

EGYPT AND EARLY ISRAEL'S CULTURAL SETTING: A QUEST FOR EVIDENTIAL POSSIBILITIES

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One of the most complex problems in biblical studies is the identification of early Israel's cultural and historical setting. The difficulties revolve around the date of Israel's exodus from Egypt and the implications of that date for Israel's patriarchal age, the Mosaic age, the conquest, and the Judges. The debates that swirl around I Kgs 6:1, Exod 12:40, Judg 11:26, and Gal 3:17 are too well known to need repeating here. The difference in perspective can be seen by comparing Eugene Merrill with James Hoffmeier. Merrill argued that patriarchal age dates could be fixed accurately on the basis of biblical data.¹ Hoffmeier argued that biblical chronology was fluid and uncertain while Egyptian chronology was absolute.² The perceived uncertainty of biblical chronology has led many authors to seek a cultural and historical setting in which the biblical text can be understood. Yet the search for this setting has been problematic because each author's presuppositions have influenced the application of cultural parallels.

I. EGYPTIAN CHRONOLOGICAL UNCERTAINTIES

Israel's interaction with Egypt was a key part of Israel's early cultural and historical setting. Any attempt to place Israel's history into an Egyptian context must wrestle with the vexing problem of Egyptian chronology. Hoffmeier claimed that Egyptian chronology was absolute because specific dates for ruler's reigns could be defended. Egyptian chronology has actually been debated as fiercely as biblical chronology, although those debates have revolved around shorter time periods. Even the sequence of rulers during the Hyksos era and the end of the 18th Dynasty has been debated. K. A. Kitchen noted that the earliest date in Egyptian history that everyone agreed was fixed was the beginning of Psammetichus I's reign in 664 BC.³ Before that time, all Egyptian dates have been controversial to some degree. Kitchen

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¹ Eugene H. Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," *BSac* 137 (1980) 241–51.

² James K. Hoffmeier, "What is the Biblical Date for the Exodus: A Response to Bryant Wood," *JETS* 50 (2007) 228.

³ K. A. Kitchen, "The Basics of Egyptian Chronology in Relation to the Bronze Age," in *High, Middle or Low? Acts of an International Colloquium on Absolute Chronology Held in the University of Gothenburg 20th-22nd August 1987 Part I* (Gothenburg: Paul Åströms, 1987) 37–38.

argued that pre-dynastic Egyptian dates were only accurate within 300 years. Dates from the first two dynasties were only correct within 200 years. Old Kingdom dates were correct within a century. Middle Kingdom dates were correct within 20 or 30 years, and New Kingdom dates were correct within 10 or 20 years.⁴

Controversies over Egyptian chronology have arisen because the ancient Egyptians did not systematize their world view. They saw the world as a collection of inconsistent fragments bound together by a mysterious unity.⁵ Egyptian chronology was characterized by a lack of precision. Each ruler's reign was an independent fragment of reality. Other than writing king lists, the Egyptians did not construct a broad historical overview with a consistent chronology.⁶ It took a man with a Greek mindset like Manetho to divide Egypt's rulers into dynasties and to construct a historical system. The ancient Egyptians began their chronology anew with the coronation of each ruler. Egyptian texts typically referred to an event that occurred during a specific year of a specific ruler's reign. Few texts indicated how many years a ruler reigned, and only a limited number of texts indicated the succession of rulers.

The earliest text that traced Egypt's rulers was the Palermo Stone. It was written in the 5th Dynasty around 2400 BC, and it traced Egypt's rulers in the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom periods. The Palermo Stone calculated king's reigns by counting the biannual census of Egyptian cattle.⁷ The most important Egyptian king list was written by Manetho in the 3rd century BC. In his book *Aegyptiaca*, Manetho traced Egypt's rulers from approximately 3100 BC to 332 BC. He divided Egypt's rulers into 30 dynasties. Manetho's list of rulers was the only complete king list from ancient Egypt, and it recorded the lengths of their reigns. Yet Manetho's list was not always right. It may have been based on secondary documents instead of Egyptian monuments, and its accuracy has increasingly been a cause for concern. Manetho's chronology suggested that the 18th Dynasty began around 1700 BC, which is too early. Manetho also confused the rulers at the end of the 18th Dynasty listing three rulers named Akencheres.⁸ Manetho's text has not survived. It has been reconstructed from the ancient authors who used it, but those reconstructions are not always consistent.

⁴ K. A. Kitchen, "The Chronology of Ancient Egypt," *World Archaeology* 23/2 (1991) 202.

⁵ See the discussion in: Sabatino Moscati, *The Face of the Ancient Orient* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960) 11. H. Frankfort, et al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946) 33. Rudolf Anthes, "Egyptian Theology in the Third Millennium B.C.," *JNES* 18 (1959) 170. Hans Goedicke, "Unity and Diversity in the Oldest Religion of Ancient Egypt," in *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975) 201. Claas J. Bleeker, *Egyptian Festivals: Enactments of Religious Renewal* (Leiden: Brill, 1967) 14.

⁶ For ancient Egyptian unconcern with chronological precision, see the discussion in William A. Ward, "The Present Status of Egyptian Chronology," *BASOR* 288 (1992) 53–66.

⁷ Alan Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) 69–71.

⁸ See the discussion in Donald B. Redford, "On the Chronology of the Egyptian Eighteenth Dynasty," *JNES* 25 (1966) 122.

Three important king lists have been found at Karnak, Abydos, and Saqqara.⁹ The Karnak king list was written during the reign of Thutmose III. The king list at Abydos was written during the reign of the 19th Dynasty ruler Seti I. It contained 67 names. The king list at Saqqara was written during the reign of Ramesses II. It included 58 names. These lists were inconsistent. Each omitted some names and placed other names in an unexpected order.¹⁰ None of these lists included the lengths of the kings' reigns. Another important king list was the Turin Papyrus. It listed rulers through Ramesses II, and it probably was written either during or shortly after his reign. It is a fragmentary document that has broken into 160 pieces. It is not always clear how the fragments related to each other, and it is a popular topic of debate.¹¹ The Turin Papyrus did list the lengths of Pharaohs' reigns although the accuracy of its claims has often been questioned.¹² Part of the debate over king lists has centered on the possibility of coregencies and the impact of coregencies on Egyptian chronology.¹³ Coregencies were used in the Middle Kingdom, but proposed New Kingdom coregencies have been fiercely debated.

Egyptian chronology has also been traced by looking for linkages with other cultures. For example, the Hittite king Suppiluliuma I interacted with the widow of an Egyptian king who may have been Tutankhamun.¹⁴ She asked Shuppiluliuma I for a Hittite prince as a bridegroom. Wente and van Siclen used this parallel to justify their claim that Tutankhamun came to the throne in 1332 BC and Akhenaten in 1348 BC.¹⁵ These linkages have also been used to date Hittite history.¹⁶ Chronological conclusions drawn from historical linkages often contain an element of circularity.

The most important evidence for Egyptian chronology has been found in the Egyptian texts that indicated the historical context of astronomical observations. The problems with these texts begin with the nature of astronomical data. It is difficult to construct a calendar that is correct over long time periods because the solar year is actually 365.24 days long. Modern calendars adjust for the extra quarter day by adding February 29 during the leap year. Ancient cultures dealt with the additional quarter day in

⁹ Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* 147–48.

¹⁰ Pierre Montet, *Eternal Egypt* (New York: New American Library of World Literature, 1964) xvii.

¹¹ *Ibid.* xvii.

¹² See the discussion and critique of Kitchen's argument in John J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978) 90.

¹³ For the debate over a coregency of Seti I and Ramesses II, see Peter J. Brand, *The Monuments of Seti I: Epigraphic, Historical and Art Historical Analysis* (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 309–16.

¹⁴ K. A. Kitchen, *Suppiluliuma and the Amarna Pharaohs* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1962) 22.

¹⁵ Edward F. Wente and Charles C. Van Siclen III, "A Chronology of the New Kingdom," in *Studies in Honor of George R. Hughes* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1976) 248–50. These are not dates with which everyone would agree. Kitchen argued that Akhenaten came to the throne in 1352 BC while Tutankhamun was crowned in 1336 BC. Kitchen, "The Basics of Egyptian Chronology" 52.

¹⁶ Bryce Trevor, *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998) 410.

different ways, and these differences complicate attempts at chronological precision.

This problem affected Egyptian Sothic Cycle dating. Egyptian Middle Kingdom chronology relies heavily on Sothic Cycle dating, while New Kingdom chronology relies on both Sothic dating and chronological evidence in historical records. Sothic cycle dating was based on texts that mentioned the date of the first annual appearance of the star Sothis (or Sirius). Since this star was located in the southern sky, it fell below the horizon for 70 days each year. Then it reappeared beside the sun at dawn. This day was called the heliacal rising of Sothis. A total of seven texts have been found that mentioned the first appearance of the star Sothis on a specific date. These texts were written during the reigns of the Middle Kingdom ruler Sesostri III, the New Kingdom rulers Amenhotep I, Thutmose III, and Ramesses I, as well as Ptolemy Euergetes in the Greek period. These texts provide the most important evidence for Egyptian chronology.

The heliacal rising of Sothis was important because the Egyptian calendar had no leap year. Without a leap year, the Egyptian calendar floated one day earlier than the physical year every four years. Over time, a calendar date in the winter would eventually occur in the fall, then the summer, then the spring, and finally in the winter again. Since the calendar date retreated one day every four years, the Sothic cycles were theoretically 1460 years long.¹⁷ The date that Sothis appeared could in theory be converted into an absolute year within the four-year margin of error built into the system. Unfortunately, Sothic dating involved a number of uncertainties. The most important variable in Sothic dating was the latitude of an observation. Since Sothis was in the southern sky, the number of days that it was below the horizon decreased as an observer moved south. The traditional Egyptian claim was that Sothis was invisible for 70 days. Rose noted that the star was invisible at Memphis for 70 days but only 55 days at Elephantine.¹⁸ So the first appearance of Sothis was earlier in the south than the north. As an observer moved south, the date implied by a Sothic observation was roughly four years earlier for each degree of latitude south. Unfortunately, the texts that gave Sothic dates never indicated the location of the observation. The most popular locations proposed for Sothic observations have been Memphis or Heliopolis in the Nile delta, Thebes in the center of the Nile valley, and Elephantine near Egypt's southern border. These sites have been proposed

¹⁷ For discussions of Sothic dating, see Richard A. Parker, "The Sothic Dating of the Twelfth and Eighteenth Dynasties," in *Studies in Honor of George R. Hughes* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1976) 182–183. Lynn E. Rose, "The Astronomical Evidence for Dating the End of the Middle Kingdom of Ancient Egypt to the Early Second Millennium: a Reassessment," *JNES* 53 (1994) 241. Ian Shaw, "Introduction: Chronologies and Cultural Change in Egypt," *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 11.

¹⁸ Rose used this to argue that Sothic observations were made in the delta ("The Astronomical Evidence for Dating the End of the Middle Kingdom" 237, 245–46). Unfortunately, Egyptian religious texts were a wild collage of contradictory motifs. No attempt was made to systematize or correct incompatible claims, so the Egyptians could easily have affirmed a 70-day absence of Sothis at a place where the star was actually invisible for only 55 days.

because of the location where specific texts were found and the cultural importance of the sites. Memphis and Thebes were Egyptian capitals at different times. The choice of locations defended for Sothic observations has led to high and low chronologies for both the Middle Kingdom and the New Kingdom. For the last 30 years, low dates for the New Kingdom have been assumed by many (although not all) Egyptologists and ancient Near Eastern scholars. Some evangelical authors continue to use the traditional high dates for 18th and 19th Dynasty rulers.

Texts which mentioned phases of the moon have also played a role in the debate. Lunar phases repeat on the same date of the Egyptian calendar every 25 years because 25 Egyptian years contain almost exactly the same number of days as 25 lunar years. If the general date can be determined, lunar texts could in principle help pin down a more precise date. For example, Parker argued that lunar data on papyrus 10,056 suggested that the 30/31st year of Amenemhat III occurred in 1813/1812 BC or either 25 or 50 years earlier.¹⁹ Lunar observations may or may not correlate with proposed chronologies, and they tend to be discounted unless they support proposed chronologies. Trevor Bryce noted that astronomical evidence is so problematic that it is losing its popularity among Egyptologists.²⁰ Especially New Kingdom chronology is now drawn on the basis of other details recorded in historical texts at least as much as Sothic dates.

II. ISRAEL'S PATRIARCHAL AGE BY A 19TH DYNASTY EXODUS MODEL

Working from a 19th Dynasty perspective, Kitchen argued that Israel's patriarchal age should be dated between 1900 and 1600 BC, or 2000 to 1500 at the outside limit. Abraham would then have been born during the Middle Kingdom while much of the patriarchal age would have occurred during the 2d Intermediate Period. Kitchen argued that this cultural setting for the Patriarchs could be demonstrated from the use of personal names, the history of Transjordan and the Negev, the scope of travel, religious customs, social and legal usage, and even the price paid for a slave.²¹ Kitchen argued that Joseph would have entered Egypt between 1720 and 1700 BC, while Jacob may have entered Egypt around 1690 or 1680 BC. Kitchen noted that the Egyptian 13th Dynasty already included rulers with Semitic names who reigned briefly between 1795 and 1640 BC.²² Based on these dates, Joseph would have entered Egypt around the time that the Hyksos were seizing

¹⁹ Parker, "Sothic Dating of the Twelfth and Eighteenth Dynasties" 181.

²⁰ Bryce, *Kingdom of the Hittites* 413.

²¹ Several of these lines of evidence can be applied equally to an 18th or 19th Dynasty model for Israel's early history. The main weight of the evidence bears against those who move Israel's patriarchal age from the MB to the LB or Iron Age.

²² K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 10. K. A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977) 68–74.

control of Avaris in the northwest Nile delta. Jacob would have entered Egypt when the Hyksos were firmly in control of the northeast delta but before the Hyksos seized control of the whole nation. Joseph settled his brothers in the land of Goshen. This was in the middle of the Hyksos territory, so by a 19th Dynasty model, Joseph would have served one of the Hyksos kings as Josephus claimed.

Genesis 37:28 noted that Joseph was sold to the Midianites for 20 shekels. K. A. Kitchen noted that the average slave price during the Ur III period averaged 10 shekels. After the 18th/17th centuries BC, prices slowly rose. However, the Mari texts and the Old Babylonian texts recorded slave prices between 15 and 30 shekels. So Kitchen argued that Joseph's sale price was appropriate to the time period.²³ This is a strong argument for the general historical setting of the patriarchal account. One limitation of the argument is that it may not give strong evidence for the choice between an 18th and 19th Dynasty model for Israel's early history. Another limitation is that Joseph was a special case. He was raised as the favorite son of a tribal chieftain. He had seen from the cradle the administration of a large household. He was probably literate. Patriarchal literacy may be implied by the reference to Judah's seal and cord in Gen 38:18. It is unlikely that Judah would have carried a cylinder seal to validate documents that he could not read. Joseph's later responsibilities in Egypt would also have required literacy. At the same time, the Midianite traders would have had to pass through Jacob's territory in the future, and they may have feared his retribution. It is hard to know how Joseph's sale price may have been influenced by his background, training, and family relationships. All of that suggests that Joseph's sale price may not provide the strongest chronological evidence.

Genesis 39:1 provided an example of a historical parallel that fits a 19th Dynasty model. This passage noted that Joseph was sold to Potiphar. Genesis 41:45 added that Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife who was the daughter of Potiphera. Hoffmeier noted that both names were transliterations of the same Egyptian name, *p3 di p3 r3*.²⁴ Kitchen argued that this variety of name only appeared in Egypt during the 19th Dynasty and contended that Moses would have written Genesis at this time. Kitchen noted that the name itself was written on a stela around 1070 BC.²⁵ That would be the transition between the 20th and 21st Dynasties, and it would be two centuries after the exodus by a 19th Dynasty model.²⁶ Alan Rowe argued that the names Potiphar and Potiphera should be placed at an even later time. He argued that they were a kind of name that became common in Egypt after 950 BC. Rowe argued that this kind of name was "very rare or even wanting in

²³ Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* 344–45.

²⁴ James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 84.

²⁵ Kitchen argued that this kind of name developed from a common 2d millennium kind of name that combined *Didi* with the name of a deity. Kitchen argued that a transitional form between these name forms was used in the 18th Dynasty. It took the form of *Ta-didit-es*. (*On the Reliability of the Old Testament* 347).

²⁶ Kitchen, "The Basics of Egyptian Chronology" 52.

earlier periods."²⁷ These positions seem to suggest that Joseph could not have known a person named Potiphar unless the Patriarchs are moved forward to the LB or the Iron Age. If these names are divorced from their patriarchal context, many explanations for them become possible. Creating a chronological argument from that uncertainty may be problematic. The absence of a name in surviving records does not prove that the name was absent from the culture, but it is troubling that Potiphar and Potiphera were the only Egyptian men named in the Pentateuch. That fact calls for an explanation that is not immediately apparent.

Genesis 14 recorded an invasion of Palestine by Chedor-laomer, Amraphel, Arioch, and Tid'al. Kitchen argued that the coalition of regional rulers in Genesis 14 could only have happened during Mesopotamia's Isin Larsa period. This was a chaotic 275-year period after the fall of the Ur III culture when local city state rulers struggled for power. Kitchen argued that Genesis 14 must have occurred between the end of the Ur III culture and the reigns of Assyria's king Shamshi-Adad I and Babylon's king Hammurabi. Mari's king Zimrilim was told that 10 or 15 kings followed Hammurabi while a similar number followed Rim-Sin of Larsa, Ibalpiel of Eshnunna, and Amutpiel of Qatna. Kitchen argued that this was the cultural setting of Chedor-laomer's alliance, and such an alliance would only have occurred during the Isin Larsa period.²⁸ Placing Genesis 14 in the Isin Larsa moves Abraham forward in history, making a 19th Dynasty model attractive. However, it may not be impossible to interpret the same evidence in the context of an 18th Dynasty model. The dates of the Isin Larsa period depended on whether a high, middle, or low chronology was used for Mesopotamian history. According to a high chronology, the Isin Larsa began after 2060 BC. By a middle chronology, it began after 2004 BC, and by a low chronology after 1949 BC. The difference between these chronologies was based on a reference to Venus in the 63d tablet of *Enuna Anu Enlil*. The observation was made in the 8th year of the Babylonian king Ammi-Zadua.²⁹ All of these chronologies are possible, and all have had their supporters.³⁰ Chedor-laomer's allies could have seized control of Syria and Palestine during the reign of Ibbi-Sin who was the last

²⁷ Alan Rowe, "The Famous Solar City of On," *PEQ* 94, 95 (1962–63) 134.

²⁸ K. A. Kitchen, "Genesis 12–50 in the Near Eastern World," in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12–50* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 73. Kitchen noted that the rulers' names were culturally and historically appropriate (Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* 319–22).

²⁹ Four dates have been popular for Ammi-Zadua's 8th year: 1701, 1645, 1637, and 1581 BC. A complete Venus cycle recurred every 275 years, and similar positions of Venus occurred on cycles of 56 and 64 years. Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites* 411. Peter J. Huber argued that chronological interpretations of the Venus tablet involve a large subjective element and that the tablet is a poor guide to absolute chronology. Huber argued that a "long," or "high," chronology fit the data better than the alternatives ("Astronomical Evidence for the Long and against the Middle and Short Chronologies," in *High, Middle or Low? Acts of an International Colloquium on Absolute Chronology Held in the University of Gothenburg 20th–22nd August 1987 Part I* [Gothenburg: Paul Åströms, 1987] 7). Jack Finegan argued for a middle date of 1646 to 1626 BC instead of a high date (*Archaeological History of the Ancient Middle East* [New York: Barnes & Noble, 1979] 60).

³⁰ Jonathan T. Glass, "The Problem of Chronology in Ancient Mesopotamia," *BA* 47 (1984) 92.

ruler of the Ur III dynasty. He gradually lost control of regions beyond Ur. By the end of his reign, he controlled little beyond the city walls of Ur. If a high chronology is used, Abraham could have fought Chedor-laomer as early as 2060 BC. By Merrill's chronology, this would be roughly 30 years after he entered the land from Haran. While Chedor-laomer's dates are impossible to determine, his conflict with Abraham could have occurred early enough to be compatible with patriarchal dates based on an 18th Dynasty model.

Parallels to the patriarchal narrative have also been proposed that are too recent for a 19th Dynasty model. An LB date for the patriarchal traditions could be supported from Gen 34:10. Shechem's king invited Jacob to settle in his city. The king offered to allow Jacob to trade in Shechem. Cyrus Gordon noted a Hittite tablet written by Hattusili III who was a contemporary of Ramesses II. Hattusili III heard that merchants from Ur were burdening Syria. So Hattusili III decreed that traders from Ur would only be allowed in the land during the harvest but not the winter. The Ur merchants could not purchase land or even approach the king's lands. Hattusili III also distinguished merchants of Ur who had troops from merchants of Ur who did not have troops. Abraham could be called a merchant of Ur who had troops because he had 318 armed retainers. Gordon noted that Gen 34:10 addressed Abraham's right to purchase property, settle in the land, and trade there.³¹ The cultural similarity is attractive, although the chronology is problematic. It is not impossible that Hattusili III reflected ancient attitudes toward merchants, but parallels that late are hard to justify. Also, the field of OT studies has not embraced the suggestion by Albright and Gordon that Abraham engaged in caravan trade. Gordon's proposal at least credits the Genesis account with some measure of historical validity. In an age of rising skepticism, parallels are now even being drawn between events in Genesis and Iron Age texts rather than the Bronze Age texts.³² These parallels assume that the general historical value of the patriarchal traditions should be questioned.

III. THE PATRIARCHAL AGE BY AN 18TH DYNASTY EXODUS MODEL

Eugene Merrill argued for a set of fixed dates for patriarchal chronology that was based on biblical data and that assumed an 18th Dynasty model. By Merrill's chronology, Israel's patriarchal age lasted from 2100 to 1800 BC.³³ That would be from the last century of Egypt's 1st Intermediate Period until shortly before the end of the Middle Kingdom. Israel's Patriarchs then lived at the high water mark of the power of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom. Merrill argued that Abraham was born in 2166 BC. He left Haran for Palestine in

³¹ Cyrus Gordon, "Abraham of Ur," in *Hebrew and Semitic Studies* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963) 77-81.

³² M. P. Maidman, "Historical Reflections on Israel's Origins: The Rise and Fall of the Patriarchal Age," *ErIsr* 27 (2003) 125*-26*.

³³ Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology" 248.

2091 BC. Isaac was born in 2066 BC, Jacob in 2006 BC, and Joseph in 1916 BC. Merrill argued that Joseph was sold to Egypt in 1899 BC, and that he became the Egyptian vizier in 1886 BC.³⁴

Hoerth disagreed with Merrill's chronology. While also arguing for an 18th Dynasty exodus, Hoerth argued for a later patriarchal chronology. Basing his case on Gen 15:13, Acts 7:6, 13:19, and Gal 3:16–17, Hoerth argued that Joseph entered Egypt during the Hyksos era after the close of the 13th Dynasty. Hoerth argued that the 430 years of Exod 12:40 included both the patriarchal age and Israel's Egyptian sojourn.³⁵

Merrill's 18th Dynasty model for Israel's early history is consistent with several possible linkages between Genesis and ancient Near Eastern history. The first can be seen in Gen 12:10. When Abraham first entered Palestine, he passed through the land and went south to Egypt. Moses claimed that he did so because the famine in the land was severe. By an 18th Dynasty model, Abraham entered Palestine near the end of the great drought that had destroyed the EB culture in Palestine. The same drought had caused the 1st Intermediate Period in Egypt when erratic Nile flood levels brought the land to chaos. The port at Ashkelon was abandoned during the drought.³⁶

William Dever described this period as "non-urban interlude," and he noted that even Megiddo was reduced to the size of a village at this time. He noted that the highlands of Palestine were unpopulated and remnants of the EB culture could only be found on the edges of semi-arid regions.³⁷ This drought ended around 2000 BC with the beginning of a period that has been labeled in two ways. Albright, Bietak, and Israeli archaeologists call it the MB IIA while Dever, Kenyon, and British archaeologists call it the MB I.

The population changes in Palestine can be seen in Adam Zertal's survey of the Shechem syncline. Zertal noted that the population of the Shechem

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ While Hoerth does not discuss the problem of Moses' lineage, one benefit of his model is that it may provide an easier explanation for Moses' chronology. Most 18th Dynasty models require Moses to have been born roughly 350 years after Jacob and Levi descended to Egypt. Yet Moses was Levi's great grandson. The MT of Exod 6:16–20 claimed that Levi, Kohath, and Amram all lived for 137 years. The LXX of these verses claimed that Levi lived for 137 years while Caath (Kohath) lived for 133 years and Amram (Amram) lived for 132 years. Most 18th Dynasty models would require that Levi, Kohath, and Amram fathered their heirs at a much greater age than Abraham. This problem may be more severe if the MT of Exod 6:20 is accepted. It claimed that Moses' mother Jochebed was Kohath's sister. That may make her very old indeed at Moses' birth. The LXX of this verse claimed instead that she was the daughter of Kohath's brother. It is not impossible that Moses' genealogy included people who were not named in the record, but that may conflict with God's promise in Gen 15:16 that Israel would return to Palestine in the fourth generation. Hoerth's model makes the problem more manageable. By his chronology for the Patriarchal Age, Levi, Kohath, and Amram would still have to father children in their old age, but not unreasonably so. Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 58, 142–47, 179.

³⁶ Lawrence E. Stager, "Port Power in the Early and the Middle Bronze Age: The Organization of Maritime Trade and Hinterland Production," in *Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and Neighboring Lands in Memory of Douglas E. Esse* (Atlanta: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001) 633.

³⁷ William G. Dever, "New Vistas on the EB ("MB I") Horizon in Syria-Palestine," *BASOR* 237 (1980) 35–64.

syncline became sparse between 2200 and 2000 BC, and the population shifted to the desert fringe. During the MB IIA (2000–1750 BC), only two settlement sites were found on the Shechem syncline. During the MB IIB (1750–1550 BC), a population wave poured south into the region. 72 settlements appeared on the Shechem syncline. Forty-nine of these settlements were established in the valleys and 22 in the hills. Both fortified tells and open villages appeared at the same time.³⁸ One limitation of Zertal's model is that dates for the MB IIA and MB IIB have been fiercely debated in recent years, and a variety of dates have been proposed.³⁹

If Abraham entered Palestine near the end of the EB IV/MB I drought, he would have been able to travel at will through Palestine. He would have encountered only small populations and would not have faced strong opposition in the land. It is striking that Genesis mentioned few cities in Palestine. It is also striking that Moses never called Palestine a land flowing with milk and honey in Genesis despite the fact that Moses used this description 13 times in the Pentateuch. In an 18th Dynasty model, Palestine was nothing of the kind in Abraham's day. If either Hoerth's chronology or a 19th Dynasty model is accepted, Abraham entered Palestine after the end of the great drought. By then, populations were being reestablished, and it would have been somewhat harder for Abraham to wander at will through the land.

It is fair to ask if the patriarchal narrative could fit the MB IIB after perhaps 1750 BC. Stager noted that Ashkelon had been abandoned during the EB IV/MB I transition, but by 1800 BC, Ashkelon already had a population between 12,000 and 15,000 people. By the 17th century BC, Canaan had reached its economic and military high point. By that time, the foothills and highlands of Palestine had gained a dense population that was ten times the MB I occupation.⁴⁰ That would seem rather different from the picture of Palestine in Gen 12:10 and 47:13–14. It can be questioned whether Abraham's force of 318 armed men would have made him a mighty prince in the MB IIB culture.

The severity of the EB IV/MB I drought may also have been reflected in the reference to tar pits in Gen 14:10. The Dead Sea is famous for its undersea tar vents that slowly release tar blobs into the sea. For thousands of years, inhabitants of the region collected floating tar and sold it as a waterproofing agent. It was such a common practice that the Romans called the sea Lake Asphaltitis.⁴¹ Tar blobs that were not collected were eventually broken down by wave action and merged into the sea bottom sediment. Soil around the Dead Sea has a high concentration of petroleum, and that has made it a

³⁸ Adam Zertal, *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey: Volume 1: The Schechem Syncline* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 46–53. For the process of resettlement after the EB IV/MB I transition, see Aaron Brody, "From the Hills of Adonis through the Pillars of Hercules: Recent Advances in the Archaeology of Canaan and Phoenicia," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 65 (2002) 69–71.

³⁹ For a summary of the debate, see James M. Weinstein, "The Chronology of Palestine in the Early Second Millennium B.C.E.," *BASOR* 288 (1992) 27–46.

⁴⁰ Stager, "Port Power in the Early Middle Bronze Age" 634.

⁴¹ J. Penrose Harland, "Sodom and Gomorrah," in *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1961) 46–47.

popular treatment for skin conditions like psoriasis. The Dead Sea water level varies as a response to climate change. Neev and Emery argued that that the Dead Sea level fell by 16.7 meters during the EB IV/MB I drought.⁴² In an 18th Dynasty model, the Dead Sea would have been dry south of the El-Lisan Peninsula because the sea south of the peninsula is very shallow. Tar vents south of the peninsula would have been located on dry ground. Instead of venting into the sea, tar would have collected in pools on the surface. This could have produced the tar pits described in Genesis 14. One limitation of this argument is that Abraham's tar pits are as difficult to locate as Sodom and Gomorrah, so this explanation for the tar pits can be no more than a possibility. Another limitation is that sea level estimates based on fossil shorelines are somewhat uncertain.

Genesis 12:15–16 noted that Pharaoh took Sarah into his household and treated Abraham well for her sake. By an 18th Dynasty model, Abraham entered Egypt while the nation was being restored from the chaos of the 1st Intermediate Period. Nile flood levels had been at their lowest point between 2180 and 2135 BC causing social chaos, severe famine, and even cannibalism. After that, flood levels began returning to near-normal levels.⁴³ As this happened, a civil war broke out between Thebes and Herakleopolis for control of the whole land. By Merrill's chronology, Abraham may have entered Egypt during this conflict. Abraham and Lot led very large households. Even without Lot's retainers, Gen 14:14 noted that Abraham led 318 armed men who were raised in his household. The king of Herakleopolis may have wished to form a marriage alliance with Abraham so that he could use Abraham's troops in the civil war.

When Pharaoh learned that Sarah was Abraham's wife, he was appalled. In Egypt, adultery was considered to be a serious breach of ethical conduct.⁴⁴ It would have threatened his support from his people and his gods, so Pharaoh ordered Abraham to leave the land, yet he also gave Abraham the kinds of gifts that were often given to northern chiefs to gain their allegiance.⁴⁵ While the account in Genesis 12 could have occurred during the reign of many pharaohs, the account fits the last part of the EB IV/MB I drought surprisingly well.

Genesis 26:1 noted that Isaac moved to Gerar because of a famine in Palestine. While it is impossible to date this famine, it probably occurred

⁴² David Neev and K. O. Emery, *The Destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Jericho: Geological, Climatological, and Archaeological Background* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) 39, 51.

⁴³ Barbara Bell, "Climate and the History of Egypt: The Middle Kingdom," *AJA* 79 (1975) 224, 227. Stanley et al. argued that the lowest Nile flood levels were 2160–2130 BC and 2020–2010 BC. Jean-Daniel Stanley, et al., "Short Contribution: Nile Flow Failure at the End of the Old Kingdom, Egypt: Strontium Isotopic and Petrologic Evidence," *Geoarchaeology: An International Journal* 18/3 (2003) 398.

⁴⁴ C. J. Eyre, "Crime and Adultery in Ancient Egypt," *JEA* 70 (1984) 92–105. Pnina Galpaz-Feller, "Private Lives and Public Censure - Adultery in Ancient Egypt and Biblical Israel," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 67 (2004) 154.

⁴⁵ John MacDonald, "Egyptian Interests in Western Asia to the End of the Middle Kingdom: An Evaluation," *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* 2 (1972) 85.

between Jacob's birth in Genesis 25 and Jacob's theft of Esau's blessing in Genesis 27. By Merrill's chronology, Jacob was born around 2006 BC, and he fled to Haran in 1930 BC.⁴⁶ By that chronology, Isaac's famine might have occurred during the reign of Sesostris I. The dates of his reign depend on the location of Sesostris III's Sothic observation. By a high chronology, Sesostris I may have ruled from 1959 to 1914 BC. By a low chronology, he may have reigned from 1917 to 1872 BC.⁴⁷ If the high dates for Sesostris I are correct, a famine text from his reign becomes interesting. During his reign, unusually low Nile flood levels brought famine to Egypt for a few years although economic difficulties did not characterize his reign as a whole. During his reign, Ameny served as the nomarch of the Beni-Hasan "nome," or administrative district. Ameny wrote,

When years of famine came, I plowed all the fields of the Oryz Nome, as far as its southern and northern boundaries, preserving its people alive, and furnishing its food so that there was none hungry therein. . . . Then came great Niles, producers of grain and of all things, (but) I did not collect the arrears of the field (taxes).⁴⁸

It cannot be proven that this was the same famine recorded in Genesis 26. However, famines that struck Egypt typically affected Palestine as well. The usefulness of the parallel may also depend on where Sesostris III's Sothic observation was made, and that cannot be determined. Thus the parallel is attractive but unproven.

One of the more difficult problems for an 18th Dynasty model is the identity of Joseph's Pharaoh. That is not a problem for a 19th Dynasty model because by that model, little can be known about events in the Egyptian court. After Ahmose I drove the Hyksos from Egypt, the 18th Dynasty destroyed almost all evidence of the Hyksos presence. Nearly the only surviving evidence for the Hyksos are the king lists, many scarabs, a brief note by Hatshepsut, the 400 year stela, a Late Egyptian story, and archaeological evidence from Avaris. Only a limited amount of history can be reconstructed from that data. An 18th Dynasty model places the Patriarchs in Egypt at a time when more historical data has been preserved. Unless Hoerth's chronology is accepted, an 18th Dynasty model must place Joseph at the high point of the Middle Kingdom. By Merrill's chronology, Joseph was released from prison in 1886 BC, and Jacob moved to Egypt in 1876 BC.⁴⁹

Even if these dates are accepted, Egyptian chronology cannot be resolved finely enough to determine the identity of Joseph's pharaoh. Egyptian chronology during the Middle Kingdom has been based on a Sothic text that was found at the temple of Pharaoh Sesostris II at Illahun. It claimed that Sothis was first seen on the 16th day of the 8th month of the ruler's 7th year. The text did not include the name of the Pharaoh in power at the time, but the Pharaoh is assumed to be Sesostris III. Handwriting on the text resembles

⁴⁶ Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology" 242.

⁴⁷ Kitchen, "The Basics of Egyptian Chronology" 49.

⁴⁸ Bell, "Climate and the History of Egypt" 225.

⁴⁹ Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology" 248.

the handwriting of texts written during his reign. As with all Sothic texts, the date of this observation depends on the location where it was made.⁵⁰ Lynn Rose noted that until recently, it was widely assumed that the Sothic observation recorded at Illahun was made in Memphis, and that observations at Memphis were authoritative throughout Egypt. The evidence for this belief was a comment by Olympiodorus who claimed that the Memphis date was accepted at Alexandria. The Memphis location was also supported by the Canopus Decree and Censorianus in the 2d and 3d centuries AD. Rose noted that it has become popular to favor Elephantine for the Sothic observations, and this location has led authors to lower the length of Sesostrius III's reign from over 30 years to 19 years.⁵¹

Proposed Middle Kingdom chronologies can be grouped into high and low dates based on the assumed location of Sesostrius III's Sothic observation. They can also be grouped into long and short chronologies depending on how much value is placed on the lengths of reigns given in the Turin papyrus. Susan Cohen listed the following high and low dates for Middle Kingdom rulers: Amenemhat I (1963–1934/1937–1908), Sesostrius I (1943–1898/1917–1872), Amenemhat II (1901–1866/1875–1840), Sesostrius II (1868–1862/1842–1836), and Sesostrius III (1862–1843/1836–1817).⁵² In contrast, Kitchen listed high and low dates for the same rulers this way: Amenemhat I (1979–1950/1937–1908) Sesostrius I (1959–1914/1917–1872), Amenemhat II (1917–1882/1875–1840), Sesostrius II (1884–1878/1842–1836), and Sesostrius III (1878–1859/1836–1817).⁵³ Several other chronologies have also been defended.

If Merrill's chronology should prove correct, Joseph's years of abundance would have been roughly 1886 to 1879 BC, while his famine years would have been roughly 1878 to 1871 BC. Who would have ruled Egypt during these years: Amenemhat II, Sesostrius I, Sesostrius II, or Sesostrius III? By the low chronology, Joseph would have served Sesostrius I and Amenemhat II. By Cohen's high dates, Joseph would have served Amenemhat II and Sesostrius II. By Kitchen's high dates, Joseph's abundant years may have occurred at the end of the reign of Amenemhat II and during the brief reign of Sesostrius II. Joseph's famine years may have occurred during the first seven years of Sesostrius III. Of course, neither Cohen nor Kitchen would accept an 18th Dynasty model. Kitchen would place Joseph in the Hyksos era instead of the Middle Kingdom.

It is fair to ask if Joseph's famine years could have occurred during Sesostrius III's reign. He was one of the strongest Pharaohs in Egyptian history. He gained control of the nomarchs who had been independent since the

⁵⁰ Kitchen, "The Basics of Egyptian Chronology" 43, 47–48; idem, "Egypt, History of," *ABD* 2.324–25. Parker, "The Sothic Dating of the Twelfth and Eighteenth Dynasties" 177–79.

⁵¹ Kitchen, "The Basics of Egyptian Chronology" 47–48; idem, "Egypt, History of," 2.324–25. Rose argued that a 19-year reign for Sesostrius III was problematic since the Turin papyrus claimed that Sesostrius III reigned for over 30 years ("The Astronomical Evidence for Dating the End of the Middle Kingdom" 237, 245–46).

⁵² Susan L. Cohen, *Canaanites, Chronologies, and Connections: The Relationship of Middle Bronze IIA Canaan to Middle Kingdom Egypt* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002) 13.

⁵³ Kitchen, "The Basics of Egyptian Chronology" 49.

1st Intermediate Period.⁵⁴ The nomarchs' perception of their new power can be seen in the autobiography of Henqu of el-Gebrawi, the nomarch of the Mountain Viper nome.⁵⁵ Before Sesostriis III's reign, the nomarchs built grand tombs for themselves. Several of the nomarchs called themselves Great Overlords. This title was not used after Sesostriis III, and the nomarchs stopped building expensive tombs.⁵⁶ Hymns of praise would eventually be sung to Sesostriis III.⁵⁷ Centuries after his death, he was still being worshipped as a god throughout Nubia on Egypt's southern frontier.⁵⁸ Herodotus later claimed that Sesostriis III "traversed the whole continent of Asia whence he passed on into Europe, and made himself master of Scythia and of Thrace."⁵⁹ Herodotus' claims were false, but they illustrated the reputation that Sesostriis III gained among later historians. His reputation was probably aided by the great number of statues of Sesostriis III that filled Egypt.

Few modern authors would take seriously a suggestion that Egypt was devastated by seven years of famine at the start of his reign. However, famine years may not have been impossible. The strongest evidence that Sesostriis III dominated Egypt is the fact that he suppressed the nomarchs' power. Yet that is exactly what Joseph's famine would have accomplished. Genesis 47:13–27 noted that Joseph gained for Pharaoh most of the money and land in Egypt. After the Egyptians sold themselves as slaves to obtain grain, only Pharaoh, the Egyptian priests, and the Israelites owned land or cattle. If the famine occurred during Sesostriis III's reign, the famine would have given him complete control of the nomarchs, and they would not have had the resources to build expensive tombs.

There is also a limited amount of archaeological evidence for years of abundance and famine at this time. Amenemhat I and Sesostriis I built a fort at Semna near the 2d Nile cataract. Amenemhat II and Sesostriis II continued to use this fort. The fort was built 8 meters higher than the normal high flood line. Yet the lower levels of the fort were eroded by flood water. Sesostriis III then rebuilt the fort 15 meters above the normal high flood line.⁶⁰ Since it rarely rained in most of Egypt, agriculture was completely tied to the level of the annual flood. High flood levels produced great abundance. Low flood levels brought famine. The floods that damaged the Semna fort would have brought vast abundance to the land.

However, it is difficult to be sure how long this flooding lasted or whether it occurred during the reign of Sesostriis II or Sesostriis III. In Sesostriis III's

⁵⁴ Paul Ray suggested that Joseph's land reforms could have grown from Sesostriis III's new power over the nomarchs ("The Duration of the Israelite Sojourn in Egypt," *AUSS* 24 [1986] 242).

⁵⁵ Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988) 21–24.

⁵⁶ Gae Callender, "The Middle Kingdom Renaissance," in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: University Press, 2000) 167–75.

⁵⁷ William Kelly Simpson, ed. *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973) 279–84.

⁵⁸ Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* 136, 140.

⁵⁹ M. Komroff, *The History of Herodotus* (New York: Tudor, 1928) 114.

⁶⁰ Bell, "Climate and the History of Egypt: The Middle Kingdom" 238.

8th year, he reopened an ancient canal around the 2d Nile cataract. He may have done so in an attempt to restore a passage through the region after years of low Nile levels. Nile flood levels may have remained unstable. In Sesostris III's 19th year, he reported great difficulty passing the 2d Nile cataract despite the canal that he had reopened 11 years earlier. Sesostris III was followed by Amenemhat III. His reign saw flood levels between 8 and 11 meters higher than normal. Amenemhat III described these floods in inscriptions on the valley walls at Semna and Kumma.

Barbara Bell noted that the valley walls near the 2d cataract had a water wear line in the rocks 8.73 meters higher than the flood level seen in 1931. Bell also found pockets of flood laid deposits with fragments of pottery 6.23 meters above the 1931 flood level. The water wear lines and flood deposits demonstrated that very high flood levels did occur at some point, but they cannot date the flooding. Bell suggested that this flooding may have caused Joseph's years of abundance, and that the return to normal flood levels brought economic difficulties to a land used to abundance.⁶¹ However, a return to normal flood levels in Egypt would not have caused a devastating famine in Palestine. The reign of Amenemhat III would also be chronologically problematic for Joseph's dates.

IV. THE EXODUS, CONQUEST, AND JUDGES BY A 19TH DYNASTY MODEL

A 19th Dynasty model seems at first to face a problem with the Exodus text. The problem can be seen in the sequence of events in Exodus 1–4. Exodus 1:10–11 noted that the Egyptians forced the Israelites to build Pithom and Raamses. Yet they multiplied. So the Egyptians demanded that every male child be killed. Moses was born, and he lived for 40 years in the Egyptian court. Then he wandered for 40 years in the wilderness before the exodus. Then Exod 2:23–25 noted that the king of Egypt died, and God promised Moses that all those who had sought his life had died. These verses have often been interpreted to mean that the Pharaoh who oppressed Israel reigned for at least 40 years, and he died shortly before the exodus. Since only Thutmose III and Ramesses II reigned for over 40 years, one of these was assumed to be the Pharaoh of Israel's oppression. The exodus Pharaoh was then assumed to be either the 18th Dynasty ruler Amenhotep II or Merenptah in the 19th Dynasty. One limitation to this argument is that Exod 4:19 referred to a group of people. God promised Moses that all of the people who had sought his life were dead. In theory, several Pharaohs could have been included in the number of men who had sought Moses' life.

Supporters of an 18th Dynasty model point out that Merenptah would be a poor candidate for the exodus Pharaoh because he encountered Israel in Palestine in his 5th year. That would be roughly 1227 BC by a high chronology or roughly 1207 BC by a low chronology. Recognizing the implications of Merenptah's stela, popular 19th Dynasty dates for the exodus have ranged

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 261.

from 1290 BC during the reign of Seti I to 1260 BC during the reign of Ramesses II.⁶² An exodus date during the reign of Seti I or early in the reign of Ramesses II provides a different difficulty for the 19th Dynasty model. Moses was 80 years old at the exodus. If the exodus occurred early in the reign of Ramesses II, Moses would have been born roughly during Akhenaten's reign, and he would have fled from Egypt roughly during Haremhab's reign.

This chronology does not fit well with the common association of the ruler's name Ramesses with the name of the store city Raamses. The strongest evidence for a 19th Dynasty model has traditionally been the claim in Exod 1:11 that Israelites built a store city at Tell el-Dab'a/Qantir named Raamses. The common assumption has been that a city named Raamses should have been built by a ruler named Ramesses. Tell el-Dab'a was the old Hyksos capital of Avaris. It was once popular to argue that Avaris was not occupied during the 18th Dynasty. That is no longer widely claimed. Avaris was a huge tell that was occupied until the reign of Amenhotep II although it may not have contained a royal palace at the time.⁶³ An exodus early in the reign of Ramesses II requires that Raamses be built at the end of the 18th Dynasty.

By an 18th Dynasty model, Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the exodus. Tell el-Dab'a/Qantir was still occupied during his reign, so a store city could have been built there. The name Raamses for this store city could reflect a later updating of the text, but that suggestion may not be necessary. Genesis 47:11 suggested that the region may have been associated with the name Raamses during the Middle Kingdom. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that 19th Dynasty rulers grew from roots in the northeast delta, so they could have used an ancient name if it was already present in the region. It is striking that the name Ramose was used twice in texts from the 18th Dynasty. Hatshepsut's vizier Senmut was described as being "beloved of Ramose," and Akhenaten's vizier was named Ramose.⁶⁴ Archer argued that Ramose and Ramesses were the same name. Ramose was grammatically comparable to the names of pharaohs Kamose, Ahmose, and Thutmose. Archer argued that the 19th Dynasty preferred the geminating form of this name and spelled the name with a second S29 hieroglyph followed by the chick sign giving the additional "s" sound in the name.⁶⁵ So the name Raamses may point to a 19th Dynasty context, but it need not do so.

Kitchen argued that there was a connection between 18th and 19th Dynasty chronology. He noted that three dates have been proposed for the

⁶² Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* 179. Magnus Magnusson, *Archaeology of the Bible* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977) 53.

⁶³ Betsy M. Bryan, "The Eighteenth Dynasty before the Amarna Period (c.1550–1352 BC)," *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 242–43. Kitchen noted that there was no royal residence at Avaris during the 18th Dynasty (*On the Reliability of the Old Testament* 319).

⁶⁴ *ARE* II:146–150, 385–90.

⁶⁵ Gleason L. Archer, "An Eighteenth Dynasty Rameses," *JETS* 17 (1974) 49.

accession of Thutmose III, 1504 BC, 1490 BC, and 1479 BC. Kitchen observed that these three dates were all exactly 200 years before the equivalent dates for the accession of Ramesses II and that the three sets of dates hung together. The preference of the 1279 BC date for Ramesses II led to the preference for the 1479 BC date for the accession of Thutmose III.

Kitchen also argued that lunar observations suggest that an accession of Thutmose III in 1479 BC was more likely than an accession in 1490 BC.⁶⁶ The 1479 BC date for Thutmose III has significant implications for an 18th Dynasty model for the exodus. Thutmose III would not have been on the throne throughout Moses' 40 years as a shepherd, and the exodus would have occurred in the middle of his reign. This would not agree well with Exod 2:23 and 4:19.

William Ward pointed out a limitation of Kitchen's date. Ward noted that 1279 BC date for Ramesses II's accession was based on the fact that he came to the throne in the 19th year of Babylon's king Kadashman-Enlil. This ruler's 19th year was traditionally understood to be either 1304 or 1290 BC. Ward noted that Brinkman proposed a minimum date for Kadashman-Enlil that would have made his 19th year 1279 BC, and Egyptologists have often accepted that date.

The three possible dates for Kadashman-Enlil produced the 1504/1304, 1490/1290, and 1479/1279 BC dates for the accessions of Thutmose III and Ramesses II. Ward noted that Brinkman also proposed a maximum chronology for Kadashman-Enlil that would make his 19th year 1302 BC, and Brinkman claimed that Babylonian chronology was not a reliable standard to determine the chronology of other cultures.⁶⁷ Thus there may be a significant problem at the heart of the popular chronologies.

Authors who defend high or low chronologies for 18th Dynasty rulers have usually defended comparable high or low chronologies for 19th Dynasty rulers. However, that has not always been true. Wentz and van Siclen dated Thutmose III's reign at 1504 to 1450 BC while also dating Ramesses II at 1279 to 1212 BC. So they claimed 225 years between the accessions of Thutmose III and Ramesses II instead of the 200 years so often claimed. Wentz and van Siclen supported high dates for the 18th Dynasty and low dates for the 19th Dynasty by arguing that the reigns of Amenhotep II and Thutmose IV must have been longer than traditionally thought.

Wentz argued that two lunar dates from the reign of Thutmose III supported dating his accession year at 1504 instead of 1490 BC. He maintained that the Sothic observation in the 9th year of Amenhotep I was made at Memphis. Wentz noted that this supported a high chronology for Amenhotep I.⁶⁸ Wentz and van Siclen also discussed the lunar evidence for the accession of Ramesses II in 1304, 1290, or 1279 BC. They noted that all three

⁶⁶ Kitchen, "Chronology of Ancient Egypt" 204; idem, "Basics of Egyptian Chronology" 39–40.

⁶⁷ Ward, "Present Status of Egyptian Chronology" 55–56.

⁶⁸ Edward F. Wentz, "Thutmose III's Accession and the Beginning of the New Kingdom," *JNES* 34 (1975) 265–72. Wentz and Van Siclen, "A Chronology of the New Kingdom" 218, 223, 248–50.

of these dates assumed that the lunar observations were incorrect in one way or another. The 1304 and 1279 BC dates assumed that the final crescent of the moon could not be seen because of clouds or smoke. This resulted in an incorrect date for the New Moon. The 1290 BC date assumed that observers believed that there was a final crescent of the moon in the sky when in fact the moon could not be seen at all. Wenté and van Siclen argued that this was much less likely than failing to see a thin crescent moon that was present.⁶⁹ The problems with lunar dates may reinforce Ward's concern about dates drawn from Kadashman-Enlil's reign.

V. THE EXODUS BY AN 18TH DYNASTY MODEL

An 18th Dynasty model suggests that Thutmose III was the pharaoh of Israel's oppression while Amenhotep II was the pharaoh of the exodus. While this model cannot be proven, it offers several possible linkages between the biblical account and Egyptian history. The first of these can be seen in Exod 33:18–23. In this account, Moses asked to see God's face on Mount Sinai. Moses had seen God's theophanic presence earlier in passages like Exod 24:9–10, yet Moses asked to see something more than this. The background of this account might be the coronation claims made by Hatshepsut and Thutmose III. In his coronation inscription Thutmose III made this claim.

Ascent to Heaven

[He opened for] me the doors of heaven; he opened the portals of the horizon of Re. I flew to heaven as a divine hawk, beholding his form in heaven; I adored his majesty _____ feast. I saw the glorious forms of the Horizon-God upon his mysterious ways in heaven.

Coronation in Heaven

Re himself established me, I was dignified with the diadems which [we]re upon his head, his serpent-diadem, rested upon [my forehead] ----- [he satisfied] me with all his glories; I was sated with the counsels of the gods, like Horus, when he counted his body at the house of my father, Amon-Re. I was [present]ed with the dignities of a god, with ----- my diadems.⁷⁰

This was a surprising claim.⁷¹ Earlier pharaohs had expected to see the sun god in the underworld as they joined Re aboard his solar ship. This motif can be seen in Middle Kingdom Coffin Spells 491 and 492. During the 18th Dynasty, this motif can be seen in the tomb text of Nakht at Thebes. This text read, "May he cause you to come and go to his temple to behold the beauty of his face."⁷²

A rather similar claim was made in the 13th century BC. An Egyptian stela at Beth Shean level 5 expressed the hope that the deceased would see

⁶⁹ Wenté and Van Siclen, "A Chronology of the New Kingdom" 223.

⁷⁰ ARE II:61.

⁷¹ Forman and Quirke noted that Hatshepsut drew her inspiration from Amenemhat III and Sobekneferu in the Middle Kingdom. Werner Forman and Stephen Quirke, *Hieroglyphs and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996) 116.

⁷² Lise Manniche, "The Tomb of Nakht, the Gardener, at Thebes (No. 161) as Copied by Robert Hay," *JEA* 72 (1986) 61.

Re in the underworld.⁷³ In this life, no one could see the true form of the sun god. The sun's radiance would blind the observer's eyes. James Breasted suggested that Thutmose III's coronation inscription had to be seen against the politics of his age. Thutmose I had claimed that he appeared like Re.⁷⁴ Hatshepsut claimed that Amon-Re had appeared to her mother. She had seen the sun god in his true form and had intercourse with him. So Hatshepsut claimed that she had been born by divine decree and had been created to rule Egypt.⁷⁵ Thutmose III countered Hatshepsut by claiming that he had already traveled to the heavenly realm, and there he had seen Re's true form.⁷⁶ In an 18th Dynasty model, Moses was a contemporary of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III. Moses and perhaps all Israel would have been aware of these claims. Then Amenhotep II claimed to shine at Thebes as the likeness of the sun god.⁷⁷ In this historical context, Moses' request to see God's face might have been partly a request for divine verification of his leadership in light of Israel's rebellion. Yahweh warned Moses that no one could see his face and live. Yet Yahweh showed Moses as much of his glory as a man could see. In Exod 34:29–35, Moses returned from Sinai with his face radiant from reflected glory.⁷⁸ In light of contemporary Egyptian claims, Israel may have seen Moses' radiance partly as divine verification of his role in the community.

An 18th Dynasty model may also be illustrated by Amenhotep II's final campaign in Palestine. By an 18th Dynasty model, he may have been the pharaoh of the exodus. Early in his reign, Amenhotep II campaigned in Palestine. He brought south to Egypt 800 captives. Amenhotep II led his army north again in his 9th year. This time, he only led his army to Sharon and the plain of Jezreel. Yet he brought a surprising number of captives back to Egypt. He listed his captives this way: "princes of Retenu: 127; brothers of princes: (30) 179; *Apiru*: 3,600; living *Shasu*: 15,200; *Kharu*: 36,300; living *Neges*: 15,070; the *adherents* thereof: 30,652; total: 89,600 men; similarly their goods, without their limit."⁷⁹

The numbers in this list add up to 101,128 captives which may suggest an error in addition.⁸⁰ Amenhotep II claimed to have seized roughly one hundred times as many captives as pharaohs normally brought back to Egypt.⁸¹ It

⁷³ Harry O. Thompson, *Mekal: The God of Beth-Shean* (Leiden: Brill, 1970) 55.

⁷⁴ H. M. Stewart, *Egyptian Stelae, Reliefs and Paintings* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1976) 1.

⁷⁵ ARE II:80.

⁷⁶ ARE II:58–61.

⁷⁷ ARE II:317.

⁷⁸ Menahem Haran compared this passage to the use of *hōd* in Job 40:10, Ps 104:1, and Hab 3:3–4. These passages depicted God as being clothed in *hōd* and wrapped in light as a garment. Haran noted that it would be fatal for a mortal to see God's face. ("The Shining of Moses' Face: A Case Study in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Iconography," in *The Shelter of Elyon* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1984] 166).

⁷⁹ ANET 247.

⁸⁰ Ward noted that Egyptian scribes did often make simple errors of addition. Ward, "The Present Status of Egyptian Chronology" 64. Cf. Douglas Petrovich, "Amenhotep II and the Historicity of the Exodus-Pharaoh," *Masters Seminary Journal* 17 (2006) 102–3.

⁸¹ William Shea, "Amenhotep II as the Pharaoh of the Exodus," *Bible and Spade* 16 (2003) 41–51.

would be easy to see this raid as his attempt to replace a lost work force. The limitation of this suggestion is that the dates for Amenhotep II's reign have been debated. Several dates have been offered even among those who support a high chronology. Whether these campaigns occurred before and after the exodus depends on the chronology defended for his reign. Steindorff and Seele argued that Amenhotep II reigned from 1452 to 1425 BC.⁸² By this chronology, Amenhotep II's ninth year would have been approximately 1443 BC, or roughly three years after the exodus. However, this chronology is not widely accepted.

It is also true that Egypt's rulers often described their victories with hyperbole. Thutmose III claimed, "I fettered Nubia's bowmen by ten thousand thousands, the northerners a hundred thousand captives."⁸³ It was not unknown for a pharaoh to claim to have seized 100,000 captives. The captive list of Amenhotep II has often been dismissed as a similar empty boast. However, Amenhotep II's captive list appears to be something different. Listing the number of captives from different tribal groups has the appearance of a detailed calculation of real slaves.

VI. THE EGYPTIAN EMPIRE

Much of the recent discussion about Israel's historical setting has focused on the Egyptian empire in Palestine during the 18th, 19th, and 20th dynasties. The Egyptians controlled the coastal regions of Palestine until the Sea People invasion of 1200 BC. Historical evidence for the Egyptian empire has led some authors to deny that an 18th Dynasty model was possible, and it has led others to deny that specific events in Judges could have happened.⁸⁴ The history of the Egyptian Empire was recorded in documents like the 'Amarna Letters and the annals of Thutmose III, Seti I, and Ramesses II.⁸⁵ These written records are reinforced by Egyptian artifacts found at sites like Beth Shean, Aphek, Jaffa, and Ashdod.⁸⁶

⁸² George Steindorff and Keith C. Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971) 274.

⁸³ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature II*:36

⁸⁴ Ralph K. Hawkins, "Propositions for Evangelical Acceptance of a Late-Date Exodus-Conquest: Biblical Data and the Royal Scarabs from Mt. Ebal," *JETS* 50 (2007) 34. Ahlström argued that the battle in Judges 4 could not have happened either during the Egyptian empire or after the Sea People entered the region. Gösta W. Ahlström, *Ancient Palestine: A Historical Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002) 34.

⁸⁵ R. O. Faulkner, "The Euphrates Campaign of Thutmosis III," *JEA* 32 (1946) 39–42; Ahituv Shemuel, "Economic Factors in the Egyptian Conquest of Canaan," *IEJ* 28 (1978) 93–105; Nadav Na'aman, "Economic Aspects of the Egyptian Occupation of Canaan," *IEJ* 31 (1981) 172–85.

⁸⁶ Ann E. Killebrew, "New Kingdom Egyptian-Style Pottery in Canaan: Implications for Egyptian Rule in Canaan during the 19th and Early 20th Dynasties," in *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 309; Amihai Mazar, "The Excavations at Tel Beth Shean during the Years 1989–94," in *The Archaeology of Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997) 144–64; Gabriel Barkay, "A Late Bronze Age Egyptian Temple in Jerusalem?" *IEJ* 46 (1996) 23–43; Israel Finkelstein, "Philistine Chronology: High, Middle or Low?" in *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1998) 140–41.

Before the United Monarchy, Israel only controlled the hill country, while Egypt was only interested in the highlands if Egyptian interests were threatened. Egypt's perception of the highlands can be seen in a letter written by the scribe Hori during the reign of Ramesses II or Merenptah. Hori's letter was copied to teach young scribes how to write the hieroglyphic language, so it represented a perspective taught to Egyptian youth. Hori noted that the highlands of Palestine were difficult to reach. Chariots had to be carried up ravines. Ambushes threatened behind every bush or rock. At night, the highland population raided their camp stealing horses and possessions. Hori even claimed that there were giants in the land. From an Egyptian perspective, there was nothing in the highlands that justified an expedition there.

This perception of the highlands may have stood behind Ramesses II's campaign in Transjordan. Kitchen noted a brief and mutilated text at Ramesses II's temple in Luxor. The text mentioned Ramesses II's conquest of Moab. Kitchen argued that Ramesses II traveled north past Gaza and Gezer. Then he turned east up the Aijalon valley past the hills of Judea. He crossed the Jordan near Jericho and headed south. He attacked Moab. Then he attacked the Shasu settlements in Edomite territory before returning west to Gaza and Egypt.⁸⁷ While the date of Ramesses II's Transjordan campaign has been debated, it is striking that he circled the southern highlands of Palestine without entering them. In a 19th Dynasty model, the highlands were hardly even occupied during his reign. In an 18th Dynasty model, many Israelites followed a pastoralist life style in the highlands. As long as they did not threaten the coastal city states, Egypt did not care about them. Aharoni noted that the topographical lists of Thutmose III did not even include the Shephelah, the Negev, the highlands of Judah and Ephraim, the lower parts of Galilee, the southern end of the Jordan valley, Gilead, or the southern part of Transjordan.⁸⁸ Israel's encounters with the Egyptian empire were mediated through the Canaanite city states who were Egyptian vassals, and the Israelites may have had limited direct contact with the Egyptians.⁸⁹

James Weinstein evaluated the Egyptian empire's impact on Palestine during the reign of Amenhotep III. He argued that large urban areas in Palestine showed no evidence of prosperity in the later 15th century BC, and the city states of Palestine only began to recover prosperity in the 14th century BC. Weinstein contended that Egypt's domination of Palestine was strongest during the reign of Amenhotep III when no vassal in Palestine could oppose Egypt's will. Weinstein argued that no time in Egypt's empire

⁸⁷ K. A. Kitchen, "Some New Light on the Asiatic Wars of Ramesses II," *EJA* 50 (1964) 47, 65–66. The direction of Ramesses II's travel has been debated, and he may have traveled north instead of south.

⁸⁸ Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979) 165.

⁸⁹ Anson F. Rainey, "Rainey's Challenge," *BAR* 17/6 (1991) 60; B. S. J. Isserlin, "Ancient Forests in Palestine: Some Archaeological Indications," *PEQ* 85 (1953) 88.

was so favorable for Egyptian interests.⁹⁰ He noted that the Egyptian administrator over the province of Canaan ruled from Gaza. This official had at his disposal only a few small garrisons of soldiers and a few Egyptian military men who worked as bureaucrats. Weinstein wrote,

Egyptian rule was strongest along the Palestinian coast and the major high-ways of the southern Levant, and it was weakest in the hill county, peripheral areas of Palestine (such as the desertic regions), and Syria. Palestine and southern Syria offered nothing that was absolutely essential to the economic well-being of Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt, but the region formed an important buffer zone between Egypt and the superpowers of western Asia; hence it was necessary to keep the vassal rulers in line. Military support for the Egyptian officials stationed in the region was provided by a series of garrison towns and grain storage depots. Six garrison towns are mentioned in the Amarna Letters: four along the coast (Gaza and Jaffa in Palestine, Ullaza and Sumur in Syria), and two inland (Beth Shean at the eastern end of the Jezreel Valley in northern Palestine, Kumidi in the Beqa^c Valley). . . . The impression one gets from the archaeological and textual sources of the period is that the principal goal of the Egyptian administration in western Asia during the first half of the fourteenth century B.C. was to exploit the region economically and politically at the smallest cost militarily.⁹¹

Even Weinstein's interpretation of the Egyptian empire may allow an Israelite presence in the highlands, as long as the Israelites offered only a limited threat to the coastal city states. Many would not agree with Weinstein's assessment of Egyptian power at this time. Goetze argued that Egypt's power in Syria had declined so far by Amenhotep III's reign that it could be described as nominal.⁹² The difference between these perspectives involves their approach to the 'Amarna Letters. Are these letters used to stress the weakness of the city states in Syria and Palestine, or are they used to stress the weakness of the Egyptian response to their requests?

The most important texts for understanding Egypt's northern empire have been the 'Amarna Letters. They recorded attacks by *hapiru* against Egypt's vassals in the Levant. Rulers in the Levant constantly appealed to Egypt for military assistance against the *hapiru*. Since the name *hapiru* is etymologically identical to the name Hebrew, the relationship of these text to Joshua's conquest has been a topic of much debate. That discussion is too well known to be repeated here. By a 19th Dynasty model, the 'Amarna Letters were written more than a century before Israel appeared in the Levant, and the *hapiru* had nothing to do with Israel. By an 18th Dynasty model, most of the 'Amarna Letters were written a generation after the conquest. That may be why the names of Canaanite kings in the 'Amarna Letters were different from the names of Canaanite kings who were killed in the book of Joshua.

⁹⁰ James M. Weinstein, "Egypt and the Levant in the Reign of Amenhotep III," in *Amenhotep III: Perspectives on His Reign* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998) 223–24.

⁹¹ Weinstein, "Egypt and the Levant in the Reign of Amenhotep III" 228–29.

⁹² A. Goetze, "The Struggle for the Domination of Syria (1400–1300 B.C.)," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 2, pt. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 2.

An example of the issues raised by the 'Amarna Letters can be seen in letters 285–91. In these letters, 'Abdu-Heba of Jerusalem requested military assistance to resist *hapiru* attacks. 'Abdu-Heba's fears were well grounded. While Jerusalem remained outside of Israelite control until David's reign, Judg 1:8 noted that the Israelites were able to seize and burn the city on one occasion. The city may have been restored with Egyptian assistance. Gabriel Barkay discussed the evidence for an Egyptian fort, an Egyptian temple, and a small Egyptian garrison at Jerusalem as late as Merenptah's reign.⁹³ The Egyptian presence at Jerusalem would have enabled the city to resist Israelite pressure during the empire.

The debate over the 'Amarna Letters has not always taken into account the biblical context of the letters. That biblical context began with the presence of unsettled populations in the region. The Levant had always contained rootless people. The Amalekites appeared in the Pentateuch as early as Gen 14:7 and the Midianites in Gen 37:28. These groups lived on the desert fringes, and they often had both settled and semi-nomadic elements in their populations. Groups like these had threatened Egypt's northeast frontier throughout Egyptian history.

When Israel left Egypt, Israel directly and indirectly increased the unsettled population of the region. Israel's indirect contribution to the *hapiru* population may have occurred because many of Israel's 40 wilderness years were spent at the north end of the Sinai Peninsula. In Deut 2:1, Moses noted that Israel had circled Mount Seir for many days. According to Gen 36:8, Mount Seir was Edomite territory. Israel was not lost in the distant desert. For at least part of 40 years, Israel had lived within the mental horizon of the Levant. The population of Palestine probably had some idea what was happening in Israel.

This can be seen in Josh 2:9–11. Rahab told Israel's spies that Yahweh was God in heaven above and on the earth beneath. These words seemed to echo passages like Deut 4:39, so Rahab may have had some knowledge of Israel's theology. Rahab also told Israel's spies that the whole land was melting away before them. The population of Palestine knew that Israel was coming to claim the land, and many fled their homes before Israel's threat. At least some of those who fled may have joined the homeless and unsettled population called *hapiru*. The Israelites were *hapiru*, but so were many other peoples. The *hapiru* who threatened Jerusalem after Joshua's death may have been both Israelites and the descendants of the mixed rabble who had joined Israel in the exodus. The *hapiru* who threatened Byblos may have included Canaanite refugees who fled before Israel, although the *hapiru* population at Byblos was also probably more diverse than this. The relations between the Israelites and the Canaanites never stabilized. Judges 18:1–2 and 18:27 described the tribe of Dan's conquest of Laish. This passage suggested an ongoing conflict as Israelites contended for control of the land. This is the general picture recorded in the 'Amarna Letters.

⁹³ Barkay, "A Late Bronze Age Egyptian Temple in Jerusalem?" 41–42.

VII. THE CONQUEST AND THE JUDGES

The model used for the exodus has a great impact on how the cultural and historical setting of early Israel is evaluated. An example of the difficulties involved in using cultural parallels can be seen by comparing Josh 6:3–4 with the KRT legend from Ugarit. Yahweh commanded Israel to march silently around Jericho for six days. On the seventh day, they were to march around the city seven times and shout loudly. Then God would give them victory over the city.

The epic of KRT was written before Ugarit was destroyed in 1200 BC. In this myth, the god El commanded KRT to besiege the city of Udm for six days without attacking the city. KRT was promised that the city would surrender on the seventh day.⁹⁴ A parallel of some kind between these texts seems likely. By an 18th Dynasty model, the Ugaritic text may have been rooted in Israel's earlier capture of Jericho. By a 19th Dynasty model, Josh 6:3–4 might represent an intentional polemical action intended to refute Canaanite theology.

Those who question the historical accuracy of the biblical text may see Josh 6:3–4 as a fictional account written under the influence of the KRT epic. The interpretive key is whether this part of the KRT legend was written before or after Israel captured Jericho, so the assumed chronology determines the interpretation of the historical and cultural evidence.

It is fair to ask if Joshua's conquest could have occurred at the high point of Egypt's power in the Levant. James Hoffmeier noted that Judges did not mention the Egyptians despite the fact that the Egyptians engaged in military activity in Palestine. Hoffmeier noted that Judges described no Egyptian response to Israel's conquest even though such a response would be expected during the empire. He argued that Israel's presence in the land was inconsistent with the historical reality of the Egyptian empire.⁹⁵ It is not impossible that the Egyptians may have invaded Palestine to counter Israel's successes. A number of years passed between Joshua 22 and 23. Those years marked a profound change in atmosphere. Joshua 1–22 was the story of Israel's victory over all the armies that opposed them. Joshua 23:1 recorded Joshua's final message "many days" after the events in Joshua 1–22. Joshua 23–24 contained an atmosphere of despair. By that time, the situation seen in Judg 1:19 had developed. Israelites controlled the highlands, but they could not capture the lowlands. Joshua had little confidence that Israel would remain loyal to God in the future. Part of Israel's lack of confidence might have been Egyptian involvement in Palestine, although that is uncertain.

By an 18th Dynasty model, Israel entered Canaan around 1406 BC. Either Thutmose IV or Amenhotep III may have been on the throne depending on how Egyptian chronology is understood. Dates for Amenhotep III as high as 1412–1375 BC and as low as 1382–1344 BC have been defended. There has been a debate about whether Amenhotep III invaded Palestine. Weinstein

⁹⁴ J. C. L. Gibson, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1977) 85–86.

⁹⁵ Hoffmeier, "What is the Biblical Date for the Exodus?" 242.

argued that Amenhotep III was never forced to lead his army north because of his total control of the region.⁹⁶ On the other hand, Amenhotep III claimed that he had surrounded a temple at Thebes with settlements of captives from Syria.⁹⁷ It is unclear whether he invaded the Levant or just took credit for the exploits of earlier rulers. If such a campaign occurred, it could have happened in the silent years between Joshua 22 and 23 since by a high chronology, Amenhotep III reigned until 1375 BC, which was approximately the time that Joshua died.

Egypt had prevented the city states from developing strong defenses in order to prevent rebellion, and their lack of strong defensive forces made them vulnerable to Israelite attack. Under Joshua's leadership, the Israelites defeated the armies of Canaan, but the Israelites initially burned only Hazor. When Joshua left the Canaanite cities intact, he also left the basis for Canaanite culture intact. Little hard evidence has survived for Joshua's conquest precisely because burn layers were not created by the conquest. Even a cultural change may not be apparent in the archaeological record if the Israelites traded for Canaanite goods as they circled Mount Seir.

Events during Israel's period of Judges have been notoriously difficult to date. A 19th Dynasty model for the Judges required that the period of judges be very brief. Kitchen suggested that Israel entered Palestine in 1210 BC, which was only 170 years before Saul's coronation.⁹⁸ Kitchen paralleled this to the Turin Papyrus which traced 170 Egyptian rulers in the 13th and 14th dynasties. The papyrus attributed 520 total years to them even though they ruled in a time period of only 240 years. Kitchen argued that many of them were contemporaries just as several of Israel's judges were contemporaries.⁹⁹ Chronologies for Judges have also recently been proposed by David Washburn and Andrew Steinmann that were based on 18th Dynasty models.¹⁰⁰ These chronologies rested partly on the time spans of twenty and forty years in Judges. Unfortunately, these numbers sometimes described periods of rest or rebellion that had no specific beginning and ending dates.¹⁰¹ Using them to construct a rigid chronology would seem problematic.

The problems involved in drawing a chronology for Judges can be seen in the account of Deborah's battle against Jabin of Hazor. When seeking a cultural and historical setting for Judges 4–5, the most serious problem involves the archaeology of Hazor. Could Hazor have been a strong city at a time that could place Deborah within the confines of a 19th Dynasty model for Israel's early history? In 1982, Yigael Yadin wrote,

Our very extensive excavations at Hazor clearly demonstrated that a large Canaanite city was suddenly destroyed and set on fire in the 13th century B.C.

⁹⁶ James M. Weinstein, et al., "The World Abroad," in *Amenhotep III: Perspectives on His Reign* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998) 224.

⁹⁷ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings* II:44.

⁹⁸ Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* 159

⁹⁹ See the critique of Kitchen's argument in Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest* 90.

¹⁰⁰ David Washburn, "The Chronology of Judges Another Look," *BSac* 147 (1990) 414–25; Andrew E. Steinmann, "The Mysterious Numbers of the Book of Judges," *JETS* 48 (2005) 491–500.

¹⁰¹ Judg 3:11; 5:31; 8:28; 13:1.

(end of the Late Bronze Age), no later than about 1,230 B.C. On the thick debris of the mound of the destroyed Canaanite city, we found a new settlement, unfortified, poor and obviously semi-nomadic in character. The so-called lower city of Canaanite Hazor had been simply abandoned. Hazor could hardly be considered a city at this point. Only in the 10th century B.C. when Solomon rebuilt it did Hazor once again become a major urban center.¹⁰²

Yadin claimed that Hazor was destroyed no later than 1230 BC because the latest stratum of the lower city at Hazor, the IA level, contained Myc IIIB pottery. Furumark's study had suggested that Myc IIIB pottery no longer appeared after 1230 BC.¹⁰³ Yadin noted that the IA level showed signs of decline. It had been rebuilt shortly after the destruction of the IB level by Seti I who reigned 1303–1290 BC by a low chronology. Yadin argued that the IA level at Hazor was destroyed by Joshua. He contended that Canaanite Hazor came to an end, and the city would only be a small Israelite settlement after that time. Yadin noted that a few authors had tried to date Deborah's battle in the 13th century BC before Joshua destroyed the city, but he argued that this suggestion created substantial historical problems. Yadin argued that no level at Hazor after Joshua burned the city could be associated with Jabin's Hazor. Yadin concluded that the account of Deborah's battle against Hazor was not historically correct.¹⁰⁴

Yadin's position was critiqued by Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger who argued that Yadin's limit of 1230 BC for the Hazor IA destruction was invalid because Myc IIIB pottery was used at Alalakh and Ugarit as late as 1200 or 1180 BC. Schäfer-Lichtenberger argued that the IA destruction of the lower city at Hazor could have been caused by Israel, the Sea People, the Hittites, the Egyptians, or one of Hazor's Amorite neighbors. However, Schäfer-Lichtenberger argued the Hazor level IA contained so few artifacts that little time could have passed between the destruction of the IB level by Seti I and the final destruction of the lower city. No matter who destroyed the city, Schäfer-Lichtenberger argued that Deborah's battle with Jabin of Hazor must have been fictional.¹⁰⁵

Yadin and Schäfer-Lichtenberger had a valid point. If a 19th Dynasty model is used to structure Israel's early history, and if Seti I destroyed the lower city IB level at Hazor, it becomes hard to find evidence for Jabin's 20-year oppression and his 900 chariots. Hazor was not a very strong city after the level IB destruction of the lower city, and it was hardly a city at all after the IA level destruction. The level IB culture is unlikely to be Jabin's

¹⁰² Yigael Yadin, "Is the Biblical Account of the Israelite Conquest of Canaan Historically Reliable?," *BAR* 8/2 (1982) 19.

¹⁰³ 1230 BC would be in the middle of Ramesses II's reign by a low chronology. It would be near the end of his reign by a high chronology. The 1230 date used here assumed a high chronology for his reign.

¹⁰⁴ Yigael Yadin, *Hazor: The Head of All Those Kingdoms* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972) 108, 132.

¹⁰⁵ Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger, "Hazor: A City State between the Major Powers," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 15 (2001) 14–16.

Hazor. The reason for this can be seen in the history of the period. Ramesses II campaigned in Palestine and Syria for the first 21 years of his reign. During these years, the Egyptians would not allow city states of Palestine to build strong defenses since doing so could lead to revolt against Egypt. Hazor could not have gained 900 chariots and oppressed Israel for two decades at the same time that Ramesses II was campaigning in the north. In Ramesses II's records of his battles against the Hittites, many cities were listed as allies on both sides.

However, Hazor was not named. Unless the name was originally written in a lacuna in the text,¹⁰⁶ Hazor's absence from the lists suggests that the city was not strong enough to participate in the war. Tubb argued that the Egyptians' fort at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh on the Jordan River was built late in the reign of Ramesses II, and it was used through the 20th Dynasty. Tubb claimed that the fort was used to collect taxes and control the region.¹⁰⁷ Jabin could not have gathered 900 chariots and oppressed Israel for 20 years while Egypt controlled Tell es-Sa'idiyeh. Ramesses II was followed by Merenptah. When he campaigned in Palestine, he did not mention or attack Hazor, so the city may not have been a dominant power in the region during his reign.

Whoever destroyed level IA of Canaanite Hazor, its destruction probably occurred either during or shortly after Ramesses II's northern campaigns. Thus placing Jabin at any time after Seti I may be difficult. To address this problem, Kitchen argued that Jabin may have ruled the state of Hazor from a different location than the city of Hazor, and that Jabin's fortress may not yet have been found.¹⁰⁸ This suggestion would be more attractive if a state called Hazor could be demonstrated independent of the city. It can also be questioned whether a small fortress town would have been a likely setting for Jabin's army of 900 chariots.

An 18th Dynasty model offers a stronger setting for Jabin's Hazor. To understand why, it is important to understand Hazor's history. Hazor was one of the most important cities in the region as early as the 3rd millennium BC.¹⁰⁹ Hazor was part of the Amorite culture of Syria, western Mesopotamia, and eastern Anatolia. During Egypt's Hyksos era, the Egyptians influenced events on the coastal plains and southern highlands of Palestine, but Hazor was beyond Egypt's influence.¹¹⁰ During the empire, Hazor was

¹⁰⁶ Such lacunae were not uncommon. For example, a text at the Ramesseum listed towns in Syria-Palestine that Ramesses II captured in his 8th year. Forts 13, 16, and 17 no longer contained the names once included on the list. The limitation of this possibility is that several lists of captured cities survived, and Hazor was not included on any of the lists. For conquest accounts by Ramesses II see K. A. Kitchen, *Ramesseid Inscriptions Translated & Annotated: Translations Volume II: Ramesses II, Royal Inscriptions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) 26–27, 48–49, 51–54, 71.

¹⁰⁷ J. N. Tubb, "An Aegean Presence in Egypto-Canaan," in *Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant: Interconnections in the Second Millennium BC* (London: British Museum Press, 1995) 141–42.

¹⁰⁸ Kitchen, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* 67–68.

¹⁰⁹ Abraham Malamat, "Northern Canaan and the Mari Texts," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) 164–77.

¹¹⁰ Aharon Kempinski and Michael Avi-Yonah, *Syria-Palestine II: From the Middle Bronze Age to the End of the Classical World (2200 B.C.–324 A.D.)* (Geneva: Nagel, 1979) 46–47.

attacked by Thutmose III in order to control Palestine and Syria.¹¹¹ As soon as Thutmose III died, Naharain and the northern Mediterranean coast rebelled against Egypt. Amenhotep II was forced to campaign in the north to regain control. After he died, Thutmose IV was forced to lead his army north again. Recognizing the difficulty of holding land that far north, Thutmose IV formed a marriage alliance with Mitanni. The region from Hazor to Mitanni resisted Egyptian control whenever the opportunity arose.

Hazor was one of the strongest cities in the Levant. It may have had a population of over 40,000 inhabitants.¹¹² The city would have been very difficult for Israel to capture if it had not already been weakened by the Egyptians.¹¹³ After Joshua destroyed Hazor's army in the field, he was able to attack the city's weakened defenses. Joshua 11:10–11 noted that Joshua killed the king of Hazor and everyone who was in the city. The text does not indicate the percentage of Hazor's population that fled from the city before it was destroyed or how long it took them to return and rebuild. It is possible that light may be shed on this question by the contrast between Abimilki of Tyre's comments in 'Amarna Letter 148 and the king of Hazor's claimed in 'Amarna Letter 228. Abimilki claimed that the king of Hazor had left his city, had joined the *hapiru*, and had opposed the Egyptian administration.

While no reason was given for his choice of a *hapiru* life style, this letter could describe the unsettled conditions after Joshua killed Hazor's former king and burned the city. When 'Amarna Letter 228 was written, a king was reigning in Hazor once more. This king asked Egypt's ruler to remember what had been done against Hazor and its king. This ambiguous claim could have referred to Joshua's attack against the city in the past. In this letter, the king of Hazor claimed that he was a loyal vassal of Egypt. He claimed that he protected Hazor and other cities for the good of the Egyptian throne. Yet despite his protests of loyalty, Hazor was already becoming aggressive. In 'Amarna Letter 256b, Aiab complained that Hazor had seized three cities from him. Yadin interpreted the 'Amarna claims to mean that Hazor controlled the region from Tyre to Ashtaroth in Transjordan.¹¹⁴ Hazor was

¹¹¹ Hazor was included in Thutmose III's list of conquered cities in Palestine. The list was carved on the 6th and 7th pylons at Karnak. Diamantis Panagiotopoulos, "Foreigners in Egypt in the Time of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III," in *Thutmose III: A New Biography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006) 374. Seti I's list of conquered cities included Tyre and Hazor. Part of Seti I's list may have copied the list by Thutmose III. William J. Murname, *The Road to Kadesh: A Historical Interpretation of the Battle Reliefs of King Sety I at Karnak* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1990) 44. The similarity of these lists leads some authors to question whether Seti I actually conquered Hazor. It is also possible that Hazor's inclusion in a list of conquered cities may not prove that Seti I destroyed the lower IB level at Hazor. For the text, see K. A. Kitchen, *Ramesseid Inscriptions Translated and Annotated: Translations: I: Rameses I, Sethos I and Contemporaries* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 26.

¹¹² Ronald Youngblood, "Hazor," in *Major Cities of the Biblical World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985) 121.

¹¹³ The 'Amarna Letters illustrated the city states' weakness. The letters requested surprisingly small groups of Egyptian soldiers as military assistance. Rib-Addi only requested 30 chariots and a hundred soldiers.

¹¹⁴ Yigael Yadin, "Further Light on Biblical Hazor," *BA* 20 (1957) 35.

becoming the kind of city that could oppress Israel and oppose Deborah. One limitation of this suggestion is that Abimilki's letter may have been written during Akhenaten's reign. There may not be enough time between the chaos following Joshua's destruction of Hazor and the aggressive culture suggested by 'Amarna Letter 256b.

In the context of the Egyptian empire, Judg 9:3 requires some explanation. How could Jabin of Hazor have acquired 900 chariots? It is unlikely that Egypt would have sold Jabin 900 chariots. During the empire, Egypt might have provided 30 chariots, but not 900. Beyond that, chariot warfare was still relatively new in Egypt at this time. Joann Fletcher noted that Amenhotep III seems to have been the first pharaoh to use chariots as a separate unit in his army.¹¹⁵ If Egypt did not give Jabin his chariots, what was their source? It is important to remember that Hazor was part of the Amorite culture of Syria, western Mesopotamia, and Anatolia. Culturally, Hazor looked north at least as much as it looked south. When Egypt's control of Palestine weakened at the end of the 18th Dynasty, it should not be surprising that Hazor once again turned north. There has been much debate about the extent that Egypt's control of the north was weakened during the 'Amarna Age and the close of the 18th Dynasty. While opinions differ widely about the extent that Egypt's empire collapsed, Egyptian control of the north was weakened to some extent while the Hittite empire was on the rise.

The most important Hittite conqueror was Suppiluliuma. He was a contemporary of Amenhotep III, Akhenaten, Tutankhamun, and Ay. Through much of his reign, he struggled against Mitanni for control of the region east and southeast of Anatolia. For the first five years of his reign, he tried to build alliances and isolate Mitanni despite Mitanni's alliance with Egypt. Then he conquered Mitanni's vassals in Syria as far south as Upi which is the land around Damascus. Bryce argued that Suppiluliuma's success was partly the result of military strength and partly diplomatic alliances. Bryce noted that Suppiluliuma's vassals Aitakkama and Aziru used their alliances with the Hittites to expand their territories at the expense of their neighbors who remained faithful vassals of Egypt. While Suppiluliuma normally avoided direct confrontation with Egypt, at the end of his reign, he sent his army into southern Syria. He attacked cities in Egypt's territory and brought thousands of captives back to Anatolia.¹¹⁶ In that cultural setting, it is not unreasonable to believe that Suppiluliuma could have sold chariots to Hazor, and that Hazor would have expanded its power at the expense of Egypt's territory in Palestine. When Ramesses II later fought the Hittites, he faced 2500 Hittite chariots. So Jabin's 900 chariots fit the historical setting rather well.

Suppiluliuma was followed to the Hittite throne by Mursili I. Anthony Spalinger made an interesting observation about his reign. Mursili I was concerned about the threat of an Egyptian campaign against Syria. However,

¹¹⁵ Joann Fletcher, *Chronicle of a Pharaoh: The Intimate Life of Amenhotep III* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 106.

¹¹⁶ Bryce, *Kingdom of the Hittites* 171, 175, 177, 189, 198.

the Egyptian army probably never reached the region. The references to this invasion are nebulous, and it is not possible to reconstruct what happened. Spalinger suggested that the Egyptian army may have been stopped at some point south of Kadesh and Amurru by the local population.¹¹⁷ If this suggestion was correct, Hazor would be a likely candidate as an opponent to Egyptian power. If Hazor sought chariots from the Hittites, the city would have done so in rebellion against Egyptian control of the region. So it is not surprising that Hazor was destroyed by Seti I at the start of the 19th Dynasty.¹¹⁸ Deborah's battle against Hazor would then have been fought at some time before the city was destroyed by Seti I. Deborah's battle would be difficult to date more precisely than this. Since Deborah's battle involved the northern tribes and Gideon's battle involved the south, the chronological relationship between Deborah and Gideon may also be difficult to determine.

Seti I may also have played a role in Gideon's story. Judges 6 noted that the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the "sons of the east" oppressed Israel for 7 years. At harvest, hordes of Bedouin from the fringe of the settled regions overran Israel and plundered the land. They passed through Israel's territory as far as Gaza. Gideon defeated them by turning their forces against each other in the night. The Midianites, Amalekites, and "sons of the east" then killed each other. The reference to Gaza was important because Gaza was the center of Egyptian administration in Palestine.¹¹⁹ In an 18th Dynasty model, the "sons of the east" not only struck the highlands but the heart of the Egyptian empire as well. In a 19th Dynasty model, Gaza was one of the most important Sea People cities. Given the strength of the Sea People forces, it seems unlikely that the "sons of the east" could overrun the Pentapolis at any time after 1200 BC.

One possible historical setting for Gideon's battle could be found shortly before Seti I led his army north in his 1st year. Seti I's possible relationship with Gideon can be seen in Seti I's conflict with an ethnic group that the Egyptians called the Shasu. Scene #8 of Seti I's Karnak reliefs depicted him leading Shasu captives to Egypt. The text explained an event that occurred before Seti I prepared for his first northern campaign. Seti I was informed that a group of Bedouin called the Shasu had plotted rebellion against Egypt, and they had attacked the "Asiatics of Kharu," or the settled population of Palestine. Seti I was told that the Shasu quarreled. Each of them killed his neighbor, and they ignored the laws of the palace. It is striking that Seti I fought the Shasu until he arrived at "the Canaan," which was the Egyptian

¹¹⁷ Anthony J. Spanlinger, "Egyptian-Hittite Relations at the Close of the Amarna Period and Some Notes on Hittite Military Strategy in North Syria," *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 1 (1979) 59.

¹¹⁸ M. Kochavi, "At that Time the Canaanites Were in the Land," in *Recent Archaeology in the Land of Israel* (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1981) 33. John Gray argued that the destruction layer at Hazor was probably caused by Seti I's campaign as he claimed ("Hazor," *VT* 16 [1966] 51).

¹¹⁹ Weinstein, "Egypt and the Levant in the Reign of Amenhotep III" 226-27.

name for Gaza.¹²⁰ The Shasu invasion of Palestine in Seti I's day echoed Judges 6 on several points. It may be that Seti I heard about the Bedouin invasion of Palestine. He may have heard about Gideon's battle although that is less clear in the text. He may then have led his army north to restore the good order of the Egyptian empire.

The key question is the identity of the Shasu. The Egyptian term is not clear enough to identify any one group named in the Bible as the Shasu. Since Albright's time, it has been popular to identify the Shasu as Israel. In a 19th Dynasty model, Israel would have entered Palestine around the time of Seti I, Ramesses II, or Merenptah, so an invasion of Bedouin during the reign of Seti I could possibly have been proto-Israel, but that suggestion is problematic. Thutmose III defeated the Shasu in his 14th northern campaign. That was before the exodus by almost any chronology.¹²¹ The Egyptian texts depicted the Shasu as a nomadic or semi-nomadic population living south and east of settled areas of Palestine although they could at times be found more widely.¹²² The Shasu were identified with Edomite territory in the famous 12th century BC report of a frontier official. Depending on how the text is translated, the official either completed or prevented the entrance of Edomite Shasu into the delta.¹²³

While the Shasu cannot be equated with any known group in the Levant, they were Bedouins who lived in the same area at the same time, and by the same life style as the Midianites, the Amalekites, and the "sons of the east."¹²⁴ It is not unlikely that the term "Shasu" included these groups. An association of the name Shasu with the Midianites may also be implied by Exod 3:1. Moses' father-in-law Jethro was a priest of Midian. This is interesting because the onomastica of Amenhotep III and Ramesses II contained six place names that included forms closely related to the name Yahweh. One of these names was spelled simply as *ya-h-wá*. The names were preceded by the words *t3 šššw* which meant "the Shasu Land."¹²⁵ Horn suggested that this may have been Edomite territory.¹²⁶ These lists have led to speculation that Moses may have learned the name Yahweh from the Midianites or Kenites.¹²⁷ However that question is interpreted, the combination of Exod 3:1 with the

¹²⁰ ARE III:45-46, 52.

¹²¹ ARE II:211.

¹²² Michael G. Hasel, *Domination and Resistance: Egyptian Military Activity in the Southern Levant, ca. 1300-1185 B.C.* (Leiden: Brill, 1998) 161. David C. Hopkins, "Pastoralists in the Late Bronze Age Palestine: Which Way Did They Go?" *BA* 56 (1993) 200.

¹²³ ANET 259.

¹²⁴ Gen 14:7 and Exod 17:8-16 located Amalekites on the eastern and southern fringes of Palestine.

¹²⁵ Michael C. Astour, "Yahweh in Egyptian Topographic Lists," *Festschrift Elmar Edel* (Bamberg: Kurt Urlaub, 1979) 19.

¹²⁶ S. H. Horn, "Jericho in a Topographical List of Ramesses II," *JNES* 12 (1952) 201. K. A. Kitchen argued that the Negev contained almost no settlements between the 19th and 10th centuries BC. Kitchen suggested that the tells of Shasu mentioned by Ramesses II may have been in Edomite territory ("Some New Light on the Asiatic Wars of Ramesses II" 66).

¹²⁷ Astour, "Yahweh in Egyptian Topographical Lists" 22.

Egyptian onomastica might suggest a link between the Shasu and groups like the Midianites and Amalekites.

Seti I might also have had a brief military encounter with the Israelites. During his first northern campaign, Seti I fought briefly the *hapiru* who inhabited the highlands near the Jordan valley. Seti I sent a small force into the highlands who returned in two days with captives. Seti I described his conflict this way.

“The ‘Apiru of the mountain of Yarmutu, along with the Tayaru [folk, they] are arisen, attacking the Asiatics of Ruhma.”

Then said [His Majesty]: “Who [do they] think they are, these despicable Asiatics, in [taking up] their [arms] for yet more trouble? They shall find out about him whom they did not know - [the Ruler valiant like a falcon and a strong bull wide-striding and sharp-horned, [spreading his wings (firm)] as flint, and every limb as iron, to hack up the [entire] land of Dja[hy]!”¹²⁸

R. O. Faulkner argued that this text described the region around Beth Shean.¹²⁹ If so, the Asiatics of Ruhma in this passage could have been Egypt’s Canaanite vassals, and the *hapiru* could have been Israelites although these identifications are uncertain. If this text is taken as an encounter with Israel, Seti I may have sought to stop new Israelite aggression against the coastal city states instigated by Gideon’s victory. It is striking that Seti I also encountered an ethnic group called the *’sr* who lived in Galilee. By an 18th Dynasty model, the *’sr* could have been the tribe of Asher.¹³⁰

Judges 8:22 noted that the Israelites offered kingship to Gideon after his victory. Gideon declared that neither he nor his sons would rule over Israel because God was their King. This passage mentioned that the land was undisturbed for 40 years in Gideon’s days. After Gideon died, Judg 9:1–6 indicated that Abimelech murdered Gideon’s 70 sons. Abimelech was the son of Gideon’s concubine at Shechem. After killing Gideon’s sons, the men of Shechem made Abimelech the king, and he ruled Israel for three years. Then Judg 9:22–25 noted that the men of Shechem turned against Abimelech. In this context, Jonathan Tubb’s excavations at Tell es-Sa’idiyeh are interesting. This site was located near the Jordan River ford about 40 miles southeast of Beth Shean. Tell es-Sa’idiyeh contained a fortress as well as an Egyptian cemetery and Egyptian architecture. Tubb argued that the site was built by the Egyptians late in the reign of Ramesses II, and that it remained an Egyptian fortress through the 20th Dynasty. Tubb noted that the fortress

¹²⁸ Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions Translated and Annotated: Translations: I: Ramesses I, Sethos I and Contemporaries* 13. See also William F. Albright, “The Smaller Beth-Shan Stele of Sethos I (1309–1290 B.C.),” *BASOR* 125 (1952) 27–29. Murname, *Road to Kadesh* 62. If an 18th Dynasty exodus is assumed to be true, the *hapiru* faced by Seti I might have been Israelites, although that is uncertain. The land of *Djahy* was southern Syria and Palestine.

¹²⁹ R. O. Faulkner, “Egypt from the Inception of the Nineteenth Dynasty to the Death of Ramesses III,” in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol 2, pt 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 219.

¹³⁰ S. Douglas Waterhouse, “Who Are the *iabiru* of the Amarna Letters?,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 12/1 (2001) 33.

was a center for taxation, and that it controlled both agriculture and trade in the region.¹³¹ While neither Abimelech's reign nor the construction of the Egyptian fortress at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh can be dated with any certainty, it is at least possible that the fortress was built in response to the rise of kingship in the highlands. Perhaps the men of Shechem were intimidated by Egypt's threat to Israel's territory and withdrew their support from Abimelech.

VIII. THE PHILISTINES

The search for a cultural setting for Israel's early history has also involved the Philistine population. James Hoffmeier noted that the Philistines appeared in Judges more than any other foe. Hoffmeier argued that the Philistines only arrived in Palestine when the Sea People invaded the land during the 8th year of Ramesses III.¹³² This would have been between 1190 and 1176 BC depending on the chronology used. Hoffmeier was correct in noting that a Philistine arrival around 1176 BC would make an 18th Dynasty model hard to sustain. Hoffmeier's claim equated the Philistines with the Sea People who invaded Palestine at that time. That identification is only partly correct. The Peleset, or the Philistines, were one of several groups that invaded the Nile delta during the reign of Ramesses III. However, the Philistines were only a small part of the total Sea People culture. After Ramesses III drove the Sea People back into Palestine, the Sea People settled into the Philistine Pentapolis. However, Philistines may have been present in Palestine for many years before this time.

Little archaeological or textual evidence has survived for the origin of the Philistines.¹³³ No one knows where their homeland was located although Crete or Cyprus are popular suggestions. At Medinet Habu, Ramesses III associated the Philistines with the "northern countries."¹³⁴ Robert Drews noted that Ramesses III claimed to have defeated the "land of the Peleset." Drews argued that this supported an origin of the Philistines in the Levant.¹³⁵ The problem with calling Palestine the Philistine homeland is that the Philistines were never included on OT lists of nations in the Promised Land. Yet Ramesses III's comment does suggest a Philistine presence in the land before his campaigns. R. D. Barnett noted evidence that could be used to support the identification of the Philistines with the Aegean. Barnett noted that the Philistines fought alongside the Akawasha who were Mycenaean Greeks. Barnett noted that Ramesses III's depiction of his battle against the Sea People depicted the Philistines sailing in an unusual

¹³¹ Tubb, "An Aegean Presence in Egypto-Canaan" 141-42.

¹³² Hoffmeier, "What is the Biblical Date for the Exodus?" 242.

¹³³ Tubb noted that "Philistine" style pottery only appeared in the region 50 years after the Sea People settled in the Pentapolis ("An Aegean Presence in Egypto-Canaan" 136).

¹³⁴ ANET, 263.

¹³⁵ Robert Drews, *The End of the Bronze Age: Changes in Warfare and the Catastrophe CA. 1200 B.C.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 51-53.

kind of ship depicted on a late Helladic III vase. Barnett noted also that Goliath's challenge to single combat was a Hellenic idea.¹³⁶

The biblical evidence for the Philistines' origin is ambiguous. The Philistines were always present in the land, but they were never included in lists of nation of the land. Genesis 10:14 claimed that the Philistines came from the Casluhim instead of the Caphtorim. The Casluhim were also descended from Mizraim but were otherwise difficult to identify.¹³⁷ Genesis 21:32 referred to the "land of the Philistines" while Gen 26:1–18 described Abimelech as a king of the Philistines. The references to Philistines in Genesis and Exodus could reflect later editorial updating of the text. However, it is not clear why a later editor of Genesis 20 would depict Abimelech as a Philistine who was in some ways more admirable than Abraham. That would be a deeply shocking claim.

Moses clearly believed that the Philistines were already in Palestine before the exodus. Exodus 13:17 referred to the coastal road to Palestine as the way of the "land of the Philistines," and Exod 23:31 described the Mediterranean Sea as the sea of the Philistines. Joshua 13:2–3 noted that at the end of Joshua's life, the Israelites had still not captured the five Philistine rulers in Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron. Judges 3:3 stated that the five Philistine lords remained unconquered, and Judg 3:31 indicated a brief oppression by the Philistines. It is surprising that the Philistines were never included in OT lists of nations in Palestine. If the Philistines were present in Palestine as early as the patriarchal age, and if they were important enough to give their name to the Mediterranean Sea, why were they never listed as a people of the land?

The Philistines of Genesis could have been traders from either Crete or Cyprus.¹³⁸

Later biblical passages associated the Philistines with Crete on several occasions.¹³⁹ The Minoan navy controlled the eastern Mediterranean basin, but the navy was used to keep piracy in check instead of being a vehicle for domination. The Mediterranean Sea could have been called the Sea of the Philistines. Ashkelon might have been either a port of call for the Minoan navy or a trade enclave similar to the Minoan enclaves on the southern shore

¹³⁶ R. D. Barnett, "The Sea Peoples," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol 2, pt 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 373.

¹³⁷ The Egyptian origin of the Early Minoan I culture has recently been supported by Keith Branigan (*The Foundations of Palatial Crete* [New York: Praeger, 1970] 198–99).

¹³⁸ Phythian-Adams surveyed archaeological evidence found at Ashkelon during Garstang's excavation. Phythian-Adams identified 43 occupation layers at Ashkelon. Phythian-Adams noted that even the lowest level contained pottery that demonstrated the influence of Cyprus and the Eastern Mediterranean. Celia J. Bergoffen, "Some Cypriote Pottery from Ashkelon," *Levant* 20 (1988) 161.

¹³⁹ Barnett noted that the coast of Palestine was called the Cretan coast in 1 Sam 30:14, and the Philistines were associated with people from Crete in Ezek 25:16 and Zeph 2:5 ("Sea Peoples" 373). The prophets also associated the Philistines with Crete. Jeremiah 47:4 associated the Philistines with the coastland of Caphtor which was probably Crete. Amos 9:7 claimed that God had brought the Philistines from Caphtor.

of Anatolia.¹⁴⁰ Hindson argued that there was a great expansion of Aegean trade during the Middle Minoan Period between 1900 and 1700 BC. He suggested that Abraham could have had commercial contacts with the Aegean traders.¹⁴¹ While no enclave colonies have been identified in the southern part of the Levant, that model would fit the biblical context. Traders lived in cities alongside the local populations. They were influential members of the community, but they did not rule those communities.

Hatshepsut and Thutmose III had economic ties with Minoan Crete. An envoy from Crete was even depicted on the walls of Senmut's tomb. Depending on the chronology used, Minoan Crete may have fallen to Mycenaean Greece shortly after Thutmose III died.¹⁴² As the Mycenaean Greeks took over the Minoan trade routes, sites like Ashkelon saw a great increase of imports from Cyprus and Mycenaean Greece.¹⁴³ The Greeks were a fierce, warlike, and aggressive people.¹⁴⁴ As the Mycenaean Greeks expanded their influence in the eastern Mediterranean, they may have persecuted Israel in Judg 3:31. Then the Sea People invasion of 1200 BC would have changed radically the nature of the Philistine presence in Palestine.¹⁴⁵ There are limitations to the strength of this model. Minoan, Cypriote, and Mycenaean traders were present in northern Syria, but their role in Palestine is less clear.¹⁴⁶

The Sea People invasion of 1200 BC marked the beginning of a dark age in the ancient Near East. Great cultures of the region went sharply into decline. There has been much debate about the causes of this dark period. The decline was set off at least partly by a famine. The famine may have begun on the North African coast as early as the closing years of Ramesses II's

¹⁴⁰ For a discussion of Minoan enclave colonies, see I. Tournavitou, "Enclave Colonies Model-True or False?," *Annual of the British School at Athens* 85 (1990) 415–18; Christopher Mee, *Rhodes in the Bronze Age: An Archaeological Study* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1982) 80; Elizabeth Schofield, "Coming to Terms with Minoan Colonists," in *The Minoan Thalassocracy: Myth and Reality* (Stockholm: Paul Åströms, 1984). Christopher Mee, "Aegean Trade and Settlement in Anatolia in the Second Millennium B. C.," *Anatolian Studies* 28 (1978) 121–55.

¹⁴¹ Edward E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971) 17, 95.

¹⁴² William S. Smith, *Interconnections in the Ancient Near East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965) 68–69.

¹⁴³ S. Yeivin, "Canaanite and Hittite Strategy in the Second Half of the Second Millennium B.C.," *JNES* 9 (1950) 126–27; Celia J. Bergoffen, "Some Cypriote Pottery from Ashkelon," *Levant* 20 (1988) 161; W. J. Phythian-Adams, "Stratigraphical Sections," in "Askalon Reports," *PEFQS* (1921) 165, 168; James D. Muhly, "Mycenaeans Were There Before the Israelites: Excavating the Dan Tomb," *BAR* 31/5 (2005) 47; Frank M. Cross and Lawrence E. Stager, "Cypro-Minoan Inscriptions Found in Ashkelon," *IEJ* 56 (2006) 129.

¹⁴⁴ William Taylour, *Ancient Peoples and Places: The Mycenaeans* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964) 139.

¹⁴⁵ The process and character of the Sea People invasion has been debated. For the problems in using Myc III C pottery to trace Philistine immigration, see Ilan Sharon, "Philistine Bichrome Painted Pottery: Scholarly Ideology and Ceramic Typology," in *Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and Neighboring Lands in Memory of Douglas L. Esse* (Atlanta: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001) 555–609.

¹⁴⁶ Yak Yakar, "Hittite Involvement in Western Anatolia," *Anatolian Studies* 26 (1976) 126.

reign. He had been threatened by Libyans who tried to seize land in the western Nile delta. Faulkner suggested that the Libyans were facing famine in their own land, and they sought to seize the delta.¹⁴⁷ Rhys Carpenter noted that this famine did not affect Western Europe, but it did strike Crete, the southern Greek Peloponnesus, Boeotia, Euboea, Pholia, and the Argoid.¹⁴⁸ During the famine, Merenptah sent grain to the Hittites for famine relief.¹⁴⁹

The famine was mentioned in a letter at Ugarit which was a Hittite vassal at the time. The Hittites required a ship from Ugarit so that they could transport 2,000 measures of grain to Cilicia. The Hittite king claimed that the grain was a matter of life and death.¹⁵⁰ Ugarit itself eventually suffered a similar fate. A thick layer of yellow dust two meters thick covered the last occupation level at Ugarit. Schaeffer saw this dust as evidence that Ugarit experienced drought conditions shortly before the city was destroyed.¹⁵¹ The drought was later mentioned by the Hittite king Annuwandas III. He described the terrible hunger that had been experienced during his father's reign.¹⁵² If the famine had eased in Hittite territory by his reign, the beginning of the dark age may have been caused by a number of loosely related factors instead of simply famine.

Motivated at least partly by this famine, immigrants across the ancient Near East searched for a place where they could survive. The Sea People invasion began during Merenptah's reign. A coalition of tribes invaded the western delta and tried to take it away from Egypt. This was a continuation of the troubles that Ramesses II had faced in the western delta. The coalition included Libyans, Sherden, Shekelesh, Lukku, and Tursha.¹⁵³ Philistines were not included in this first Sea People assault on Egypt. Ramesses II may have contributed to the problems that Merenptah faced. Ramesses II had incorporated into his army Sherden troops from Sardinia and Meshwesh troops from Africa's northern coast. Enough Sherden fought for Egypt that they formed a contingent of their own in his army, and they fought for Ramesses II at Kadesh.¹⁵⁴ They knew the delta's resources quite well. When the famine came, it is not surprising that the Sherden and other tribal groups attempted to seize the western delta. Merenptah was able to defeat them and drive them from Egyptian territory.

The threat to the Nile delta reappeared during the reign of Ramesses III. In the years around the Sea People invasion of the Levant, many cities were destroyed in Greece, the Aegean, Anatolia, and the Levant. George

¹⁴⁷ Faulkner, "Egypt from the Inception of the Nineteenth Dynasty to the Death of Ramesses III" 230-33.

¹⁴⁸ R. A. Bryson, et al., "Drought and the Decline of Mycenae," *Antiquity* 48 (1974) 46.

¹⁴⁹ *ARE* III:243-44.

¹⁵⁰ Barnett, "Sea People" 369; Albert J. Leonard, "Archaeological Sources for the History of Palestine: The Late Bronze Age," *BA* 52 (1989) 30.

¹⁵¹ Claude F. A. Schaeffer, "The Last Days of Ugarit," *BAR* 9/5 (1983) 74-75.

¹⁵² G. A. Wainwright, "Menepthah's Aid to the Hittites," *JEA* 46 (1960) 25.

¹⁵³ K. A. Kitchen, *Ramesseid Inscriptions Translated and Annotated: Translations: Volume IV: Merenptah & the Late Nineteenth Dynasty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) 2, 7.

¹⁵⁴ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, II:63; *ARE* III:136-37.

Mendenhall claimed that almost every site on Greece that had been excavated showed a destruction level between 1250 and 1150 BC.¹⁵⁵ The Hittite empire was completely devastated. Cities were destroyed or abandoned as far north as Alaca Höyük and Mašat. The destruction also reached east as far as Noršuntepe and Lidar Höyük on the east side of the Euphrates River.¹⁵⁶ Albright argued that the Sea People reached southwestern Armenia by 1165 BC.¹⁵⁷ The Sea People poured south through the Levant. They destroyed Ugarit and it never rose again. When the Sea People moved south into Palestine, they initially struck only the coastal cities. They did not destroy inland cities like Beth Shean, Ta'anach, Jerusalem, Shechem, Gezer, and Gibeon.¹⁵⁸ The Sea People invasion may not have been mentioned in Judges because they did not attack the highlands. The Sea People invasion may also not have been discussed if Israel's prophets and judges did not interpret their advance as a judgment from God. If the Sea People attack was limited to the coastal city states, their appearance in the land may at first have seemed to help Israel rather than threatened the nation. Ramesses III described the Sea People threat to Egypt in his temple at Medinet Habu. He wrote,

The foreign countries made a *conspiracy* in their islands. All at once the lands were removed and scattered in the fray. No land could stand before their arms, from Hatti, Kode, Carchemish, Arzawa, and Alashiya on, being cut off *at [one time]*. A camp [was set up] in one place in Amor. They desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being. They were coming forward toward Egypt, while the flame was prepared before them. Their confederation was the Philistines, Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denye(n), and Weshesh, lands united. They laid their hands upon the lands as far as the circuit of the earth, their hearts confident and trusting: "Our plans will succeed!"¹⁵⁹

If this translation of the text is accepted, Ramesses III described a conspiracy of ethnic groups who devastated cities across the Levant. Their destruction began a dark age after 1200 BC. After bringing devastation to the Levant, the Sea People attacked the Nile delta by land and sea from the northeast.

Recently, it has become popular either to deny or to retranslate Ramesses III's words. There is no doubt that many cities across Anatolia, the islands of the Mediterranean, and the Levant were destroyed at roughly the same time. It is being debated whether all of these cities were destroyed by one movement of people or several factors. If a great drought set off the migrations, and if the destroyed cities were also suffering from the drought, the historical process may have been complex. Yet Ramesses III's words cannot be discounted. He faced several ethnic groups who merged their

¹⁵⁵ George Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973) 148.

¹⁵⁶ Drews, *End of the Bronze Age* 9.

¹⁵⁷ Albright, "Syria, the Philistines, and Phoenicia" 507.

¹⁵⁸ Drews, *End of the Bronze Age* 10, 17.

¹⁵⁹ ANET 262.

forces and tried to take the northeast delta. Ramesses III was able to defeat them, and the Sea People tribes were driven back to the Philistine Pentapolis.¹⁶⁰ Ramesses III may have been able to control the Sea People in Palestine throughout his reign although that has been debated.¹⁶¹ When he died, Egypt largely lost control of Palestine.

The Sea People settlement would be of great importance for Israel. The Sea People brought an Iron Age culture to the Levant that was militarily superior to their neighbors. After Ramesses III died, even Egypt could no longer dominate them. As the Sea People merged into a consistent culture, they became aggressive. Just as Canaanites had melted away before Israel in Josh 2:9, now the inhabitants of the coastal plains may have melted away before the Sea People. Jews who had lived among the Canaanites fled to the highlands. At this time, there was a great increase of population in the highlands. Bimson argued that the increase in population only began up to three decades after Merenptah's reference to Israel on Merenptah's stela. Bimson argued that Israelites in the highlands had lived a semi-nomadic life style for some time before Merenptah mentioned their presence.¹⁶² The increased highland population in the Iron I should not then have been Israel's entrance into the land.

This increase in population has been one of the most debated issues in Biblical Archaeology. The interpretations of Alt, Mendenhall, and Gottwald are too well known to discuss here. One of the more useful perspectives on the population increase was suggested by Joseph Callaway. He assumed Alt's peaceful immigration model, but he changed the direction from which the settlers arrived in the highlands. Callaway explained his suggestion this way.

The thinly-populated highlands were indeed peacefully infiltrated at the end of the Late Bronze Age, but the newcomers were primarily farmers and secondarily herders of small cattle, not nomads as Alt theorized. These settlers came to the highlands with fixed cultural patterns of village life and established settlements in marginal and even inhospitable areas with the aid of two new subsistence technologies: (1) the introduction of bell-shaped rock-cut cisterns for household water supplies; and (2) the construction of agricultural terraces which enabled the cultivation of steep hillsides never before planted in crops. Furthermore, the newcomers seem to have migrated from the lowlands and coastal region *west* of the hill country. The occasion for the migrations seems to have been population pressures imposed by more warlike newcomers to the coastal region, such as the Sea Peoples. Thus the hill country settlers migrated to escape wars and violence, and sought out in their remote and isolated mountain-top villages a place of

¹⁶⁰ Albright, "Syria, the Philistines, and Phoenicia" 514–15.

¹⁶¹ Trude Dothan, "The Arrival of the Sea People: Cultural Diversity in Early Iron Age Canaan," *Recent Excavations in Israel: Studies in Iron Age Archaeology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989) 2–3; Itamar Singer, "How Did the Philistines Enter Canaan?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 18/6 (1992) 44–46.

¹⁶² John J. Bimson, "Merenptah's Israel and Recent Theories of Israelite Origins," *JSOT* 49 (1991) 24.

refuge from the strife and disruptions in the more fertile plains. This is the new perspective I propose for the Iron Age I settlement of the highlands in central Canaan.¹⁶³

Callaway's suggestion could be applied to a 19th or an 18th Dynasty model for Israel's early history.

Adam Zertal's archaeological survey of the Shechem syncline illustrated the population changes in Palestine. Zertal noted that 72 settlements occupied the Shechem syncline in the MB IIB (1750–1550 BC). During the LB, most of those settlements disappeared. Only 18 remained. Half of these were fortified tells, and 15 of these were located on the edge of valleys. So the highlands were largely abandoned. Zertal noted that the LB population used pottery with red stripes that was rare before and after the LB. Zertal suggested that the LB population of the highlands may have disappeared because of the Egyptian attack against the Hyksos at Sharuhén and that the *hapiru* may have been present in the region.¹⁶⁴

It is not impossible that highland settlements disappeared during the LB because a pastoral Israelite culture had entered the highlands. Holska-Horowitz and Milevski noted that the LB saw a marked increase in cattle and sheep in the highlands. They argued that the transition from the MB to the LB was a shift from urbanism to pastoralism in the highlands.¹⁶⁵ At the same time, pigs largely disappeared from the highlands. No pig bones were found at Shiloh from the LB.¹⁶⁶ The extent to which the increased highland population used improved technology has often been overstated. Shimon Gibson studied the use of terraces in Palestine. He noted Harel's claim that terraces were unknown in Palestine before the Iron I, and they were Israel's supreme accomplishment. Gibson argued that plastered cisterns had been used in Palestine in the MB, and he argued that terraces had been used since the EB. He contended that the Iron I period did see an increase in terrace construction, but he also argued that really widespread terrace construction only began during the Iron II period in the 8th century BC. Gibson argued that extensive terrace construction occurred in the Iron II period, the Roman/Byzantine period, the Medieval Period, and the Ottoman Empire. Gibson argued that these later terraces destroyed evidence for earlier settlements and led to improper conclusions about the Iron I culture. Finally, Gibson noted that the new highland settlers of the Iron I period were experienced terrace building agriculturalists instead of semi-nomadic pastoralists. So Gibson

¹⁶³ Joseph A. Callaway, "A New Perspective on the Hill Country Settlement of Canaan in Iron Age I," in *Palestine in the Bronze and Iron Ages* (London: Institute of Archaeology, 1985) 33.

¹⁶⁴ Zertal, *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey* 42–43, 53–54.

¹⁶⁵ Llora Kolska-Horowitz and Ianir Milevski, "The Faunal Evidence for Socioeconomic Change between the Middle and Late Bronze Age in the Southern Levant," in *Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and Neighboring Lands in Memory of Douglas L. Esse* (Atlanta: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001) 283–305.

¹⁶⁶ Israel Finkelstein argued that pig bones were also not found at Lachish level 6 which he identified as Canaanite. He argued that pigs were avoided for practical reasons rather than religious ones (*The Archaeology of the Israelite Settlement* [Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1988] 31).

argued that the new highland people may have come from the lowlands in the west.¹⁶⁷

Such a highland culture would have left few archaeological remains. This original highland population would have been augmented by Israelites leaving the coastal plains. The difficulty with finding archaeological evidence from such a culture can be seen in the surprising lack of burials in the highlands during the Iron I period. A number of explanations have been offered for the lack of Iron I tombs. Raz Kletter argued that poor people buried in shallow graves would be archaeologically “invisible.” The graves would have been easily destroyed as the bodies decayed, and poverty would have prevented the inclusion of the grave goods that are often used to date tombs.¹⁶⁸ By that model, a rather large population could have lived in the highlands without leaving a substantial archaeological record. The “invisibility” of this culture may have been compounded by the fact that until recently, archaeology has been mainly “tell-minded,” and few surveys of the countryside have been undertaken.¹⁶⁹

IX. CONCLUSION

After all of the evidence has been weighed, it is apparent that the cultural setting of Israel’s early history will not solve the problem of Israel’s chronology. An 18th Dynasty model is at least as possible as a 19th Dynasty model. The academic debate is as likely to be shaped by perceptions of academic competency and religious orthodoxy as the textual and historical evidence. Thus the debate over Israel’s early history is likely to continue indefinitely.

¹⁶⁷ Shimon Gibson, “Agricultural Terraces and Settlement Expansion in the Highlands of Early Iron Age Palestine: Is There Any Correlation between the Two?” in *Studies in the Archaeology of the Iron Age in Israel and Jordan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2001) 113–46.

¹⁶⁸ Raz Kletter, “People without Burials? The Lack of Iron I Burials in the Central Highlands of Palestine,” *IEJ* 52 (2002) 39. Alan Millard argued that the Amorites arrived in Babylon around 1900 BC according to the written accounts, but no archaeological evidence has survived from their arrival. Millard argued that Israel’s appearance in Palestine could have been similarly silent in the archaeological record. (“Amorites and Israelites: Invisible Invaders—Modern Expectation and Ancient Reality,” in *The Future of Biblical Archaeology: Reassessing Methodologies and Assumptions* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004] 148–60).

¹⁶⁹ Ahlström, *Ancient Palestine: A Historical Introduction* 5.