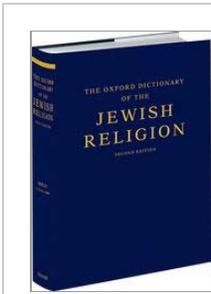


## Oxford Reference



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## PHILISTINES,

people who settled on the southern coast of Canaan in the twelfth century BCE. Their ethnic identification is debated. They originated in the Aegean and were not circumcised (unlike most others in the land of Canaan), which suggests they were not Semitic but may have been Indo-European. Their god, however, was Dagon, an old Semitic deity, and the Bible assumes that Israelites and Philistines could communicate without difficulty, suggesting that their language was a dialect of Canaanite. However, no Philistine texts have been discovered. The first reference to the Philistines occurs in a series of Egyptian historical texts from the reign of Ramses III (c.1182–1151), when the Philistines led an alliance of nations called the Sea Peoples in an attack against Egypt. The Egyptians repulsed the invaders, who then settled in Canaan. The Bible agrees with this picture, as it consistently portrays the Philistines as originating in Caphtor, a name used either for the Aegean in general or for Crete in particular (see, e.g., *Am.* 9.7). The Philistine arrival on the Canaanite coast coincided with the arrival and settlement of the Israelites in the central hill country of Canaan. A short while later, when both groups attempted to expand their territories, tensions arose and they became enemies. Two biblical judges, Shamgar (*Jgs.* 3.31) and Samson (*Jgs.* 14–16), fought against the Philistines in the late twelfth and early eleventh centuries BCE. Major battles occurred later in the eleventh century BCE. In one encounter, the Philistines captured the Ark (*1 Sm.* 4–6). Although they later returned the Ark, this event resulted in the Israelites pressing their leader Samuel to establish a monarchy (*1 Sm.* 8). The first king, Saul, was initially victorious against the Philistines, but in the end he was defeated by them and met his death on the battlefield at Gilboa (*1 Sm.* 31). When David became king of Israel about 1000 BCE, he set out to rid his nation of the Philistine menace. He was successful (*2 Sm.* 5.17–25, 8.1, 21.15–22, 23.9–17), and never again do the Philistines appear in the Bible as a major threat to the Israelites. They eventually came under Assyrian rule in 734 BCE. The Bible also refers to Philistines living in Canaan at the time of the Patriarchs (*Gn.* 20 and 26). These Philistines either belong to an earlier wave that came from the Aegean or it is an anachronism. The Philistines in *Genesis* differ in many ways from the Philistines in *Judges* and *Samuel*: they live in Gerar, not in the five citystates of Gath, Gaza, Ekron, Ashdod, and Ashkelon, called the Pentapolis; they are ruled by a king, not by lords (Heb. *seranim*, probably of Philistine origin); and they make peace with the Israelites instead of appearing as belligerent. Recent excavations at several of the cities of the Pentapolis (Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron), as well as Tel Qasile on the Mediterranean coast at Tel Aviv, have revealed many aspects of the material culture of the Philistines.

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