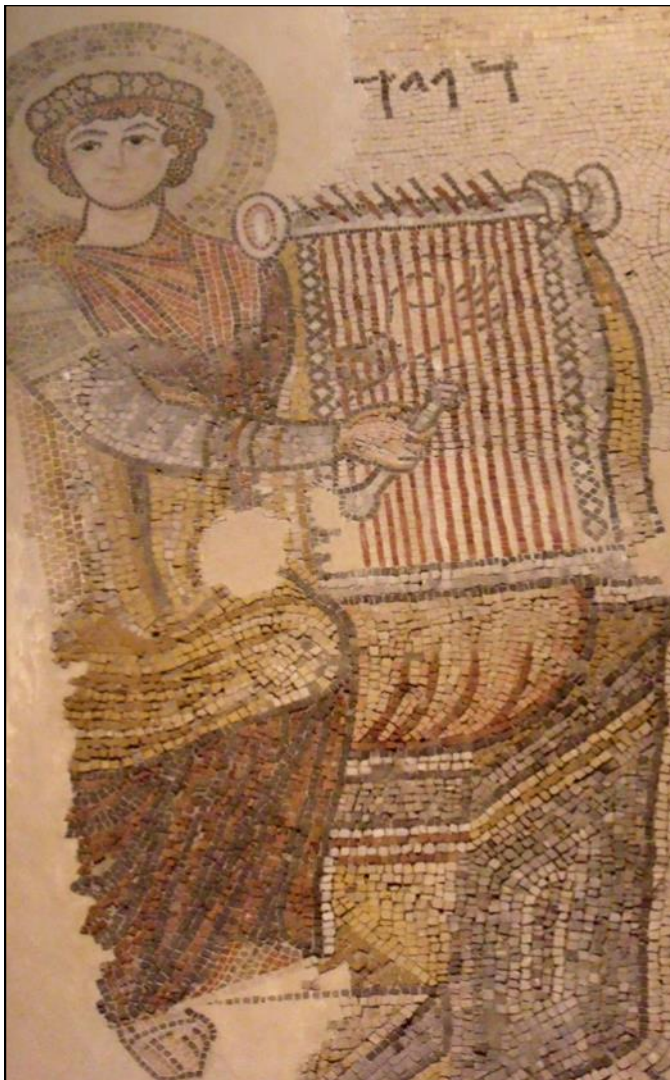


GAZA STRIP

The Gaza Strip is a piece of land located between Israel and Egypt along the southern Mediterranean coast, measuring 25 miles long and 5 to 7.5 miles wide. Palestinian refugees fled to this area in 1948 during the Arab-Israeli War. In 1956, the Gaza Strip was occupied by Israel after the Suez-Sinai War, but Israel withdrew following pressure from the United Nations. A decade later, in 1967, Israel recaptured the Gaza Strip in the Six Day War. After that time, Israel not only occupied the territory with troops, but Jews also built a total of 21 settlements there in the 1970s and 80s. These communities caused increased conflicts between the Palestinians and Israelis. The Oslo Accords in 1993 led to the Palestinian National Authority taking over and the Israelis withdrawing.



Mosaic of David with a Lyre. Near the end of the Roman period, Jews began decorating their synagogues with mosaic floors, sometimes using scenes and characters from the Bible (see the *Sepphoris* section). Perhaps with the decline of paganism, they did not see these two-dimensional images as a temptation toward idolatry. Soon after the Six Day War in 1967, when Israel captured the Gaza Strip, Israeli archaeologists removed this mosaic from a sixth century A.D. synagogue in the city of Gaza. They restored it, since David's face had been destroyed. The name "David" appears in Hebrew over the lyre. The mosaic is kept in the Israel Museum.

The Gaza Strip has been divided between Hamas and Fatah factions. In 1995, Hamas engaged in suicide bombings to destroy Jewish settlements in the territory. Israel responded by limiting border crossings from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Since many Palestinians worked in Israel, this had serious economic repercussions. In 2005, Israeli troops and settlers left the territory. The region suffers from deprivation, poverty, and unemployment. In 2007, Hamas gained power in the government. Over the past two decades, the Palestinians have shot numerous short range rockets into Israel, often killing or harming civilians. These have the potential to reach Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, but most of them have been intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome defense system. Israel has retaliated by targeting key terrorist leaders and groups, but sometimes killing civilians in the process.

According to 2022 statistics, more than 2.3 million Palestinians live in the Gaza Strip, and Gaza City is the major population center with over 750,000 people. In the Old Testament, Gaza was one of the five cities of the Philistine Pentapolis (Josh. 13:3); it is featured in the Samson narrative (Judg. 16:1-3, 21-31).