

ARTICLE V.

WHEN DID ISRAEL ENTER CANAAN?

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THE pivotal importance of the question lies in its relation to the national development of the Hebrew people. The history of that development has come to be far otherwise important than for the sacred interest which attaches to the people Israel as the race whence, after the flesh, came our Lord. It has to do with the development of the political idea, as in modern times we have come to understand it. We know now that Israel was not in early days, nor ever, a separate people in the sense once attached to the word; but the importance, from this point of view, of the little nation which for centuries occupied that thoroughfare and battle-ground of the world, Canaan, is hardly yet recognized. Egypt had a culture, and Babylon a genius for jurisprudence, quite unknown to Israel; both were far richer and stronger than she; but neither has permanently influenced the world. Not only by reason of her geographical position, but far more because of the unique alliance between the religious and the political idea in Israel, she has been in a very literal sense the heart of the nations, the vital organ of the world. Her life has gone pulsing through the world's life, from the earliest day of her national existence until now. And as there is a supreme moment in the existence of the human organism when the mysterious life-principle awakes and the heart begins to beat, so there was a supreme moment when this heart of the world began to beat with the mysterious consciousness of divine

activity in national affairs, and that national idea which has ever since been slowly coming to maturity was made ready to be born.

Unquestionably the supreme moment when this life-principle awoke in Israel is the period of the Judges. For it was through the conflicts and triumphs of these untaught heroes that an unorganized horde of desert wanderers struggled into national self-consciousness, and gave to the world the truth, embodied in Israel's history from that time, latent in the history of all peoples, perceived by the pioneers of our own nation, but not even yet clearly apprehended by the world,—the truth that there is a divine element in national life; that a nation is something other than the sum of all its parts, and that that something other is divine. It is in the book of Judges that we learn to define the word nation as a "people working with God for the progress of the human race." This is why the book of Judges is, to-day, perhaps the most important work of ancient literature; this is why the intricate problems of that book are not met by any theory as yet current—as of synchronisms and the various origins of its strange hero tales. Though every one of these tales were proved to be merely legendary, and every date in the book the mere figment of a mind which saw an occult meaning in certain numbers, we should yet know that something like what is therein narrated actually took place, and that a considerable period was occupied by the events; because this is demanded by the previous and subsequent history.

Therefore the date of the entrance of Israel into Canaan is of practical moment. Not religion, indeed, nor any theory of biblical inspiration, but the history of human development, demands an answer to the question "How long was the Judges period?" Or, by way of gaining a larger perspective,

“What was the length of time between the Exodus and the building of Solomon’s temple? When did Israel enter Canaan?”

The elements of the discussion are these:—

First.—The data found in the Bible.

1. The statement in 1 Kings vi. 1 that the fourth year of Solomon’s reign was the four hundred and eightieth after the Exodus.

2. The claim of Jephthah to Israel’s right in the country east of the Jordan, namely, that they had been in possession three hundred years (Judges xi. 26).

3. The notes of time in the book of Judges, which, added together, give four hundred and ten years from the death of Joshua to the death of Samson.

4. The fact that to this period must be added the time of the wilderness wandering (forty years), of the Conquest under Joshua (an unknown period), the judgeships of Eli (forty years), and of Samuel (an unknown period, as is also the reign of Saul), the reign of David (forty years), and the first four years of Solomon, making a total of five hundred and thirty years besides the unknown periods.

5. The statement of St. Paul (Acts xiii. 20) that the Judges period before Samuel was “about four hundred and fifty years.”

6. The statement in Genesis xlvii. 11 that Joseph settled his father and brethren in the land of Rameses.

7. The statements in Exodus i. and ii. that the Israelites built for Pharaoh the cities Pithom and Rameses, being forced a part of the time to make bricks without any provision of straw.

Second.—The data from Archæology.

1. The somewhat recent discovery by Edward Naville of

the long-lost treasure-city Pithom, with a number of bricks made without straw.

2. The tablets found in 1887 at Tell-el-Amarna, on the Nile.

3. The so-called Merenptah stele found in 1896, bearing an inscription in which the name *Israel* occurs.

Third.—1. The general agreement of scholars, especially since Naville's researches at Pithom (Succoth), that the Pharaoh of the Oppression was Rameses II. of the nineteenth dynasty, and the Pharaoh of the Exodus his son Merenptah, or, more probably, his grandson Seti II.

2. Recent astronomical calculations, especially by Mahler, by which the dates of Egyptian kings of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth dynasties have been fixed with approximate accuracy, and that of Solomon's accession almost certainly at 990 B. C.

Even before the dates of these Egyptian kings were accurately ascertained, it had been understood, in a general way, that they were nearer the date of Solomon than the period apparently demanded by the book of Judges. This was not deemed a matter of importance. Scholarship has easily shown that the numbers of the Bible are often purely conventional, and the book of Judges, considered as a collection of local and probably synchronous stories, did not necessarily cover any long period. So far as these considerations are concerned, the Exodus might well have occurred as late as 1230 B. C., the date formerly given to Seti II., or even, as Meyer judges, under one of the weak kings at the very close of the nineteenth dynasty, a little before 1180, or, as McCurdy puts it, in the twentieth dynasty, between 1180 and 1148. But it is an entirely different matter when we begin to account for the social and the ethical development of the Hebrew people from a

horde of runaway slaves to a highly organized kingdom,— a problem whose elements we can only slightly appreciate by considering the social and the ethical development of our own negroes in a period considerably longer than that between Seti II. and Solomon, and under circumstances incomparably more favorable, even as they had been during the period of slavery. And there is far more in the problem than the development of the people Israel from a horde to a nation, from government by heroes of accident or circumstance to government by hereditary kings—a form of government, it must be remembered, utterly foreign to Semitic genius, although the Davidic dynasty is the most stable known to history. The essential element in the problem is not the development of the form of government, but the birth of the national idea, for this was nothing less than an entire revolution in the religious conceptions of Israel, from the conception of Jahweh as a mere tribal deity, like the tribal deities of other nations,—greater indeed than any other precisely for the reason that every boy's father is the greatest man in the world,—to the conception of Jahweh as the unifying bond of the nation. The gestation of such an idea must have been long.

These and other considerations have later caused the pendulum to swing the other way, and Professor Mahler, to whose astronomical investigations we owe the precise dates which are now ours, has calculated,—remembering the ancient Hebrew tradition that the Exodus took place on a Thursday,—that it could have occurred on no other day than Thursday, March 27, 1335 B. C. This brings the event back to the reign of the great Rameses II., commonly deemed the Pharaoh of the Oppression, the grandfather of Seti II., and this conclusion has been adopted by that weighty authority, the new “*Dictionary of Egyptian Archæology*.” This gives about one

hundred and fifty additional years to the period of Israel in Canaan before Solomon, and if it could be made to accord with historic conditions in Egypt and Syria it might be deemed satisfactory. But here, it appears to me, the theory fails.

The critical factors in the problem, beyond the astronomical conclusions, are the Merenptah stele and the Amarna tablets. The latter were written in the eighteenth dynasty (1587-1340 B. C.), and they mention Canaanitish towns bearing names which must be transliterated "Jakob-el" and "Joseph-el." Much more important is the fact that the great stele on which are inscribed the victories of Merenptah, commonly supposed to be the predecessor of the Pharaoh of the Exodus, speaks of Israel as already in Canaan. According to one translation (there are several, slightly varying but in substantial agreement) the closing lines run thus:—

" Vanquished is the land of the Libyans,
 Tranquilized is the land of the Hittites,
 The land of Pa-Kana'na [Phœnicia] is captured absolutely,
 The land of Ashkelon is carried away,
 The land of Gezer is seized,
 The land of Suni'un [in Cœle Syria] is brought to naught,
 The people of Isra-el is devastated, it has no grain [or seed],
 The land of Khan [Southern Canaan] is become like the widows of

Egypt.

All lands together are in peace.

Every one that was a marauder hath been subdued by the King Merenptah, who giveth life like the sun every day."

This inscription is dated in the second year of Merenptah's reign, a date which in the very year of the discovery of the stele was fixed at 1206 B. C. by the unearthing of a tablet recording the heliacal rising of Sirius, the "dog star."

For a time after the discovery of this stele, the allusion to Israel as already in Canaan was doubted. Professor Sayce, misapprehending the word "seed"—which in fact refers to grain—as figuratively denoting *offspring*, jubilantly argued

that it proved the story of the death of the first-born. It needed, however, only to recall the fact that, not Israel's first-born, but those of Egypt, had perished, according to the biblical narrative, to compel the acceptance of the word in its natural meaning, and admit the presence of some Israelites in Canaan before the supposed date of the Exodus and their share in the sorrows of Merenptah's victories. The well-known hypotheses of recent scholarship—for which, however, there is no basis except the pressure of necessity—that certainly the Israelitish clan Asher, and probably clan Judah, had, before the Oppression, broken away from the great body of the Bene-Israel and returned to Canaan by the direct route of the isthmus and the Negeb, has in general satisfied the conditions, but conclusions based upon well-nigh gratuitous hypotheses are becoming every year less satisfactory to the thinker, and some better way is being sought. As has already been shown, Mahler finds that way by placing the Exodus in the time of Rameses II., the father of Merenptah. It will be observed that while, in the stele, the determinative for the other proper nouns requires the English word "land," that for Israel is "people," and easily fits the condition of Israel before the completed conquest. The known condition of Syria under the strong rule of Rameses and Merenptah, however, does not lend itself to the theory that Israel had lately entered Canaan, when Merenptah came to the throne.

A careful study of the Amarna tablets as they have been put at the disposal of readers of English and German, comparing their indications of the internal history and civilization of Syria, especially of Canaan, at that period, with such indications of the relations of Canaan with the wider world as may be found in the books of Joshua and Judges, brings to light much unanticipated information. Much of it, indeed,

lies between the lines, both of the tablets and the biblical books, but he who cannot read between the lines of any product of the human mind loses much of what it has to offer. It appears to me that the data thus gained thoroughly satisfy the requirements of the historic problem, and enable us to throw the Exodus of Israel from Egypt farther back than it has hitherto been placed, even as early as the eighteenth dynasty.

The late dates usually assigned for the Exodus are based upon the fact of the strong control which Egypt exercised over Syria until the very close of the nineteenth dynasty. The Amarna tablets, however, have made it clear that the eighteenth dynasty offers a period when Egypt was pitifully weak in Syria, a condition precisely inviting the raid of a great nomadic horde. If, therefore, we should find that the Exodus actually did occur, and the conquest of Canaan, in this dynasty, the requirement of time for the development of ideas would be met and the biblical account supported. The counter difficulty then arises, that the Old Testament narrative gives no indication that Egypt was the overlord of Israel during much of the Judges period. But neither does the Old Testament anywhere give any obvious indication of the great world-movements of which we certainly know Canaan to have been in part the theater, during all the centuries after Thothmes III. of the eighteenth dynasty as well as before. We find in the so-called historic books no slightest suggestion of that awful devastation of Israel and Judah by the Scythians, in Josiah's reign, which Jeremiah so vividly describes in his fourth and sixth chapters. The silences of the Old Testament may be inexplicable, but they do not argue that none of its historic statements are to be accepted.

A brief review of certain familiar facts is necessary here. When Jacob migrated to Egypt with all his clan, Lower

Egypt was under the dominion of the Hyksos, originally a small race of nomads in part of Hittite origin, but in the main, like Israel, of Semitic stock. A native Egyptian was indeed weakly ruling in Upper Egypt, though much under Hyksos supremacy. The Hyksos, though they formed an eighth of the population of Lower Egypt, never amalgamated with the native people any more than the English overlords of Egypt amalgamate with the fellaheen to-day. As early as Joseph's time, these Shepherd Kings were engaged in a struggle for life with the Egyptians, and it became clear why every shepherd was an abomination to the Egyptians, and also why Pharaoh was glad to welcome a large clan of healthy, hardy adventurers of his own stock, and establish them "in the best of the land," on the eastern frontier. This frontier it was his special policy to guard, and to it, indeed, a few generations later, these Shepherd Kings and their clans were fain to retreat. For after a struggle of more than a century, the Southern dynasty threw off the Hyksos rule, driving the Hyksos Kings and all their clans first into the land of Goshen among the Bene-Israel, and finally out of the kingdom. The date of this event has recently been practically fixed from astronomical calculations. It was 1582 B. C., more than a hundred years earlier than the date which up to this time historians have given to the rise of the victorious eighteenth dynasty. At the final expulsion of the Hyksos, this eighteenth dynasty arose, a dynasty supremely important in Egyptian history because of the brilliant ability of its earlier kings, and the part they played in restoring Egypt to its long-lost place among the great nations of the world.

The first task of this brilliant dynasty must needs have been to humble the Hittite power which for centuries had been dominant in Western Asia; and thus Canaan became the

theater of a very bloody warfare. Armed hosts of Egypt and *Khita* were constantly traversing her highways, and war chariots deploying on the plain of Esdraelon, which, near Megiddo (the Armageddon of the Apocalypse), became the scene of the most sanguinary battle of ancient times. In the decisive victory which the great pharaoh of this eighteenth dynasty, Thothmes III., won in his twenty-fifth year at Megiddo over the Hittite King of Qadesh, and his numerous allies,—“all the kings from Egypt to the Euphrates and also Phœnicia and Cyprus,”—Thothmes took from the enemy nine hundred and twenty-four chariots, and even the golden-plated chariot of the Hittite King—the first chariots ever seen in Egypt. But though Thothmes was able to push eastward and even to keep a fleet on the upper Euphrates, the Hittite empire was by no means crushed. It took two hundred years of warfare, first and last, for Egypt to gain even such ascendancy over *Khita* that hostilities could be brought to an end by the marriage of the Hittite king's daughter to Seti I. of the nineteenth dynasty; and during these centuries Egypt was often in pretty desperate plight, as the Amarna tablets show. For internal troubles arose in Egypt, as they may arise in Germany, from the complications incident to the keeping of a great standing army. The eighteenth dynasty went to pieces under the heel of a military despotism, and during the time of weakness preceding this result Canaan had rest from invasion, a point of capital importance with regard to the date of Israel's entrance into this land.

Now if the Exodus occurred in the eighteenth dynasty, shortly after the brilliant victories of Thothmes III., the children of Israel on entering the desert would find themselves in the midst of a friendly people, the Hyksos, to whom they had themselves shown kindness in their recent time of trouble.

And this would explain the fact that, contrary to what would naturally be expected, the years of desert wandering were a time of peace. We are told that the reason why Moses led the people by the roundabout way of the desert was to avoid the risk that unwarlike Israel should "see war." But the desert was at that time by no means an unpeopled solitude, nor a place of safety to helpless wanderers, any more than it is now. Countless nomad tribes roamed over it, and the only way to account for the facts in this part of the history of Israel is by the hypothesis that the Exodus took place in the eighteenth dynasty, when the desert was largely peopled by the friendly tribes of Hyksos. If these joined themselves to Israel, we may have the mixed multitude of Exodus xii. 38 accounted for, and certain other difficulties resolved. And they were surely more likely to homogenize with Israel than those "island inhabitants," the pirates of Northern Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean islands, in whom Mahler, dating the Exodus a century later, in the time of Rameses II., finds the "mixed multitude."

The earlier date of the eighteenth dynasty fits also into the conditions of the Hittites. After their disastrous overthrow by Thothmes III., they were for a long time in a paralyzed condition, their southern outposts, Hebron in Southern Canaan and Zoan in Northern Egypt, being cut off from the mother country. The people of Canaan, also,—the Jebusites, Perizzites, and the rest,—were pretty well demoralized; for Thothmes III. by no means paused at defeating the Hittites. The story of his campaign, inscribed in the temple at Karnak, names a hundred and twenty conquered towns in Canaan, many of them familiar names, and shows him to have overrun the entire country from Galilee to the southern desert.

Now we know that when the children of Israel emerged

from the desert on the east of Jordan, a wide-spread fear of them prevailed in Canaan; and, having learned from tablets and inscriptions that at the time of Thothmes III. the Canaanites were a highly civilized people, far in advance of Egypt in arts and education, well protected in their cities and villages, furnished with chariots and arms, and familiar with the art of war, we are impelled to ask the cause of that deep-seated terror at the approach of a wandering desert horde of runaway slaves. We must seek for the cause of this terror in something other than superstitious fear, or the vague legend, as one scholar puts it, "that Israel was coming to his own again." Nothing short of their overwhelming defeat by Thothmes III. and the continued oppression of his immediate successors, can account for their willingness to consider the claim of the God of the Hebrews that his people had rights in this land. These various considerations speak for the year 1423 B. C., in the reign of Thothmes IV., of the eighteenth dynasty, the grandson of the great conqueror, as the year of the Exodus. That it almost precisely agrees with the figures in 1 Kings vi. 1 and in St. Paul's address, and with Jephthah's three-century claim to the land of Moab, is an interesting feature, and may have its bearings on certain critical questions which do not enter here.

A much-discussed word, frequently recurring in the Amarna tablets, appears to point to the same conclusion,—the word *Habiri*. The word has been bandied back and forth between scholars, but it is now conceded that it means Hebrews. It occurs in the reports of the Egyptian governor of Jerusalem, Ebed-Tob, or Abdi-Khiba. The *Habiri*, he says, are making much trouble. They are ubiquitous; they are enemies to Egypt, they are capturing forts, have devastated all the king's territory—"the whole territory of my lord the

king is going to ruin because of them"; they are fomenting war at Bethel and Beth-aven. They have taken Gath-rimmon and are in Judæa, pressing from the hills down to the plains.

Now if the Exodus took place in the reign of Thothmes IV., the second successor of the great conqueror Thothmes III., or in that of Amenhotep III., who followed the fourth Thothmus, both of whom were weak monarchs, it would be just about this time, forty years later than Thothmes III., that the Hebrews did take Bethel and "Ai" (Josh. viii.), a name which may signify "ruin," and which appears to refer to Beth-aven, the neighbor city of Bethel. Furthermore, in Joshua (xix. 45) we find Gath-rimmon appointed to Dan as if it were already a conquered city. And very striking is that expression of Abdi-Khibba, that the Habiri were "pressing from the hills *down* to the plain." For in Judges i. 9 we read that, after the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and had taken it and had smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire (causing that disquietude of which he tells us to the worthy governor Abdi-Khibba in his impregnable citadel on the crag above), then "afterward the children of Judah *went down* to fight against the Canaanites that dwelt in the Shephelah and in the lowland." The Hebrew word "go down" precisely describes the descent from a great height like that from Jerusalem to the sea. These coincidences of the biblical account with the inscriptions on the stele and the Amarna correspondence, slight in themselves, have a cumulative weight for the conclusion that the Exodus occurred fully two hundred years earlier than it has of late been placed, that is, in 1423, forty years earlier than 1383, the date of Akenaten's reign, the king to whom Abdi-Khibba wrote; namely, in the reign of Thothmes IV. It is therefore, also, almost certain that the Pharaoh of the Oppres-

sion was the great warrior Thothmes III., who, 1449 B. C., conquered the Hittites and the Canaanites, and thus indirectly made possible the conquest of Canaan by Israel.

As against this conclusion are the facts that Rameses II. was a great builder, that bricks without straw are found at Pithom, and that one of the treasure-cities which the Hebrew slaves built for the Pharaoh is claimed to have borne his name, Rameses. But Thothmes III. was also a very noted builder—in the Heliopolis and Karnak, at Wady Halpha and more than thirty other sites, and, though he built mainly of stone (as, indeed, did Rameses II.), we have descriptions of some of his buildings as of brick. So far as we know, no bricks without straw are found in these buildings, but forty years ago the same was to be said of those of Rameses, and, in fact, we are nowhere told that the Hebrew slaves made any bricks without straw, but simply that they had to procure their straw where they could. The name Rameses occurs in Genesis, in a passage assigned indeed to “our very latest sources,” but that fact is hardly conclusive proof for or against the existence of the name in Egypt at any period.

There are other slight points of contact between the Amarna tablets and the book of Judges, which suggest that the Old Testament account of the entrance of Israel into Canaan has a better standing than some recent conjectures would admit. For example, if the Exodus occurred in the eighteenth dynasty, there is no necessity for sending Asher to Canaan two centuries in advance of the other clans of Israel, and Professor Jastrow's discovery of “men of Judah” in Canaan as early as 1400 B. C. needs no explanation. If the Pharaoh of the Exodus was Thothmes IV., the presence of Asher in central Canaan when the Amarna tablets were written, and certain inscriptions were made, is very accurately

accounted for by the scattered notices in Joshua and Judges. And the Amarna tablets throw into high relief many slight indications in Judges, especially concerning the tribes of Judah, Asher, Dan, Ephraim, and Benjamin, and offer at least a suggestion of an historical kernel to that story of Othniel's victory which has hitherto appeared to be purely legendary. Space forbids any attempt to trace these here, although they offer material for a fruitful study; but enough has been brought out, I think, to show that the theory of an early date for the Exodus, a date that would afford time for that remarkable development of the Hebrew people which we know did take place, is tenable in itself, and valuable for its far-shining light upon other questions.

The present study looks by no means to any support of the accuracy of the biblical data in the interest of any theory of inspiration. The indisputable inspiration of the biblical writers is argued from considerations quite other than those of historic accuracy. To any tenable theory of inspiration it is of absolutely no moment that the figures given in Kings and Judges and the Acts should be accurate. That they should prove to be substantially correct would be, however, a great historic gain. Such a conclusion clears up a psychological problem otherwise insoluble; it gives a kernel of fact to a group of unique hero tales, all the more valuable in the history of ideas because they are not entirely historic, but rather the beautified result of the play of the half-developed imagination around facts whose historic moment is beyond even its power of dreaming. It directs the mind of today to one of the most impressive events in human history, the birth in Israel, and not elsewhere, of that governmental idea which through the slow subsequent ages has gradually become dominant in human society.