

THE “MISSING” PHOENICIANS OF HISTORY

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King Solomon of ancient Israel entered into a peaceful alliance with the city-state of Tyre. King Solomon’s father, King David, had conquered the Edomites and had opened an access to the Arabian Gulf. To an ancient Phoenician, this indicated endless possibilities. A seaport and a harbor were built by Phoenician labor and with Phoenician lumber. Ships were constructed with Phoenician labor and Phoenician lumber. And then what? Did these ships and crews float idly in harbor? What happened next?

The ancient Phoenicians did what the ancient Phoenicians are famous for doing – they sailed off into the unknown in both directions.

King David had conquered the Philistines, too. For this reason, Gaza was chosen as the seaport to the Mediterranean Sea. The southern tribes of Ishmaelites handled the overland transport to Gaza. These southern Ishmaelites were known as the Nabateans.

Both King Solomon and the city-state of Tyre prospered enormously. Then, the Edomites threw off the yoke of sovereignty of the southern Kingdom of Judah.

Nebuchadnezzar of ancient Babylon conquered the southern Kingdom of Judah. Historians differ in their interpretations of the events regarding the Edomites. Some historians contend that the Edomites expanded to occupy the Negev, because the Kingdom of Judah was nonexistent and could not stop the Edomite imperialism. Other historians contend that the Nabateans defeated the remnant of Edomites which survived Nebuchadnezzar, and these Edomite survivors were forced to leave their ancestral homeland because of Nabatean aggression. When the dust settled, the Nabateans controlled the land. The Edomites in the Negev became known as the Idumeans.

The city-state of Tyre was not conquered by Nebuchadnezzar. The fortress of Gaza might have repelled Nebuchadnezzar, also. The transport of goods continued. Mediterranean products were exported to India and China by Phoenician maritime merchants. Another Phoenician ship had already slowly circumnavigated the continent of Africa. Then, Alexander the Great came and conquered both the city-state of Tyre and the fortress of Gaza.

The Nabateans assumed control of the maritime traffic. The Phoenicians of the Arabian Gulf seaport became the “valued” guests of the Nabatean Kingdom. The last Tyrian died and was buried in a Nabatean graveyard.

And the other Northern Tribe of Ishmaelites? These tribes became the fierce Arameans. These tribes built the industry of overland transport. The eighth of the twelve sons of Ishmael, Hadad, founded the city of Damascus as a hub for the camel caravans. Interestingly, the city of Damascus seemed to be “outside” of the sovereignty of Imperial Rome and sovereign to the Kingdom of Nabatea around 40 A.D.

History tells us of the wars between the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt and the Seleucid Kingdom of Syria in the 3rd Century B.C. over Judea. History fails to mention Gaza, the terminal point of the overland transport of goods from the Arabian Gulf. During the brief reign of Marc Anthony over the Eastern Roman Empire, Marc Antony gave Gaza to Cleopatra as a wedding present. At that time, Gaza prospered the Idumean family of Antipas II. Octavian (Augustus) Caesar “restored” Gaza to Antipas II’s surviving son, Herod (The Great). But, Augustus Caesar “bypassed” this centuries-old pipeline of commerce and established his own. A trade envoy from Rome arrived in India. Newly-conquered Egypt supplied a seaport to the Arabian Gulf. Egypt supplied the terminal point to the Mediterranean Sea, also.