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Research Paper

Aphek: The Riverbed

“Aphik” is the Hebrew word the city Aphek was named after. It means riverbed because Aphek protects an important source of water (Feldman). Located in Israel the city is well known for its appearances in biblical passages like 1Samuel 4 that mentions the consequences of the battle of Aphek between the Philistines and the Israelites. The first mentioning of Aphek can be traced back to the first urbanization in Israel in 3000 B.C.E. Furthermore, archeological examinations have revealed more details about the life in this city in ancient times. This paper will provide more information about Aphek regarding geography, history, and archaeology.

### **1. Geography**

Aphek is located nine miles northeast of Tel Aviv in Israel nowadays. In ancient times Aphek could be found along a key trade route “the Via Maris” which means the way of the sea (Feldman). It has a strategic location due to the triangle route between Aphek, Gittaim, and Joppa (Monson, p. 122). One kilometer east of Aphek are the Samarian hills and west the Nahel-Auja which is today called Yarkon River (Anson, p. 19). These two natural borders force all the routes to converge in the narrow Aphek pass. Therefore, it has a unique location which situated it to one of the most important passes (Shawn-Zelig, p.297).

The source of the Yarkon River starts in Aphek and flows to Tel Aviva and the Mediterranean Sea. West of Aphek was also a small lake that vanished due to drought in recent years (Feldman). From Aphek north ran the key segment of the coastal trunk route that

connected Egypt with Mesopotamia. According to *The Land Between* by James Monson Aphek is located south of the Sharon Plain, north of Lod, east of Joppa, and west of Shechem.

## **2. History:**

The city has a long history starting with the earliest findings of Israel in 3000 B.C.E. During the Neo-Assyrian administration in the Southern Levant “(...) emissaries from Egypt, Philistia, and Judah would all have traveled through the Aphek-Gezer region, bearing tribute, on an annual basis “(Shawn-Zelig, p.300). Moreover, the Assyrian administration was concentrated in the area around Aphek because caravans could be taxed there. This enhanced the importance of this region for the Assyrian Empire (Shawn-Zelig, p.306). The income for this region can be accounted to come from agricultural and customs duties.

From 734-732 B.C.E the campaign of Tiglath-Pileser III led along the city of Aphek and it belonged to the Assyrian provinces (Anson, p.120;124).

In 597 B.C.E. the Babylonian army besieges Jerusalem and Jehoiachin surrenders. Their troops were margin from Samaria to Aphek and then to Jerusalem (Anson, p. 146)

During the Territorial States in the tenth century B.C.E. Aphek belonged to the third district the northern Sharon Plain and the Dotan Valley which included the Land of Hephher (Anson, p.83).

The Persian domination in the late sixth to fourth centuries B.C.E. made it belong to the area of the Sidonian Land Grand (Anson, p.167).

Herod the Great was named king (37-4 BC) he rebuilt the city and named the city Antipatris after his father Antipater.

Important historic background offers the following two facts about Aphek. At the beginning of the second millennium written evidence of the “Execration Texts” (Moshe, p. 77) mentions Aphek and its ruler Yanikilu. Secondly, in the Hellenistic period, the city was known as Pegae which means springs (Moshe, p. 75).

Several events refer to Aphek in the Bible. In Joshua 12:18 Aphek is referred to as a Canaanite royal city and the king that was killed by Joshua is mentioned. Secondly, 1 Kings 20:26 discusses the battle between the Israelites and the Arameans (Hasegawa, p.502). The first battle was in Samaria and the second one in Aphek where it was identified with Fiq an Arabic village. Aphek was also on the route of the Ishmaelite caravan to Egypt as mentioned in Genesis 37:25 (Anson, p.36). Moreover, in 1 Samuel 1-10 the Philistines "...gathered all their forces at Aphek..." triumphed and the death of Saul took place. The Philistines leaders objected that David and his men should participate and they were sent home before the battle (Anson, p.66). Also, the allotment for Asher in Joshua 24-30 mentions the city. The most well-known mentioning of Aphek is in 1 Samuel 4:1 (Monson, p.123). The Israelites tried to choose a good place to attack the Philistines. At Aphek, their troops could merge from the hills in the narrow funnel of the land due to the Yarkon River and Hill Country. This was a "carefully planned all-or-nothing-at-all attempt to defend the Israelites interest in the land." (Monson, p.123). However, the attack was met with resistance and the Israelites put God on trial. They tried to carry the Ark through the most difficult Hill Country. As mentioned 1 Samuel 4 is a warning that one cannot control God and or package God. The consequence of the battle of Aphek was the loss of the Ark of the covenant. In this battle also both of Eli's sons died.

### **3. Archaeology:**

In the year 1934 the first salvage excavations under J. Ory and another one in 1961 under A. Eitan were started in Aphek (Moshe, p. 76). Findings from the first mentioning of the city include a wall that is 2.9 meters wide and has a length of 12 meters which was most likely the border of private property. More property that is called "broad-room houses" (Moshe, p. 76) were discovered and in these houses imported Egyptian ware as well as Philistine pottery. The ladder was found in red and black design in the pits and courtyards. Intersecting streets of this

time could be comprehended. Moreover, also remains from the Bronze Age could be found which supports settlement in this era.

In the late Iron Ages farmsteads were established from the Aphek are to the Ayalon Valley. This has been observed since the 1970s through surveys and then salvage excavations over the years (Shawn-Zelig, p.302).

The Oxford Bible Atlas mentions that “Migdal Aphek”, the tower of Aphek was built by Crusaders (p.151 ff.). Until today ruins can be found on the hill most likely remains from the Turkish period.

The findings of the acropolis of Aphek could be traced back to 16th Century BCE belonging to the kings of Canaanite Aphek. In addition, a bilingual lexicon, and trilingual lexicon, clay tablets that are around 6cm long were found there (Moshe, p. 79). The first Hittite Bulla in Israel was discovered by the palace “The diameter of the impression was 40 mm, but more than half of it was broken off in antiquity and lost” (Moshe, p.79). The most important finding is the letter from Ugarit that is complete and is written on both sides of the clay tablet of 5x9 cm.

To sum up, Aphek is located at a strategic location on the Via Maris a major trade route in ancient times. Due to the Samarian Hills, the Aphek pass converges several routes which makes the city such a major trade location. The River Yarkon can also account for Aphek’s well-being. Biblical passages like 1Kings 20:26, 1Samuel 1-10, 1 Samuel 4:1, and Joshua 12:18 show the crucial influence the city had in the bible. Archaeological evidence showed that farmsteads, Migdal Aphek, The Letter of Ugarit, and the Hittite Bulla were found there. Exploration of this important city is still in the preliminary state and therefore a lot more artifacts can be discovered in the future which gives us more insights into the city’s history. Therefore, Aphek is definitely worth a visit to gain deeper understanding of the biblical account and the historical and archaeological evidence.

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