

What is the significance of Ashdod in the Bible?

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

Ashdod was one of the five primary Philistine cities: Gaza, Gath, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Ashdod. These were major metropolitan areas because later Ashdod, as well as the other cities, are mentioned as having “town and villages” (Joshua 15:46-47), perhaps similar to modern suburbs.

Ashdod is mentioned several times in the book of Joshua in conjunction with the conquest of the Promised Land. Joshua 11:22 mentions that most of the Anakim (giant warriors) had been destroyed in the conquest, but a few remained in some of the Philistine cities including Ashdod. Gath, the future home of Goliath, is also mentioned here.

Joshua led the people in the conquest and captured a number of major cities. The land was then divided among the tribes of Israel who were then supposed to finish taking control of their territory. However, by the time Joshua is old and ready to pass from the scene, there were some areas that had not yet been subdued including Ashdod and the other four primary Philistine cities (Joshua 13:3). Ashdod was in the territory allotted to Judah (Joshua 15:46-47). The Philistines continued to present problems for Israel for many years to come. Although the Philistines figure prominently in the book of Judges, Ashdod is not mentioned in that book.

In 1 Samuel, the Israelites decide to carry the ark of the covenant into battle against the Philistines. They do this, treating the ark almost as if it were a “good luck charm,” and God, in response, allows the ark to be captured by the Philistines and taken to Ashdod:

When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon. And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place. But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him. This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory. And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, “The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god” (1 Samuel 5:1-7, ESV).

The leaders of Ashdod sent the ark to Gath, where similar things happened, and the Gathites sent it on to Ekron. Ultimately, the Philistines decided they had to send the ark back to Israel. The whole story is found in 1 Samuel 5-6.

During the time of Saul and David, the Philistines are a frequent enemy, but Ashdod is not specifically mentioned in conjunction with either king. After the time of David, the Philistines are not mentioned as prominent enemies, although King Uzziah is commended for his campaign against the Philistines. One of his specific accomplishments was breaking through the wall of Ashdod (2 Chronicles 26:6).

Amos prophesied judgment against Ashdod (Amos 1:8; 3:9), and later the Assyrian armies

defeated Ashdod (Isaiah 20:1). Years after that, Jeremiah also prophesied judgment against “the remnant of Ashdod” to be carried out at the hands of the king of Babylon (Jeremiah 25:20).

After the Jews’ return from exile, some of the people of Ashdod were among those who opposed the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem under Nehemiah (Nehemiah 4:7). Nehemiah was also dismayed to find that some of the Israelites had intermarried with the women of Ashdod and many of the children could not even speak “the language of Judah” (Nehemiah 13:23-24).

Zephaniah also gives a word on the Philistines: “For Gaza shall be deserted, and Ashkelon shall become a desolation, Ashdod’s people shall be driven out at noon, and Ekron shall be uprooted” (Zephaniah 2:4, ESV). And, finally, Zechariah weighs in: “Ashkelon shall see [the judgment of God on the surrounding nations] and be afraid; Gaza too, and shall writhe in anguish; Ekron also, because its hopes are confounded. The king shall perish from Gaza; Ashkelon shall be uninhabited; a mixed people shall dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of Philistia” (Zechariah 9:5-6, ESV).

However, even in judgment there is mercy. Immediately following the pronouncement of doom, Zechariah includes a note of hope: “I will take away its blood from its mouth, and its abominations from between its teeth; it too shall be a remnant for our God; it shall be like a clan in Judah” (Zechariah 9:7, ESV). In the future, the Philistines would cease to eat unclean food and join in true worship of God. The historian Josephus reports that many Philistines became proselytes to Judaism. Yet there still awaits an even greater fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy. Philistines or their descendants will one day be part of the great congregation made of every tribe and tongue and people and

nation who worship God (Revelation 7:9-10).