

The Doctrine of the City of Ashdod

Preface: There were five principal cities of the Philistines: along the coast, going from south to north, we have Gaza, Ashkelon and Ashdod. Further inland, we have Gath and Ekron. There is a sixth city, Joppa, which was alternately under the influence of Egypt, Philistia and Israel. Today, this area is known as the Gaza Strip. Ashdod was in the northern central portion of the Philistine territory, which was not actually on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, but it did have a port nearby. Ashdod later became known as Azotus.

Topics:

Charts: The Time Frame of Philistine Oppression

1. In the Hebrew, the name is *ʿAshdôwd* (אַשְׁדּוֹד) [pronounced *ash-DOHD*], which is transliterated *Ashdod*. According to Barnes and ISBE, its name means *fortress, castle*.¹ Strong's #795 BDB #78. There are two additional cognates of which mean *of Ashdod*. Strong's #796–797 BDB #78.
2. Even though the book of Genesis takes place on possibly two different continents² and Abraham travels all over the Land of Promise, not once is the city of Ashdod mentioned in Genesis or even in the writings of Moses. Joshua conquered a great deal of the Land of Promise, leaving only a few Anakim (giants) in Gaza, Gath and Ashdod, three of the Philistine cities. This would have been around 1390 B.C. Joshua 11:21–22
3. Philistia had three cities on or near the coast. Ashdod was the northernmost of these cities, due west of Jerusalem, about 3 miles from the coast (although 3 miles is not very far, I wonder why they were not closer).
4. Ashdod was one of the cities given over to Judah (Joshua 15:46–47). There is no indication that Israel ever occupied this city.
5. When Joshua went through the land, he did not conquer each and every city, but he conquered enough so that the land belonged to Israel. The individual tribes would then have to root out those remaining within their borders. The land which remained to be conquered is listed in Joshua 13:1–6; Ashdod is mentioned, along with the four cities of the Philistines. Judah and Simeon were the only tribes which continued with their manifest destiny (ironically enough, the five cities of the Philistines were within the border of Judah). At the beginning of the time period of the judges, they continued to conquer additional territory given to them, which included Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron. They discontinued their procession, as their enemies in the valley (who were probably Philistines) had iron chariots. Judges 1:17–19
6. Because of Israel's later idolatry, God allowed the Ammonites to attack her from the east and the Philistines to attack her from the west. This appears to be a simultaneous attack, primarily upon Judah. The book of judges treats it in two separate accounts.
7. Although we do not have specifics as to what area exactly is involved, Israel served the Philistines for 40 years, meaning that the Israelites must have paid taxes and tributes to the Philistines. This would indicate that the Philistines had taken their cities back.
8. The time frame for this, according to several different sources, is below:

¹ *Barnes' Notes; Joshua to Ruth*; F. C. Cook, editor; reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 383. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. I; p. 267.

² We do not know where the pre-deluvian culture takes place.

Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible ¹		 The Short Chronology The Long Chronology 		The Reese Chronological Bible ²	The Narrated Bible ³
Date	Event	Time		Time	
		Reese	Klassen		
	The oppression by the Philistines in south and central Israel (Judges 10:7 13:1)	1114–1074	1076–1036	1090–1050	
1070	Samson's exploits against the Philistines in southwestern Israel (Judges 13–16)	1108–1074		1090–1060	
	Samson's judgeship in Israel	1096–1076		1080–1060	
1050	The Philistines defeat Israel twice and capture the Ark of God. Eli dies and Shiloh is destroyed. This affects southern, western and central Israel (I Sam. 4 Psalm 78:59–64 Jer. 7:14)	1094	1036		
1040	Samuel becomes a judge over Israel	1074–1027		1050	
Although these chronologies vary widely at the beginning of the period of the judges, they are in relative agreement for this series of events.					
This is a portion of the chart from the introduction to the book of the Judges.					

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9. Between the giving of Ashdod to Judah and the attack of the Philistines upon the Israelites in I Sam. 4, the city of Ashdod is not specifically mentioned. Our passage is the first time since the book of Joshua (15:46–47) that Ashdod is mentioned. The first city of the Philistines that the Ark will be taken to is Ashdod, and in Ashdod, we are given the longest description of what happened.
 - a. The Ark is placed next to a statue of Dagon, the Philistine God, in the Dagon temple. The next day, the statue of Dagon is found toppled over (I Sam. 5:3).
 - b. The second day, after setting the statue upright, the statue had fallen again and the head and the hands of Dagon had been cut off (I Sam. 5:4).
 - c. Because of the perceived power of the Ark, none of Dagon's priests would walk on the threshold of the temple of Dagon (the hands and head were lying on the threshold). I Sam. 5:5
 - d. God also struck the populace of Ashdod with tumors. These were apparently very visible tumors. I Sam. 5:6
 - e. The lords of the Philistines gathered and decided to move the Ark of God to Gath.
10. Ashdod is mentioned again when the Ark is returned to Israel with a guilt offering from Ashdod (and a guilt offering from each of the other four Philistine cities as well). I Sam. 6:17
11. In Isa. 20:1, we have a prophecy of Isaiah: [In the year that the commander came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him and he fought against Ashdod and captured it, at that time, Jehovah spoke through Isaiah, the son of Amoz, saying...](#) (Isa. 20:1–2a). The NIV Study Bible estimates this to be 711 B.C.. Ashdod had rebelled against Sargon II in 713 B.C. (who reigned over Assyria 721–705 B.C.). As recently as 1963, three fragments of an Assyrian monument were discovered at Ashdod *commemorating Sargon's victory*.³

³ Quoted and paraphrased from *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 1038.

12. Although we have several instances of Israel defeating the Philistines in battle under David (from the time of Goliath up until and including the time that David ruled over all Israel), we do not have any indication that David ever sent troops to Ashdod or that he occupied Ashdod.
13. Ashdod is not mentioned again in Samuel, Kings or Chronicles until II Chron. 26:6, where King Uzziah of Judah is said to go to war against the Philistines. He tore down the wall around the city of Gath, Jabneh and Ashdod, and then built cities for Israelites in the vicinity of those cities. This would have been between 767–740 B.C., the years of Uzziah's reign.⁴ This appears to be the only time in Israel's history during which Israel actually occupied Ashdod.
14. The prophet Amos, who was born in Judah, but ministered to the northern kingdom, apparently ministered circa 750–740 B.C. Most of Amos 1 is a prophecy against the neighbors of Israel, which included Ashdod. It is not clear if his prophecy against Ashdod ("I will destroy the king of Ashdod") refers to Uzziah above or to a time in the future, e.g., when Nebuchadnezzar would destroy Philistia (see below). More than likely, we are looking at a double fulfillment (which is relatively common in judgment prophecy).
 - a. This is actually a bit tricky. Uzziah, the king of Judah, is said to have torn down the walls of Ashdod and Gath. He did some rebuilding around Ashdod, however. II Chron. 26:6–7
 - b. Amos prophesies against Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron (Amos 1:6–8), but does not list Gath in that list.
 - c. Amos does list Gath on the list of cities that a prosperous person from Samaria should look at and be reminded that prosperity does not last (Amos 6:2).
 - d. This would indicate that when Uzziah tore down the walls of Ashdod and Gath, that he was much more destructive towards Gath. Ashdod was neutralized and Gath was decimated. Although the people of Gath would build themselves up to a short-lived rebellion within a few decades, they will apparently be wiped out completely when Sargon II quells an uprising there.
 - e. All of this taken together implies that (1) Amos prophesied prior to Uzziah's attack upon Gath and Ashdod or, (2) Uzziah first attacked Gath, after which Amos prophesied; and later attacked Ashdod. Just because the two cities are mentioned in the same verse as having their walls torn down by Uzziah does not mean that Uzziah did this to both cities during the same year. The latter explanation seems to better explain the prophesies of Amos.
15. Amos mentions Ashdod again (Amos 3:8), but mostly as a witness against the northern kingdom Israel.
16. Zephaniah prophesied during the time of Josiah, but probably prior to his reformation (circa 630–620 B.C.). He prophesied against Ashdod in Zeph. 2:4, when he writes: *Gather yourselves together, yes, gather, O nation without shame before the decree takes effect. The day passes like the chaff, before the enduring anger of Jehovah comes upon you, before the day of Jehovah's anger comes upon you. Seek Jehovah, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances. Seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of Jehovah's anger. For Gaza will be abandoned, and Ashkelon will be a desolation, and Ashdod will be driven out at noon, and Ekron will be uprooted. Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of Jehovah is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines; and I will destroy you, so that there will be no inhabitant. So that the seacoast will be pastures with caves for shepherds and folds for flocks. And the coast will be for the remnant of the house of Judah. They will pasture on it. In the houses of Ashkelon, they will lie down at night, for Jehovah their God will care for them and restore their fortune* (Zeph. 2:1–7). Again, this was a double prophecy referring both to the attacks of Nebuchadnezzar and to the war of the Great Tribulation. The basic idea is that the once vigorous and well-populated areas of Philistia would be turned into pasture land.
17. Apparently, Ashdod soon gained her independence back as during the time of the Assyrian dominance, the town revolted during the reign of Sargon II (721–705 B.C.). *This uprising evidently took place about 711. According to his annals, Sargon II ordered Azuri, the local king of Ashdod, deposed, and he set up a younger brother, Ahimiti, in his place.* However, the Ashdodites under the leadership of an Ionian Greek named Imani (or ladna), continued to revolt against Assyrian control, Sargon II marched into Ashdod, and conquered and punished it, as well as Gath and Ashdudimmu (which means *Ashdod by the Sea*, which later eclipsed the importance of the original Ashdod), essentially placing all of Ashdod under Assyrian rule. Now, Imani the

⁴ ZPEB gives these years as 783–742 B.C. in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. I, p. 352. On the same page, the ministry of Amos is given as circa 760–745 B.C.

Greek escaped to the territory of Musru, which was under Ethiopian control at the time. Ethiopia handed Imani over to Assyria. This is the background which helps to explain Isa. 20:1–6 where Judah is warned not to get involved with Ashdod, because Ethiopia would not support them against Assyria.⁵ Douglas also ties Sargon's decimation of Ashdod to Amos' prophecy (Amos 1:8).⁶

18. Ashdod was under a king named Mitinti during the reign of Sennacherib (704–681 B.C.), and still paid tribute to Assyria. However, some of King Hezekiah's towns were given back over to Ashdod (I am assuming these would be the towns built near Ashdod by Uzziah). We also have ancient records of another king of Ashdod, Ahumilki (or, Ahimilki) who paid tribute to Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.) and to Ashurbanipal (668–633 B.C.) while Assyria warred with Egypt, Syria and Palestine.⁷
19. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus tells us that the Egyptian pharaoh Psammetichus I (664–610 B.C.), destroyed Ashdod (called *Azotus* by Herodotus) after a 29 year siege, which is one of the longest concentrated sieges on record. It is not clear the relationship between Assyria, Egypt and Ashdod at this time. It appears as though Ashdod paid tribute to Assyria and that Egypt came along and took Ashdod away from Assyria. By the time of Nehemiah (see the point below), Ashdod was inhabited again.
20. Jeremiah prophesied between 626–580 B.C., primarily prior to the dispersion of Judah. He wrote: *For thus Jehovah, the God of Israel, says to me, "Take this cup of wine of wrath from My hand and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. And they will drink and stagger and go mad because of there sword that I will send among them."* Then I took to the cup from Jehovah's hand, and made all the nations drink, to whom Jehovah sent me: to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, and its kings, princes, to make them a ruin, a horror, a hissing, and a curse, as it is this day; to Pharaoh, king of Egypt, his servants, his princes, and all his people; and to all the foreign people, all the kings of the land of Uz, all the kings of the land of the Philistines (even Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod..."And you will say to them, thus says Jehovah of armies, the God of Israel, "Drink, be drunk, vomit, fall, and rise no more because of the sword which I will send among you." ' (Jer. 25:15–20, 27). This prophecy had a near fulfillment with the attack of Nebuchadnezzar, and a far fulfillment in the Tribulation.
21. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon from 605–562 B.C., marched into Ashdod and took its king prisoner, whom is mentioned as being in Nebuchadnezzar's court.⁸ In other words, for about a century, the city of Ashdod knew nothing but a continual influx of conquering forces.
22. ZPEB suggests that the remnant which remained were those about whom Jeremiah and Zephaniah prophesied.
23. Zechariah prophesied circa 520 B.C. and later. He prophesied against Ashdod and other cities in Zech. 9. Against Ashdod, he said, *"And a mongrel race will live in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines."* (Zech. 9:6).⁹ The mongrel race came from the fact that Israel and those of Ashdod intermarried and from the fact that Ashdod became a district capital of Persia (see below for both of these points). This is in stark contrast to the Philistine rule over Canaan being so absolute that the name *Palestine* (used to this day) comes from *Philistine*.
24. Ashdod is mentioned once again in Neh. 4:7, where the people of Arabia, Ammon and Ashdod are all upset because the Jews were building the walls of Jerusalem again. They wanted to gather against Jerusalem and go to war against them. Circa 445 B.C. Around this time, Ashdod became a district capital of Persia.¹⁰
25. Around 432 B.C., in some of the last lines of the Old Testament, Nehemiah expresses his displeasure with the intermarriages which had taken place between the Israelites and the surrounding heathen (which included

⁵ Quoted and paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, pp. 352–353.

⁶ *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.95.

⁷ Quoted or paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 353. Most of their information seems to have come from Prichard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 288–294).

⁸ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 353 (taken from Prichard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 308).

⁹ This prophecy would have been given during the time of Darius the Mede (Zech. 7:1).

¹⁰ *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 691.

- those of Ashdod). Their children were able to converse in the language of Ashdod, but not Hebrew. Neh. 13:23–24
26. Ashdod appears to be equivalent to the New Testament city Azotus. Actually, there were two cities named Azotus—one on the coast and one further inland.¹¹ It is possible that these were twin cities?
 27. Ashdod was eventually completely destroyed by the Maccabees; Judas Maccabees destroyed its altars and images while Jonathan Maccabees burned both the temple of Dagon and the remainder of the city with fire (I Macc. 10:77–84 11:4). According to Josephus, Azotus belonged to Israel during the time of Alexander Jannæus (circa 104–78 B.C.).¹²
 28. The Greeks settled the Azotus (Ashdod) (this is by a lone reference by Will Durant). However, the Romans rebuilt Azotus (this was by Pompey the Great, who rebuilt and repopulated many of the cities in that area—Josephus, Antiquities XIV.v.4 and Wars I.viii.4). Later, the city was under the control of Herod the Great *who then willed it to his sister Salome*. She probably willed it to Empress Livia, the wife of Augustus.¹³
 29. There was apparently a considerable Jewish population there during the 1st century A.D., as Vespasian placed a garrison there during the Jewish war prior to the fall of Jerusalem.¹⁴
 30. In three volumes of Will Durant’s ancient history, Ashdod is mentioned but once as Azotus as one of the many cities surrounding the Jewish population which offered them the many temptations of the new world.
 31. Finally, the last reference to Azotus is found in passing in Acts 8:40, as one of the cities that Philip the Evangelist (not the Apostle) found himself in, as he moved northward to Cæsarea (which is one-third of the way from Joppa to Tyre).
 32. Today, Ashdod is a small village 18 miles northeast of Gaza.¹⁵ On my newest map, it is called *Ashdod*.¹⁶

Additional Endnotes

1. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 3, p. 757.
2. *The Reese Chronological Bible*; KJV translation; Editor: Edward Reese; ©1977 by Edward Reese and Klassen’s dating system ©1975 by Frank R. Klassen; ©1980 by Bethany House Publishers, South Minneapolis, MN; p. 379–437.
3. *The Narrated Bible In Chronological Order*; narrated by F. LaGard Smith; ©1984 by Harvest House Publishers; Eugene, Oregon; (NIV ©1984 by the International Bible Society); p. 347–385, 1693.

¹¹ Josephus speaks of the coastal Azotus in Antiquities XII.xv.4 and of the inland Azotus in Antiquities XIV.iv.4 and in War I.vii.7.

¹² Antiquities, XVII.ii.2 xi.1.

¹³ Quoted and paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 353. They took it from Josephus Antiquities XVII.ii.2 xi.1 XIII.ii.2 and Wars II.vi.3 ix.2.

¹⁴ Paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 353. Taken from Josephus Wars IV.iii.2.

¹⁵ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. I; p. 267. Note the date of this reference.

¹⁶ *The World Book Atlas*; ©World Book Encyclopedia; ©1980 by Rand McNally & Company; p. 183.