

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_churchman\\_os.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php)

## DR. BURNEY'S "ISRAEL'S SETTLEMENT IN CANAAN."<sup>1</sup>

BY THE REV. J. S. GRIFFITHS, Rector of Lothersdale,  
Keighley.

THE nineteenth century will always be remarkable for the recovery of the knowledge of ancient civilizations through the labours of excavators, the discovery of monuments and the deciphering of old inscriptions. Bible students in particular are deeply indebted to the great explorers who have in many ways and at many points illuminated the pages of Holy Writ. It is true that archaeology is not yet an exact science, and the temptation is strong to go beyond the limits of what is actually proved, to exaggerate, to mix up theory and conjecture, and to make large and premature deductions from insufficient evidence; yet the area of positive knowledge is ever widening, and to-day there is a mass of archaeological material available for the illustration and elucidation of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Dr. Burney's book is an attempt, by the use of a portion of this material, to shed new light upon an admittedly difficult period of sacred history. It represents "an endeavour to reach historical results through the evidence of literary and historical criticism of Old Testament documents combined with the evidence of archaeology." That such an attempt should be made by an avowed disciple of Wellhausen is highly significant. It seems to indicate a changed attitude towards archaeology on the part of the Evolutionary critics. Formerly, as Dr. Cheyne frankly admits (*Bible Problems*, p. 142), they were disposed to ignore the claims of archaeology to influence criticism. This may have been due partly to the undeveloped state of the science, partly also to the way in which it was pressed, not always wisely or even fairly, into the service of conservative writers; but chiefly, we imagine, to the facts that it has completely disproved some of the propositions maintained by early critical writers (including Wellhausen himself), and that so many of the leading archaeologists have felt constrained to abandon

<sup>1</sup> *Israel's Settlement in Canaan*, by Dr. C. F. Burney (Schweich Lectures, 1917).

and oppose the evolutionary hypothesis. More recently however, the leaders of the Wellhausen school have begun to realize that archaeology is a factor that must be reckoned with, and that their theories must harmonize with its testimony if they are to prevail. Dr. Burney is quite clear "that these two departments of Biblical research (archaeology and criticism) cannot rightly be kept apart" (p. 1). Proceeding along these two lines, he arrives at certain historical conclusions which may be summarized as follows:

The early ancestors of Israel migrated into Canaan about 2100 B.C. The traditional stories of the patriarchs "deal in the main with the movements of *tribes* under the guise of individuals" (p. 84); and some of these were possibly in Egypt under the Hyksos in the sixteenth century B.C. In the following century came further immigrations into Syria and Canaan from the E. and N.E. These immigrants were of the SA-GAZ, the bandit folk mentioned in the Tell-el-Amarna letters, and included "Habiru" presumably Hebrews and Aramaeans. The Israelites oppressed in Egypt by Raameses II in the thirteenth century B.C. were mainly those of the Joseph-tribes (containing possibly some other elements, *e.g.* Simeon and Levi). There were other tribes in Canaan all along. And it was an army of Joseph-tribesmen that invaded Canaan under Joshua. The Biblical conception of an early organized unity of Israel is "the reading of later conditions back into a period when they were non-existent."

There are, however, several weak links in this chain.

(1) The evidence is not convincing for the date 2100 B.C. given for the migration from Mesopotamia into Canaan. Genesis xiv. mentions a Babylonian king Amraphel as being contemporary with Abraham. Dr. Burney, in common with many other scholars, identifies him with Hammurabi. But the final "1" in Amraphel is an insuperable difficulty. Even if the final "1" could be accounted for, the remaining Hebrew consonants give us one of *eight* possible transliterations of the consonants of Hammurabi's name. That is the utmost that can be urged in favour of the dating. Formerly it was thought that the Arioch, king of Ellasar, mentioned in Genesis xiv. was identical with Warad-Sin, of Larsa, (*not* Ellasar), whose name could be read in Sumerian as Eriaku; but it is now known that Warad-Sin (2143-2123 B.C.) was not contemporaneous with Hammurabi (2123-2081 B.C.). There is no recorded episode

in the career of Hammurabi that corresponds with the notice of Amraphel who falls, according to any reasonable view of the Biblical chronology, in the gap between the end of the reign of Samsu-ditana, of Babylon (1926 B.C.—for dates see King, *Hist. Bab.*) and the accession of Gandash (1760 B.C.), a period concerning which archaeology furnishes no information.

(2) The identification of the Habiru with the Hebrews or Aramaeans is also open to question. Dr. Burney says (p. 68), "the philological equivalence of *Ha-bi-ru* with 'Hebrew'—or, rather, since the form is not gentile, with 'Ebher is perfect." But if we *assume* that the word Habiru is a transliteration from the Hebrew—of which there is no positive evidence—then one of *eight* sets of Hebrew consonants which it may represent is found in the consonants of 'Ebher. In other words, on a purely consonantal basis, there are seven other equivalents just as perfect as 'Ebher! No proof is given that the Habiru were Semites at all. On the other hand, as Dr. Burney admits (p. 77), the term *Ha-bir-a-a* (=Habiraeans) is applied in two Babylonian documents to men who bear Kassite names—Harbisihu and Kurdurra. But the Kassites were not Semites. If the Habiru were Hebrews, it is singular, to say the least, that the only two names of Habiru-people known to us should be non-Semitic.<sup>1</sup>

(3) The theory that only the Joseph-tribes were oppressed in Egypt while the other tribes were still in Canaan is, of course, contradictory to the Biblical account. The author supports it, however, by reference to two place-names, Jacob-el and Asher, and to the Israel stele of Menepthah.

*Jacob-el* is found in a list of places in Palestine conquered by the Pharaoh Thutmose III c. 1479 B.C. Dr. Burney seems to infer from this that a Jacob-tribe existed in Southern or Central Canaan at that time. But *Jacob-el* is the name of a *place*, not a tribe, and is not an adequate foundation for the argumentative edifice which the author seeks to erect upon it.

Of *Asher* Dr. Burney says (p. 54), "there exists external evidence which seems to prove that the Zilpah-tribe Asher was already settled in its final position in North-Western Galilee at a period prior to the Exodus (cp. pp. 82, 83)." Turning obediently to pp.

<sup>1</sup> For other arguments against the identification, see an article by Prof. Luckenbill in the *American Journal of Theology*, Jan., 1918.

82, 83 in search of this evidence, we find, "It is interesting to note that Sety I (like his successor Ra'messe II) mentions among his conquests a district called 'Asaru, corresponding to the hinterland of Southern Phoenicia, precisely the position assigned in the Old Testament to the Israelite tribe of Asher." The identification of 'Asaru with Asher though strongly supported by many scholars is, however, far from certain. Eerdmans (*Vorgeschichte*, 1908, p. 66 f.) contends that the Egyptian transliteration does not correspond to the name Asher, and that the name of the only known inhabitant of the district is not even Semitic. In other words it is a transliteration from some non-Semitic language, not from Hebrew at all. He also disputes the geographical location. On this latter point W. M. Müller argues that the position of 'Asaru was that of the tribal district of Asher because it is found in a list which is clearly working from N. to S. (beginning with the N. Syrian Hittites), and occurs between Kadesh and Megiddo. But Eerdmans in reply points out that the places which follow Megiddo on the list are North and not South of that town. If so the list is not in geographical order, and the location of 'Asaru cannot be certainly determined.

The author's third proof of a divided Israel is based on the "Israel stele" discovered by Prof. Flinders Petrie in 1896. This inscription mentions "Israel" among a number of Palestinian localities subdued and plundered by Meneptah (1214-1234 B.C.). "Israel is desolated, his seed is not." From this Dr. Burney infers that Meneptah had defeated in Canaan a tribal element called Israel at a date nearly coincident with that which is commonly assigned to the Exodus.

The following is Breasted's translation of the material portion of the inscription (*Ancient Records*, Vol. III, pp. 263 f.):

"The kings are overthrown, saying: 'Salâm!'  
 Not one holds up his head among the Nine Bows.  
 Wasted is Tehenu,  
 Kheta is pacified,  
 Plundered is Pekanan with every evil,  
 Carried off is Askalon,  
 Seized upon is Gezer,  
 Yenoam is made as a thing not existing.  
 Israel is desolated, his seed is not;  
 Palestine has become a widow for Egypt.  
 All lands are united, they are pacified;  
 Every one that is turbulent is bound by King Meneptah."

Of the places named, Tehenu is Libya, Kheta is Hittite-land, Askalon and Gezer are in S. Palestine, and Pекanan is *Kanan*, two miles S. W. of Hebron (Petrie, *Hist. Eg.* III, 12). Yenoam has been identified by Petrie and others with Yanuh near Tyre. Maspero suggests the *Yanim* of Joshua xv. 53, and locates the defeated Israel in that neighbourhood.

Now the determinative sign for "land" which is used of Tehenu, Kheta, Askalon, Gezer and Yenoam is lacking in the case of Israel. The name Israel, as Dr. Burney himself points out is marked by the determinative meaning "men," showing that it denotes a people, not a country. It is in fact an expression that fits a *non-territorial* Israel. The inscription, then, records a defeat of a non-territorial Israel, in or near Palestine, so complete ("his seed is not"—a conventional phrase used in some other inscriptions and meaning "crushingly defeated") that as a result Canaan was for a time at least saved for the king. That is to say there was a *pax Aegyptia* in Palestine, and the attempts of Israel and others to disturb it had signally failed. ¶The date of the Stele is given as Epiphi 3 = April 15 in the fifth year of Menepthah (1229 B.C.).

The inscription does not state that all the events mentioned occurred in the course of a single campaign, or that the king himself was present in every or any case. On this point Prof. E. Naville says, "Thus the last lines of the stele show that the safety of the king is complete. There is no indication whatever that this state of things is due to the victories of the king. He is not mentioned as conqueror. It is not said that he, personally did anything in the destruction of Askalon or Innuamma. It would be quite contrary to Egyptian inscriptions such as we know them to forget in that way the great deeds of their king. No more than the day-book of the official does this record a conquest by Menepthah in Palestine. The successful campaign attributed to him is a mere hypothesis resting on two texts neither of which gives any indication whatever of this war, still less a positive proof" (*Journ. Eg. Arch.*, 1915, p. 201). Israel's defeat, then, may have been inflicted by Egyptian troops—with or without Menepthah, or by allies or vassals of the king. The essential point is that by whomsoever inflicted it helped to save Canaan for a time for the king of Egypt.

The interpretation of the stele does *not* necessitate the assumption of a divided Israel, for in Numbers xiv. 40-45 and Deuteronomy i.

41-46 an event is recorded which seems to correspond in all essentials with the Egyptian inscription. In those passages it is related that the Israelites on attempting an invasion of Canaan from the south were so decisively defeated by the Amorite tribes that they made no further attempt for thirty-eight years. That notice may safely be accepted as historical for no nation ever *invented* a story that on trying to invade a country it was so crushingly routed as to be compelled to wander in a wilderness for thirty-eight years! This defeat was inflicted upon a non-territorial Israel, in or near Palestine, by tribes who were under the suzerainty of the Egyptian king, and it sufficed to protect Canaan from further attack by Israel until some thirty-eight years later; thus fulfilling the conditions of the Israel stele. Incidentally it indicates the second year of Menepthah as the date of the Exodus (see H. M. Wiener's interesting discussion in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, July, 1916).

(4) On behalf of his contention that only the Joseph-tribes entered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, Dr. Burney points to the conquest of Arad in the Negeb by Judah and Simeon as a clear instance of a tribal settlement effected independently. In this case he relies exclusively upon Biblical evidence, *viz.*, Judges i. 16, 17, and Numbers xxi. 1-3 (J.), which passages he believes to be "obviously parallel." Both narrate a victory won by Israel in the Negeb, therefore they must be duplicate accounts of the same event! But according to Numbers this victory was gained *before* the general invasion under Joshua, the attack was made from the south, and no tribes are specially mentioned; while in Judges the conquest is attributed to Judah and Simeon moving southwards from Jericho after the passage of the Jordan. Besides, Numbers represents the Canaanite king as the aggressor, while in Judges the contrary is the case. It is not astonishing therefore that one who regards these passages as "obviously parallel," should find it "impossible to reconcile them as they stand." But Dr. Burney is in nowise discouraged. He judiciously selects from each passage just those elements which appear to countenance his theory. The *place* of conflict is of course common to both sections. On the questions of *date* and *direction* he "adopts the view that the position of the narrative as it stands in Numbers is more correct." Yet he follows Judges in representing the campaign as having been waged by Judah and Simeon, not (as in Numbers) by all Israel.

We give the result in his own words, "adopting the view that the position of the narrative as it stands in Numbers is more correct, and that the conquest of Arad in the Negeb took place through a tribal movement northward from the neighbourhood of Kadesh, the inference becomes plausible that the movement was effected by the tribes of Judah and Simeon" (pp. 29, 30). Plausible, perhaps, but far from sound! For Numbers xxi. 1-3 does not describe a *tribal* movement. It gives no hint or suggestion of such a thing. It was "Israel" that fought and won. It is not Numbers but the "less correct" account in Judges that mentions the tribes by name. If these passages are parallel it is, as Dr. Burney says, impossible to reconcile them.

Does not this impossibility warrant the suggestion that they may not be doublets at all, but relate to two distinct events? But, it may be asked, if Israel conquered Arad and occupied the Negeb under Moses, why should they need to re-conquer that region after crossing the Jordan? Why should they have turned and wandered for many years in the wilderness and finally invaded Canaan from another quarter? A clue to the solution of this difficulty is given in Numbers xiv. 40-45. There we read of a severe defeat sustained by the Israelites as a result of which they were driven back "even unto Hormah (Heb. *the* Hormah)." The fact that Numbers xxi. 3 explains why the city was called Hormah, while xiv. 45 assumes that it already has this name seems to show that the passage xxi. 1-3 has been misplaced. In fact, "it has long been recognized that the section is, in part at least, out of place" (Gray, *Numbers*, p. 271). The most reasonable view is that put forward by Wiener (*Essays in Pentateuchal Criticism*), viz., that the text of Numbers has been disarranged, that the victory at Hormah preceded the defeat, and that both took place *before* the thirty-eight years' wandering. In that case Judges i. 16, 17, refers to a re-conquest of the Negeb and the re-naming of the city. It is true that this explanation vindicates the Biblical history at the expense of Dr. Burney's "plausible inference," but surely it ought not to be rejected merely on that account!

(5) Dr. Burney's adoption of the view expressed by Kuenen, Stade and others that the patriarchal narratives deal with the movements of tribes under the guise of individuals enables him to present a very fascinating version of the history. Abraham's journey was a

clan-movement from Ur to Harrañ, and thence to southern Canaan. The marriage of his son represents the arrival from the East of the Aramaean tribe of Rebekah which by union with Isaac produces the two tribal groups Esau-Edom and Jacob. These after a while disagree and the Jacob-tribe crosses the Jordan in the direction of the ancestral home, but having been reinforced by "marrying" the Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah tribes returns to Canaan under pressure by the Laban-tribe. This return [Dr. Burney identifies with the] incursions of the Habiru in the fifteenth century B.C. The story of Joseph describes the separation of the Joseph-tribes from their brethren and their migration into Egypt. Dr. Burney claims that this interpretation of the traditions solves all the extra-Biblical allusions save one. The exception is the alleged occurrence of Joseph-el as a place-name in Canaan in 1479 B.C., a date at which, according to the theory, the Joseph-tribes were hardly in existence and were certainly not in Palestine.

On this highly ingenious re-construction of Hebrew history we may observe

(a) The view that the Old Testament represents the patriarchs as *tribes* under the guise of individuals has been ably discussed and refuted by many scholars of repute. Genesis knows nothing of an Abraham-clan, or an Isaac-tribe, or a Rebekah-tribe, or a Laban-tribe. Even Jacob whose names became quite naturally those of the nation is regarded, not as the founder of a special tribe, but as the progenitor of the individual tribes from whose union the nation was formed.

(b) It rests mainly (according to Kuenen, Stade, Guthe, and others) upon an alleged law of the growth of societies. "New nations never originate through rapid increase of a tribe; new tribes never through derivation from a family propagating itself abundantly through several generations" (Stade, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel*, I. p. 28). To which König aptly replies: "Often as I have read these sweeping statements, I have always missed one trifle: I never found a proof of this thesis" (*Neueste Prinzipien*, p. 36). Such a proof cannot be found. On the other hand many who are better entitled to be heard on this point than even Stade and Kuenen maintain the opposite thesis. Thus, according to H. S. Maine, the "patriarchal theory" is the one which best accords with all the facts (*Ancient Law*, pp. 126, 128).

(c) The interval between Abraham (2100 B.C.) and the return of Jacob (Habiru-invasion, 1411 B.C.) seems disproportionate when compared with that between the return of Jacob and the descent of the Joseph-tribes into Egypt (c. 1360 B.C.). But the exigencies of the theory compel the author to date the migration of Joseph *after* the coming of the Habiru for until then the Joseph-tribes were not in Canaan at all. This further obliges him to reject the commonly accepted view that the entry into Egypt took place under the Hyksos kings. Here again he comes into conflict with the Biblical account, for the Joseph-scenes presuppose a capital near the frontier. This was the case in the Hyksos period, but not afterwards until the reign of Raamses II. Also, the Israelites were settled in the land of Rameses. While the name itself is not as early as the days of the Hyksos, there is archæological evidence of the importance of this district in that period. It then sank into obscurity until the days of Raamses II.

On the whole we feel bound to confess that this book is not convincing. Of the author's wide reading, patient industry and literary skill there is evidence on every page. But the presuppositions with which he approached his task, and in particular his attitude towards the Biblical documents have militated against his success. He has developed a highly ingenious theory of early Hebrew history, but, as we have already shown, it receives but scant support from archæology and practically none from the Old Testament Scriptures.

J. S. GRIFFITHS.

