

EGYPTIAN DOMINATION

The Late Bronze Age (1550-1200 BC)

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The period known as the Late Bronze Age (about 1550-1200 BC) is one of the most fascinating in the history of the Near East, though somewhat difficult to correlate directly with biblical events. If we are correct in assigning the Patriarchs to the Middle Bronze Age, the Late Bronze is the time of the Israelite sojourn in the Land of Goshen and eventual enslavement by Egypt. The Bible passes over most of this 350 year span with but a verse or two in the book of Exodus. The Exodus event itself is placed by most scholars within the Late Bronze Age, but the precise date has been hotly disputed.

In order to give a general perspective of the world of Israel's origins, this chapter will begin with a survey of the Late Bronze (LB) Age—a period characterized by the clash of competing empires. The survey will be followed by a review of archaeological evidence used in the dating of the Exodus.

The World of the Late Bronze Age

Anatolia and Mesopotamia in the Late Bronze Age

The Hittites at the Beginning of the Late Bronze. The Indo-European group known as the Hittites established themselves within the curve of the Halys River in central Anatolia during the late third and second millennia. From their capital at Hattusas in the northern central steppes, they created a strong kingdom that, by the end of the Middle Bronze Age, was capable of projecting its power beyond Anatolia.

The Hittite king Hattusilis I moved into north Syria, destroying Alalakh and attacking Aleppo, the capital of Yamhad, the region's major power. His successor, Mursilis I, was able to destroy Aleppo, thus ending the kingdom of Yamhad. More impressive is Mursilis' feat of moving an army down the Euphrates to sack the city of Babylon in about 1595 BC. The latter feat ended the dynasty of the Amorites in Babylon. Unfortunately for the Hittites, the assassination of Mursilis was followed by continual internal struggles and the Anatolian nation temporarily receded from the spotlight by about 1500 BC.¹

The Kassites The LB periods in Mesopotamia saw little activity with a direct impact on the biblical story. The Hittite raid on Babylon in 1595 BC had ended the old Amorite Dynasty. By the mid fifteenth century, the Kassites consolidated their rule over the city, which continued for another 250 years. Though the Kassites were of non-Semitic origin and newcomers to Mesopotamia, they thoroughly adopted Babylonian culture and played a major role in the compiling and editing of Mesopotamian literature. In this, they have an indirect, but significant, impact on archaeology's contribution to biblical studies.

The Kassites of Babylon were not militarily active, and political initiative during this period passed to the Egyptians and Hittites in the west and to the Hurrians and, later, Assyria in the north. Jumping, for a moment, to the end of the period, Kassite power waned in the late thirteenth century in the face of Assyrian and Elamite attacks. The latter group carried away two of Babylon's most famous monuments: the Stele of Naram-Sin and the stele bearing the Law Code of Hammurabi. These objects were found in excavations of Susa in Persia.

¹J. G. Macqueen, *The Hittites and Their Contemporaries in Asia Minor*, rev. ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 44.

Mitanni. With the decline of Babylonian military interests in northern Mesopotamia, Hurrian elements took advantage of the opportunity to fill the vacuum. The Hurrians, like the Kassites, originated from the mountains north and east of Mesopotamia. In the LB period, the Hurrians became quite numerous and could be found over a wide geographical area. The biblical Horites may be Hurrian elements resident in Palestine. Politically, the Hurrians were dominated in the LB by nobles of a chariot-owning warrior class—with many Indo-Aryan features—called *maryannu*.

The initial establishment of a number of Hurrian power centers was followed by their consolidation into a Hurrian kingdom called Mitanni. The capital was located at Wasukanni, which has not been positively identified. Mitanni rapidly expanded at the beginning of the LB to become the most powerful state in western Mesopotamia and North Syria. Thus, it came into contact and conflict with other nations which were expanding during this period. While Mitanni enjoyed initial success against the Hittites of Anatolia, she met a more formidable foe in Egypt.

The Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty (about 1552-1306 BC)

Expulsion of the Hyksos. During the Hyksos Period, Egypt was divided between the Asiatic “Hyksos” rulers of Dynasty 15 and the native Egyptian Dynasties 13 and 17. Dynasty 17 ruled most of Upper Egypt, but was generally subject to the Hyksos rulers of Dynasty 15.

There was apparently increased conflict between the two groups toward the end of Dynasty 17. An Egyptian tale recounts the Hyksos ruler Apophis’ provocation of the Egyptian prince, Seqenenre Ta’o; the former claiming he was disturbed by loud hippopotami at Thebes, the capital of Dynasty 17. The mummy of Ta’o exhibits fatal spear and axe wounds, perhaps inflicted in ensuing hostilities. Despite this apparent drawback, the last king of Dynasty 17, Kamose, began the process of driving out the Hyksos by wresting Middle Egypt from Apophis and approaching Avaris, the Hyksos capital, itself.²

It was a brother of Kamose, Ahmose I (ca. 1550-1525 BC),³ who finally succeeded in driving the Hyksos from the Nile Delta region. Avaris was destroyed and the Hyksos leadership fled to the city of Sharuhin in southwestern Palestine, which in turn was taken.⁴ With his reunification of Egypt, Ahmose is considered the founder of the 18th Dynasty and the period called the New Kingdom (sometimes called the Empire period).

A very convincing case can be made that Ahmose was the Pharaoh who “did not know Joseph” (Ex. 1:8). As a native Egyptian, he did not know Joseph ethnically; and as an opponent to the Hyksos regime, he would not have known or cared about Joseph politically or historically. This is not to suggest that Ahmose should be considered the pharaoh of the Exodus or even the pharaoh of the oppression. A great deal of time is covered in the summary statements at the beginning of Exodus with no mention of the heirs of Ahmose—the Egyptian 18th Dynasty. We can do little better here, merely offering a review of this important period of Egyptian history; concentrating on those aspects which affect Palestine or our understanding of Israel’s origins.

The Early Eighteenth Dynasty. It was apparently Amenhotep I (1525-1504 BC), despite our lack of contemporary records, who consolidated Egypt’s position with territorial gains. Thutmose I (1504-1492 BC), however, is credited with extended Egyptian domination to the Euphrates River, where he faced the Hurrians of Mitanni. Whatever Thutmose’s intentions, his attack was temporary and Egypt withdrew from campaigns into Syria for the next forty years. Back home, Thutmose I was the first king certainly buried in the famous “Valley of the Kings,” just across the Nile from Thebes. In fact, he seems to have lain in two tombs there. Thutmose I also initiated extensive work on the temple of Amun at Karnak, the first indication of the growing power of the that deity’s priesthood.

There is little of interest concerning Thutmose II (1492-1479 BC), except that he was married to his own half sister (in itself not unusual in royal Egyptian families) Hatshepsut. Thutmose II had a single son, Thutmose III, by another

²*ANET*, 231-33; 554-55.

³18th Dynasty dates vary with certain dates locked to one of three possible schemes; the modified ‘Middle’ chronology of John Baines and Jaromir Malek, *Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Facts on File, 1980), is used here.

⁴*ANET*, 233-34.

wife. Upon the father's death, the younger Thutmose—still a child—ascended to the throne, but was soon overshadowed by his step-mother, Hatshepsut.

Hatshepsut (1473-1458 BC) took all the trappings of kingship, even having herself represented with the pharaonic false beard in statues. Her funerary temple at Deir el-Bahari is a masterpiece, frequently pictured in histories of architecture. Militarily, there is no evidence for any active involvement in Syria-Palestine on the part of Hatshepsut. This allowed Mitanni to make gains in Mesopotamia and northern Syria. In the meantime, in central Syria, the city of Kadesh on the Orontes River expanded its control south into Palestine. One attempt has been made to relate an inscription of Hatshepsut to the events of the Exodus, but this has been vigorously refuted.⁵

Historians have often suspected that Hatshepsut's death may have involved her step-son—the legitimate pharaoh in waiting—but there is no evidence of this. Whether as a response to his oppression by Hatshepsut or for some other reason, Thutmose III (1458-1425 BC) became the most active military pharaoh of the dynasty. Most significant of his exploits is the famous Battle of Megiddo on his first campaign to Canaan, known from texts carved into the walls of the Temple of Amun at Karnak. Thutmose's account illustrates the strategic importance of Megiddo, guarding the narrow Aruna pass of the main coastal road through the Carmel mountain range. Forces loyal to Kadesh, Egypt's enemy, had been marshaled at Megiddo where they anticipated stopping the Egyptian force. The Karnak inscription is sufficiently detailed to allow a detailed reconstruction of the battle, and important for students of the ancient Near East and the Bible alike.⁶ The pharaoh—ignoring the pleas of his advisors, according to the text—decided on a bold thrust through the dangerous Aruna pass and caught the Canaanite forces by surprise. The enemy was routed and Megiddo besieged until it fell some seven months later. Thus, the back of resistance to Egypt in Palestine was broken.

In subsequent years, Thutmose III pushed into Syria, enjoying continued success against Kadesh and Mitanni itself.⁷ In all, the pharaoh made at least 16 campaigns to Canaan. Topographical "city lists" on monuments of Thutmose III at the Karnak Temple of Amun preserve the names of cities conquered in these campaigns. One list contains some 119 Canaanite city names, inscribed in ovals surmounted by the torsos of bound Asiatic captives so as to indicate the city's subjection to the Pharaoh. This list contains the names of many Canaanite cities known from the Bible and is invaluable for the study of Palestine and Syria in this period.⁸ It should be noted that the "early date" for the Exodus (see below) would put the event in the time of Thutmose III. The constant campaigns of Thutmose and his successors in and through Palestine, however, are very difficult to reconcile with such a reconstruction.

Amenhotep II (1427-1401 BC) continued occasional campaigns in the Levant, primarily in a struggle with Mitanni. The latter, facing an impending struggle with a resurgent Hittite nation, began to make peace overtures with Egypt. The pharaoh Thutmose IV (1401-1391 BC) concluded the peace by receiving a Mitannian princess in marriage.⁹

The Amarna Period. Amenhotep III (1391-1353 BC) thus inherited an empire at peace and enjoyed unparalleled prosperity at home. Instead of military campaigns, Amenhotep III concentrated on building projects, adding to the Temple of Amun at Karnak and building a new temple to the same god at Luxor, also in the Thebes area. He married a commoner, Queen Tiy, who became very popular with the masses. From this union came a son, Amenhotep IV, undoubtedly one of the most curious personalities of the ancient Near East.

⁵The theory of Hans Goedicke is presented in Hershel Shanks, "The Exodus and the Crossing of the Red Sea, According to Hans Goedicke," *BAR* 7 (Sept./Oct. 1981): 42-50; and its refutation by Charles Richard Krahmalkov, "A Critique of Professor Goedicke's Exodus Theories," *BAR* 7 (Sept./Oct. 1981): 51-54; and Eliezer Oren, "How Not to Create a History of the Exodus: A Critique of Professor Goedicke's Theories," *BAR* 7 (Nov./Dec. 1981): 46-53.

⁶*ANET*, 234-38.

⁷Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton, 1992), 156-60.

⁸See Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, rev. and enlarged ed., trans. and ed., Anson F. Rainey (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 154-66; *MBA*, map 30.

⁹Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 160-69; contemporary details are found in el Amarna (see below) tablet (EA) 29; see the text in William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1992), 92-99.

A few years into his reign, Amenhotep IV (1353-1335 BC) embarked on a radical course, changing the focus of official Egyptian religion from Amun, the chief deity of Thebes, to the worship of the Aton, a combination of sun gods personified by the sun disc. To accompany the change in worship, the king changed his name to Akhenaten, by which he is better known. Late in his reign, temples of other gods were closed and the name Amun was systematically erased from public monuments. Akhenaten is often referred to as the “Heretic Pharaoh,” as the majority of Egyptians apparently were resistant to his reforms. Sometimes he is called “the first monotheist,” and it has been suggested that the reforms of Akhenaten provided the basis for the monotheism of Moses. It is also true that the Egyptian Hymn to the Aton from this period has remarkable similarities to Psalm 104.¹⁰ Akhenaten’s religion, however, was more of a henotheism or monolatry—the worshipping of one god to the exclusion of others. In fact, only the royal house worshipped the Aton, while other Egyptians were supposed to worship Akhenaten—probably a device to bolster the pharaoh’s divine status.

It may be that Akhenaten’s reforms were politically motivated; designed, as it were, to reduce the influence of the powerful priesthood of Amun in Thebes. Along those lines, Akhenaten built a new capital north of Thebes at Akhetaton, the modern el-Amarna. The collective reigns of Amenhotep III and IV are thus known as the Amarna period, an era with distinctives of interest to political and art historians. Akhenaten’s main wife was Nefertiti, made famous by the striking bust of her [fig. 6-**] found at Amarna and now in a Berlin museum. Other art of the period began to take on a bizarre character. The king was depicted with a distended belly, slight shoulders, and an elongated head. Whether such pieces are accurate portrayals of a deformed Akhenaten or some kind of idealized representation is the matter of much debate. Whatever the case, Amarna Period art evolved to depict all the members of the royal family with the same characteristics. In general, Amarna Period art represents a break from the rather stiff, stereotyping Egyptian art of earlier periods.

Egyptian foreign relations are particularly well documented by the Amarna Tablets, some 350 clay tablets found at the site of the capital. The tablets, written in Akkadian cuneiform, consist mainly of correspondence to the Pharaoh from petty kings of Canaan, North Syria, and Mesopotamia. A few tablets contain copies of responses from the Pharaoh.¹¹ The letters from Canaan may reflect a weakening of Egyptian power there, perhaps due to preoccupation with internal affairs—especially during the reign of Akhenaten. On the other hand, they may be reflections of an Egyptian policy of indifference to certain levels of activity in the Empire. In any case, the Amarna Letters are quite interesting for biblical studies, as they throw considerable light on the political situation in Palestine just prior to the emergence of Israel. They reveal a picture of city states ruling over small areas, each in conflict with its neighbors, but still ostensibly under Egyptian control. Mutual accusations fill the letters, with each king defending whatever actions he has taken.¹²

The *Habiru*^c*Apiru*. In many of the Amarna Letters, the kings of Canaan complain of a lawless, seminomadic people encroaching on the pharaoh’s domain in Palestine. In the letters from ^c*Abdi-Kheba*, the king of Jerusalem, the cuneiform spelling *Habiru* (more correctly, *Hapiru*) appears in reference to this group. Other Amarna tablets employ the ideographically written SA.GAZ, which contains the ideogram for “marauder”, “robber”, or “bandit.” It is clear, however, that SA.GAZ is identical in meaning with *Habiru* and the Egyptian form, ^c*pr-w*, usually written ^c*Apiru*.¹³ In many of the letters, they appear as mercenaries and confederates of Labayu, King of Shechem.

The similarity of *Habiru* to the biblical designation “Hebrews,” and their association with Shechem, makes it tempting to equate the terms and view the Amarna letters as evidence for Israelite activity in Canaan following the Exodus.¹⁴ While there are philological difficulties in identifying the *Habiru* with the Hebrews, such an equation is

¹⁰ANET, 369-71.

¹¹A recent and accessible translation of the tablets is Moran, *Amarna Tablets*; selections of interest are found in ANET, 483-90.

¹²For a complete discussion of the situation in Palestine, see W. F. Albright, “The Amarna Letters from Palestine,” in *CAH*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 98-116.

¹³Albright, “Amarna Letters,” 110-111.

¹⁴This view was especially furthered by J. W. Jack, *The Date of the Exodus* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1925), 142-68; 237-41.

theoretically possible. More difficult are questions regarding the nature of the two terms and the overall activities of the *Habiru*/^c*Apiru*.

The *Habiru*/^c*Apiru* /SA.GAZ are mentioned in documents throughout the Near East from the twentieth to the twelfth centuries BC, usually in the context of foreigners without a settled home.¹⁵ Indeed, the biblical usages of “Hebrews” are chiefly by non-Israelites speaking of Israelites or by the latter describing themselves to the former. But it has been demonstrated that the term *Habiru* was probably not used as a designation for an ethnic group (that is, a gentilic), as is the case of “Hebrews.” Rather, *Habiru* seems to have been used (as an appellation) of a social class of diverse origins, but having the common status of being propertyless aliens. There may still be a connection between the groups if the biblical Hebrews are regarded as part of the larger social designation *Habiru*. In other words, Hebrews could be classified generically as *Habiru*, but not all *Habiru* were Hebrews.

It may not be unreasonable to suppose that some of the *Habiru*/^c*Apiru* mentioned in the Amarna letters were ethnically related to the contemporary Hebrews in Egypt, possibly including some who were actually escaped slaves seeking to establish themselves in Palestine. That Egyptian slaves escaped to Palestine during this period cannot be doubted. A model letter set for the instruction of school boys from the end of the thirteenth century preserves the report of an official in pursuit of two slaves escaping from Egypt into Asia.¹⁶ Additionally, one of the Amarna letters specifically mentions slaves who had become ^c*Apiru*.¹⁷

Thus, the *Habiru*/^c*Apiru* activity in the Shechem area may be plausibly attributed to Hebrew/Israelite elements in the form of escaped slaves from Egypt. The curious continuity of the Shechem area in early Hebrew tradition (Gen 12:6-7 and 33:18-20; cf. Josh 8:30-35; 24; and Judg 9) may reflect some attractiveness that the city held for Hebrew persons. It seems entirely possible that Shechem became an objective for escaping Hebrew slaves and that a substantial “Israelite” population had found its way there by the time of the conquest. This would explain the conspicuous lack of a campaign against Shechem in Joshua and the inclusion of “strangers” in their covenant renewal ceremony held around the city (Josh 8:33).

The End of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Following the death of Akhenaten and the short reign of his brother, Smenkhare (1335-1333 BC), the throne passed to the nine year old Tutankhaten. The young king, apparently under guidance, moved his residence to the old civil capital of Memphis, reversed the reforms of Akhenaten, revived the cult of Amun at Thebes, and changed his name accordingly.

This Tutankhamen (1333-1323 BC) died after a reign of only nine years. He would be a little known figure of Egyptian history but for the discovery of his tomb in the Valley of the Kings by Howard Carter in 1922. Though it had been robbed in antiquity (contrary to popular belief), the tomb of “king Tut” was largely intact. The solid gold mask of Tutankhamen—one of the most recognizable objects from ancient Egypt—was placed over the head of his mummy inside a solid gold coffin, nestled inside two concentric gilded wood coffins, laid in a stone sarcophagus, within three concentric gilded shrines. The magnificence of this burial only hints at the treasures that must have been contained inside the tombs of more powerful and long ruling pharaohs. The tomb of Tutankhamen was so relatively small, that its entrance was eventually concealed by the debris from the hewing of a later tomb and forgotten.

Though the “heresies” of Akhenaten had been reversed, Dynasty 18 was doomed. Tutankhamen was succeeded by Ay (1323-1319 BC) and Horemheb (1319-1307 BC), who had served Akhenaten as chief minister and general, respectively. Horemheb lacked an heir, and with his death the Dynasty came to an end.

The Canaanites of the Late Bronze Age

¹⁵See Moshe Greenburg, *The Hab/piru*, American Oriental Series 39 (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1955), 15-58; for a comprehensive review of the texts.

¹⁶*ANET*, 259; the route taken by the slaves and their pursuers recalls that taken by the Israelites on the first stages of the Exodus.

¹⁷EA 288, 43-44; translated in *ANET*, 489.

The end of the Middle Bronze Age in Palestine was accompanied by the widespread destruction of cities. These destructions can be attributed to Egyptian campaigns following the expulsion of the Hyksos. Unlike the end of the Early Bronze Age, however, the urban nature of the land continued following the destructions. Cities were rebuilt, albeit on a smaller scale, and the Late Bronze Age was a continuation of the Canaanite culture. It was the LB Canaanite culture that the Israelites encountered in the land following the Exodus.

A word should be said here about terminology. "Canaan" was used as a geographic term in cuneiform documents, but came to refer to a province including Palestine and southern Syria under the Egyptian New Kingdom. The Bible seems to present a somewhat narrower view, the "Land of Canaan" apparently being coterminous with the "Promised Land" or Palestine. This may be because the Canaan of Egyptian control was reduced to this area by the time of the Exodus.

Cities. Settlement and population density declined in Palestine during the LB period. In general, the number and size of cities was smaller than in the Middle Bronze periods. Some former MB cities ceased to exist or were reduced to poor villages. An exception to the downsizing rule is found in Hazor, which continued to be settled over its 200 acre enclosed area. The hill country areas seem especially to have declined, even in the number of small agricultural settlements. A few new cities appeared along the coast to facilitate marine trade, a growing economic aspect of Canaanite life. A few former cities became fortress-bases for the Egyptian presence in parts of the land.¹⁸

The Transjordanian regions of Edom and Moab were occupied during the MB I with settled villages, but beginning in the early nineteenth century, these sites were abandoned. Surface explorations by Nelson Glueck in the 1940's suggested that sedentary populations were not again present in these regions until the thirteenth century BC, and that the area was occupied only by semi-nomadic groups. On this basis, it had been argued that a pre-thirteenth century Exodus impossible, as no sedentary population capable of refusing passage (cf. Num 20-22) would have been present.¹⁹ New explorations, however, have revealed sedentary occupation during the supposed gap. In the northern and central areas of the Transjordan, several cities of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages are now known. A cultic structure at the Amman (Rabboth-ammon) airport,²⁰ formerly seen as an isolated semi-nomadic shrine, now fits into a context of LB cities and other remains. The occupational gap of the northern and central areas of the Transjordan now appears questionable²¹ and, though the question remains open for southern Transjordan, this issue is no longer a major criteria in determining the date for the Exodus.

The divisions of LB Palestine into subphases and their relationship to Egyptian chronology are disputed and need not concern us here.²² Many sites exhibit 3-5 LB phases, often punctuated by destruction levels. This level of disruption must have been caused by the political turmoil of Egyptian campaigns as well as fighting between cities and raids by the *Habiru* (as described in the Amarna Letters).

Most LB cities in Palestine continued to utilize the MB fortifications with little or no renovation and modification. In some areas, regional defense was effected by small rectangular forts, apparently built under Egyptian auspices. A

¹⁸Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible 10,000-586 B.C.E.* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 239-40.

¹⁹Nelson Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1940), 114, 125-47; idem, "Transjordan," in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, ed. D. Winton Thomas (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1967), 443-45.

²⁰Larry G. Herr, ed., *The Amman Airport Excavations, 1976*, AASOR, Vol. 48 (Winona Lake, Ind.: ASOR, 1983).

²¹Gerald K. Mattingly, "The Exodus-Conquest and the Archaeology of Transjordan: New Light on an Old Problem," *Grace Theological Journal* 4 (No. 2, 1983):248-62; James A. Sauer, "Transjordan in the Bronze and Iron Ages: A critique of Glueck's Synthesis," *BASOR* 263 (August 1986):7-9.

²²see James M. Weinstein, "The Egyptian Empire in Palestine: A Reassessment," *BASOR* 241 (Winter 1981): 1-28; Albert Leonard, Jr., "The Late Bronze Age," *BA* 52 (March 1989): 6-7; Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 238-39.

chain of such forts extends across northern Sinai and into southern Palestine, guarding the main military route from Egypt.²³

Religious Architecture. A wide variety of temple structures are known from LB Palestine. A large temple precinct has been found at Beth Shean, one of the Egyptian strongholds in the land, where there is evidence for the mixing of Canaanite and Egyptian religious ideas.²⁴ With its beginnings in the MB, this rambling complex continued through the LB and into the following Iron I period.

Some individual temples of the monumental type common in the MB period survived or were rebuilt in the LB at Hazor, Megiddo, and Shechem. At the former, two large temples (Areas A and H) continued into the LB with rebuildings and modifications, including the addition of basalt orthostats. One of these temples (in Area H) was rebuilt through the end of the LB period, its last phase exhibiting twin freestanding pillars and a tripartite plan which recalls the Temple of Solomon.²⁵

An interesting phenomenon is the building of several temples in isolated locations, not associated with any city. Tel Mevorakh has such a building, and the isolated structure near the Amman airport may also be a temple. These may have been places of pilgrimage or served the needs of travelers.²⁶ A related phenomenon is the construction of religious structures outside the city walls. At Lachish, for example, a small temple (known as the Fosse Temple) was built at the base of the mound and continued through several phases in the LB. It has been suggested that such extramural temples served foreign populations at or travelers to the adjoining cities. The latter seems more likely, and the type is now known a bit earlier, owing to the discovery of an extramural sanctuary of the last phase of Middle Bronze Age Ashkelon. This structure, located on the rampart below the city gate, produced a exquisite bronze calf statuette overlaid with silver and an accompanying pottery shrine.²⁷ The calf is an excellent example of Canaanite iconography. Calves and bulls were associated with El or Baal, Canaanite deities. Though a bit early, it represents the type of image the Israelites tended to adopt (e.g., Ex 32)—either as a symbol of the Lord or as part of the outright worship of Canaanite gods (the following chapters will deal with this issue more completely).

Overall, there is a tendency towards smaller religious structures, each perhaps with a single cult focus, from the middle of the LB period onward. At Hazor, a small structure with benches along the wall contained a raised niche in which were found eleven basalt stelae, a statue of a seated male deity (probably the moon god), and a miniature orthostat with a lion in relief.²⁸ The stelae are excellent representations of Canaanite *masseboth*, or standing stones, which the Israelites were explicitly instructed to destroy (Deut 12:2-3) and not to make for themselves (Lev 26:1).

The religious structures lead us to other questions about the religion of the Canaanites. By happy circumstance, a body of texts from this period sheds considerable light on that subject.

Ugarit. A farmer's 1928 discovery of a necropolis at Minet el-Beida on the coast of Syria led to its excavation and that of the nearby tell, Ras Shamra (see Chap. 1), now known to be the ancient city Ugarit. Although it lay to the north of Palestine, Ugarit belonged to the broad category of Canaanite culture. Excavation of the site yielded temples to Baal and Dagan, a palace, a library, and most importantly, thousands of texts on clay tablets. Most valuable for biblical study are the approximately 1400 tablets written in the local language, called **Ugaritic** by scholars. Ugaritic was a Semitic language quite close, in linguistic terms, to biblical Hebrew and written in an alphabetic cuneiform script.

²³Aharon Kempinski, "Middle and Late Bronze Fortifications," in *The Architecture of Ancient Israel from the Prehistoric to the Persian Periods*, eds. A. Kempinski and R. Reich (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1992), 136-42.

²⁴*ANET*, 249.

²⁵Yigael Yadin, *Hazor*, The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy, 1970 (London: Oxford, 1972), 75-95; idem, *Hazor: The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible* (New York: Random House, 1975), 79-99.

²⁶Ephraim Stern, *Excavations at Tel Mevorakh, Part Two*, Qedem 18 (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1984), 35-36.

²⁷Lawrence E. Stager, "When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon," *BAR* 17 (March/April 1991): 24-28.

²⁸Yadin, *Hazor*, 67-74; idem, *Hazor: The Rediscovery of a Great Citadel of the Bible*, 43-48.

The Ugaritic texts have made a tremendous impact on our understanding of the vocabulary and the context of many Old Testament passages.²⁹ In addition to economic documents, the Ugaritic texts include literary and religious documents that are primary sources for the study of Canaanite culture. These include the Legend of Keret, the Legend of Aqhat, and the Baal-Anat cycle.³⁰

The religious texts from Ugarit fill some of the gaps in our knowledge of Canaanite religion. From them we see that the chief deity of the Canaanite pantheon was the retiring El (the generic Semitic term “god”), attended by his wife Asherah. But the active god and focus of the literature is Baal (a title, meaning “lord”), the god of storms and rain. In the Baal cycle, the storm god, assisted by his sister/consort Anat, faces enemies in Yamm (meaning “sea”), representing chaos, and Mot (“death”), who seems to represent drought.

Development of the Alphabet. The tablets from Ugarit are also important in tracing the history of writing. The Ugaritic script is a step between the complicated system of cuneiform and the use of an alphabet. The former uses signs to represent syllables (phonograms) and sometimes ideas (ideograms) which are combined to render words. A similar system provides the basis for Egyptian hieroglyphic writing. Alphabetic writing, on the other hand, uses a single symbol (letters) for each distinct sound. The scribes of Ugarit had developed 30 cuneiform “letters”—far more convenient than the hundreds of signs used in Akkadian. This system still had another disadvantage of cuneiform: cumbersome symbols written on bulky clay tablets. In the meantime, other systems of alphabetic writing were being developed in Late Bronze Syria-Palestine.

The earliest alphabetic inscriptions are found in the Sinai about 1500 BC and may have been influenced or inspired by Egyptian hieroglyphic. In any case, these Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions were pictographic in appearance, but alphabetic in function. In other words, a picture-symbol had come to represent a single sound. Development took place in Palestine, where the symbols became more stylized in what scholars call Proto-Canaanite script, by the thirteenth century. This clearly Semitic development became the basis for the Phoenician alphabet which, in turn, was passed on to the Greeks and, through Latin, to the modern European alphabets used today.

A number of the letter names in Hebrew and Greek have their origin in the symbols used in the first alphabetic system (see fig. 6-**). As an example, the Proto-Sinaitic script contained a picture of an ox-head, which was stylized in the Canaanite script and more so in the Phoenician. The Greek alphabet rotated the symbol ninety degrees (as was true of many of the symbols) and it became recognizable as our “A.” In Hebrew, the letter so represented is called aleph, meaning “ox;” which is the origin of the Greek name alpha. Alpha (which combined with beta, is the root for “alphabet”) has no meaning in Greek other than the name of the letter.

Before ancient writing systems had been revealed by archaeology, it was common to hear the assertion that Moses produced the first writing when given the Law at Mt. Sinai. We have seen that such was far from the case. Ironically, however, we now know that alphabetic writing was developed on the eve of the emergence of Israel and that its impetus seems to have come from the very region of the Exodus. That is not to suggest that Moses invented alphabetic writing. But its development may have played a large part in the formation of a young nation’s literary tradition—the survival of which has given that nation a special status in the ancient Near East. With that in mind, we now return to the events of the world of Israel’s conception.

The Hittites

Hittite Revival. Before continuing with Egypt, we must consider another major power of the latter half of the Late Bronze Age. After a period of decline, the Hittite nation made a resurgence under Suppiluliumas I (about 1380-1334 BC), who conquered the kingdom of Mitanni and made inroads in northern Syria. His son Mursilis II (1334-1308 BC) further consolidated the Hittite position as masters of Anatolia.³¹ Clearly, the Hittites were in a position to challenge Egyptian authority in Syria-Palestine.

²⁹See Peter C. Craigie, *Ugarit and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 67-90.

³⁰For the texts, see J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1978); *ANET*, 129-55.

³¹Macqueen, *Hittites*, 46-48.

The Hittite capital was at Hatussas, located in the north central Anatolian plateau. This fabulous city was destroyed in the chaos that ended the Late Bronze Age about 1200 BC.³² Excavation at the site produced, among other things, a large cache of cuneiform tablets, mostly in the Hittite language, which proved to be the royal archives of the later Hittite kings. These have aided immeasurably in the reconstruction of the history of the Hittites and their relations with other nations.

Treaties and Covenants. Of special interest for students of the Bible are a number of treaty documents outlining the relationship between the Hittite king, as overlord (or suzerain), and the subject nation (vassals). The form of these treaties consistently contains certain elements which can be found in the biblical texts outlining the Mosaic Covenant.³³ It seems clear that, with some inevitable detail differences (“functional shift”), the covenant between God and Israel reflects normal treaty/covenant forms of the LB and not those of other periods.³⁴ Though the details of comparison vary by interpreter, the following presents a general idea of the parallels.

Hittite Treaty Element	Covenant Code	Deuteronomy	Joshua 24
Preamble	Exod 20:1 or 2a	Deut 1:1-5	1-2a
Historical Prologue	Exod 20:2	Deut 1:6-3:29	2b-13
Stipulations	Exod 20:1-17	Deut 4-26	14-25
Deposit/Public Reading	Exod 25:16	Deut 27:2-3	26
List of Witnesses	(Exod 25:1-11?)	-	22, 27
Blessings and Curses	(Lev 26?)	Deut 28	20

The Hittites were quite removed from the physical situation of the Hebrews and might seem an unlikely source of parallels to the biblical tradition of the Exodus. But it should be noted that we have Hittite treaties due to the accidents of discovery and that others from the period might well be equal good parallels. It is also possible that Hebrews in Egypt could have come into contact with Hittite ideas, including treaties, through Egyptian dealings with that nation.

The Egyptian Nineteenth Dynasty (about 1307-1200 BC)

Horemheb died without heir and was succeeded by his vizier Rameses I (1307-1306 BC), who begins Dynasty 19. It is not without significance that the 19th Dynasty pharaohs hailed from the north and honored northern gods with their throne names. The prominence of the element Ra in their names may have been an attempt to limit the power of the priests of Amun. But there is a curious connection of the Ramesside family with the old Hyksos stronghold in the eastern Delta. Rameses was the son of a certain Seti from the Delta region, near the “Land of Goshen.” The name Seti, borne by Rameses father, son, and a later pharaoh of the dynasty, means “man of Seth.” Seth was the god of Avaris, the capital of the Hyksos, who identified him with the Canaanite Baal. Perhaps it was the influence of Rameses I as vizier that caused his predecessor Horemheb to add to the temple of Seth in Avaris. This is known from the so-called 400 Year Stele, erected by Rameses II some time later, noting that Rameses I’s son Seti celebrated the 400th year of Seth’s rule there and, by implication, the quadricentennial of the city’s ascendancy to power.³⁵

³²Kurt Bittel, *Hattusha: The Capital of the Hittites* (New York: Oxford, 1970).

³³George E. Mendenhall, “Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law,” *BA* 17 (May 1954): 26-46; idem, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *BA* 17 (Sept. 1954): 59-76; both reprinted in E. F. Cambell, Jr. and David Noel Freedman, *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader 3* (New York: Anchor, 1970), 3-53.

³⁴Kenneth A. Kitchen, “New Directions in Biblical Archaeology: Historical and Biblical Aspects,” in *BAT 1990*, 43-44.

³⁵*ANET*, 252-53.

After the short reign of Rameses I, the throne passed to his son Seti I (about 1306-1290 BC). An energetic ruler, Seti campaigned in Palestine and Syria to restore the empire there. Though Seti returned Canaan to the Egyptian fold, dominance of Syria was contested vigorously by the renewed Hittite Empire. Reliefs at the Karnak temple and two stelae of Seti I discovered at Beth Shean provide details of Seti's campaigns.³⁶ The Karnak reliefs also detail the Egyptian military road leading across the northern Sinai into southern Palestine. A pictorial representation, approximating a map, shows over twenty way-stations on this "Way of Horus," almost certainly the "Way of the Land of the Philistines" avoided by the Israelites at the beginning of the Exodus (Exod 13:17). Surveys have revealed a string of sites along this route, two of which have been excavated (Haruvit and Deir el-Balah).³⁷

Seti embarked on a number of building projects, including an addition to the Karnak temple to Amun and temples at Abydos. Most importantly for biblical interests, he built a summer palace at Avaris, an ideal site for a center of communications with Canaan.

Seti I was succeeded by his son, Rameses II (about 1290-1224 BC), a historical figure of great significance. We can do no more here than mention some his most significant accomplishments. Militarily, the Hittites remained Egypt's major opponent in Syria. In one of the best documented battles of antiquity,³⁸ Rameses II fought the Hittites under Muwatallis at the Battle of Qadesh on the Orontes River. Nearly a complete disaster for Egypt, the battle was turned by Rameses' bravery and claimed by the pharaoh as a great victory. In reality, both sides suffered from what can best be described as a stalemate. A few years later, Rameses concluded a peace treaty with Hittites (then under Hattusilis III)—the earliest of which copies from both parties are known.³⁹

A number of text sources from the late 19th Dynasty indicate additional activity by Rameses II in Canaan and give geographical details about the land. Of interest is a satirical letter from a scribe to a rival, preserved in the so-called papyrus Anastasi I, refers to the "chief of Asher" in discussing the hazards of the Aruna Pass.⁴⁰

Rameses was the major builder of the New Kingdom. His most important works include the famous temple at Abu Simbel and impressive additions to the Karnak and Luxor temples. Across the river from Thebes was the Ramesseum, his mortuary temple, and his tomb in the Valley of the Kings. He finished the temple of Seti I and added his own at Abydos. The Precinct of Ptah was rebuilt on a fabulous scale at Memphis, complete with colossal statues of the king. One of Rameses II's first projects, however, was to proclaim the expansion of his father's palace in the eastern Delta into a new capital city to be called Pi-Ramesse ("domain of Rameses"). In the massive construction work *c* *Apiru* are specifically named as laborers. For this and other reasons outlined below, it seems plausible that Seti I was the pharaoh of the oppression of Israel and Rameses II was the pharaoh of the Exodus.

It is worth noting that Rameses' first son, Amen-hir-khopshef, was apparently dead by the king's 20th year (cf. Ex 12:29). A huge tomb in the Valley of the Kings, quite recently identified as that of the sons of Rameses, has sparked considerable interest but has yet to produce any royal remains.⁴¹ In the end, Rameses outlived many of his approximately 90 offspring and was succeeded by his 13th son, Merneptah (about 1224-1211 BC).

At one time it was popular to assume that Merneptah was the pharaoh of the Exodus, because his mummy was conspicuously unaccounted for. This is no longer the case, as the remains of Merneptah are identified along with most of the New Kingdom rulers and kept in the Cairo Museum. Nevertheless, Merneptah does provide us with information relevant to the Exodus.

³⁶Amihai Mazar, "Beth Shean: Tel Beth-Shean and the Northern Cemetery," *NEAEHL*, 1:217-19; *ANET*, 253-55; *MBA*, maps 37-38.

³⁷Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 279-85; for a good popular article on Deir el-Bahari, see Trude Dothan, "Lost Outpost of Ancient Egypt," *National Geographic* 162.6 (Dec. 1982): 739-69.

³⁸Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant: The Life and Times of Rameses II* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1982), 52-64; *ANET*, 255-56; *MBA*, maps 39-40.

³⁹*ANET*, 199-203.

⁴⁰*ANET*, 477-78.

⁴¹Salima Ikram and Dennis Forbes, "KV5: Retrospects and Prospects," and Kenneth A. Kitchen, "'As Arrows in His Quiver': The Sons of Rameses II," *KMT* 7 (Spring 1996): 38-51.

In 1895, Petrie discovered a stele in the mortuary temple of Merneptah at Thebes. Originally a stele (now Cairo Museum 34025) of Amenhotep III, the stone was usurped by Merneptah who inscribed its back side with an account of a victory over the Libyans in the spring of his fifth year (about 1220 BC). This account includes the earliest reference to mercenary peoples that later comprised part of the “Sea Peoples” (to be discussed fully in Chap. 7). Added to the end of the text is a hymn relating a separate triumph over peoples in Canaan:

The princes are prostrate, saying: “Mercy!”
 Not one raises his head among the Nine Bows.
 Desolation is for Tehenu; Hatti is pacified;
 Plundered is the Canaan with every evil;
 Carried off is Ashkelon; seized upon is Gezer;
 Yanoam is made as that which does not exist;
 Israel is laid waste, his seed is not;
 Hurru is become a widow for Egypt!⁴²

This is the earliest known mention of Israel in non-biblical sources, and the only one in Egyptian literature. Clearly, our survey has arrived at the point where we find a definable Israel. We now turn to the question of placing the Exodus against the proper historical background.

The Exodus

One naturally wonders if the events of the Exodus can be related to the vast amount of information known about New Kingdom Egypt. In fact, there are no direct confirmations of Israel’s sojourn in Egypt or the Exodus event itself. Nevertheless, some archaeological data can be applied to the biblical account so as to provide a reasonable framework within which to understand the Exodus. Central to any such discussion is the question of the date of the Exodus.

Our discussion will be limited primarily to archaeological data and will of necessity anticipate archaeological data from the period of the Conquest/Settlement, treated for fully in Chapter 7.

The Problem of the Date of the Exodus

An understanding of the chronology surrounding the Exodus is essential to an understanding of the Pentateuch as a whole. For example, the patriarchal period is determined largely by the date assigned to the Exodus. Similarly, the nature of the period of the Judges is dependent on the Exodus date. Indeed, perceptions of the person of Moses himself depend in part on when he is supposed to have lived.

Did it Happen? An attempt to place the Exodus chronologically makes the assumption that the event actually occurred—a premise that many scholars would deny. Arguments for or against such an assumption inevitably move away from archaeological evidence and have no real place here. A couple of general observations will have to suffice.

It is often observed that the nature of the biblical witness itself is evidence for a historical bondage and escape; that is to say, slavery is not the sort of heroic past a people would tend to invent.⁴³ Aside from the story itself, the Bible preserves details that hint at an Egyptian origin for Israel. Egyptian names, for example, are prevalent in the early nation, especially in the tribe of Levi.⁴⁴ Other details in the narratives dealing with the sojourn in Egypt are

⁴²*ANET*, 376-78; see also the translation by Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3 Vols. (Berkeley: University of California, 1976), 2: 73-77.

⁴³For example, John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), 120.

⁴⁴The names of Moses, Hophni, Phinehas, Merari, and Aaron are examples. The name Moses comes from the Egyptian verb *msi*, meaning “to be born,” and is an element in royal names such as Ahmose, Thutmose, and Rameses; Alan Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 570.

consistent with what is known of Egyptian history and culture.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, there is no confirmation of the personalities named by the Bible and no contemporary record to corroborate the Exodus account. We are left, therefore, to work under the assumption that the Exodus took place and see if any archaeological evidence can help put the assumed event into a historical context. As we shall see, however, there is much archaeological data which points to a certain time frame for the Exodus and, in turn, illuminates the event in that setting.

The Two Dates. Two biblical passages which give chronological references for the Exodus from Egypt:

The time that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt (Ex 12:40-41 [RSV]).

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord (1 Ki 6:1).

These passages appear to place the Exodus event within a relative chronology for the Israelite nation. In theory, an actual date for the Exodus could be calculated if other events within the framework could be dated with certainty. Archaeology has provided data which allows the dating of the "fourth year of Solomon's reign" (1 Ki 6:1) to within a few years of 960 BC.⁴⁶ Taken literally, then, 1 Kings 6:1 places the Exodus at about 1440 BC. This date, however, plays havoc with the historical settings of other biblical events whose chronology depends in part on the date of the Exodus. This problem has led to the establishment of two competing dates for the Exodus, the "early" date just described and a "late" date.

The "late" or thirteenth century date (placing the Exodus about 1290-1270 BC) is arrived at by correlation of biblical passages with a compelling number of archaeologically established date ranges. This date has been the most widely accepted among archaeologists and historians and is the one followed here. Unfortunately, the late date cannot be reconciled with a "literal" interpretation of 1 Kings 6:1. This has resulted in a situation where conservative biblical scholars with little or no archaeological training argue for the early date, while historians and archaeologists (including many conservatives) tend to favor the late date. The difference of opinion can be detected by examining a selection of study Bibles or Bible handbooks, where lay persons are often led to the conclusion that the "traditional" early date is more conservative and to be preferred.⁴⁷

Problems with the Early Date. From an archaeological standpoint, not one shred of extrabiblical evidence independently points to a fifteenth century date for the Exodus. Proponents of the early date assume 1 Kings 6:1 as their starting point and interpret other evidence *a priori* to fit their case, while ignoring or attempting to explain away more convincing indicators for the late date. Two bits of archaeological data formerly used to support the early date must now be rejected.

The first is an association of the *Habiru*/^c*Apiru* of the Amarna Tablets (see above) and the biblical "Hebrews." True, a mid-fifteenth century Exodus would place the conquest and settlement at approximately the Amarna period. But, as we have seen, there are serious differences between the accounts of *Habiru* activity in the Amarna letters and the invasion of the Israelites as related in Joshua and Judges. The Amarna texts do not view the *Habiru* as an

⁴⁵It is not possible to present a comprehensive survey of comparative details here. For some details and bibliography, see K. A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977), 75-79; and Charles F. Aling, *Egypt and Bible History: From Earliest Times to 1000 BC* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 25-75.

⁴⁶Dates for the Israelite and Judean kings are arrived at by correlation with known dates in Egyptian and Mesopotamian history. For principles involved and specifics, see David Noel Freedman and Edward F. Campbell, Jr., "The Chronology of Israel and the Ancient Near East," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, G. Ernest Wright (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1965), 265-99; and Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983).

⁴⁷For example, see *The NIV Study Bible*, edited by Kenneth Barker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), introduction to Exodus and timeline in frontispiece, which introduces both dates with a preference for the early one.

invading force or as tribal in nature and there is an ease by which the label *Habiru* could be applied to an enemy—one could “become a *Habiru*.” They frequently operated in league with local kings, while the Bible pictures the conquest with uncompromising hostility toward the Canaanites.⁴⁸ Thus, even advocates of a mid fifteenth century date for the Exodus now reject an outright equation of the Amarna period *Habiru* with the biblical Hebrews.

The second is the oft-repeated claim that the walls of Jericho felled by Joshua have been found. As we shall see in some detail in Chapter 7, this view can no longer be maintained, despite recent attempts to revive it.

An “early” or fifteenth century date for the Exodus would seem allow a period of the Judges sufficiently long to accommodate the 300 year Israelite occupation of the Transjordan span referred to in Judges 11:26. While this may sound attractive, it introduces other serious problems in biblical history. For example, Exodus 12:40 calls for a sojourn in Egypt of 430 years. If this 430 years is added to a 1440 date for the Exodus, the arrival of Jacob and his family in Egypt would fall about 1870 BC, during the Twelfth Dynasty. Such a date would preclude any association of Joseph and the Hyksos period (about 1700-1550 BC). As we saw in Chapter 7, the Joseph account is best understood in a Hyksos context and would be most difficult to reconcile with another period. A similar problem is created on the other end, as there is no evidence for the emergence of Israel in Palestine until about 1200 BC.

1 Kings 6:1. The following discussion demonstrates that the bulk of historical and archaeological evidence undoubtedly favors a thirteenth century setting for the Exodus. It is not unfair to say that except for the chronological reference in 1 Kings 6:1, there likely would be no attempt to reconcile the other biblical material with a fifteenth century date. Nevertheless, for biblical conservatives, the 1 Kings 6:1 reference to 480 years between the Exodus and Solomon’s fourth year begs for an explanation.

Four hundred and eighty is the product of forty and twelve, both significant numbers in the Bible (Ex 11:41-42, in contrast, is neither a product of significant factors nor a round figure). As a generation was often viewed as forty years in the ancient Near East, it has been suggested that 1 Kings 6:1 refers to a period of twelve generations.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the succession of High Priests from Aaron to the return from the Exile can be divided by the construction of Solomon’s Temple into two sections of twelve generations each. The period covered by the second of these sections can be made to equal 480 years. Thus, the first twelve generations could have been reckoned as 480 years by an editor who wished to balance the two periods.⁵⁰ If a generation is figured as the time from the birth of the father to the birth of the son, a length of about twenty-five years would be more reasonable than forty. Twelve generations of twenty-five years would yield a period of about three hundred years. Added to the approximate date of Solomon’s fourth year (about 960 BC), this figure yields an approximate date for the Exodus of 1260 BC, remarkably in line with our other evidence.⁵¹

Finally, we may make an observation regarding apologetic use of data related to the Exodus. While the late date presents a reasonable setting for the event, placing the Exodus in the fifteenth century makes it most difficult to plausibly reconcile the Bible with the known history of the Near East.

The Extreme Early Date. A variation of the arguments for an early date of the Exodus attempts to equate the Israelite invasion of Canaan with a widespread destruction of Palestinian cities at the end of the Middle Bronze Age. The destruction of many cities in Palestine at this time is usually connected with the expulsion of the Hyksos from Egypt, about 1550 BC. The theory of John Bimson would attempt to reduce the date of these destructions by about one hundred years, and attribute them to the Israelite invasion.⁵²

This scheme would solve the problem that Jericho presents for reconstructions of the conquest; that is, the paucity of evidence for a Late Bronze city. The pottery which is missing from Jericho is the finely made “Bichrome Ware,” a transitional form between the Middle and Late Bronze Ages, and typical of the LB I period. Thus it is

⁴⁸See Greenburg, *Hab/piru*, 93-96; Aling, *Egypt*, 109-110.

⁴⁹W. F. Albright, “Syria, the Philistines, and Phoenicia,” in *CAH*, Vol. 2, Part 2, 522.

⁵⁰R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 317.

⁵¹Van Seters, *Hyksos*, 181-91.

⁵²John J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest* JSOTS 5 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1978), 115-17. The reduction in the dates is necessary for other chronological considerations.

assumed that Joshua was responsible for destroying the last MB level at Jericho and elsewhere. Sites other than Jericho which were destroyed at the end of the MB typically contain Bichrome Ware in the following LB I phase. Therefore, a reduction of the end of the Middle Bronze at these sites (and, thus, their destruction) is dependent on a lowering of the dates for Bichrome Ware.

More detailed consideration of Bimson's theory will be given in Chapter 7. While it may be possible to disassociate the appearance of Bichrome Ware from the expulsion of the Hyksos, the drastic lowering of the MB-LB transition creates more problems than it solves.⁵³ Furthermore, even if the destructions marking the end of the MB are viewed as coming later than the expulsion of the Hyksos, the pharaohs of the mid-Eighteenth Dynasty still would be the most likely agent for them; much more so than would an invasion of Israelites.

The Exodus in a Thirteenth Century BC Setting

Exodus 12:40-41, Joseph, and the Hyksos. There are a number of indications, outlined below, that the Israelites emerged in Palestine in the closing decades of the thirteenth century. If, for the moment, we accept a provisional date of about 1230 BC for the conquest and allow for the generation in the wilderness, we arrive at a date of about 1270 BC for the Exodus. Unlike the early date, this figure allows for an association of Joseph with the Hyksos.

Exodus 12:40-41 indicates that the sojourn in Egypt lasted 430 years. Added to a 1270 BC date for the Exodus, a figure of about 1700 BC is reached for the move into Egypt by Israel. This corresponds approximately with the beginning of the Hyksos Period (or, Second Intermediate Period) in Egypt.

The Store City Pithom and Succoth. According to Exodus 1:11, the Israelites labored on the "store cities" Pithom and Raamses. They should be sought in the eastern part of the Delta region, especially in the region of the Wadi Tumilat, the location of the Land of Goshen.

The name Pithom corresponds easily with the Egyptian *Pr-Itm*, or Per-Atum, meaning "House of Atum." Atum is a name for the sun-god, so Per-Atum might be applied to any center of worship of the god Atum. Excavations by Naville at Tell el-Maskhuta in the eastern part of the Wadi Tumilat revealed monuments from the time of Rameses II, a later temple of Atum, and two inscriptions naming *Pr-Itm*. In addition, two Roman fragments were found mentioning Ero, the shortened Latin form of the Greek name Heroopolis (a Greek translation of "Per Atum," meaning "city of Hero"), which also occurs in the LXX of Genesis 46:28-29. In addition, remains of what were thought to be storehouses were found at the site and bricks there were found to be made without straw.⁵⁴ These evidences led Naville to identify Tell el-Maskhuta with the biblical Pithom. A number of inscriptions at the site also feature the name *Ṭkw*, equivalent to the biblical Succoth, first encampment on the Exodus itinerary (Ex 12:37; 13:20; Num 33:5-6). Naville concluded that Pithom was the religious name for the site, while Succoth was the civil name.

Recent reinvestigation of Tell el-Maskhuta, however, has made it unlikely that the site was built by the Israelites. While there was an Asiatic occupation there in during the Hyksos period, there is a gap in the pottery evidence from the late MB period down to the seventh century BC. Ramesside monuments and others mentioning Atum were apparently imported to the site during the seventh century, when the Atum temple was built, or later.⁵⁵

There is other evidence that Pithom should be located elsewhere. The most common name in the inscriptional evidence at Tell el-Maskhuta is *Ṭkw*, while *Pr Itm* is found but twice (and on later monuments). One of the Ero inscriptions at the site gives the distance from Ero (= Heroopolis = Per Atum) to Clusma as nine. It has been argued

⁵³Bright, *History*, 123, n. 36.

⁵⁴Edouard Naville, *The Store-City of Pithom and The Route of the Exodus*, 4th ed. (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1903); North, *Archeo-Biblical Egypt*, 94, n. 29.

⁵⁵John S. Holladay, Jr., "Maskhuta, Tell el-," *ABD*, 4:588-92, suggests that Jewish refugees who came to the Delta region at the time of the Babylonian Exile (Jer 41:1-45:1) may have erroneously used the later imported objects to identify the site, then called Per Atum, as a city (Pithom) built by their forefathers.

that Pithom should be located nine miles away from Maskhuta, rather than at the site itself.⁵⁶ This distance westward brings one exactly to the site of Tell er-Rataba, where excavations discovered remains of a Ramesside temple to Atum.⁵⁷ That Succoth and Pithom were distinct places is indicated by the Papyrus Anastasi VI, in which a border official reports having allowed Bedouin of Edom to pass the fortress of *Tkw*, to reach “pools of Pithom” some distance to the west.⁵⁸ Thus it seems more reasonable to identify Pithom with Tell er-Rataba.

Tell el-Maskhuta would seem to be the fortress of *Tkw* (= Succoth), but for the problematic lack of pottery from the LB period. It is clear, however, that *Tkw*/Succoth existed and functioned in the Ramesside period, as evidenced by the papyri and a fragment bearing both cartouches of Rameses II and the name *Tkw* at Tell el-Maskhuta. *Tkw* in the Papyrus Anastasi VI (cited above) and other Egyptian texts seems to be a regional designation, perhaps of the eastern Wadi Tumilat. The name Succoth means “tents,” and its Egyptian counterpart may reflect the area’s history of occupation by tent-dwelling Asiatics. In any case, it would seem unlikely that the Israelites would choose to camp at an occupied Egyptian city, so the biblical reference to Succoth as the first stop on the Exodus may indicate an encampment in the region of *Tkw*. There is no evidence for New Kingdom activity at either Tell el-Maskhuta or Tell er-Rataba prior to the Ramesside period and there are no possibilities for identification of Pithom for an early (fifteenth century) Exodus.

Raamses/Rameses. “Raamses” in Exodus 1:11 is clearly a reference to the well-known capital city Pi-Ramesse (see above). As the name Pi-Rameses (“domain of Rameses”) is only known from the Nineteenth Dynasty, the biblical reference to Raamses is convincing evidence that the Exodus should be placed in the thirteenth century. It is often lamented that the Bible does not name the pharaoh of the Exodus; but in mentioning the city named Raamses it comes mighty close to doing so.

Pi-Ramesse was formerly identified with the site of San el-Hagar in the northeast Delta, as a large number of monuments of Rameses II were unearthed there.⁵⁹ The Arabic San is equivalent to Zoan in Numbers 13:22. In the LXX, Zoan is rendered “Tanis,” the Greek name for the city of *Dja^cnet*, joint capital of Egypt under the Twenty-First Dynasty (founded about 1170 BC).⁶⁰

The identification of San with Tanis is clear, but its identification with Pi-Ramesse is certainly mistaken. In a Nineteenth Dynasty list of cities, both Tanis and Pi-Ramesse are mentioned, separated by several other cities. It is true that many monuments of Rameses II’s residence city have been found at Tanis. Not one of these, however, comes from a structure whose foundations date to the Nineteenth Dynasty—all were transported to Tanis from elsewhere to be reused as cheap building material. Furthermore, Tanis yields no small everyday finds from the Ramesside period.⁶¹

Recent excavations have made positive an identification of Pi-Ramesse with Tell el-Dab^ca and the surrounding modern villages of Khata^cna and Qantir. A number of mounds in the area have produced find and evidence of occupation from the Middle Kingdom, Hyksos Period, and Nineteenth Dynasty. Qantir has produced some remarkable blue glazed tiles depicting scenes characteristic of a throne room and bearing the names of Seti I and Rameses II. In addition, small finds from the Nineteenth Dynasty abound, including ostraca bearing the name Per Rameses. Ramesside foundations include doorways to dwellings of chief ministers of Rameses II and the base of a colossal statue of that king. These finds, indicating a palace with an extensive bureaucracy, point to the identification

⁵⁶Alan H. Gardiner, “The Delta Residence of the Ramesides,” *JEA* 5 (1918): 267-68.

⁵⁷W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Egypt and Israel*, rev. ed. (London: S.P.C.K., 1923), 33-34.

⁵⁸*ANET*, 259.

⁵⁹Early work was conducted by Rifud in 1833, Mariette in 1861, followed by Petrie in 1883/1884; see W. M. Flinders Petrie, *Tanis: Part I., 1883-4* (London: Egypt Exploration Fund, 1885), and idem, *Tanis: Part II., Nebesheh (Am) and Defenneh (Tahpanhes)* (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1888).

⁶⁰So Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs*, 258.

⁶¹Van Seters, *Hyksos*, 128-31; Bimson, *Redating the Exodus*, 39-42.

of Qantir/Tell el-Dab^ca with Pi-Ramesse.⁶² This also must have been the city “Raamses” built by the Israelites (Ex 1:11) and the starting point for the Exodus (Ex 12:37).

Prior to the rebuilding, there was a gap in the settlement of the area for most of Dynasty 18; reoccupation only beginning during the reign of Horemheb.⁶³ The possibility that the author of Exodus 1:11 used the name “Raamses” retroactively, with the Israelites having worked at the site in the mid fifteenth century, is thus eliminated.

Pi-Ramesse, Avaris, and the Land of Goshen. Pi-Ramesse was built on the site of the Hyksos capital, Avaris (Egyptian *Hawac^cre*).⁶⁴ This is indicated by the continuity in worship of the god Seth attested by the 400 Year Stele (see above), and a similarity in the topographical situations of the two cities in the epigraphic evidence.⁶⁵ The archaeological evidence at Tell el-Dab^ca provides a confirmation in the numerous dwellings and objects of Canaanite type uncovered there, along with a complex of two large Canaanite temples. In addition, there is evidence for another temple, including a lintel dedicated to Seth (by the epithet Sutekh) and bearing the names of Horemheb. This find corroborates the building of a shrine (by Seti, father of Rameses II) under Horemheb for Seth at Avaris, as indicated by the 400 Year Stele.⁶⁶

The physical location of the Egyptian capital is a factor in determining the date of the Exodus. The narratives describing Moses’ intercourse with Pharaoh imply an ease of access. The royal court must have been in close proximity to the land of Goshen; in other words, in or near the Delta region. From the expulsion of the Hyksos until the reign of Akhenaten, however, the Dynasty 18 capital was at Waset (biblical No-Amon), better known by its Greek name, Thebes, whose location in Upper Egypt precluded the ease of access described in Exodus.

The Land of Goshen also must have been near the capital of Joseph’s time (Gen 45:10), but towards Canaan from it (Gen 46:28). We have already seen that Joseph likely served a Hyksos pharaoh; and therefore at Avaris. The equation of Avaris and Pi-Ramesse would place both capitals in the same close proximity of the Land of Goshen. In this regard we note that the LXX of Genesis 46:28 reads “Land of Rameses” instead of “Land of Goshen,” perhaps equating the two. In summary, then, both the capital of Joseph’s day and at the time of the Exodus are best sought in the eastern Nile Delta. Avaris/Pi-Ramesse suits the biblical account perfectly, and only the late date for the Exodus allows this reconstruction.

The Route of the Exodus. Some limited data provides general information about the direction taken at the beginning of the Exodus journey. It is clear, for example, that the Israelites did not go “by the way of the land of the Philistines” (Ex 13:17), apparently a reference to the northern Sinai military road known to the Egyptians as the “Way of Horus.” After a stop at “Etham, on the edge of the wilderness” (Ex 13:20), it seems that the Israelites took a more southerly route and camped “in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal Zephon” (Ex 14:2). It has been suggested that the name Pi-hahiroth (Exod 14:1) can mean “the mouth of the depression (of digging),” and may be a reference to a canal, examples of which are known at the eastern limit of the Delta. A canal may have

⁶²Manfred Bietak, *Avaris and Piramesse: Archaeological Exploration in the Eastern Nile Delta*, rev. ed. (London: Oxford, 1986), 226-31.

⁶³Bietak, *Avaris and Piramesse*, 232-37.

⁶⁴The curious note in Numbers 13:22 that “Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt,” is significant for the date of the Exodus only if Avaris/Pi-Ramesse can be identified with Tanis/Zoan. In that case, the verse would indicate that Hebron was built shortly before Avaris, the Hyksos capital. By implication, Abraham could not have been active around the city of Hebron long before the beginning of the Hyksos period in Egypt; see W. F. Albright, “Archaeology and the Date of the Hebrew Conquest of Palestine,” *BASOR* 58 (April 1935): 16; who also finds a striking similarity in the 400 years of the Four Hundred Year Stele and the 430 years of the sojourn (Exodus 12:40).. With the equation of Avaris with Pi-Ramesse, however, the note in Numbers 13:22 becomes enigmatic. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus*, 202-203, suggests that the building of Hebron refers not to the MB city (Kiriath-arba) of Abraham’s day, but to an Israelite reconstruction in the Iron Age, seven years before the rebuilding of Tanis in the Twenty-first Dynasty (about 1070 bc).

⁶⁵Alan H. Gardiner, “Tanis and Pi-Ramesse: A Retraction,” *JEA* 19 (November 1933):122-28; Van Seters, *Hyksos*, 127.

⁶⁶Bietak, *Avaris and Piramesse*, 247-56, 270.

formed part of the Egyptian defensive barrier against Asiatic incursions, known in earlier times as the Wall-of-the-Ruler (in the Tale of Sinuhe, for example). “Migdol” means “fortress” and probably refers to a fortress of the same defensive system. These defensive barriers may have been the reason Pharaoh was expected to say, “they are entangled in the land; the wilderness has shut them in” (Ex 14:3). But this must have been a known route of escape, for the Papyrus Anastasi V preserves a late thirteenth century report of an Egyptian frontier official tracking escaping slaves, on a path strikingly like that described of the Exodus:

. . . following after these two slaves Now when I reached the enclosure-wall of Tjeku on the third month of the third season, day 10, they told me they were saying to the south that they had passed by on the 3rd month of the third season, day 10. [Now] when [I] reached the fortress, they told me that the *scout* had come from the desert [saying that] they had passed the walled place north of the Migdol of Seti-Merneptah.⁶⁷

In both cases, Tjeku (*Tkw*)/Succoth and a fortress/Migdol are mentioned and a southerly direction taken. It is impossible to locate the crossing of the Red (or “Reed”) Sea, although the Bitter Lakes region seems likely. Indeed, beyond Raamses and Succoth, any attempt to identify the encampments of the Exodus is tenuous at best. There is simply no archaeological evidence for the Israelites in the wilderness, nor should we expect there to be. Most of the names of the Israelite camps in Sinai relate to events during the Exodus itself and modern Arabic reflections of those names are more likely based on local legend than any genuine connection with the biblical sites.

The location of Mt. Sinai is a vexing problem for which a number of solutions have been proposed, apart from the traditional site at Jebel Musa in southern Sinai. Most identifications are based on literary considerations and have little or no archaeological support.⁶⁸

Midianites. The biblical account credits Moses’ father in law Jethro (also called Hobab), a Midianite priest (Ex 2:16; 3:1), with guiding the Israelites from Sinai (Num 10:29-32). Though Midian proper was located east of the Gulf of Aqaba in the northwest corner of the Arabian peninsula, there is ample evidence for Midianites in the Sinai and other wilderness areas south of Palestine. Of particular interest is the Timna^c Valley, at the south end of the Arabah, where Egypt operated copper mines utilizing Midianite and Amalekite workers. An Egyptian temple to Hathor at the site was rebuilt as a Midianite shrine after the Egyptian withdrawal at the end of the Ramesside period. It apparently was a tent shrine, similar in nature to the Israelite’s portable “Tent of Meeting” (Ex 26:7; 33:7). Of many objects found associated with the shrine, the most interesting is a copper snake with a gilded head, recalling the bronze serpent (Nehushtan) made by Moses in the wilderness (Num 21:8-9).⁶⁹

Later Stages of the Exodus. In contrast with the earlier Exodus encampments in Sinai, the location of Kadesh-barnea (Num 13:26) is well established, although there are no remains at the site from the period of the Exodus. This is the case with many of the subsequent camps. The route from Kadesh-barnea on can be traced, but there is nothing to report in the way of contemporary evidence at the sites.⁷⁰

The lack of LB strata at various sites has been used as evidence to deny the veracity of the Exodus and conquest accounts.⁷¹ Excavations at Dhiban, apparently to be identified with Dibon of the Numbers 33 Exodus itinerary, have revealed no significant LB remains. But the biblical itinerary, including Dibon, is echoed in Egyptian topographical lists of the New Kingdom. Rameses II even conquered the place, which therefore must have existed during the period.⁷²

⁶⁷ANET, 259.

⁶⁸For a review, see George L. Kelm, *Escape to Conflict: A Biblical and Archaeological Approach to the Hebrew Exodus and Settlement in Canaan* (Fort Worth: IAR Publications, 1991), 83-91.

⁶⁹Beno Rothenberg, *Were These King Solomon’s Mines? Excavations in the Timna Valley* (New York: Stein and Day, 1972), 125-84.

⁷⁰MBA, map 52.

⁷¹William G. Dever, “Israel, History of (Archaeology and the “Conquest”),” *ABD*, 3: 548.

⁷²Charles R. Krahmalkov, “Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence,” *BAR* 20 (Sept/Oct 1994): 54-62, 79.

Mention should be made here of a find dating some centuries after the Exodus. Excavation of an eighth century BC house at Tell Deir Alla (perhaps biblical Succoth of the Transjordan), discovered a plaster inscription naming Balaam, the prophet . . .

The Israel Stele. The mention of Israel in the Merneptah Stele (see above) is the earliest known in non-biblical sources. As Israel is mentioned among other enemies in Canaan, it thus provides a lower limit for the conquest of about 1220 BC (or 1207, by the low chronology).

A 1220 BC date for an encounter between Israel and Egypt is of course compatible with either date for the Exodus. Indeed, one could argue for the early date on the basis that Israel would require some time to become an obstacle to Egyptian control over Canaan. But while the names of the other enemies in Canaan (Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yanoam) are written with the Egyptian determinative for “country, land,” Israel is written with the determinative for “people.” The implication is that the Israelite tribes were in Canaan in force, but had not (yet) established definable territorial boundaries.⁷³ In other words, when assuming an actual Exodus event and conquest, the Merneptah Stele is evidence that Israel had recently arrived in the land in 1220 BC.⁷⁴

Four battle scene reliefs carved into an outer wall of the Amun Temple at Karnak, formerly attributed to Rameses II, are now dated to the reign of Merneptah. It has been shown that the four scenes correspond to the four enemies vanquished in Canaan according to the Merneptah Stele. Three scenes show attacks on fortified cities and one depicts the rout of a group in open territory. One of the besieged cities is identified as Ashkelon, which is also named in the stele. The other two cities, whose names have not survived on the reliefs, must be Gezer and Yanoam as named in the stele, while the group without a city must represent Israel, the only enemy named as a “people” rather than a territorial entity.⁷⁵ Thus, in addition to the earliest literary evidence, Merneptah has provided us with the earliest depiction of Israel. The manner of Israel’s depiction is fuel for another debate about the nature of the conquest.⁷⁶

The Conquest and Israelite Settlement in Palestine. As we shall see in the next chapter, the exact nature of the Israelite conquest is a complicated question. If one assumes a violent conquest of Palestine as traditionally interpreted in Joshua, the archaeological evidence clearly favors a thirteenth century date for the Exodus. That is not to imply that the evidence is unambiguous and absolute, but a number of cities said to have been destroyed by the invading Israelites exhibit destruction levels dating to the late thirteenth century BC. While there exists no proof for the agent in the destruction levels at the end of the Late Bronze Age in Palestine, they are well clustered around a locus in the late thirteenth century—about 1230 BC. If these destructions are related to the Israelite invasion, a resulting date for the Exodus would fall within the early decades of Rameses II.

Whatever may be said concerning the numerous destructions of Canaanite cities at the end of the Late Bronze Age, they were not the major change between that period and the ensuing Iron Age I. The real change took place in the settlement pattern of Palestine. Small unfortified settlements appear by the hundreds at the beginning of the Iron Age, about 1200 BC. The distribution of these sites, their planning and location, the composition of the pottery assemblage, and the apparent social structure clearly represent the beginnings of the tradition which can reasonably be called Israelite.⁷⁷

⁷³Lawrence E. Stager, “Merneptah, Israel and Sea Peoples: New Light on an Old Relief,” *EI* 18 (1985): 56*-64*.

⁷⁴Objections to the effect that Egyptian scribes were not consistent in their use of determinatives and slow to change the way in which they wrote words, amount to special pleading. The other enemies listed in the text of the Merneptah stele are identified by the proper determinatives; *ANET*, 378, n. 18; Stager “Merneptah, Israel and Sea Peoples,” 59*-61*. There is no reason to assume that Israel is an exception apart from a predisposition to a fifteenth century Exodus.

⁷⁵Frank J. Yurco, “3,200-Year-Old Picture of Israelites Found in Egypt,” *BAR* 16 (Sept/Oct 1990): 20-38.

⁷⁶Anson F. Rainey, “Rainey’s Challenge,” and Frank J. Yurco, “Yurco’s Response,” *BAR* 17 (Nov/Dec 1991): 54-61, 93.; Diana Edelman, “Who or What Was Israel?,” and Rainey, [“Anson Rainey Replies”], *BAR* 18 (Mar/Apr 1992): 21, 72-74.

⁷⁷David Noel Freedman, “The Chairman’s Introduction,” in *BAT*, 31; Mazar, “Excavations,” 70.

Evidence for the existence of Israel in Canaan simply does not exist prior to the late thirteenth century, a fact which is fatal to “early date” reconstructions of the Exodus. It is only with the beginning of the Iron Age that we find the emergence of Israel, and to that subject we turn in Chapter 7.