

CHAPTER IV

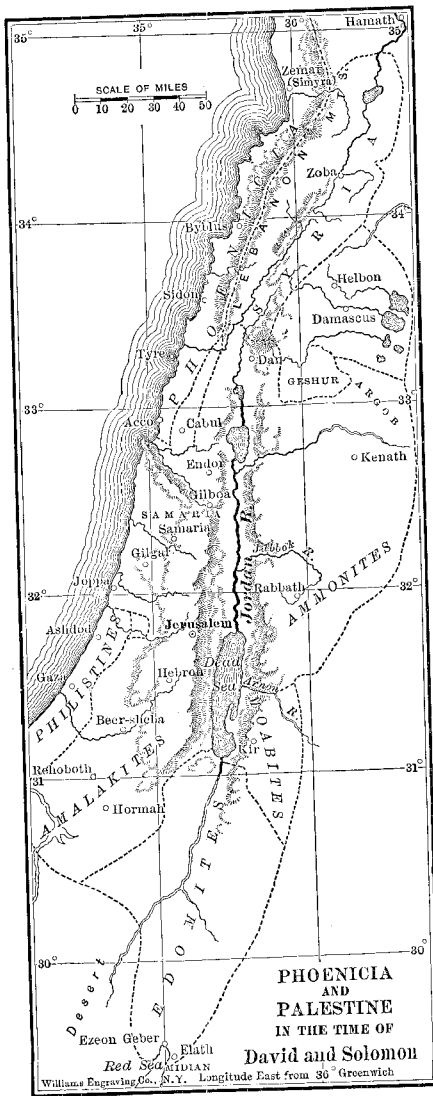
SYRIA: THE PHOENICIANS AND THE HEBREWS

I. THE PHOENICIANS

46. **The Country.** — Syria has already been mentioned as a land of hills and mountains, lying northwest of the Arabian desert.¹ It stretched along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean for a distance of four hundred miles with an average breadth of less than a hundred miles. The area of the whole region was therefore about that of Kentucky. In the north the Leb'an-on mountain range extends through about half the length of Syria from one to five miles from the coast. The western slope of the range was Phoe-ni'ci-a, a district about the size of one of our counties. Farther south the mountain range, which here has no common name, diverges more widely from the coast and extends almost directly south to the desert. Along the eastern base of the range flows southward the Jordan River. In its lower course it descends below the level of the Mediterranean, and empties into the Dead Sea. The latter has no outlet. East of the Jordan is a plateau stretching away to the desert. The country here described, consisting of the coast region, the mountains, the Jordan valley, and the plateau, was Ca'naan or Pal'es-tine.

47. **Influence of the Country upon the People.** — In studying the history of Syria, as of other countries, it is necessary to keep in mind the influence of the land and its surroundings on the character of the people. Life was more difficult in the hills and mountains than in the great river plains; the people, therefore, in the beginning made slower progress in useful knowledge and in the arts. To secure the best livelihood from their country, coöperation on a large scale, such as prevailed on the Nile and lower Euphrates, was altogether useless. Men could obtain the best results by working individually as members of small communities. Hence Syria was a

¹ § 31.



country of little states. One other great fact must be noticed. The people of Syria, bounded on two sides by powerful kingdoms, had to be ever alert to save as much as possible of their independence. Though they often bowed the neck to a master, their spirit remained free. The peculiarity of their situation may help explain their native shrewdness. Furthermore, as carriers between the two countries some of them early engaged in commerce. Then, too, their cramped position drove the coast people to a seafaring life.

I. THE PHOENICIANS

48. **The Cities and their Industries.** — The earliest known inhabitants were Semites from Arabia. Those who lived on the coast west of the Lebanon range called themselves Sidoni-ans and their oldest city Sidon. The Greeks named them Phoenicians, "the purple folk," because of the purple dye which they extracted from a variety of shell-fish caught in

the Mediterranean. Among the cities afterward founded, the most celebrated was Tyre. Both were placed on barren rocky islands near the coast.

All the Phoenician cities, however small, were sovereign states. In defence of their country they often acted together. Otherwise each pursued independently its own aims. The Phoenicians had the advantage of few natural resources. On the mountains they cut cedars for their own houses and ships, and for exportation to Egypt and Babylon. The slopes and patches of coast plain yielded little pasturage and still less grain. Hence they were forced to the sea for support. The dyes obtained from their purple fisheries were eagerly bought by kings and nobles throughout the civilized world. As early as the third millennium (3000-2000) B.C., the Phoenicians, even more than the other Syrians, were importing and learning to imitate the products of Babylonian skill. Their culture became thoroughly Babylonian, slightly influenced by Egypt. Their writing was for a long time cuneiform. Among the early products of Phoenician industry were bronze armor and weapons, war chariots, vessels of silver and gold, tables and chairs inlaid with ivory and ebony, or with gold and silver, precious stones, statues of the gods ornamented with gems and with silver and gold, glass-ware, and brilliantly colored pottery.

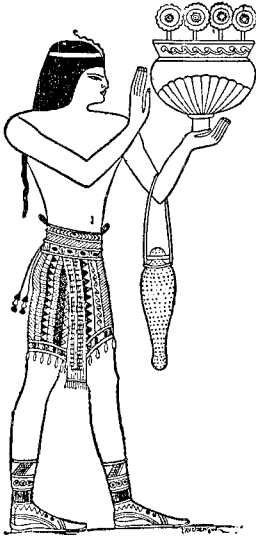
49. Commerce and Colonies. — Cyprus attracted the Phoenicians by its rich mines of copper. They planted many settlements in the island. Thence they continued westward. About 1500 B.C. they reached Crete.¹ In the Aegean Sea they colonized Rhodes, worked the mines in various places, and traded with the natives. This was before the beginning of Greek colonization.

As the Greeks extended their settlements over the islands and coasts of the Aegean,² they expelled the Phoenicians entirely from that region. Thereupon the latter continued their voyages westward, planting colonies on the African coast, in Sicily and Sardinia, and in Spain. They were drawn to Spain by its wealth of metals,

¹ From about this time Asiatic influence can be found in the civilization of Crete. Commerce between this island and Egypt had been carried on continuously for more than two thousand years — from early in the fourth millennium.

² §§ 92 ff., 98.

not only copper and tin, but silver and gold. Their colonies were planted merely as trading-stations; but where circumstances favored, they grew into cities. Of all their settlements in the Mediterranean none was so favored by nature as Carthage. This colony



A PHOENICIAN

was founded about 800 B.C. on the northern coast of Africa opposite Sicily. It had a large harbor, and the neighboring country was remarkably fertile. Besides these advantages, it was situated midway between Spain and Phoenicia and could easily reach Sicily and Italy by ship. These favorable conditions made it in time the greatest commercial city of the Mediterranean basin.

50. Trade Routes. — In the Orient the lines of traffic followed by the Phoenicians connected with those of Babylon. Their sea routes covered the Mediterranean and stretched along the neighboring coasts of the Atlantic. Nowhere do they seem to have pushed far into the interior. Amber from the Baltic coasts and tin from Britain were brought them by traders along two overland routes. One passed from northern Germany southward over the Alps to the head of the Adriatic Sea; the other, crossing Gaul, reached the sea at the mouth of the Rhone. How early these routes came into use no one can say.

51. Carriers of the Arts and of the Alphabet. — Wherever they went they carried the products of Eastern industry. The nations gladly bought these wares, and soon began in imitation to attempt similar work of their own. In the same way the Babylonian notation, the system of weights and measures, and useful knowledge of many other things were brought to the western peoples. In brief, the Phoenicians were the missionaries of civilization.

Their most valuable gift to Europe was the phonetic alphabet.

We find them in possession of it as early as 900 B.C. Evidently it was produced by simplifying some earlier system, or systems, of writing; but we do not know how much is due to their own invention or from what sources they derived its elements.¹ It consisted of twenty-two letters, each representing a consonant. As the Phoenicians pronounced their vowels but lightly, they felt no need of indicating them by letters.

PHOENICIAN	ARCHAIC GREEK	LATER GREEK	ENGLISH
𐤀 𐤁	Α Δ ΔΔ Δ	Α Α	A
𐤂	Β Β	Β	B
𐤃 𐤄	Γ Δ Δ Δ Δ	Γ	C
𐤅 𐤆	Δ Δ Δ Δ Δ	Δ	D
𐤇	Ε Β Ε Δ Ε	Ε Ε	E
𐤈	Ζ Β Ζ		F
𐤉	Ζ Ζ Ζ	Ζ	Z

THE ANCESTORS OF SOME OF THE LETTERS OF OUR ALPHABET

Having learned or invented this alphabet, they discarded the cuneiform system. From the Phoenicians the Greeks adopted the new alphabet,² changing it somewhat to suit their own language. The Romans learned it from the Greeks and introduced other changes. In the Roman form it has come down to us. Its simplicity has made education far easier than it was on the banks of the Nile and Euphrates. It has therefore been an enormous help in increasing the intelligence, especially of the middle and poorer classes of all countries, and in elevating them in the scale of civilization.

II. THE HEBREWS

52. **Early Wanderings.** — Palestine, the country of the Hebrews, has been described above. Like the Phoenicians, they were Semites. Their own writers tell us that Abraham, their remote ancestor, left his home in Ur,² to wander in Canaan, a land Jehovah had promised him and his descendants. During the remainder of his life he moved about in this country with his family, his many slaves, and

¹ It has recently been suggested that they got some of these elements from the Cretan script, cf. § 85.

his flocks. The people with him formed, so to speak, a little state, of which Abraham was chief. A simple government of this kind, exercised over children and servants, is called patriarchal, signifying "rule of the father." Wandering peoples are generally governed in this way. The wealth and authority of Abraham passed to his son Isaac, and then to his grandson Jacob, or Is'ra-el. These men, too, were patriarchs. When oppressed by famine, Israel took refuge in Egypt. This was probably during the Hyksos invasion. There his people were held in slavery four hundred years. Finally Moses, a hero favored by Jehovah, freed his people, and led them into the desert of Mount Si'nai. On the top of this mountain Moses received a body of laws for his people from Jehovah. Among them were the Ten Commandments. Moses was one of the greatest moral and religious teachers in history. After dwelling some time in the neighborhood of Mount Sinai, his people, the Israelites or Hebrews, invaded Canaan, seized the land, and killed or enslaved the inhabitants. The conquest began early in the fourteenth century B.C.¹

53. The Judges (about 1400-1000 B.C.). — Fresh hordes followed the earlier invaders; and the conquest of the country went on for centuries. The twelve tribes, who claimed descent from the twelve sons of Israel, occupied each a distinct territory. There was little political connection between the tribes, and anarchy usually prevailed. The only government the country had was in the hands of leaders, the "judges," who generally ruled each a part of the nation. Under these circumstances the Hebrews fell beneath the yoke of the Phi-lis'tines, who lived in the coast region. From them the country got the name Palestine.

54. The Founding of the Kingship: Saul (about 1000-985 B.C.). — The Hebrews were restive under the yoke. Samuel, the prophet, urged them to rebel; and when they demanded a military chief, he chose as their first king, Saul, a strong impetuous leader of armies. Saul displayed great energy in uniting the Hebrews under his rule and in freeing them from their oppressors. But in the end these

¹ An Egyptian inscription recently discovered proves that there were tribes of Israel in Palestine at the time it was written, 1273 B.C. The beginnings of their invasion should be dated at about a century earlier.

terrible enemies overthrew his army, severely wounded him, and killed his three sons. In despair the warrior king fell on his sword and perished. Wildly the people lamented the fallen hero: "Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and with other delights, who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel. How are the mighty fallen in the midst of battle!"

55. David (about 985-955 B.C.).¹ — His successor was David of the tribe of Judah. Beginning life as a shepherd lad and poet, he had come to the front through personal bravery and ability to command. In time he made Israel a single state, wholly independent of the Philistines. By conquering various small tribes of Syria he extended his kingdom northward to the Euphrates and southward nearly to Egypt. Jerusalem, which to his time had remained in the hands of the Canaanites, he made the capital and religious centre of his realm. Here he established the Ark — the portable shrine of Jehovah which the Hebrews had carried with them in their nomadic life. The masses of Israel were worshippers of many gods. But the followers of Jehovah, though few, were exceedingly zealous and aggressive. It was largely through the help of his priests that David came to power. Jerusalem became a holy city, Israel was temporarily won for Jehovah, and a halo of religion consecrated David and his descendants to the kingship for all time. With the help of workmen lent him by the friendly king of Tyre, with the cedars of Lebanon and the Phoenician arts, David built and adorned his city. He was now an Oriental king, with his hand in the politics of the world, living magnificently in a palace filled with wives and slaves. His extensive wars and heavy taxes oppressed the people, who followed his favorite son Ab'sa-lom in a revolt against the king. But the son fell, and the father continued to rule. After his death his oppression, caprices, and violence were soon forgotten. Remembering only his service to Israel and Jehovah, his people to this day have ever looked back to him as their ideal king and their national hero.

56. Solomon (about 955-925 B.C.); **the Decline.** — After his death, Solomon, another son, succeeded to the throne. Devoting

¹ The dates of the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon are only approximately known. Some put them 25-40 years earlier.

himself to peace, he built in Jerusalem a magnificent temple to Jehovah. He fortified the city with stronger walls, and made for himself splendid palaces. He surrounded himself with all the luxury and brilliancy of an Oriental despot. His ships in the Mediterranean and Red seas brought him the products of distant lands. Among his allies were numbered the kings of Tyre and Egypt. In administration and diplomacy, as well as in the practical affairs of life, he displayed great shrewdness. Even to-day he is popularly, though with little reason, considered the wisest man in history.

All this glory was a burden to the people. He taxed them heavily, and compelled them to labor unrewarded on his great buildings. Thirty thousand men were kept busy cutting stone and hewing wood. Naturally the people chafed under the yoke. When, therefore, his son and heir attempted to continue his policy, Judah, with a part of the tribe of Benjamin, alone remained faithful. The other tribes revolted. Henceforth we have to do with two small weak states, Ju-de'a (Judah) and Israel, afflicted with internal strife and nearly always at war with one another.

57. The Captivity and the Restoration (722-536 B.C.). — In the eighth century B.C., while the Assyrian king was pushing his frontier westward, he made both states tributary. Israel revolted, whereupon he destroyed its capital, Sa-ma'ri-a, and transplanted the population to the country beyond the Euphrates (722 B.C.). They were soon lost among the natives of that region. The lands of the rebels were assigned to colonists from the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates, and were incorporated in a province of the empire.¹ The fall of Assyria and the rise of Babylon meant for Judea merely a change of masters. To punish it for rebellion, Nebuchadnezzar² besieged and captured Jerusalem. He had already deported many of the inhabitants on a former occasion of disobedience. Now he destroyed the holy city and carried into captivity the rest of the people, excepting the very poorest.

Fifty years (586-536 B.C.) the Hebrews remained in captivity, settled in various parts of the Babylonian empire. When Cyrus,³ king of Persia, conquered Babylon, probably with their help, he restored them to their native land and permitted them to rebuild

¹ Cf. § 36.

² § 37.

³ § 63.

their temple.¹ The city rose from its ruins; but Judea remained a province of the Persian empire.

58. Religion and Literature. — Before the period of exile most of the Hebrews were worshippers of the various Semitic gods. Some of their religious customs and ideas they had brought with them from the desert; many others they adopted from the Canaanites and the Babylonians. From very early time, however, there were among them leaders and prophets who worshipped none but Jehovah, and who strove to uproot paganism wholly from the nation. The establishment of Jehovah's shrine with a priesthood at Jerusalem — the work of David — was an important step in this direction. Under Solomon the masses were still idolatrous; and the crafty king patronized the gods in order to secure the good will of his Canaanitish subjects. The priests and prophets of Jehovah, however, continued to insist on the commandment, "Thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." To keep his worship pure they emphasized another commandment, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." Gradually the people learned that Jehovah was Lord of the whole world, and that the so-called gods were unreal. They were helped to this belief by their long political bondage to Assyria, and especially by their captivity in Chaldea. Restored Jerusalem knew no god but Jehovah, who demanded of his worshippers moral as well as ceremonial holiness. About nineteen hundred years ago Christianity, a new form of the same faith, grew out of the old. Judaism insists on strict obedience to the religious law; Christianity lays greater emphasis on forgiveness and love.

The Hebrews produced no science. Their religion discouraged art, but fostered literature. Prominent among their writings are the books of the *Old Testament*, a national library of tradition, history, proverbs, songs, and prophecy, written to glorify Jehovah and to show the plan of his dealings with men. The *New Testament*, composed in Greek by Hebrew writers, tells the story of

¹ It was built under Darius, who gave the money for the purpose.

Christ and his early followers, and explains his teachings. The Old and New Testaments make up the Bible. It has been read by more persons than any other book. Jo-se'phus, born 37 A.D., wrote *Jewish Antiquities*, a history of his people from the creation of the world, and *The Jewish War*, including a detailed account of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. Lastly, Jewish rabbis composed the *Tal'mud*, a collection of Hebrew laws and traditions with comments and explanations.

59. Life, Character, and World Influence. — Before the captivity the Hebrews lived chiefly by tilling the soil; but their long stay in Babylon, the centre of Oriental trade, made of them a commercial people. From that time many of them travelled over the world and settled in foreign lands in order to carry on business. Wherever they went they built synagogues; and it was in these houses of worship that Christianity was first proclaimed.

Among them the tie of blood has always been as strong as that of religion. Still closer was the family bond. "Honor thy father and thy mother," was one of their commandments. Though polygamy was permissible, it had no footing with the masses. Women were highly respected, and went about freely in public. Morals were excellent, family life was pure, and the nation seems to have been full of happy homes. It would be hard to overestimate the influence of this little nation on the history of the world. Christianity, the offspring of Judaism, has become the religion of the Europeans and of their colonies throughout the world; and missionaries are carrying it to all other peoples. The wisest men of the present day can find no better moral code than the Ten Commandments. In brief, religion and moral law, the most important elements of our civilization, were contributed chiefly by the Hebrews.

Suggestive Questions

1. Why were the states of Syria smaller than the others we have been studying?
2. What effect had the Syrian hills on the character of the people? Would such a country produce a higher type of character than one like Egypt?
3. What was a result of the situation of Phoenicia between a high mountain range and the sea?
4. Describe the physical peculiarities and the dress of the Phoenicians (p. 40).
5. What was the great contribution

of the Hebrews to civilization? 6. Describe the location of Lebanon Mountains, Phoenicia, Palestine, Tyre, Sidon, Jerusalem, and Carthage.

Note-book Topics

I. **The Reign of Saul.** — *I. Samuel*, chs. viii-xxxi; *II. Samuel*, ch. i; *I. Chronicles*, ch. x.

II. **The Babylonian Captivity.** — Kent, *History of the Jewish People*, 34-44.

III. **The Glory and the Fall of Tyre.** — *Ezekiel*, chs. xxxvi, xxxvii.

IV. **Phoenician Science and Trade.** — Sayce, *Ancient Empires of the East*, 203-209.

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