

What is the significance of Ashkelon in the Bible?

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

Ashkelon is a coastal city in the southern part of Israel on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. It is just north of Gaza and about 36 miles south of modern-day Tel Aviv. In biblical times, Ashkelon was the oldest and largest seaport in ancient Canaan. Over history, it has been ruled by the Egyptians, the Canaanites, the Assyrians, the Greeks, the Philistines, and others. The geographical location of Ashkelon likely led to these various nations and tribes vying to control it, as it would have been a highly desirable seaport for trade and military staging.

Ashkelon - Philistine Rule

The Bible speaks of various battles for the control of Ashkelon. Judges 1:17-18 gives an account of the armies of Judah taking it from the Canaanites: “The men of Judah went with the Simeonites their fellow Israelites and attacked the Canaanites living in Zepheth, and they totally destroyed the city. Therefore it was called Hormah. Judah also took Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron—each city with its territory.” Throughout Israel’s history, the Philistines were a people group hell-bent on destroying the Israelites, fighting with them at nearly every turn. Joshua mentioned Ashkelon as one of five cities held by Philistine rulers, along with Gaza, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron (Joshua 13:3; cf. 1 Samuel 6:17).

Samson, in his wrath against the Philistines, “went down to Ashkelon, struck down thirty of their men, stripped them of everything” (Judges 14:19). David includes a reference to Ashkelon in his dirge for Saul and Jonathan: “Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in

the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice” (2 Samuel 1:20). The contention between the Israelites and the Philistines is a common theme in the Old Testament, with the city of Ashkelon being one of the main theaters of battle.

Ashkelon - Prophecies of Destruction

Various prophets went on to prophesy about the ultimate destruction of Ashkelon. Jeremiah said, “This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: ‘Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad because of the sword I will send among them’” (Jeremiah 25:15-16). One place made to drink the cup of the Lord’s wrath was Ashkelon (verse 20). Later, Jeremiah wrote, “Ashkelon will be silenced” (Jeremiah 47:5) and that the “sword of the Lord” has been ordered “to attack Ashkelon and the coast” (Jeremiah 47:6-7). The prophet Zechariah, speaking of God’s judgment on Israel’s enemies, said, “Ashkelon will see it and fear” (Zechariah 9.5). Zephaniah stated plainly, “Gaza will be abandoned and Ashkelon left in ruins” (Zephaniah 2:4). Philistine control of Ashkelon was about to come to an end, as foretold by God through His prophets.

Post-Philistine Ashkelon

Ashkelon was conquered by Assyria about 734 BC, and it was under Assyrian rule that the Philistines were finally driven out. The city changed hands many times after that, as Greeks and Maccabees and Romans and Muslims and Crusaders all had their turn. Some think that Herod the Great was born in Ashkelon; the fact is he did build a palace and

aqueduct there. After Saladin destroyed Ashkelon in AD 1191, the city lay in ruins for a century. A town was later built by Arabs near the original site of Ashkelon and called Al-Majdal.

After the Arab-Israeli War of 1948–49, the place was formally granted to Israel, who renamed it Ashkelon. This event could be seen as a fulfillment of Zephaniah's prophecy that Ashkelon would eventually be a peaceful place belonging to Judah:

“The land by the sea will become pastures
having wells for shepherds
and pens for flocks.

That land will belong
to the remnant of the people of Judah;
there they will find pasture.

In the evening they will lie down
in the houses of Ashkelon.

The Lord their God will care for them;
he will restore their fortunes” (Zephaniah 2:6–7).