

What is the significance of Gaza in the Bible?

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

Gaza, also called Azzah, is first mentioned in Genesis as one of the border cities of Canaan (Genesis 10:15-19). The city was on the border of Israel and Egypt in the southwest part of Israel near the Mediterranean Sea. Gaza is one of the oldest cities in history. The name Gaza means “strong,” which is a fitting name considering the city’s strongholds and fortifications for protection.

Gaza was a city associated with the Philistines. Originally, the Avvites lived in Gaza, but the Caphtorites displaced them and settled in the city (Deuteronomy 2:23). The Philistines were most likely identical or related to the Caphtorites, who came from Crete. The ancient Philistines had traveled to Canaan from a coastal region (Jeremiah 47:4), so it’s quite possible that they originally came from Crete.

In the time of Joshua, the Israelites conquered the land “from Kadesh Barnea to Gaza and from the whole region of Goshen to Gibeon” (Joshua 10:41). The tribe of Judah inherited Gaza, and they were able to keep the city for a short time before it fell back into the hands of the Philistines (Judges 1:18). By the time of Samson’s judgeship, the Philistines were living in and controlling Gaza (Judges 16:1). When Samson visited Gaza, the people there planned to kill him, but he escaped and carried off the city gates (Judges 16:1-3). After Delilah tricked Samson into divulging the secret of his strength, the Philistines captured him and took him to a prison in Gaza (Judges 16:21). Later, Samson regained his strength from the Lord and pushed down the pillars of Dagon’s temple, destroying the edifice and killing many Philistines in the process (Judges 16:23-30).

The Philistines continued to control Gaza during the time of Samuel (see 1 Samuel 6:17). King Hezekiah won great victories over the Philistines, “as far as Gaza and its territory,” but did not conquer Gaza itself (2 Kings 18:8).

Gaza was a city associated with judgment. Jeremiah, Amos, Zephaniah, and Zechariah all prophesied judgment on Gaza because of the sin of the Philistines. Amos 1:6–7 records God’s judgment on Gaza: “For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment, because they carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom. So I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza, and it shall devour her strongholds” (ESV). Likewise, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Zechariah prophesied of Gaza’s destruction (Jeremiah 25:17–20; Zephaniah 2:4; Zechariah 9:5). King Sargon of Assyria conquered Gaza and probably destroyed it in 720 BC. Later, Alexander the Great destroyed the city again in 332 BC, after a lengthy battle. During the Maccabean period, Jonathan subjugated Gaza to Israel.

Gaza was a city associated with the spread of the gospel. The New Testament mentions Gaza once. An angel told Philip the evangelist to “go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza” (Acts 8:26). On the road to Gaza, Philip shared the gospel with an Ethiopian eunuch and subsequently baptized him (Acts 8:26–39). A city once filled with hostility toward the Lord served as a marking point for an Ethiopian to hear of and trust in the grace of God.

The Bible associates Gaza mainly with the Philistines. God had given the city to Judah, but the Israelites had failed to obey God in driving out the former occupants of Canaan (Numbers 33:51–53). Because of that disobedience, the Philistines and the city of Gaza remained a thorn in Israel’s side for centuries (see Judges 2:3).