

Gaza

The Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature. James Strong and John McClintock; Haper and Brothers; NY; 1880.

(Heb. *Azzah'*, אַזָּח, *strong*, q.d. *fortress* or *Valentia*, or fem. of *goat*, Sept. and other Greek writers Γάζα, sometimes confounded with *Gazara* [q.v.]; "Azzah" in Deuteronomy 11, 23), a city remarkable for its early importance and continuous existence, lying along the Mediterranean sea-coast, in latitude 31° 29', longitude 34° 29' (Robinson), on the great thoroughfare between the head of the Persian Gulf and Hebron, as well as between Egypt and Palestine, of which it was indeed the frontier town (Arrian, *Exp. Alex.* 2:26). It is chiefly noted as having been one of the cities of the Philistine pentarchy ([Jos 15:47](#)). It is mentioned in [Ge 10:19](#), as one of the border-cities of the Canaanites. Its earliest inhabitants of whom we find any mention, though probably not the aborigines, are the *Avim*, who appear to have lived in a semi-nomad state, roving over the neighboring plain and desert. They were attacked and driven northward by "the Caphtorim, who came forth out of Caphtor, and they dwelt in their stead" ([De 2:23](#), with [Jos 13:2-3](#); see Keil's note on the latter passage). The Caphtorim and Philistines were identical, or at least different families of the same tribe who afterwards amalgamated and formed the powerful nation of whom we read so much in the Bible (comp. [De 2:23](#); [Am 9:7](#); [Ge 10:14](#); [Jer 47:4](#)). *SEE CAPHTORIM*; *SEE PHILISTINES*. The time of the conquest of Gaza by the Philistines is not known. It must

have been long before Abraham's time, for they were then firmly established in the country, and possessed of great power ([Ge 21:32](#)). Gaza was from the first their principal stronghold. Joshua smote the Canaanites as far Gaza ([Jos 10:41](#)), but spared the Anakim (giants) that dwelt there ([Jos 11:21-22](#)). In the division of the land, Gaza fell to the lot of Judah ([Jos 15:47](#)), and was taken by him with the coast thereof ([Jg 1:18](#)), but its inhabitants ("Gazites," [Jg 16:2](#); "Gazathites," [Jos 13:3](#)) were not exterminated ([Jg 3:3](#)). Gaza was one of the five Philistine cities which gave each a golden emerod as a trespass-offering to the Lord ([1Sa 6:17](#)). Gaza is celebrated for the exploit recorded of Samson ([Jg 16:1-3](#)), who "took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them on his shoulders, and carried them up to the top of a hill that is before Hebron." The Philistines afterwards took Samson, and put out his eyes, and brought him to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass, and he did grind in the prison-house: the, however, pulled down the temple of Dagon, god of the Philistines, and slew, together with himself, "all the lords of the Philistines," besides men and women ([Jg 16:21-30](#)). Solomon's kingdom extended as far as Gaza ([1Ki 4:24](#)). But the place always appears as a Philistine city in Scripture ([Jg 3:3](#); [Jg 16:1](#); [1Sa 6:17](#); [2Ki 18:8](#)). Hezekiah smote the Philistines as far as Gaza ([2Ki 18:8](#)). Gaza fell into the hands of the Egyptians, probably Pharaoh- Necho, as a diversion of Nebuchadnezzar in his designs against Jerusalem ([Jer. 47:1](#)), an event to which has been incorrectly referred ([Rawlson, Herod. 1:411](#)) the statement of Herodotus (2:159) respecting the capture of *Cadytis* by the Egyptians. [SEE JERUSALEM](#). During this period of Jewish history, it seems that some facts concerning the connection of Gaza with the invasion of Sennacherib may be added from the inscriptions found at

Nineveh (Layard's *Nineveh and Babylon*, page 144). *SEE CUNEIFORM INSCRIPTIONS*. The prophets speak in severe terms against it ([Jer 25:20](#); [Jer 47:5](#); [Am 1:6-7](#); [Zep 2:4](#); [Zec 9:5](#)). — After the destruction of Tyre it sustained a siege of two (Quint. Curt. 4:6, 7, says five) months against Alexander the Great (Josephus, *Ans.* 11:8, 4), a fact that illustrates the propriety of its name and its military importance. As Van de Velde says (page 187), it was the key of the country. So vigorously was it then defended by the forces under the command of the eunuch Batis, and of such massive strength were its walls, that the engineers of Alexander's army found themselves completely baffled in their attempts to effect a breach. They were obliged to erect an enormous mound 250 feet in height, and about a quarter of a mile in width, on the south side; of the town; and even with this advantage, and the use also of the engines that had been employed at the siege of Tyre, the besiegers were frequently repulsed, and Alexander himself sustained no slight bodily injury. It was at last carried by escalade, and the garrison put to the sword. The town itself was not destroyed, but most of the inhabitants that remained were sold into slavery, and a fresh Arab population settled in their stead (Arrian, 2:27). What had happened in the times of the Pharaohs (*Jar.* 47:1) and Cambyses (*Pomp. Mel.* 1:11) happened again in the struggles between the Ptolemies and the Seleucidae (Polybius, 5:68; 16:40). Jonathan Maccabaeus (*1 Macc.* 11:61) destroyed its suburbs; Simon Maccabaeus (*1 Macc.* 13:43) took the city itself, though not without extraordinary efforts. Alexander Jannaeus spent a year (B.C. cir. 96) in besieging it and punishing its inhabitants (Josephus, *Ant.* 13:13, 3). The place was rebuilt by Gabinius (Josephus, *Ant.* 14:5, 3). It was among the cities given by Augustus to Herod (Josephus, *Ant.* 15:7, 3), after whose death it was united to the province of Syria (Josephus, *Ant.* 17:11, 4).

It was near Gaza — on the road from Jerusalem to that place that Philip baptized the eunuch "of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians" ([Ac 8:26](#) sq.). As Gaza lay some distance from the sea (Arrian, 2:26), it had a port on the sea (?Γαζαίων λιμήν, Ptol. 5:16) called Γάζα πρὸς θάλασσαν, "Gaza on the sea;" called also Majuma (ὁ Μαιούμας), which Constantine called *Constantia*, from the name of his son, giving it, at the same time, municipal rights. Julian took away this name, and ordered it to be called the port of Gaza. Subsequent emperors restored the name and the privileges of the place. It was afterwards called the sea-coast of Gaza. Further particulars may be read in Reland (Palaestina, page 791 sq.), where mention is made, from Pausanias, of something like a parallel to the feat of Samson; and where, as well as in Kuisöl (in loc.) and in Winer (*Realwörterbuch* in voc.), explanatory circumstances may be found of the words in [Ac 8:26](#) "Gaza, which is desert;" an expression that appears to refer rather to the road (ὁδός) from Jerusalem in that direction than to Gaza itself (see Robinson, *Researches*, 2:640). Besides the ordinary road from Jerusalem by Ramleh to Gaza, there was another, more favorable for carriages ([Ac 8:28](#)), further to the south, through Hebron, and thence through a district comparatively without towns, and much exposed to the incursions of people from the desert. The matter is discussed by Raumer in one of his *Beitrag*e, incorporated in the last edition of his *Palästina*; also by Robinson in the Appendix to his second volume. The latter writer suggests a very probable place for the baptism, viz., at the water in the *wady el-Hasy*, between Eleutheropolis and Gaza, not far from the old sites of Lachish and Eglon. The legendary scene of the baptism is at *Beit-sur*, between Jerusalem and Hebron: the tradition having arisen apparently from the opinion that Philip himself was traveling southwards

from Jerusalem. But there is no need to, suppose that he went to Jerusalem at all. Lange (*Apost. Zeitalt.* 2:109) gives a spiritual sense to the word ἔρημος. About A.D. 65 Gaza was laid in ruins by the Jews, in revenge for the massacre of their brethren in Caesarea (Josephus, *War*, 2:18, 1). It soon recovered again; and it was one of the chief cities of Syria during the reigns of Titus and Adrian (see Smith's *Dict. of Class. Geogr.* s.v.). Though Christianity was early introduced into Gaza, the city long remained a stronghold of idolatry. In the beginning of the 5th century its bishop received authority to demolish its temples and build a large Christian church (Sozomen, *H.E.* 2:5). In A.D. 6304 Gaza was taken by the Moslems, and its splendid church turned into a mosque (Elmakín, *Hist. Saracen.* chapter 2, page 20). From this period it gradually declined under the blight of Islamism, and the Crusaders found it deserted. They built a castle on the mill, which became the nucleus of a new town (*William of Tyre*, 17:12). In the 12th century we find the place garrisoned by the Knights Templars. It finally fell into the hands of Saladin, A.D. 1170, after the disastrous battle of Hattin. The modern town is called Ghuzzeh, and contains about 15,000 inhabitants. It resembles a cluster of large villages. The principal one stands on the flat top of a low hill, and has some good stone houses, though now much dilapidated. The others lie on the plain below; their houses are mean mud hovels, and their lanes narrow and filthy. The hill appears to be composed in a great measure of the accumulated ruins of successive cities. We can see fragments of massive walls, and pieces of columns cropping up everywhere from the rubbish. Traces of ruins have been discovered at various places among the sandhills to the west, which are supposed to be those of primeval Gaza. The great mosque crowns the hill, and can be distinguished in the distance by its tall minaret and pointed

roof. The town has no walls or defences of any kind. Its inhabitants have been long known as a fierce and lawless set of fanatics. Between Gaza and the sea there is a broad belt completely covered with mounds of drifting sand. A mile east of the town a long ridge of low hills runs parallel to the coastline. Between the sand and the hills, the ground is very fertile, and supplies the town with abundance of the choicest fruit and vegetables. The climate of the place is almost tropical, but it has deep wells of excellent water. There are a few palm-trees in the town, and its fruit orchards are very productive. But the chief feature of the neighborhood is the wide-spread olive-grove to the N. and N.E. Hence arises a considerable manufacture of soap, which Ghuzzeh exports in large quantities. It has also an active trade in corn. For a full account of nearly all that has been written concerning the topographical and historical relations of Gaza, see Ritter's *Erdkunde*, 16:45-60. Among the travelers who have described the place we may mention especially Robinson (*Biblical Researches*, 2:375 sq.) and Van de Velde (*Syria and Palestine*, 2:179-188); also Thomson (*Land and Book*, 2:331 sq.). The last writer speaks of the great extent of corn-land near Gaza, and of the sound of mill-stones in the city. Even now its bazaars are better than those of Jerusalem. "Those travelling towards Egypt naturally lay in here a stock of provisions and necessaries for the desert, while those coming from Egypt arrive at Gaza exhausted, and must of course supply themselves anew" (Robinson, 2:378). The place is often mentioned in the Talmud (Otho, *Leax. Rabb.* page 258). See Cellarii *Notit.* 2:603 sq.; Siber, *De Gaza* (Lips. 1715); Burscher, *De Gaza sarrat.* (Lips. 1767), and *De Gaza derelicta* (Lips. 1768).