

# When we use the word Gaza, what Biblical echoes sound?

On July 9th 2014, Colonel Ofer Vinter wrote a letter to his Givati brigade soldiers. In high biblical idiom he referred to the enemy in Gaza:

"ההיסטוריה בחרה בנו להיות בחוד החנית של הלחימה באויב הטרוריסטי"

"העזתי" אשר מחרף מנאץ ומגדף, אלוקי מערכות ישראל"

"History has chosen us to spearhead the battle against the Gazan terrorist, the enemy who curses, scorns, and derides the God of Israel's Campaigns"

This letter, from an army commander to his troops, was met with much controversy.

Some voices asked:

- Does Vinter's language suggest our conflict with the Palestinians is the extension of a religious war rooted in the Bible, and not an example of a State defending itself against a terror organization?
- Do we wish for the soldiers of the IDF to see their battle as religious?
- What should be the rhetorical tone of our wartime statements?
- How do our Jewish sources refer to war, and to this particular piece of land now called the Gaza Strip?

Vinter's comment was not without current or biblical context. Controversy in the Bnei Akiva movement also raged recently after the three kidnapped youths were found murdered, when the Secretary General Rabbi Rabbi Noam Perel wrote on his facebook that: "An entire nation and thousands of years of history demand revenge," and specifically referred to how the Israeli "army of avengers" should not to stop at "300 Philistine foreskins."



**How does Biblical Gaza echo in our conversations about current Gaza?**

**How do mythical references to Philistines connect with  
Palestinians of today?**

**We invite you to dig into the biblical echoes of this piece of land.**

Makom – The Gaza Conflict

The first time Gaza is mentioned is in Deuteronomy II:23

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| <p>כג וְהַעֲוִים הַיֹּשְׁבִים בְּחִצְרִים, עַד-<br/>                 עֵזָה--כַּפְתֹּרִים הַיֹּצְאִים מִכַּפְתֹּר,<br/>                 הַשְּׂמִידִם וַיֵּשְׁבוּ תַּחְתָּם.</p> | <p>23 and the Avvim, that dwelt in villages as far as<br/>                 Gaza, the Caphtorim, that came forth out of<br/>                 Caphtor, destroyed them, and dwelt in their<br/>                 stead.--</p> |
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But the nature of Gaza, and its threat to the Jewish People, does not emerge until Joshua 11

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| <p>כא וַיָּבֹא יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בַּעֲת הַהִיא, וַיַּכֶּת<br/>                 אֶת-הָעֲנָקִים מִן-הַהָר מִן-חֶבְרוֹן מִן-<br/>                 דְּבִיר מִן-עֲנָב, וּמְכַל הַר יְהוּדָה, וּמְכַל<br/>                 הַר יִשְׂרָאֵל: עִם-עָרֵיהֶם, הִחָרִימָם<br/>                 יְהוֹשֻׁעַ.</p> | <p>21 And Joshua came at that time, and cut off<br/>                 the Giants from the hill-country, from Hebron,<br/>                 from Debir, from Anab, and from all the hill-<br/>                 country of Judah, and from all the hill-country<br/>                 of Israel; Joshua utterly destroyed them with<br/>                 their cities.</p> |
| <p>כב לֹא-נֹתַר עֲנָקִים, בְּאֶרֶץ בְּנֵי<br/>                 יִשְׂרָאֵל: רַק, בְּעֵזָה בְּגַת וּבְאַשְׁדּוֹד-<br/>                 בְּנִשְׁאָרוֹ.</p>   | <p>22 There was none of the Giants left in the land<br/>                 of the children of Israel; only in Gaza, in Gath,<br/>                 and in Ashdod, did some remain.</p>   |

Gaza and its neighboring Gath and Ashdod, would seem to be where enemy giants continue to dwell...



Take a look in I Samuel 17 to find out where Goliath was from...

The Land of Giants?

Makom – The Gaza Conflict



## Makom – The Gaza Conflict

As the map of Biblical Israel shows, the area including Gaza, Ashkelon, and Gat, came to be known by the people living there: The Philistines.

All three of Samson's treacherous wives were Philistines from the Gaza area.



Samson's famous last words still resonate in current Hebrew:  
I shall die with the Philistines. תמות נפשי עם-פְּלִשְׁתִּים



Philistines/Palestinians?

There is no historical or genealogical proof of any connection between Philistines (descendants of sea peoples from the Aegean who arrived in the Eastern Mediterranean in the 18<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and the Palestinians (descendants of Arab-Islamic groups arriving in Palestine beginning with the Muslim conquest in the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE). Yet the linguistic and biblical echoes are often used in some religious Zionist rhetoric.

Makom – The Gaza Conflict

The death of Jonathan and his father King Saul is traumatic for David, whose beautiful eulogy is quoted endlessly. However according to David, there are certain places his words should never be repeated:

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| II Samuel 1  |  |
| יט הַצְּבִי, יִשְׂרָאֵל, עַל-בְּמוֹתֶיךָ,<br>חָלְלִי: אֵיךְ, נָפְלוּ גִבּוֹרִים.   | 19 Thy beauty, O Israel, upon thy high places is slain! How are the mighty fallen!   |
| כ אֶל-תִּגְדוּ בְּגַת, אֶל-תִּבְשְׂרוּ<br>בְּחוּצַת אֲשְׁקֶלֶן: פֶּן-תִּשְׂמַחַנָּה בָנוֹת<br>פְּלִשְׁתִּים, פֶּן-תַּעֲלֶזְנָה בָנוֹת<br>הָעַרְלִים. | 20 Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph. |

- What do you think is revealed by David demanding the information not be shared with the area of Gaza? Why at the height of his sorrow is the old enemy worthy of mention?
- Why do you think the "daughters" are specifically mentioned? Is David still blaming them for Samson's suicide death?

The grudge deepens...



Makom – The Gaza Conflict

During the days of the prophet Amos (circa 800 BC), Gaza is still a danger for the Israelites. Amos 1 6

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| <p>ו כה, אָמַר ה', עַל-שְׁלֹשָׁה פְּשָׁעֵי עֲזָה, וְעַל-אַרְבָּעָה לֹא אֲשִׁיבֶנּוּ: עַל-הַגְּלוּתָם גְּלוּת שְׁלֹמֹה, לְהַסְגִּיר לְאֵדוֹם.</p>                          | <p>6 Thus saith the LORD: For three transgressions of Gaza, yea, for four, I will not reverse it: because they carried away captive a whole captivity, to deliver them up to Edom.</p>                                  |
| <p>ז וְשַׁלַּחְתִּי אֵשׁ, בְּחוֹמַת עֲזָה; וְאָכְלָהּ, אֲרַמְנֹתֶיהָ.</p>   | <p>7 So will I send a fire on the wall of Gaza, and it shall devour the palaces thereof;</p>  |
| <p>ח וְהִכַּרְתִּי יוֹשֵׁב מֵאַשְׁדּוֹד, וְתוֹמָךְ שֹׁבֵט מֵאַשְׁקְלוֹן; וְהִשִּׁיבֹתִי יָדַי עַל-עֶקְרוֹן, וְאַבְדוּ שְׂאֵרֵית פְּלִשְׁתִּים--אָמַר, אֲדֹנָי ה'. {פ}</p> | <p>8 And I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him that holdeth the sceptre from Ashkelon; and I will turn My hand against Ekron, and the remnant of the Philistines shall perish, saith the Lord GOD. {P}</p> |

- What kind of picture is emerging of our relationship to Gaza? How are the words of the Amos adding to our understanding?

The hostility between the kingdom of Judah and Gaza reaches its peak with the prophecy of Zephaniah:

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| <p>ד כִּי עֲזָה עֲזוּבָה תִהְיֶה, וְאַשְׁקְלוֹן לְשִׁמְמָה; אֲשְׁדּוֹד, בְּצַהָרִים יִגְרְשׁוּהָ, וְעֶקְרוֹן, תִּעֲקָר.</p> | <p>4 For Gaza shall be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation; they shall drive out Ashdod at the noonday, and Ekron shall be rooted up.</p> |
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Makom – The Gaza Conflict

The Israeli poet from Sderot Simon Adaf wrote this poem in 2009. It is included in an anthology published in protest at the military action in Gaza that took place back then. In it he draws on Zephaniah’s curse and his own hometown.

## Zephaniah

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| <p>וְאֲנִי בְּאֶבְלֵי הַתְּעוֹרָרָתִי בִּבְקָר<br/>         אֶתְמוּל וּצְפַנְיָה עַל שִׁפְתַי: כִּי</p> <p>עֲזָה עֲזוּבָה תִהְיֶה וּשְׂדֵרוֹת תִּשָּׁדָד<br/>         וְאַשְׁקֵלוֹן</p> <p>לְשִׁמְמָה אֲשַׁדֵּד בְּצַהֲרַיִם יְגִרְשׁוּהָ<br/>         וְעֵקְרוֹן תִּעָקֵר.</p> <p>מִי הִכְרִיחַ אוֹתִי לְקַרֵּא תִּירֵי עֶשֶׂר<br/>         כְּשֶׁהָיִיתִי צָעִיר מְכַדֵּי</p> <p>לְהִתְנַגֵּד.</p> | <p>And I from my mourning awoke<br/>         yesterday morning with Zephania on my<br/>         lips: For</p> <p>Gaza shall be forsaken, and Sderot shall<br/>         be looted and Ashkelon</p> <p>A desolation; they shall drive out<br/>         Ashdod at the noonday, and Ekron shall<br/>         be uprooted.</p> <p>Who forced me to read The Dozen<sup>*</sup><br/>         when I was too young<br/>         to resist.</p> <p><sup>*</sup> The dozen scrolls of the minor<br/>         prophets in the Bible</p> |
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- Which location is Adaf adding? Why?
- How does inserting a modern Israeli town impact your response to the poem?

And now?

Looking back at the way in which the Bible indicates a very certain relationship between the area of Gaza, and the People of Israel, now take another look at the words of Colonel Vinter to his troops in the modern-day State of Israel.

What is your opinion of what he says and how he says it?