

Joshua 15:47

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ashdod with her towns and her villages, Gaza with her towns and her villages, unto the river of Egypt, and the great sea, and the border thereof:

Analysis

Ashdod with her towns and her villages, Gaza with her towns and her villages, unto the river of Egypt, and the great sea, and the border thereof:

This verse climaxes Judah's western boundary description, explicitly naming **Ashdod** and **Gaza** (עַזָּה, azzah) with their dependencies. **Gaza**, the southernmost Philistine city, guarded the coastal route to Egypt. The name possibly means "strong" or "fortified," reflecting its military significance. Gaza appears throughout biblical history: Samson's final act destroyed Gaza's temple of Dagon (Judges 16:21-30), Amos and Zephaniah pronounced judgment (Amos 1:6-7; Zephaniah 2:4), and Jeremiah witnessed Egypt's attack on it (Jeremiah 47:1). The city's strategic location made it perpetually contested—controlling Gaza meant controlling Egypt-Syria trade.

The southern boundary extends "unto the river of Egypt" (נַחַל מִצְרַיִם, nachal mitsrayim), likely the Wadi el-Arish rather than the Nile, marking the traditional Egypt-Canaan border. This wadi formed a natural barrier separating Egyptian influence from Canaanite territories. The western boundary is "the great sea and the border thereof" (הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל וְגִבּוֹל, hayam hagadol ugevul)—the Mediterranean coastline forming a definitive natural frontier.

The repetition of "with her towns and her villages" emphasizes comprehensive grant—God gave Judah not scattered outposts but complete territorial control with

economic infrastructure. Yet this promise remained tragically unfulfilled. Gaza and Ashdod stayed Philistine, becoming perpetual antagonists. This incomplete possession demonstrates that covenant blessings require covenant obedience; divine promises don't automatically materialize apart from faith-filled action.

Historical Context

Gaza (Tell Haruba/Tel Haror) commanded the Via Maris, the coastal highway connecting Egypt to Syria-Mesopotamia. Egyptian pharaohs considered Gaza their northernmost stronghold, and its capture signaled invasion of Canaan proper. Thutmose III (c. 1479 BCE) listed Gaza among conquered cities, and the Amarna Letters mention it as Egyptian administrative center. The Philistines captured it c. 1175 BCE during the Sea Peoples invasion. Archaeological evidence confirms continuous occupation through biblical periods. The Wadi el-Arish (traditional River of Egypt) forms a significant geographical boundary approximately 50 miles southwest of Gaza. Ancient treaties between Egypt and Near Eastern powers often used this wadi as the official border. The Mediterranean coast provided natural western boundary but no harbors in Philistine territory, limiting Israelite naval development.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does the mention of Gaza (where Samson died defeating God's enemies) remind us that even in defeat, faithfulness to God accomplishes His purposes?

2. What does God's assignment of powerful, fortified cities to Judah teach about His expectation that His people would trust Him for impossible victories?
3. How do we balance acknowledging partial obedience (Israel captured some but not all cities) while not becoming complacent about incomplete spiritual conquest?

Interlinear Text

אֲשְׁדּוֹד	בְּנוֹתֶיהָ	וְחִצְיֶיהָ	עַזָּה	בְּנוֹתֶיהָ	וְחִצְיֶיהָ
Ashdod	with her towns	and her villages	Gaza	with her towns	and her villages
H795	H1323	H2691	H5804	H1323	H2691
עַד	בְּחַלְיָה	מִצְרַיִם	וְהַיָּם	וְהַגָּבֹל	וְהַגָּבֹל:
H5704	unto the river	of Egypt	sea	and the great	and the border
	H5158	H4714	H3220	H1419	H1366

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 15:4 (References Egypt): From thence it passed toward Azmon, and went out unto the river of Egypt; and the goings out of that coast were at the sea: this shall be your south coast.