

44. The Philistines

Pressure from this warlike coastal people may have been the real reason why a majority of the priests finally accepted a king.

The “Sea Peoples” destroyed Ugarit, north of Tyre, then attacked Egypt in the south. In c01190 they were defeated by Ramesses III, who settled them as soldiers and laborers in the nearby coastal cities Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza.¹ To these they added inland Ekron and Gath, nearer to Jerusalem (Atlas 63).

Then in 01150, they revolted against Egypt. King Saul warred against them. David, hard pressed by Saul, fled for protection to the stronger Philistines:

1Sam 27:1. And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul; there is nothing better for me than that I should escape into the land of the Philistines . . . [2] And David arose, and passed over, he and the six hundred men that were with him, unto Achish the son of Maoch, king of Gath.

On the eve of one battle, no longer receiving advice from Yahweh, Saul consulted the Necromancer of Endor. The omen was evil, and so it proved:

1Sam 31:2. And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons, and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Malchishua, the sons of Saul. [3] And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers overtook him . . . [4] Then said Saul to his armor-bearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his armor-bearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took his sword, and fell upon it. [5] And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he likewise fell upon his sword, and died with him. [6] So Saul died, and all his men, that same day together.

After Saul’s time, the Philistines figure among the opponents of David, along with such eastern foes as the Moabites and the Syrians.

Egypt then reasserted itself in the area, and the Philistines were suppressed. David’s successor Solomon was a client king under Egypt; his son Rehoboam was a hostage in Egypt during his father’s reign. Solomon received such favors from Egypt as a personal guard, and an Egyptian (specifically, a Nubian) wife:

Song 1:5 I am black, but comely,
O ye daughters of Jerusalem

In later days, there was just enough left of the waning Philistines for King Hezekiah to be credited with an exploit of c0720 against them:

[2Kgs 18:8] He smote the Philistines unto Gaza and the borders thereof, from the tower of the watchman to the fortified city.

Those five centuries, from Ramesses III in c01190 to Hezekiah in c0720, are the period when the Philistines played a visible part in the history of Israel.

¹Redford **Egypt** (1992) 250-256.

