

## The Canaanite / Syrophenician / Gentile Woman

Canaanite is a term for a number of ethnic groups who had settled in what we now call Israel, the Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Jordan and neighbouring regions, but they were not unified into a nation. They occupied these areas for 2-3 millennia.

The Philistines (of Saul and David's time) were Canaanite, but not all Canaanite were Philistine. Further north, the Phoenicians were Canaanites, but not all Canaanites were Phoenician. The Phoenicians eventually occupied much of the Mediterranean coastal areas. There are suggestions based on DNA testing of ancient skeletons etc. that there are current inhabitants of Lebanon who have early Canaanite ancestry. There are also claims that there were very early settlers in what is now America who had Canaanite origin.

The OT refers only to Canaanites – not to Phoenicians – but remember the OT closed with Malachi ~ 400 b.c.e. but the NT refers to Phoenicia 3 times in Acts (11:19; 15:3; 21:2). Early Canaanite religions (as referred to in the OT) had probably disappeared long before the time of Christ, being replaced by Greek and then Roman belief systems. Elijah goes to Zarephath, slightly north of Sidon, to stay with a widow during the drought. Tyre and Sidon are referred to frequently in the OT.

Conquests between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> C by Assyria and Babylonia sacked much of the Phoenician area in the coastal area of the Levant.

Alexander's conquest initiated the Hellenization of this area which occurred in the 3 centuries prior to the time of Christ, following which it came under Roman occupation.

In the 1<sup>st</sup> C, Tyre and Sidon would have been Roman Territory, but populated to a great extent by Phoenicians, many of whom would have been of Canaanite descendancy, (with added Greek and other middle eastern influences). The inhabitants of this area were certainly considered Gentile by the Jews. There would have been trading relationships between Phoenicia and Jewish territories, but the Phoenicians at the time of Christ were Gentiles, not Jews and therefore unclean and untouchable (but good for engaging in profitable business with).

Note that Matthew refers to a Canaanite woman from the district of Tyre and Sidon, Mark calls her a Gentile of Syro-phenician origin. Luke refers to Phoenicia in reporting Paul's journeys.

Perhaps Matthew, writing for Jews, wants to place as much socio-religious distance as possible between this woman and his own people and his audience; Mark, probably as a result of Peter's inclusive influence, is descriptive rather than exclusive, and Luke uses his Lingua-franca (the commercial language of the Levant, -- a mixture of the languages of the people of the region and of foreign traders).

<https://phoenicia.org/history.html>

