

# Philistines

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Philistines (Heb. *Pelishti'*, פְּלִשְׁתִּי, gentile from פְּלִשְׁתִּים, *Philistia*; Sept. ἀλλόφυλος, but sometimes Φυλιστεῖμ for the plur., which is the usual form; A.V. once "Philistim," [Ge 10:14](#); Josephus, Παλαιότινοι, *Anf.* 5:1, 18), a race of aboriginal Canaanites inhabiting the land of Philistia (q.v.). The following article combines the Scripture information with that from other sources.

## I. Early History. —

1. The origin of the Philistines is nowhere expressly stated in the Bible; but since the prophets describe them as "the Philistines from Caphtor" ([Am 9:7](#)), and "the remnant of the maritime district of Caphtor" ([Jer 47:4](#)), it is *prima facie* probable that they were the "Captorims which came out of Caphtor" who expelled the Avim from their territory and occupied it in their place ([De 2:23](#)), and that these again were the Captorim mentioned in the Mosaic genealogical table among the descendants of Mizraim ([Ge 10:14](#)). But in establishing this conclusion certain difficulties present themselves: in the first place, it is observable that in [Ge 10:14](#) the Philistines are connected with the Casluhim rather than the Captorim. It has generally been assumed that the text has suffered a transposition, and that the parenthetical clause "out of whom came Philistim" ought to follow the words "and Captorim." This explanation is, however, inadmissible; for (1) there is no external evidence whatever of any variation in the text, either here or in the parallel passage in [1Ch 1:12](#); and

(2) if the transposition were effected, the desired sense would not be gained; for the words rendered in the A.V. "out of whom" (אֲשֶׁר מִשְׁמָךְ) really mean "whence," and denote a local movement rather than a genealogical descent, so that, as applied to the Caphtorim, they would merely indicate a sojourn of the Philistines in their land, and not the identity of the two races. The clause seems to have an appropriate meaning in its present position: it looks like an interpolation into the original document with the view of explaining when and where the name Philistine was first applied to the people whose proper appellation was Caphtorim. It is an etymological as well as a historical memorandum; for it is based on the meaning of the name Philistine (from the root פָּלָשׁ =the Ethiopic *falasa*, "to migrate;" a term which is said to be still current in Abyssinia [Knobel. *Vilkert.* page 281], and which on the Egyptian monuments appears under the form of *Pulost* [Brugsch. *Hist. d'Egypt.* page 187]), viz. "emigrant," and is designed to account for the application of that name. But a second and more serious difficulty arises out of the language of the Philistines; for while the Caphtorim were Hamitic, the Philistine language is held to have been Shemitic. (Hitzig, in his *Urgeschichte d. Phil.*, however, maintains that the language is Indo-European, with a view to prove the Philistines to be Pelasgi. He is, we believe, singular in his view.) It has hence been inferred that the Philistines were in reality a Shemitic race, and that they derived the title of Caphtorim simply from a residence in Caphtor (Ewald, 1:331; Movers, *Phoniz.* 3:258), and it has been noticed in confirmation of this that their land is termed Canaan ([Zep 2:5](#)). But this seems to be inconsistent with the express assertion of the Bible that they were Caphtorim ([De 2:23](#)), and not simply that they came from Caphtor; and the term Canaan is applied to their country, not ethnologically but

etymologically, to describe the trading habits of the Philistines. The difficulty arising out of the question of language has been met by assuming either that the Caphtorim adopted the language of the conquered Avim (a not unusual circumstance where the conquered form the bulk of the population), or that they diverged from the Hamitic stock at a period when the distinctive features of Hamitism and Shemitism were yet in embryo. (See below.) A third objection to their Egyptian origin is raised from the application of the term "uncircumcised" to them ([1Sa 17:26](#); [2Sa 1:20](#)), whereas the Egyptians were circumcised (Herod. 2:36). But this objection is answered by [Jer 9:25-26](#), where the same term is in some sense applied to the Egyptians, however it may be reconciled with the statement of Herodotus. *SEE CAPHTOR* ⇒ "Philistines." topical outline.

There is additional evidence to the above that the Philistines belonged to the Shemitic family. The names of their cities and their proper names are of Shemitic origin. In their intercourse with the Israelites there are many intimations that the two used a common language. How is this, if they were immigrants in Palestine? This difficulty is removed by supposing that originally they were in Palestine, being a part of the great Shemitic family, went westward, under pressure from the wave of population which came down from the higher country to the sea-coast, but afterwards returned eastward, back from Crete to Palestine; so that in [Am 9:7](#) it is to be understood that God brought them up to Palestine, as he brought the Israelites out of Egypt-back to their home. This view the passage undoubtedly admits; but we cannot agree with Movers in holding that it gives direct evidence in its favor, though his general position is probably correct, that the Philistines first quitted the mainland for the neighboring islands of the Mediterranean sea, and then, after a time,

returned to their original home (Movers, pages 19, 29, 35). Greek writers, however, give evidence of a wide diffusion of the Shemitic race over the islands of the Mediterranean. Thucydides says (1:8) that most of the islands were inhabited by Carians and Phoenicians. Of Crete, Herodotus (1:173) declares that barbarians had, before Minos, formed the population of the island. There is evidence in Homer to the same effect (*Od.* 9:174; comp. Strabo, page 475). Many proofs offer themselves that, before the spread of the Hellenes, these islands were inhabited by Shemitic races. The worship observed in them at this time shows a Shemitic origin. The Shemitics gave place to the Hellenics—a change which dates from the time of Minos, who drove them out of the islands, giving the dominion to his son. The expelled population settled on the Asiatic coast. This evidence, derived from heathen sources, gives a representation which agrees with the scriptural account of the origin, the westerly wandering, and eastward return of the Philistines. But chronology creates a difficulty. Minos probably lived about the year B.C. 1300. According to the O.T. the Philistines were found in Palestine at an earlier period. In [Ge 20:2](#); [Ge 26:1](#), we find a Philistine king of Gerar. But this king (and others) may have been so termed, not because he was of Philistine blood, but because he dwelt in the land which was afterwards called Philistia. There are other considerations which seem to show that Philistines did not occupy this country in the days of Abraham (consult Bertheau, page 196). It is, however, certain that the Philistines existed in Palestine in the time of Moses as a brave and warlike people ([Ex 13:17](#)) — a fact which places them on the Asiatic continent long before Minos. This difficulty does not appear considerable to us. There may have been a return eastwards before the time of Minos, as well as one in his time; or he may have merely put the finishing stroke to a return

commenced, from some cause or other — war, over-population, etc. — at a much earlier period. The information found in the Bible is easily understood on the showing that in the earliest ages tribes of the Shemitic race spread themselves over the West, and, becoming inhabitants of the islands, gave themselves to navigation. To these tribes the Philistines appear to have belonged, who, for what reason we know not, left Crete, and settled on the coast of Palestine.

**2.** The next question therefore that arises relates to *the early movements* of the Philistines. It has been very generally assumed of late years that Caphtor represents Crete, and that the Philistines migrated from that island, either directly or through Egypt, into Palestine. This hypothesis presupposes the Shemitic origin of the Philistines; for we believe that there are no traces of Hamitic settlements in Crete, and consequently the Biblical statement that Caphtorim was descended from Mizraim forms an *a priori* objection to the view. Moreover, the name Caphtor can only be identified with the Egyptian Coptos. But the Cretan origin of the Philistines has been deduced, not so much from the name Caphtor, as from that of the Cherethites. This name in its Hebrew form (כְּרֵתִי) bears a close resemblance to Crete, and is rendered Cretans in the Sept. A further link between the two terms has apparently been discovered in the term קָרִי, *kari*, which is applied to the royal guard ([2Ki 11:4,19](#)), and which sounds like Carians. The latter of these arguments assumes that the Cherethites of David's guard were identical with the Cherethites of the Philistine plain, which appears in the highest degree improbable. See [CHERETHITE](#) With regard to the former argument, the mere coincidence of the names cannot pass for much without some corroborative testimony. The Bible furnishes none, for the name occurs but thrice ([1Sa 30:4](#); [Eze 25:16](#); [Zep 2:5](#)), and apparently applies to the occupants of the

southern district; the testimony of the Sept. is invalidated by the fact that it is based upon the mere sound of the word (see [Zep 2:6](#), where *keroth* is also rendered Crete); and, lastly, we have to account for the introduction of the classical name of the island side by side with the Hebrew term Caphtor. A certain amount of testimony is indeed adduced in favor of a connection between Crete and Philistia; but, with the exception of the vague rumor, recorded but not adopted by Tacitus (*Hist.* 5:3), the evidence is confined to the town of Gaza, and even in this case is not wholly satisfactory. The town, according to Stephanus Byzantinus (s.v. Γάζα), was termed Minoa, as having been founded by Minos, and this tradition may be traced back to, and was perhaps founded on, an inscription on the coins of that city, containing the letters ΜΕΙΝΩ; but these coins are of no higher date than the 1st century B.C., and belong to a period when Gaza had attained a decided Greek character (Josephus, *War*, 2:6, 3). Again, the worship of the god Mama, and its identity with the Cretan Jove, are frequently mentioned by early writers (Movers, *Phoniz*).

⇒[Bible concordance for PHILISTINES](#).

1:662); but the name is Phoenician, being the *maran*, "lord," of [1Co 16:22](#), and it seems more probable that Gaza and Crete derived the worship from a common source, Phoenicia. Without therefore asserting that migrations may not have taken place from Crete to Philistia, we hold that the evidence adduced to prove that they did is not altogether sufficient. What is remarkable, and as if two distinct and unallied peoples bore the same appellation, on a tablet of Rameses III at Medinet HabA is sculptured a naval victory over the Sharutana, perhaps the Cherethites of Crete; while another nation of the same name, perhaps the Cherethites of the mainland, form a portion of the Egyptian army. We find also

the name *Pulusata* in close connection with this Sharutana.

*SEE CRETE*

On the other hand, it has been held by Ewald (1:330) and others that the Cherethites and Pelethites ([2Sa 20:23](#)) were Cherethites and Philistines. The objections to this view are:

⇒See also the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.

**(1)** that it is highly improbable that David would select his officers from the hereditary foes of his country, particularly so immediately after he had enforced their submission;

**(2)** that there appears no reason why an undue prominence should have been given to the Cherethites by placing that name first, and altering Philistines into Pelethites, so as to produce a paronomasia;

**(3)** that the names subsequently applied to the same body ([2Ki 11:19](#)) are appellatives; and (4) that the terms admit of a probable explanation from Hebrew roots. *SEE PELETHITE.*

**3.** A still more important point to be decided in connection with the early history of the Philistines is *the time when they settled in the land of Canaan*. If we were to restrict ourselves to the statements of the Bible, we should conclude that this took place before the time of Abraham; for they are noticed in his day as a pastoral tribe in the neighborhood of Gerar ([Ge 21:32,34](#); [Ge 26:1,8](#)); and this position accords well with the statement in [De 2:23](#) that the Avim dwelt in Hazerim, i.e., in nomad encampments; for Gerar lay in the south country, which was just adapted to such a life. At the time of the exodus they were still in the same neighborhood, but grown sufficiently powerful to inspire the Israelites with fear ([Ex 13:17](#); [Ex 15:14](#)). When the Israelites arrived, they were in full possession of the Shephelah from the "river of Egypt" (el-Arish) in the south to Ekron in the north ([Jos 15:4,47](#)), and had formed a confederacy of five powerful cities-Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron ([Jos 13:3](#)). At what period

these cities were originally founded we know not, but there are good grounds for believing that they were of Canaanitish origin, and had previously been occupied by the Avim. The name Gath is certainly Canaanitish; so most probably are Gaza, Ashdod, and Ekron. Ashkelon is doubtful; and the terminations both of this and Ekron may be Philistine. Gaza is mentioned as early as in [Ge 10:19](#) as a city of the Canaanites; and this as well as Ashdod and Ekron was in Joshua's time the asylum of the Canaanitish Anakim ([Jos 11:22](#)). The interval that elapsed between Abraham and the exodus seems sufficient to allow for the alteration that took place in the position of the Philistines, and their transformation from a pastoral tribe to a settled and powerful nation. But such a view has not met with acceptance among modern critics, partly because it leaves the migrations of the Philistines wholly unconnected with any known historical event, and partly because it does not serve to explain the great increase of their power in the time of the Judges. To meet these two requirements a double migration on the part of the Philistines, or of the two branches of that nation, has been suggested. Knobel, for instance, regards the Philistines proper as a branch of the same stock as that to which the Hyksos belonged, and he discovers the name Philistine in the opprobrious name *Philiton* or *Philitis*, bestowed on the Shepherd kings (Herod. 2:128); their first entrance into Canaan from the Casluhim would thus be subsequent to the patriarchal age, and coincident with the expulsion of the Hyksos. The Cherethites he identifies with the Caphtorim who displaced the Avim; and these he regards as Cretans, who did not enter Canaan before the period of the Judges. The former part of his theory is inconsistent with the notices of the Philistines in the book of Genesis; these, therefore, he regards as additions of a later date (*Volkert.* page 218 sq.). The view

adopted by Movers is, that the Philistines were carried westward from Palestine into Lower Egypt by the stream of the Hyksos movement at a period subsequent to Abraham; from Egypt they passed to Crete, and returned to Palestine in the early period of the Judges (*Phoniz.* 3:258). This is inconsistent with the notices in Joshua. Ewald, in the second edition of his *Geschichte*, propounds the hypothesis of a double immigration from Crete, the first of which took place in the ante-patriarchal period, as a consequence either of the Canaanitish settlement or of the Hyksos movement, the second in the time of the Judges (*Gesch.* 1:329-331). We cannot regard the above views in any other light than as speculations, built up on very slight data, and unsatisfactory, inasmuch as they fail to reconcile the statements of Scripture. For they all imply

- (1)** that the notice of the Caphtorim in [Ge 10:14](#) applies to an entirely distinct tribe from the Philistines, as Ewald (1:331, note) himself allows;
- (2)** that either the notices in [Ge 20:18](#):or those in [Jos 15:45-47](#), or perchance both, are interpolations; and
- (3)** that the notice in [De 2:23](#), which certainly bears marks of high antiquity, belongs to a late date, and refers solely to the Cherethites.

But, beyond these inconsistencies, there are two points which appear to militate against the theory of the second immigration in the time of the Judges:

- (1)** that the national title of the nation always remained Philistine, whereas, according to these theories, it was the Cretan or Cherethite element which led to the great development of power in the time of the Judges; and
- (2)** that it remains to be shown why a seafaring race like the Cretans, coming direct from Caphtor in their ships (as Knobel, page 224, understands "Caphtorim from Caphtor" to imply),

would seek to occupy the quarters of a nomad race living in encampments, in the wilderness region of the south.

We hesitate, therefore, to endorse any of the proffered explanations, and, while we allow that the Biblical statements are remarkable for their fragmentary and parenthetical nature, we are not prepared to fill up the gaps. If those statements cannot be received as they stand, it is questionable whether any amount of criticism will supply the connecting links. One point can, we think, be satisfactorily shown, viz. that the hypothesis of a second immigration is not needed in order to account for the growth of the Philistine power. Their geographical position and their relations to neighboring nations will account for it. Between the times of Abraham and Joshua the Philistines had changed their quarters, and had advanced northwards into the Shephelah or plain of Philistia. This plain has been in all ages remarkable for the extreme richness of its soil; its fields of standing corn, its vineyards and olive-yards, are incidentally mentioned in Scripture ([Jg 15:5](#)); and in time of famine the land of the Philistines was the hope of Palestine ([2Ki 8:2](#)). We should, however, fail to form a just idea of its capacities from the scanty notices in the Bible. The crops which it yielded were alone sufficient to insure national wealth. It was also adapted to the growth of military power; for while the plain itself permitted the use of war-chariots, which were the chief arm of offence, the occasional elevations which rise out of it offered secure sites for towns and strongholds. It was, moreover, a commercial country; from its position it must have been at all times the great thoroughfare between Phoenicia and Syria in the north, and Egypt and Arabia in the south. Ashdod and Gaza were the keys of Egypt, and commanded the transit trade; and the stores of frankincense and myrrh which Alexander captured in the latter place prove it to have been a depot of Arabian

produce (Plutarch, *Alex.* cap. 25). We have evidence in the Bible that the Philistines traded in slaves with Edom and Southern Arabia ([Am 1:6](#); [Joe 3:3,5](#)), and their commercial character is indicated by the application of the name Canaan to their land ([Zep 2:5](#)). They probably possessed a navy; for they had ports attached to Gaza and Ashkelon; the Sept. speaks of their ships in its version of [Isa 11:14](#), and they are represented as attacking the Egyptians out of ships. The Philistines had at an early period attained proficiency in the arts of peace; they were skilful as smiths ([1Sa 13:20](#)), as armorers (17, 5, 6), and as builders, if we may judge from the prolonged sieges which several of their towns sustained. Their images and the golden mice and emerods (6:11) imply an acquaintance with the founder's and goldsmith's arts. Their wealth was abundant ([Jg 16:5,18](#)), and they appear in all respects to have been a prosperous people.

**4. Subsequent Extension.** — Possessed of such elements of power, the Philistines had attained in the time of the Judges an important position among Eastern nations. Their history is, indeed, almost a blank; yet the few particulars preserved to us are suggestive. About B.C. 1209 we find them engaged in successful war with the Sidonians, the effect of which was so serious to the latter power that it involved the transference of the capital of Phoenicia to a more secure position on the island of Tyre (Justin. 18:3). About the same period, or a little after, they were engaged in a naval war with Rameses III of Egypt, in conjunction with other Mediterranean nations; in these wars they were unsuccessful (Brugsch, *Hist. d'Egypte*, pages 185, 187), but the notice of them proves their importance, and we cannot therefore be surprised that they were able to extend their authority over the Israelites, devoid as these were of internal union, and harassed by external foes. With regard to their tactics and the objects that they had in

view in their attacks on the Israelites, we may form a fair idea from the scattered notices in the books of Judges and Samuel. The warfare was of a guerilla character, and consisted of a series of *raids* into the enemy's country. Sometimes these extended only just over the border, with the view of plundering the threshing-floors of the agricultural produce ([1Sa 23:1](#)); but more generally they penetrated into the heart of the country and seized a commanding position on the edge of the Jordan valley, whence they could secure themselves against a combination of the trans- and cis-Jordanic divisions of the Israelites, or prevent a return of the fugitives who had hurried across the river on the alarm of their approach. Thus at one time we find them crossing the central district of Benjamin and posting themselves on Michmash ([1Sa 13:16](#)), at another time following the coast-road to the plain of Esdraelon and reaching the edge of the Jordan valley by Jezreel ([1Sa 29:11](#)). From such posts as their headquarters they sent out detached bands to plunder the surrounding country ([1Sa 13:17](#)), and, having obtained all they could, they established some military mark (VI., A.V. "garrison," but perhaps meaning only a *column*, as in [Ge 19:26](#)) as a token of their supremacy ([1Sa 10:5](#); [1Sa 13:3](#)), and retreated to their own country. This system of incursions kept the Israelites in a state of perpetual disquietude: all commerce was suspended, from the insecurity of the roads ([Jg 5:6](#)); and at the approach of the foe the people either betook themselves to the natural hiding-places of the country, or fled across the Jordan ([1Sa 13:6-7](#)). By degrees the ascendancy became complete, and a virtual disarmament of the population was effected by the suppression of the smiths ([1Sa 13:19](#)). The profits of the Philistines were not confined to the goods and chattels they carried off with them. They seized the persons of the Israelites and sold them for slaves; the earliest notice of this occurs in

**1Sa 14:21**, where, according to the probably correct reading (עבדים, נציב), and not followed by the Sept., we find that there were numerous slaves in the camp at Michmash: at a later period the prophets inveigh against them for their traffic in human flesh (**Joe 3:6; Am 1:6**): at a still later period we hear that "the merchants of the country" followed the army of Gorgias into Judaea for the purpose of buying the children of Israel for slaves (**1 Macc. 3:41**), and that these merchants were Philistines is a fair inference from the subsequent notice that Nicanor sold the captive Jews to the "cities upon the sea-coast" (**2 Macc. 8:11**). There can be little doubt, too, that tribute was exacted from the Israelites, but the notices of it are confined to passages of questionable authority, such as the rendering of **1Sa 13:21** in the Sept., which represents the Philistines as making a charge of three shekels a tool for sharpening them; and again the expression "Metheg-ammah" in **2Sa 8:1**, which is rendered in the *Vulg.frenum tributi*, and by Symmachus τὴν ἔξουσίαν τοῦ φόρου (the true text may have been הַמְּדָה, instead of הַאֲמָה). In each of the passages quoted the versions presuppose a text which yields a better sense than the existing one.

## **II. Connection of the Philistines with Israelitish History.** —

Here we recur to the Biblical narrative.

**1. Under Joshua and the Judges.** — The territory of the Philistines, having been once occupied by the Canaanites, formed a portion of the Promised Land, and was assigned to the tribe of Judah (**Jos 15:2,12,45,47**). No part, however, of it was conquered in the lifetime of Joshua (**Jos 13:2**), and even after his death no permanent conquest was effected (**Jg 3:3**), though, on the authority of a somewhat doubtful passage, we are informed that the three cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron were taken (**Jg 1:18**). The Philistines, at all events, soon recovered these, and commenced an aggressive policy against

the Israelites, by which they gained a complete ascendency over them. We are unable to say at what intervals their incursions took place, as nothing is recorded of them in the early period of the Judges. But they must have been frequent, inasmuch as the national spirit of the Israelites was so entirely broken that they even reprobated any attempt at deliverance ([Jg 15:12](#)). Individual heroes were raised up from time to time whose achievements might well kindle patriotism, such as Shamgar the son of Anath ([Jg 3:31](#)), and still more Samson (Judges 13-16); but neither of these men succeeded in permanently throwing off the yoke. Of the former only a single daring feat is recorded, the effect of which appears, from [Jg 5:6-7](#), to have been very shortlived. The true series of deliverances commenced with the latter, of whom it was predicted that " he shall begin to deliver" ([Jg 13:5](#)), and were carried on by Samuel, Saul, and David. A brief notice occurs in [Jg 10:7](#) of invasions by the Philistines and Ammonites, followed by particulars which apply exclusively to the latter people. It has hence been supposed that the brief reference to the Philistines is in anticipation of Samson's history.

The history of Samson furnishes us with some idea of the relations which existed between the two nations. As a "borderer" of the tribe of Dan, he was thrown into frequent contact with the Philistines, whose supremacy was so established that no bar appears to have been placed to free intercourse with their country. His early life was spent on the verge of the Shephelah between Zorah and Eshtaol, but when his actions had aroused the active hostility of the Philistines he withdrew into the central district, and found a secure post on the rock of Etam, to the south-west of Bethlehem. Thither the Philistines followed him without opposition from the inhabitants. His achievements belong to his personal history: it is clear that they were the isolated acts of an individual, and

altogether unconnected with any national movement; for the revenge of the Philistines was throughout directed against Samson personally. Under Eli there was- an organized but unsuccessful resistance to the encroachments of the Philistines, who had penetrated into the central district and were met at Aphek ([1Sa 4:1](#)). The production of the ark on this occasion demonstrates the greatness of the emergency, and its loss marked the lowest depth of Israel's degradation.

The next action took place under Samuel's leadership, and the tide of success turned in Israel's favor: the Philistines had again penetrated into the mountainous country near Jerusalem; at Mizpeh they met the cowed host of the Israelites, who, encouraged by the signs of divine favor, and availing themselves of the panic produced by a thunderstorm, inflicted on them a total defeat. For the first time the Israelites erected their pillar or *stele* at Eben-ezer as the token of victory. The results were the recovery of the border-towns and their territories "from Ekron even unto Gath," i.e., in the northern district. The success of Israel may be partly ascribed to their peaceful relations at this time with the Amorites ([1Sa 7:9-14](#)).

**2. Under the Hebrew Monarchy.** — The Israelites now attributed their past weakness to their want of unity, and they desired a king, with the special object of leading them against the foe ([1Sa 8:20](#)). It is a significant fact that Saul first felt inspiration in the presence of a pillar (A.V. "garrison") erected by the Philistines in commemoration of a victory ([1Sa 10:5,10](#)). As soon as he was prepared to throw off the yoke he occupied with his army a position at Michmash, commanding the defiles leading to the Jordan valley, and his heroic general Jonathan gave the signal for a rising by overthrowing the pillar which the Philistines had placed there. The challenge was accepted; the Philistines invaded the central district with

an immense force (a copyist's clerical exaggeration, *SEE NUMBERI*), and, having dislodged Saul from Michmash, occupied it themselves, and sent forth predatory bands into the surrounding country. The Israelites shortly after took up a position on the other side of the ravine at Geba, and availing themselves of the confusion consequent upon Jonathan's daring feat, inflicted a tremendous slaughter upon the enemy (chapter 13, 14). No attempt was made by the Philistines to regain their supremacy for about twenty-five years, and the scene of the next contest shows the altered strength of the two parties: it was no longer in the central country, but in a ravine leading down to the Philistine plain, the valley of Elah, the position of which is about fourteen miles south-west of Jerusalem; on this occasion the prowess of young David secured success to Israel, and the foe was pursued to the gates of Gath and Ekron (chapter 17). The power of the Philistines was, however, still intact on their own territory, as is proved by the flight of David to the court of Achish ([1Sa 21:10-15](#)), and his subsequent abode at Ziklag (chapter 27), where he was secured from the attacks of Saul. The border warfare was continued; captures and reprisals, such as are described as occurring at Keilah ([1Sa 23:1-5](#)), being probably frequent. The scene of the next conflict was far to the north, in the valley of Esdraelon, whither the Philistines may have made a plundering incursion similar to that of the Midianites in the days of Gideon. The battle on this occasion proved disastrous to the Israelites: Saul himself perished, and the Philistines penetrated across the Jordan, and occupied the forsaken cities ([1Sa 31:1-7](#)). The dissensions which followed the death of Saul were naturally favorable to the Philistines; and no sooner were these brought to a close by the appointment of David to be king over the united tribes than the Philistines attempted to counterbalance the advantage by an attack on the person of

the king; they therefore penetrated into the valley of Rephaim, south-west of Jerusalem, and even pushed forward an advanced post as far as Bethlehem ([1Ch 11:16](#)). David twice attacked them at the former spot, and on each occasion with signal success, in the first case capturing their images, in the second pursuing them "from Geba until thou come to Gazer" ([2Sa 5:17-25](#); [1Ch 14:8-16](#)). About seven years after the defeat at Rephaim, David, who had now consolidated his power, attacked them on their own soil, and took Gath, with its dependencies ([1Ch 18:1](#)), and thus (according to one interpretation of the obscure expression "Metheg-ammah" in [2Sa 8:1](#)) "he took the arm-bridle out of the hand of the Philistines" (Bertheau, *Comm.* on 1 Chronicles), or (according to another) "he took the bridle of the metropolis out of the hand of the Philistines" (Gesenius, *Thesaur.* page 113) — meaning in either case that their ascendancy was utterly broken. This indeed was the case; for the minor engagements in David's lifetime probably all took place within the borders of Philistia; Gob, which is given as the scene of the second and third combats, being probably identical with Gath, where the fourth took place ([2Sa 21:15-22](#); comp. the Sept., some of the copies of which read Γέθ instead of Γόβ).

The whole of Philistia was included in Solomon's empire, the extent of which is described as being "from the river unto the land of the Philistines, unto the border of Egypt" ([1Ki 4:21](#); [2Ch 9:26](#)), and again, "from Tiphsah unto Gaza" ([1Ki 4:24](#); A.V. "Azzah"). The several towns probably remained under their former governors, as in the case of Gath ([1Ki 2:39](#)), and the sovereignty of Solomon was acknowledged by the payment of tribute ([1Ki 4:21](#)). There are indications, however, that his hold on the Philistine country was by no means established; for we find him securing the passes that led up from the plain to the central district by the fortification of Gezer and

Bethhoron ([1Ki 9:17](#)), while no mention is made either of Gaza or Ashdod, which fully commanded the coastroad. Indeed the expedition of Pharaoh against Gezer, which stood at the head of the Philistine plain, and which was quite independent of Solomon until the time of his marriage with Pharaoh's daughter, would lead to the inference that Egyptian influence was paramount in Philistia at this period (verse 16).

Under the later Jewish kings these signs of aggression on the part of the Philistines increase. The division of the empire at Solomon's death was favorable to the Philistine cause:

Rehoboam secured himself against them by fortifying Gath and other cities bordering on the plain ([2Ch 11:8](#)): the Israelitish monarchs were either not so prudent or not so powerful, for they allowed the Philistines to get hold of Gibbethon, commanding one of the defiles leading up from the plain of Sharon to Samaria, the recovery of which involved them in a protracted struggle in the reigns of Nadab and Zimri ([1Ki 15:27](#); [1Ki 16:1](#)). Judah meanwhile had lost the tribute; for it is recorded, as an occurrence that marked Jehoshaphat's success, that "some of the Philistines brought presents" ([2Ch 17:11](#)). But this subjection was of brief duration: in the reign of his son Jehoram they avenged themselves by invading Judah in conjunction with the Arabians, and sacking the royal palace ([2Ch 21:16-17](#)). The increasing weakness of the Jewish monarchy under the attacks of Hazael led to the recovery of Gath, which had been captured by that monarch in his advance on Jerusalem from the western plain in the reign of Jehoash ([2Ki 12:17](#)), and was probably occupied by the Philistines after his departure as an advanced post against Judah: at all events it was in their hands in the time of Uzziah, who dismantled ([2Ch 26:6](#)) and probably destroyed it; for it is adduced by Amos as an example of divine vengeance ([Am 6:2](#)), and then disappears from history. Uzziah at the same

time dismantled Jabneh (Jammia), in the northern part of the plain, and Ashdod, and further erected forts in different parts of the country to intimidate the inhabitants ([2Ch 26:6](#)). The prophecies of Joel and Amos prove that these measures were provoked by the aggressions of the Philistines, who appear to have formed leagues both with the Edomites and Phoenicians, and had reduced many of the Jews to slavery ([Joe 3:4-6](#); [Am 1:6-10](#)). How far the means adopted by Uzziah were effectual we are not informed; but we have reason to suppose that the Philistines were kept in subjection until the time of Ahaz, when, relying upon the difficulties produced by the Syrian invasions, they attacked the border-cities in the Shephelah, and "the south" of Judah ([2Ch 18:18](#)).

From this time the notices of the Philistines are largely involved in the movements of the great powers surrounding Palestine. Isaiah's declarations ([Isa 14:29-32](#)) throw light upon these subsequent events: from them we learn that the Assyrians, whom Ahaz summoned to his aid, proved themselves to be the "cockatrice that should come out of the serpent's (Judah's) root," by ravaging the Philistine plain. A few years later the Philistines, in conjunction with the Syrians and Assyrians ("the adversaries of Rezin"), and perhaps as the subject — allies of the latter, carried on a series of attacks on the kingdom of Israel ([Isa 9:11-12](#)). Hezekiah's reign inaugurated a new policy, in which the Philistines were deeply interested: that monarch formed an alliance, with the Egyptians, as a counterpoise to the Assyrians, and the possession of Philistia became henceforth the turning-point of the struggle between the two great empires of the East. Hezekiah, in the early part of his reign, re-established his authority over the whole of it, "even unto Gaza" ([2Ki 18:8](#)). This movement was evidently connected with his rebellion against the king of Assyria, and was undertaken in

conjunction with the Egyptians; for we find the latter people shortly after in possession of the five Philistine cities, to which alone are we able to refer the prediction in Isa 19:18, when coupled with the fact that both Gaza and Ashkelon are termed Egyptian cities in the annals of Sargon (Bunsen, *Egypt*; 4:603). The Assyrians under Tartan, the general of Sargon, made an expedition against Egypt, and took Ashdod, as the key of that country (Isa 20:1,4-5). Under Sennacherib Philistia was again the scene of important operations: in his first campaign against Egypt Ashkelon was taken and its dependencies were plundered; Ashdod, Ekron, and Gaza submitted, and received as a reward a portion of Hezekiah's territory (Rawlinson, *Herod.* 1:477): in his second campaign (on the view that the two were different) other towns on the verge of the plain, such as Libnah and Lachish, were also taken (2Ki 18:14; 2Ki 19:8). The Assyrian supremacy, though shaken by the failure of this latter expedition, was restored by Esar-haddon, who claims to have conquered Egypt (Rawlinson, 1:481); and it seems probable that the Assyrians retained their hold on Ashdod until its capture, after a long siege, by the Egyptian monarch Psammetichus (Herod. 2:157), the effect of which was to reduce the population of that important place to a mere "remnant" (Jer 25:20). It was about this time, and possibly while Psammetichus was engaged in the siege of Ashdod, that Philistia was traversed by a vast Scythian horde on their way to Egypt: they were, however, diverted from their purpose by the king, and retraced their steps, plundering on their retreat the rich temple of Venus at Ashkelon (Herod. 1:105). The description of Zephaniah (Zep 2:4-7), who was contemporary with this event, may well apply to this terrible scourge, though more generally referred to a Chaldaean invasion. The Egyptian ascendancy was not as yet re-established, for we find the next king, Necho, compelled to

besiege Gaza (if the Cadytis of Herodotus, 2:159) on his return from the battle of Megiddo. After the death of Necho, the contest was renewed between the Egyptians and the Chaldaeans under Nebuchadnezzar, and the result was specially disastrous to the Philistines: Gaza was again taken by the former, and the population of the whole plain was reduced to a mere "remnant" by the invading armies (Jeremiah 47). The "old hatred" that the Philistines bore to the Jews was exhibited in acts of hostility at the time of the Babylonian captivity ([Eze 25:15-17](#)); but on the return this was somewhat abated, for some of the Jews married Philistine women, to the great scandal of their rulers ([Ne 13:23-24](#)).

**3. Post-exilian History.** — From this time the history of Philistia is absorbed in the struggles of the neighboring kingdoms. In B.C. 332, Alexander the Great traversed it on his way to Egypt, and captured Gaza, then held by the Persians under Betis, after a two month's siege. In 312 the armies of Demetrius Poliorcetes and Ptolemy fought in the neighborhood of Gaza. In 198 Antiochus the Great, in his war against Ptolemy Epiphanes, invaded Philistia and took Gaza. In 166 the Philistines joined the Syrian army under Gorgias in its attack on Judaea ([1 Macc. 3:41](#)). In 148 the adherents of the rival kings Demetrius II and Alexander Balas, under Apollonius and Jonathan respectively, contended in the Philistine plain: Jonathan took Ashdod, triumphantly entered Ashkelon, and received Ekron as his reward ([1 Macc. 10:69-89](#)). A few years later Jonathan again descended into the plain in the interests of Antiochus VI, and captured Gaza ([1 Macc. 11:60-62](#)). No further notice of the country occurs until the capture of Gaza in 97 by the Jewish king Alexander Jannseus, in his contest with Lathyrus (Joseph. *Ant.* 13:13, 3; *War*, 1:4, 2). In 63 Pompey annexed Philistia to the province of Syria (*Ant.* 14:4, 4), with the exception of Gaza, which was

assigned to Herod (15:7, 3), together with Jamnia, Ashdod, and Ashkelon, as appears from 17:11, 5. The last three fell to Salome after Herod's death, but Gaza was re-annexed to Syria (17:11, 4, 5). The latest notices of the Philistines as a nation, under their title of ἀλλόφυλοι, occur in 1 Macc. 3-5. The extension of the name from the district occupied by them to the whole country, under the familiar form of PALESTINE, has already been noticed under that head.

**III. Usages, etc.** — With regard to the institutions of the Philistines our information is very scanty. Their military tactics have been noticed above. The country in which they settled is remarkably productive (2Ki 8:2). Thomson exclaims on entering it, "Beautiful but monotonous-wheat, wheat, a very ocean of wheat" (*Land and Book*, 2:32 sq.). The country, he adds, greatly resembles some of the prairies in Western America. "Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year a hundredfold" (Ge 26:12). Not only was agriculture most remunerative, but Philistia was the highway for caravans between Egypt and the north, and commerce must have added to its wealth. Harbors were attached to Gaza and Ashkelon, and a lucrative navigation may have been carried on. The greatness of the cities was mainly owing to commerce, for the coast of Palestine was in the earliest ages exclusively in possession of the traffic which was carried on between Europe and Asia. Besides a great transit trade, they had internal sources of wealth, being given to agriculture (Jg 15:5). In the time of Saul they were evidently superior in the arts of life to the Israelites; for we read (1Sa 13:20) that the latter were indebted to the former for the utensils of ordinary life. The five chief cities had, as early as the days of Joshua, constituted themselves into a confederacy, restricted, however, in all probability, to matters of offence and defence. Each was under the government of a prince whose official title

was *seren*, שְׁרֵן (Jos 13:3; Jg 3:3, etc.), and occasionally *sar*, שָׁר (1Sa 18:30; 1Sa 29:6). Gaza may be regarded as having exercised a hegemony over the others, for in the list of the towns it is mentioned the first (Jos 13:3; Am 1:7-8), except where there is an especial ground for giving prominence to another, as in the case of Ashdod (1Sa 6:17). Ekron always stands last, while Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gath interchange places. Each town possessed its own territory, as instanced in the case of Gath (1Ch 18:1), Ashdod (1Sa 5:6), and others, and each possessed its dependent towns or "daughters" (Jos 15:637; 1Ch 18:1; 2Sa 1:20; Eze 16:27,57), and its villages (Joshua l.c.). In later times Gaza had a senate of five hundred (Joseph. *Ant.* 13:13, 3).

The Philistines appear to have been deeply imbued with superstition: they carried their idols with them on their campaigns (2Sa 5:21), and proclaimed their victories in their presence (1Sa 31:9). They also carried about their persons charms of some kind that had been presented before the idols (2 Macc. 12:40). The gods whom they chiefly worshipped were Dagon, who possessed temples both at Gaza (Jg 16:23) and at Ashdod (1Sa 5:3-5; 1Ch 10:10; 1Ch 1 Macc. 10:83); Ashtoreth, whose temple at Ashkelon was far-famed (1Sa 31:10; Herod. 1:105); Baal-zebub, whose fane at Ekron was consulted by Ahaziah (2Ki 1:2-6); and Derceto, who was honored at Ashkelon (Diod. Sic. 2:4), though unnoticed in the Bible. Priests and diviners (1Sa 6:2) were attached to the various seats of worship; and the Philistine magicians were in repute (Isa 2:6).

The special authorities for the history of the Philistines are Stark, *Gaza und die philistiiische Küste* (Jena, 1852); Knobel, *Volkertafel der Genesis* (Giess. 1850); Movers, *Phonizien* (Bonn, 1841); Hitzig, *Urgesch. und Mythologie der Philistaer* (Leips. 1845); and

Kneucker, in Schenkel's *Bibel-Lex.* s.v. *Philistaer.* See also *Jour. Sac. Lit.* July 1852, page 323 sq.; January 1856, page 299 sq.; Frisch, *De Origine, diis et terra Palaestinorum* (Tubing. 1696); Wolf, *Apparatus Philistceorumz bellicorum* (Viteb. 1711); Hannecker, *Die Philistaer* (Eichstadt, 1872).