gath proved to be a safe haven of sorts for David in times of need, it was ultimately enemy territory. Gath and its idolatry represented all that was antithetical to the nation of Israel, just as the Bible presents this world’s system as all that is opposite to God’s will for His people (1 John 2:15-17). The earth is our home for now, but we are called to live in this world as sojourners and ambassadors, not participating in the world’s evil but understanding that our true citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). All the while, we invite others to join us in heaven through faith in Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:19-20; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; 1 Peter 3:14-17; John 3:16-18).