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NEW LIGHT ON THE WILDERNESS JOURNEY AND THE CONQUEST

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In the previous issue of GRACE JOURNAL (Winter, 1961), the writer set forth his conclusions regarding the time of the Oppression and the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt. Arguments were presented for a date around 1447 B.C. for the Exodus, during the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt (1570-1315 B.C.). This date can be further substantiated by the subsequent experiences of the Israelites under Moses and Joshua.

New Considerations Concerning the Wilderness Journey

The opposition of the Edomites.--One of the weightiest arguments in favor of the late date of the Exodus (13th century B.C.) is advanced by Nelson Glueck concerning the Edomites who denied passage through their territory to Moses and the Israelites. He has charged that no Edomite or Moabite kingdoms would have been encountered in Transjordan by Moses before the thirteenth century B.C. Not until that century did these peoples build houses and fortifications in Transjordan. He writes, "Not a site was discovered nor a sherd found which could be ascribed to Middle Bronze II or to Late Bronze" (Explorations in Eastern Palestine, II, Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research, XV, 138). Elsewhere he contends:

Had the Exodus through southern Transjordan taken place before the 13th century B.C., the Israelites would have found neither Edomite nor Moabite kingdoms, well organized and well fortified, whose rulers could have given or withheld permission to go through their territories. Indeed, the Israelites, had they arrived on the scene first, might have occupied all of Edom and Moab themselves and left the land on the west side of the Jordan for late comers. -- The Other Side of the Jordan (New Haven: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1940), pp. 146 f.

First of all, we must accept the Biblical statement that it was not so much the superior strength of the Edomites and the Moabites that prevented the Israelites from crossing their territories as it was the direct command of Jehovah not to fight with these distant brethren of theirs (Deut. 2: 4, 5, 9). It was God's sovereign plan that His chosen nation not settle in these areas but in Canaan primarily.

Second, while the Bible speaks of the king of Edom (Num. 20:14) and of various cities of Edomite kings (Gen. 36:32, 35, 39), these terms need not prove that the Edomites were yet a sedentary people dwelling in fortified towns. At that period the head of every tribe or city-state was called a king. The five kings of Midian (Num. 31:8) in Moses' day and the two kings of Midian in Gideon's day (Jud. 8:5, 12) were surely nomadic chieftains, as was perhaps also Adoni-bezek who had subdued seventy kings (Jud. 1:3-7). The book of Joshua and the Amarna Letters both testify to the great number of petty kings of city states in Palestine around 1400 B.C. Nor does

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the word "city" mean necessarily a well-fortified site with permanent buildings, for Kadesh-barnea is called "a city in the uttermost of thy (i. e., Edom's) border" (Num. 20:16). The Israelites lived in and around Kadesh about thirty-seven years, and yet probably never erected any stone buildings nor made and used much pottery. Their community was centered around the portable tabernacle; thus their's was a tent city. Likewise the Edomites may well have lived in similar tent cities. Note that when Moses sent forth the twelve spies into the territory of the Canaanites, he instructed them to detect "what cities they are that they dwell in, whether in camps or in strongholds" (Num. 13:19).

Third, a careful study of the location of Edom and Mount Seir in Genesis through Joshua seems to reveal that whereas Edom later on was in southern Transjordan, up through the time of the Conquest Esau and his descendants were living for the most part in the central Negeb, i. e., in the mountainous country with its valleys and oases between Kadesh-barnea and the Arabah. The key to the location of Mount Seir and Edom is the route which the children of Israel took after the Edomites turned down their request to be permitted to pass through Edom. First the Israelites journeyed to Mount Hor, probably a prominent point in the highlands (up to 3000') ten to fifteen miles east or northeast of Kadesh-barnea and on the border of Edom. This location of Mount Hor is likely, because after Aaron died there and the congregation of Israel was still mourning for him, the king of Arad who dwelt farther north in the Negeb attacked them (Num. 20:22-21:3). The next part of their journey took them to the Gulf of Aqabah: "And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way to the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way" (Num. 21:4; cf. Deut. 2:1-8). The Israelites had to go all the way to Ezion-geber (Deut. 2:8), for the Edomites were holding the west side of the Arabah, making stops at Punon and Oboth (Num. 33:42,43; 21:5-10). Punon is probably to be identified with Feinan, the site of ancient copper mines, and is a logical place for the spot where Moses lifted up the copper serpent in the wilderness.

If the Edomites were living in the Negeb instead of in Transjordan at the time of the Exodus, is there any evidence of their existence in the more western area? According to Egyptian records from the 15th century B.C. there were peoples dwelling in the Negeb important enough to warrant an attack by the pharaoh's army. Thutmose III mentions the Negeb in the campaign list of his military operations (James Pritchard, Ancient Near Eastern Texts, p. 243). Amen-em-heb, one of Thutmose's soldiers, had the following statement painted on the wall of his tomb at Thebes: "I made captives in the country of the Negeb" (ANET, p. 241). A century later Amarna Letter #256 mentions Udimu as a city or people seemingly in South Canaan in the area of Hebron-Beersheba (Samuel A.B. Mercer, The Tell el-Amarna Tablets Toronto: Macmillan Co., 1939, II, 666; BASOR, #89, p. 14). Various scholars have identified Udimu with Edom.

The condition of the Moabites.--Two things relevant to the Moabites at the time of the wilderness journey lead one to believe that they were neither settled nor so strong as they were in the thirteenth and following centuries. First, Moab was much weaker than Israel and feared the latter greatly: "And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many; and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel" (Num. 22:2). Second, Moab was closely associated with the Midianites, so much so that the elders of both peoples acted as one group when they went to the town of Pethor to bring back Balaam (Num. 22:4-7). The Bible depicts the Midianites as largely a nomadic people. The point is this: for the Moabites to have been on such friendly terms with the Midianites, the former also were probably still largely nomadic, since from time imme-

morial there has been strife between the inhabitants of the desert and the residents of the towns in agricultural areas. Therefore the time of Moses must have been before the thirteenth century B.C. when the Moabites began to build permanent towns.

New discoveries near Amman.--Several recent finds in the vicinity of Amman, the capital city of the Kingdom of Jordan, tend to modify Glueck's sweeping statements that there was no settled occupation anywhere in Transjordan south of the Jabbok River between the eighteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. Four tombs in Amman and one near Madeba discovered in the past decade or so contained hundreds of pottery vessels and scarabs and other objects from the periods known as Middle Bronze II and Late Bronze I, i.e., from about 1800 to 1400 B.C. Also, in 1955, a building which appears to have been a Late Bronze Age temple with over 100 pieces of imported pottery of Cypriote and Mycenaean origin, was unearthed when bulldozers were clearing away a small mound by the airport of Amman. (G. Lankester Harding, The Antiquities of Jordan London: Lutterworth Press, 1959, p. 33). Thus it seems that there was some sedentary occupation in central Transjordan at the end of the fifteenth century B.C. On the other hand the apparent relative scarcity of population in southern Gilead around 1400 B.C. made Moses' task of conquering that district considerably less difficult than it would have been in the thirteenth century B.C. when so many more cities existed. His campaigns against Sihon and Og lasted only a matter of months compared with the several years necessary for Joshua to subdue Canaan.

The time of Balaam.--In order to invite Balaam the prophet to come to curse Israel, Balak king of Moab sent messengers "to Pethor, which is by the River, to the land of the children of his people" (Num. 22:5). Pethor is the Hittite city of Pitru, captured by Thutmose III and much later on by Shalmaneser III; it lay on the western bank of the Euphrates River a little ways south of Carchemish. The Hebrew word for "his people" is ammo. W. F. Albright interprets this term as the name of the land called 'Amou in the inscription on the statue of Idri-mi found by Sir Leonard Woolley at Alalakh (Wm. F. Albright, "Some Important Discoveries, Alphabetic Origins and the Idri-mi Statue," BASOR, #118, p. 16). Idri-mi also found sons of the land of 'Amou and sons of the land of Halep (Aleppo) in the land of Canaan when he went into exile there for seven years. Thus it is not surprising to read of Balaam's coming from such a distance (350 miles) to Moab in the fifteenth century B.C. As to the date of Idri-mi, Albright dates the statue about 1450 B.C., but Woolley and Sidney Smith date it about 1375 B.C. The land of 'Amou is also mentioned in an inscription from the tomb of an officer who served in the army of Amenhotep II (ibid., p. 15). My argument is this: if Balaam prophesied at the end of the fifteenth century B.C., according to the early date of the Exodus, then the term 'Amou in Num. 22:5 is found in a proper historical context, along with the occurrences of this name in the Idri-mi inscription and the Egyptian text. Only around 1400 B.C. was the Aleppo-Carchemish region--the land of 'Amou--independent and not under the rule of either the Egyptians or the Hittites. During the reign of Amenhotep III (1410-1372 B.C.) northern Syria was able to free itself from Egyptian overlordship, while the Hittites under Suppiluliumas did not conquer this area until about 1370 B.C. But if the Exodus happened in the thirteenth century, then the homeland of Balaam was under Hittite control and would probably have been called "the land of the Hittites" (cf. Josh. 1:4; Jud. 1:26).

New Excavations in Old Canaan

Jericho.--The first fortress city in Canaan which faced the Israelites after they crossed the Jordan River was Jericho. The date of the destruction of Jericho should provide an excellent

check on the chronology adopted for the Exodus and the Conquest, whether around 1407 B.C. or about 1250 B.C. But the date as determined by archaeological methods has become one of the most hotly-contested issued among Palestinian archaeologists.

Both Sir John Garstang, who dug at Jericho from 1930 to 1936, and Miss Kathleen Kenyon, who has been directing a new series of excavations there since 1952, agree that the Middle Bronze Age levels, Garstang's City III, represent Hyksos occupation ending about 1550 B.C. Both recognize remains from the Late Bronze Age, but at that point the agreement ceases. We must be ready and willing to admit that Miss Kenyon's careful investigations disproved that the parallel fortification walls, built of mud bricks and fallen outwards, belonged to the Late Bronze Age city, as Garstang claimed so loudly (Garstang, John and J.B.E., The Story of Jericho, 2nd ed. rev. London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1948, pp. 133-142). But this does not mean that there were no walls to the Canaanite city in Joshua's time. In the light of the fact that the mound of Jericho, Tell es-Sultan, has suffered severely from erosion caused by the hard winter rains, the absence now of such walls may in a way be a confirmation of Scripture. Joshua 6:20 states that the wall fell down flat, or, in its place. Since the wall was probably made of mud bricks, after it fell and the city lay unoccupied for the most part until Hiel rebuilt the city in the time of King Ahab (I Kings 16:43, there was nothing to cover the fallen bricks and to prevent their turning back to mud and washing down the slope.

There can be no doubt, however, that there was occupation of the site of Jericho in the late Bronze Age. Garstang's expeditions discovered in 26 tombs that contained deposits, some 320 Late Bronze Age objects out of a total of 2818 specimens, including two scarab seals of Amenhotep III (1410-1372 B.C.); also he found Late Bronze potsherds in the fosse (moat) and on the mound, especially in debris underlying the isolated "Middle Building" (which Garstang attributed to Eglon--Jud. 3:12ff). In 1954 Miss Kenyon uncovered on the eastern side of the mound the foundations of a single house wall with about a square meter of intact floor beside it; on the floor was a small bread oven beside which was a juglet that she says is probably fourteenth century in date. She believes the evidence accords with a destruction and subsequent abandonment of the site, and suggests a date in the second half of the fourteenth century B.C. (Archaeology in the Holy Land London: Ernest Benn, 1960, pp. 210f). At any rate, G. E. Wright's statement seems totally unwarranted: "All that remains which can be assigned with any confidence to the period between 1400 and 1200 B.C. are a few pieces of pottery from three tombs and from the area above the spring, and perhaps the 'Middle Building'" (Biblical Archaeology Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957, p. 79). Garstang did competent, accurate work on the whole. Miss Kenyon speaks very highly of the fulness of his records (Kathleen M. Kenyon, "Some Notes on the History of Jericho in the 2nd Millennium B.C.," Palestine Exploration Quarterly, LXXXIII 1951, 122f). The Israeli archaeologist, Immanuel Ben-Dor, who was on Garstang's staff at Jericho, told me personally that much Late Bronze pottery was found in the tombs and a good bit of it on the tell itself.

All the evidence so far available seems to suggest that the Hyksos city of Jericho was destroyed by fire about 1550 B.C., presumably by the pursuing Egyptians. Then the mound lay vacant for about 150 years. Since most of the typically fifteenth century forms of pottery are lacking, re-occupation could hardly have taken place much before 1410. Probably the Canaanites re-used the Hyksos rampart or glacis; this is the conclusion of Miss Kenyon and of Yigael Yadin, the director of the current excavations at Hazor. On the rampart they may or may not have built their own mud brick wall. The reason not more Late Bronze pottery has been found may be that the city

accept a late date for the Exodus and the Conquest. They feel compelled to combine the two Israelite victories into one campaign and the two Jabin's into one man because of the shortness of the time allotted by them to the period of the Judges. Yet the same scholars would not claim that Rameses II and Rameses III of Egypt must be one ruler because they have the same name. Biblical history requires that in interpreting the archaeological evidence from Hazor one must assign a later Canaanite level to the time of Deborah and Barak than the level which he assigns to the time of Joshua. Therefore, since the last Canaanite city in the vast enclosure to the north of the mound of the acropolis had been destroyed, not to be reoccupied, in the thirteenth century B.C., this last city must be the one in which Jabin of Judges 4 resided. This date agrees well with a date around 1240 to 1220 B.C. for Deborah's battle against Sisera.

In the fourth season of excavations at Hazor, Yadin found what may well be evidence of Joshua's burning of the city. In Area K he and his staff excavated the gate of the Lower City. The gate in the Late Bronze period was erected on the foundations of the earlier Middle Bronze Age II gate, and is identical in plan. Yadin writes:

This gate must have been destroyed in a violent conflagration, though the exterior walls still stand to a height of nine feet. Traces of the burnt bricks of its inner walls and the ashes of the burnt beams still cover the floors in thick heaps. The evidence suggests that this destruction occurred before the final destruction of Hazor by the Israelites, but this problem remains to be studied. -- Yigael Yadin, "The Fourth Season of Excavation at Hazor," The Biblical Archaeologist, XXII (1959), 8f.

One may wonder why or how the Canaanites regained control of Hazor after the time of Joshua. This question can be answered by pointing out that in his southern campaign Joshua did not attempt to occupy the cities whose inhabitants and kings he killed. At the end of that campaign "Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, unto the camp to Gilgal" (Josh. 10:43), evidently leaving no garrisons in the cities to hold them. Furthermore, in the cases of Hebron and Debir it is stated that these cities had to be recaptured (Josh. 15:13-17). Joshua's method of warfare seems to have been a series of lightning-like raids against key Canaanite cities, with the purpose of destroying the fighting ability of the inhabitants, not necessarily of besieging and actually capturing and settling the cities which he attacked (see Josh. 10:19f and 10:33 with 16:10 re the king of Gezer). It must be remembered that Joshua burned none of those cities except Jericho, Ai, and Hazor (11:13).

Upper Galilee and Asher.--In conclusion, let me describe some startling new evidence which has appeared, not at the tell of some important ancient city, but at numerous small unnamed sites in Galilee. In 1953 an Israeli archaeologist, Yohanan Aharoni, conducted a systematic survey of an area in Upper Galilee lying chiefly in the south-western section of the territory of Naphtali. Sixty-one ancient sites were examined, and he and his associates made two trial digs. He reports that a chain of eight Bronze Age towns, presumably Canaanite, lay along the present Israeli-Lebanese border in less hilly and more fertile territory; and that nineteen small Iron Age settlements--sometimes only a mile apart--were situated in the heavily forested higher mountains in the southern part of Upper Galilee. At these latter sites his expedition found a "special sort of large jar with thickened rim and plastic ornament, made of gritty clay." In a trial dig at Khirbet Tuleil he discovered in the lowest stratum not a sherd from the Late Bronze Age; rather he found examples of those large jars in situ, together with other types of pottery somewhat analogous to vessels from

Megiddo Level VII and Tell el-Ful (Gibeah). Aharoni is of the opinion that this pottery type, dating from the 13th-12th centuries B.C., was introduced by the invading Northern Israelite tribes who took over areas not very suitable for settlement in the harsh mountains where there was no Canaanite population (Y. Aharoni, "Problems of the Israelite Conquest in the Light of Archaeological Discoveries," Antiquity and Survival, II 1957, 146-149. Since Megiddo VII is usually dated about 1350-1150 B.C., we may date the beginning of these Iron Age I settlements in Upper Galilee as early as 1300 B.C. This date, then, would agree with the reference to the territory of a people called 'Asaru or Asher in an inscription of Seti I, dating about 1310 B.C. According to a book review by B. S. J. Isserlin (Journal of Semitic Studies, IV 1959, 279f.) of Aharoni's book, The Settlement of the Israelite Tribes in Upper Galilee, published in Hebrew in 1957, Aharoni readily admits that Israelite infiltration began at least as early as the period of Seti I in the 14 century B.C.

It must be remembered that Joshua returned to Gilgal after defeating Jabin and burning Hazor, without occupying any towns or territory in Galilee. Thus, when Naphtali and Asher received their tribal allotments and migrated northward, they found that the Canaanites had reoccupied their cities and resumed control of most of Upper Galilee. The Israelite tribesmen therefore lived in tents for a century or more until they began to clear fields in the forests and build towns in the mountainous part of Galilee. The fact that Israelite remains as early as 1300 B.C. have been discovered in Upper Galilee is one more argument against a thirteenth century date for the Exodus and the Conquest. Let us remember that the Bible over and over again indicates that all the tribes entered Canaan together; thus, if Asher was in Palestine by the fourteenth century, then all the tribes must have been there also.

The Silence concerning Egypt

The objection.--Those who favor the late date of the Exodus and of the Conquest make much of the fact that contact with Egypt throughout the time of Joshua and the Judges is seldom if ever mentioned in the sacred text. They claim that Palestine was effectively controlled by the Egyptians as one of their provinces from Thutmose III at least through the reign of Rameses II (1301-1234 B.C.). Therefore they say it was impossible or at least very improbable that the Israelites could have taken possession of Canaan until the reign of Merneptah (1234-1222 B.C.),¹ who mentioned crushing Israel along with certain cities in Palestine in his hymn of victory. This was inscribed on a stela found in the ruins of his mortuary temple at Thebes by Flinders Petrie in 1896. In reply it may be pointed out that in the book of Judges there are two references to the Egyptians (6:8, 9; 10:11). While these mentions probably refer to that people at the time of the Exodus, they may also include later attempts by Egypt to subjugate parts of Israel.

The probable solution.--J. W. Jack has discussed this whole problem thoroughly and sanely in his book The Date of the Exodus. He demonstrates from the evidence in the Amarna Letters that beginning around 1400 B.C. in the reign of Amenhotep III (1410-1372 B.C.), Egypt's hold on her Asiatic possessions weakened and that Palestine and Syria soon were lost to the pharaoh. The weakness and lack of concern on the part of the Egyptians continued for over three quarters of a century, thus giving ample time to the Israelite invaders to get a foothold in the land of Canaan.²

Beginning again with the Nineteenth Dynasty pharaohs (whose records can be read on the walls of their great temples at Thebes), Egyptian armies once marched northward into Palestine

and Syria. Seti I (1313-1301 B.C.) led his forces up the coast of Palestine and captured the towns of the Plain of Esdraelon (Armageddon). Taking the bastion-city of Beth-shan, he made it a garrison town for Egyptian troops; he erected at least two stelae of his in that city. From there he crossed the Jordan River and turned northward again to the Lebanon Mountains and the cities of the Orontes Valley. His son, the great Rameses II, re-established Egyptian authority in many a Palestinian town, but these were all in the Maritime Plain and the Shephelah (the Judean foothills), which were not actual Israelite territory at the time, or at least not continuously held by the Jews till long afterward. While Merneptah listed Israel along with the cities of Ashkelon, Gezer, and Yenoam in the land of Canaan, he gave no names of any distinctly Israelite towns as having been captured or sacked, which seems to show that he, no more than his father Rameses, penetrated into what was Israelite territory. In the Twentieth Dynasty Rameses III (1195-1164 B.C.) pursued the retreating "Sea Peoples," whom he had repulsed in their attempted invasion of the Nile Delta, along the Mediterranean coast into Syria. He seems to have made no attempt, however, to recapture the coastal towns. Gaza alone, so far as his records show, fell into his hands. Before the end of his reign Egypt was compelled to abandon the whole of her Asiatic dependencies.³

The facts just recited do not furnish reason to say that Palestine was reconquered by the kings of the Nineteenth Dynasty and made so thoroughly an Egyptian province that the Conquest could not well have begun until the latter part of the reign of Rameses III -- or even of Rameses II. Sir Flinders Petrie's remarks were too hasty when he wrote: "The Egyptians were incessantly raiding Palestine down to 1194 B.C., and yet there is absolutely no trace of Egyptian action in the whole period of the Judges, which shows that the entry into Canaan must be after that date."⁴ Jack presents a number of arguments to demonstrate that the Israelites could have been in the land of Canaan from 1400 B.C. onward without there being any necessity of mentioning contact with Egyptians during the period of Joshua and the Judges.⁵

(1) After Joshua's campaigns or raids to exterminate much of the wicked population of Canaan in obedience to the command of Jehovah, the actual settlement in Palestine by the Israelites took place only gradually and slowly. The names of the towns which could not be conquered and consequently were left for a long period in control of the Canaanites make a surprising list. The inspired record in Judges 1 includes Jerusalem (v. 21), Beth-shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, Megiddo, Gezer, Kitron, Nahalol, Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphik, Rehob, Beth-shemesh (in Naphtali's portion), Beth-anath, Aijalon, and Shaalvim. The Israelites, then, at least until after the time of Rameses III, were residing chiefly in the hill country, removed from the coastal plain along which the pharaohs were wont to march.

(2) The campaigns of Seti I, Rameses II, and Rameses III were directed mainly against the Syrians and the Hittites to the north of Palestine. From the names of towns and districts mentioned in their records of their marches it seems that the Egyptian armies kept as much as possible to the military route along the Mediterranean coast. There is no indication that they invaded the high central ridge of the land of Canaan south of Megiddo and Beth-shan.

(3) Even supposing that the Egyptians did make some attacks on Israel or repulse some Israelite raids on their positions along their line of march--such as the victory which Merneptah claimed over Israel, the fact that the book of Judges makes no clear references to such does not afford any valid argument against the early-date theory. No one would claim that the Hebrew records of the time of the Judges are a complete account of every battle and skirmish in which every tribe of Israel participated.

(4) Some of the encounters which the tribes of Israel had with the Canaanites and Amorites (Jud. 1-5) may have been instigated by Egypt, for it is well established that the pharaohs used native levies and mercenaries to maintain control in their provinces. As Jack says, "The struggling Israelites in the heart of the land were beneath the notice of the main Egyptian armies, and could be safely left to the soldiery of the tributary princes to deal with."⁶

In general throughout the long period of the Judges Israel had little contact with the Egyptians. The pharaohs marched along the coast and through the Valley of Esdraelon, whose cities the Israelites could not capture from the Canaanites at least until the time of Deborah. Concerning any times when the Egyptians did meet the Hebrews, it was not in the purpose of the writer of the book of Judges to mention them in any detail. The Egyptians were never one of the main adversaries of Israel after the days of Moses. Thus no valid objection to the early date of the Exodus and the Conquest can rightfully be made on the basis of the reputed silence in the book of Judges about Egyptian campaigns in Palestine during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Dynasties.

DOCUMENTATION

1. E.g., Melvin Grove Kyle, "Exodus: Date and Numbers (Alternative View)," ISBE, II, 1056A.
2. J. W. Jack, The Date of the Exodus (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1925), pp. 43-57.
3. Ibid., pp. 58-68.
4. W. M. Flinders Petrie, Egypt and Israel (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1911), pp. 37f.
5. Jack, op. cit., pp. 69-85.
6. Ibid., p. 84.