

Smith's Bible Dictionary

Syria

is the term used throughout our version for the Hebrew Aram , as well as for the Greek Zupia . Most probably Syria is for Tsyria , the country about Tsur or Tyre which was the first of the Syrian towns known to the Greeks. It is difficult to fix the limits of Syria. The limits of the Hebrew Aram and its subdivisions are spoken of under [ARAM](#). Syria proper was bounded by Amanus and Taurus on the north by the Euphrates and the Arabian desert on the east, by Palestine on the south, by the Mediterranean near the mouth of the Orontes, and then by Phoenicia on the west. This tract is about 300 miles long from north to south, and from 50 to 150 miles broad. It contains an area of about 30,000 square miles. General physical features . --The general character of the tract is mountainous, as the Hebrew name Aram (from a root signifying "height") sufficiently implies. The most fertile and valuable tract of Syria is the long valley intervening between Libanus and Anti-Libanus. Of the various mountain ranges of Syria, Lebanon possesses the greatest interest. It extends from the mouth of the Litany to Arka , a distance of nearly 100 miles. Anti-Libanus, as the name implies, stands over against Lebanon, running in the same direction, i.e. nearly north and south, and extending the same length. [[LEBANON](#)] The principal rivers of Syria are the Litany and the Orontes. The Litany springs from a small lake situated in the middle of the Coele-Syrian valley, about six miles to the southwest of Baalbek. It enters the sea about five miles north of Tyre. The source of the Orontes is but about 15 miles from that of the Litany. Its modern name is the Nahr-el-Asi , or "rebel stream," an appellation given to it on account of its violence and impetuosity in many parts of its course. The chief towns of Syria may be thus arranged, as nearly as possible in the order of their importance: 1, Antioch; 2, Damascus; 3, Apamea; 4, Seleucia; 5, Tadmor or Palmyra; 6, Laodicea; 7, Epiphania (Hamath); 8, Samosata; 9, Hierapolis (Mabug); 10, Chalybon; 11,

Emesa; 12, Heliopolis; 13, Laodicea ad Libanum; 14, Cyrrhus; 15, Chalcis; 16, Poseideum; 17, Heraclea; 18, Gindarus; 19, Zeugma; 20, Thapsacus. Of these, Samosata, Zeugma and Thapsacus are on the Euphrates; Seleucia, Laodicea, Poseideum and Heraclea, on the seashore, Antioch, Apamea, Epiphania and Emesa (Hems), on the Orontes; Heliopolis and Laodicea ad Libanum, in Coele-Syria; Hierapolis, Chalybon, Cyrrhus, Chalcis and Gindarns, in the northern highlands; Damascus on the skirts, and Palmyra in the centre, of the eastern desert. History. --The first occupants of Syria appear to have been of Hamitic descent -- Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, etc. After a while the first comers, who were still to a great extent nomads, received a Semitic infusion, while most Probably came to them from the southeast. The only Syrian town whose existence we find distinctly marked at this time is Damascus, ([Genesis 14:15](#); [15:2](#)) which appears to have been already a place of some importance. Next to Damascus must be placed Hamath. ([Numbers 13:21](#); [34:8](#)) Syria at this time, and for many centuries afterward, seems to have been broken up among a number of petty kingdoms. The Jews first come into hostile contact with the Syrians, under that name, in the time of David. ([Genesis 15:18](#); [2 Samuel 8:3,4,13](#)) When, a few years later, the Ammonites determined on engaging in a war with David, and applied to the Syrians for aid, Zolah, together with Beth-rehob sent them 20,000 footmen, and two other Syrian kingdoms furnished 13,000. ([2 Samuel 10:6](#)) This army being completely defeated by Joab, Hadadezer obtained aid from Mesopotamia, *ibid.* ver. 16, and tried the chance of a third battle, which likewise went against him, and produced the general submission of Syria to the Jewish monarch. The submission thus begun continued under the reign of Solomon. ([1 Kings 4:21](#)) The only part of Syria which Solomon lost seems to have been Damascus, where an independent kingdom was set up by Rezon, a native of Zobah. ([1 Kings 11:23-25](#)) On the separation of the two kingdoms, soon after the accession of Rehoboam, the

remainder of Syria no doubt shook off the yoke. Damascus now became decidedly the leading state, Hamath being second to it, and the northern Hittites, whose capital was Carchemish, near Bambuk, third. [DAMASCUS] Syria became attached to the great Assyrian empire, from which it passed to the Babylonians, and from them to the Persians, In B.C. 333 it submitted to Alexander without a struggle. Upon the death of Alexander, Syria became, for the first time the head of a great kingdom. On the division of the provinces among his generals, B.C. 321, Seleucus Nicator received Mesopotamia and Syria. The city of Antioch was begun in B.C. 300, and, being finished in a few years, was made the capital of Seleucus' kingdom. The country grew rich with the wealth which now flowed into it on all sides. Syria was added to the Roman empire by Pompey, B.C. 64, and as it holds an important place, not only in the Old Testament but in the New, some account of its condition under the Romans must be given. While the country generally was formed into a Roman province, under governors who were at first proprietors or quaestors, then procounsuls, and finally legates, there were exempted from the direct rule of the governor in the first place, a number of "free cities" which retained the administration of their own affairs, subject to a tribute levied according to the Roman principles of taxation; secondly, a number of tracts, which were assigned to petty princes, commonly natives, to be ruled at their pleasure, subject to the same obligations with the free cities as to taxation. After the formal division of the provinces between Augustus and the senate, Syria, being from its exposed situation among the province principis, were ruled by legates, who were of consular rank (consulares) and bore severally the full title of "Legatus Augusti pro praetore." Judea occupied a peculiar position; a special procurator was therefore appointed to rule it, who was subordinate to the governor of Syria, but within his own province had the power of a legatus. Syria continued without serious disturbance from the expulsion of the Parthians, B.C. 38, to the

breaking out of the Jewish war, A.D. 66. in A.D. 44-47 it was the scene of a severe famine. A little earlier, Christianity had begun to spread into it, partly by means of those who "were scattered" at the time of Stephen's persecution, ([Acts 11:19](#)) partly by the exertions of St. Paul. ([Galatians 1:21](#)) The Syrian Church soon grew to be one of the most flourishing ([Acts 13:1](#); [15:23,35,41](#)) etc. (Syria remained under Roman and Byzantine rule till A.D. 634, when it was overrun by the Mohammedans; after which it was for many years the scene of fierce contests, and was finally subjugated by the Turks, A.D. 1517, under whose rule it still remains. --ED.)