

## 63 Ashkelon

### Names (also known as)

Ascalon, Askelon, Ashqelon, Askalan, Tel Ascalon

### Etymology

Derived from the word *shaqal* which means to weigh or pay out in trade (Gen. 23:16; Ex. 22:17). Ashkelon was a major port and centre of commerce. It also lay along the Via Maris a trade route linking Egypt with Syria and Mesopotamia.

### Location/Description

Ashkelon is an Israeli city along the Mediterranean coast, 50 km south of Tel Aviv.



### Scriptural references

#### Old Testament

Jud. 1:18; 14:19; 1 Sam. 6:17; 2 Sam. 1:20; Jer. 25:20; 47:5,7; Amos 1:8; Zeph. 2:4,7; Zech. 9:5.

In Judges 14 we see that Samson went down to Ashkelon after his riddle was discovered and slew 30 men of the town. There is a series of prophecies against the Philistines in which Ashkelon is included describing their destruction at the hands of the Assyrians. In Amos 1:8 it seems that Ashkelon was a ruling city of the Philistines as it speaks of it having a sceptre.

### Famous characters

Samson  
Herod the Great

### Brief history

Ashkelon was one of the 5 cities of the Philistines who conquered the area around the time that Joshua entered and conquered Canaan. There is evidence of previous inhabitants and it seemed to be a place where animals were slaughtered in meat processing and conservation. The previous Canaanite inhabitants seem to have constructed a large wall and are mentioned in early Egyptian writings (Amarna letters, Merneptah stele). One of the largest covered gates of the period also has been excavated (see below).



The Philistines seem to have come from a Mediterranean Island (Amos.9:7, Jer.47:4 – Caphtor is either Cyprus or Crete). There was war between Israel and the Philistines throughout the reigns of the Israelite kings. Even though David defeated the Philistines he did not fully drive them from their cities. This was done by Tiglath-Pileser III and Nebuchadnezzar. When Hezekiah rebelled against the Assyrians he was joined by two of the Philistines cities; Ekron and Ashkelon. He then defeated the Philistine cities who remained loyal to Assyria (2 Kings 18:8). It was the last of the Philistine cities to hold out against Babylon and when it was destroyed in 604 BC the era of the Philistines was over.

In Persian times there was a settlement of Phoenicians located here who seemed to venerate dogs as there is a mass grave of 700 dogs that died of natural causes. When the Jews under Maccabean leadership overthrew the Greeks and set up the Hasmonean kingdom, Ashkelon became an autonomous city.

It is believed that Ashkelon was the birthplace of Herod the Great who greatly enlarged and beautified the city, constructing a summer house, palaces, and an aqueduct. Under the Romans it was granted the rare privilege of being exempt from taxes. It flourished as a major commercial centre and wine producer. At this time worship of the Roman god of victory seem to be preeminent in the city as statues of Nike (Kore) have been excavated.

During the Byzantine period the Christian Roman Empire set up churches and bishops there, the most prominent being Sabinus who was present at the Nicaean council in 325. During the crusade period the city was fought over by the Muslims and Crusaders and at one point the Fatimids fortified the city with 53 towers. At this point the Muslims also used Roman columns to further fortify the walls of the city.



The city under Islamic rule became an important religious site for a while when the grandson of Mohammad was buried there, until he was moved to Fustat (Egypt). In 1270 the Mameluke king Bybars captured and demolished the city, filled up the fort and left it desolate. Ashkelon was never built or inhabited again and its rediscovery only came in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

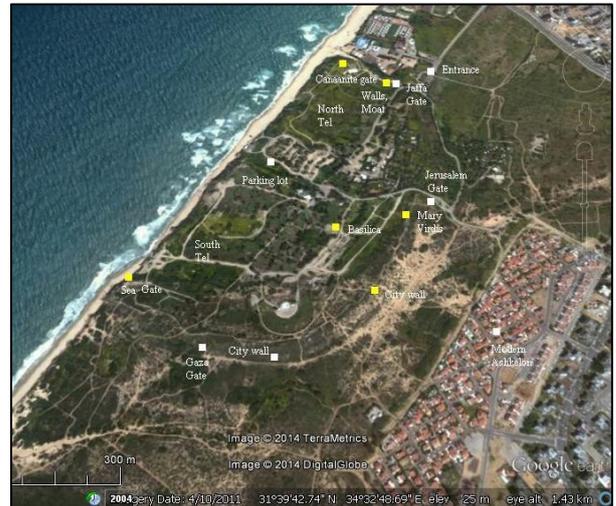
This shows us the accuracy of God’s word as he declared in Zech. 9:5 – “Ashkelon shall not be inhabited.” All that is left of this great city are the ruins of a godless society. In these ruins a small silver statuette of a bull calf was found. It is identified with Baal and might be



linked to the calf worship of Israel. We are warned in Hosea 13:2 - “And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver, and idols

according to their own understanding, all of it the work of the craftsmen: they say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.”

We know that there is only one true God and the worship of bulls and goats gives no hope. If we want to be part of an eternal city and an everlasting Kingdom that will not decay like Ashkelon, we must put our trust in the everlasting God, Yahweh Elohim.



### Sources:

- Smiths Bible Dictionary
- Wikipedia
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- Biblewalks.com
- Jewishmag.com
- Jewish virtual library

(Compiler – Dan Leadbetter)