

The Seafaring Phoenicians

At the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, in what are now the nations of Lebanon and Syria, lived a people called the Phoenicians. Their civilization was at its height from about 1000 B.C. to 700 B.C. Phoenicia consisted of a group of city-states that were seldom independent throughout their history. At one time or another, they were either ruled or paid tribute to most of the great empires that sprang up in the Fertile Crescent.

During brief periods when other empires were weak or declining, the Phoenicians became the great sailors and merchants of the ancient world. They built fine ships from cedar that grew in the Lebanon Mountains, and they sailed these vessels to such distant places as Britain, France, Spain, and Africa. Their leading cities, Tyre and Sidon, became important trading centers. The Phoenicians traded such items as iron tools, glassware, pottery, and wine. Their most famous export was woolen and linen cloth, called murex, that was colored with a purple dye made from a shellfish. Purple cloth was in great demand throughout the Mediterranean area, and the Phoenicians used it to obtain other articles they needed. Because their sailors carried the civilization of the eastern Mediterranean to less advanced peoples, the Phoenicians are sometimes called the "missionaries of civilization."

The Phoenicians gave the world its first alphabet. They developed a system of writing containing signs that stood for single sounds. These signs evolved into an alphabet of twenty-two consonants. The Greeks later adopted Phoenician writing and added vowels. They in turn passed the alphabet on to the Romans, who made changes of their own and passed it on to western Europe.

Circle the letter of each correct answer.

1. Phoenicia was located in what are now the nations of Syria and
a. Egypt b. Israel c. Lebanon
2. The Phoenicians built ships of
a. cedar b. oak c. cypress
3. The Phoenicians' most important export was
a. wine b. purple cloth c. iron tools
4. The Phoenician alphabet contained no
a. vowels b. signs c. consonants
5. How was the Phoenician system of writing similar to the cuneiform of the ancient Egyptians? How was it different?

The Hebrews

About 1800 B.C., a people called the Hebrews moved from Mesopotamia to a land that lay between the eastern Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. They were led by Abraham, who is often referred to as the "father of the Israelites." The land in which they settled lay south of Phoenicia and was called Canaan. Later it became known as Palestine, named after the Philistines who controlled it for a short time. Today the area is the modern state of Israel.

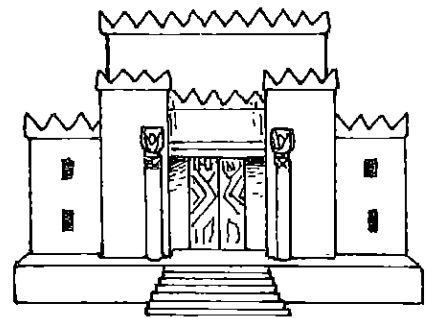
The Hebrews lived in Canaan for several hundred years until a famine drove them west into Egypt sometime after 1600 B.C. There, they were eventually forced into slavery and stayed for 300 years. In 1300 B.C., the prophet Moses led them out of captivity and back to Canaan.

Sometime around 1025 B.C., the Hebrews united and chose Saul as their king. Several great kings followed. King David built a magnificent capital city at Jerusalem, and King Solomon dedicated a great temple to Jehovah, the Hebrew god. However, after Solomon died, the nation split into the kingdoms of Israel to the north and Judah to the south. (It is from Judah that the word *Jews* is derived.) Israel was conquered by Assyria in 722 B.C., and its people were taken away and lost forever. Judah met the same fate in 586 B.C. at the hands of the Chaldeans. When the Chaldeans in turn fell to the Persians in 538 B.C., the Hebrews that were left were allowed to return to their homeland, Judah. Later, they were conquered by the Romans and once again dispersed.

The ancient Hebrews contributed greatly in the field of religion. They were the first people to practice monotheism, the belief in one god. They also gave the world the Ten Commandments and the Old Testament.

Put the following events in chronological order by numbering them from 1 to 7.

1. ____ The Assyrians conquer Israel.
2. ____ Moses leads the Hebrews out of Egypt.
3. ____ Saul becomes the first Hebrew king.
4. ____ The Hebrews split into two kingdoms.
5. ____ The Chaldeans overrun Judah.
6. ____ Abraham guides the Hebrews to Canaan.
7. ____ The Romans conquer the Hebrews.



8. List three religious contributions of the Hebrews.

9. What were the misfortunes that the Hebrews experienced?
