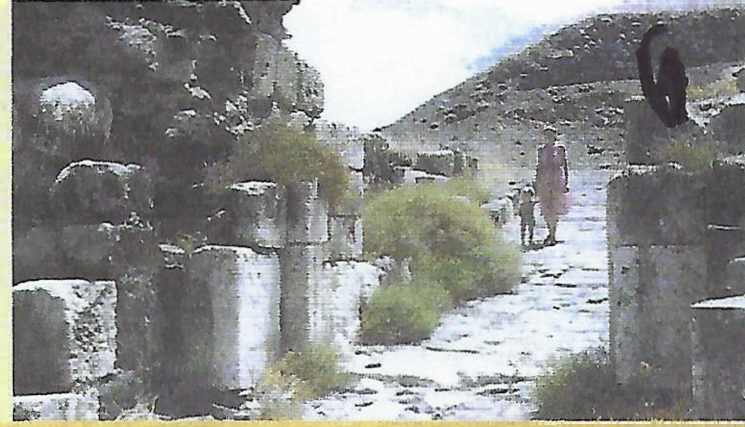


▲ Gate system at Tel Beth-Shemesh, *Dustinroyer* (CC-BY-3.0).



▲ The gate of Beth Shan, the city where the Philistines displayed King Saul's body from the walls.

The site of Ekron was not positively identified until 1957 when Joseph Naveh proposed that Tel Migne should be identified as Ekron. Seymour Gitin and Trude Dothan conducted excavations there from 1981 to 1986. As it was only a low hill, it had not even been identified as an abandoned city. The excavations revealed no less than 102 olive oil presses capable of producing a thousand tons of oil every year, indicating that this must have been a lucrative export industry.

PHILISTINE HISTORY

The origin of the Philistines has been grossly misunderstood. Conclusions have been drawn from the reliefs on the walls of the temple of Rameses III at Medinet Habu in Egypt. Rameses III was supposed to have ruled in the 12th century B.C., but the enemy warriors depicted have what seem like feathered helmets and are called "Pereset," which archaeologists have interpreted to mean "Philistines." They say they were part of the coalition army that invaded Egypt at this time, and that this was when the Philistines first became established along the Mediterranean coast.

However, Abraham had dealings with the Philistines hundreds of years earlier (Gen. 21:34), as did his son (Isa. 26:1), and when the exodus occurred in 1445 B.C., God told the Israelites that He would not lead them by way of the Philistines (Exod. 13:17). All of this clearly demonstrates that the Philistines were there long before the time of Rameses III.

Actually, the feathered helmets are typical of Persian soldiers, and Rameses III should be dated to the Persian period. So all the so-called knowledge we have of the Philistines, their origins, and their peculiar helmets has been totally misrepresented. We really know very little about the Philistines of biblical times. They left no inscriptions and all we really know of them has to be derived from the Bible, Assyrian inscriptions, and archaeology.

ARK AND ABU GHOSH

The Philistines decided that the ark of God was too dangerous to keep and sent it on an ox cart to Beth Shemesh. When the residents of this city impiously looked inside the ark they were smitten by a plague, and they sent the ark to Kirjath Jearim where it remained for 20 years. This location is now known as Abu Ghosh and a Roman Catholic church stands on the site. On the roof of the church is a replica of the ark with a statue of the virgin Mary standing on the ark.

In the meantime, Shiloh had been conquered and destroyed, and we find Samuel residing at Ramah only nine miles (15 km) north of Jerusalem. Up until this time Israel had preserved its identity as a theocracy ruled by judges and prophets, but the people began to clamor for a king to be like the nations around them. God told Samuel to accede to their demands and anoint Saul, a noble man of imposing height. It seemed a good choice, but time was to reveal defects in his character.

At this time the Philistines were a major force in the region and mustered a huge army to attack Israel. "Then the Philistines gathered together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude. And they came up and encamped at Michmash" (1 Sam. 13:5).

Apparently Samuel had promised to come to bless the army of Israel and had told Saul to wait for his arrival. Saul waited seven days, but as Samuel had not shown up, Saul took it on himself to offer a burnt offering. This he was not authorized to do, and when Samuel arrived he took a serious view of Saul's deviation from divine instructions.

And Samuel said to Saul, "You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God. . . . Now your kingdom shall not continue. The Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart" (1 Sam. 13:13-14).