

# The Doctrine of Aphek

## Joshua 12:18

### I. Hebrew:

- A. ʾāphêq (אָפְהֵק) [pronounced *uh-FAKE*]. Strong's #663 BDB #67.
- B. Possibly the same city with a different name: ʾāphêkâh (אָפְהֵכָה) [pronounced *uh-FAY-kaw*]. Strong's #664 BDB #68. Joshua 15:53. We have another similarly named city, Aphik—actually, aphîyq (אָפְיִק) [pronounced *uh-FEEK*]. Because the only original difference between the two is the yodh (which could be an error), and since this is associated with Asher in Judges 1:31, this is probably the same city. Strong's #663 BDB #67 (notice that both BDB and Strong's have both assumed that they are equivalent).
- C. Related words: Aphek is probably most closely related to the verb ʾāphaq (אָפַחַק) [pronounced *aw-FAHK*], which means *to hold, to be strong*. Strong's #662 BDB #67. Because of the name, it would not be unlikely for several places to be named Aphek. Douglas gives the meaning as *fortress, enclosure*; ZPEB as *stream-bed, strong, fortress*. Because of its meaning, it would not be unlikely for several cities to be given this name.

### II. The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible lists 4 different Aphek's:<sup>1</sup>

- A. A city of Asher taken from the Canaanites (Joshua 19:30 Judges 1:31). This Aphek would therefore be in the northeast portion of Israel.
- B. A site located on the northern boundary of the Canaanite territory adjacent to the boundary of the Amorites (Joshua 13:4). They suggest that it is located near the source of the Nahr River, southeast of Byblos (which is not really too far from the city's location above). *The New International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* combines A and B together.
- C. In Ephraim:
  1. One of the important chain cities on the plain of Sharon which is located at the source of the Yarkon, northeast of Joppa. This is the city mentioned in Joshua 12:18 (Joshua and his army killed the king of that city). In the Hebrew, we literally have *...a king of Aphek—one; a king to the Sharon—one*. However, in the Septuagint, we don't have two kings named here, but it is *king of Aphek of Sharon* (actually, the names are very different in the Greek<sup>2</sup>). And, at the end of the list of kings, they are inventoried in the Septuagint as 29 kings rather than 31. In other words, instead of there being two different kings at this point, this more identifies which Aphek is being spoken of (the NRSV, unfortunately, follows the Hebrew, rather than the Greek, at this point, so we don't know which the Dead Sea Scrolls are in agreement with).<sup>3</sup>
  2. This is the city mentioned in I Sam. 4:1 29:1 (this is where Israel was defeated near the end of the judges period and this is near where the Ark was taken from them). *The New International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* agrees with this assessment. They also point out that many have assumed that I Sam 29:1, where the Philistines are camped in Aphek and when Israel was camped in Jezreel, that these two cities were opposite one another. This would place Aphek in the plain of Esdraelon; however, no such place has ever been discovered by archaeologists. Furthermore, the text of I Samuel does not imply that the two groups were directly opposite one another. ISBE suggests that this could be located in the plains of Sharon.
  3. Keller comments: *A mound of ruins, Tell el-Muchmar, conceals all that is left of this place which lay on the upper reaches of a river which flows into the sea to the north of Jaffa. From a strategic point of view Aphek was extremely favorably situated. Eastward lay the road to the mountains of central Palestine where Israel had settled. On the edge of the mountain range lay Eben-ezer where the opposing forces met.*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The information here was taken almost verbatim or paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, pp. 199–200.

<sup>2</sup> In the Septuagint, it reads Basilea Ophek tês Arôk (Βασιλέα Ὀφεκ τῆς Ἀρῶκ), which refers to Aphek of the Sharon (plains).

<sup>3</sup> When the NRSV follows the Greek rather than the Hebrew, they will also note that the DSS are in agreement (if they are). However, when the Hebrew is followed, the NRSV does not tell us anything about the alternate readings.

<sup>4</sup> Werner Keller, *The Bible as History* (second revised edition); New York, 1981; p. 181.

4. The Memphis Stele of Amenhotep II mentions Aphek in the second campaign against the Sharon and Jezreel Plains as a city which he captured (circa 1440 B.C.).
  5. This Aphek became part of the province of Samaria during the rule of Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.). There was a letter found, apparently from the King of Ashkelon, who had requested help from Egypt against Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, who had already taken Aphek (circa 600 B.C.).
- D. Finally, they list a city in the northern Trans-Jordanian district of Bashan which is on the road from Damascus which goes through the Jezreel Valley to Beth-shean. It was in this general area that Syrian ruler Ben-hadad was defeated by King Ahab of Israel (I Kings 20:26–34). There is a later confrontation between Israel and Syria mentioned in II Kings 13:17, indicating that there was probably an Aphek in the northwest. I Kings 20:26–34 II Kings 13:14–25.<sup>5</sup> The ISBE suggests that the modern *Fīḳ* (or *Afīḳ*) which are on the brow of the hill beyond *Ka'at el-Husn*, east of the Sea of Galilee, probably represents this ancient city.<sup>6</sup>
- III. Reference placement:
- A. The map with the NASB places Aphek in Asher, several miles from the coast, as well as in Ephraim, also several miles from the coast.
  - B. The NIV places it on the northern border of Ephraim, several miles from the coast (quite a distance from Asher).
  - C. The Scofield Bible places it both in Ephraim and in Asher, similar to NASB and NIV. The Scofield map places Aphekah in the middle of Judah.
  - D. The Macmillan Bible Atlas also places it in Asher (maps 68 and 69), several miles west of the Mediterranean. It also places Aphek in Ephraim (map 17). They identify Aphek as also being next to and east of the Chinnereth Sea (map 126).
- IV. Extra-Biblical references: *a place name in Egyptian Texts (execration texts, inscriptions of Amenhotep II, Rameses II and III), and in an Aramaic letter of c. 600 B.C. An inscription of Esarhaddon mentions 'apku in the territory of Samaria as well.*<sup>7</sup>
- V. Scripture: Joshua 12:18 13:4 19:30 I Sam. 4:1 29:1 I Kings 20:26, 30 II Kings 13:17 (Judges 1:31?)
- VI. Aphek in the south:
- A. Aphekah is listed with Beth-Tappuah as one of the cities which was parceled out to Judah. Joshua 15:53 cp 15:20. The implication of Joshua 13:4–5 is the Aphek is in the southern portion of the land conquered by Joshua, which would also place it with Judah. Aphek and Tappuah are both listed relatively close together in Joshua 12:17–18.
- VII. Aphek in Asher (the northeast):
- A. We have an Aphek listed in Joshua 19:30 which is parceled out to Asher, who lived on the northern coast of Israel. Therefore, that Aphek must be different from the Aphek given to Judah. ZPEB places this on the coastal highway which connected Phœnicia and Egypt. Most maps seem to place it further inland.
  - B. We have a similarly spelled city name, Aphik (mentioned above), assumed by BDB and Strong's to be equivalent to Aphek (recall that vowel points were added thousands of years after the autographs). This city is associated with the tribe of Asher in Judges 1:31.
  - C. We have another confrontation, but not a battle, between the Israelites and the Philistines in I Sam. 29. Achish is camped with his men in Aphek and David and his men are camped in Jezreel. Assuming that this is the Aphek in Asher, and if David is in the city of Jezreel, then they are camped roughly 20 miles apart; if David is on the edge of the plain of Jezreel, then they are camped about 15 miles apart. In either case, it is reasonable to assume that we have the same city Aphek. Our only problem here is that this all takes place in northern coastal Israel and the Philistines primarily lived in the southern, coastal Israel. This does not mean that they could not move in from the north as well, either by troop movement on land or by sea. Furthermore, the borders of these countries are not as well-defined as they are today; there was some ebb and flow as these countries advanced and declined.
- VIII. Aphek in the west.

<sup>5</sup> This was either quoted or paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 199.

<sup>6</sup> *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. 1; p. 161.

<sup>7</sup> *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p. 43.

- A. When the Philistines fought against Israel in I Sam. 4:1, they camped at Aphek. At this time, Aphek was on the northern rim of Philistine territory. This would likely be near, but not on, the northern coast of the Mediterranean. Although this could be the Aphek listed in the point above in the southern portion of Judah, it is more likely that this is located in Ephraim. Given that the Philistines controlled the territory of Dan at this time, moving eastward into Ephraim would make the most sense. The Israelites who will be routed in battle by the Philistines, will go to the Tent of God (also located in Ephraim at Shiloh) and grab the Ark for good luck (all of this is I Sam. 4). Therefore, it makes much more sense for all of this to take place in Ephraim.
- B. The modern mound of ruins, Tell el-Muchmar, is probably the site of this ancient Aphek.
- IX. Aphek in the northwest.
  - A. The Syrians lived northeast of Israel. If the Aphek mentioned in I Kings 20:26, 30 is the same Aphek as the previous point, then the Syrians moved along the north of Israel and then came down from the northwest to attack Israel.
- X. **Conclusion:** There seem to be three or four Aphek's, two of which the book of Joshua testifies to, as one is given to Asher (Joshua 19:30) and the other to Ephraim (it is not so named in Scripture, however, as a city specifically given to Ephraim). It is possible that there is a third Aphek in the northwest, but that is not absolutely necessary. There is also the possibility that there is another Aphek in East Manasseh; however, that is not by Scripture, but by extra-Biblical sources. This gives us three or four Aphek's, including under the umbrella the two names which are similar (Aphik and Aphekah).