

PHILISTIA, PHILISTINES

Judges

The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary

Philistia

The land of the Philistines in the southern coastal plain along the Mediterranean. The borders extend south toward Egypt, north to Ekron near the Sorek River, and east to the Shephelah. The Pentapolis, which included the cities Gaza, Ekron, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Gath, ruled Philistia. A major international trade route, the Via Maris, cut through Philistia (Exod.

Philistines

The Philistines inhabited the southern coastal plain of Palestine as early as the time of Abraham (Gen. 21:32, 34; 26:1, 8, 14–15, 18) and of Moses (Exod. 13:17; 15:14; 23:31), and as late as the exilic (Ezek. 16:27, 57; 25:15–16) and postexilic (Zech. 9:6) periods.

History and Culture The geographical origin(s) of the Philistines cannot be stated with certainty, though it appears likely that at least some of the Philistines came from the vicinity of the Aegean Sea. The Philistines were descendants of the Kasluhites (Gen. 10:14; cf. 1 Chron. 1:12), a group whose identity is uncertain. Since the Kasluhites are descendants of Ham listed among other peoples from Egypt (Gen. 10:6, 13–14), perhaps the Philistines migrated from the Nile Delta to one of the Mediterranean islands before moving to Canaan.

There was apparently a close association between the Kasluhites and the Caphtorites (cf. Gen. 10:14), for Amos 9:7 suggests that the Philistines were from Caphtor (cf. Deut. 2:23; Jer. 47:4), a region usually identified with Crete. The connection with Crete is seen with greater clarity in Ezek. 25:16; Zeph. 2:5–6, for both prophets refer to the Philistines and the Kerethites (= Cretans) in parallel phrases. Caution leads us to note that the authors of Samuel and Kings, though frequently referring to the Philistines, did not clearly equate the Philistines and the Kerethites (cf. 1 Sam. 30:14; 2 Sam. 8:18; 15:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Kings 1:38, 44; 1 Chron. 18:17).

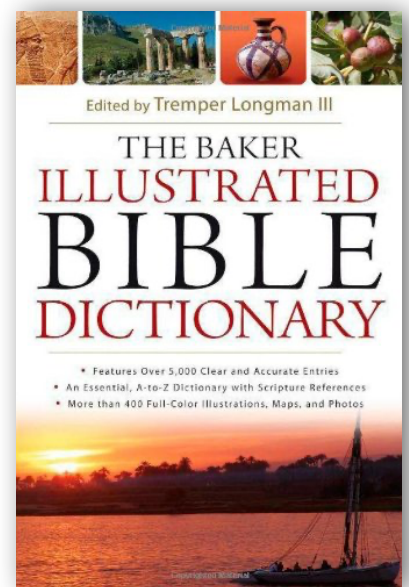
The material culture of the Philistines between about 1150 and 1000 BC shows similarities to, and likely influence from, what is found in the islands of the Aegean Sea, Mycenae (southern Greece), Crete, Anatolia (south-central Turkey), Cyprus (cf. Num. 24:24), Egypt, and Canaan.

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The Philistines adopted Canaanite gods (cf. 1 Sam. 17:43), including Dagon (Judg. 16:23; 1 Sam. 5:2–7), Ashtoreth (1 Sam. 31:10; cf. Judg. 10:6; 1 Sam. 7:3–4), and Baal-Zebub (“lord of flies,” probably a cynical distortion of Baal-Zebul, “lord of the [heavenly] dwelling”), the god of Ekron (2 Kings 1:2–6, 16).

The Philistine Pentapolis consisted of three cities on or near the Mediterranean coast (Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Gaza) and two inland cities (Ekron and Gath) under the authority of five rulers (cf. Josh. 13:3; Judg. 3:3; 1 Sam. 6:4, 16, 18).

Papyrus Harris I describes the defeat of the Philistines and other Sea Peoples by Ramesses III (1198–1166 BC), while the Egyptian Onomasticon of Amenope (late twelfth or early eleventh century BC)



refers to the Philistines as one of the ethnic groups that settled in Palestine.

Philistines in the Bible The mention of Philistines in Gen. 21 and 26 refers either to early inhabitants of the territory that later would be inhabited by Philistines or to peoples who later would become part of the Philistine nation. The Philistines mentioned in the Bible may constitute diverse peoples who migrated by land or by sea to the southern coastal region of Palestine over several centuries.

Prior to the influx of at least some of the Philistines from eastern Mediterranean islands, the southern coastal region was, at various times, inhabited by Canaanites (Num. 13:29; Deut. 1:7; Josh. 5:1; cf. Josh. 13:4); Anakites, who fled to Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod after being defeated by Joshua (Josh. 11:21–22); and Avvites, who were replaced by the victorious Caphtorites (Deut. 2:23; Josh. 13:3).

The migration of Judah and other tribes of Israel into Canaan resulted in several centuries of hostility with the Philistines. Judah's allotment of land included the cities and surrounding areas of Ekron, Ashdod, and Gaza, as well as "the coastline of the Mediterranean Sea" (Josh. 15:45–47). The soldiers of Judah subsequently conquered at least part of this area (Judg. 1:18).

During the time of the judges, Shamgar "struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad" (Judg. 3:31). Samson burned the grain, vineyards, and olive groves of the Philistines when he fastened torches to the tails of foxes (15:4–5). He killed a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey (15:15) and, after they had gouged out his eyes, killed many Philistine leaders when he pushed over the pillars supporting one of their temples (16:21, 29–30).

In one of their many victories over Israel (cf. Judg. 10:7; 13:1; 15:11; 1 Sam. 4:2, 10; 12:9), the Philistines captured the ark of God and placed it in the temple of Dagon in Ashdod (5:1). The next day the god was found lying on his face before the ark of God.

Saul's reign as Israel's king was characterized by war with the Philistines (1 Sam. 9:16; 14:52; cf. 7:13) and included both defeat (13:6–7; 23:27; 31:1) and victory (14:13, 22, 31, 47; 17:52–53; 24:1).

The military dominance of the Philistines over Israel during the time of Saul is attributed to their control of blacksmithing and ironwork (1 Sam. 13:19–22). This superiority in weapons allowed the Philistines to extend their influence beyond the region of the five cities into Judean territory (1 Sam. 4:1; 7:7; 10:5; 13:3, 16–18, 23; 17:1; 29:1, 11; 31:7–8, 10; 2 Sam. 5:18, 22; 23:14).

Saul became jealous of David after his defeat of the Philistine champion Goliath (1 Sam. 17:4, 50; 18:7–9). To win the hand of Saul's daughter Michal, David and his men killed two hundred Philistines and presented their foreskins to Saul (18:27). When Saul later attempted to kill David, David sought refuge with the Philistines and lived with them for sixteen months (27:1, 7).

When the Philistines gathered to fight against Israel, David's host, Achish, invited him to participate in the battle against his enemy Saul (1 Sam. 28:1). David was spared the dilemma of fighting against his own people when, fearing his betrayal, the other Philistine rulers refused to let David accompany them (29:4). In the ensuing battle between Israel and the Philistines, Saul's sons were killed, and Saul took his own life after being critically injured by a Philistine archer (31:2–4).

David's early success in battle against the Philistines (1 Sam. 17:50; 19:8; 23:5) continued upon his accession to kingship after the death of Saul (2 Sam. 5:20, 25; 8:1, 12), though in his old age David was too tired to fight well against the Philistines (2 Sam. 21:15).

Later battles between Judah and the Philistines took place during the reigns of Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:16–17), Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:6–7), Ahaz (2 Chron. 28:18), and Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:8). Jehoshaphat received tribute from the Philistines (2 Chron. 17:11).