

The Doctrine of the City of Ekron

Preface: The city of Ekron is located nearly 20 miles inland within the territory of Dan, near the Dan-Judah border. It is the northernmost of the five principal cities of Philistia and the nearest major Philistine city to Israel.

Topics: **The Hebrew**
The Occurrence of Ekron or Ekronite in Scripture
The Prophets Mention the City of Ekron
The Secular History of Ekron
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Application

Charts:

1. The Hebrew
 - a. *Ekron* is עֶקְרוֹן (עֶקְרוֹן) [pronounced *gek^e-ROHN*]. Strong's #6138 BDB #785.
 - b. We also have עֶקְרוֹנִי (עֶקְרוֹנִי) [pronounced *gek-roh-NEE*], which is transliterated *Ekronite*. Strong's #6139 BDB #785.
2. The occurrence of *Ekron* or *Ekronite* in Scripture:
 - a. Near the time when Joshua was old and nearly retired, God listed for Joshua the areas of Palestine which had not yet been conquered by Israel. Ekron was one of the border cities northernmost of the Gaza Strip listed in this geography. Joshua 13:3
 - b. Ekron is named as a border city for Judah in Joshua 15:11, 45–46. To help understand the way that the property was doled out: the various cities and territories were given out to the various tribes of Israel with the understanding that some adjustment would be made near the end of the distribution with regards to fairness. Therefore, several of the cities originally given over to Judah were soon transferred over to Simeon (which lived within Judah's borders). Several border cities were given to the tribe which Judah bordered.
 - c. There were apparently several other communities closely tied to Ekron, as Joshua mentions Ekron and its towns and villages (Joshua 15:45).
 - d. In a later adjustment of city ownership, Ekron was put under the control of Dan. Joshua 19:43
 - e. Soon after the time of Joshua, Judah took three Philistine cities: Ekron, Ashkelon and Gaza (Judges 1:17–18).
 - f. Also, early on during the period of the judges, the Philistines pressed their territory into the territory of the tribe of Dan, that Dan moved far up north, taking land from a weaker people up there. Although Ekron is not mentioned in this account, Josephus mentions Ekron in his account of this time period (Antiquities V. 177). Josephus perhaps mentions Ekron simply because of its being in Dan.
 - g. In Judges 13–16, we have the history of Samuel, who had a large number of altercations with the Philistines, to whom the Israelites were subservient (Judges 10:7 13:1). We may reasonably assume that the Philistines had taken back the city of Ekron around that time, even though it is not mentioned by name in this account.
 - h. The city of Ekron is not mentioned again until I Sam. 5:10, our passage, where the Ark of God is moved by the Philistines into Ekron. This indicates that the Philistines took back their city some time after Judges 1:17–18.
 - i. The people protested the bringing of the Ark to Ekron and God's hand was against the city because the Ark was there. We will be told that there was chaos throughout the city and that God's hand was against the city and that many people were infected with tumors. There is no mention of rats, but this does not mean that rodents were not a part of the judgment. In fact, it is my theory (which comes from several sources) that the residents of Philistia suffered from the bubonic plague, which is carried by rats.
 - j. It was the Ekronites who proposed that the Ark be returned to Israel. I Sam. 5:11
 - k. Ekron appears to be the last city where the Ark was taken. The five lords of the Philistines meet and decide to send the Ark back into Israeli territory. After returning the Ark, the five lords *return* to Ekron

(I Sam. 6:16), which meant that is where they met and it is from Ekron that the Ark was sent out. I Sam. 6

- I. There will be another battle between the Israelites and the Philistines and the Israelites will take back their territory from Ekron to Gath. However, it is unclear whether Ekron and Gath were included in this taking back. I Sam. 7:14
- m. This expression, *from Ekron to Gath*, is used again in I Sam. 17:52 when David defeats Goliath, and the Philistines are chased back to Ekron, and their bodies fall from *Gath to Ekron*. In the previous point, Saul is not yet king; and in this point, Saul is king, and David is a very young man. Therefore, there are probably 20–30 years which transpire between these two passages.¹ In any case, if the Philistines retreated to these cities, that means that they had possession of them again. Being somewhat of a border city between Israel and Philistia, we would expect Ekron to change hands often, given the animosity between the two powers.
- n. You may recall that we recently studied Dagon, the god of the Philistines. Apparently, by the time of Ahab's death, those in Ekron worshiped Baal-zebul (obviously, Beelzebub), circa 870 B.C. (II Kings 1:2–3, 6, 16).² In other words, between the last mention of Ekron and this mention, about 250 years have passed. During this time, Gath is mentioned (primarily in connection with David and a little at the beginning of Solomon's rule); but in the case of Ashdod, Gath and Ekron, there are about 200 years where these cities are not mentioned.

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3. The prophets mention the city of Ekron:
 - a. God, through Amos, denounces and prophesies against Philistia (and her individual cities). Amos 1:6–8, circa 765 B.C.
 - b. Zephaniah prophesies against Philistia and its cities in Zeph. 2:1–7. Zephaniah says that Ekron will be rooted up in Zeph. 2:4, which is actually a play on words, as *Ekron* is very similar to the verb *to root up, to root out*. Zephaniah prophesied this circa 624 B.C.
 - c. Jeremiah prophesies against all of the surrounding cities and countries of Israel, which includes Ekron, of course (Jer. 25:15–27). Circa 606 B.C.
 - d. Zechariah also prophesies against the cities of Philistia in Zech. 9:1–8, circa 516 B.C.³ Actually, Zechariah is speaking about the fall of Tyre and Ekron's consternation concerning Tyre's fall. However, he adds that Ekron would become like a *clan* or *chief* in Israel and that Ekron would become like a Jebusite (the Jebusites occupied Jerusalem when Israel came into the Land of Promise). In the modern state of Israel, Ekron is not a part of the Gaza strip but a part of Israel. Ekron would have been on the border of Judea during the time of our Lord.
 - e. By this time period, Gath had disappeared from history leaving only four principal Philistine cities.
4. Secular history:
 - a. We know from the Assyrian records that in 701 B.C., Ekron rebelled against Sennacherib's rulership and the Ekronite people *expelled Padi, the governor he had placed over it, and sent him to Hezekiah, at Jerusalem, for safekeeping*.⁴ Apparently, he was imprisoned in Jerusalem. When Sennacherib mustered his troops to attack Ekron, the city of Ekron enlisted the help of the king of Mutari, whose exact

¹ Reese has nearly 50 years passing between these two mentions of Ekron. *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; pp. 430, 447.

² ZPEB puts this circa 850–849 B.C. for the rulership of King Ahaziah. *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 2, p. 260.

³ These dates all come from *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; pp. 808, 970, 1000, 1193.

⁴ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. II; p. 916. The date is from *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.355.

identity is in question. Originally thought to be Egypt, later scholars have guessed that this is a district in Northwestern Arabia. Sennacherib destroyed this enemy in Eltekeh and then marched into the city of Ekron, killed the leaders of the revolt, and took their followers into captivity. *He then compelled Hezekiah to restore Padi, who was once more made governor. This affair led to the famous attack of Sennacherib on Hezekiah and Jerusalem.*⁵

- b. Ekron is listed as a tributary of Esarhaddon (Assyrian king, 681–669 B.C.), but it still remained populated by Philistines. They also paid tribute to Ashurbanipal, who succeeded Esarhaddon and ruled until circa 626 B.C.⁶
 - c. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., Ekron is not mentioned for over 400 years.
 - d. According to the Apocrypha, one of the Seleucid kings, Alexander Balas, who ruled in the Palestine area 150–145 B.C., gave Jonathan Maccabees Ekron and the land adjoining it (it is unclear to me exactly what this means, as Jonathan was more of a guerrilla leader rather than a ruler over any particular parcel of land). That Alexander gave Jonathan Ekron is recorded in I Maccabees 10:89. Apparently, Jonathan later became High Priest.⁷
 - e. Ekron also appears in accounts of the first crusade.
5. Modern location:
- a. Originally thought to have been equivalent to the modern city of Eltekeh.
 - b. Eusebius, in *Onomasticon*, tells us that Ekron is a large Jewish village between Azotus and Jamnia, which would suggest it be identified with the modern turrim Stratonis (Caesarea). Apparently, no scholar holds to this today.
 - c. Robinson, in *Biblical Researches*, II, pp. 226–229 identifies Ekron with the village of Aqir, which is 12 miles northeast of Ashdod. However, this area lacks a tell as well as the potsherds that we would expect to find. Nevertheless, a few scholars still hold to this site.
 - d. Macalister suggested a northern and a southern Ekron, the former lying in Dan and the latter in Judah, and identifies them with 'Aqir and Dhikerin, respectively.
 - e. Qatra is a hill three miles southwest of 'Aqir with a tell and remains from the Greco-Roman period. Albright, accepting Eusebius' description as being between Ashdod and Jamnia, takes Qatra as the modern location of Ekron.⁸
 - f. Now, it is believed that Khirbet al-Muqanna sits where Ekron was.
 - i. Khirbet al-Muqanna is south of the Sorek valley and 1/3 of a mile east of Kibbutz Revadim.
 - ii. In 1957, it was determined by surface exploration that site had been occupied in the Early Bronze Age, but then not again until the Early Iron Age.⁹
 - iii. It appears that at its peak, this formerly walled city occupied 40 acres in area, making it the largest Iron Age settlement yet found in Palestine.¹⁰
 - iv. There are springs of water which could support a large settlement here.¹¹
 - v. The site, of course, has lots of Philistine pottery. On its southern slopes, there apparently was a double wall with gates and towers.¹²

⁵ Quoted and paraphrased from *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. II; p. 916. This information originally comes from the Taylor Prism ii. 69-iii 11; Chicago Prism ii. 73-iii. 17.

⁶ This is from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 2, p. 260, which in turn took it from Prichard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 291, 294.

⁷ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 99; Vol. 4, pp. 7–8. Also, I Maccabees 10.

⁸ These last four locations were quoted or paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 2, p. 260.

⁹ *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.355.

¹⁰ Paraphrased from *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.355.

¹¹ Location and information about the springs from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; Merrill Tenney, ed., Zondervan Publishing House, ©1976; Vol. 2, p. 260.

¹² *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; p.355.

6. Application: What you may have noticed in covering these three Philistine cities is that two of them were wiped out early and Ekron lasted into the time of the first crusades. What's the difference, if any? Here's the difference: [They \[the Ekronites\] sent therefore and gathered all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the Ark of God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people."](#) (I Sam. 5:11a). In the previous two cities, the Ark was simply sent along to another Philistine city. The people of Ekron told the Philistine lords to return the Ark from whence it came. They recognized the power of the God of Israel, and that simple recognition gave long life to the city of Ekron.

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