

# Hannibal



**Biography Workbook Series**

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HANNIBAL  
(247-183 B.C.E.)

Hannibal (the grace of Baal, the Haniel of Scripture) was the son of the great Carthaginian general Hamilcar Barca, and was born in 247 B.C.E. It is said that, in his ninth year, his father led him to an altar and bade him swear eternal enmity to Rome. From the age of nine to eighteen he was trained in war and diplomacy under Hamilcar in Spain. From his eighteenth to his twenty-fifth year he was the chief agent in carrying out the plans by which his brother-in-law, Hasdrubal, extended and consolidated the Carthaginian dominion in the Iberian Peninsula (modern Spain).

1. How old was Hannibal when he swore that Rome would be his eternal enemy?

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On the death of Hasdrubal, in 221 B.C.E., the soldiers with one voice chose Hannibal, then in his twenty-sixth year, as their general. Forthwith he crossed the Tagus, and in two years reduced all Spain up to the Ebro, with the exception of the Greek colony of Saguntum. That town, which claimed the protection of Rome, fell in 218 B.C.E., and the Second Punic War, or, as the Romans justly called it, "the War of Hannibal," began.

2. What Greek colony in Iberia fell in 218 B.C.E.?

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Garrisoning Libya with Spaniards, and Spain with Libyans (a precaution against treachery), Hannibal set out on his march for Rome. In the summer of 218 B.C.E., he left New Carthage with 90,000 foot, 12,000 horse, and 37 elephants, crossed the Pyrenees, and gained the Rhone, where his passage was barred by a host of Gauls. The general thereupon sent part of his troops two days' journey up-stream, with orders to cross the Rhone and fall on the rear of the barbarians. His orders were executed by Hanno, and the passage of the river was safely effected.

3. Why did Hannibal place Libyan troops in Spain and Spanish troops in Libya?

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4. What group barred Hannibal's passage at the Rhone River?

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## Hannibal

Hannibal crossed the Alps in fifteen days, in the face of obstacles which would have proved insuperable to almost any other commander. His troops, reared under African and Spanish suns, perished in the thousands amid ice and snow. The native tribes threatened the annihilation of Hannibal's force, and were only dispersed by his matchless courage and address. The beasts of burden fell over precipices, or stuck fast and were frozen to death. In places, rocks had to be shattered and roads constructed to enable the men to creep round projecting crags. When he gained the valley of Aosta, Hannibal had but 20,000 foot and 6,000 horse to attempt the conquest of a power which had lately shown that it could put an army of 170,000 unrivalled soldiers into the field.

5. Imagine that you are part of Hannibal's army, being marched across the Alps with elephants and horses. Do you think that you would survive the journey? If you did manage to survive, what would you think of the commander who had led you on such a trip?

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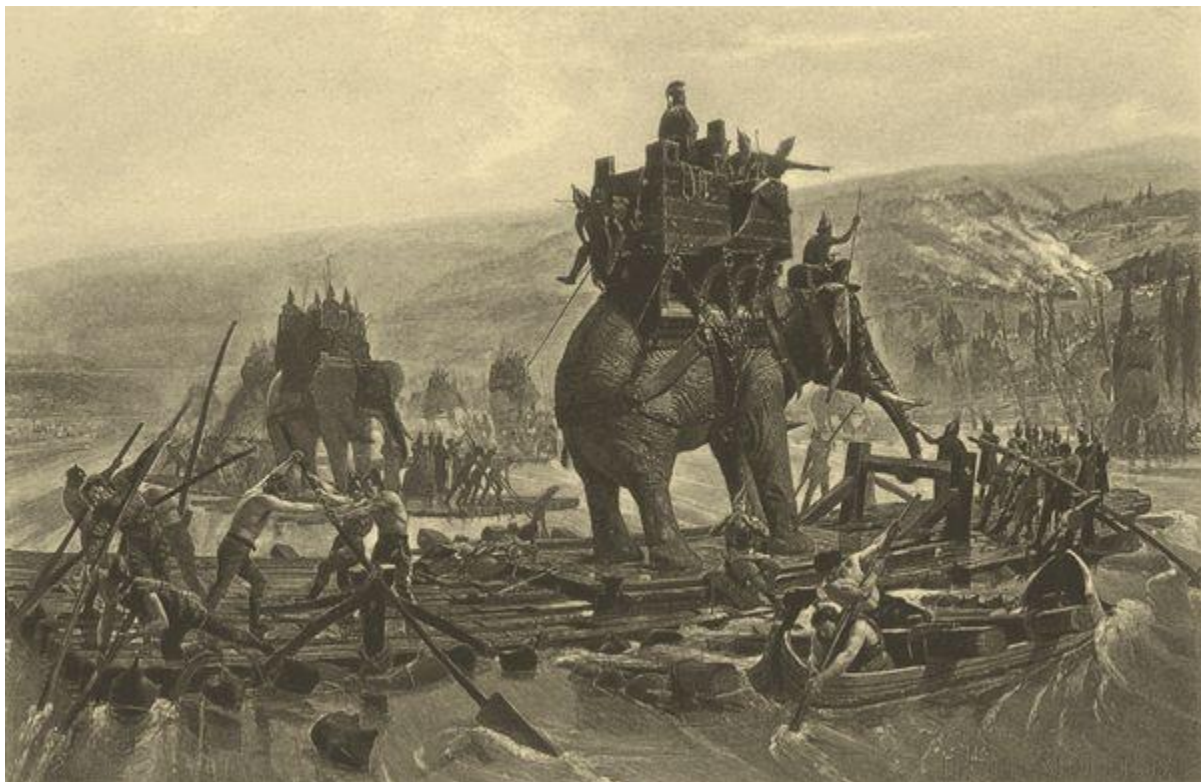
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*Hannibal crossing the Rhone.*

After allowing his men to recruit in the villages of the friendly Insubres, Hannibal overcame the Taurini, besieging and taking Turin, and forced the Ligurian and Celtic tribes on the Upper Po to serve in his army. At the Ticinus, a stream which enters the Po near Pavia, he encountered the Romans under Scipio, the father of Scipio Africanus. The cavalry of both armies joined battle, Hannibal's Numidian horse (cavalry) proved their superiority, and Scipio fell back beyond the Po.

6. What tribes, living near the upper portion of the Po River, did Hannibal force into his army?

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The Carthaginians crossed the river, and the first great battle of the campaign was fought in the plain of the Trebia. Placing Mago in ambush with 2,000 men, Hannibal enticed the Romans across the stream. His light troops retired before the legionaries. As Scipio was pressing on to fancied victory, he was taken in flank by the terrible Numidian horse, Mago came down in the rear, and the 40,000 men of the consular army were either cut to pieces or scattered in flight.

7. Where did the Carthaginians defeat 40,000 Romans with 2,000 men?
- Etruria
  - Plain of the Trebia
  - Po River
  - Zama

Wintering in the valley of the Po, in the early spring Hannibal crossed the Apennines and pushed through a region of lakes, flooded by the melting of the snow, to Fæsulæ. The beasts of burden perished in vast numbers amid the morasses. The Gauls, disheartened by the perils of the journey, had to be driven forward by Mago's horsemen, and the general lost an eye. Quitting Fæsulæ, Hannibal wasted Etruria (modern Tuscany) with fire and sword, and marched toward Rome, leaving behind him two consular armies of 60,000 men.

8. What mountain range did Hannibal cross after wintering in the Po River Valley?

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Hannibal awaited the consul Flaminius by the Lake Trasimene, where the hills, retiring in a semicircle from the shore, enclose a plain entered by two narrow passes. Concealing the main body of his army amid the hills, Hannibal placed his Numidians in ambush at the pass by which the Romans must enter; while he stationed part of his infantry in a conspicuous position near the other defile. The Romans pushed into the valley. The pass in the Romans' rear was secured by the Carthaginians who had lain in ambush. Hannibal's men charged from the heights, and the army of Flaminius was annihilated. Six thousand infantry cut their way through the farther pass, but these were overtaken by the horse (cavalry) under Maherbal and forced to yield on the following day.

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9. Hannibal defeated \_\_\_\_\_ near Lake Trasimene in Italy.
- Flaminius
  - Hasdrubal
  - Mago
  - Terentius Varro

After recruiting his men in the champagne country of Picenum, where the Numidian horses, we are told, were groomed with old Italian wine, Hannibal marched through Apulia and ravaged Campania. He was dogged by the dictator Quintus Fabius Maximus, whom he vainly endeavored to entice into an engagement.

Hannibal wintered at Gerontium, and in the spring took up a position at Cannæ, on the Aufidus. A Roman army of 80,000 men, under the consuls L. Æmilius Paulus and P. Terentius Varro, marched against him. Hannibal flung his troops (he had but 30,000) into a space enclosed on the rear and wings by a loop of the river. He placed his Spanish infantry in the centre, with the African foot on either flank. His Numidian horse, now reduced to 2,000 men, he posted on the right wing; while Hasdrubal, with 8,000 heavy cavalry, was opposed to the Roman cavalry on the left.

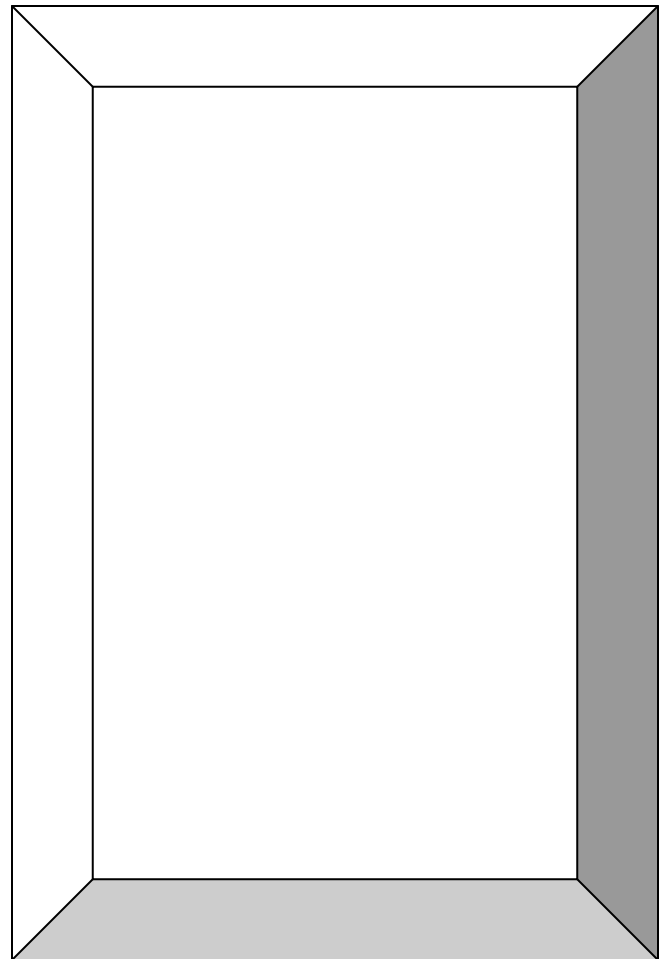
The legionaries pressed into the loop, and Hannibal drew back his centre before them. Hasdrubal, on the left, broke the Roman cavalry, swept round to the left wing of the Romans, drove the second detachment of Roman horse into flight, and then came thundering in the rear of the legionaries.

The Libyans, who had by the general's orders fallen back as the Romans pressed after the retiring Spanish infantry,

now closed on the enemy's flanks. Packed together so closely that they could not use their weapons, assailed in front, flank, and rear, the legionaries were hewn down through eight hours of carnage, till 50,000 lay dead on the field.

The battle became a butchery. Nearly 20,000 men were taken prisoners. The consul Paulus, the proconsul Servilius, the master of the horse Minucius, 21 military tribunes, and 60 senators lay amid the slain. On his side Hannibal lost but 5,700 men. "Send me on with the horse, general," said Maherbal, "and in five days thou shalt sup in the Capitol."

Draw a map (battle plan) indicating the troop movements at Cannæ.



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But the general was wiser than the fiery captain of the horse. It has been common to censure Hannibal for neglecting to march on Rome after the battle of Cannæ. But his dazzling triumph did not for a moment unsettle his clear judgment. He knew that his forces were unequal to the task of storming a walled city garrisoned by a population of fighting men. An attack which he had made on Spoletium had proved the inadequacy of the small Carthaginian army to carry a strongly fortified town. Had Hannibal followed the advice of Maherbal, he would in all likelihood have dashed his army to pieces against the walls of Rome.

10. Why did Hannibal fail to march on Rome after the Battle of Cannæ?

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Hannibal's aim was to destroy the common oppressor, Rome, by raising the Italian allies against it. The hope was partly justified by the revolt of Lucania and Bruttium, Samnium and Apulia. The soundness of judgment, the patience and self-control which he evinced in this hour of intoxicating success, are hardly less marvelous than the genius by which the success had been won.

After the battle of Cannæ, the character of the war changes. Hitherto Hannibal had swept everything before him. Rivers and mountains and morasses had been powerless to thwart his progress. Army after army, vastly superior in numbers and composed of the best fighting men the ancient world ever saw, had come against him to be broken, scattered, and destroyed. His career through Italy had been, in the words of Horace, "as the rush of the flames through a forest of pines."

But after Cannæ the tide turned. His piggish, short-sighted countrymen denied him the financial support without which success was impossible. As his veterans were lost to him he had no means of filling their places, while the Romans could put army after army into the field. But through the long years during which Hannibal maintained a hopeless struggle in Italy, he was never defeated. Nor did one of his veterans desert him. Never was there a murmur of disaffection in his camp. It has been well said that his victories over his motley followers were hardly less wonderful than his victories over nature and over Rome.

11. Why did the tide of war turn against Hannibal?

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## Hannibal

Hannibal spent the winter of 216-215 B.C.E. at Capua, where his men are said to have been demoralized by luxurious living. When Hannibal again took the field, the Romans wisely avoided a pitched battle, though the Carthaginians overran Italy, capturing Locri, Thurii, Metapontum, Tarentum, and other towns.

In 211 B.C.E., Hannibal marched on Rome, rode up to the Colline gate, and, it is said, flung his spear over the walls. But the fall of Capua smote the Italian allies with dismay, and ruined his hopes of recruiting his ever-diminishing forces from their ranks.

12. What purpose, do you imagine, was served by Hannibal throwing his spear over the Colline gate into Rome?

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In 210 B.C.E., Hannibal overcame the praetor Fulvius at Herdonea, and in the following year gained two battles in Apulia. Thereafter, he fell upon the consuls Crispinus and Marcellus, both of whom were slain and their forces routed, while he almost annihilated the Roman army which was besieging Locri.

In 207 B.C.E., Hannibal's brother Hasdrubal marched from Spain to his aid, but was surprised, defeated, and slain at the

Metaurus by the consul Nero. By the barbarous commands of Nero, Hasdrubal's head was flung into the camp of Hannibal, who had been till then in ignorance of his brother's doom. The battle of the Metaurus sealed the fate of "the lion's brood"—of the great house of Hamilcar. But for four years Hannibal stood at bay in the hill-country of Bruttium, defying with his thinned army every general who was sent against him, till in 202 B.C.E., after an absence of fifteen years, he was recalled to Africa to repel the Roman invasion.

13. Describe what happened to Hannibal's brother, Hasdrubal.

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In the same year, Hannibal met Scipio at Zama. His raw levies fled, and in part went over to the enemy. His veterans were cut to pieces where they stood, and Carthage was at the mercy of Rome. So ended the Second Punic War—the war, as the writer Arnold so truly said, of “a man with a nation, and the war which is perhaps the most wonderful in all history.” Three hundred thousand Italians had fallen, and three hundred towns had been destroyed in the struggle.

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Peace being made, Hannibal turned his genius to political toils. He amended the constitution, cut down the power of the ignoble oligarchy, checked corruption, and placed the city's finances on a sounder footing. The enemies whom he made by his reforms denounced him to the Romans, and the Romans demanded that he should be surrendered into their hands.

Setting out as a voluntary exile, Hannibal visited Tyre, the mother-city of Carthage, and then betook himself to the court of Antiochus, at Ephesus. He was well received by the king, who nevertheless rejected his advice to carry the war with Rome into Italy.

On the conclusion of peace, to avoid being given up to the Romans, Hannibal repaired to Prusias, king of Bithynia, for whom he gained a naval victory over the king of Pergamus. The Romans again demanding that he should be surrendered, he baffled his enemies by taking poison, which, we are told, he carried about with him in a ring. Hannibal died at Lybyssa about the year 183 B.C.E.

14. Why did Hannibal flee from Carthage and ultimately commit suicide?

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In judging of the character and achievements of Hannibal, it must never be forgotten, that for all we know of him, we are indebted to his implacable enemies. No Carthaginian record of that astounding career has come down to us. The Romans did all that unscrupulous malignity can, to blacken the fame and belittle the deeds of the most terrible of their foes.

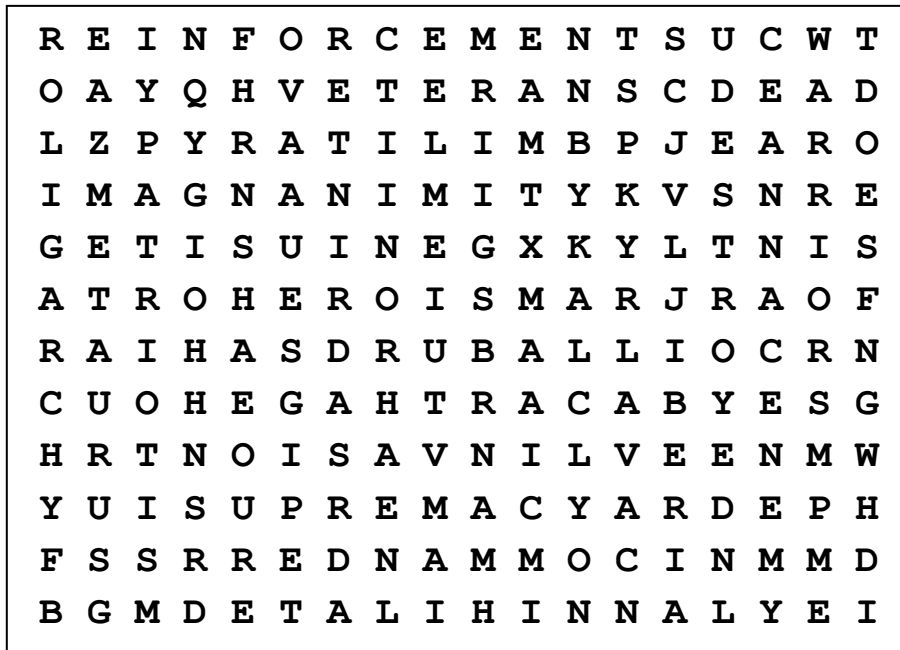
Yet, though calumny has done its bitterest against him, Hannibal not only dazzles the imagination, but takes captive the heart. He stands out as the incarnation of magnanimity and patriotism and self-sacrificing heroism, no less than of incomparable military genius. Napoleon, the only general who could plausibly challenge the Carthaginian's supremacy, had throughout the greater part of his career an immense superiority to his adversaries in the quality of the forces which he wielded. Napoleon had the enthusiasm of the Revolution behind him, and he was unhampered by authorities at home. Hannibal, on the contrary, saw his plans thwarted and finally wrecked by the sordid merchant-nobles of the city he strove so hard to save. He had not, like Alexander, to lead picked troops against weak foes.

Hannibal had to mold his little army out of raw and barbarous levies. He had no reinforcements to fall back on. With a motley army of Libyans, Gauls, and Spaniards he had to encounter a nation in arms—a nation of the stoutest and most highly trained warriors of ancient times. There is not in all history so wonderful an example of what a single man of genius may achieve against the most tremendous odds,





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annihilated  
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Carthage  
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commander  
destroyed  
enemy  
genius  
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