PARALLEL GUIDE 12
The Exodus and the Settlement of Canaan

Summary: Central to Israel's life as one people, the Exodus/Sinai event and the settlement of Canaan depict how God chooses and calls Israel, how God covenants with them and gives them the Law, and provides the promised land. This chapter summarizes the biblical accounts and then uses other sources to reconstruct the story from the standpoint of a modern historian.

Learning Objectives

• Read Exodus as indicated in text, Numbers 10ff., 20-24, 27, 31-32, and Joshua 1-11
- • Recount the biblical narrative of the Exodus and the settlement of Canaan
- • Name where Moses fled from Egypt
- • Identify the circumstances of the making of the covenant
- • Identify Balak and Balaam
- • Name where Moses died
- • Name the pharaoh who probably lived when the Hebrews entered Egypt
- • Identify the Hyksos

Assignments to Deepen Your Understanding

1. Recount the biblical narrative of the Exodus and the settlement of Canaan including the following points:

a. the name of the place to which Moses fled from Egypt
b. the meaning of the name YHWH
c. the circumstances of the making of the covenant
d. the identification of Balak and Balaam
e. the site of the death of Moses
f. the successor of Moses for the invasion of Canaan.

2. Locate a map of the area depicting the time Moses lived. Trace out the Exodus and mark significant places. The pilgrim's progress has long been a part of the Christian tradition. What marks along the path of the Exodus can you identify with modern movements for freedom and independence?

3. Trace out the route of the Exodus on a map. What events on the route remind you of changes in your own life?

4. The four-step cycle of salvation-history is fundamental to the EfM program. State the cycle that forms the theme of the Book of Judges and identify times in your life that might illustrate each aspect.

Preparing for Your Seminar

How is the religious authority of the Bible affected by the reconstruction offered in the chapter? What great themes transcend history and help us to reflect on our own lives and times?

Additional Sources

G. M. Landes, "Jericho" in The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplement (Abingdon, 1976) pp. 472-

473.

Brevard Childs' The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary (Westminster Press, 1974) is one of the best commentaries. It is intelligent, interesting, and highly readable. Another useful article is Walter Brueggemann's in The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. I, (Abingdon, 1994), pp. 675-981.

Chapter 12
THE EXODUS AND THE SETTLEMENT OF CANAAN

This chapter consists of two parts. In the first part we recount in brief form the story of the flight of the people of Israel from Egypt, their wanderings in the wilderness of Sinai, and their entrance into the land of Canaan. We draw this story from the various narratives of the books of Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, and Judges. Interspersed with these narratives are rather large sections of material dealing with the Law. We hold these sections—throughout Exodus, all of Leviticus, parts of Numbers, and almost all of Deuteronomy—for a later discussion of law.

Much has been discovered in recent years about the history of the ancient Near East. From these discoveries, as well as from certain evidence within the biblical narrative, it is possible to reconstruct—with some hazy areas—much of the background of the biblical story, and to describe the events from the point of view of a modern historian or archaeologist. We summarize such a reconstruction in the second part of this chapter.

In its biblical form this story is probably the most important part of the tradition of Israel. Time and again, as the nation came up against troublesome times, the people were asked to remember the events of the Exodus and the making of the covenant with YHWH in order to regain their bearings—to renew their relationship with YHWH and their identity as the people of God. The account of the Exodus and the settlement in Canaan is different in many ways from the stories we have seen in the Book of Genesis. The stories of the patriarchs come from dim tribal memories, and—although they probably contain some historical fact—they are largely legendary. In a sense the patriarchs stand for the people—or, as we shall see, for different groupings of peoples who eventually came together as the people of Israel. The accounts in the other Pentateuch books, even when there is legendary material, describe real historical persons and events.

In Genesis the stories have been assembled in their present form in order to paint a theological picture of God's plan of redemption in the face of the total spread of sin throughout the creation. In the story of the Exodus and the settlement of the land, the different documentary sources are put together in order to tell that story. While it was important that the people of Israel be aware of the larger picture of creation, sin, judgment, repentance, and redemption which the Book of Genesis paints, it was also important that they know the central events in their life as a people in which God acted to carry out the plan of redemption. The telling of the story of these events begins with the Book of Exodus.

While the material in the stories of Exodus is more "factual" than that in the Book of Genesis, the intent of the redactors and writers is very much the same. Even though Exodus is history in a way that Genesis is not, we should not think of it as history in a modern sense. It is still salvation-history—that is, history seen as showing forth

God's saving activity, or in von Rad's phrase, history "worked by the word of God." The point of view is not that of modern historians. This is no historical picture but a theological picture, the vision of God's actions. The primary purpose of the biblical writers is to tell us how Israel came to be the people of God; how God

chose them when they were mere slaves and brought them to the promised land; how God made a covenant with them in the wilderness and gave them the Law which spelled out the response they were to make to his gracious election of them. They do not tell us when these things happened, how they fit into the picture of the political life of the ancient Near East, what groups of peoples eventually made up the nation of Israel, what was the religious history of these peoples, and how the religion of Israel may have been influenced by this history. In short, they tell us very little about those things a modern historian wants to know.

Exodus 1 The Biblical Account

The story in the Book of Exodus takes up where Genesis left off, with Joseph's kinsfolk in Egypt. It then moves directly to a later time when the people have multiplied greatly and a pharaoh arises "who did not know Joseph" (Exod. 1:8). This unnamed pharaoh oppresses the people, forcing them to work as slaves in the building of two new cities. When the people continue to multiply, the pharaoh tries to reduce their numbers by having the male children killed, but the boy Moses is saved and grows up as the adopted son of the daughter of the pharaoh (1:9-2:10).

As a grown man Moses kills an Egyptian for beating a Hebrew and has to flee from Egypt to avoid arrest. He goes to the land of Midian, which was in the northeastern part of the Sinai peninsula (probably Kadesh-Barnea).[top] There he tends sheep for a priest of Midian and is given his daughter, Zipporah, for a wife (2:11-22).

After some time, while Moses is tending his sheep at Mount Horeb (called Mount Sinai in another tradition), God appears to him at the site of a bush which is burning yet is not consumed. God instructs Moses to return to Egypt, where the pharaoh under whose reign Moses fled has died. There he is to deliver the people of Israel from their bondage. Moses protests several times against this command from God, but finally obeys and sets off for Egypt. During Moses' dialogue with God, God reveals the divine name as "YHWH," saying that in the past he has been called by many other names. In this passage the meaning of the name is tied to a statement God makes when Moses asks for the name: "I am who I am," or "I will be what I will be." We discuss this at considerable length when we look at the text in detail (2:23-4:26).[top]

Moses' brother, Aaron, comes to meet Moses, and together they approach Pharaoh with the request to let the people go on a journey of three days into the wilderness in order to hold a feast to YHWH. Pharaoh, however, refuses to let them do so and instead increases the burden on the people by making them find their own straw to mix with mud for the making of bricks (4:27-7:3).

YHWH promises to prevail over Pharaoh, and begins a series of mighty acts—miracles and eventually a series of plagues—by which God will ultimately break down Pharaoh's resistance and secure the release of the people. The last of the plagues is

the destruction of all the firstborn of the Egyptians, even reaching to the firstborn of their cattle. To protect the Israelites from the plague of death, God commands that each family sacrifice a lamb and smear its blood on the doorpost of their house to indicate that Israelites dwell there. They are to eat the flesh of the lamb that night, together with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. In this way, the feast of Passover is begun, and the people are commanded to continue this feast every year to remember the deliverance which YHWH provided them (7:4-13:16).

Finally, after his own son is killed in the plague, Pharaoh agrees to let the Israelites go. God leads them out into the wilderness rather than following the usual route to the land of the Philistines. "If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt" (13:17). From the very outset the storyteller lets us see that

the people of Israel are going to grumble under hardships and become willing to go back even into slavery rather than face the difficulties which lie ahead. YHWH goes before them in a “pillar of cloud by day” and “pillar of fire by night” (13:22) to guide them through the wilderness. The pharaoh regrets allowing them to leave and comes after them with an army of charioteers. But at the sea, when the way ahead is blocked by the waters and the way behind held by the Egyptian army, God parts the waters so that the Israelites can go through and then allows the waters to rush back on the Egyptians so that “horse and rider he has thrown into the sea” (15:1). Moses and his sister Miriam sing a song of praise to YHWH for this deliverance: God has saved Israel from the power of the pharaoh (13:17-15:21).

These first fifteen chapters of Exodus form a single story which was, and continues to be, recited again and again to celebrate God’s act of deliverance, the victory of YHWH, the God of Israel, over the gods of Egypt personified in the figure of the pharaoh.

After the crossing of the sea, the people of Israel walk through the desert of Sinai toward the “mountain of God.” The people grow hungry and thirsty and complain to Moses, who takes their complaints to God. God gives them water to drink and “bread from heaven,” called “manna,” to eat. They meet with warlike Amalekites, 12 and God gives them victory. So, in spite of their grumbling, God shows that God is with them. When they reach the mountain, Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, meets them and advises Moses how to organize the people into smaller units with leaders to share with Moses the burden of governing (15:22-18:27).

At the mountain the covenant between YHWH and the people is sealed by sacrifice. But during Moses’ long absence from the people—while he is on the mountain with YHWH receiving God’s law for the people—the crowd demands that Aaron make for them a god to be with them, such as other nations have. Aaron constructs a golden calf for them. When Moses returns, he is angry. He breaks the tablets of stone on which the Law is written; this action symbolizes that the covenant has been broken. He then pleads for the people before God, and the covenant is renewed (Exod. 19, 24, 32-34). (Chapters 20-23, 25-31, and 35-40 contain statements of the Law; we hold these chapters, also the entire Book of Leviticus and the first ten chapters of Numbers, for later discussion.)top

We pick up the story at Num. 10:11. The people, accompanied by some of Jethro’s clan, set off toward Canaan. Moses sends out spies to scout the land and the Canaanite people. The spies return with frightening accounts of the strength of the peoples who live in the land, and the Israelites begin to rebel against Moses’ leadership. YHWH supports Moses and punishes the rebels, ordering the whole group to go back into the wilderness until all the generation that has so constantly grumbled and resisted him has died; none except Caleb and Joshua the son of Nun will live to enter the promised land (Num. 10:11-14:45). Still, the rebellion against Moses continues, and Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, the ringleaders, are punished: the earth opens up and swallows them (Num. 16).

The people eventually set out again toward Canaan. When the Edomites refuse to allow them to go through Edom, they detour around it. And they fight victoriously against the peoples who stand in their way, until they come to Moab, on the southeastern edge of the Dead Sea (called the Salt Sea on some maps). Balak, the king of Moab, sends for a Mesopotamian magician named Balaam to come and curse Israel, because he is afraid of their great numbers and strength. But God speaks to Balaam and tells him that Israel is blessed, so Balaam pronounces blessings instead of curses upon Israel. Israel fights in the name of YHWH and is victorious over the various tribes in that region. Joshua is appointed as successor to Moses, and the way is open for the invasion of Canaan (Num. 20-24, 27, 31-32). (The other material, which pertains to ceremonial laws, we will discuss later.)

At the end of the Book of Deuteronomy (which we also look at later) Moses is described as going to the top

also of Mount Nebo from which he can see over the Jordan into the promised land. There he dies (Deut. 34).[top]

Under the command of Joshua, the son of Nun, the people cross the Jordan, take the city of Jericho, and go on to conquer the rest of Canaan. The people of Gibeon—Canaanites living in the central area—trick the Israelites: Israel has sworn to destroy all Canaanites, but the Gibeonites claim to be a people who have come from a faraway land especially to covenant with Israel. The two peoples covenant together, and when Israel discovers how she has been tricked, she cannot go back on the covenant. Thus, Israel and Gibeon live side by side in the land (Josh. 1-11).

After the conquest, the tribes of Israel bind themselves together in a loose confederation, but have no centralized government. The pattern of God's people turning away from God's purpose and then being restored to it continues. Again and again Israel will "do evil in the sight of YHWH"; then will come punishment, usually in the form of some foreign oppressor. When the people repent and cry out to YHWH, he raises up a leader who "judges" the people, restoring them to peace and plenty. The cycle repeats itself: sin, judgment, repentance, and restoration. This pattern, carried throughout the Book of Judges, thematically unifies that book.

Thus the biblical story depicts liberation of all twelve tribes of Israel from Egypt, the wanderings of the people in the wilderness and the covenant with YHWH, entrance into Canaan from the desert land east of the Jordan, total conquest of the land, and

the setting up of tribal boundaries. Throughout all this, sin and redemption present a constant pattern. This picture reflects the theological understanding of the biblical writers. It had been shaped by the continual liturgical recitation of the story over a long period of time. In the next part of this chapter we see that there is reason to doubt that all the tribes were together in Egypt or that the conquest of Canaan was as complete as it is described. Still the essentials of Israel's faith—that YHWH had delivered her from bondage and had given her the land of Canaan—are truly present in the story she told to her children.

Reconstructing the History

In this reconstruction we seek the answers to three main questions:

a) When did the Exodus take place?
b) What tribes were involved in it?
c) How and when did Hebrews invade and settle the land of Canaan?

Because of the nature of the evidence we have, we begin with the second question.

First we describe the evidence. Then we can point up the problems raised by it when we compare this evidence with the biblical account. The evidence consists of the letters that were discovered in Tel El Amarna in Egypt. These "Amarna letters" were written to the pharaoh by Canaanite kings who were puppet rulers under Egyptian control. In the letters the puppet kings ask for help from Pharaoh to put down some destructive raids by a nomadic or semi-nomadic group belonging to no established culture but generally living on the fringes of civilization. The letters refer to these people as Habiru, a word which is very close to the word "Hebrew." In the Bible the Israelites do not call themselves "Hebrews," except when they are talking to foreigners. So Habiru may well be a word used to refer to any of the unsettled gypsy-like groups of people who from time to time pressed in on the settled cultures of Canaan; among these peoples some tribes may eventually have become a part of the nation we know as Israel. Foreigners—like those who wrote the letters—would not be able to distinguish among the "Habiru" or "Hebrews," as to who were Israelites and

who were not.

The Amarna letters seem to indicate that the Habiru were causing trouble in the northern and the southern areas of Palestine. Except for the city of Shechem, there was little or no unrest in the central area. When the Amarna letters were first discovered and the reference to Habiru was seen, people tended to jump to the conclusion that these were the tribes from the Exodus invading the land under Joshua. Joshua's invasion, however, was supposed to have taken place directly in the central area—Jericho, Gilgal, Ai—which was the one area that the Amarna letters described as peaceful! Scholars then began to suggest that there may have been two groups that came up out of Egypt, one attacking the northern and southern areas during the Amarna period and another attacking in the center; this suggestion assumes that at a later time the tradition combined the two invasions, and the name of Joshua was attached to the combined event. In the Book of Joshua, the invasion is pictured as beginning in the central area and then striking south and north.

The problem we have is how then to reconcile the biblical account with this evidence: how could fourteenth-century letters speak of trouble in the north and south but not the center when the Book of Joshua describes an invasion to the center spreading to the south and the north?

Other archaeological evidence suggests that two of the tribes of Israel, Asher and Zebulun, had already settled in the north of Palestine in the fourteenth-century, with no hint that they had ever been in Egypt or taken part in an invasion such as that described in the Book of Joshua. This evidence lies in the texts from the ancient city of Ugarit, near present-day Ras Shamra. These Ras Shamra tablets refer to a people called, in the ancient Canaanite language of Ugaritic, "Asara." This word might be the same as the tribal name Asher. Another reference in the tablets is unquestionably to a group called Zebulun. If you look at a map, you will find the land held by the tribes of Asher and Zebulun in the north, right where the Ras Shamra texts describe them. Thus we have evidence of the presence of these two tribes of Israel in Canaan in the fourteenth-century BCE. The tablets speak of these groups as simply living there; there is no suggestion of anything like Joshua's invasion. So the question is, how do we account for this evidence of at least two of the tribes being settled in Canaan in the fourteenth century with no suggestion of an invasion?

Still another part of the picture concerns what was happening in Egypt. Sometime between 1750 and 1550 BCE—the dating is very uncertain—a group of people from the north invaded Egypt and eventually took control of the area around the Nile delta, where the river flows into the Mediterranean Sea. These were called the Hyksos.[top] At least some of the Hyksos were Semites, and on the basis of this, scholars at one time assumed that Joseph was elevated to power under one of the Hyksos kings. It would not be likely, so the argument runs, that a Semite would be given such power after the Egyptians had finally succeeded in expelling the Hyksos.

If, however, there were already "Israelite" tribes in both north and south Palestine in the fourteenth century, how could they feel any sense of unity with the tribes who had presumably been in Egypt ever since the sixteenth or seventeenth century? If we could suppose that they all had been in Egypt in the sixteenth-or seventeenth-century Hyksos period, and that one group had left to invade northern and southern Canaan in the fourteenth century, and another group had invaded the central area later, it would all work out. There is nothing to indicate, however, that there were two invasions and still less to indicate that the Asher-Zebulun tribes had associations with Egypt. This points up still another problem: how do we account for feelings of unity between tribes who were in Egypt and others who apparently were not?

There have also been archaeological discoveries made in Palestine around some of the cities mentioned in the Joshua account of the invasion. These discoveries seem to show that around 1230 BCE these cities fell under attack and were destroyed, just as the account in Joshua describes it.

When Jericho was first unearthed, it was thought that its fall took place around 1400 BCE. More recent studies, however, seem to indicate that it is more likely to have

happened just before 1200 BCE. From radiocarbon dating—which uses atomic decay to establish very early dates with a relatively high degree of accuracy—it has been established that Lachish, Makkedah, Hazor, and Bethel—all of which are mentioned in the biblical story—were destroyed in about 1230 BCE. This could be the date for the invasion under Joshua. There are at least two problems, however. Joshua 2 depicts Jericho as a walled city. This it may have been as late as the beginning of the fourteenth century, although archaeological evidence for this is slim. There is complete lack of evidence for a thirteenth-century occupation of Jericho, so that ". . . if there is any historical validity to the Joshua traditions they refer either to the fourteenth-century destruction or to a later overturn of such a small settlement that its remains . . . have not yet been discovered by archaeologists. It is possible that the tradition about Jericho is an etiology . . . an explanation of the site's impressive ruins, created long before Joshua's day, but subsequently attributed to the invasion under his leadership . . ." (G. M. Landes, "Jericho," IDB Supp., p. 473).

This is probably the case with the city of Ai (pronounced AY-eye) which also figures prominently in the story of the invasion. But archaeological studies show it already desolate and abandoned between 2000 and 1200 BCE. This would mean that it was already destroyed during the time these other cities were under attack. We do not know how to account for this. Some possibilities: we may not be excavating the proper site for Ai; since only a little valley separates Ai and Bethel, it may be that the biblical account has confused the two places; it is possible that the story of the fall of Ai either before 2000 BCE or after 1200 BCE got incorporated into the conquest tradition. At any rate, many of the cities which the tradition says were destroyed by the Israelites actually did fall at roughly 1230 BCE.

This is but one bit of evidence for an invasion in the central portion of Canaan at about the middle of the thirteenth century. Still further evidence shows that around 1250 BCE cities in the area around the Dead Sea —where Edom and Moab were in biblical times—were attacked and destroyed. This would accord with the biblical stories of warfare with these peoples as the Israelites tried to get into position for the strike into central Palestine across the Jordan River. This is further support for a theory that places the date of the Israelite invasion around 1250-1230 BCE. There are also some matters we referred to but did not develop pertaining to the patriarchal stories and the peculiarities of the J and E documents. The Abraham saga frequently mentions places like Hebron, Beersheba, and Mamre. These are in the southern part of Palestine. The Jacob saga centers to the north at Bethel and across the Jordan. We noticed that the Isaac stories seemed to serve mainly to link these two figures together and had little substance in themselves. Further, we noticed that the northern tradition as expressed in the E document did not use the divine name YHWH; E does not use this name until the story of Moses at the burning bush, for in this tradition God was not called by that name until then. J, however, uses the name YHWH from the beginning.

This seems to indicate two groups, a northern and a southern. The northern group had Jacob as the main patriarchal figure and the southern had Abraham; the northern group did not call God by the name YHWH until the Exodus, while the southern group called God by that name all along.

These are the main pieces of evidence we have with which to work. Is there any way to bring all these points together? So that we can keep the events and the dates straight, look at the chart below to which we have added the names and dates of some of the Egyptian pharaohs.

Egypt*	*Canaan*
1800	Hyksos invasion
1700	Hyksos rule
1600	Return of Egyptian control Ahmose (1552-1527 BCE)
1500	Thutmose III (1490-1436 BCE)
1400	Amenhotep III (1411-1377 BCE) Amenhotep IV (Akh-en-Aton) (1377-1360 BCE) *Asher and Zebulun in north Palestine (Ras Shamra); Habiru in north and south (Amarna).*
1300	Seti I (1305-1301 BCE) Rameses II (1301-1234 BCE) Merneptah (1234-1227 BCE) *Destruction of Edomite and Moabite sites and of central Canaanite sites.*
1200	

* Dates of pharaohs are only approximate. You may find slight variations in different books.

The following reconstruction is speculative, but it fits the pieces of evidence we have at this time. First, some people from the northern Mesopotamian area came into the land and lived relatively peacefully with the Canaanites in the south. These would be the “Abraham” group of semi-nomads living around Hebron, Mamre, and Beersheba, probably sometime in the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries. This group, which eventually became Judah, encountered Midianites (or Kenites) from the southern desert area, their center at the oasis at Kadesh-barnea. Here we make

an assumption that we try to justify later when we discuss Moses' stay in Midian with his father-in-law, Jethro. The assumption is that the Kenites worshiped a god whom they called YHWH.

Sometime later, in the fourteenth century, a mixture of "Abraham" tribes and Kenites began to pressure the settled cities of the south. (Because of certain features of the biblical story, some scholars see a period of 38 years during which southern "Abraham" groups and Kenites lived together at the oasis of Kadesh-barnea.) At the same time another wave of migrating clans, among whom were the tribes of Asher and Zebulun, came down from the north. These latter were the "Jacob" tribes. These two waves are part of the general fourteenth-century upset in the north and south. During the reign of the enlightened and peaceable Pharaoh Akh-en-Aton (also known as Amenhotep or Amenophis IV 1377-60 BCE) some of the northern "Jacob" tribes went down into Egypt, probably for economic reasons as suggested in the Joseph story.

Pharaoh Akh-en-Aton is an interesting figure. He overthrew the old religion of Egypt with its center at Thebes and set up a monotheistic religion worshiping only the sun-god, Aton. Under his reign there was a fantastic change in the entire culture. Art forms became more naturalistic, for example. You may have seen pictures of the bust of Akh-en-Aton's queen, Nefertiti, one of the most beautiful pieces of sculpture of all time. Under the reign of someone like Akh-en-Aton it would have been quite possible for a Semite such as Joseph to rise to power. But Akh-en-Aton's religious reform did not last long. The priesthood of the Thebes cult was too powerful to remain under submission, and with the death of Akh-en-Aton, the old gods returned and with them the old ways of life.

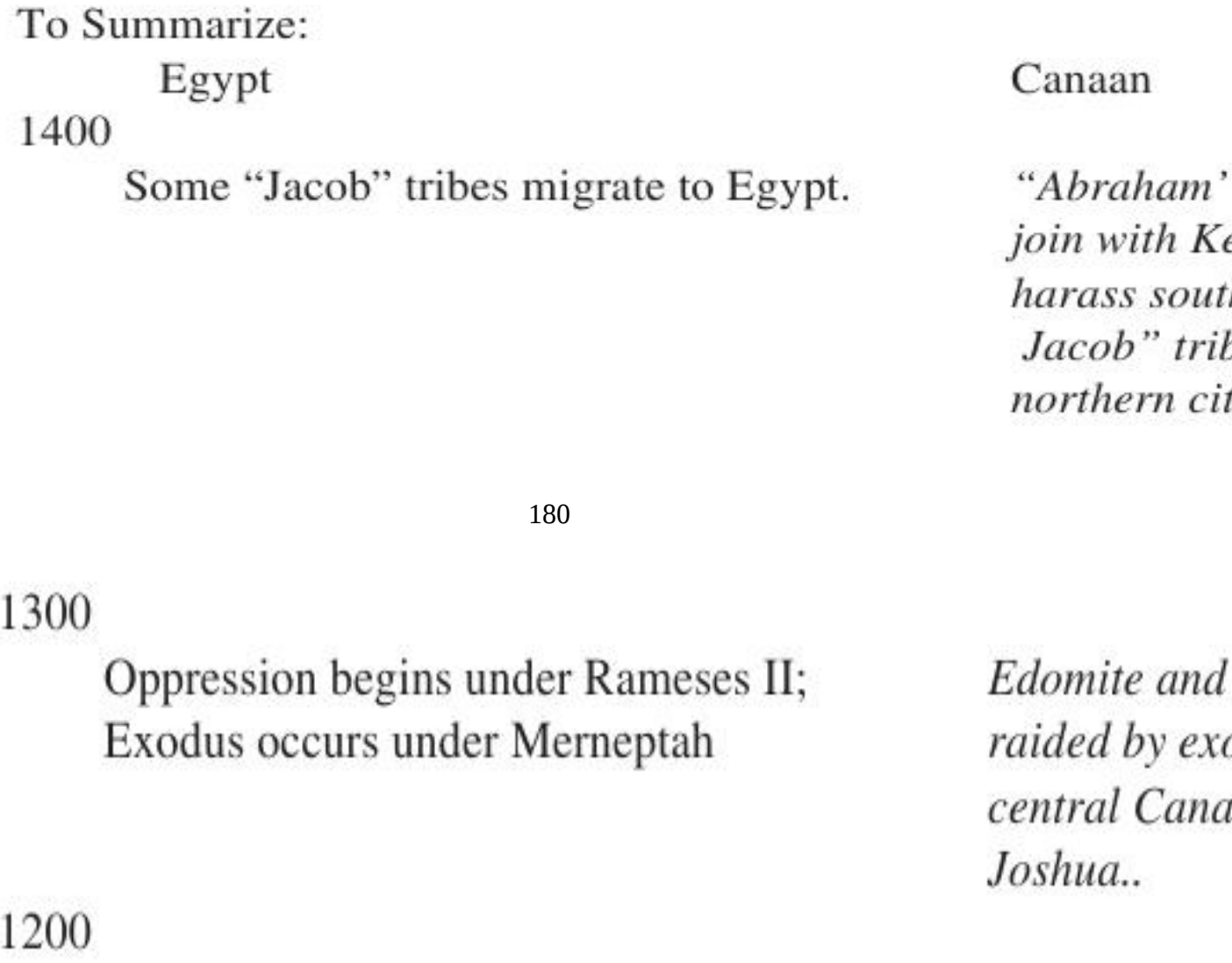
In terms of rebuilding the power and prestige of Egypt, Akh-en-Aton's successor, Rameses II, was one of the greatest of the pharaohs. Rameses undertook a massive building program employing great numbers of slaves and peasants. (Among his many projects was the temple at Abu Simbel which was recently moved to higher ground at a cost of some eleven million dollars to prevent its being submerged by the water of the lake created by the Aswan Dam.) He finished construction of the cities of Pithom and Rameses in the Goshen area of Egypt which his father, Seti I, had begun. This powerful king, grandiose in his ideas and ruling in a time which had completely disavowed the views of Akh-en-Aton, would fit the picture of the pharaoh "who did not know Joseph" and who pressed lower-class squatters into service to build his cities.

If Rameses II were the pharaoh of the oppression of the Hebrews, then his son, Merneptah (1234-1227 BCE), would have been the pharaoh of the Exodus. Under him a group of Hebrews came out of Egypt and wandered until they came to Kadesh-barnea, stayed there a short time (probably two years), and then began their invasion of central Canaan from across the Jordan. This would give an entry into the land of Canaan in about 1230 BCE.

Thus we have northern and southern invasions in the fourteenth century, with the southern group calling God YHWH, a name they learned from the Kenites; part of the northern group goes into Egypt and comes out in the thirteenth century; this group from Egypt stays at the Kenite (Midianite) center where the southern group had lived for many years, taking over the "Yahwist" tradition during this stay; this same exodus group invades the central area in about 1230 BCE and is the bridge group that brings the northern "Elohist" and the southern "Yahwist" tribes together under a religious unity which now includes not only the divine name, YHWH, but—from the experience in the wilderness—the covenant tradition. In the later biblical tradition, the 38-year stay at Kadesh-barnea, during which the southern group prepared for the fourteenth-century invasions, and the two-year stay at the same oasis spent by the exodus group, became combined into the now traditional forty-year period in the wilderness.

Pharaoh Merneptah, the pharaoh of the Exodus according to this theory, engaged in some battles during this time of upheaval in his Canaanite territory. (Remember that the Canaanite puppet-kings had written for assistance to their Egyptian overlord during the fourteenth century. Egypt was too weak to respond then, but under Rameses II and Merneptah attempts were made to regain some measure of control in Palestine.) About 1220 BCE Merneptah erected an obelisk-type marker called a stele (pronounced STEEL-y) on which he claimed, "Israel is no more." This was obviously an exaggeration, but it indicates that he had engaged in battle outside Egypt with a group by that name, and that they were no longer a slave population within his domain.

By this reckoning, the stay in Egypt would have been about 125 years, which is not long enough to destroy a feeling of common ancestry between the group that had gone to Egypt and the people who remained in northern Canaan. It would lead us to expect a feeling of distinctness between the "Joseph" tribes of the exodus experience and the "Judah" tribes who were never in Egypt, and this might account for the later precariousness of the union of northern and southern tribes under the united kingdom. If the mingling of the southern tribes with the Kenites is accepted—see the "Kenite hypothesis" in Chapter Thirteen for justifications for this—it would explain why the J writer from the southern Judah tradition uses "YHWH" throughout for the name of God, while the E writer from the northern Joseph groups knows of this name only when it is revealed to Moses at Mount Sinai (Horeb).



What effect does this reconstruction have on our appreciation of the traditional biblical story? At first it may

be disappointing to realize that it is possible that not all of the twelve tribes of Israel went into Egypt and participated in the exodus experience. The picture of Moses leading the whole people of Israel out of bondage and of the entire nation sealing its covenant with YHWH at Sinai and marching triumphantly into the promised land has a grandeur about it. It is somehow what ought to have happened. On the other hand, in the reconstructed story there is something wonderful that demonstrates the power of God at least as much as the traditional story does: a small group, whom a special series of experiences had made different from their immediate kinsfolk back home and from more distantly related kinsfolk whom they would meet in Canaan, had an experience of God in the wilderness of Sinai which was so powerful and so commanding in its newness that it provided the focus of unity around which all the tribes would unite. This unity of faith in YHWH and the covenant at Sinai were to prove strong enough to survive even the political division after Solomon's reign.

End of chapter

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Paints[back]

Actually that's what the EFM writers say. We could discuss whether that's what Genesis is about.

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Salvation-history[back]

OK - so I'm in a bad mood. Another word would be "propaganda."

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The permanence of a dishonest agreementback

This seems to be a constant fact about the culture - that an agreement must be honored, no matter if dishonestly arrived at.

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Semitesback

We keep referring to things Semitic; let's look at a definition.

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A Semiteback

Or actually any non-Egyptian. But is there any warrant for believing this might be true?

>

Feelings of Unity[back]

I don't see a problem here. English people, to take only an instance that I'm aware of, feel pretty close to the Norwegians and the Danes. Close cousins, hardly foreigners, really.

>

Ai[back]

According to Amy-Jill Levine, *Ai* means "heap of ruins."

>

"quite possible for a Semite like Joseph" back

Oh Please!

>

38 years at Kadesh-barneaback

Makes a lot more sense than living in the wilderness for forty years!

>

Priestly coup[back]

If indeed Joseph worked for Akenaten (really speculation), then this would have been a time of grumbling about the famine. And if Joseph sold corn at blockade prices, he might have even been ripping off the priests of Amun. One more reason why the new religion had to go, and Joseph's people weren't popular with Ramses II? Total speculation on my part.

>

YHWHback

See Wikipedia. Or - just me - perhaps the name really means "none of your business."

>