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The Evangelical Quarterly

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THE DATE OF THE EXODUS.

OPINION among scholars regarding the date of the Exodus has recently been undergoing a change. Before modern investigation had made progress, Biblical data were relied on, but the results of calculations varied, as the problem is somewhat complex. Ussher made the date 1491 B.C., and his view became so generally accepted that it has been incorporated in the margin of the English Bible.

With the advance of archæology and with the greater knowledge of the affairs of Egypt and Babylon, attempts were made to fix the date on scientific grounds, independently, or to a great extent independently, of the notes of time given in the Bible. On this basis it was argued that the weight of evidence points to Rameses II as the Pharaoh of the Oppression and to his son Merentpah as the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The Egyptian chronology of the period is not yet quite settled, but we may take Griffiths' date, 1233 B.C., as the time required by the theory. A date approximating to this is accepted by Kuenen, Driver, Naville, Sayce, Burney, Petrie, Breasted and by most modern scholars. There are, of course, many divergencies, as in the case of Eerdmans, who is an advocate for the date 1130 B.C., Hall, who makes it coincide with the expulsion of the Hyksos, c. 1580 B.C., and Weigall, who connects the religious revolution under Akhenaten with the influence of Moses and the Israelites and places the Exodus at a date soon after the collapse of Atenism, say 1345 B.C.

In spite of the arguments brought forward by these investigators, there have always been scholars who adhered practically to Ussher's date, say 1445 B.C., such as Orr, Conder, Hommel, Aalders, Zimmern; and, quite recently, as the result of the latest discoveries, the trend of opinion is, in effect, towards the same date. The Rev. J. W. Jack, who adopts modern critical methods regarding the analysis of the Pentateuch, states with great clearness the arguments in favour of this date "in the light of external evidence." It is interesting to hear the theory of

Kuenen, Driver, Petrie and Breasted spoken of as that of "the traditional school"; or to observe that Professor Sugden refers to it as the older view, and the view that corresponds to Ussher's as the new. The theory is that the Pharaoh of the Oppression was Thothmes III, and that the Exodus took place about 1445 B.C., in the reign of Amenhotep II.

It may here be stated that Ussher was taking the foundation of Solomon's temple as about forty-six years too early, and his calculations, as in the case of all schools, were made from that event as a fixed point; but as the fourth year of Solomon has now been determined by Babylonian synchronisms, the date that Ussher was really aiming at as that of the Exodus was the year 1445 B.C. This is unmistakably the Old Testament date. The statement is definite in 1 Kings vi. 1 that Solomon began to build the temple in the fourth year of his reign, 480 years after the Exodus, that is, in the year 965 B.C. Again, when we count downwards from an earlier date that can be fixed from contemporary history we have the following result. The duration of the sojournings of the patriarchs from the time Abraham left Haran to the descent of Jacob and his family into Egypt, according to the numbers given in the book of Genesis, was 215 years, and the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt, according to Exodus xii. 40 (Massoretic Text), was 430 years, a total of 645 years. If we take the time of Abraham's departure from Haran as 2090 B.C., as he was, during his life in Canaan, a contemporary of Hammurabi, we have another fixed point to measure from; for Hammurabi began his reign in 2067 B.C. (Langdon). The sum 645, if taken from 2090, brings us back to 1445 B.C. as the date of the Exodus.

The evidence that has come to light within recent years tends to confirm the accuracy of these direct statements of the Old Testament.

1. Conditions in Egypt at the time of Thothmes III and of Amenhotep II harmonise more exactly with what is required by the Bible narrative than they do at any other period known to us. With the beginning of the eighteenth dynasty, about 1580 B.C., an era of great prosperity opened for the land. The Hyksos had been driven out and firm government established under native kings. Aahmes, the first of the line, not only maintained regular administration at home, but initiated a policy of foreign conquest. His invasion of Palestine was followed up

by Thothmes I, who extended his dominion northwards as far as the Orontes. He advanced to the Euphrates, where he set up a boundary stone to mark the limits of his conquests. Thothmes III, whom we take to be the Pharaoh of the Oppression, was a greater warrior still. He had uninterrupted success during his fifty-four years' reign. He reduced neighbouring states to be tributaries, gained victories in the Sudan, overcame the Phoenicians, was frequently in the field in Palestine and Syria, and led conquering armies to the upper Euphrates, where he captured Carchemish, the stronghold of the Hittites. He was proud and overbearing, and shows his vanity in the numerous records he has left of his victories. His list on the walls of the temple at Karnak contains the names of 119 conquered provinces or cities. Egypt felt the effects of his conquests in the wealth that poured into the land, in the quickened mental activity and the sense of power that prevailed. He undertook great operations in building, and the well-known picture is from his time which represents the gangs of forced labourers of Semitic type at brickmaking under their taskmasters. The aspect of the men at work and the conditions in general throughout the land correspond exactly to what is depicted in the early chapters of Exodus. During the reign of his son, Amenhotep II, the prosperity and military success continued. He had been born at Memphis, a fact which shows that there was a royal residence within easy reach of Goshen, and which would account for the apparent quickness with which intermediaries could pass between the Hebrews and the king. He succeeded his father at the age of 18 in 1447 B.C. It was this youthful sovereign whose boastfulness and confidence in his power are attested by the inscriptions he has left, whom we regard as the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

It has often been pointed out that a remarkable woman of the royal family, prudent and peace-loving, yet daring, played an important part during several reigns in this dynasty. Hatshepsut was the daughter of Thothmes I, and for thirty-five years was the virtual ruler of Egypt. She was associated with her father during the later years of his reign, was co-regent with Thothmes II, and was the controlling force in the government during the first twenty years of the reign of her nephew (or brother) Thothmes III. At the birth of Moses, according to our calculation, she would be a young woman whose word was becoming law; and the intensifying of the oppression when

Thothmes III was freed from control by her death might be the occasion of his flight to Midian. His return would be soon after the accession of Amenhotep II (Exodus ii. 23). What we have to consider here is whether there was anything in the state of affairs in Egypt at this time to conflict with the statement of 1 Kings vi. 1, and we find that, on the contrary, all the circumstances suit.

Manetho, whatever his testimony is worth, can be cited as an authority for this date. All the ancient chronologers, dependent on him, place the event to which he refers in the time of the eighteenth dynasty. There is great confusion in the details of his story, but he makes the name of the king who sent away the lepers Amenophis (=Amenhotep) and verifies the name by saying that he acted on the advice of a wise man of the same name, Amenophis the son of Paapios. This wise man is commonly identified with Amenophis the son of Hapis, who during the early years of his fame was a contemporary of Amenhotep II.

2. When we pass over a period of fifty years and consider what was then occurring in Palestine, there is no need for conjecture, as we have first-hand information in the Tell-el-Amarna tablets. Egyptian control of the land remained firm during the reign of Thothmes IV and into the early years of Amenhotep III, that is to about 1410 B.C. After that, indications of weakness appear, and during the time of Akhenaten, who began to reign in 1383 B.C., the land was seething with rebellion and intrigue. Important cities revolted and some which remained loyal sent urgent but unavailing appeals to Egypt for help. While Palestine was being abandoned by Egypt and left in this state of turmoil and confusion, bands of invaders swept over the land. In the north they were Hittites, Amorites and Sa-Gaz or "fighting-men" from the north-east, apparently of a Hebrew stock. The invaders in the south are spoken of as the Habiru. Abdi Hiba, king of Jerusalem, in his letters to Pharaoh, connects them with the land of Seir. He tells how they are taking cities and gaining the mastery of the country whilst the local rulers in some cases play into their hands. He shows that his own case is becoming desperate, and pleads urgently that troops may be sent from Egypt. In one letter he says "The Habiru are devastating all the lands of the king. If there be troops in this year, then the lands will remain the king's, my lord's; but if no troops arrive, the lands of the king, my lord, are lost." In another letter he

says, "Now the Habiru are seizing the cities of the king. There is no local ruler left to the king, my lord ; all are lost " ; and in others, " Labaya and the land of Shechem have given everything to the Habiru " ; " The land of the king is lost to the Habiru." Abdi Hiba further implies that the Habiru are gaining their successes with the connivance of Yanhamu, the Egyptian High Commissioner.

The identification of the term " the Habiru " with " the Hebrews " is now generally agreed on, and the contention is that these Hebrews are the Israelites whose fathers had left Egypt at the Exodus and who are now gaining possession of Canaan under Joshua. " The Sons of Israel " is the national name which the people are proud of using, but in intercourse with foreigners " The Hebrews " is the usual designation. It is so used in the early chapters of the Book of Exodus and elsewhere, and was the natural term for Abdi Hiba, king of Jerusalem, a Canaanitish vassal of Egypt to employ. The time fits in with the date assigned to the Exodus. After the forty years sojourn in the wilderness, spent for the most part about Mount Seir, the Israelites under Joshua were not contending against a united people under a strong central government. The country was in a state of anarchy and cities could be taken in detail, or where local kings made common cause their numbers and resources were not great enough to make a successful stand against the conquering Hebrews. But even so, the Israelitish conquest was only gradual and partial, and their conflict with such part of the inhabitants as they overcame by force extended over a series of years. We have not exact dates for Joshua's campaigns, but if twenty-five years be allowed after the forty years' wandering and the crossing of the Jordan, then these sixty-five years counted from 1445 B.C., bring us to the date 1380 B.C., which tallies with the time when Canaan was left to its fate by Egypt ; for Akhenaten's reign began about 1383 B.C.

3. The next most important evidence bearing on the date of Israel's settlement in Canaan, and consequently on that of the Exodus, is the statement on the well-known monument of Merenptah. In his inscription on this stele at Thebes he recounts his victories over the Libyans, his pacifying of the land of the Hittites, his conquest of Canaan, Ashkelon, Gezer and Yenoam, and adds, " Israel is destroyed, its seed is not ; Palestine has become a widow for Egypt." Whilst the determinative sign for

“country” is used with the other words here, the determinative sign for “people” is used with the word for “Israel.” They are referred to by their race name and not by the country they occupy. This is clear evidence that Israel was at that time (c. 1228 B.C.) inhabiting Palestine and were of such importance in the country that the Pharaoh of the day considered a victory over them, whether real or assumed, a matter worthy of record in his permanent memorial. Whether he really won the victories which he claims or not does not affect the argument. This evidence is in direct conflict with the theory that Rameses II was the Pharaoh of the Oppression and Merenptah the Pharaoh of the Exodus, for in the fifth year of Merenptah’s reign Israel was already in the land. To meet this conclusive evidence, the theory of a “divided Israel” has been put forward, viz. that the Joseph tribes were still in Egypt up to the time of Merenptah and that the reference here is to the Jacob tribes, who had never left Palestine, or who had been driven out of Egypt at the time of the expulsion of the Hyksos, or who had left at some other time either voluntarily or under compulsion. This is a pure conjecture, and has nothing to rest on either in the Bible or in the Egyptian records. If the place names, Jacob-el and Joseph-el, in the inscription of Thothmes III (c. 1479 B.C.) are correctly read, this would show at the most that there were places called after Jacob and Joseph in Southern Syria.

Thus when we look for confirmation of the Old Testament representation that the Exodus was about 1445 B.C., we have the evidences of Manetho, who places what passes for it in his story about this time, viz. in the reign of Amenophis or Amenhotep; the conditions in Egypt at this period harmonise more completely with the Biblical account than they do at any other time in the history of Egypt of which we have knowledge; the terror caused by the conquering Hebrews (the Habiru) in Canaan soon after 1400 B.C. is accounted for; and the presence of Israel in Palestine in the reign of Merenptah (c. 1228 B.C.) is explained.

The rival theory, that the Exodus was about 1233 B.C., in the reign of Merenptah, is in direct conflict with all this evidence, except in the one point that conditions were not unsuitable, although less suitable than in Amenhotep’s time. The theory also leaves too short a period for the events between the Exodus and the time of Solomon and for the political development that took place. From 1233 B.C. to 965 B.C. gives 268 years. For

the Wandering and Conquest, the reigns of Saul and David and four years of Solomon, there are required about 164 years. This leaves only 104 years for the period of the Judges, and the time is too short, no matter what calculation is made regarding the contemporaneous control of judges in different parts of the land.

In the way of accepting the date 1445 B.C., there are only two difficulties that require consideration, viz. the likelihood of Israel, if settled in Palestine, being brought into conflict with Egypt during the period 1314 B.C. and 1233 B.C.; and the statement in Exodus i. 11, that the Israelites built the store cities Pithom and Raamses (Rameses).

1. After a period of weakness the warlike spirit of Egypt revived, particularly under Seti I and Rameses II, and these kings in seeking to regain the lost dominion made expeditions into Palestine and northwards against the Amorites and the Hittites. Both have left stelæ at Beth-shean and lists of conquered cities at Karnak, Thebes and Luxor. It is said that if Israel had been in Palestine at this time they would have been brought into conflict with the Egyptian armies, and we should expect some reference to the fact either in the Old Testament or on the Egyptian monuments. If they had been there, as a whole, at the time of Merenptah's victory, we might look for some mention of it in the Book of Judges, but the exploit after all may not have been great, and we have to remember that the notices we find there are very fragmentary and different from a complete continuous history. The identity of the Aperu mentioned by Rameses II at Beth-shean is too doubtful to be used as an argument. In general we have to take account of the region occupied by Israel, and the sphere of Egypt's military operations. For generations after their entrance into the country, the Israelites were confined to the mountainous ridge of Central Palestine, and even there some of the strongholds maintained themselves against them. The occupation by Israel was only partial. A long list of the cities they failed to take is given in the first chapter of Judges. They had to leave them in the hands of the Canaanites, and it was only "when Israel had become strong" that they asserted their lordship over the inhabitants. Even Beth-shean and Jerusalem were not occupied by Israel till the time of David. Up to his time, they do not appear to have had any permanent hold on the plain of Esdraelon. For so far Israel's position and resources offered little temptation

for invaders to attack, especially for forces whose chief strength was in war chariots; and some of the old tolerance of Egypt for the Hebrews may have remained from Yanhamu's day. The cities captured by the Egyptians and the fortresses established by them were in the low-lying country, along the coast road from Egypt, through the country of the Philistines, in the plain of Esdraelon, across the Jordan and northwards. It is quite in keeping with the purpose of their operations that they should have refrained from attacks on the inhabitants of the Negeb and Central Palestine. There is no force in the argument that if Israel had been in Palestine during this period they must of necessity have been brought into conflict with Egypt.

2. The other difficulty involves a more complex question. The argument is: If the Israelites built Pithom and Rameses, they must have been in Egypt till after the reign of Rameses II. We take the statement in Exodus i. 11 as absolutely correct. It is interesting to observe how critics also who do not place a high value on the book of Exodus as history, accept the statement here unquestioned. The assumption is that these cities must have been built in the time of Rameses II, and that one of them was called after his name. But the case is by no means proved. The suggestion that, if he was not the original founder and if the name was changed in his honour, the narrative may have been written after his time or the name altered in the text by a scribe, is not under consideration. If we take it that we have here the original text, and even if we accept the identification of Pithom with Tell-el-Muskhutah and Rameses with Tanis or Tell-Rotab, it is not established that Rameses II was the original founder of these cities. It is not beyond possibility that Rameses may have been a place-name applied to a city or to a section of the country before his day. The word is such an obvious formation in Egyptian that we cannot think that it could have failed to be used as a proper name before the time of the nineteenth dynasty. We find it in fact in the unreduplicated form as a personal name during the eighteenth dynasty, for Rames was the father of the architect of Hatshepsut's temple at Der-el-Behari. We need more definite information on the origin of the cities, and of their names, before we can regard this verse as being in conflict with the theory for which the evidence is so strong, to wit, that the date of the Exodus was 1445 B.C.

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