

CHAPTER 3: ISRAEL'S PATRIARCHAL AGE AS A WILDERNESS POLEMIC

A) Archaeology and the Fading Patriarchs

In the 1950's and 1960's, a number of texts from the ancient Near East were interpreted as shedding light on the Patriarchal Age. The texts from Mari and Nuzi were seen as especially important. Thousands of tablets were found at these sites. The texts from Mari included people who had the same name as people in Abraham's family. Texts from Nuzi shed light on customs recorded in the Genesis text. There was general agreement that Abraham and the Patriarchs could be associated with the Middle Bronze Age I period in the early 2nd millennium BC.¹

In 1978, J. Alberto Soggin discussed a search in the field for what W. F. Albright called a "datum point." This was the point at which substantial confidence could be placed in the historical claims of ancient texts. Before this "datum point," all ancient texts are problematic and can only be used with great caution. Soggin noted that there has been little agreement in the field about the location of this datum point. One possible datum point has been suggested for the 2nd millennium BC. If this time was accepted as a datum point, the Biblical accounts of the Patriarchs, the exodus, the conquest and the period of Judges could be the source for information about Israel's history that was at least partly valid. Soggin argued that if this period were accepted as the datum point, it should be possible to correlate the Patriarchal narratives, the exodus, the wilderness wandering, and the settlement of Canaan with events in the history of the ancient Near East. Writing in 1978, Soggin argued that the majority of modern scholars agreed with R. Kittel's assumption that the datum point for Israel's history should be placed in the middle of the 2nd millennium BC. Soggin noted that Martin Noth set the datum point later in history than this. He set it at 1200 BC when he believed that Israel was still a tribal league. Soggin suggested instead that the datum point for Israel's history should be set during the United Monarchy. Soggin suggested that the Patriarchal narratives, the exodus, the wilderness wandering, and some of the stories about the settlement and the judges should be viewed as traditions that existed among the Israelites during the United Monarchy. Soggin assumed that these accounts may not have had any historical validity, but they did represent the way that people understood their own history during the United Monarchy.²

Soggin's suggestion reflects the confidence that was then felt in the general historical merit of the United Monarchy and its texts. His position was also consistent with the form that the Documentary Hypothesis usually took in his day. Defenders of the Documentary Hypothesis still believed that David and Solomon ruled in Jerusalem, but they were quite skeptical about the value of earlier Biblical accounts as historical witnesses.

As Soggin wrote his article, his conclusions were already being challenged. In 1974 and 1975, Thomas Thompson and John Van Setters began writing books that questioning the historical validity of both the Patriarchal narratives and the United Monarchy. Thompson and Van Setters were very critical of the use of texts from Mari and Nuzi to interpret Genesis. Both argued that the Patriarchal narratives were not historically correct, and that the current Biblical books were written in the 1st millennium BC instead of the 2nd millennium. Thompson pointed out that archaeological evidence has not proven the truth of any

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Selman noted that the Nuzi texts were written in the 14th and 15th centuries BC. Rather close parallels between the Nuzi texts and events in Israel's Patriarchal Age have led many authors to date Israel's Patriarchs in the 15th century BC. Selman noted that as early as 1976, Thompson and Van Setters were calling into question whether the Nuzi texts actually shed light on the Patriarchs. Selman noted that over 4,000 tablets were found at Nuzi. Yet only around a dozen of those have been used in the academic discussion, and many authors have mentioned only three or four texts. Selman noted that around 300 of the Nuzi tablets relate to family law, so the three or four commonly used texts may not be a representative sample. Selman argued that social customs recorded at Nuzi may be weak evidence to date the Patriarchal Age because social customs tend to remain stable over a long time period. Selman argued that customs recorded in the Nuzi texts were also common more widely in the ancient Near East. They were also in use over a wide time period. So using the Nuzi texts to date the Patriarchal Age is problematic. M. J. Selman, "The Social Environment of the Patriarchs," *Jyndale Bulletin* 27 (1976): 114-23, 135.

J. Alberto Soggin, "The History of Ancient Israel: A Study in Some Questions of Method," *Eretz-Israel* 14 (1978): 45*-6*, 51*.

Patriarchal tradition.³ As far as it goes, this was a correct claim. The Patriarchs have not appeared in any of the ancient texts. Thompson also added the claim that archaeological evidence has not shown any Patriarchal tradition to be likely, and this was a far more controversial claim. Assumptions are always involved in any assessment that an event was likely or not likely.

In 2003, M. P. Maudman expressed the new spirit in Pentateuchal studies. Maudman argued that there were strong parallels between the Patriarchal narratives and the ancient Near East, but that these were Iron Age parallels. Maudman noted that this was the period that Wellhausen dated the composition of Genesis. Maudman argued that Nuzi had been mined ruthlessly for alleged parallels to the Patriarchs. Looking at the proposed parallels between Genesis and the ancient Near Eastern texts, Maudman argued that many of the proposed parallels were simply wrong. The proposed parallels either adjusted the Mesopotamian evidence to fit the Biblical text or adjusted the Biblical text to fit the Mesopotamian evidence. Maudman argued that many of the parallels proposed for the Nuzi texts proved to be illusory. Other parallels were valid, but they were so general that they could apply to any time period. Maudman concluded that, "the search for Israel's Abrahamic origins runs up against an insuperable barrier."⁴

Amy Marcus claimed that Abraham and the Patriarchal Age are no longer of any interest to Biblical scholars and archaeologists. They don't regard the Abrahamic narrative as having anything historically accurate to say. Marcus noted that since the 1970's, Biblical parallels were proposed for texts from Ebla that have proven to be incorrect. Proposed parallels from Nuzi were shown to be misinterpretations. Other parallels would have been equally true for later periods. Marcus claimed that by the time the dust settled, the academic community had moved on to other topics of discussion, and the Patriarchal narratives had become a dead topic.⁵

Otto Eissfeldt made an interesting comment about the book of Genesis. Eissfeldt was not a conservative, but his comment made a valuable point. Eissfeldt noted that if scholars reinterpreted the account so completely that they produced a different picture of the Patriarchal Age, or if they replaced the Biblical account with a modern hypothetical reconstruction, they removed the only positive evidence that existed for the Patriarchal Age. They replaced the only evidence with something that can only be guesswork and something that can not be verified. They have then entered the realm of pure theory. Their opinions can have no advantage over the Old Testament account, and their opinions have no place in serious history. As far as it goes, Eissfeldt's observation was correct. The problem is that it also implied substantial skepticism about the historical accuracy of the Patriarchal Age. Kitchen evaluated Eissfeldt's comments. Kitchen argued that there was much circumstantial evidence that the Genesis account was correct.⁶ This evidence included the fact that Biblical names were common in the ancient Near East. Legal and Social customs in Genesis could be paralleled to customs at Nuzi. Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah could be paralleled to the Hittite Laws.⁷ The geopolitical conditions reflected in Genesis 14 corresponded with conditions during the Old Babylonian period until the time of Hammurapi. Conditions in the Levant during the Patriarchal Age corresponded with Egyptian data about the Levant during the Middle Kingdom. Abraham's visits to Egypt can be compared to Abishar's party of 37 Asiatics at Beni-Hasan in Egypt.⁸

Yamauchi responded to the recent attacks on Genesis led by Thompson, Van Setters, and others. Yamauchi noted that Van Setters' critiques of the Mari and Nuzi texts were not justified. When the Genesis text could be paralleled to both 1st and 2nd millennium customs, Van Setters used the 1st millennium parallels but dismissed the 2nd millennium parallels as irrelevant. Yamauchi noted that the name Abraham

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See the discussion of this issue in Edwin Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," 1-36 in A. R. Millard, et al, eds. *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in its Near Eastern Context*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 7-10.

M. P. Maudman, "Historiographic Reflections on Israel's Origins: The Rise and Fall of the Patriarchal Age," *Eretz-Israel* 27 (2003): 125*-26*.

⁵ Amy Dockser Marcus, *The View from Nebo*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 2000), 32.

K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2003), 10. K. A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World: The Bible & Archaeology Today*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 68-74.

⁷ The validity of this parallel has been questioned by a number of authors.

⁸ See the discussion of Eissfeldt's comments in K. A. Kitchen, "Historical Method and Early Hebrew Tradition," *Tyndale Bulletin* 17 (1966): 65-74.

could be compared to 1st millennium BC names that included the elements *ab*, "father," and *ram*, "exalted." Yet Van Setters ignored the closest parallels from the 2nd millennium. Yamauchi noted Nahum Sarna's argument that 27 of the 38 names associated with the Patriarchal household never occurred later in the Bible. This even included the names Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Sarna had argued from this that the text reflected an authentic early historical tradition instead of a later invention. Yamauchi noted that names used for God in Genesis included El Elyon, El Ro'i, El Olam, and El Bethel. Yamauchi noted that these names were in use in the 2nd millennium BC, but not in the 1st millennium.⁹

Yamauchi suggested that the strongest argument against Thompson and Van Setters was the content of Genesis. Abraham was married to his half sister, and Jacob was married to two sisters. Yamauchi noted that someone in the exilic or postexilic period would not have invented details like this in the text.¹⁰

B) ABRAHAM THE HEBREW

1) PATRIARCHAL CHRONOLOGY

Any study of the Patriarchal Age must begin with the problem of chronology because it determines the relationship between the Patriarchs and events in the ancient Near East. Israel's Patriarchs must be understood against their historical and cultural background if they are to be understood. However, that historical and cultural background changes substantially based on the broader chronological concerns in the book. Unfortunately, Genesis chronology is highly controversial. Traditional Patriarchal Age dates have been calculated by subtracting the 480 years of I Kings 6:1 and the 430 years of Exodus 12:40 from the construction of Solomon's temple in 966 BC. Similar chronologies have been popular in the evangelical community but have not been universally accepted. Eugene Merrill suggested a chronology for Genesis that was based on the assumption of an 18th Dynasty date for Israel's exodus from Egypt. Merrill suggested that Abraham was born in 2166 BC. He departed from Haran in 2091 BC and married Hagar in 2081 BC. Merrill suggested that Isaac was born in 2066 BC, and Jacob in 2006 BC. Merrill suggested that Abraham died in 1991 BC. He claimed that Judah was born in 1918 BC and Joseph in 1916 BC. Merrill suggested that Joseph was sold to Egypt in 1899 BC, and that he became vizier of Egypt in 1886 BC. Merrill suggested that Jacob entered Egypt in 1876 BC, and died in 1859 BC. Merrill claimed that Joseph then died in 1806 BC.¹¹

Merrill's chronology assumed that Israel left Egypt in the 18th Dynasty. All Patriarchal Age dates are strongly affected by the choice of exodus dates. Those who defend a 19th Dynasty exodus date move Israel's Patriarchal Age forward in history accordingly. So they propose later dates for Abraham, and later dates for Joseph's service in Egypt. One of the leading defenders of a 19th Dynasty exodus date has been K. A. Kitchen. He accepted the 430 year claim of Exodus 12:40. Yet he also argued that the 480 years of I Kings 6:1 should be understood as the total of several concurrent periods.¹² Kitchen argued that the Patriarchs had to be dated between 1900 and 1600 BC, or between 2000 and 1500 BC at the outside limit. He argued that this could be seen from the use of personal names, from the history of Transjordan and the Negev, from the scope of travel, from religious matters, from social and legal usage, and even from the price paid for a slave. Kitchen noted that this fit well with 430 years spent in Egypt and a 13th century entrance into the Promised Land. He argued that Jacob may have entered Egypt around 1690 or

⁹ Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," 11.

¹⁰ Yamauchi, "The Current State of Old Testament Historiography," 11. It is fair to ask why Moses may have included in Genesis the fact that Abraham was married to his half sister. If Israel left Egypt in the 18th Dynasty, it is interesting that early 18th Dynasty Egyptian rulers married sisters or half sisters. Forman and Quirke argued that doing so was related to their theology of creation, and the Pharaohs did not normally raise children through their sisters. Werner Forman and Stephen Quirke, *Hieroglyphs and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 115. Moses gave Abraham's marriage to his half sister had no such theological overtones, and that may have been part of Moses' message to Israel.

¹¹ Eugene H. Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 137 (1980): 248.

¹² See the discussion in J. J. Bimson, "Archaeological Data and the Dating of the Patriarchs," 53-89 in A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman, eds. *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 84-5.

1680 BC. Joseph would have arrived in Egypt between 1720 and 1700 BC.¹³ Kitchen noted that the Egyptian 13th Dynasty already had Semitic kings among its list of rulers who reigned for short periods between 1795 and 1640 BC. After this, the Hyksos came to power. Kitchen argued that Joseph and Jacob could have come to Egypt during these periods.¹⁴

Hoerth interpreted the evidence in a slightly different way. He argued for an 18th Dynasty exodus and a Patriarchal Age during Egypt's 2nd Intermediate Period. This would move Joseph forward to the Hyksos era. Hoerth argued for this chronology from the Septuagintal text of Exodus 12:40 as well as his interpretation of Genesis 15:13; Acts 7:6; 13:19, and Galatians 3:16-17.¹⁵ Galatians 3:17 claimed that the law was given 430 years after the promise. While this verse was probably just a loose allusion to Exodus 12:40, it could possibly be interpreted a different way. It could mean that the 430 years of Exodus 12:40 included both part of the Patriarchal Age and the Egyptian sojourn. This is a popular option for those who defend a 19th Dynasty exodus date. Dates as late as 1200 BC for Abraham have often been defended by arguing from ancient Near Eastern parallels to the events recorded in Genesis.¹⁶

The dates offered for Israel's Patriarchal Age will differ greatly from author to author depending on the presuppositions that they bring to the evidence. It is also true that the whole question is now being viewed as obsolete in the field. As critics become more and more skeptical of the Biblical text, the Patriarchal narratives are becoming a dead issue. So both the Patriarchal era and the exodus are slowly disappearing from the mainstream academic debate. This study will use dates for Israel's Patriarchal Age that are based on an 18th Dynasty exodus model. Readers should remember that these dates are controversial, and that other models for Israel's Patriarchal Age can also be defended.

2) ABRAHAM AND HISTORY

The Early Bronze culture was almost completely destroyed by a terrible drought that began in 2300 BC and lasted for roughly three centuries. This drought not only destroyed the cultures of the ancient Near East, it may have been felt as far away as Australia.¹⁷ The drought devastated Old Kingdom Egypt and caused the 1st Intermediate Period. Egypt descended into political, social, and economic chaos. The famine was equally destructive in the north. Many sites in western Mesopotamia were abandoned including the Habur River valley and the Assyrian plains.¹⁸ The Early Bronze Age culture of the Levant nearly came to an end. The port city of Ashkelon in Palestine was abandoned.¹⁹ Dever called the years between 2300 and 2000 BC a "non-urban interlude" between the Early Bronze and Middle Bronze Ages. Dever argued that great cities like Megiddo were reduced to the size of villages while the highlands of Palestine were nearly unpopulated. Dever argued that the Early Bronze Age culture continued only on the edges of the semi-arid land.²⁰ Adam Zertal studied the archaeological evidence for population changes in the Shechem syncline at this time. Zertal noted that only two settlement sites could be found on the Shechem syncline between 2000 and 1750 BC. Then between 1750 and 1550 BC, a wave of settlers moved into Palestine from the north. 72 settlements appeared on the Shechem syncline. 22 of these occupied the highlands, and 49 were in the valleys. Zertal noted that both fortified and unfortified

¹³ Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 359.

¹⁴ Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 348.

¹⁵ Hoerth, *Archaeology & the Old Testament*, 58, 142-47, 179.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the search for a datum point in Old Testament history, see Soggin, "The History of Ancient Israel: A Study in Some Questions of Method," 44-51.

¹⁷ H. H. Lamb, *Climate, History and the Modern World*, (New York: Methuen, 1982), 131.

¹⁸ A. Gibbons, "How the Akkadian Empire Was Hung Out to Dry," *Science* 261, (1993): 985. H. Weiss, et al. "The Genesis and Collapse of Third Millennium North Mesopotamian Civilization," *Science* 261 (1993): 999.

¹⁹ Lawrence E. Stager, "Port Power in the Early and the Middle Bronze Age: The Organization of Maritime Trade and Hinterland Production," *Studies in the Archaeology of Israel and Neighboring Lands in Memory of Douglas E. Esse*, (Atlanta: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2001), 633.

²⁰ W. G. Dever, "New Vistas on the EB ("MB I") Horizon in Syria-Palestine, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, #237 (1980): 35-64.

settlements appeared during these years.²¹ By 1800 BC, the port of Ashkelon had a population between 12,000 and 15,000 people. By the 17th century, Canaan had reached its economic and military strong point for the Middle Bronze Age. The highlands of Israel had a population ten times as large as the population after the drought in the EB IB/MB I transition.²² So before God called Abraham from Ur of the Chaldees, Palestine had been largely depopulated for three centuries. The significance of this famine for Israel's history has often been overlooked. Abraham entered the Levant in the latter part of this famine. Parts of Palestine may have been occupied only by semi-nomadic people who farmed small fields in the summer and moved to warmer areas in the winter. If Abraham entered Palestine at this time, it should not be surprising that Abraham also led a mobile life style in Palestine.

Genesis 12:10 may have referred to this famine. This passage noted that Abraham passed through Palestine and entered Egypt because the famine in Palestine was severe.²³ Abraham entered Egypt near the end of the Egyptian 1st Intermediate Period.²⁴ After 2135 BC, Nile annual flood levels had risen once more and famine conditions had begun to ease.²⁵ When Abraham reached Egypt, he found a civil war. After the end of the 1st Intermediate Period, Egypt was still not a unified culture. The land was divided between a southern ruler at Thebes and the northern ruler at Herakleopolis. These kings were struggling for control of the whole land. The ruler of Herakleopolis may have sought military assistance from Abraham in his struggle against Thebes. The northern ruler may have sought to form a marriage alliance with Abraham because Abraham led a very large household. The Egyptians viewed adultery as a serious social evil. When the northern ruler realized that Sara was Abraham's wife, he removed her from his house and his land as soon as possible.²⁶ As Sara left Pharaoh's house, the ruler gave Abraham gifts of servants and livestock. MacDonald argued that these things were often given as gifts to gain alliances with Egypt.²⁷

3) ABRAHAM'S BIRTH

Genesis 11:31 noted that Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldeans. There has been a surprising amount of discussion about where Ur of the Chaldeans was located. For many years, it was popular to identify Abraham's Ur with the great city of Ur in southern Mesopotamia. Ur in southern Mesopotamia was one of the great capitals of the Sumerian culture. The great city of Ur was excavated by Leonard Woolley between 1922 and 1934. Woolley found that Ur was a large and prosperous city in 2000 BC. This was

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Adam Zertal, *The Manasseh Hill Country Survey: Volume I: the Schechem Syncline*, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 46-53. Aaron Brody, "From the Hills of Adonis through the Pillars of Hercules: Recent Advances in the Archaeology of Canaan and Phoenicia," *Near Eastern Archaeology* 65 (2002): 69-71. James M. Weinstein, "The Chronology of Palestine in the Early Second Millennium B.C.E." *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, #288 (1992): 27-46.

²² Stager, "Port Power in the Early Middle Bronze Age," 634.

²³ Genesis never praised conditions in Palestine. After Genesis, Moses called Palestine "a land flowing with milk and honey" 13 times.

²⁴ If a 19th Dynasty exodus is defended, Abraham entered Palestine between 1925 BC and 1875 BC. By that time, the famine was over and cities were appearing in the Levant once more. In that setting, it would have been more difficult for Abraham to pass peacefully through the land. This problem would be less severe if Auld and Steiner's dates for the famine are accepted. They dated the famine in western Mesopotamia between 2200 and 1900 BC. Graeme Auld and Margreet Steiner, *Jerusalem I: From the Bronze Age to the Maccabees*, (Macon University Press, 1996), 24.

²⁵ Rodger Dalman, "In Search of Ancient Famines," *Bible and Spade*, 17 (2004): 8. Barbara Bell, "Climate and the History of Egypt: The Middle Kingdom," *American Journal of Archaeology* 79 (1975): 225. Jean-Daniel Stanley, et al, "Short Contribution: Nile Flow Failure at the End of the Old Kingdom, Egypt: Strontium Isotopic and Petrologic Evidence," *Geoarchaeology: An International Journal* 18.3 (2003), 398.

²⁶ While K.A. Kitchen does not accept this chronology for Abraham's life, he made an interesting observation. Kitchen noted that Abraham was escorted out of Egypt. Kitchen suggested that this escort could be compared to the escort that Sinuhe received when he returned to Egypt. Kitchen, "Historical Method and Early Hebrew Tradition," 73. This suggests that the Genesis text was culturally appropriate.

²⁷ MacDonald, "Egyptian Interests in Western Asia to the End of the Middle Kingdom: An Evaluation," 85. On Sara's relationship with Abraham, see Samuel Greengus, "Sisterhood Adoption at Nuzi and the 'Wife-Sister' in Genesis," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975): 5-31. Selman, "The Social Environment of the Patriarchs," 122-23.

roughly when Abraham lived. Many of the houses in Ur were quite large containing between ten and twenty rooms. Woolley noted that some buildings had rooms intended for educating youth in reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion.²⁸ Thousands of cuneiform tablets were found at Ur. Several authors have claimed that Abraham was highly cultured and well educated because he was raised in Ur.

The problem with this perspective was that the great city of Ur in southeast Mesopotamia may or may not have been Abraham's Ur.²⁹ The southern city of Ur was never connected with the Chaldeans who were a branch of the Aramaean people. In Job 1:17, the Chaldeans raided Job's camels and killed his servants. Job lived in the land of Uz east of Palestine during Israel's Egyptian sojourn. This would seem to associate the Chaldeans with western Mesopotamia instead of the southeast end of the valley. It has become popular in recent years to suggest that Abraham's Ur of the Chaldeans was a much smaller town in the northwest part of Mesopotamia. This position was defended by Cyrus Gordon who argued that the Biblical evidence was consistent with a location of Ur somewhere around Haran. Genesis 11:31 recorded that Abraham passed through Haran as he traveled from Ur to Palestine. Gordon argued that no one in the ancient Near East would have passed through Haran when traveling to Palestine from the southern, Sumerian Ur. Haran was much too far out of their way.³⁰ So Gordon argued that Abraham's Ur would probably have been much farther north than Sumer. Gordon noted that a tablet found at Ebla mentioned a city called "Ur in Harran." Gordon also noted that northern cities named Ur were also mentioned in texts from Nuzi, Alalakh, and Ugarit. Gordon noted that the texts from Nuzi mentioned two cities that were named Ur. These were distinguished from each other. One was called "The Great Ur," and the other was called "The Small Ur." Gordon noted that another city named Ur was located about 200 miles north of Haran. He noted that no ancient text ever called the great Sumerian city of Ur by the name "Ur of the Chaldeans."³¹ Gordon's suggestion has not been universally accepted. For example, D. J. Wiseman argued in favor of the traditional understanding of Ur. Wiseman noted that Joshua 24:2-3 associated Abraham's origin with the Euphrates instead of Syria. This may imply a southern location for Ur.³² K. A. Kitchen claimed that the name "Ur of the Chaldees" was "undoubtedly to be identified with the famous ancient city of Ur in south Babylonia." Kitchen argued that the name "Chaldees" was added to the text between 1000 and 500 BC to distinguish this city from the northern Urs. Kitchen justified this claim by pointing to the presence of the Kaldu people in south Babylonia from the late 2nd millennium BC forward.³³ However, the presence of Kaldu people in the south nearly a thousand years after Abraham's time may or may not be very strong evidence for the location of Abraham's homeland. Kitchen noted that settlements with the names of Abraham's relatives were already found around Harran in the 3rd and 2nd millennium BC.

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Gleason L. Archer Jr. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, (Chicago: Moody, 1964). On the southern location, see Alan R. Millard, "Where Was Abraham's Ur?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27 (2001): 52-3, 57.

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Wiseman noted Sagg's arguments against Gordon's location of Ur in Syria. Wiseman noted that it can be questioned whether *Ura* in Syria could have been called Ur. Josh. 24:2-3 associates Abraham's origin with the Euphrates River which would not be true for a northern Ur. The Genesis text makes no claims that would require Abraham to be a nomad. Instead, the account described a trip from one city to another. Wiseman, "Abraham Reassessed," 141-43.

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The southern Sumerian city of Ur was located on the Euphrates River. The trade route north along the Euphrates left Mesopotamia at Mari and went overland to the Levant. The trade route along the Tigris River went through Haran and on to the Levant. A branch of the Euphrates route did leave Mari. It went north along the Habur River and west to Haran. However, there was no obvious reason for Abraham to travel that way. Hoerth, *Archaeology & the Old Testament*, 63.

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Cyrus Gordon, "Abraham of Ur," *Hebrew and Semitic Studies*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 77-84. Cyrus H. Gordon, "Where is Abraham's Ur?" *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 3 (1977): 20-1.

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Wiseman, "Abraham Reassessed," 142. For a more discussion of the problem, see H. W. F. Sagg, "Ur of the Chaldees," *Iraq* 22 (1960): 200-09.

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Kitchen argued that the name Chaldees was added to the text around 1000 to 500 BC in order to distinguish Abraham's Ur from any of the northern locations. Kitchen argued that the Kaldu people occupied southern Babylonia at that time. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 316. If that suggestion is accepted, it only demonstrates how Abraham's Ur was understood between 1000 and 500 BC instead of the location of Abraham's city in the Patriarchal Age. It also assumes that the name Chaldee could not have been used in the Patriarchal Age, and that assumption has to be justified. Nehemiah's association of Abraham with Ur of the Chaldees in Neh. 9:7 may support Kitchen's position.

Kitchen suggested that Terah might have traveled from this region south to Ur. While not impossible, it would seem at least as possible that northwest Mesopotamia was Abraham's homeland

There is rather interesting evidence from later in Abraham's life that might shed light on his birthplace. Genesis 11:27-32 claims specifically that Abraham was born in Ur of the Chaldeans. Then in Genesis 24:4, Abraham sent his servant back to his country and his relatives to find a wife for Isaac. Abraham's servant did not travel to the great southern city of Ur. The servant went instead to the city of Nahor in western Mesopotamia.³⁴ Why would it matter where Abraham had been born? The Semitic peoples in the southeastern part of Mesopotamia were by and large East Semitic peoples. The East Semitic culture had been involved in the government of Mesopotamia for some time, and it had given rise to Sargon's Semitic empire.³⁵ Texts preserved in the East Semitic world demonstrated that the East Semitic culture had drifted rather far from the original tradition of faith. If Abraham was born in the northwest end of the valley instead, he was a part of the West Semitic population. The West Semitic people had retained much more of a semi-nomadic life style than the East Semitic population of Mesopotamia. The West Semitic population may have been less influenced by the Sumerian culture. The Hebrew language was a West Semitic language. Names in Genesis like Abram, Haran, Nahor, Melchizedek and Abimelech were West Semitic names. While few claims about pre-Abrahamic faith can be made with any certainty, it is much easier to make a case for the continuation of an original believing tradition within the West Semitic world than the East Semitic world. Of course by Abraham's time, even the remnant of true faith in the West Semitic world was being lost. Joshua 24:2 and 24:14 noted that Terah and Abraham's ancestors had worshiped idols.³⁶

4) ABRAHAM AS A HEBREW

Genesis 14:13 called Abraham a Hebrew. The name Hebrew has often been misunderstood. Most Christians today automatically associate the name Hebrew with the name Israel. The Israelites spoke the Hebrew language, and Scripture often seemed to equate the Israelites with the Hebrew people. Actually this is only partly correct. The Israelites were indeed Hebrews, but the name Hebrew also described a far larger group of people. The name of this people has often been spelled as Hebrew, *'Epiru*, *'Apiru*, *Habiru*, or *Hapiru*.³⁷ To avoid confusion, it should always be remembered that these names refer to the same group of people.

To understand why Genesis 14:13 calls Abraham a Hebrew, it is necessary to begin with the debate about who the Hebrews, or the *Habiru*, were in the ancient Near East. While it is possible that the name *Habiru* may first have been used by the descendants of Shem's great-grandson Heber, by Moses' time, the *Habiru* included people from many ethnic backgrounds. The *Habiru* appeared as a semi-nomadic people quite early in ancient Near Eastern history. George Mendenhall pointed out that the name *Habiru* was clearly a West Semitic name.³⁸ So it is reasonable to believe that the *Habiru* may have originated in a West Semitic environment.³⁹ Texts that described the *Habiru*, *Hapiru*, or *'Apiru* were found almost

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This suggests that Abraham regarded western Mesopotamia as his homeland instead of the southeastern end of the valley. This may suggest that Abraham's birthplace was in the west, or it may just indicate that Abraham had come to regard the region around Haran as his hometown. Abraham, Terah, and Lot had moved from Ur to Haran. It is unclear when and why his other relatives had entered the same region.

³⁵ Sargon founded his empire by creating the first standing army in history. His empire reflected his will. His empire was not just the product of his culture, although it grew out of his culture.

³⁶ This might describe syncretism in Laban's household. It also might suggest that Abraham's ancestors had fallen into similar syncretism.

³⁷ The association of the name Hebrew with the *Habiru* is not accepted by everyone. Rainey argued that it is impossible to establish a linguistic identification between the Hebrews and the *Habiru*. Richard S. Hess, "Alakh Studies and the Bible: Obstacle or Contribution?" 199-215 in Michael D. Coogan, *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 206.

³⁸ George Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973), 138.

³⁹ This claim has been called into question somewhat by the *Habiru* prism of King Tunip-Tessup. This king ruled a small city state named Tikunani in Mesopotamia. This prism was written around 1550 BC. It named 438 *Habiru* soldiers

everywhere that the *Amurru* lived.⁴⁰ Alfred Haldar suggested that the *Habiru* may in fact have been a subdivision of the Amorites. There clearly were many *Habiru* who were not ethnically Semitic.⁴¹ So the question is whether the *Habiru* were originally a Semitic group that was eventually joined by people from across the ancient Near East, or whether the name *Habiru* referred to a social class that included people from many ethnic groups. There has been quite a bit of academic discussion about who the *Habiru* were. George Mendenhall noted that the earliest surviving references to the *Hapiru* came from Mesopotamia. The name appeared in Ur III texts from the 3rd millennium BC. Mendenhall noted that the *Habiru* were also mentioned in the 2nd millennium BC by Rim-Sin who was defeated by the famous Old Babylonian ruler Hammurabi.⁴² Mendenhall noted that the *Habiru* were also mentioned in a variety of texts from ancient Nuzi.⁴³

Alberto Green discussed references to the *Habiru* in ancient texts from Alalakh on the Orontes River in northern Syria.⁴⁴ The texts from level VII at Alalakh were also written during the 1st Dynasty of Babylon in the 18th century BC.⁴⁵ Green noted that the Alalakh texts shed light on the *Habiru*. The census tablets from Alalakh showed that *Hapiru* had been living at Alalakh already by 2000 BC. The *Hapiru* were well organized militarily, and they controlled part of the territory around the city. The *Hapiru* spoke a variety of languages, and lived among all the ethnic groups in the ancient Near East. Green noted that the *Hapiru* could be found in every social class and social group.⁴⁶ They included soldiers of every kind. Some of the *Hapiru* owned houses. Green noted that the census at Alalakh found *Hapiru* living in 43 different localities around Alalakh. Green noted that the *Hapiru* at Alalakh included people who had been forced to abandon their homes. They became homeless drifters looking for a way to survive. Green noted that these drifters merged together to form rather powerful groups during periods of social disruption.⁴⁷ Hess noted that the Alalakh texts included a reference to the "land of the *Hapiru*."⁴⁸ Jack Finegan described other references to the *Habiru* in texts from the 1st Babylonian Dynasty. Finegan noted a text from Zimrilim that requested clothing for 2,000 *Habiru* soldiers. Another text from Mari described 30 *Habiru* who had come from a

employed by the king. The majority of the *Habiru* names on this prism were Hurrian. One name was Kassite, and the rest were Semitic. For a discussion of this text, see Mirjo Salvini, *The Habiru Prism of King Tunip-Tessup of Tikunani*, (Rome: Istituti Editoriali e Polegrafici Internazionali, 1996).

The names *Habiru*, *Hapiru*, and Hebrew are linguistically closely related. Rowton noted that the name *Hapiru* was sometimes spelled as *Habiru* in the texts. The Egyptian Amarna Letters spelled the name as *Habiri* ('*Abiru*). Rowton suggests that this is a grammatical form called a "nisbe." Rowton noted that the word was spelled in the Nuzi texts and the Babylonian texts in a way that suggested that it was originally spelled with a *b* instead of a *p*. Rowton noted that the nominative singular form *habiruu* appeared four times in the Nuzi texts. Rowton suggested that the basic meaning of the name Hebrew referred to a man who lived out in the fringe territory of the region. M. B. Rowton, "The Topological Factor in the *Hapiru* Problem," 375-87 in *Assyriological Studies #16, Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965).

⁴⁰ Haldar, *Who Were the Amorites?* 2-5, 54-5.

⁴¹ Finegan, *Light from the Ancient East*, 56. A similar list of *Habiru* soldiers was written around 1550 BC. It came from Tikunani which was a small city in central Mesopotamia. Tunpi-Teshub of Tikunani listed 438 *Habiru* soldiers. Salvini claimed that the majority of these names were Hurrian. One name was Kassite, and the rest were Semitic. Salvini, *The Habiru Prism of King Tunip-Teshub of Tikunani*.

⁴² Sasson discussed the earliest references to the *Habiru* from Mesopotamia and the Levant. He noted that the Mari letters grouped the Canaanites with a people named the *habbatum*. The Mari letters were written during the 1st Dynasty of Babylon, in the 18th century BC. Sasson noted that the name *habbatum* was written with the same Sumerogram that was often used for the word *Habiru*. Sasson noted that this name has often been associated with the name Hebrew. Jack Sasson, "The Earliest Mention of the Name 'Canaan,'" *Biblical Archaeologist* 47.2 (1984): 90.

⁴³ 17 occupation levels have been found at Alalakh dating from 3100 to 1200 BC. See the discussion in Hess, "Alalakh Studies and the Bible: Obstacle or Contribution?" 200-01.

⁴⁴ Finegan, *Archaeological History of the Ancient Middle East*, 59-64.

⁴⁵ Hess noted that *Habiru* at Alalakh included a priest, a mayor, a diviner, and a slave. Hess, "Alalakh Studies and the Bible," 206.

⁴⁶ Alberto R. W. Green, "Social Stratification and Cultural Continuity at Alalakh," 181-203 in H. B. Huffmon, et al, eds. *The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of George E. Mendenhall*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 198.

⁴⁷ Hess, "Alalakh Studies and the Bible," 207.

region north of Babylonia. Finegan noted that the *Habiru* were also mentioned in many texts that were written between the 18th and 12th centuries BC. These texts described *Habiru* who lived in many places around the borders of Babylon and Assyria.⁴⁹ These texts could not refer to the Israelites because they were written while the Israelites were sojourning in Egypt.

William F. Albright argued that the recorded names of *Habiru* leaders in the ancient Near East came from the Elamite, Babylonian, Hittite, Hurrian, and Northwest Semitic cultures. Albright argued that the *Habiru* were originally semi-nomadic groups in northwest Mesopotamia, around Haran and Nahor. Albright argued that the homeless *Habiru* often were employed in the caravan trade. He noted that the name *Habiru* has traditionally been translated as the "Dusty Ones."⁵⁰ He argued that this name was completely appropriate for someone who was walking behind a donkey in a caravan. Albright argued that after the 18th century BC, the donkey caravaneers were forced to find other occupations since donkey caravans were replaced with mules and wagons. Then the name *Habiru* came to mean "one from beyond" by a common phonetic change.⁵¹ A number of other suggestions have also been made for the meaning of the name *Habiru*.

While several explanations for the name *Habiru* are possible, it is striking that the name was for the most part involved with the culture of the 2nd millennium BC. The name Hebrew almost disappeared from the Biblical text after I and II Samuel. The name Hebrew only appeared in the Old Testament three times after the United Monarchy. Two of these were warnings in Jeremiah that God's judgment would restore Israel to the life style of a wandering Hebrew. In the ancient Near East as a whole, the name fell out of use at roughly the same time. So the frequency of the name Hebrew before the Divided Monarchy may testify to the accuracy of the Old Testament record.

5) ABRAHAM, THE HEBREW MERCHANT

Habiru populations in the ancient Near East were typically homeless. They were often involved in trade, pastoralism, and mobile life styles. Like the *Habiru*, West Semitic peoples in the Near East also tended to be wanderers, sojourners, traders, or shepherds of one kind or another. This was not true in all cases, but it was not an uncommon pattern for them. In this context, it is striking to read Alfred Haldar's description of the earliest *MAR.TU*, or Amurru, person named in texts from the ancient Near East. Haldar argued that the first appearance of the name *MAR.TU* in Mesopotamia appeared in a Sumerian text from Tell Fara. The *Amurru* man named in this text was a traveling merchant or caravaner. Haldar suggested that he may have been an envoy or emissary, since such envoys often traveled the caravan routes. The text was written around 2600 BC. Haldar noted that this was well before the Semitic ruler Sargon gained control of Mesopotamia before 2300 BC.⁵² The importance of this text is that the earliest Amurru named in the ancient Near East was a businessman.

Abraham was a West-Semitic *Habiru*. William F. Albright and Cyrus Gordon have suggested that Abraham may also have lived as a caravan trader in Palestine. Their suggestion has not been widely accepted by the academic community, although it is worthy of consideration.⁵³ If Albright and Gordon were

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⁵⁰ Finegan, *Archaeological History of the Ancient Middle East*, 67-8.

⁵¹ Wiseman noted that "dusty one" is no longer widely accepted. Wiseman, "Abraham Reassessed," 147.

⁵² William F. Albright, *Archaeology, Historical Analogy, and Early Biblical Tradition*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966). George Mendenhall suggested that the name *Habiru* may have been derived from a common Semitic root *br* which meant "to cross," and especially "to cross a border." If understood this way, the *Habiru* were semi-nomadic people who crossed national borders instead of living in one place. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, 138. Wiseman noted that this translation is not now widely accepted. Wiseman, "Abraham Reassessed," 148-49.

⁵³ Porada suggested dates for Sargon I of 2371-2316 BC. Edith Porada, "The Relative Chronology of Mesopotamia. Part I. Seals and Trade (6000-1600 B.C.)," 133-200 in Robert W. Ehrich, ed. *Chronologies in Old World Archaeology*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 178.

For a summary of the evidence against Gordon's position, see: Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, 172-86. The heart of Thompson's objection to Gordon's position was the date that Thompson defends for the EBIV/MBI transition. Thompson is a minimalist. He views almost the whole Old Testament as religious fiction. While Daniel Fleming did not accept the suggestion that Abraham was a business man, he argued against Thompson's assessment of Abraham. Fleming argued that the Mari archives supported the Bible's

correct, Abraham may have been involved in the caravan trade that ran through Palestine. While Genesis does not call the patriarchs businessmen, several aspects of the account could be understood in that context. First, it is unclear why Abraham's father Terah left Ur of the Chaldeans. In Acts 7:1-4, Stephen claimed that God had appeared to Abraham while Abraham was still in Ur. Stephen claimed that God called Abraham to leave Mesopotamia, to leave his family, and to travel to a land that God would give him. Stephen did not claim that God called Terah to leave Ur, although it is not impossible that God may have called Terah along with Abraham. The Biblical text is silent about Terah's motivation. If Abraham was called to leave his family behind, did the Biblical text mean to suggest that Abraham should have left Terah in Ur? It is interesting that Stephen claimed in Acts 7:4 that Abraham left Haran in western Mesopotamia after Terah had died. Genesis 11:32 claimed that Terah was 205 years old when he died. If Abraham was 99 years old when Isaac was born, he would have been around 80 to 85 years old when he entered Palestine. Terah would then have been around 120 years old when Abraham was born. This conflicts with Genesis 11:26. Moses claimed that Terah was 75 years old when Abraham and his brothers were born. The answer may be that either Nahor or Haran was born 45 years earlier when Terah was 75 years old while Abraham was born in Terah's old age. This would provide an interesting context for Abraham's advanced age at Isaac's birth. Haran had died before Terah and Abraham left Ur of the Chaldeans.

It is interesting that Terah named one of his sons Haran. The city of Haran may have been located roughly half way between Ur and Palestine depending on the site for Ur that is defended. Roger T. O'Callaghan argued that Terah's city of Haran was an important caravan stop. O'Callaghan noted that Haran was also called Padan-Aram. The name Padan means "route," or "road." The East Semitic name *Harranu* has the same meaning. *Harranu* was the root word behind the name Haran. So when Abraham and Jacob sojourned at Haran, they were sojourning at a temporary stop on the caravan route.⁵⁴ Haran was a famous trading center at the north end of the Balikh River valley. As caravans crossed from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean coast, they had to stop at Haran to water their animals. Haran was located at a spot where the Habur River fanned out into many small streams. Haran was an ancient city. It was mentioned already in the Ebla tablets that had been written around 2400 BC.⁵⁵ The Mari texts that were written around 1700 BC described both Haran and Nahor as caravan centers⁵⁶

It is possible that Abraham's brother may have been named after Haran because the family had been somehow involved in a caravan trade that had passed through Haran.⁵⁷ Caravan traders usually had a settled base from which caravans were sent out. Perhaps Terah had been living at Ur of the Chaldeans as his caravan base, and then replaced Ur with Haran. This would explain how Abraham's family was able to obtain riches in Haran. This would seem to be a natural occupation for West Semitic peoples since so many led a semi-nomadic life style. Several recent authors have suggested that the patriarchs may have retained at least some involvement with the caravan trade throughout their lives in Palestine. All the Patriarchal Age settlements and worship sites in Palestine were located along trade routes. It is important to remember that the Levant was not an intellectual backwater in the ancient Near East. The Levant was a land bridge between the great cultures of Egypt, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia. Great trade routes ran through the Levant, and control of those trade routes made city states like Ebla rich when Palestine was decimated by drought.

While Genesis did not claim that the patriarchs were involved in the caravan trade, descriptions of the patriarchs in Genesis could easily be interpreted to mean that they maintained a rather mobile caravan base, and sent out caravans from that base. This would explain how the patriarchs amassed their wealth. Genesis 14:14 noted that Abraham led a force of 318 armed retainers who had been born in his household. Genesis 12:16 noted that Pharaoh gave Abraham a great many oxen, donkeys and camels. Genesis 20:14 noted that Abimelech gave Abraham more sheep, oxen, and servants. Genesis 24:10

depiction of Abraham's life. Fleming noted that Zimri-Lim ruled a settled city, but the population of Mari also contained a large and mobile pastoral component. Fleming, "Genesis in History and Tradition," 204.

⁵⁴ Roger T. O'Callaghan, *Aram Naharaim*, (Rome: Pontificum Institutum Biblicum, 1948).

⁵⁵ Alfonso Archi, "Harran in the III Millennium BC," *Ugarit Forschungen* 20 (1988): 1-8.

⁵⁶ The Mari texts included 20,000 clay tablets. The royal archives of Mari were written during the reign of Zimrilim. He reigned from 1730 BC to 1700 BC. The Mari texts mention several places that occur in the Biblical text, including Canaan, Haran, Nahor, and Hazor. The Mari texts also mentioned several people who had the same name as characters mentioned in the Old Testament, including: Job, Serug, Nahor, and Terah.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of Patriarchal links to the caravan trade, see Stephen Caesar, "The Wealth and Power of the Biblical Patriarchs," *Bible & Spade* 19 (2006): 1-13.

noted that Abraham's servants took ten camels from among the camels of their master and traveled to Mesopotamia. Genesis 24:35 noted that the Lord had made Abraham rich in flocks, herds, silver, gold, servants, camels, and donkeys. Genesis 30:43 noted that Jacob had become very rich in flocks, servants, camels and donkeys. Genesis 32:13-15 noted that Jacob offered Esau a gift of 220 sheep, 220 goats, 30 camels, 40 cows, 10 bulls, and 30 donkeys. Genesis 34:28 noted that Jacob's sons had flocks, herds and donkeys. It would be easy to interpret the patriarchal life style as maintaining a semi-permanent base for their flocks, and sending out caravans from that base. It is striking that Joseph looked for his brothers in Genesis 37 by following the trade route from Hebron, through Shechem, and on to Dothan.⁵⁸ Joseph was carried to Egypt by a Midianite caravan that was traveling along the same trade route. It is at least obvious that in Genesis 42:26, Jacob's sons led donkey caravans down to Egypt to obtain grain from Joseph. Whatever the patriarchs' life style may have been, at least in Genesis 42, they clearly were involved in caravan trade. Genesis 42:34 may be especially interesting in this light. Joseph specifically offered his brothers the right to trade in Egypt.

The association of the patriarchs with the caravan trade was defended by William Albright and Cyrus Gordon. Albright traced the evidence that Abraham was involved with the donkey caravan trade. Albright noted that the evidence for this is circumstantial but compelling. He argued that all of the places where Abraham sojourned were places that were caravan stops in the donkey caravan trade. Albright suggested that such caravan stops included: Ur, Harran, Damascus, the watershed ridge in Palestine, the Negev, and Egypt. Albright argued that some elements of the Genesis account could only refer to the caravan trade. Genesis 20:1 described journeys back and forth between Palestine and Egypt while the Patriarchs lived at a caravan base. Genesis 13:1 specifically mentioned caravan stages. Genesis 15:2 mentioned the name of Abraham's outfitter, Eliezer of Damascus. Albright suggested that Eliezer was Abraham's heir because Abraham owed him money. The Nuzi texts noted that it was common practice for money lenders to be adopted to give security for a loan.⁵⁹ Albright also noted that in Genesis 14:15, Abraham led a force of 318 armed retainers. Such retainers were necessary to defend caravans against bandits and raiders.⁶⁰

In his book *The Archaeology of Palestine*, William F. Albright argued that trade relations across the Fertile Crescent reached a high point during the Patriarchal Age. People were free to move at will between settlements. There were no serious language problems for traders anywhere in the Fertile Crescent. The West Semitic language was not used everywhere, but it was understood by many people everywhere in the region. Akkadian, or East Semitic, was the language of trade and government in Mesopotamia. East Semitic was still close enough to West Semitic that peoples in these two language groups could understand each other. The West Semitic language was spoken by many groups in Syria and Palestine. The Nile delta in Egypt also contained many people who understood West Semitic.⁶¹

Albright noted that Abraham was called a Hebrew in Genesis 14:14. Albright argued in detail that the name Hebrew originally referred to donkey caravaneers. Albright noted that Canaanite caravan traders were depicted on a wall painting from Beni Hasan. The painting was found in the tomb of Khnumhotep II at Beni Hasan. This tomb was made during the reign of Pharaoh Sesostris III who ruled from roughly 1879 BC to 1878 BC. Sesostris III ruled around the time that Joseph came to power in Egypt although Joseph's dates are problematic. The wall painting pictured Canaanite traders included eight men, four women, and three children. The text above the painting claimed that a total of 37 people were in the original group depicted on the tablet. The text claimed that the group of Canaanites was led by a "sheikh" named Abi-Sha(i). Wolfgang Helck suggested that this was a group of traders who were bringing eye paint to Egypt. The Canaanite caravan traders were armed with darts, throw sticks, and composite bows. One carried a lyre. They led donkeys who were carrying loads. One of the traders carried a bellows for making metal objects. Albright compared this to Genesis 4:19-22. This passage claimed that Lamech's family included people who could make objects from metal, along with those who played the lyre, and those who raised animals. Hans Goedicke suggested that Abi-Sha(i) could have been leading a group of immigrants

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Dothan was located at the head of a long, narrow valley that led up from the coastal plain. It was one of the few places that caravans from the coastal trade route could reach the caravan routes through the highlands.

⁵⁹ Similar outfitters may be described in the Ur III texts from Mesopotamia. Morris Silver noted in an ANE posting on 9/21/05 that these texts described an organization called *bama*, or houses of merchants, that collected commodities like silver and grain from merchants and dispersed them to other merchants.

⁶⁰ Albright, *Archaeology, Historical Analogy, and Early Biblical Tradition*, 24, 38.

⁶¹ William F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, (London: Penguin Books, 1949).

instead, although that was unlikely in this time period. Goedicke concluded that the picture probably depicted Abi-Sha(i) leading a business venture that had been funded by Sesostri III himself.⁶²

Cyrus Gordon also argued that the patriarchs were involved in the caravan trade. Gordon suggested that this theme can be seen in Genesis 23:16. This verse noted that Abraham paid 400 shekels of silver. This was a lot of money. Abraham was described as being very wealthy, having gold and silver, herds and slaves. Gordon suggested that this sounded like commercial activity. Genesis noted that Abraham traveled between Egypt and Padan-Aram which was dominated by the Hittites. Gordon suggested that Abraham sold Hittite silver to Egypt, and Egyptian gold to the Hittites. Gordon suggested that the patriarchs' business interests were also reflected later in Genesis. The king of Shechem invited Jacob and his sons to live in Shechem. As an inducement, the king offered to let them trade in Shechem. Gordon noted a very interesting parallel to the patriarchal narratives. He noted a Hittite tablet written by Hattusili III who reigned from 1282 BC to 1250 BC. The tablet was found at Ugarit. Hattusili III responded to a complaint about the merchants who had come from Ur. The complaint alleged that the Ur merchants were being a real burden for Syria. So the Hittite king passed a decree that the traders from Ur were only allowed in Syria during the harvest. However, they were not allowed in the land during the winter. The Ur merchants were not allowed to purchase real estate. They were also not allowed to approach the lands owned by the king. However, the Hittite king did decree that any citizen who could not repay his debt to the merchants of Ur would be handed over to the merchants as a slave. Gordon noted that their treaty required three specific things. The merchants' trading rights were protected. The merchants were forbidden to purchase property, and they were forbidden to settle in the land. Gordon noted that these three points were addressed in Genesis 34:10 when the king of Shechem offered Abraham the right to buy property in Shechem, the right to settle there, and the right to trade there.⁶³ The Hittite text also distinguished between merchants of Ur who had troops, and merchants of Ur who did not have troops. Abraham's 318 armed retainers classified him as a merchant of Ur who had troops. Of course, Hattusili III reigned long after Israel's Patriarchal Age. He reigned half way through Israel's period of the Judges. So it is fair to question whether this text actually revealed anything about Abraham's life. Gordon appreciates the strength of this parallel partly because he dated Israel's patriarchal age after 1500 BC. A related problem involved the identity of the "Hittites" in Genesis 23. The "Sons of Heth" in Genesis might have been either Hittites or Hethites from the city of Heth east of the Levant. If the "Hittites" of Genesis were actually "Hethites," the significance of the tablet of Hattusili III would be even less clear.⁶⁴

Albright and Gordon made an interesting case. It is difficult to evaluate whether they were right. It has not been widely supported in the field of Old Testament studies.⁶⁵ Were the patriarchs largely pastoralists, largely businessmen, or both? It is clear that the patriarchs were wealthy men. The Israelites in the wilderness were not especially prosperous. Much of their gold had been used to build either the golden calf or the tabernacle with its articles. It is fair to wonder why Moses stressed the patriarchs' wealth. Could he have been promising the Israelites that God's material blessings would follow if they continued in faith?

C) ABRAHAM, JERUSALEM, AND SODOM

Genesis 13:10-11 noted that Lot settled near the Dead Sea in the southern Jordan River plain because it was well watered like Eden, the Garden of God, or like the Nile delta around Zoar. This contrasts sharply with conditions in the rest of Palestine. In Abraham's day, Palestine had known drought conditions for over 300 years. Auld and Steiner noted that urban life in Palestine had almost disappeared between 2300 BC and 2000 BC.⁶⁶ Auld and Steiner argued that Palestine was inhabited for the most part by semi-nomadic people who farmed small fields in the summer and moved to warmer areas in the winter.

⁶² Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*. Hans Goedicke, "Abi-Sha(i)'s Representation in Beni Hasan," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 21 (1984): 203-10.

⁶³ Gordon, "Abraham of Ur," 78-81.

⁶⁴ For the "Hethites," see Harry A. Hoffner Jr. "The Hittites," *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 127-55.

⁶⁵ Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham*, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974), 172-86.

⁶⁶ Auld and Steiner, *Jerusalem I: From the Bronze Age to the Maccabees*.

Auld and Steiner argued that cities only began to reappear in Palestine after 1800 BC. It is interesting that Genesis had little to say about conditions in Palestine during the Patriarchal Age. This contrasted sharply with the rest of the Pentateuch. After Genesis, Moses consistently referred to Palestine as "a land flowing with milk and honey." This expression appeared four times in Exodus, once in Leviticus, three times in Numbers, and five times in Deuteronomy. Yet Moses never used the expression in Genesis. The simple truth is that Palestine was very far from being "a land flowing with milk and honey" in Abraham's day. Palestine was still suffering from the drought conditions that had ended the Early Bronze culture. This drought would return at the end of Jacob's life. Drought conditions in Palestine eventually forced the patriarchs to move permanently down to Egypt.

Lot had his choice of locations where his household could move. He chose the abundance and fruitfulness of the Dead Sea basin in spite of the wickedness of its inhabitants. Genesis 13:10-11 noted that Lot settled in the southern Jordan River plain because it was well watered like the Garden of God. Kenneth Barker discussed this passage. Barker noted that the Dead Sea valley today contains little fresh water and is very hot. Several authors have argued that the Dead Sea valley must have been quite similar in Abraham's day. However, Barker noted Albright's study of the area around Bâb edh-Dhrâ east of the Dead Sea shore. Albright concluded from the archaeology of Bâb edh-Dhrâ that the account in Genesis was essentially accurate. The lower Jordan valley had been prosperous and densely populated in Abraham's time. However, Albright argued that the population of the valley only gradually declined. He argued that the population of the Dead Sea plain reached its lowest level around 900 BC.⁶⁷

1) CHEDORLAOMER'S CAMPAIGN

Genesis 14 claimed that Palestine was invaded by four kings from Mesopotamia, Amraphel, Arioch, Chedorlaomer, and Tidal.⁶⁸ For some time, it was popular in mainstream critical circles to deny the

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Kenneth L. Barker, "The Antiquity and Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives," 131-40 in Walter C. Kaiser Jr. and Ronald F. Youngblood, eds. *A Tribute to Gleason Archer: Essays on the Old Testament*, (Chicago: Moody, 1986).

Kenneth Kitchen discussed Chedorlaomer's invasion. Kitchen argued that Gen. 14 presupposed a time period in Mesopotamia when the valley was broken up into city states. Kitchen argued that Palestine was not invaded by Babylon or Assyria. It was invaded by a coalition of four regional rulers. Kitchen argued that the Genesis text could only fit historically the Isin-Larsa period. The Isin-Larsa period was a somewhat chaotic time in Mesopotamian history. Local city state rulers struggled for power in the valley after the Elamite destruction of the Ur III Dynasty. The Isin-Larsa period lasted for 275 years. The dates for the Isin-Larsa period depend on whether a "high," "middle," or "low" chronology is used for Mesopotamian dates. A "high" chronology would begin the Isin-Larsa period in 2060 BC. A "middle" chronology would date this period after 2004 BC. A "low" chronology would date the Isin-Larsa period after 1949 BC. Kitchen suggested that Chedorlaomer's invasion must have occurred between the end of the Ur III period and the time of Shamshi-Adad I in Assyria and of Hammurabi in Babylon. Shortly before the end of this period, a letter was written to king Zimrilim of Mari. The king was told that 10 or 15 kings followed Babylon's king Hammurabi. Roughly the same number of kings followed Larsa's king Rim-Sin, Eshnunna's king Ibalpiel, and Qatna's king Amutpiel. Another 20 kings followed Yarimlim, the king of Yamkhad. Kitchen suggested that this kind of political situation was reflected in Genesis 14. Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Genesis 12-50 in the Near Eastern World," 67-92 in Richard S. Hess, et al, eds. *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12-50*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 73. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 319-22. This is a subject that is greatly affected by the debate about Mesopotamian chronology. The "high," "middle," and "low" chronologies are based on which Venus cycle is understood to stand behind an observation of the planet recorded in the 63rd tablet of the text *Enuna Anu Enlil*. This text was written during the 8th year of the Babylonian king Ammi-Zadua. Full cycles of Venus were 275 years long, but the planets stood at similar positions on cycles of 56 and 64 years. Trevor Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 411. Peter Huber argued that chronologies based on the Venus cycles were rather subjective and that Ammi-Zadua's tablet was a poor basis for chronology. Huber argued that a "high" chronology fits the historical data better than the alternative chronologies. Peter J. Huber, "Astronomical Evidence for the Long and against the Middle and Short Chronologies," *High, Middle or Low? Acts of an International Colloquium on Absolute Chronology Held in the University of Gothenburg 20th-22nd August 1987 Part I*, (Gothenburg: Paul Åströms, 1987), 7. Four dates have been proposed for Ammi-Zadua's 8th year: 1701, 1645, 1637, and 1581 BC. These dates have been used to construct "high," "middle," and "low" chronologies for Mesopotamia. All of these are possible, and all have been defended in the academic debate. Jonathan T. Glass, "The Problem of Chronology in Ancient Mesopotamia," *Biblical Archaeologist* 47 (1984): 92. If a "low" or "middle" chronology is defended, Chedorlaomer would be moved forward in history. It would then seem attractive to use dates for Israel's patriarchal age that are based on a 19th Dynasty Exodus. If a "high" chronology for Mesopotamia is defended, Chedorlaomer's allies could have seized control of Syria and Palestine during the reign of Ibbi-Sin, the last Ur III ruler. By the end of his reign, Ibbi-Sin controlled little beyond the city

historical accuracy of this passage. Gleason Archer noted three reasons that critical scholarship denied that this invasion ever actually happened. It was claimed that no king in Elam or in Mesopotamia actually had any of these names. It was claimed that there was no extensive travel between Mesopotamia and Palestine in Abraham's day. It was also claimed that the travel route used by these kings did not actually exist east of the Jordan River. Archer responded to these claims. Archer noted that an Elamite dynasty had established a temporary sovereignty over Sumer. Some of the Elamite kings had names beginning in the word *kudur*, which means "servant." There was also an Elamite goddess named Lagamar. So there could easily have been an Elamite king named Kudur-Lagamar. Archer also noted that an Elamite king named Kudur-Mabug had a son named Eri-Aku, who became the king of Larsa. This king's name was also written as Arad-Sin. His name indicated that he was the servant of the moon god. His name was quite close to the name of the king Arioch of Ellasar in Genesis 14:1. Archer added that a similar name also appeared in the Mari texts, where the name Ariyuk appeared.⁶⁹

Genesis 14:6 noted that Chedorlaomer defeated the Horites in Mt. Seir. The Horites may have been Hurrians, although that identification has been debated.⁷⁰ The Hurrians invaded the ancient Near East from the land of Hurru (the Caucasus) in the northeast. Yohanan Aharoni noted that the Egyptian Hyksos rulers sometimes called Palestine the land of Hurru.⁷¹ A number of the Hyksos rulers even had Hurrian names.

William F. Albright also argued for the substantial accuracy of Genesis 14. He noted that the invasion described in Genesis 14 was once thought to be very late and inaccurate. Albright argued that this could no longer be claimed. Albright noted that several towns named in Genesis 14 clearly did exist during the Patriarchal Age. Albright noted that some of the allusions in Genesis 14 reflect a Middle Bronze Age culture. For example, the Hebrew word *chânîyk* in Genesis 14:14 means "trained man" or "retainer." This word appears nowhere else in the Bible. The word does appear in the Egyptian Execration Texts from the 19th century BC. In the Egyptian texts, the word is used to describe the retainers who served chieftains from Palestine. The same word was used this way four centuries later in tablets found at Taanach. Albright also noted that several words and poetic expressions found in Genesis 14 are now known to be quite ancient expressions. Albright argued that the ancient nature of these expressions demonstrates that a very old Hebrew text stands behind the current text of Genesis 14.⁷²

When the Ebla texts were first translated, it was popular to claim that the five cities of Genesis 14 were included in a list of caravan sites at Ebla. The cities were claimed to include Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela. It was claimed that one tablet from Ebla spelled the names of these cities in the same way that they were spelled in the Genesis text with only minor changes in the vowels. David N. Freedman claimed that the five towns were named as a group, and were listed in the same order as they appeared in the Genesis text. Freedman added that the name "Birsha" also appeared on this tablet. Birsha was the king of Gomorrah in Genesis, but the king of Admah in the Ebla tablet. So Freedman argued that Genesis may have been based on very early sources.⁷³ While this claim is still often repeated in the evangelical orbit, it has not held up well. The names translated as Sodom and Gomorrah at Ebla were *si-da-mu*^{K1} and *é-ma-ra*^{K1}. An improved understanding of the languages at Ebla has led most authors

walls of Ur. Abraham would then have fought Chedorlaomer either at the very end of the Ur III period, or at the beginning of the Isin Larsa period. Abraham could have fought Chedorlaomer as early as 2060 BC. This suggestion would be strengthened by the acceptance of the LXX reading for I Kngs. 6:1, which would move all dates for Israel's patriarchal age forward in history by 40 years. The LXX claimed that Solomon built the Jerusalem temple 440 years after the exodus instead of 480 years. Dates for Israel's patriarchal age are usually based in I Kngs. 6:1.

⁶⁹Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 159.

⁷⁰The Horites have also been regarded as cave dwellers associated with Edom. The Hurrians were widespread and powerful force who influenced the region as far away as India. They originated in the Caucasus and the center of their territory was western Mesopotamia.

⁷¹Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962).

⁷²Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, 23

⁷³David N. Freedman, "The Real Story of the Ebla Tablets: Ebla and the Cities of the Plain," *Biblical Archaeologist* 41.4 (1978): 143-64.

in the field to argue that the names Sodom and Gomorrah would probably not have been spelled this way. Other Biblical place names claimed for the Ebla texts have proven equally problematic.⁷⁴

Abraham's encounter with the king of Sodom probably occurred near Jerusalem. It was already an important location in the spiritual environment of Palestine in Abraham's day. Jerusalem was ruled by the priest/king Melchizedek.⁷⁵ He was a priest for El Elyon, which is one of the Old Testament names for the true God.⁷⁶ Jerusalem was an ancient city on the top of a hill.⁷⁷ As such, it may have participated in the tradition of holy mountains that stretched back all the way to Eden.

2) PASSING A TEST ON THE HOLY MOUNTAIN

⁷⁴ Alan Millard, "Ebla and the Bible: What's Left (If Anything)," *Bible Review* 8 (1992): 27.

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Melchizedek was the priest/king of Salem. The name *salem* means "peace." This name is usually understood to be an early name for Jerusalem. The Hebrew word for "city" is *ir*. So "Jerusalem" is simply *ir salem*, the "city of peace." J. A. Emerton discussed the evidence for this. He noted that a place called Salem is only described in a few Old Testament passages. Ps. 74:3 paralleled Zion with Salem, which suggests that Salem was another name for Jerusalem. Emerton also discussed Ps. 110:4 which described a priest after the order of Melchizedek. It is not clear whether the priest described in Ps. 110 was David, Christ, or both. Ps. 110:1 began the Psalm with the claim that the Lord said to my Lord. If the second "Lord" was David, he would be the priest of Ps. 110:4. However, Christ Himself described Ps. 110:1 as a reference to Himself in Matt. 22:44. If understood in this light, Ps. 110:4 was not a description of David, despite several academic discussions which assume that it was. Emerton suggested that this pointed to a connection between Melchizedek's Salem and David's Jerusalem. Emerton noted that there is also textual evidence that could be used to argue against this identification as well. Emerton noted that Gen. 33:18 claimed that Jacob had come in peace to Shechem. A textual variant for this verse reads, "to Shalem, a city of Shechem." The textual evidence for this reading is quite late. It is supported by the LXX, the Vulgate, the Peshitta, the Book of Jubilees, and the Targums. Emerton noted that other Jewish sources like Josephus do associate Salem with Jerusalem. J. A. Emerton, "The Site of Salem, the City of Melchizedek (Genesis XIV 18)," 45-71 in J. A. Emerton, ed. *Studies in the Pentateuch*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990).

Loren Fisher argued that Melchizedek was a part of the Canaanite world. Fisher argued that Melchizedek was described as a priest king for the god El-Elyon, possessor of heaven and earth. Fisher argued that the role of the priest king was a common Canaanite role. For example, King KRT of the Ugaritic texts was both a priest and a king. Fisher noted that there was no specific Canaanite deity named El-Elyon. However, both El and Elyon were Canaanite gods. Elyon was the lord of heaven. El was his grandson, and was the lord of the earth. Fisher claimed that Gen. 14 combined the names of these two gods and called the two together the possessor of heaven and earth. Fisher suggested that the editor who put the text into its current form used the name Elyon as an adjective in order to construct a divine name. It was a typically Canaanite name for a god. Fisher argued that the name Melchizedek was also typically Canaanite. The blessing "possessor of heaven and earth" was also typical Canaanite vocabulary. Fisher went on to discuss the fact that Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe of all the spoil from his battle. Fisher argued that a tithe of 10% was a common tax in the ancient Near East. For example, the Ugaritic texts mention the tithes paid by the city of Biri. The Ugaritic texts also demonstrated that the tithe was a common tax at Ugarit. Loren R. Fisher, "Abraham and his Priest-King," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 264-70. Fisher's position reveals ways that Genesis 14 fits into the *Amurru* and Canaanite cultures in Palestine. However, there are rather serious problems with Fisher's position. Fisher used Ugaritic texts that were written after Moses' day to interpret events in Abraham's day. While the bulk of the Ugaritic literature was written between 1400 BC and 1200 BC, the continuity of an earlier tradition was possible. Yet a patriarchal date for texts at Ugarit is problematic. The earliest texts at Ugarit were mentioned by André Caquot and Maurice Szyner, *Ugaritic Religion*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1980), 6. Caquot and Szyner argued that little or nothing can be learned about the ancient Semitic traditions from the Ugaritic texts. They only shed light on the various religious traditions at Ugarit in the 2nd half of the 2nd millennium BC. It is at least as likely that the Ugaritic texts reveal how an earlier believing tradition in Palestine was disintegrating by Moses' day. Fisher's position also implied that Melchizedek was not a worshiper of Yahweh when Moses clearly intended Israel to understand that he was. Melchizedek had a West Semitic name. While there is no clear evidence for his ethnic background in the text, Melchizedek clearly was depicted as a part of the believing remnant within the West Semitic world. Habel discussed the debate about the meaning and history of the name Elyon. Norman C. Habel, "Yahweh, Maker of Heaven and Earth: A Study in Tradition Criticism," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 9 (1972): 321-37.

W. Harold Mare noted that ceramic evidence suggesting that Jerusalem was already inhabited during the Neo-Lithic Age. This would be between, perhaps, 8000 BC and 4000 BC. Mare noted that the city of Salem was also mentioned in the Ebla texts from before 2300 BC. He noted that Jerusalem was mentioned in the Egyptian Execration Texts that were written during the 19th and 18th centuries BC. He noted that only a small amount of pottery evidence has survived proving that Jerusalem was inhabited during the Early Bronze Age. Mare concluded that the city only had a small population at the time. W. Harold Mare, *The Archaeology of the Jerusalem Area*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 35.

Jerusalem was not the only holy mountain site in Palestine during the Patriarchal Age.⁷⁸ The Patriarchs often worshiped God on mountaintop shrines like Bethel.⁷⁹ This was reflected in Genesis 12:6-8 and 35:1-6. Bethel had been a place of sacrifice since the Chalcolithic Age. When Kelso excavated the northwest gate of Bethel, he found a high place at the bedrock level.⁸⁰ Sections of the rock still contained blood stains from sacrifices. In another section, he found a pottery jar made around 3500 BC.⁸¹ Holy mountain motifs can also be recognized in Genesis 28:12. In this passage, Jacob had a dream and saw a ladder that reached to heaven. Ackroyd noted that many authors have compared Jacob's ladder to the stairway on the side of a Babylonian ziqqurat. This is an interesting comparison. The Mesopotamian ziqqurat tradition was represented in Genesis 11:1-9 by the Tower of Babel. The name Babel means "Gate of Heaven."⁸² All of the ziqqurats claimed to be stairways leading up to heaven. The top of the tower was believed to be "heaven on earth." By climbing up to the temple on top of the tower, Mesopotamian priests believed that they were climbing the stairs into heaven itself. As Jacob left for Aram in western Mesopotamia, he was given a vision of the true stairway to heaven. Genesis 28:19 noted that Jacob recognized the site of his vision to be the true Bethel, the true House of God, and the true Gate of Heaven. He saw real angels ascending to heaven and descending to earth. He heard God's voice and spoke with Him. This vision may well have strengthened Jacob as he would shortly encounter the idolatry of Mesopotamia.⁸³

Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek can best be understood by putting it in the context of the surrounding chapters. In Genesis 13, Abraham and Lot had separated because they had too many material possessions to live near each other. Abraham and Lot had found that the arid land could not support their combined possessions. Lot had moved to Sodom because the city was rich and the valley contained agricultural abundance. This was a destructive decision based on a desire for wealth. In Genesis 14:1-16, Sodom and its allies stopped paying their annual tribute to Chedorlaomer and his allies. This was another destructive decision based on a desire for wealth. These decisions led to slavery and a complete loss of possessions when Chedorlaomer's allies invaded the valley. When Abraham heard that Lot had been seized by Chedorlaomer, Abraham and his allies attacked the invaders. Abraham reclaimed Lot along with the residents of the plain and all of their possessions.

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In Gen. 22:14, Abraham responded to the events associated with the sacrifice of Isaac by claiming that "in the mountain of the Lord it will be provided." In Gen. 31:54, Jacob sacrificed on a mountain.

⁷⁹ D. J. Wiseman noted that Abraham built an altar and a tent at Moreh. Wiseman argued that the tent may have been a sanctuary. Abraham did the same at Bethel and Beersheba. Wiseman, "Abraham Reassessed," 143.

⁸⁰ There has been substantial academic debate about the nature of a high place. Whitney noted that in 1941, James Montgomery had claimed that every excavation in Palestine had revealed the remains of a high place. This original confidence was replaced by disillusionment as every proposed high place was interpreted in a different way. Beginning in 1957, authors like Albright interpreted the high places as tomb-shrines. Vaughn argued instead that they were raised platforms. In 1979, Whitney argued that high places were simply cultic areas, and they took a number of different forms. They may or may not have been on the tops of hills, and they may or may not have included platforms. J. T. Whitney, "'Bamoth' in the Old Testament," *Tyndale Bulletin* 30 (1979): 125-47.

⁸¹ Kelso, *The Excavation of Bethel*, 20-1.

⁸² Parrot noted that the earliest surviving mention of the name Babylon was found in a text by Shargalisharri around 2350 BC. It appeared in the form *Ka-Dingir-Ra* which meant "gate of god." The Akkadians translated this name as *Bâb-ilu* which also meant "the gate of god." In the 7th to the 4th centuries BC, this name took the form *Bâb-ilâni* or "gate of the gods." It was then spelled in Greek as Babulon. André Parrot, *Babylon and the Old Testament*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 15-6.

⁸³ Ackroyd noted that the idea of a stairway to heaven was also present in the Egyptian texts. The Old Kingdom Pyramid texts often claimed that a ladder had been set up so that Pharaoh could ascend to heaven. The pyramids themselves were these ladders to heaven. The ladder to heaven motif may have been preserved from the earliest Dynasties of the Old Kingdom when pyramids still had a stepped structure like the Mesopotamian ziqqurats. The Egyptian Old Kingdom texts located the eternal home of the righteous in the sky around the North Star. Egyptian Middle Kingdom texts located the eternal state of the righteous in the underworld near the eastern horizon. The patriarchs lived during the Middle Kingdom, so it is unclear if they would have known the Old Kingdom motif of a ladder to heaven. It is even less clear if Moses would have been aware of such a motif. Peter R. Ackroyd, "The Celestial Ladder and the Gate of Heaven (Genesis 28, 12 and 17)," *The Expository Times* 76 (1965): 229-30.

Then Genesis 14:17-24 arrived at what may have been the point of the account. Two men went to meet Abraham. Genesis 14:21 noted that the king of Sodom offered to give Abraham all the goods that he had seized from Chedorlaomer. These were the goods that had tempted Lot to sin. At the same time, Genesis 14:18 noted that Melchizedek came to Abraham and offered only food for the day. Abraham had promised God that he would take nothing for himself from the spoils of battle.⁸⁴ The king of Sodom tempted Abraham to break his vow to God so that he could become wealthier than he already was. Melchizedek reminded Abraham of his vow, and he called Abraham to remain faithful to God. There is a remarkable similarity in Genesis 14 between the words of Abraham and Melchizedek. In Genesis 14:19, Melchizedek blessed Abraham by God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth. Then in Genesis 14:22, Abraham told the king of Sodom that he had sworn to the Lord Most High, possessor of heaven and earth. The whole chapter concerned the ownership of possessions. Who owned the spoil, God or the king of Sodom? Who could give true possessions, God or Sodom? Abraham faced a severe temptation in Genesis 14. He showed that he had passed the temptation by giving Melchizedek a tithe of all the spoil.⁸⁵ Pagolu noted that tithing as part of a vow appeared in texts from the Old Babylonian period and from Ugarit.⁸⁶ The tithe stood for the total. By giving a tithe of the spoil, Abraham accepted the fact that all of the spoil belonged to God. Abraham then refused to accept for himself any of the spoils of battle. Then Genesis 15 began with God's promise to Abraham that his reward would be very great because he had remained faithful to God.

It is fair to ask why Moses included this account in Genesis. Students often overlook the fact that individuals in the wilderness community were not trapped in the wilderness. They were free to leave if they chose to do so. The nation as a whole would not have been able to move anywhere without God's leadership and provision. However, individuals in the believing community were not confined in the wilderness. Moses had visited Sinai in Exodus 3:1 before the exodus without miraculous provision of food or water. Sinai had been the "mountain of God" from long before Moses' time, so travel to and from Sinai had always been possible. Individuals in the wilderness could also have traveled to the Egyptian mines in the Sinai. The Egyptians operated mines in the Sinai early in the 18th Dynasty. Albright claimed that the mines were run by forced Semitic laborers who suffered greatly in them.⁸⁷ However, there has been an ongoing discussion about whether the miners were slaves or voluntary employees.⁸⁸ If they were employees, they were probably able to travel to and from the Sinai mines by themselves.

It is also true that most of Israel's life in the wilderness was not spent in the southern Sinai. It was spent at the north end of Sinai rather close to settled areas. Through most of their sojourn, the Israelites either circled around Mount Seir or lived at Kadesh. Mount Seir was identified with Esau's descendants in Genesis 32:3 and 36:8. Kadesh was an important caravan stop. These areas were not out of touch with the cultures of the ancient Near East. Individuals in the wilderness community could have traveled north into the Dead Sea valley and on into the settled regions of Palestine. Doing so, they would have encountered a hostile culture and they may have been as welcome as Joshua's spies at Jericho.

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Abraham had placed the spoils of war under a ban somewhat parallel to the ban which God placed on the spoils from Jericho. Such bans were not uncommon in the West Semitic world. For a discussion of them, see Abraham Malamat, "The Ban in Mari and in the Bible," 40-9 in *Proceedings of the Ninth Meeting of "Die Ou-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap in Suid-Afrika*, (University of Stellenbosch, July 1966).

⁸⁵ The tithe was not an uncommon sacrifice in the ancient Near East. Pagolu noted that there is ancient Near Eastern evidence for the tithe between the 21st and 14th centuries BC. However, there is no evidence for the tithe between the 14th and the 6th centuries BC. Augustine Pagolu, *The Religion of the Patriarchs*, (JSOT, 1998), 172. The lack of evidence does not demonstrate that the tithe was unused during these centuries. The tithe did appear in the Old Testament in passages like Neh. 10:38, Amos 4:4, and Mal. 3:8-10. It is interesting though that the evidence for a tithe in the ancient Near East is consistent with the traditional dates for Israel's patriarchs.

⁸⁶ Pagolu noted that Gen. 28:20-22 described another Patriarch giving a tithe to God. This tithe was part of Jacob's vow that he would make Yahweh his God, and he would build a sanctuary for Yahweh. Pagolu, *The Religion of the Patriarchs*, 183, 189.

⁸⁷ William F. Albright, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and their Decipherment*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 14-5. Albright argued that Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions 350, 352, 356, and 374 referred to the sufferings of the Sinai miners.

⁸⁸ Ramesses II claimed to employ *Habiru* workers in the Sinai mines.

In this context, Genesis 14 becomes very interesting. It may amount to a call for faith in God's promise. It may warn Israelites not to leave the wilderness where God had placed them among His covenant people. Genesis 14 may warn the Israelites not to choose money and possessions in place of their responsibility to God. It may warn Israelites not to seek the places where possessions could be obtained. Genesis 14 may warn the wilderness community that they would become slaves if they left God's people in the wilderness. It may have called the Israelites to accept Melchizedek's bread and wine, or God's simple provision for the day.⁸⁹ While this interpretation of the passage is speculative, there is much to commend it.

There may be another meaning behind that text as well that has not been commonly recognized. This passage might be directly related to the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22. It is striking that Abraham was directed in Genesis 22 to offer his firstborn son as a sacrifice.⁹⁰ Abraham was commanded to do so on one of the mountains in the land of Moriah. II Chronicles 3:1 identifies Mount Moriah as the temple mount in Jerusalem. In David's day, this mount was still outside of the city.⁹¹ In Abraham's day, Jerusalem had been a far smaller settlement. It may have survived the great drought because of its location on the trade route, but it was a small settlement. II Chronicles 3:1 has led many Jewish and Christian authors to associate the binding of Isaac with the region outside of Jerusalem. In Christian thought, this has strengthened the event's intended typological interpretation.⁹² Support for this idea can also be seen in Genesis 22:14. Abraham called the place where Isaac was sacrificed "Yahweh will provide." Then Moses noted that this event was remembered in the expression "In the mountain of Yahweh, it will be provided." This may imply that Moses associated the place of the sacrifice with the kind of holy mountain imagery seen at Bethel, Sinai, and the promised holy mountain of Exodus 15:17.

What could Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac have had to do with Abraham's encounter with Melchizedek? It may be helpful to apply an article written by Baruch Margalit to this passage, although Margalit does not make this application himself.⁹³ Margalit noted that a text from Ugarit told rulers how to seek divine assistance in battle when their cities were surrounded by enemies. The text instructed the rulers to enter Baal's temple, and to lift their eyes to Baal in prayer. The rulers were to promise to sacrifice a bull and a firstborn child to Baal. Then the ruler was to give Baal's priest a tenth of all that he possessed. After this was done, the ruler would receive Baal's assistance against his enemy.⁹⁴ Margalit's interpretation of this text may not be correct. The text may refer to an animal sacrifice instead of the sacrifice of a child. Pardee discussed the cultic texts from Ugarit. He concluded that the Ugaritic texts contained no specific word for prayer and that prayers in general were rather rare in the texts.⁹⁵

If Margalit's interpretation of this sacrifice was correct, it might provide an interesting parallel to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac. Abraham had prayed for Yahweh's assistance in battle before fighting

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B. Mazar assumes that the Documentary Hypothesis is correct. On that basis, he argued for a Davidic era purpose behind Genesis 14. He argued that Abraham's association with Melchizedek justified Israel's claim to the land and especially David's claim to Jerusalem. See the discussion in Gaalyah Cornfeld, *Archaeology of the Bible: Book by Book*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 20.

⁹⁰ In the Koran's version of this story, the child sacrificed was Ishmael instead of Isaac. After Ishmael's deliverance, the Koran claimed that Abraham and Ishmael built the Kaaba. This is the shrine at Mecca which every devout Muslim is expected visit in a pilgrimage. Marcus, *The View from Nebo*, 34.

⁹¹ While the identification of the mountains of Moriah with Jerusalem is perhaps uncertain, this has not been an unusual suggestion. For example, Heschel wrote that Mount Moriah was chosen as the site of Solomon's temple because it was the place where Abraham had sacrificed Isaac. Heschel then compared this event to the founding of the modern nation of Israel on the sacrifices at camps like Auschwitz. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*, (Woodstock: Jewish Light, 1995), 138.

⁹² J. Edwin Wood, "Isaac Typology in the New Testament," *New Testament Studies* 14 (1968): 583-89.

⁹³ Baruch Margalit, "Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 12 (1986): 62-3. Margalit used this parallel to explain II Kings 3:27. The Moabites worshiped Chemosh instead of Baal, but the religious principle might have been more widely applied.

⁹⁴ Margalit noted that this text was written between 1250 BC and 1200 BC. So it may or may not reflect religious traditions that were already current in Abraham's day. Margalit did demonstrate that this custom remained in use down to Roman times, but it is hard to pin down how early similar customs appeared in the ancient Near East.

⁹⁵ Dennis Pardee, *Ritual and Cult at Ugarit*, (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 52-3, 149-50, 268.

against Chedorlaomer. In Genesis 14:22-23, Abraham testified that he had made a vow to Yahweh that he would take none of the spoil of battle for himself. Genesis 14:20 then noted that Abraham gave Melchizedek a tithe of all. In Genesis 15:9, Abraham offered a sacrifice to Yahweh. Then in Genesis 22, Yahweh demanded that Abraham return to the region where he had earlier requested divine assistance in battle. Yahweh commanded Abraham to offer his firstborn son as a sacrifice to Yahweh. This raises very interesting questions. Was Yahweh's demand for a sacrificed child in some way a polemical confrontation with the religious motifs of Palestine? The evidence is not clear enough to require any relationship between Genesis 22 and Genesis 14, but the parallels are highly suggestive of what might have stood in the background.

What might the wilderness generation have learned from this passage? They certainly learned that Yahweh did not require human sacrifice like the gods of Palestine. Child sacrifice was common in the ancient Near East. In Israel, child sacrifice was to be punished by death. In Exodus 13:2, God had decreed that the firstborn of every man and animal belonged to God. The firstborn of most animals were to be sacrificed to the Lord, but the first born sons were always redeemed with a price.⁹⁶ Moses may have used this account partly to demonstrate God's goodness. Yahweh never required infant sacrifice, but the substitution of a sacrifice for the child. The Christian church has often seen Isaac's sacrifice as an Old Testament "type" or picture of Christ's death as a sin offering. Jesus was also sacrificed on a hill outside of Jerusalem at His Father's decision.⁹⁷

D) ABRAHAM AND THE COVENANT

1) GENESIS AND TREATY MOTIFS

An ancient tradition of treaty or covenant making was well known in the Near East long before Moses wrote Genesis. While rather few treaty documents have survived from before the Mosaic Age, treaties were mentioned in ancient texts as early as the Old Sumerian period.⁹⁸ Dennis McCarthy argued that treaties were known from the beginning of Sumerian culture in Mesopotamia in a form that resembled later treaties. McCarthy noted that the earliest surviving treaty was written in Sumerian on the Vulture Stela. It recorded a treaty between Lagash and Umma. While the stela was badly damaged, part of it recorded the historical events of the two parties to the treaty. The treaty also included the establishment of an obligation on the part of the defeated nation, and threatened curses for violating the treaty obligation. McCarthy noted that there was also a fragmentary 3rd millennium BC vassal treaty between the kings of Elam and Akkad. The treaty involved an oath, blessings, curses, and an invocation of the gods.⁹⁹ There were also a number of 2nd and 1st millennium BC international treaties. Several of these have been preserved.¹⁰⁰ So when Moses used treaty content in Genesis, he was not being anachronistic. In a loose and general way, treaty concepts had been in use in the Near East at least as early as the beginning of

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⁹⁷ Lev. 20:2; Num. 3:13; 3:41-51.

For the typological significance of this event, see Jeong Koo Jeon, "Covenant Theology and Old Testament Ethics: Meredith G. Kline's Intrusion Ethics," *Kerux* 16 (2001). For a discussion of typology, see W. Edward Glenny, "Typology: A Summary of the Present Evangelical Discussion," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997): 627-38.

McCarthy argued that the basic legal idea of a contract in international relations originated in Mesopotamia. Dennis J. McCarthy, "Covenant in the Old Testament: The Present State of Inquiry," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965): 227. Hallo noted that the "net-cylinders" of Enmetena were a form of vassal treaty imposed by Lagash on Umma in the 3rd millennium BC. Hallo argued that a parity treaty was also found at Ebla. William W. Hallo, "Sumer and the Bible: A Matter of Proportion," 163-75 in James K. Hoffmeier and Alan Millard, eds., *The Future of Biblical Archaeology*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 171.

Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament*, (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), 16-9.

The texts for three treaties appear in Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. Most of the Hittite treaties were published by Weidner and Friedrich. McCarthy published a variety of the texts in *Treaty and Covenant*, 181-205.

written history. The tradition of covenant or treaty making would have a profound impact on the believing community.¹⁰¹

Genesis 15:8-14 described a covenant ratification ceremony by which Yahweh promised to give the land to Abraham. In this ceremony, Abraham cut various animals in half. Then at night in deep darkness, a smoking oven and a flaming torch passed between the pieces of Abraham's sacrifice as God declared the certainty of His promise to Abraham. Richard Hess discussed a tablet found at Alalakh that may shed light on this passage. The tablet was written in Old Babylonian script while Israel was sojourning in Egypt. The tablet was an example of a covenant ratification ceremony in the West-Semitic world during the 2nd millennium BC. The Alalakh text was also a land grant. The text listed the servant's obligations to the master who was granting him the land. It included the master's vows to the servant. The ceremony involved swearing an oath by the gods. It also involved cutting the neck of a lamb, offering sacrifices, and dividing the carcasses of the animals. Hess argued that Genesis 15 was Yahweh's promise that He Himself would be destroyed if He violated His promise to Abraham.¹⁰² It is fair to wonder if Moses included this section in Genesis to reassure the Israelites of the strength of Yahweh's commitment to them.

In Genesis 17:9-14, Yahweh commanded Abraham to circumcise every male in his household. Circumcision was to be the great sign of God's covenant with Abraham and his descendants. While Israel was in Egypt, the Egyptians had practiced a form of circumcision.¹⁰³ Egypt's Hyksos rulers had not done so. The text does not specifically state whether the Jews had practiced circumcision in Egypt, but the implication seems to be that they either had done so or had followed the Egyptian custom of incomplete circumcision.¹⁰⁴ This had changed in the wilderness. According to Joshua 5:5, the Israelites had not circumcised their children in the wilderness. As soon as Joshua led Israel across the Jordan, he stopped to circumcise the whole nation. If this is true, then Moses wrote Genesis 17:9-14 for a generation that was rejecting God's covenant sign by refusing to circumcise their children. No wonder that Moses stressed the importance of the ceremony as highly as he did in Genesis 17.

Another treaty concept in Genesis was the appeal to witnesses. In the international treaties, various gods were summoned as witnesses to the treaty.¹⁰⁵ When Moses wrote Genesis, he included in the text a number of allusions to treaty witnesses. Abraham gave Abimelech seven ewe lambs in Genesis 21:30. Moses wrote that these ewe lambs were intended to serve as a witness to the treaty between Abraham and Abimelech. In Genesis 31:44-52, Moses recorded that Jacob and Laban had made a covenant.¹⁰⁶ When they did so, Moses noted that they selected a stone pillar and a heap of stones as

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Kitchen noted that the blessings and curses pattern can be seen in Egyptian texts from the 13th and 12th centuries BC. One of the clearest examples came from Deir el-Medina in Western Thebes. Tombs in the Valley of the Kings were being cut from the 18th to the 20th Dynasties. One of the tomb workmen was the draftsman Nakhtamun. He had done wrong in the sight of Amun. He had been punished with illness, and he was close to death. He prayed to Amun, and he was healed by Amun in his mercy. Kitchen dated this text between 1260 and 1140 BC. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 217, 283-304. A 19th Dynasty exodus date could place this motif in Egypt near the time of the exodus.

Richard Hess also noted that Van Setters argued against this application of the Alalakh text. Richard Hess, "The Slaughter of the Animals in Genesis 15," 55-65 in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12-50*, (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1994), 57.

The earliest depiction of circumcision has been found on a wall relief in the tomb of Pharaoh Teti's vizier. Teti ruled around 2345 to 2333 BC. Philip J. King, "Who Did It, Who Didn't and Why: Circumcision," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 32 (2006): 7. Circumcision in the ancient Near East was also discussed in Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis: Volume 1: Genesis 1:1-25:18*, 314-316.

¹⁰⁴ King, "Circumcision: Who Did It, Who Didn't and Why," 48-55.

¹⁰⁵ Munn-Rankin noted that both international treaties and personal contracts in Babylonian law were only valid after they were written down and were sworn in the presence of the gods. After an oath was taken, it was accompanied by sacrifices that symbolized the divine punishments that would result from breaking the oath. J. M. Munn-Rankin, "Diplomacy in Western Asia in the Early 2nd Millennium B.C.," *Iraq* 17 (1955): 84, 88.

¹⁰⁶ Gen. 31:38 suggested that Jacob and Laban's earlier relationship had also been based on a work contract or covenant. E. A. Speiser noted similarities between Gen. 31:38 and an ancient Near Eastern legal tradition reflected in the Laws of Hammurapi paragraph 266. J. J. Finkelstein, "An Old Babylonian Herding Contract and Genesis 31:38f," 30-6 in William W. Hallo, ed., *Essays in Memory of E. A. Speiser*, (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1968), 30.

witnesses to their treaty.¹⁰⁷ In Genesis 31:53, Moses concluded his account of this treaty with their request that the God of their fathers watch, or judge, between them. In Genesis 16:5, Moses included a rather similar appeal to God as a witness. In this verse, Sarah said to Abraham, "May the Lord judge, or watch, between you and me." These verses appealed to God to be the ultimate witness to their covenant relationship. God would be the divine judge in a covenant or treaty lawsuit instigated by a voluntary breaking of the covenant responsibilities.

When Moses wrote Genesis, he taught Israel that Yahweh's covenant was not a new invention. God's people had always been in a covenant and treaty relationship with Yahweh. Moses taught this by using a variety of treaty concepts and treaty technical vocabulary in Genesis. While Moses did not use the word "covenant" to describe Adam's relationship with God in Eden, Moses depicted Adam as being in a relationship with God that resembled a covenant.¹⁰⁸ In Genesis 2:15-16, Yahweh gave Adam two treaty stipulations. Adam was to tend the Garden, but he was forbidden to eat from the tree in the center of the Garden. Yahweh warned Adam that disobedience would bring "death."

Moses next used the treaty or covenant motif in the account of Noah and his flood. In Genesis 6:14-16, Elohim commanded Noah to build an ark to preserve his family from the flood. Then Elohim promised to establish His covenant with Noah, his family, and all creation. In Genesis 9:9-17, Elohim established His covenant with Noah, his seed, and all life on earth. Elohim decreed that the rainbow would be His sign or witness to the covenant that He had made with all life.¹⁰⁹ The stipulations of Noah's covenant included the command in Genesis 9:4 that blood should not be eaten with meat.

Moses then added in Genesis 15:18-21 that Yahweh formed a covenant with Abraham after a covenant formation ceremony.¹¹⁰ Moses added in Genesis 17:1-14 that Yahweh appeared to Abraham promising to establish His covenant with Abraham. The most obvious stipulation of Abraham's covenant would be circumcision, although Genesis 26:5 suggested that many other stipulations were also

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Joshua would later set up a similar stone pillar at Gilgal as a witness in Josh. 4,

¹⁰⁸ McCoy argued that Scripture depicted creation as the formation of a covenant relationship between God and all of the earth. Charles S. McCoy, "Creation and Covenant: A Comprehensive Vision of Environmental Ethics," 212-25 in Carol S. Robb and Carl J. Casebolt, eds. *Covenant for a New Creation*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991): 213. McCoy's position could be supported by Jer. 33:20 which mentioned God's covenant with the day and night. This interpreted creation as the formation of a covenant.

¹⁰⁹ The covenant sign of Noah's covenant was the glory rainbow that covered the earth in Gen. 9:12-17. This glory rainbow reappeared in Ezek. 1:28 as the glory that surrounded God's throne. So the sign of Noah's covenant may have been God's presence within His creation. This rainbow has been interpreted in various ways. See for example, Turner, "The Rainbow as the Sign of the Covenant in Genesis IX 11-13," 119-24.

¹¹⁰ When Moses depicted the nature of Abraham's faith as a treaty or covenant, he was not being anachronistic. Abraham would have been familiar with treaty forms. Abraham arrived in Palestine during the transition between the Early Bronze Age and the Middle Bronze Age. The Early Bronze culture had ended in a terrible drought that had lasted for 300 years. William Dever noted that the Early Bronze culture had survived only in a limited way among shepherds and semi-nomadic peoples on the fringe of the eastern desert, and that the hill country had been almost completely abandoned. Dever, "New Vistas on the EB IV ("MB I") Horizon in Syria-Palestine," 35-64. Benjamin Mazar suggested that the patriarchs should be understood as part of the semi-nomadic population of the Levant. For a summary of the debate about the nature of the patriarchal life style, see: L. M. Muntingh, "The City which has Foundations: Hebrews 11:8-10 in the Light of the Mari Texts," 108-20 in I. H. Eybers, et al, eds. *De Fructu Oris Sui: Essays in Honour of Adrianus Van Selms*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 109. Mazar argued that Abraham was part of the semi-nomadic population of Palestine around 1000 BC. Benjamin Mazar, "The Historical Background of the Book of Genesis," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 28 (1969): 77. Mazar's date for Abraham was actually the period of the united monarchy under King David. Evangelicals may appreciate his view of the nature of Abraham's life style without accepting his proposed date for Abraham. Since Israel's patriarchs were not bound to any one geographical location, they were forced to carry on relationships with many cities, cultures, and rulers. This can be seen in Abraham's relationships with Abimelech, Melchizedek, Ephron, and other local rulers in Palestine. Israel's patriarchs also sometimes lived in tents settlements outside the walls of settled communities like Gerar. Treaties of some kind were necessary for stable relationships with many different rulers. So Yahweh's use of treaty motifs in a religious context with Abraham would simply have been an extension of vassal relationships that Abraham would have known quite well.

involved.¹¹¹ In Genesis 17:14, Moses added the covenant curse that any male who was not circumcised should be cut off from God's people.

2) MOSES AND THE COVENANT BLESSINGS IN GENESIS

One treaty feature seen in Genesis was the presence of blessings and curses. Every treaty in the ancient Near East contained curses that would harm anyone who violated the treaty.¹¹² The 2nd millennium BC treaties also contained a corresponding list of blessings which would be poured out on those who remained loyal to the treaty. Moses used the motif of covenant or treaty blessings and curses in a number of ways in Genesis. Some of these were rather general. In Genesis 12:1-3, Moses noted that Yahweh would bless Abraham. Yahweh would then bless those who blessed Abraham, and curse those who cursed him. In Genesis 24:60, Moses added a similar blessing given to Rebekah by Laban and Bethuel.

When Moses included treaty blessings and curses in Genesis, he stressed that Yahweh had earlier promised to Abraham the treaty or covenant blessings that He now promised to Israel. The first of these blessings was the promise of a land. It could be argued that the promise of a land may have begun as early as Genesis 2:2. This verse noted that God rested from all of his works. From the Second Temple Period down to the Middle Ages, both Jewish and Christian authors have interpreted this passage as a promise pointing forward to God's eternal rest in the eschaton. Magnus Ottosson argued that the promise of a land in the Old Testament was grounded originally in the geography of Eden.¹¹³ Moses recorded in Genesis 3:23-24, that God drove Adam and Eve from the garden into a sin cursed land. They left the Garden with the promise in Genesis 3:15 that one day God would remove the curse which Adam's sin had placed on the earth.¹¹⁴

In Genesis 4:14-16, Moses recorded that God drove Cain not only from the region around Eden, but also from God's own face. Cain's son Enoch founded the first human city.¹¹⁵ This city replaced the Garden of God with a city named after man. While Enoch founded a city, Genesis 4:14 noted that Cain became a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth.¹¹⁶ Moses recorded in Genesis 7:10-12 that God judged Cain's culture with God's great flood that destroyed the land and returned it to the state that had existed before creation began.¹¹⁷ Then Moses recorded in Genesis 8:21-22 that God removed the curse that He had placed on the earth, and made eternal promises about the earth's preservation. So in a partial and

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Kaiser discussed this approach. He argued that Genesis 26:5 should be seen as a reference to God's law written on the hearts of all men instead of a reference to divine revelation. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "God's Promise Plan and His Gracious Law," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (1990): 289-302.

Weinfeld argued that blessings and curses were not only a key element of ancient Near Eastern treaties, they were also used in all types of legal settlements, grants, land transactions, oaths of succession, and other oaths. Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomy School*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 61.

Ottosson wrote from a critical perspective. While he saw Eden as a myth, he may have been correct in seeing a link between the Garden and the promise of a land. Ottosson, "Eden and the Land of Promise," 177-88. Eden would seem to be replicated in all Biblical land promises. Moshe Weinfeld wrote from a critical perspective. He argued that the promise of a land actually developed during the Davidic period. Moshe Weinfeld, *The Promise of the Land: The Inheritance of the Land of Canaan by the Israelites*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

Fishbane argued that the loss of Eden created a "profound inner-biblical nostalgia for spatial harmony" that would be embodied in motifs like Zion. Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 369.

This passage has been interpreted in a wide variety of ways. For a survey of interpretations, see: Maarten J. Paul, "Genesis 4:17-24: A Case-Study in Eisegesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 47 (1996): 143-62.

One Old Testament theme was that God judged people by making them drifters and wanderers. Job 12:24-25 noted that God turned the earth's leaders into wanderers in dark and pathless places. In Ps. 35:5, David prayed that God turn his enemies into chaff before the wind driven on by the Angel of the Lord. Ps. 107:40 echoed these ideas noting that God made the wicked wander in a pathless waste. Along the same lines, Jude 12-13 described the wicked as waterless clouds carried by the wind, wild waves, and stars wandering in the black darkness.

¹¹⁷ David Clines, "Noah's Flood: I: The Theology of the Flood Narrative," *Faith and Thought* 100, (1972/73): 136.

limited way, Moses suggested that the new earth of Genesis 8:21-22 was the uncursed land promised in Genesis 3:15.¹¹⁸

At least a corrupted memory of this promise may have been preserved in several ancient Near Eastern nations. Most commonly, the ancient Near East recognized that the land belonged to a god, and the god gave the land to whoever he chose.¹¹⁹ Daniel Block discussed a Sumerian tradition in Mesopotamia that the god Enlil had marked off the boundaries of Ningursu and Shara.¹²⁰ This suggested that Enlil owned the earth and gave it to whomever he wished. After 2300 BC, the Semitic ruler Sargon claimed that the god Dagan had given him all of the lands in the west. This also suggested that the land was owned by a god and was given to the man of his choice. It is striking that the land given by Dagan to Sargon was the Amurru homeland of the West Semitic people. Similar ideas appeared in other texts from Mesopotamia.¹²¹

A related motif was expressed in a number of Egyptian texts. The Egyptians viewed the whole broad band of land on their eastern horizon as "God's Land," because of the nature of their underworld beliefs. The Egyptians often called Syria, Lebanon and Palestine "God's Land." For example, the 18th Dynasty ruler Thutmose III ordered plant samples from "God's Land" to be gathered during his campaigns in the Levant. Amenhotep III claimed to have cut cedars in the mountains of "God's Land," and to have dragged their logs over the mountains of Retenu, or Lebanon.¹²² The texts from Egypt and Mesopotamia demonstrated the common assumption that territory belonged to a god who could give it to whoever he chose.

The settled Semi-nomadic populations often saw their own cities as gifts from their gods. Semi-nomadic populations included at least a remnant of believers who searched for a future promised land and a future promised city.¹²³ This remnant preserved God's promise to Adam that the curse would one day be removed from the earth. This remnant tradition might stand behind Hebrews 11:8-10. This passage claimed that Abraham had lived in tents while looking for a city with foundations whose builder and maker was God.¹²⁴

In the Old Testament, this idea took quite a different form than in the rest of the ancient Near East. In the Old Testament, God gave the land as a promise instead of an ethnic right or a right of conquest. The Old Testament was dominated by the promise of a future land. It is probably no coincidence that the early Semitic Amurru were associated with Palestine, and that a believing tradition led by Melchizedek was still found there in Abraham's time. Palestine was God's land. It was the land that Yahweh claimed as His own special possession. Palestine was the goal toward which Abraham was led when he was called

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The promise of Gen. 3:15 also looked beyond Noah's time, to Israel's occupation of the land, to Christ's coming, and to the eschaton.

¹¹⁹ Both the Old and New Testaments claimed that God gave all of the nations their lands. This can be seen in Acts 17:26-27; Deut. 32:8; Amos 9:7.

¹²⁰ Daniel Block, *The Gods of the Nations: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern National Theology*, (Jackson: Evangelical Theological Society, 1988), 9.

¹²¹ Mendenhall noted ancient Mesopotamian examples where property gained by conquest was seen as a gift from god. George Mendenhall, "The Nature and Purpose of the Abraham Narratives," 337-56 in Patrick D. Miller Jr. et al, eds. *Ancient Israelite Religion*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 344.

¹²² Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, II:193, 359.

¹²³ This was at best only a small remnant. Most members of the semi-nomadic population hoped for nothing better than their current life style. There was no evidence that the tradition of faith was ever the dominant force within the West Semitic world.

¹²⁴ Muntingh supported a somewhat similar position. He argued that the Yaminites were one of three major West Semitic tribal groups at Mari. Muntingh noted that the normal East Semitic word for "city" was *ilu*. This word was used in the Mari texts to describe Yaminite tent settlements. Muntingh noted that Haran was the great center for moon worship in western Mesopotamia. He argued that God appeared to Abraham in Haran, calling him to set out on a pilgrimage. God called Abraham to look for a city with foundations built by Yahweh instead of the moon god. Muntingh argued that Abraham usually lived in Palestine in tent settlements outside small cities. He argued that Abraham's tent settlement would have been called a "city" as the word was used in his day. Muntingh argued that the "city with foundations" in Heb. 11 may have been Jerusalem, and that the passage expressed the hope that the city would be founded by God's authority. Muntingh, "The City which has Foundations: Hebrews 11:8-10 in the Light of Mari," 110-19.

from Ur of the Chaldees in Genesis 12:1. The boundaries of this Promised Land were spelled out in passages like Genesis 15:18-21. The land of Palestine was never given to Abraham and his heirs. They were always just temporary residents in it. Palestine was always a land promised to them instead. It was a land to which God's people traveled in some way throughout their history.

When Moses wrote Genesis, he gave a dominant position to the ideas of coming to the land, leaving the land, and returning to it again.¹²⁵ Several times, members of the patriarchal household left the land, or attempted to leave the land. Each time, the faithful remnant was brought back by God. In Genesis, those outside of the covenant of promise usually left the land forever. This tradition of leaving and returning climaxed in Genesis 15:12-21. Abraham was told that his heirs would leave the land to return after 400 years in captivity.

Thomas McComiskey discussed the promise of a land in his book *The Covenants of Promise*.¹²⁶ McComiskey suggested that the promise of a land must have seemed to be an empty hope to the Israelites who were being persecuted in Egyptian bondage. This changed when Yahweh hurled His plagues against Egypt and led His people out into the wilderness. McComiskey suggested that the conquest of Palestine was more than a historical event. It was also a theological event because it confirmed God's ancient covenant promise to His people.

During Joshua's conquest, Israel was brought into the land of promise. Yet even then, the land was not given to Israel. It was only promised to them. The land belonged to God.¹²⁷ The Israelites were always only temporary tenants in God's land. They were heirs waiting to inherit the land when God would finally fulfill His promises to them. Throughout the Old Testament, God's people always remained wanderers. They wandered as sojourners looking for their eternal home. In Leviticus 25:23, Moses recorded Yahweh's declaration that the land belonged to Him, and the Israelites were just strangers and sojourners with Him. God's people would remain strangers and exiles in the Promised Land until the Babylonian captivity.¹²⁸

The second covenant and treaty blessing that Moses recorded in Genesis was the promise of dominance. This promise may also have been rooted in the Garden of Eden. As Yahweh's faithful vassals, Adam and Eve had dominance over all of Yahweh's creation. Adam's sin cost him much of this control of creation, but his dominance was not entirely lost. After Adam was driven from the garden, the promise of dominance became a key eschatological motif and it was also in a limited way a contemporary experience for God's people.

The promise of dominance was an important motif for Israel in Moses' day. In Deuteronomy 28:7-10, Moses recorded God's promise that Yahweh would cause Israel's enemies to be defeated before them, and all the people of the world would fear them. As long as Israel obeyed God, Moses promised that they would dominate their enemies.¹²⁹ In Genesis 9:26-27, Moses recorded that Noah had given Shem sovereignty over Palestine and spiritual responsibility for Japheth. Noah's promise to Shem created a power struggle between the descendants of Shem and Canaan. That power struggle has had an impact on ancient Near Eastern history that has echoed down to the present day. It is interesting that Noah's curse on Canaan came as a result of Ham's sin. Yet the curse was not announced against Ham.

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The motif of coming, leaving, and returning may have appeared in the Genesis text as early as Gen. 1-3. Renckens noted that man had not been created in the garden. He had been brought to Yahweh's garden as an act of pure grace and had been assigned as its keeper. Renckens then argued that the motif of a garden given to man was eventually developed into the theme of a land promised to Israel. Henricus Renckens, *Israel's Concept of the Beginning: The Geology of Genesis 1-3*, (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964), 200, 213.

¹²⁶ Thomas Edward McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 42-55.

¹²⁷ Ezek. 36:5.

¹²⁸ Num. 32:13-15; Deut. 4:25-28; 28:64-66; Is. 57:13; 65:9. In Ps. 39:12 and 119:19, David identified himself as a stranger and sojourner like all of his fathers. In I Chron. 29:15, David declared that all the Israelites were sojourners and tenants with God. Jer. 35:6-7 noted that the Rechabites went so far as to live in tents as a demonstration of the fact that they were only sojourners in the land. This was not just an Old Testament promise. The New Testament also recognized that believers were only sojourners in this world. In I Pet. 2:11, Peter urged his readers as aliens and strangers in this world to abstain from fleshly lusts.

¹²⁹ Deut. 28:1; Num. 24:8-9.

Moses explained in Genesis 10:6 that Ham's sons were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. The descendants of Cush seem to have settled in Mesopotamia, and they may have been part of the Ubaid and Uruk cultures. Ham's son Mizraim became the father of the Egyptians, and Put seems to have been associated with the African nations. Canaan was associated with some of the nations in Syria and Palestine. Out of all these descendants, Noah only gave the Semitic people a right to dominate the Canaanite population in the Levant. God did not give Shem's descendants the right to dominate Egypt or Mesopotamia. It is interesting in this regard that the Israelites never in their long history tried to gain control of Egypt or Mesopotamia.¹³⁰ Semitic people did at times control regions where the descendants of Ham and Canaan lived. The history of the ancient Near East recorded the struggle for dominance between the Semitic and non-Semitic populations of the ancient Near East. It can be seen, for example, in Sargon's East Semitic empire and his conquests of western Mesopotamia and the Levant.

The promise of dominance may stand behind God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3. Here Moses recorded God's promise that He would bless those who blessed Abraham and curse those who cursed him. This suggested that opposition to Abraham was also opposition to God. This promised dominance may also have been in the background behind a number of other passages. In Genesis 22:17-18, Moses recorded God's promise Abraham that his heirs would be like the sand on the seashore and would possess the gates of their enemies.¹³¹ This was a promise of military dominance. In Genesis 24:60, Moses recorded Laban's blessing to Rebekah in similar terms. Laban blessed Rebekah by expressing his wish that she become thousands of ten thousands, and that her descendants possess the gate of those who hated her. The fact that Laban gave this blessing suggested that this was not a uniquely patriarchal blessing. It may have been instead a common West Semitic blessing that was only inherited by Abraham.¹³² Moses recorded in Genesis 27:29 that the promise of dominance was passed on by Isaac to Jacob. Isaac's blessing decreed that the peoples should serve Jacob, and the nations bow down to him. It decreed that his brothers should bow down to him. It also decreed that those who cursed him would be cursed by God, and those who blessed him would be blessed by God. In Genesis 37:8-10, Moses reminded Israel that Joseph had gained his brothers' enmity when he claimed this promise for himself.

To some degree, the promised dominance was already a reality in the patriarchal community. In Genesis 14:14, Moses noted that Abraham had led a force of 318 men who had been raised in his household. In Genesis 23:6-11, Abraham was called a "Mighty Prince" because of this force. So Abraham was a dominant power in the region.¹³³ Moses may also have implied Abraham's dominance in Genesis 16:9. Here, God commanded Hagar the Egyptian to return to the patriarchal home and to submit herself to Sarah's authority. The promise of dominance may also have been reflected in Joseph's rise to become vizier over all of Egypt.

The promise of dominance was always closely tied to the idea of a divine warrior. God Himself promised that He would fulfill His promises to His people. One way that He would fulfill His promises was to fight personally on their behalf. Moses gave an example of this in Genesis 12:17. Yahweh struck Pharaoh's house with a plague because he had taken Sarah into his palace. Moses also used the divine

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It is possible that Israel may have refused to join the Hyksos in Egypt because God had not given them the right to control Egypt. Israel should have dominated the Canaanites in Egypt but were unable to do so. This may reflect their fall into idolatry.

¹³¹ Since court judgments were given in the gates, this could also be a promise of political domination.

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This blessing might reappear in a more spiritual form in Matt. 16:18 where the enemies' gates became the gates of hell. This promise must be understood in the context of ancient Near Eastern underworld motifs. Christ promised that no spiritual power could prevent His people from arriving safely at their eternal home.

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Wiseman explored Abraham's role as a prince. Wiseman argued that Abraham functioned as a local or district governor. Wiseman argued that the office of governor, or *shapitum* was well known from the Mari texts around 1800 BC. Wiseman argued that these governors acted on behalf of the high ruler who had appointed him. Abraham served the high king Yahweh who had granted him the land. Wiseman argued that Yahweh's command in Gen. 13:17 that Abraham "walk about" in the land amounted to a command to act as a judge in it. Wiseman noted that Abraham recognized Yahweh's supremacy in Gen. 18:25. Wiseman argued that Abraham was expected by Yahweh to maintain justice, law, and order in the region. So Abraham settled disputes in Gen. 13:17 and 21:25. Wiseman noted that provincial governors were usually given land instead of a salary, and Abraham was given the land. Wiseman noted that provincial governors were also expected to take military action to support the sovereign. Abraham led his armed retainers to recover Lot in Gen. 14:14, 24. Wiseman, "Abraham Reassessed," 151-52.

warrior theme when Yahweh intervened directly in history. For example, Genesis 18:20-21 declared that God would personally go down to Sodom to bring the city before His court of judgment.

The promise of dominance was also closely related to the promise of a Messiah. The messianic motif in the Old Testament was grounded in the famous "proto-evangelium" that Moses wrote in Genesis 3:15. That passage has been interpreted in a number of ways,¹³⁴ and it was at least in part a messianic promise pointing forward to Christ's victory on the cross.¹³⁵ The promise that Moses recorded in Genesis 3:15 may also have been fulfilled in a "now and not yet" way in every human deliverer that God provided for His people.¹³⁶ The first of these promised deliverers may have been Noah. In Genesis 5:29, Moses recorded Noah's parents' reaction to his birth.¹³⁷ Noah's parents hoped that he would give them rest from their toil on the ground that God had cursed. Noah's flood was a "now and not yet" promise of God's final, eschatological judgment on the whole earth. In Genesis 8:21-22, Moses recorded God's promise that the earth after Noah's flood would no longer be cursed by God in the same way that it had been cursed before the flood. So there was a real sense in which Noah did deliver the earth from God's curse. However, Noah was at best only a partial and very imperfect representative of the future promised Deliverer.

The promise of a future Deliverer ran through Scripture from that time forward.¹³⁸ Before Moses was born, Job declared in Job 19:23-27 his faith that his Redeemer would one day come, and at the last would take His stand upon the earth. Job expanded on this faith statement in an amazing way. Job declared that he would see the promised Redeemer with his own eyes, even after his death. In Genesis 49:8-12, Moses recorded Jacob's promise that the scepter would not depart from Judah until He came to Whom it belonged. Later in Numbers 24:15-17, Moses recorded Balaam's prophecy that a future ruler from Judah would crush the forehead of Moab, just as the promised Deliverer in Genesis 3:15 would crush

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Ken Schurb, "Sixteenth-Century Lutheran-Calvinist Conflict on the Protevangelium," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 54 (1990): 25-47.

¹³⁵ When placed in the broader context of Scripture, it was a Messianic promise that spoke in part about Christ's coming to remove the curse of sin. Gen. 3:15 promised that a descendant of Adam would destroy the serpent who had caused Adam to sin. The promised Son would crush the serpent's head while forcefully driving the serpent's deadly fangs into His own heel. This Messianic promise was given on the basis of God's prior deliverance in Eden itself. After Adam rebelled against his covenant with God, the Lord did not leave Adam in his spiritual "death." Instead, God came to Adam in mercy and called him to repentance. In Gen. 3:21, God covered Adam's nakedness with the first sacrifice, symbolizing the future death of the promised Son. With this sacrifice, God provided animal skins to cover the shame and guilt caused by their sin.

¹³⁶ Every judge, tribal chief, and deliverer in the long history of God's people was to some degree a "now and not yet" representative of this promised future deliverer. This long tradition of deliverers ran through Seth, Enoch, Noah, Shem, and Moses. Through Israel's history, her judges, deliverers, and prophets were each in some way given authority over the nations. This can be seen in Jer. 1:10 when the prophet was placed over the earth's nations, to pluck up, destroy, plant, and build. Each in his own way was a son of the promise, and each pointed forward to Christ as the final and ultimate fulfillment of Gen. 3:15.

¹³⁷ If Jude 14-15 is taken at face value, Enoch may represent an early prophetic tradition that looked forward to God's coming in judgment on the world. It is unclear whether Enoch's prophecy would have been exclusively about Noah's coming flood, or if it also carried an eschatological meaning. Of course, the relationship between 1 Enoch and the book of Jude is highly problematic.

¹³⁸ For a summary of the evidence and academic discussion, see: Helmer Ringgren, *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, (Chicago: Alec R. Allenson, 1956). Ronald E. Clements, "The Messianic Hope in the Old Testament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43 (1989): 3-19.

the Serpent's head.¹³⁹ These early messianic promises were followed by a long list of messianic promises that ran throughout the Old Testament.¹⁴⁰

The blessing of dominance was never intended to produce oppression. God's people were always called to be a blessing to the earth. Yahweh promised that He would make Abraham into a great nation, and make his descendants a blessing.¹⁴¹ The nation promised in Genesis 12 grew through four centuries in Egypt. It was formally established as a nation at Sinai. It became a vehicle for preserving God's Kingdom on earth, and a vehicle for teaching God's Word to the nations. It was eventually the vehicle which God used to raise up His Son and bring salvation to the world. In its fullest meaning, the promise of a great nation was a promise of Christ Himself. The nation founded at Sinai was partly a typological promise pointing forward to Christ's eternal Kingdom when the Lord would rule among His vast people forever.¹⁴²

E) ABRAHAM AND THE GENTILES

1) ABRAHAM IN A WEST SEMITIC WORLD

The Amorites, or the *Amurru*, played a very ambiguous role in Genesis. In Genesis 48:22, Jacob gave to Joseph an additional portion of what Jacob had seized by armed force from the Amorites.¹⁴³ This depicted the Amorites as Jacob's opponents. On the other hand, the Amorites in Genesis included Abraham's friends Mamre, Eshcol and Aner. Genesis 14:13 specifically called these men Amorites. Genesis 15:16 noted that God sent Abraham down to Egypt for 400 years specifically because the wickedness of the Amorite was not yet full.¹⁴⁴ This suggested that at least a remnant of true faith remained among the Amorites in Abraham's day. This remnant of faith may have been reflected in Melchizedek, and the believing community that he led. Melchizedek worshiped El Elyon, God Most High. Both Abraham and Moses treated this as a true name for God. The name "El" was a very ancient Semitic name for God. The names El and Elyon both occurred in the later Canaanite texts. In the Canaanite texts, El was the ancient father god, the creator and ruler of the world. Surprisingly many parallels can be found between the valid

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There has been a lot of debate about whether Balaam was a true or false prophet. The Jewish world depicts him as a deeply wicked man. Early Christian authors saw him as a true prophet who sinned. However Balaam is understood, prophecy was a common phenomenon in the ancient world although most men who claimed to be prophets were really false prophets. For a discussion of early prophetic claims, see Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, (Atlanta: SBL, 2003). Stanley D. Walters, "Prophecy in Mari and Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 89 (1970): 78-81. Moshe Weinfeld, "Ancient Near Eastern Patterns in Prophetic Literature," *Vetus Testamentum* 27 (2006): 178-95. Hans M. Barstad, "No Prophets? Recent Developments in Biblical Prophetic Research and Ancient Near Eastern Prophecy," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 57 (1993): 39-60.

Mass interpreted many passages as messianic prophecies, including: 2 Kgs. 7:1-16,; Ps. 3; 22; 34; 54; 67; 68; 90; 93; 117; Is. 7:1-17; 9:1-7; 11:1-16; 28; 35; 40:1-11; 51:1-52:12; 52:3-53:12; 54; Hos. 5:15-6:3; Zech. 11; 12; Mal. 1; 4:5-6. ¹⁴⁰ Mass, *Christ in Type and Prophecy*, 2 vols., (New York: Benziger, 1893).

Writing from a Jewish perspective, Raphael Jospe discussed the concept of a chosen and blessed people. Jospe suggested that Israel's "chosenness" did not indicate any innate Jewish superiority or privilege. Jospe argued that Israel's "chosenness" centered on Israel's responsibility to live according to the Torah. Jospe stressed that Israel's promised blessings were conditional on Israel's keeping covenantal responsibilities. Raphael Jospe, "The Concept of the Chosen People: An Interpretation," *Judaism* 43 (1994): 127-48. ¹⁴²

Paul Williamson argued that God's promise of a blessing through Abraham's "seed" was interpreted by the New Testament in terms of the Gospel's blessings experienced in Christ. Williamson illustrated this truth with the following passages: Rom. 15:9 f.; Gal. 3:8-9; 3:14, and Jn. 8:56. Paul Williamson, "Abraham, Israel and the Church," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 72 (2000): 99-118. ¹⁴³

It is probably not possible to know what armed conflict stood behind this claim. Unless Levi's massacre at Shechem stands behind this claim, Moses chose not to record an armed conflict between Jacob and the Amorites in Genesis. ¹⁴⁴

Van Selms argued that this verse pointed to the sojourn in Egypt and the conquest of Palestine. He suggested that this verse also pointed to the Israelites' later attitude toward the Canaanites. Van Selms noted that Genesis never recorded Canaanite idolatry or Canaanite abominable behavior. A. Van Selms, "The Canaanites in the Book of Genesis," 182-213 in B. Gemser, et al, eds. *Studies in the Book of Genesis*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 209.

West Semitic believing tradition and the Canaanite myths of Baal and El. The possibility must at least be considered that the later Canaanite and Amorite religions of Palestine were in part an apostasy away from an earlier believing tradition.

This ancient, *Amurru* believing tradition was not only represented by Melchizedek and his remnant, it was also represented by the relatives of the Patriarchs. Genesis 25:16 recorded that Abraham had given presents to Keturah's sons, and had sent them to the east. It is impossible to know how many of Keturah's descendants had retained some kind of faith. Esau had also settled east of Palestine. Job and his friends had lived east of Palestine. One of Job's friends was named Eliphaz the Temanite. He may very well have been a descendant of Esau since Esau's son was named Eliphaz, and his grandson was named Teman.¹⁴⁵ Job and his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu knew God and knew quite a bit of theology. All of these early believers lived in the Amurru territory east of Palestine while Israel sojourned in Egypt.¹⁴⁶ Another faithful man east of Palestine was Jethro who was Moses' father-in-law. Jethro was a priest of the true God in Midian. While Jethro served God in Midian, a prophet named Balaam lived east of Palestine in the Semitic territory of northwest Mesopotamia. Balaam knew God, and received several remarkable prophecies directly from God Himself.¹⁴⁷ However, Balaam was far from being as noble a person as Jethro. Balaam opposed Israel for profit, and he died in God's judgment.

It is fair to ask why Moses might have included Genesis 15:16 in the text of Genesis. Why would Moses stress that Israel had lived in Egypt for 400 years because the wickedness of the Amorite was not yet full? The answer might be that Yahweh had ordered the Israelites to drive out the peoples of Palestine as a part of God's judgment on the nations. The Israelites would always be faced with the temptation to live peacefully among the Canaanite and Amorite nations instead of driving them out. The Israelites could always argue that they should be allowed to do so because the patriarchs themselves had lived at peace with the Amorites in Palestine. Moses nipped this thinking in the bud. He noted that Abraham could only live at peace with the Amorites in his day because the wickedness of the Amorite was not yet full. Yet even in Abraham's day, God had warned that this would no longer be true when He led His people back out of Egypt. Then the wickedness of the Amorite would be full, and the time for God's judgment would have come.

In Genesis 15:18-21, God declared the boundaries of the land promised to Israel. The passage notes that God has given to Israel the land of the Kenite, Kenizzite, Kadmonite, Hittite, Perizzite, Rephaim, Amorite, Canaanite, Girgashite and Jebusite. This was a strange list in several ways. The Kenizzites and Kadmonites appeared nowhere else in the Old Testament. The Rephaim were defeated by Chedorlaomer in Genesis 14:5. They disappeared from the Old Testament account after Genesis 14. Their name was preserved only in the place name "Valley of Rephaim." They were never again named among lists of nations to be driven from Palestine. This list was also striking because of its omission. The Horites and Hivites were included in later lists,¹⁴⁸ but they were absent in Genesis 15. All of this suggests that the nation list of Genesis 15 does come from the Patriarchal Age. Even by Moses' day, the nations of Palestine were quite different. It may be that Moses included this nation list because of the contrast between it and so many later lists. It is striking that the Kenites were not included in later lists of nations to be driven from the land. Judges 4:11 pointed out the relationship between Moses' father-in-law Jethro and the Kenites. In I Samuel 15:6, Saul reminded the Kenites that they were present in the land because of the support they had given to Israel during the wilderness sojourn. The contrast between the list of nations in Genesis 15 and lists elsewhere in the Pentateuch might have been intended partly to teach Israel that the Kenites were no longer to be driven from the Promised Land. Of course, Moses did record Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 24:21-22 that in the distant future, the Kenites would suffer God's judgment as well.

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Gen. 36:10-11.

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The name Job appeared in the Mari texts that were written between 1730 BC and 1700 BC. Job at Mari was a prince who lived in the area of Damascus. It is not impossible that this may have been the Biblical Job. He was a prince in the right place, at the right time. Merrill F. Unger, *Israel and the Aramaeans of Damascus*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 7-8. Abraham Malamat noted that the general culture in the book of Job and several details of the text fit with Israel's patriarchal age. Malamat, "Pre-Monarchical Social Institutions in Israel in the Light of Mari," 165-76.

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Num. 22-24.

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It has often been suggested that the name Hivite was a copy error for the name Horite since the Hebrew *r* and *v* could be confused if poorly written, and the original text contained no vowels.

2) HAGAR AND ABRAHAM

Genesis 12:5 noted that Abraham left Haran with Sara, Lot, and all of the people that Abraham had acquired in Haran. This suggests that many gentiles were present in the Patriarchal community from the beginning. This remained true throughout the Patriarchal Age. Genesis 12:16 noted that Pharaoh had given Abraham male and female gentile servants. Genesis 20:14 noted that Abimelech did the same thing. In Genesis 23:6, the Hittites called Abraham a mighty prince among them. Genesis 24:35 claimed that God had made Abraham rich in servants as well as animals. Genesis 14:14 noted that Abraham led a force of 318 men who had been born in his household. Isaac and Jacob had similar large groups of gentile servants in their households. It is important to notice the status that these gentiles had in the believing community. The gentiles in the patriarchal household were not just employees loosely tied to the patriarchs. They were a part of the covenant community. Genesis 17:12-13 insisted that gentile servants either purchased or born in the household should be circumcised when they entered the community. These gentile servants had their own share in God's covenant. Genesis 24:27 even depicted Abraham's gentile servant as a man of faith and integrity. However, what was the gentiles' place in the believing community? Their place was one of service to the Jews. They were not free sons of the covenant.

A rather similar situation stood behind Moses' account of Hagar's life within the believing community. Hagar has received quite a bit of academic attention in recent years. One discussion of Hagar was written by Iain Duguid.¹⁴⁹ He noted that Genesis 16:1-3, 21:9 and 25:12 stressed that Hagar was an Egyptian. In Genesis 16:17, Hagar ran from Sarah, and God encountered Hagar the Egyptian at Shur on the Egyptian border. In Genesis 21:21, Hagar the Egyptian found an Egyptian wife for Ishmael. Duguid asked why Hagar's Egyptian background was stressed so often. He noted that several commentators have seen Israel's Egyptian oppression in the background. They suggest that Sarah's oppression of an Egyptian slave girl foreshadowed in an ironic way, Egypt's later oppression of Israel.

Duguid affirmed this interpretation, but suggests another theme in the text as well. Duguid pointed to the contrast between Egypt's fruitfulness and Palestine's barrenness. Duguid suggested that this theme was introduced already in the contrast between Genesis 12:12 and Genesis 13:10. When Abraham first entered the land, there was a famine in Palestine. However, Egypt was a well watered land.¹⁵⁰ Duguid suggested that this was the basis for an important lesson for the wilderness generation. Abraham chose Hagar the fruitful Egyptian instead of God's promise for the barren Sarah. Duguid argued that Abraham always got into trouble when he chose fruitfulness instead of barrenness with God's promise. When Abraham chose the fruitfulness of Egypt over barren Palestine, he nearly lost Sarah. When Lot chose the fruitfulness of Sodom, he lost almost his entire household and nearly died in Sodom's destruction. When Abraham chose fruitful Hagar instead of Sarah, Ishmael caused constant trouble in the household. Duguid noted that the Egyptian option in all of these passages led to disaster. Duguid argued that the wilderness generation needed to hear this message. In Numbers 11:5-20, the Israelites longed for Egypt's food. In Numbers 14:3, many Israelites argued that the nation should return to Egypt. In Numbers 20:5, many Israelites asked why they had been bought out of Egypt to die in an evil place. Duguid argued that Egypt always attracted Israel like a magnet. He suggested that Hagar had to be driven out of the believing community in order to remove the Egyptian option. Duguid argued that Abraham was forced to lean in faith on God's promise after he had removed the option of finding fruitfulness through Egypt.

There is much to be said for Duguid's perspective, but it may not exhaust the didactic significance of the Hagar story. The Genesis text may be richer in meaning. It may be useful to note recent academic discussion about Hagar. Much of this academic discussion has resulted from the application of the law code of Hammurabi, and texts found at Nuzi and Nimrud. These texts noted that a barren wife was often required to give her handmaid to her husband to produce an heir. When this happened, the wife held authority over the maid's child. The child's inheritance rights were uncertain unless the father formally

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Iain M. Duguid, "Hagar the Egyptian: A Note on the Allure of Egypt in the Abraham Cycle," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 56.2 (1994): 419-21. The historical setting of the Hagar account was also discussed in Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis: Volume 1: Genesis 1:1-25:18*, 303-309.

¹⁵⁰ This interpretation is historically somewhat problematic. The same famine that destroyed the Early Bronze culture in Palestine also caused the 1st Intermediate Period in Egypt when Egypt's culture and economy descended into chaos.

adopted the son.¹⁵¹ Cyrus Gordon noted the marriage contract of Gilimninu from Nuzi that required such an arrangement if the wife proved barren. "If Gilimninu (who was the bride) will bear no children, Gilimninu shall take a woman of N. Lullu-land as a wife for Shennima (who was the groom.)" Gordon noted that Lullu-land was the region from which the best slaves could be obtained. Gordon argued that Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham as a wife because this action was normal in her cultural environment. Two generations later, Rachel gave Bilhah to Jacob for about the same reason. Gordon noted that in Genesis 21, Sarah told Abraham to drive Hagar and Ishmael out so that Ishmael would not inherit with Isaac. Gordon argued that Abraham was upset because Sarah was asking for something that her culture would have considered wrong. In this kind of situation, a wife at Nuzi was specifically forbidden to drive away the maid's child. For example, the marriage contract of Gilimninu required in part that if Gilimninu had to give her servant to her husband, she was not allowed to send away the servant's offspring. God intervened in the argument between Abraham and Sarah. God declared that Abraham should send Hagar and Ishmael away even though their culture would have thought it improper.¹⁵²

It is fair to ask why Moses would have stressed so frequently the presence of gentiles in the Patriarchal household. The answer may be that there were also quite a few gentile servants in the wilderness community. Moses may have included this aspect of the Hagar narrative partly because a mixed rabble had left Egypt with Israel. Some members of this mixed rabble were probably Egyptians. There must have been some debate about how these gentiles should be incorporated into the community. Hagar could have provided a pattern for dealing with the gentiles in the wilderness community. Like Hagar, the gentiles could only be allowed in the community so long as they obeyed, respected, and served the Israelites. As long as they submitted to Israel, they could have a place in God's covenant community. When the gentiles rebelled against God and against Israel, they were to be cut off from the nation, just as Hagar was driven from the patriarchal community for arrogance against Sarah. Once removed from the community, the gentiles would lose their share in God's covenant, just as Ishmael's descendants were cut off from the tradition of faith. Just like Hagar, rebellious gentiles in Israel would cut themselves off from the blessings of God's people and God's land.

Exodus 12:38 noted that a mixed rabble of gentiles left Egypt with the Israelites. Numbers 11:4 noted that this mixed gentile rabble went with Israel as they traveled through the wilderness. Exodus 22:21 commanded the Israelites not to oppress or wrong the strangers among them. Leviticus 17:8-13 insisted that Israel's laws were also binding on the aliens among them. Leviticus 22:18 noted that Israel's sacrifices were also intended for the alien among them. Deuteronomy 29:10-13 recorded a covenant renewal ceremony where the aliens among the wilderness community joined all the Israelites entering God's covenant and becoming God's people. So Moses may have been using the gentiles in the patriarchal household as a pattern for the role that gentiles would take in the wilderness community. They were to remain servants, but they were to be treated kindly, and they were to have a full share in the nation's spiritual life. The gentiles at Sinai were a part of the believing community, but what was their part? They were always servants, just like the gentiles in the Patriarch's household.¹⁵³ Deuteronomy 29:11 declared

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M. J. Selman, "Comparative Customs and the Patriarchal Age." 91-139 in A. R. Millard & D. J. Wiseman, eds. *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983). Kitchen pointed to a similar custom in the marriage of Laqipum and Hatala at the Assyrian colony in Kanesh. Hatala was allowed to purchase a slave to raise an heir to her husband if she did not have a child within two years. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 324-28.

¹⁵² Cyrus Gordon, "Biblical Customs and the Nuzi Tablets," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 3.1 (1990): 1-12. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 219-20.

¹⁵³ The apostle Paul contrasted the slavery of believing gentiles in the Old Testament with the new freedom that they found in Christ. Paul used Hagar's story to construct an allegory in Gal. 4:24-5:1. Paul's use of Hagar has often been misunderstood. Too often, authors have argued that Hagar equaled Sinai, and Sinai equaled Israel. So Hagar must represent Israel. That was not Paul's point. Paul was discussing the relationship between gentiles and Israel's law. So he pointed the Galatians back to the relationship of gentiles to Israel's law in the patriarchal age and the exodus. In both settings, they were slaves and bond servants. Why would they want to return to that kind of relationship with the Law? They were free in Christ, and they had the same status before God as the patriarchs. They should not choose to return to the bondage that they would have under the Old Testament law. Then Paul noted in Gal. 4:29-30 that believing gentiles and Jews had already been in conflict in the patriarchal age. That remained true in Paul's day with the huge ongoing conflict between believing gentiles and Jews. Paul claimed that despite all of the opposition that they were currently receiving from the Jews, they did not have to become bond servants again. They were now free in Christ, and they should remain free.

that these gentiles were the ones who chopped their wood and drew their water. This remained true throughout Israel's history. In Joshua 9, the Gibeonites tricked Joshua into forming a peace treaty with them. However, Joshua 9:21 noted that they became hewers of wood and drawers of water for the whole congregation.

There might have been another lesson in the Hagar account as well. In Genesis 21:8-21, Hagar left Sarah for the last time. Hagar wandered in the wilderness until she was on the point of death from thirst. It is quite striking that this occurred in the same area from which Israel had sent out spies to spy out the land. Israel wandered in the wilderness for a generation because they had rebelled against God, just as Hagar had rebelled so many years earlier. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Hagar in the wilderness and showed her a well of the water of life. The wilderness generation could easily have related to this. They knew what it was like to suffer thirst in the wilderness. They also knew how the Angel of the Lord could appear and provide water in a barren waste. They had seen this happen more than once. So the Hagar account could have provided the wilderness generation with a historical perspective.¹⁵⁴ Despite their rebellion and judgment, God would continue to treat them with mercy and grace in a dry land.

3) GENTILES AND THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY

The relationship between Jews and gentiles may also have been addressed in Genesis 23. This passage described Abraham's negotiations with the Hittites for a burial cave for his wife's body. R. K. Harrison discussed Winckler's excavations of Boghazköy which was the Hittite capital in Anatolia. Harrison noted that the Hittite empire centered on Boghazköy. Harrison argued that the Old Hittite empire began after 1850 BC when an invasion of European peoples merged with the local Hittite population in Anatolia. The Old Hittite Empire lasted until 1600 BC when it was weakened by internal conflicts and a renewed Hurrian threat from the east.¹⁵⁵ The Hittites were important in Genesis, but they were the original Hittite inhabitants of Anatolia before the invasion described by Harrison. Manfred Lehmann discussed Abraham's treaty with the Hittites in Genesis 23:1-20. Lehmann noted that this passage has received quite a bit of academic attention. Lehmann noted that the most popular interpretation of this passage has been that Ephron forced Abraham to pay a huge price for the burial cave by pretending to be generous to him. This interpretation suggests that Ephron forced Abraham to pay 400 shekels for the cave because Abraham had little choice but to purchase the cave. Lehmann suggested that this interpretation was incorrect. Lehmann suggested that this passage must be understood against the background of Hittite property laws. Lehmann noted that a law code was found at Boghazköy that was written by the Hittite king Hattusili. The law code contained 209 paragraphs. Paragraphs 46 and 47 of the Hittite law described the requirements of feudal service that resulted from property ownership. These requirements amounted to the payment of an annual tax and perhaps required military service. Lehmann noted that these paragraphs of the law only required feudal service from a new property owner if he had purchased or inherited a whole piece of land. If a person only purchased a small part of a field, he was not responsible for paying taxes or performing feudal obligations. Lehmann noted that Abraham only wanted to purchase a cave on the edge of a field. Abraham did not want to purchase the whole field because doing so would carry heavy consequences. Lehmann suggested that Ephron saw a way to be rid of his own feudal obligations. He forced Abraham to purchase the whole field so that Abraham would have to pay the annual tribute and perform the required feudal obligations. Lehmann suggested that Abraham may have had religious reasons to want to avoid feudal service. The Hittite laws specified religious ceremonies that had to be performed at the transfer of property. Abraham may have wanted to avoid being involved in these idolatrous ceremonies. Lehmann noted that Hittite law was quite different from Babylonian law in these areas. The Babylonians tied feudal obligations to individuals instead of the land. In Babylon, there was no way that an individual could avoid feudal service. The Hittites bound feudal service to the land. So feudal service could be avoided simply by selling the land. Lehmann also noted that the Genesis text stressed that Abraham had to purchase the field with its trees. Lehmann noted that the Hittite texts listed very carefully the exact number of trees on each piece of land. Genesis 23:17 demonstrated that Abraham's

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Lindemuldersuggested thatHagar's final expulsion from Abraham's household prefigured both Moses' flight from Egypt into the wilderness and Israel's later exodus from Egypt. Paul Lindemulder, "Hagar's Wilderness Sojourn," *Kerux* 15 (2000).

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R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969).

legal agreement with Ephron mentioned specifically the number of trees on the property. Lehmann concluded that Genesis 23 was based on very intimate knowledge of Hittite law and Hittite customs as they existed in Abraham's day. He argued that this at least confirmed the authenticity of the background material behind the Genesis text.¹⁵⁶ While this interpretation of the Hittite laws is attractive, its validity has been questioned by a number of authors.¹⁵⁷ The greatest problem with this parallel was that Hattusili III was a contemporary of Ramesses II. That is far too late for the passage to shed light on the Biblical text. For Hattusili III's decrees to shed light on the Patriarchal age, his laws would have to reflect ancient customs. The great chronological gap between these time periods makes any parallel between them at best unlikely. If Lehmann was right, and if Abraham's purchase of the cave involved him in idolatry, this passage may also have provided a warning for the wilderness community that they should not allow gentiles to lead them into sin.

F) YAHWEH'S JUDGMENT ON SODOM AND HUMAN CULTURE OPPOSED TO GOD

1) THE KING COMES IN BLESSING AND JUDGMENT

Israel's Patriarchs stood in the tradition of Yahweh's messengers. They saw God, heard His voice, and declared God's Word to their generations. In Genesis 20:7, God appeared to Abimelech and warned him not to take Sarah as his wife. God also told Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet, and that Abraham would pray for him. Moses recorded a number of people in Genesis who saw God and heard His voice. These appearances of God are called theophanies.¹⁵⁸ The first theophanies appeared as early as Genesis 1:2 when God's Spirit hovered over the surface of the primal sea. Throughout Genesis 1 and 2, God was continually present interacting with His creation. In Genesis 3:8, Adam heard the sound of God walking in the garden. In Genesis 4:15, Cain complained that he would be hidden from God's face and would be a wanderer on the earth. Genesis 5:24 noted that Enoch walked with God. In Genesis 6:13, God spoke with Noah. In the Patriarchal Age, God's presence was known continually.¹⁵⁹ From beginning to end, Genesis was not just the story of human history. It was also the story of God and His messengers.

In this long list of theophanies, Genesis 18:8 holds a unique position. It points up most clearly the radical difference between theophanies in Genesis and theophanies throughout the rest of the Pentateuch. The theophanies in Genesis resembled the kind of theophanies seen in passages like Joshua 5:13-15, Judges 2:1 and Judges 6:11. When God appeared in Genesis, He appeared in a form much like that of a man. In Genesis 18:8 God's form resembled a human form so closely that He actually ate a meal prepared by Abraham. Nothing like this appeared in the Pentateuch after Genesis. In the rest of the Mosaic books, God usually appeared in glory fire.¹⁶⁰ Almost without exception, the theophanies in Genesis

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Manfred R. Lehmann, "Abraham's Purchase of Machpelah and Hittite Law," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 128 (1952): 15-8.

Alan Millard argued that this parallel has more recently been seen as misleading. A. R. Millard, "Abraham," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary 1 A-C*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 38.

Old Testament theophanies have often been interpreted as preincarnate appearances of Jesus Christ. See for example, Charles A. Gieschen, "The Real Presence of the Son Before Christ: Revisiting an Old Approach to Old Testament Christology," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 68:2 (2004): 111-20.

The patriarchal history began in Gen. 12:1 when the Lord appeared to Abraham and called him to travel to a Promised Land. God appeared to Abraham again in Gen. 15:1, 17:1, 18:1, 21:12, 22:2, and 22:15. The Angel of the Lord found Hagar in the wilderness in Gen. 16:7. The Lord appeared to Abimelech in a dream in Gen. 20:3. The Lord spoke to Rebekah in Gen. 25:23. The Lord appeared to Isaac in Gen. 26:2 and 26:24. God appeared to Jacob in Gen. 28:13, 31:11, 32:1, 32:30, 35:1 and 46:2. God appeared to Laban in Gen. 31:24.

The concept of supernatural glory fire has had an interesting history in the academic debate. On the theological left, many have followed von Rad. He claimed that glory theology was characteristic of JE and P. He saw glory theology especially in Psalms and Chronicles. He argued that glory theology was closely associated with the idea that God had a physical form, and that God was often seen in bodily form. Von Rad saw this as rather primitive Judaism. Von Rad argued that this early glory theology was later replaced by name theology in the Deuteronomic tradition. McConville argued against

lacked the glory fire grandeur of theophanies elsewhere in the Pentateuch. This leads to the obvious question of why this should be true.¹⁶¹ Part of the answer may be that the Genesis theophanies were intended to reassure the wilderness generation. In Egypt, almost no theophanies had been seen. Ezekiel 20 is the only evidence for a theophany during Israel's Egyptian sojourn. The wilderness community may have learned from Genesis that theophanies were to be expected. The Patriarchs had known such divine visits as well and had not been destroyed by the experience. It is also true that the pillar of cloud and fire would not last much longer. The pillar of cloud and fire would leave Israel as they entered the land. The character of Genesis theophanies may have assured Israel that God would still interact with His people through theophanic visions even after the pillar of fire disappeared.

This does not explain why Christ would actually eat a meal prepared by Abraham in Genesis 18:8.¹⁶² The answer might come from the context of this passage. The whole point of the event may have been the contrast between the angels' reception by Abraham, and the angels' reception at Sodom. When the heavenly visitors arrived at Abraham's dwelling, he immediately showed proper hospitality for them. He invited them into his tent, washed their feet, and presented them with a feast. This is exactly what he was expected to do for strangers in his culture. Regardless of the visitors' identity, this was the correct way to treat strangers in Abraham's culture.¹⁶³ In the next chapter, the angelic visitors would receive a very different welcome in Sodom.

Victor Matthews offered an interesting insight into the events in Sodom.¹⁶⁴ Matthews noted that only Lot offered the angelic visitors shelter, a chance to wash their feet, and a feast. Lot treated them correctly in his culture. However, Lot had no right to do this in Sodom. Matthews argued that Lot was acting as a representative of Sodom by offering hospitality to the visitors. This enraged the inhabitants of Sodom. They saw Lot's actions both as condemning them and as assuming a position of power in the city that he did not really have.¹⁶⁵ They attacked Lot, his family, and his visitors. This proved their wickedness to everyone who would hear of the event.

Both Abraham and Lot proved their righteousness by their proper treatment of strangers. The inhabitants of Sodom proved that they deserved judgment by their failure to offer hospitality and by their violence. In this context, the Lord said to the other angelic visitors that Abraham had been chosen to command his household after him to act in a righteous way. Only by doing so would God bring on Abraham and his descendants the covenant promises made to them. The wilderness community stood in a similar position. They had seen Egypt destroyed in God's judgment for failing to offer Israel proper hospitality. After forty years in the wilderness, they were about to see God's judgment fall on all of Palestine not just the cities of the plain. Seeing God's judgment on the gentile nations, Moses may have been reminding Israel that God had called them to righteousness as Abraham's descendants. Only by living in a righteous way could God bring on them the promises that He had made to Abraham.

2) THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

¹⁶¹this model in J. Gordon McConville, "God's 'Name' and God's 'Glory,'" *Tyndale Bulletin* 30 (1979): 149-63.

¹⁶²The only glory theophany in Genesis was Gen. 15:7-17.

It is very unusual for a theophany to eat a meal. One of the most difficult questions in Old Testament studies is the nature of the divine body seen in theophanies. Should a "Neo-Platonic" definition of "spirit" be assumed or a more traditional Semitic view of "spirit"? See the discussion in Carl W. Griffin and David L. Paulsen, "Augustine and the Corporeality of God," *Harvard Theological Review* 95 (2002): 97-118.

¹⁶³This requirement of hospitality has been retained in some parts of the Near East down to the present day. The Minneapolis Star Tribune for 7/12/05 contained an article titled, "Four escape U.S. jail in Afghanistan." The article noted in part that a navy SEAL had been wounded in a fire fight in Afghanistan. The other members of his team were killed in the fight. An Afghan shepherd found the SEAL and brought him home to heal his wounds. When the Afghan insurgents learned of the SEAL's presence, they demanded that the shepherd turn him over to them. The whole village refused because turning over a guest would have violated their tribal code of honor. So 4,000 years after Abraham, the protection of strangers has remained a cultural ethic in Afghanistan. For NT parallels, it may be worth considering if Luke implied God's judgment by recording a lack of hospitality in Lk. 2:7 and 10:8-14.

¹⁶⁴Victor H. Matthews, "Hospitality and Hostility in Genesis 19 and Judges 19," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 22.1 (1992): 3-11.

¹⁶⁵Gen. 19:8.

Genesis 19:1-26 recorded God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. Walter Rast expressed substantial skepticism about the historical accuracy of this part of the Genesis account. He traced the main approaches that have been taken to explain the text. Rast noted that some authors have argued that the archaeological evidence for Sodom may have been buried, or it may have been covered with the waters of the Dead Sea. Rast noted that an exploration of the Dead Sea bottom in 1962 did not find any archaeological evidence for Sodom or the cities of the plain. Rast noted that some have seen Sodom as falling victim to an earthquake. Rast argued that there is no evidence for an earthquake at any time that Sodom could have been occupied.¹⁶⁶ Others have suggested that the cities of the plain were destroyed so completely that no evidence for them could be found. Rast found this explanation speculative and unsatisfactory. He noted that proposed sites for Sodom have been suggested from one end of the Dead Sea valley to the other and as far away at Arabia. None could be proven true. Rast suggested that the story of Sodom's destruction may have had its origin in the military destruction Bâb edh-Dhrâ which was burned during the Early Bronze Age.

Rast made another suggestion that was quite interesting. He noted that fire and brimstone "fell" on Sodom.¹⁶⁷ The Hebrew word for "fall" was *haphak*. This was a common word with the general meaning of "overthrow." Rast noted that this word appeared in the curse formulas of international treaties. This word was used along with fire and brimstone to describe the destruction of cities that rebelled against the high king. Rast gave as an example of this the use of *haphak* in the Assyrian treaties at Sefire.¹⁶⁸ While Rast would not apply the evidence this way, it may be possible to understand his point in an evangelical context. Perhaps Moses was using the treaty curse concepts seen in Deuteronomy 28-29. In doing so, perhaps he was stressing that Sodom's destruction was a divine judgment for the violation of the Noahic covenant. Moses may have been claiming that the Sodomites were covenant violators, as all men were.

Not all authors have been as skeptical about the Genesis account. William F. Albright studied the region around Bâb edh-Dhrâ east of the Dead Sea shore. The artifacts from Bâb edh-Dhrâ included stone monoliths, or sacred pillars, that were used in idolatrous worship. These stone monoliths were made from a kind of rock that did not exist in the Dead Sea basin, so they were brought into the region from somewhere else. Albright concluded from the archaeology of Bâb edh-Dhrâ that the account in Genesis was essentially accurate. Albright argued that the lower Jordan valley had been very prosperous and densely populated in Abraham's time. He noted that Genesis 13:10 described the Jordan valley as being well watered like the Garden of Eden. Albright and Nelson Glueck both found fertile fields and orchards in the southeast corner of the Dead Sea basin. They noted that this land would be even more fertile if it was irrigated, as it once had been. Between 500 and 1,000 years ago, the rulers of Palestine insisted that the irrigation system be kept in good repair. During these centuries, the south end of the Dead Sea basin had been filled with plantations of sugar and indigo. This irrigation system had drawn water from five streams that flowed down into the valley. Albright noted that even in his day, these five streams still formed oases in the valley. Albright claimed that the southern end of the Dead Sea basin would have been rich and

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Walter E. Rast, "Bâb Edh-Dhrâ and the Origin of the Sodom Saga," 185-201 in Leo G. Perdue, ed. *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation*, (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987). Rast was probably correct on this point. Ambraseys traced the geological faults that ran through Anatolia, Palestine, the Red Sea, and Egypt. Ambraseys noted that there has not been a major earthquake in the Dead Sea basin since 31 BC. However, Ambraseys noted that there was strong evidence for two great earthquakes at an earlier time. These earthquakes caused destructive seismic sea waves on the Dead Sea, and evidence for these waves can still be found. Ambraseys did not suggest dates when these earthquakes might have occurred. N. N. Ambraseys, "Studies in Historical Seismicity and Tectonics," 185-212 in William C. Brice, ed. *The Environmental History of the Near and Middle East Since the Last Ice Age*, (London: Academic Press, 1978). Neev and Emery suggested that severe earthquakes struck the region around 2400 BC and 2150 BC. They suggested that Numeira was abandoned after the 2nd earthquake, and Bâb edh-Dhrâ was reduced to a semi-nomadic population. Neev and Emery, *The Destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Jericho*, 73. The Dead Sea basin may still have been geologically active a century later when Sodom fell.

¹⁶⁷ It is hard to know if Moses intended this claim to be taken literally or if he was using ancient Near Eastern imagery to describe the destruction of the city. A parallel to Sodom's destruction could be seen in a hymn to the goddess Inana. This hymn was written by Sargon the Great's daughter Enheduana around 2300 BC. The hymn claimed that Inana rained down blazing fire upon the land. This claim came in the context of destruction by a storm and flood. The hymn called Inana the destroyer of foreign lands. Black, et al, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, 316.

¹⁶⁸ Rast, "Bâb Edh-Dhrâ and the Origin of the Sodom Saga," 185-201.

fertile in the centuries immediately before 2000 BC. However, Albright claimed that no physical evidence has survived for human occupation of the region between 1900 BC and New Testament times.¹⁶⁹

Albright did not identify Bâb edh-Dhrâ with Sodom. He suggested that it might have been the town named Zoar in Genesis 19:30. However, several recent authors have argued for an identification of Bâb edh-Dhrâ with Sodom. For example, Neev and Emery suggested that Bâb edh-Dhrâ and its sister city Numeira were indeed Sodom and Gomorrah. They argued that Bâb edh-Dhrâ and Numeira had an "urban" period from roughly 2885 BC to 2335 BC. They suggested that this "urban" period was followed by a "post-urban" period from roughly 2335 BC to 2185 BC. They suggested that the site was only occupied by a semi-nomadic population after this time.¹⁷⁰

J. Penrose Harland discussed Sodom and Gomorrah from the context of ancient historical records. Harland noted first that Genesis 13 located Sodom east of Bethel, and associated it with the plain of the Jordan River. Genesis 14 then claimed that Chedorlaomer's invasion followed a chain of settlements across Transjordan. Harland noted that Albright and Glueck had found a chain of settlements along the path Genesis claimed that Chedorlaomer had used. Harland dated Chedorlaomer's war at some point before 1800 BC, and he suggests that it may have occurred as early as 2000 BC.¹⁷¹

Harland noted that Abraham fought Chedorlaomer in a region that had tar pits. Genesis 14:10 described these tar pits.¹⁷² Harland noted that tar was found in the Dead Sea valley in antiquity as it is today. Harland noted that this tar was described by a 1st century BC Greek historian named Diodoros of Sicily. Diodoros described large amounts of asphalt that spouted up from the Dead Sea and floated on the water's surface. Harland also noted that this tar was described by the Greek geographer Strabo. He lived between 63 BC and 19 AD. Strabo discussed the Dead Sea bitumen at length. He described pitch, hot waters, sulfur, and bitumen that were found in abundance around the Dead Sea. Strabo claimed that the Dead Sea basin had once been occupied by thirteen cities that centered around the metropolis of Sodom. Harland noted that the Roman historian Tacitus also described the Dead Sea. Tacitus lived from 50 AD to 117 AD. Tacitus noted that people who lived near the Dead Sea collected bitumen from the surface of the water.

Harland referred to the Jewish historian Josephus who was born in 37 AD. Josephus mentioned Sodom in two of his books, *The Jewish War*, and *The Antiquities of the Jewish People*. Josephus described the Dead Sea with the name Lake Asphaltitis because of the asphalt that rose to the surface of the sea. Josephus compared the shape of these floating bitumen lumps to headless bulls.¹⁷³ Josephus located the city of Sodom at the southern end of the Dead Sea.¹⁷⁴ Harland noted that Josephus placed Abraham's battle of Genesis 14:10 in the valley of asphalt wells. Josephus claimed that after Sodom was destroyed, the valley of asphalt wells became covered with water producing Lake Asphaltitis. This was Josephus' name for the Dead Sea.

Harland asked how the valley of Sodom and Gomorrah could have been submerged beneath the waters of the Dead Sea. He noted that the south end of the Dead Sea is very shallow. The north end of the Dead Sea is over 1,100 feet deep in its deepest spots. However, the south end is completely different. In 1848, the deepest part of the south end of the Dead Sea was between seven feet and thirteen feet deep. The sea became progressively shallower as the southern shore was approached. When Lynch sailed to the south end of the Dead Sea in 1848, his men had to wade ashore the last 300 yards because the water was too shallow for his boat to proceed.

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Barker argued that Albright's evidence demonstrated that the region had a large population before God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. Albright argued that the region was not destroyed by a violent catastrophe at all. The population slowly declined instead. Of course, Albright identified Bâb edh-Dhrâ with Zoar, with mayvery well have had a gradual decline in its population. Barker, "The Antiquity and Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives," 131-40.

¹⁷⁰ Neev and Emery, *The Destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Jericho*, 73.

¹⁷¹ J. Penrose Harland, "Sodom and Gomorrah," 41-75 in G. Ernest Wright and David Noel Freedman, eds. *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), 41-5.

¹⁷² The word translated as "tar" in Gen. 14:10 also was used in Gen. 11:4 to describe the tarmortar used to build the Tower of Babel.

¹⁷³ While rare today, as recently as 1969, a lump of tar weighing over a ton popped to the surface of the Dead Sea, and methane bubbles still appear in some areas.

¹⁷⁴ Harland, "Sodom and Gomorrah," 41-75.

Harland noted that the Dead Sea water level changes frequently. He suggested several lines of evidence for this. He noted that three islands were located at the mouth of the Jordan River. In 1848, these islands were eight feet above the sea surface. In 1892, the same islands were still visible, though the top of each was close to the water level. In 1924, these islands were covered by several feet of water. Harland noted that this demonstrated a rise in the Dead Sea water level. Along the same line, DeSaulcy noted that the distance between Jebel Usdum and the Dead Sea shore varied between 260 feet and 750 feet as the water level rose and fell. Similarly in 1948, Lynch noted that there was a large grove of tamarisk trees at the southern end of the Dead Sea. The trunks of these trees were up to a foot thick. However, when he saw them, the trees were dead and bleached white. The Dead Sea water level had risen far enough to fill the forest land completely with salt water. It became a vast ghost forest of dead, barren, white, salt covered trees. Albright claimed to have seen many square miles of such dead trees. Harland added that an old Roman road had once crossed the Lisan peninsula that stretched out between the north and south ends of the Dead Sea. The Roman road forded the water at this point, and continued on the eastern shore. After that, the water level rose high enough to make such a crossing impossible. However, an Arab tradition still remains that such a ford existed at this place. Harland noted that in 1924, the southern end of the Dead Sea had become about one third larger than it had been a century earlier.¹⁷⁵

Harland would seem to be on the right track here. In recent years, a great deal of research has been done on the rate at which the Dead Sea water level has risen and fallen since the end of the last Ice Age. At times the Dead Sea water level has either risen or fallen by hundreds of feet, although such huge changes in water level took centuries to accomplish. Abraham had entered Palestine after a severe drought that had lasted for over three centuries. Neev and Emery noted that fossil shorelines on the Dead Sea coast demonstrate a fall in sea level of 16.7 meters during the EB IV/MB I drought. That would have been more than enough of a sea level all to turn the southern end of the sea below the El-Lisan Peninsula into dry ground.¹⁷⁶ The Dead Sea is famous for its undersea petroleum vents. These vents released the tar that was collected by inhabitants of the region for thousands of years. Many of the regions petroleum deposits are located in the southwest end of the valley. When the region south of the El-Lisan Peninsula was dry, these tar vents would have been on dry ground. Since the tar could no longer float to the sea surface, it would have collected in pools at ground level. These would have been the tar pits encountered by Chedorlaomer's army. Today, so much Jordan River water is diverted for agriculture that the sea south of the El-Lisan Peninsula has once more almost completely disappeared.

Harland went on to discuss how the cities of the plain were destroyed. Genesis 19:24-29 claimed that Sodom and the cities of the plain were destroyed by fire and brimstone that rained down on them from the sky.¹⁷⁷ Harland argued that this was no ordinary catastrophe. It was so unusual that its memory was passed down in the ancient Near East for many centuries. Harland argued that there were two key elements to Moses' description of this destruction. The first was that fire and brimstone fell on the cities. "Brimstone" was burning sulfur, and a great deal of sulfur can be found in the Dead Sea valley. The second element of the account was that Abraham could see smoke from the valley rising to heaven like the smoke of a great furnace. Harland noted that Strabo described the bitumen that rose to the surface of the Dead Sea at irregular intervals. Strabo noted that before the bitumen rose to the surface, vapor would bubble up and make the water's surface boil. Soot would rise with this vapor, and the soot could be seen rising in the air from a great distance. Strabo noted that there was much heat beneath the bottom of the sea. Strabo knew this because the bitumen would be extremely hot and thin as it reached the sea surface. It only formed thick clumps as it cooled.¹⁷⁸ Strabo argued that there were many kinds of evidence for the fiery character of the Dead Sea region. The rugged rocks near Masada had a scorched appearance, and

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Harland, "Sodom and Gomorrah," 54-7.

¹⁷⁶ Neev and Emery suggested that the Dead Sea water level fell by 16.7 meters during these years. Neev and Emery, *The Destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Jericho*, 39, 51.

¹⁷⁷ Writing from a critical perspective, W. W. Fields discussed the use of fire imagery in judgment in the Old Testament. Fields noted that fire was used in judgment in Ex. 9:23-24; Lev. 10:1; Num. 3:4; 16:35; 26:61 and 2 Kgs. 1:10-14. Fields suggested that allusions to the destruction of Sodom might appear in Ex. 9:18-24; 20:18, and Deut. 5:22-23. Weston W. Fields, *Sodom and Gomorrah: History and Motif in Biblical Narrative*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 134-38.

¹⁷⁸ Lumps of tar weighing up to a ton still rise to the surface of the Dead Sea occasionally today. So Strabo's claims can be verified by modern observations.

contained many fissures. Soil around the Dead Sea contained a lot of ash, and drops of pitch dripped from the smooth cliffs in the region. Strabo argued that rivers flowing into the Dead Sea boiled and emitted a foul smell that could be detected a great distance away. Strabo noted that in his day, ruined settlements could still be seen in the valley. Strabo argued that these were the remains of thirteen villages and cities that had once inhabited the plain. Strabo noted the local claim that these villages had been destroyed by a great earthquake, by eruptions of fire, and by hot water that contained asphalt and sulfur. As this happened, the Dead Sea burst its bounds. Rocks were enveloped with fire. Some of the cities were swallowed up by the sea. Others were abandoned by those who were able to escape. Harland noted that Strabo's account sounds like it was based on local traditions and eye witness reports.¹⁷⁹

Harland also noted a claim written by Diodoros. He described the Dead Sea water as evil smelling and bitter. Diodoros claimed that those who lived near the sea were warned when bitumen was about to rise to the surface of the sea. Before it rose, a bitter smell spread across the region that could be detected miles away. This vapor tarnished gold, silver, and bronze. This bitter vapor dispersed after the bitumen had risen to the surface. Diodoros noted that the inhabitants of the Dead Sea valley did not live very long and were susceptible to many different diseases. Harland used these ancient comments to explain how Sodom was destroyed. Harland suggested that there was a great earthquake which brought ruin and conflagration. He suggested that the fire may have been caused by igniting methane that bubbled up from the tar pits because of the earthquake.¹⁸⁰ Harland supported this interpretation by noting an article by Frederick Clapp.¹⁸¹ Clapp had argued that a large amount of bitumen, petroleum, and natural gas could have been released by an earthquake. The natural gas could have been ignited, and could have burned the cities of the plain.¹⁸²

Harland also discussed Genesis 19:26. This verse claimed that Lot's wife looked back at the city and became a pillar of salt. Harland noted that the region always contained salt pillars that were associated with Lot's wife in local tradition. One of these salt pillars was a large mass of salt called Jebel Usdum which is Arabic for "the Mountain of Sodom." Jebel Usdum is a mountain 742 feet high. It has a salt layer 100 feet thick that is capped by limestone. Lynch's expedition in 1848 mentioned a large pillar of salt on the east face of Jebel Usdum. It stood at the head of a deep and narrow chasm.¹⁸³ All associations of salt pillars with Lot's wife are highly speculative and unlikely.

The academic debate can be summarized by saying that the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah can not be proven to have occurred. However, the archaeological, geological, and historical evidence is certainly consistent with the accuracy of the account. It is completely credible to believe that the Genesis account is correct as written. It is interesting that Genesis 19:24 described Sodom's destruction as God raining fire and brimstone from heaven on the cities of the plain. This was an interesting way to describe what was probably a natural event. Methane, sulfur and bitumen continued to bubble up through the Dead Sea waters all the way down to Roman times.¹⁸⁴

In Genesis 19:1-26, Moses recorded God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah. It is fair to ask why Moses might have described the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in these terms. The wilderness community was quite familiar with the idea that supernatural fire executed God's judgment. Deuteronomy 4 and 5 described in detail how heavenly fire appeared on the top of Sinai as God descended onto the mountain. Deuteronomy 5:24-26 recorded how the Israelites begged Moses to speak instead of God. The Israelites realized that the heavenly fire on Sinai would destroy them for their sins if God continued to

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Harland, "Sodom and Gomorrah," 62-3.

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Harland, "Sodom and Gomorrah," 46-7. Gas pockets still exist within the sediment layers near the Dead Sea.

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Frederick G. Clapp, "The Site of Sodom and Gomorrah," *American Journal of Archaeology*, (1936): 323-44.

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As late as 1957, a water well being dug at Amazyahu near Jebel Usdum produced a natural gas blow instead of water. Neev and Emery, *The Destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and Jericho*, 3. The African crustal plate does not form a subduction zone as it hits the Asian crustal plate in Palestine. Instead, the plates bounce back and forth against each other forming the Dead Sea valley. As the plates slip past each other, a series of rock columns are formed beneath the surface that act as rollers. Hot spots form rather easily in this complex geology as the rock columns move in relation to each other.

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Harland, "Sodom and Gomorrah," 47-58.

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David M. Howard Jr. "Sodom and Gomorrah Revisited," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (1984): 385-400.

speak to them any longer.¹⁸⁵ The Israelites' fear of death was quite justified. In Leviticus 9:24, fire came out from the Lord's presence and consumed Israel's burnt offering. In Leviticus 10:1-3, the same spiritual fire came out from the Lord's presence and consumed Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu. In Numbers 16:35-38, the same fire from God's presence consumed 250 men. So Moses described Sodom's destruction in terms that the wilderness generation could easily have understood. Moses described Sodom's fall in terms of fire and brimstone raining from God's presence in heaven on to the cities of the plain.

It is also striking that the Sodom account ended with an explanation for the origin of the Moabites and Ammonites. The Israelites were about to move into the territory of these nations. The Moabites and Ammonites were closely related to Israel. The Israelites could easily have been tempted to form alliances with them. Israelites would also be tempted to leave the Promised Land, and to move into Moabite territory, as Naomi and her family would later do. Moses warned Israel that these nations had their origin in Lot's sin, and that they would be characterized by unbelief. Deuteronomy 2:9-19 commanded the Israelites to respect the boundaries of these nations. Yet no Moabite to the tenth generation could enter the congregation of Israel.¹⁸⁶

G) JACOB

1) JACOB AND THE EGYPTIAN 12TH DYNASTY

Eugene Merrill argued that Jacob was born in 2006 BC.¹⁸⁷ If Merrill's date is even approximately correct, Jacob was born near the beginning of the Egyptian 12th Dynasty which began around 2000 BC. The Middle Kingdom brought both political and economic stability to Egypt. The Middle Kingdom was never able to regain the glory of the Old Kingdom. Middle Kingdom rulers constructed complex pyramids that rivaled in size the Old Kingdom pyramids. However, the Middle Kingdom pyramids were made out of mud brick with a stone facing. Once the stone facing was lost, the mud bricks eroded catastrophically, and the pyramids are largely ignored today. Middle Kingdom Pharaohs were forced to fortify Egypt's northeast border to prevent Asiatic aggression against Egypt's frontier. Middle Kingdom rulers built a string of fortresses across the Isthmus of Suez, and they even dug a defensive canal in the northeast that rivaled the original size of the Suez Canal.¹⁸⁸

While the Egyptians were fortifying their northeast border, they were also expanding greatly their trade relations with northern cities like Ugarit and Byblos. Many Egyptian artifacts have been found in Syria and Palestine from the Middle Kingdom. While the Egyptian Middle Kingdom generally excluded peoples from Syria and Palestine, they always welcomed traders. During these years, a fortified Canaanite base was built with Egyptian permission at Tell el-Daba in the northeast delta. Tell el-Daba was the southern anchor of the sea trade route from Byblos in Syria. Almost all sea trade between Egypt and Byblos was conducted by Canaanite sailors. Tell el-Daba was their main settlement in Egypt, although Canaanite traders and sailors were also present in other Egyptian cities as well. Tell el-Daba eventually would become the capital of Egypt's Hyksos rulers. The Canaanite sailors were not the only traders in Egypt during the Middle Kingdom. Caravans continually rolled into Egypt along the trade routes that passed through Palestine. These caravan traders were welcomed into Egypt as long as they did not plan to settle in the land.

All of this suggests that Egypt was strongly on the rise throughout Israel's Patriarchal Age. By the beginning of the Egyptian 12th Dynasty, Egypt's Pharaohs had even moved their residence to It Tawy where the Nile River opened out into the Nile delta. By living in the delta, the Pharaoh's were in a better position to regain control of the local rulers of delta "nomes," or city states. This movement north to the delta also made it possible for the Patriarchs to encounter Egypt's rulers.

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¹⁸⁶ In Deut. 5:28, God declared that this fear was justified.

¹⁸⁷ The book of Ruth was an exception to this rule. Ruth entered the congregation directly because of her commitment to God. Since Ruth was the direct ancestor of David, it is fair to wonder if the book of Ruth may have been written to justify David's reign, or at least to justify the presence of gentiles in his court.

¹⁸⁸ Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," 242.

This should not be surprising. Since earth moving machines could not shift the thick clay north of Suez, the Suez Canal was dug with pick axes and baskets just like Egypt's ancient canals. So it was the same size when it was first opened. Later with water soaking into the clay, dredges were able to increase greatly the size of the canal.

Egypt's 12th Dynasty rulers were among the strongest rulers that Egypt ever knew. During Jacob's life, Sesostri III rose to the Egyptian throne. Sesostri III was one of the strongest rulers ever to sit on Egypt's throne. Sesostri III was such a strong ruler that his name became legendary throughout Egypt's history. Sesostri III invaded Palestine and campaigned north as far as Shechem. He carried many captives down to Egypt, along with a great deal of plunder. The Egyptians also launched an economic invasion of Palestine. William Ward described the evidence for this in an article titled "Egypt and the East Mediterranean in the Early 2nd Millennium BC."¹⁸⁹ Ward noted that a wide variety of Egyptian Middle Kingdom objects have been found in Palestine. Ward noted that there was no evidence that Egypt controlled Palestine during the Middle Kingdom either militarily or politically. Instead, a wide variety of Egyptian citizens traveled up into Palestine to make their fortunes. These Egyptians brought along the Egyptian artifacts that archaeologists have found.

During the Middle Kingdom, the Egyptians eventually did begin to allow a limited number of Asiatics to enter Egypt peacefully to work as servants in temple estates and individual households. Ann Rosalie David argued for the presence of Asiatics at Kahun. She noted evidence for household servants, for Asiatic dancers in the temple celebrations of Sesostri II, and of Asiatic porters in the temple.¹⁹⁰ A. R. David noted that Asiatics from Syria and Palestine held a variety of positions in public institutions and private homes, and some of these were fairly responsible positions. Goedicke noted that the earliest representations of Canaanites in Egyptian paintings came from the reign of Sesostri II.¹⁹¹ It is not clear why these Asiatics came to Egypt. Some may have come as captives from military raids. Many probably were allowed to enter Egypt in order to provide cheap labor.¹⁹²

Harold Liebowitz added that many objects were made in Palestine at this time that were made in an Egyptian style. Some of these objects merged Canaanite and Egyptian religious motifs. Liebowitz argued that these objects showed how Egypt's religion temporarily influenced Canaanite religion during the Middle Kingdom.¹⁹³ Egyptian objects found in Palestine from the Patriarchal Age included a statue of the wife of Pharaoh Sesostri III, a sphinx of Pharaoh Amenemhet III, and a sculptured group that depicted vizier Sesostri-Onekh.¹⁹⁴ After the death of Sesostri III, the 12th Dynasty slowly weakened. People from Palestine were once more being allowed to settle in Egypt during the great drought but only under close governmental control.

2) ESAU AND THE EDMITES

The next passage to be discussed will be Genesis 25:21-23. In this passage, Rebekah gave birth to twin sons. Rebekah was told that the two sons would become two nations, and the descendants of the older son would serve the descendants of the younger. Esau's descendants became an important part of the Edomite population.¹⁹⁵ When the Israelites were in the wilderness, they spent most years living not far

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¹⁹⁰ William A. Ward, "Egypt and the East Mediterranean in the Early 2nd Millennium BC," *Orientalia* 30 (1961): 22-45.

¹⁹¹ Ann Rosalie David, *The Pyramid Builders of Ancient Egypt: A Modern Investigation of Pharaoh's Workforce*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 190.

¹⁹² Goedicke, "Abi-Sha(i)'s Representation in Beni-Hasan," 203.

¹⁹³ The Middle Kingdom toleration of Asiatics conflicted with Egypt's struggle to keep Bedouin out of Egyptian territory, but the Egyptians did not view all Asiatics in the same way. Settled and urban Canaanites were acceptable while unsettled nomadic Asiatics were a constant threat. See Manfred Bietak, "Canaanites in the Eastern Nile Delta," 41-55 in Anson F. Rainey, ed. *Egypt, Israel, Sinai: Archaeological and Historical Relationships in the Biblical Period*, (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1987), 52. MacDonald, "Egyptian Interests in Western Asia to the End of the Middle Kingdom," 85-9. Albright described collections of pottery from the 20th and 19th centuries BC along the Negev trade routes. He noted that each site where Abraham camped was a stop along the trade route. He argued that Abraham ran a donkey caravan trade between Egypt and the north. Albright, *Archaeology, Historical Analogy, & Early Biblical Tradition*, 22-41.

¹⁹⁴ Harold Liebowitz, "The Impact of the Art of Egypt on the Art of Syria and Palestine," in Denise Schmandt-Besserat, ed. *Immortal Egypt*, (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1978), 28.

¹⁹⁵ George Steindorff and Keith Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 22.

The Edomites were a composite people. Some Edomites were descended from Esau and some were not. Gen. 14:6 described Horites in Mt. Seir in Abraham's time. Gen. 36:20 listed Horites who also reigned in Edom.

south of Edom's borders. Genesis 36:8 noted that Esau's descendants had lived in the hill country of Seir. According to Deuteronomy 2:1, the Israelites in the wilderness had circled Mt. Seir for many days. Genesis 36:24 noted that the inhabitants of Mt. Seir had discovered the hot springs in the wilderness. It is possible that the Israelites could have seen and used these springs. So the wilderness generation would have been quite familiar with the Edomites. When Israel entered Palestine, they were forced to travel around Edom's borders. In Numbers 20:14, Moses sent a messenger to the king of Edom. Through this messenger, Moses called Edom the brother of Israel, and Moses asked permission to pass Edom's territory. If Moses called the Edomites Israel's brothers, it is striking that no Edomite could become an Israelite to the third generation. The Edomites would always be Israel's neighbor both during the wilderness sojourn and after Israel entered the land.

Since the Edomites were such a visible presence in the region, the wilderness generation needed to learn the nature of Israel's relationship with them. So Moses spent a lot of time in Genesis tracing out the relationship between Jacob and Esau. This history began in Genesis 25. The wilderness generation learned from Genesis 25 that Israel had gained the birthright over the Edomites through the patriarchs. So the Israelites should properly exercise some measure of authority over the Edomites. Down through Israel's history, a power struggle between Judah and Edom did in fact exist. When Judah was strong, Judah dominated Edom. When Judah was weak, the Edomites raided Judah's territory, seized Judah's possessions, and sold Judah's people into slavery. The Edomites became the great slave traders of the ancient East.

In Genesis 25:33, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob. This passage was discussed by E. W. Davies. He noted that this passage was interesting in the light of Deuteronomy 21:15-17. Deuteronomy required that a first-born son be given an increased portion of the inheritance. Deuteronomy specifically denied fathers the ability to give the firstborn's right to a younger son who was preferred. According to Israel's law, Isaac would not have been able to give Esau's birthright to Jacob even though Isaac knew that Jacob was supposed to be the son of the covenant. Davies noted that the normal practice in Genesis and Deuteronomy differed from the requirements of the Code of Hammurabi in Mesopotamia. The Code of Hammurabi required that all sons inherit equally. However, Davies noted that the first-born's right was not an unknown custom in other texts from Mesopotamia, Mari and Nuzi.¹⁹⁶ Gleason Archer discussed the Nuzi texts. He noted that at Nuzi it was possible to sell one's birthright just as Esau had done in Genesis 25:33. In one case, the Nuzi texts record that an older brother received three sheep for selling his birthright to a younger brother.¹⁹⁷

Genesis 26 recorded a new famine that struck Palestine during Isaac's life. Genesis 26:1 recorded that Isaac found refuge with Abimelech in Gerar during the famine. Isaac's servants dug wells. They used the ground water of Gerar to grow crops and support these flocks. The men of Gerar resisted Isaac's use of their groundwater during a drought. The men of Gerar filled Isaac's wells with dirt and drove Isaac's household from the region. It is difficult to date this famine. It seems to have occurred somewhere between Jacob's birth in Genesis 25 and Jacob's theft of Esau's blessing in Genesis 27. Merrill dated Jacob's birth at 2006 BC.¹⁹⁸ If that date was approximately right, Isaac's famine might have been mentioned in an Egyptian text. Barbara Bell noted that unusually low Nile floods brought economic distress to Egypt for a few years during the reign of Pharaoh Sesostri I. This was only a limited famine because the wealth of "nomarch" tombs testified to the prosperity of the age. Bell noted that Ameny's tomb text recorded this brief famine. Ameny was the "nomarch," or local ruler, over the Beni-Hasan "nome."¹⁹⁹ Ameny claimed,

When years of famine came, I plowed all the fields of the Oryz Nome, as far as its southern and northern boundaries, preserving its people alive, and furnishing its food so that there was none hungry

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Eryl W. Davies, "The Inheritance of the First-Born in Israel and Ancient Near East," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 38 (1993): 175-91.

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Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, 160.

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Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," 242.

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A "nome" was an Egyptian administrative district.

therein. ... Then came great Niles, producers of grain and of all things, (but) I did not collect the arrears of the field (taxes)²⁰⁰

This famine may have struck Egypt anywhere between 1771 and 1911 BC depending on how the chronology of the Egyptian Middle Kingdom is understood.

H) **REBELLION WITHIN THE PATRIARCHAL HOUSEHOLD**

1) IDOLS IN THE FAMILY

Kenneth Barker discussed Genesis 31:34. This passage noted that Rachel had stolen Laban's household idols. Barker noted that the Nuzi texts have often been applied to suggest that Rachel stole these idols for a purpose. Rachel was thought to have stolen these idols to establish Jacob's leadership in the family.²⁰¹ The assumption has been that the person who held the household idols also held leadership in the family. Barker argued that this is an incorrect application of the texts from Nuzi. Barker argued that Rachel believed these idols would bless and protect her.²⁰² It is a little hard to understand why Moses would have included this account in Genesis. Perhaps the presence of idols in the wilderness community stood in the background. Even Rachel had fallen into the sin of hiding idols in her tent.²⁰³ Yet Rachel's act was clearly identified with shame and uncleanness. In the same way, those who hid idols in their tents in the wilderness were doing something unclean and improper.

Genesis 35:1 noted that Abraham set out for Bethel. This site was excavated by James Kelso. He noted that the earliest extended occupation of Bethel had occurred during the Late Chalcolithic Age around 3200 BC. Kelso noted that a Canaanite high place was found on the mountain top near Bethel. The earliest object found at the site was a jar that was made around 3500 BC. Kelso noted that Bethel would become a very important town in the Middle Bronze Age IIB period. However, in Abraham's day, it was a small, unfortified settlement.²⁰⁴

Genesis 35:1-4 noted that Jacob required everyone in his household to purify themselves as they traveled to Bethel, the house of God. Part of this purification involved the burial of their idols beneath a tree. Why would Jacob require that his servants' idols be buried? The probable answer was proposed by Yosef Garfinkel in an article titled "Ritual Burial of Cultic Objects: The Earliest Evidence."²⁰⁵ Garfinkel discussed a religious practice that had its roots in the Neolithic Age. Garfinkel discussed the burial of religious objects. He noted that Near Eastern archaeologists have found quite a few pits full of statues, figurines and votive objects. Many of these pits were associated with temples of some kind. Archaeologists called these pits full of ritual objects by the name "bothros." Garfinkel described eight bothros that were dug over a wide time period. He suggested that ritual objects were normally buried in pits when they were worn out and could no longer be used.

Seen in this context, Jacob did not bury ritual objects so that they could be recovered later. He buried them to dispose of them forever. As Jacob's household traveled to Bethel, "the house of God," they had to

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²⁰¹ Bell, "Climate and the History of Egypt: The Middle Kingdom," 225.

²⁰² Selman noted that the text Gadd 51 might make a connection between the inheritance of the household idols by a real son in preference to the inheritance rights of an adopted son. Selman noted that 11 references to household idols have been found at Nuzi, and 9 of these involved inheritance. Selman, "The Social Environment of the Patriarchs," 124.

²⁰³ Barker, "The Antiquity and Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives," 135.

²⁰⁴ Several reasons have been proposed for Rachel's theft of the household gods. Jan Zandee compared this passage with an Egyptian text in which departing sailors took along their household gods. None of the sailors dared to claim that they would see Egypt again. Zandee suggested from this parallel that Rachel took the idols because she did not expect to see her parents again and she did not want to be completely cut off from the household. Jan Zandee, "Egyptological Commentary on the Old Testament," 269-81 in M. A. Beek, ed., *Travels in the World of the Old Testament*, (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1974), 271.

²⁰⁵ Kelso, *The Excavation of Bethel*.

Yosef Garfinkel, "Ritual Burial of Cultic Objects: the Earliest Evidence," *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 4(1994): 159-88.

leave behind forever every form of idolatry. This almost constituted an act of conversion by members of his household. It is worth noting that Jacob would have buried the teraphim that his wife had stolen from Laban. Whatever her reason may have been for stealing Laban's idols, Jacob prevented these teraphim from having any future role in the believing community.²⁰⁶ As Moses wrote these words, the wilderness community was also traveling to God's holy dwelling place in Palestine. As they approached the land, it was vital for them to dispose forever of the idols in the community. So Genesis 35 strongly encouraged them to do so.

2) REVOLUTION IN THE FAMILY

The next verse to be mentioned is Genesis 35:22. In this verse, Jacob's firstborn son Reuben had an improper relationship with Jacob's concubine Bilhah. As a judgment on Reuben's sin, Jacob declared that Reuben would lose his firstborn right and would no longer be pre-eminent in power and dignity. It may be worth asking why Reuben would have done such an awful thing. B. J. Van Der Merwe suggested that Reuben was actually trying to replace Jacob as the head of the community.²⁰⁷ Van Der Merwe noted that ancient Near Eastern coronation rituals usually included taking possession of the last king's harem. He noted that in later Israelite history, Absalom did this with David's concubines, and Adonijah attempted to do this as well. Van Der Merwe suggested that Reuben approached Bilhah because he hoped to seize leadership from Jacob. As a consequence, Reuben lost the right of succession in Genesis 49:4,²⁰⁸ although Reuben continued to exercise some kind of leadership as late as Genesis 42:22 and 42:37. This event may have been important for the wilderness generation because it explained why Judah came to be the dominant tribe in Israel instead of Reuben. While Reuben was Jacob's firstborn son, he lost his position of dominance in the household because of his sin. Simeon and Levi lost their leadership because of their violence at Shechem.²⁰⁹ So leadership in the community passed down to Judah. In Genesis 43:8 and 44:14, Judah was already gaining some kind of leadership among his brothers. Of course in Genesis 37, Joseph was depicted as the future leader of at least that generation.

I) JOSEPH AS THE IDEAL VASSAL

Adam was created to be Yahweh's faithful vassal in a world controlled by the devil. Adam was created to fill the earth and subdue it as Yahweh's vassal. Yahweh's servants were always promised dominance in some form if they served their Lord faithfully. Moses recorded how this principle could be illustrated in the life of Joseph. He was a righteous man who was oppressed by wickedness on all sides. Yet he remained a faithful vassal of Yahweh. He also served as a faithful vassal to his father, to Potiphar, to his jailor, and finally to Pharaoh. His faithful vassal service led him eventually to dominance over the greatest nation in the world of his time.

1) A DEEPLY DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILY

Joseph was raised in a very troubled family. Jacob's family relationships were far from ideal. The sons of Rachel, Leah, Zilpah and Bilhah were often at odds with each other. Jacob favored Rachel's sons Joseph and Benjamin, since Rachel had been his chosen wife. Genesis 37:3 noted that Jacob loved

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Ktziah Spanier, "Rachel's Theft of the Teraphim: Her Struggle for Family Primacy," *Vetus Testamentum* 42.3 (1992): 404-12. Gordon, "Biblical Customs and the Nuzu Tablets," 1-12.

²⁰⁷ B. J. Van der Merwe, "Joseph as Successor of Jacob," 221-32 in *Studia Biblica et Semitica*, (Wageningen: H. Vecuman & Zonen, 1966).

²⁰⁸ Jacob's blessing of his sons in Gen. 49 was a great prophecy that pointed far into the future. In Gen. 49:1, Jacob announced what would happen to Israel at the "end of the days." Jacob's prophecies pointed far down Israel's history. Gen. 49:8-12 included a clearly Messianic promise to Judah. This would seem to associate Christ's first coming with "the end of the days." Jacob promised that the scepter would not depart from Judah until He came to whom it belonged. The kingship and messiahship in Israel was always associated with the tribe of Judah, while the priesthood was tied to the tribe of Levi. This is why priest kings like Melchizedek were almost unknown in Israel's faith.

²⁰⁹ Gen. 49:5-7.

Joseph more than the rest of his brothers. Unfortunately, Rachel's sons were young, and were in a poor position to compete with their brothers. In an atmosphere of rivalry and veiled hostility, Jacob gave Joseph a coat of many colors. A picture of this kind of coat has found at Beni-Hasan in Egypt. The Beni-Hasan text depicted a troop of Canaanite traders bringing their trade goods to Egypt. Some of the men depicted on the tablet wore tunics made of bright colored woven strips of cloth that were sewed together. William F. Albright suggested that this kind of garment may have been mentioned in Genesis as Joseph's coat of many colors.²¹⁰ Wearing such a garment was a mark of status, and the coat was resented by Joseph's brothers.

Genesis 37:2 noted that Joseph's relationship with his brothers was strained by his faithfulness to his father's interests. Joseph informed his father of his brothers' improper behavior. As a faithful son, this was his responsibility. Joseph's relationship with his brothers deteriorated further when Joseph was given a vision by God. Joseph dreamed that the rest of his family would bow down to him. Genesis 37:4 noted that Joseph's brothers hated him so much because of this dream that they could not even speak to him in civil terms. Joseph was only 17 years old. He lived with his father while his brothers traveled with the flocks.

It is unclear whether his brothers were simply shepherds, or were involved in a caravan trade in some capacity. It is striking that Joseph's search for his brothers led him straight up the caravan route from Hebron to Dothan.²¹¹ Joseph's brothers conspired against him, and sold him to a group of passing Midianite caravaneers.²¹² The Midianite caravan was probably traveling on the route from Dothan to the sea coast, and south to Egypt along the coastal road. If the Midianite caravan had taken the highland trade route, they would have passed Jacob's settlement at Hebron, and Jacob would probably have learned what had happened. According to Genesis 37:28, Joseph's brothers sold Joseph for 20 shekels of silver, which was the price of a slave in the Middle Bronze Age.²¹³ Kitchen noted the average slave price during the Ur III period was around 10 shekels. After the 18th or 17th centuries, the average slave price rose. During the Mari and Old Babylonian periods, slaves sold for between 15 and 30 shekels. So Kitchen argued that Joseph's sale price was appropriate to the Patriarchal Age.²¹⁴ There is a problem with this case. Joseph was an unusual slave. He was the favorite son of a wealthy man. He was probably able to read and write. Genesis 38:18 refers to Judah's cord and seal. To carry a cylinder seal to validate documents, Judah must have been literate. If he was able to read, all of his brothers were probably literate as well. It is impossible to know how Joseph's family background and ability may have influenced his purchase price as a slave.

Reuben's role in this event was rather interesting. According to Genesis 37:21-22, Reuben warned his brothers not to harm Joseph, and he tried to rescue Joseph from his brothers. In Genesis 42:22, Reuben reminded his brothers of how he had pleaded with them not to sin against Joseph. Reuben was exercising his responsibility as the first-born. Reuben's attempted insurrection in Genesis 35:22 had not yet happened. So Reuben may still have had his father's confidence. By the time that Joseph rose to power in

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Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*. For a discussion of clothing in the Joseph narrative, see: Victor H. Matthews, "The Anthropology of Clothing in the Joseph Narrative," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 65 (1995): 25-36.

²¹¹ Joseph was cast into a dry pit. Malam argued that the pit was dry because it was summer. He argued that when Joseph found his brothers, they were simply doing what was normal for semi-nomadic people. They maintained a base camp at Hebron, and sent their flocks and herds out from that base camp looking for pasturage in the spring and summer months. Malam, "Pre-Monarchical Social Institutions in Israel in the Light of Mari," 165-76.

²¹² Longacre noted that Gen. 37:28 identified the Midianites and the Ishmaelites as the traders who sold Joseph into Egypt. Longacre noted that this has led some authors to brand the text as inconsistent. Longacre suggested that both names could have been used properly to describe the same people. As evidence for this, Longacre pointed to Judg. 8:24. In that passage, Gideon defeated the Midianites. As part of the spoils from the battle, Gideon claimed the Ishmaelites golden ear rings. So at least in Judges 8, the Midianites and Ishmaelites were the same group. Robert E. Longacre, "Who Sold Joseph into Egypt," 93-108 in R. Laird Harris, et al, eds. *Interpretation & History*, (Singapore: Christian Life Publishers, 1986).

²¹³ Kenneth Barker made an interesting point about this verse. Barker noted that the average price for a slave in the 18th century BC was 20 shekels of silver. Before the 18th century BC, slaves cost less than this. After the 18th century BC, slaves were more expensive. So the price paid for Joseph was appropriate to that historical setting. Barker, "The Antiquity and Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives," 134.

²¹⁴ Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 10. K. A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World: The Bible & Archaeology Today*, 68-74.

Egypt, all of this may have changed. In Genesis 42:35-38, Reuben was still trying to accept some degree of responsibility for what happened in the household. However, Genesis 44:18 suggested that Judah had become the spokesman for his brothers. In Jacob's patriarchal blessing recorded in Genesis 49, Judah would officially replace Reuben as the head of the household.

2) A FAITHFUL SLAVE IN A FOREIGN LAND

Moses may have included an account in Genesis 39:9 that was intended to teach Israel in the wilderness. In this passage, Potipher's wife tried to seduce Joseph. In response, Joseph asked her, "How could I do this great evil and sin against God?" Moses reminded Israel that Joseph already recognized adultery to be a sin.²¹⁵ Moses presented Joseph as an ideal figure. All of the other patriarchs had feet of clay. They were men of faith and doubt. They were sometimes faithful to God, and sometimes rebellious. Joseph was the exception. Moses described Joseph as a man who remained consistently faithful to God despite his great troubles. Moses may have used Joseph as the great example of how the Israelites should have acted in Egypt. Joseph was faithful in all his actions. So God brought on Joseph all the blessings of His covenant. Joseph became the father of a multitude. The great tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were both descended from him. Joseph possessed the gates of his enemies. He was a blessing to the earth since he preserved life in Egypt and Palestine through seven long years of famine. Joseph received the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Despite all of this potential trouble, Moses never wrote anything about Joseph that directly condemned him. The reason may well be that Moses chose to use Joseph's life to teach Israel how they should have acted in Egypt but did not do so. The Joseph account may best be understood in the context of Leviticus 18:3. In that passage, Moses warned Israel not to continue to do the things that they had done in Egypt.²¹⁶ Moses may have used the Joseph account to illustrate how they should have acted instead. If the Israelites in Egypt had remained faithful to God, they would have lived off the fat of the land. By rebelling against God in Egypt, the Israelites brought on themselves persecution and oppression by the Egyptian 18th Dynasty rulers. The Joseph narrative would also have been important for the wilderness generation because it spelled out in detail how they have ended up in Egypt in the first place.

The blessing and cursing principles that Moses would later record in Deuteronomy 28 were already acting in Joseph's life. The sins of Joseph's brothers resulted in Joseph's trouble and slavery in a foreign land. It also resulted in trouble and sorrow for the whole household. Joseph's obedience brought the Israelites dominance and abundance. Moses taught the wilderness generation that this basic reality could be seen at work already in the Patriarchal Age. Moses may have been pointing out as well the blessing and cursing principle had dominated Israel's life in Egypt. The Israelites had begun their life in Egypt in a position of power. Their idolatry had brought them judgment, poverty, oppression and slavery. The lesson from this is not hard to draw. As he did so often in the Pentateuch, Moses was calling Israel to obey God and live.

Moses taught the wilderness generation that God's law was not a new or temporary thing. The same law given to Israel at Sinai had already been given in some form to their fathers. The wilderness generation had simply inherited an expanded version of a covenant which God's people had always possessed. This would have added to the law's authority, and may have increased Israel's sense of security as they tried to follow it. All of this material may have been added to Genesis to place God's covenant with the wilderness community in its historical perspective. God had always been loyal despite the failure of His people. God had always revealed His law whether or not people obeyed Him. God had always called His people to faith and obedience. So the wilderness community should live in faith and obedience to God.

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Looking at this passage in a broader context, both Egypt and Mesopotamia recognized that adultery by married people was improper. Neither culture was worried very much about immorality by unmarried people. However, adultery by married people caused a lot of trouble. So it was illegal, and those who were caught in adulterous relationships were subject to criminal prosecution. C. J. Eyre, "Crime and Adultery in Ancient Egypt," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 70 (1984): 92-105. Martin Noth, *The Laws of the Pentateuch and Other Studies*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966).

Compare this to Ezek. 20:5-10.

When Moses wrote Genesis, he included in it several allusions to the stipulations or laws of God's covenant with His people.²¹⁷ These laws appeared in a less formal way in Genesis than in the rest of the Pentateuch because Genesis reflected the form that these motifs took before the Mosaic Age.²¹⁸ Moses included a number of verses in Genesis that implied a patriarchal knowledge of many covenant commands that would appear later in the Pentateuch. For example in Genesis 39:9, Joseph asked Potipher's wife how he could commit this great evil and sin against Yahweh. This was a clear statement that Joseph understood adultery to be a sin against Yahweh. Moses' claims to a Patriarchal Age knowledge of God's law can also be seen in Genesis 18:19. In this verse, Moses recorded God's claim that He had chosen Abraham so that he would command his household to keep Yahweh's way. Then in Genesis 26:5, Yahweh reminded Isaac that Abraham's blessings would be passed on to him because Abraham had obeyed God, and had kept God's charge, commandments, statutes and laws. There was a very striking similarity between this passage and Moses' words in Deuteronomy 11:1. Both passages use four law words. Three of the four were identical in each passage. The fourth word was especially interesting. Moses used the word *torah*, or law, in Genesis 26:5, while he used instead the word *mishpat*, or "judgment," in Deuteronomy 11:1. If Moses had believed that God's "law" was first given on Mount Sinai, he would almost certainly have reversed his use of these words. In the structure of the book of Deuteronomy, verse 11:1 summarized the whole Mosaic legislation. Genesis 26:5 could only be a claim by both Yahweh and Moses that Abraham had already known and obeyed God's revealed law.²¹⁹

Genesis 38 contains the account of Judah and Tamar. Moses may have added this account as an intentional contrast to Joseph's righteousness. Judah had left the covenant community, and had fathered children by a Canaanite girl. The oldest of his children was a son named Er, who married a girl named Tamar. Judah had sinned by forming this relationship with an unbelieving Canaanite girl.²²⁰ His descendants could have brought idolatry into the covenant community. In response to this threat, God judged Judah's sin by taking the life of his sons.²²¹ It is not hard to imagine what this account might have meant to the wilderness generation. They were about to enter Palestine. Individual Israelite men would be tempted to associate with the Canaanite women, just as Judah had before them. Even in the wilderness, the Israelites had fallen into adultery through Baal worship with the golden calf and with the temple prostitutes at Baal Peor.²²² With the account of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38, Moses may have warned the wilderness generation of the disastrous consequences that would follow from such sin. The polemical importance of this passage has not been completely overlooked by the academic community. Aaron Wildavsky discussed the message of this passage. He suggested that the Tamar account was intended to teach Israel's leaders that they can not save their people by breaking God's moral law. Wildavsky suggested that this account was an intentional contrast to Joseph's resistance to temptation in Potipher's house.²²³

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Law codes were already ancient in the Patriarchal Age, and were well known by the Mosaic Age. One of the first surviving examples of legal material can be seen in the reforms of Urukagina around 2350 BC. For a discussion of early legal traditions, see John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in its Cultural Context*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 69-93.

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When Moses recorded customs in Genesis, they were always appropriate to the time depicted. Moses did not create a false history for Israel based on customs that were present in his own day. Moses did select items from Israel's history to include in Genesis that were significant for the wilderness generation.

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There is no way to recover today the amount of Yahweh's revealed "law" that Abraham understood. It is striking that Moses included in Genesis examples of every kind of sacrifice that would be required of Israel at Sinai. So at least part of Israel's ceremonial legislation was already known. Similar lists of law words can be found in a variety of Old Testament passages like 1 Kings 2:3 and 8:58.

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Judah tried to look righteous by demanding that Tamar be burned to death in Gen. 38:24. This was a common punishment for adultery in his culture. However, Judah's secret sin soon became obvious to everyone.

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Richard Clifford argued for a different interpretation of this passage. He noted Judah's sins in this passage. Then he argued that Judah was the first of Jacob's sons to recognize that God could bring good out of evil. Richard J. Clifford, "Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 66 (2004): 519ff.

²²²

Num. 25.

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Aaron Wildavsky, "Survival Must Not be Gained through Sin: The Moral of the Joseph Stories Prefigured through Judah and Tamar," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 62 (1994): 37-48.

3) A VIZIER OVER ALL OF EGYPT

Genesis 41:14 noted that Pharaoh sent for Joseph from the prison.²²⁴ One of the more difficult questions in Old Testament studies is the identity of the Pharaoh who Joseph served. Eugene Merrill argued that Joseph was sold to Egypt in 1899 BC, and that he stood before Pharaoh in 1886 BC.²²⁵ These dates assume an 18th Dynasty exodus as the basis for calculating Patriarchal Age chronology. They are not bad "ball park" dates, but there are a number of problems with any proposed Patriarchal Age chronology.²²⁶

224

Kitchen noted that a papyrus from the reign of Amenemhat III shed light on Egyptian prisons at this time. The papyrus was the Register of Criminals of the Great Prison at Thebes. It listed the criminals in the prison between the 10th and 31st years of Amenemhat III. Kitchen suggested that such prisons were probably found in every important city and that they provided corvée labor. Since Kitchen defends a 19th Dynasty exodus, he dates this list before Joseph's time. K. A. Kitchen, "A Recently Published Egyptian Papyrus and its Bearing on the Joseph Story," *The Tyndale House Bulletin* 2 (1956/57): 1-2. If an 18th Dynasty exodus is assumed, this text would have been written a few decades after Joseph's famine.

Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," 247.

225

The most important issue in Patriarchal Age chronology is whether an 18th or 19th Dynasty exodus is used as the basis of calculation. If a 19th Dynasty exodus date is assumed, most of the evidence proposed below would be understood in a different way. Patriarchal Age dates are based on two key verses in the Old Testament, I Kngs. 6:1 and Ex. 12:40-41. I Kngs. 6:1 noted that Solomon built the Jerusalem temple 480 years after the exodus. Ex. 12:40-41 noted that Israel left Egypt 430 years after entering the land. Solomon's temple is usually dated around 966 BC ± five years. Solomon's temple is dated by noting texts from Mesopotamia that parallel events in the Old Testament, and by then dating the Mesopotamian texts. If an 18th Dynasty exodus is assumed behind I Kngs. 6:1, this process would seem to give rather solid dates for Israel's Patriarchal Age. However, problems appear when the evidence is examined more carefully. The first problem is that the Hebrew MT text of I Kngs. 6:1 differs from the Greek LXX text. The MT claims that the temple was built 480 years after the exodus, but the LXX claims that the period was only 440 years. In general, the Western half of the Christian world has always supported the Hebrew text, while the Eastern Orthodox half of the church has supported the LXX text. Recent studies of the Qumran texts tend to give support to the Eastern perspective. F. M. Cross has made a strong case that there were four different families of Hebrew texts at Qumran. One text family was the Proto-Massoretic text. This family was very similar indeed to the current Hebrew MT. Another text family at Qumran was the Proto-LXX family. This text family was represented most clearly in Jeremiah, although it may have been represented by other fragments as well. For a discussion of text families at Qumran, see Frank M. Cross Jr. "The Contribution of the Qumran Discoveries to the Study of the Biblical Text," *Israel Exploration Journal* 16 (1966): 81-95. If the LXX reading of I Kngs. 6:1 was based on a different Hebrew text family than the MT, the LXX would suggest Patriarchal Age dates that were 40 years later than those commonly accepted by defenders of an 18th Dynasty exodus model. The second key Old Testament verse for determining Patriarchal Age dates was Ex. 12:40-41. This verse noted that Israel was in Egypt for 430 years. Unfortunately, it is not completely clear who had descended to Egypt 430 years earlier. Did this verse refer to Jacob or Joseph? Either is possible, and the choice between them makes a difference of 13 years in patriarchal era dates. So even without taking into account all of the issues related to a proposed 19th Dynasty exodus, Patriarchal Age dates could fall somewhere within a range of about 58 years. The case for a 19th Dynasty exodus is also not insubstantial. For example, Gal. 3:17 could be interpreted to mean that the 430 years of Ex. 12:40 included part of the Patriarchal Age. To complicate this problem further, dates for events in Egypt are only slightly firmer than dates for events in Mesopotamia. "High," "middle," and "low" chronologies have been defended for events in Egypt as well. There is a rather radical difference between Middle Kingdom dates based on Manetho, and dates based on the Turin papyrus. This suggests that all Middle Kingdom dates should be approached with caution. See the discussion in: Janine Bourriau, "The 2nd Intermediate Period (1650-1550 BC)," 191-93 in Ian Shaw, ed. *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, (Oxford: University Press, 2000). See also in the same volume, Gae Callender, "The Middle Kingdom Renaissance," 148-49. The most commonly defended dates for Middle Kingdom rulers fall within a range of about a decade. Joseph might have served either Sesostri II, Sesostri III, or Amenemhat III. Several dates have been proposed for these pharaohs. Sesostri II may have come to the throne as early as 1897 BC although Kitchen dates his reign much later. Kitchen suggests that he reigned from 1868 to 1862 BC. Sesostri III may have come to the throne as early as 1887 BC, although Kitchen argued for 1862 to 1843 BC. Amenemhat III could have come to the throne as early as 1849 BC, although Kitchen dates him between 1843 and 1798 BC. Chronology has been the source of endless debate among Egyptologists. For Kitchen's dates, see K. A. Kitchen, "Egypt, History of," David Noel Freedman, ed. *The Anchor Bible Dictionary Volume 2 D-G*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 328-29. If an 18th Dynasty exodus is used as the basis for Patriarchal chronology, Joseph could have served Amenemhat II, Sesostri II, Sesostri III, or Amenemhat III depending on how the Biblical and Egyptian chronology are understood.

Joseph held a position of great importance in Egypt. He was Egypt's vizier.²²⁷ Much of what is known about this office comes from tomb inscriptions written by various viziers. The most detailed of these tomb inscriptions was the tomb of Rekhmire, a vizier of the great 18th Dynasty Pharaoh Thutmose III.²²⁸ In the Middle Kingdom, the office of vizier was no longer a hereditary position as it had been in the Old Kingdom. Normally, Pharaoh assigned the office to a nobleman of his own choosing. The vizier's authority extended over all of Egypt. He ruled in a special hall where no one else worked. His great authority was regulated by very ancient laws because the vizier exercised the king's authority in all things. The vizier reported daily to the king whenever possible. He freed the Pharaoh to lead foreign wars, participate in religious festivals throughout Egypt, and hunt in the delta marshes. The vizier was in charge of collecting taxes and tribute from foreign lands. He also oversaw builders and craftsmen. As vizier, Joseph was even in charge of the prison from which he had just been taken. So it was a natural part of Joseph's duties to collect grain during the seven years of abundance, and to build store cities to hold the produce.²²⁹

Genesis 41:45 noted that Pharaoh gave Joseph a new name when Joseph rose to power in Egypt. Claus Westerman noted that this was a common practice in Egypt. Semitic servants and captives were often given new Egyptian names by their masters. This practice can be seen illustrated in several Egyptian texts. One text from the 13th Dynasty listed slaves that had been captured in Syria and Palestine. The document listed both their original names and their new Egyptian names.²³⁰ Pharaoh gave Joseph a signet ring and fine linen clothing. Currid noted that the words in the text for ring and clothing were Egyptian loan words. Currid also noted that Joseph was given a golden necklace. Currid noted that this gift was also well known in Egypt as a sign of favor.²³¹

Genesis 41:45 also noted that Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife named Asenath, the daughter of Potiphara, the priest of On.²³² The name "On" was the traditional Egyptian name for the great solar city of Heliopolis. The theology of this city justified Pharaoh's own claims to divinity. So support from Heliopolis was crucial. In the Old Kingdom, the priests of On had even been able to influence the selection of each Pharaoh.²³³ While they had lost this power by the Middle Kingdom, the priests of Heliopolis were still very

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Steindorff and Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East*, 86-8. John A. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 172-73. G. P. F. Van den Boorn, *The Duties of the Vizier: Civil Administration in the Early New Kingdom*, (London: Kegan Paul, 1988). Harold R. Mosley, "Joseph Ruler in Egypt," *Biblical Illustrator* 13 (2007): 73-6.

²²⁸ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, II: 266-93. William A. Ward, "The Egyptian Story of Joseph," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 5 (1960).

²²⁹ The vizier held such an important position in Egypt that a vizier could threaten Pharaoh's throne. Since the Pharaohs claimed to be god incarnate, crop failure and low floods threatened their thrones. How could a ruler claim to be the true Horus if he could not bring the Nile? Joseph's Pharaoh made a wise choice. Joseph would be blamed for Egypt's troubles. As a hated foreigner, rage at collecting grain during years of abundance would be directed at Joseph. At the same time, Joseph could never be more than a *rhyt*, and he was very unlikely to threaten Pharaoh's office directly.

Claus Westerman, *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 96.

²³¹ Currid, *A Study Commentary on Genesis: Volume 2: Genesis 25:19-50:26*, 269.

²³⁰ Kitchen argued that the kind of name represented in Potiphar and Potiphara only appeared in Egypt during the 19th Dynasty. Kitchen takes this as evidence for a 19th Dynasty exodus since Moses would have written the text at this time. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 347-55.

²³³ It is interesting that Moses only recorded the names of two Egyptian men in the Pentateuch: Potiphar and Potiphara. Hoffmeier noted that both were translations of the same Egyptian name, *p3 di p3 r'*. James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence of the Exodus Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 84. Alan Rowe noted that the names Potiphar and Potiphara were a kind of name that became quite common in Egypt after 950 BC. However, this kind of name was "very rare or even wanting in earlier periods." Alan Rowe, "The Famous Solar City of On," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 94, 95 (1962-63): 134. If this was such an uncommon name, it may be interesting to consider whether Potiphar and Potiphara could have been the same person. Janssen argued that temple overseers were often not priests but laymen attached to the government. Jac J. Janssen, "The Role of the Temple in the Egyptian Economy during the New Kingdom," 505-15 in Edward Lipinski, ed., *State and Temple Economy in the Ancient Near East II*, (Leuven: Department Orientalistik, 1979), 509. During dangerous times, Egypt's ruler could place a court official in charge of a key temple estate like Heliopolis. While purely speculative, this might have implications for why Pharaoh gave this woman to Joseph as a wife. Could Joseph have developed an attachment to her when he still served in Potiphar's house? There is simply no way to know. An example of a high government official acting as priest can be seen in Hapuseneb who served in

powerful. Several authors have suggested that Asenath's father may have been the high priest of the solar cult. If so, Pharaoh may have married Joseph into the priestly family as a political marriage to strengthen Joseph's authority. By this marriage, Joseph would have become more deeply involved with the Egyptian religion. Since Pharaoh claimed to be one of Egypt's high gods, it was impossible to hold high office in Egypt without also being involved in Egypt's religion to some degree.

Genesis 44:14-34 recorded Joseph's meeting with his brothers after Joseph's cup had been found in Benjamin's sack. In this passage, Joseph declared that Benjamin would have to remain in Egypt as his slave, while the rest were free to return to Jacob in Palestine. In this passage, Judah demonstrated the leadership that he was gaining among Jacob's sons due to the failures of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Judah beseeched Joseph for permission to act as a substitute for his brother. Judah declared that he had vowed to Jacob that he would be responsible for Benjamin's life. In Genesis 44:20, Judah recognized and accepted Jacob's special love for Joseph and Benjamin. In Genesis 44:29, Judah implied that Jacob knew that his sons had taken Joseph from him. In Genesis 44:16, Judah recognized that Yahweh was dealing with their sins. Then in Genesis 44:33, Judah begged that he be accepted as a substitute for his brother. Judah wished to take on himself his brothers' punishment so that his father would not die of grief. Judah can be seen to be replacing Reuben as the leader of the family in this passage.²³⁴

This offer may have been a great "type," or symbol, for Christ's death as a substitutionary atonement for the sins of His people. Moses had done something rather similar himself in Exodus 32:33. After Israel sinned by making the golden calf at Sinai, Moses told them that he would try to make atonement before God for their sin. When he returned to Sinai, Moses asked that his own name be removed from the Book of Life if by doing so, Israel might be forgiven for their sins. This was a "type" of Christ's death that rather resembled Genesis 44:33. It is fair to wonder if Moses saw an echo of his own heart in Judah. Moses may have used the account in Genesis 44:33 to teach Israel the nature of true leadership in the community.

In Genesis 46:1-4, Jacob set out for Egypt to see Joseph once more. As he traveled to Egypt, he stopped at Beersheba and offered sacrifices to Yahweh. In response, God appeared to him in a vision. God promised to bring him safely to Egypt, and to bring his descendants back to Palestine after they had become a great nation. It is not hard to speculate about why Moses may have included this detail in the Genesis text. In Moses' day, this promise was being fulfilled. God had been with Israel throughout their Egyptian sojourn. Now Yahweh was bringing His people home to Palestine.²³⁵ The wilderness community might have been reassured from this of God's continual love and faithfulness. They might have seen His great hand behind their wanderings, and Israel might have heard His promise that He would bring them into the land.

After Jacob immigrated to Egypt, Joseph's family began to share his authority. In Genesis 47:6, Pharaoh suggested that any competent men among Joseph's brothers should be placed in charge of Pharaoh's cattle. Pharaoh was not suggesting that Joseph's brothers should become farmers. Joseph's brothers were given the position of "overseer of cattle." This was a civil position that was about half way up the political ladder.²³⁶ Several Egyptian tomb texts noted that the buried official had held such a position as he rose in the court. So Joseph's brothers also became involved in Egyptian politics, and in Egypt, there was no clear line between politics and theology.

Israel's importance in Egypt can be seen in Genesis 47:20-27. This text described the conclusion of the famine account. After a seven year long famine, all of the land and cattle in Palestine and Egypt

Hatshepsut's court. He was, "priest of Heliopolis, governor of the city, vizier, overseer of the temples." Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, II:161. An association of Potiphar with Potiphara would not receive wide support in the academic world. The best source for information about priests in solar temples like Heliopolis is M. Moursi, *Hohenpriester des Sonnengottes von der Frühzeit Aegyptens bis zum ende des Neuen Reiches*, (Munich, 1972).

²³⁴ Bryan Smith argued that the Genesis account juxtaposed Reuben, Joseph, and Judah. In Gen. 38:26, Judah deserved to be condemned while Reuben was relatively more honorable. By Gen. 44:33-34, Judah had become the most honorable of Jacob's sons. He was now willing to sacrifice himself so that his father may live. Bryan Smith, "The Central Role of Judah in Genesis 37-50," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (2005): 158-74.

²³⁵ Moses then listed specifically the names of the 70 people who had gone down to Egypt in Jacob's day. It may be that the names of these 70 people were included to provide a basis for genealogical records that had been preserved during the Egyptian sojourn

²³⁶ See for example, Barbara Cumming, *Egyptian Historical Records of the Later Eighteenth Dynasty*, 3 vols. (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1982), II: 106-09.

belonged to Pharaoh. The Egyptian Pharaohs did not give up this claim to ownership. Even in the New Kingdom, they continued to claim ownership to all the land and cattle in Egypt.²³⁷ There were only two exceptions to this rule during Joseph's life. After the famine, the Egyptian priests continued to own land and cattle. The priests were wealthy and powerful men who received an annual stipend from the court as well as income from their own lands. The second exception to Pharaoh's universal ownership was Israel. Genesis 47:26-27 recorded that the Israelites had acquired property in Egypt as they multiplied in the land. Israel acquired property when all land belonged to Pharaoh. They also retained their cattle. Exodus 9:4 recorded that some Israelites were able to hold on to their possessions until the exodus. This suggests that at least a few Israelites may have retained positions of importance throughout Israel's sojourn in Egypt.

In Genesis 47:6, Pharaoh instructed Joseph to allow his family to settle, "in the best of the land," in the region of Goshen. Genesis 47:11 noted that Joseph gave his brothers a possession in the best of the land of Raameses. So the name Raameses may already have been associated with the northeast Nile delta in the Middle Kingdom.²³⁸ At the end of their Egyptian sojourn, the Israelites would be forced to build the store city of Raameses in the same region. It is striking that the Israelites were given land as a possession when all the inhabitants of Egypt were losing their land to the crown. Pharaoh told Joseph to settle his family "in the best of the land." This did not mean that the Israelites could take the best land away from Egyptian farmers. They were given permission to raise cattle in the best land available for that purpose in the northeast delta.²³⁹ The seven years of very high Nile floods would have destroyed most settlements in Goshen. The famine would have been caused by very low Nile flood levels. Yet even during these years, there would have been enough Nile River water to grow reeds in the delta swamps. Such reeds and rushes had always been used as animal fodder in Egypt.²⁴⁰ It is fair to ask how this passage might have been heard by the Israelites as they wandered through the arid wilderness. They may have seen it as a promise that God would lead them to the best of the land if they obeyed Him. They may also have seen it as a promise of protection during their own wanderings in a barren land.

At the end of Genesis 50, Joseph died. He had lived to be 110 years old. Pnina Galpaz-Feller noted that this was thought by the Egyptians to be the ideal length of a life span.²⁴¹ In Genesis 50:7-13, Joseph had requested that his body be carried back to Palestine when Israel left Egypt, just as Jacob had been buried in the Promised Land in Genesis 49:28-33. In Exodus 13:19, Moses quoted from this passage in Genesis to explain why the Israelites took Joseph's body with them at the exodus. Joshua 24:32 noted that the bones of Joseph were buried at Shechem. There is a striking contrast between Genesis 50 and Exodus 13. Genesis noted that Joseph was embalmed, or mummified. He was then placed in a coffin. Exodus 13 states that Joseph's bones were carried to Palestine. The process of embalming or mummifying someone in Egypt took 40 days, and produced a body that would survive almost forever. After being embalmed, the body was placed in a very heavy coffin. The wealthy were placed in expensive carved coffins that were placed in carved stone tombs. Those less wealthy were placed in coffins of baked clay which were then buried in the ground. The poor were just thrown into the river for the crocodiles. The interesting question here is why Exodus only talks about Joseph's "bones" instead of his body. Presumably, Joseph's body would have been taken out of its coffin because the coffin would have been too heavy to transport. However, Joseph should still have had a mummified body. It is not impossible that Joseph's body may have suffered violence during Israel's persecution. It would not be at all unlike the

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Edward Bleiberg, "The King's Privy Purse during the New Kingdom," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 21 (1984): 155-67.

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Moses wrote Genesis, and he may simply have used the name for this area that was common in his own day.

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Kitchen noted that the eastern delta was a good location for pasturing cattle. He noted that Kamose of Thebes grazed cattle in the north. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 348.

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In his tomb text, Peshor bragged that he had provided marsh plants to Pharaoh for animal fodder. Cumming, *Egyptian Historical Records of the Later Eighteenth Dynasty*, I:150. There is an interesting parallel to this account in an early Middle Kingdom text called the Instruction of Merikare. This text recorded that regions that had been almost abandoned during the drought of the 1st Intermediate Period were now settled with towns and people "of the best of the land." Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature: A Book of Readings*, 3 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), I:103.

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Pnina Galpaz-Feller, *The Exodus from Egypt: Reality or Illusion*, (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2002). See also the review of Galpaz-Feller's book by Pamela Barmash in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 (2003).

Egyptian 18th Dynasty to throw his body out of his tomb. After the Hyksos left Egypt, the Egyptians scoured the land to destroy evidence that the Hyksos had been present. Perhaps Joseph's tomb was destroyed, although that is simply speculation. It is somewhat surprising that a tomb for someone so important to Egypt's survival has not survived, although Joseph may have been hated by many Egyptians. He had seized their crops during years of abundance and had then used those crops to force them into slavery.

Transporting Jacob's bones to Palestine may have been meaningful to the wilderness community. It demonstrated that Palestine was their home instead of Egypt. During their 400 year long Egyptian sojourn, the Israelites had seen many Pharaohs die in Egypt. After a Pharaoh died, he was mummified with great ceremony for 40 days. During these days, he was regarded as being still alive. Then with great ceremony, Pharaoh was transported in his coffin to his tomb. This ceremony brought him to his eternal dwelling place. When Pharaoh arrived at his tomb, the tomb was regarded as a "heaven on earth" place. He was being brought to his home. When he arrived there, the dead Pharaoh became one more manifestation of the high god Osiris who ruled in the underworld. Only when this ceremony was completed did the next Pharaoh become the manifestation on earth of the god Horus. So to become a god himself, the new Pharaoh had to bury his predecessor with proper pomp and ceremony. In this context, it would be important to the Israelites that both Jacob's bones and Joseph's bones were brought home to Palestine. This would identify Palestine as the patriarchs' homeland, and it may have implied a rejection of Egyptian underworld theology.

4) CLIMATE CHANGE AND JOSEPH'S FAMINE

Genesis 41:46-49 noted that Joseph gathered grain during seven years of great abundance. These years were followed by seven years of great famine. Merrill argued that Joseph's years of abundance and famine were dated between 1886 BC and 1872 BC.²⁴² Even if these dates are accepted, it is difficult to identify Joseph's Pharaoh. High and low chronologies are defended for the Egyptian Middle Kingdom based on proposed locations for observations of the star Sothis.²⁴³ Short and long chronologies have also been defended based on the degree of confidence that authors have for the lengths of rulers' reigns recorded in the Turin Papyrus. There are also debates about co-regencies during the Middle Kingdom, so the chronology of the Middle Kingdom remains in flux.²⁴⁴ Even if an 18th Dynasty exodus model is used as the basis for Patriarchal chronology, Joseph could have served Sesostri I, Amenemhet II, Sesostri II,

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Merrill, "Fixed Dates in Patriarchal Chronology," 247. Battenfield made a chronological case that Joseph's Pharaoh was Sesostri III. James R. Battenfield, "A Consideration of the Identity of the Pharaoh of Genesis 47," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 15 (1972): 77-85.

²⁴³ Egyptian chronology is a very difficult and complex problem. Egyptologists argue about dates constantly. The most important evidence for Egyptian chronology is the day of the year that the star Sothis is first seen above the horizon. That day is important because the Egyptians did not have a leap year. So their calendar floated. Every four years, a calendar date occurred one day earlier. A calendar date in the winter would eventually occur in the fall, then the summer, then the spring, and finally the winter. It took approximately 1460 years for a specific calendar date to occur on the original absolute date once more. This 1460 years is called the Sothic Cycle. Seven texts from ancient Egypt gave the calendar date that the star Sothis first appeared. In theory, these dates can be converted into absolute dates by knowing when the star would actually appear. Unfortunately, the Sothic texts never gave the location where the star was first seen. The star disappeared below the horizon for a few months because it was located in the southern sky. So the further south an observer traveled, the earlier the star appeared. Each degree of latitude south changed by four years the year indicated by a Sothic observation. There is no way to know where any of the Sothic observations were made. Proposed locations included Memphis, Heliopolis, Thebes, and Elephantine. The differences between the Sothic dates implied by these locations has added a lot of diversity and controversy to debates about Egyptian chronology. Middle Kingdom chronology is based on a Sothic observation recorded in a text found at Sesostri II's temple at Illahun. The text was probably written during the reign of Sesostri III, although the text does not name a ruler. The debate about Sothic dating can be seen in Richard A. Parker, "The Sothic Dating of the Twelfth and Eighteenth Dynasties," in *Studies in Honor of George R. Hughes*, (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1976), 182-83. Lynn E. Rose, "The Astronomical Evidence for Dating the End of the Middle Kingdom of Ancient Egypt to the Early Second Millennium: a Reassessment," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 53 (1994): 241. Ian Shaw, "Introduction: Chronologies and Cultural Change in Egypt," *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 11.

²⁴⁴ Callender, "The Middle Kingdom Renaissance (c. 2055-1650 BC)," 148-49.

Sesostris III, or Amenemhet III depending on how the chronologies of Genesis and Egypt are interpreted.²⁴⁵

The historical setting of Joseph's famine has been difficult to identify. In 1975, a climatologist named Barbara Bell argued that Amenemhet III may have been Joseph's sovereign. She argued from textual and archaeological evidence that the reign of Amenemhet III included a period of unusually high Nile flood levels and great abundance. Agricultural prosperity in Egypt was tied to the annual flood levels. High floods produced prosperity because a larger land area could be cultivated. Low floods brought poverty, hardship, and famine. Bell described flood texts that were written on the Nile valley walls near Semna and Kumma. These sites were near the 2nd Nile cataract. These texts recorded very high Nile flood levels during the reign of Amenemhet III. The texts at Semna recorded flood levels that were between 8 and 11 meters higher than normal. The highest of these flood levels occurred during Amenemhet III's 30th year.

Bell noted that the flood texts at Semna and Kumma were accompanied by physical evidence. A line of water wear appeared on the rock cliffs around the valley near the 2nd Nile cataract. Below that water wear line, the rocks were clearly carved by water, while above the line there was no sign of water caused erosion. This wear line appeared 8.73 meters above the 1931 high flood line. Bell also found a pocket of water laid flood deposit 6.23 meters above the 1931 AD flood line. A piece of pottery found in this flood deposit could not be dated by its style, but the presence of pottery in the flood deposit demonstrated that the high floods had occurred after pottery came into use.

Amenemhet III's high flood levels could explain Joseph's abundant years. After Amenemhet III's 30th year, Nile flood levels retreated to their normal height. Bell argued that these lower levels could have caused economic difficulty if the Egyptians had become used to the greater abundance. Bell argued that this may have caused Joseph's famine years,²⁴⁶ but that seems unlikely. Normal flood levels would not have caused a famine in Palestine. There also may not be a good chronological fit between Joseph and Amenemhet III.²⁴⁷ His reign fell between Merrill's dates for Joseph and Hoerth's dates. Amenemhet III's high flood levels did demonstrate that the Middle Kingdom saw unstable Nile flood levels.

5) JOSEPH AND SESOSTRIS III?

If Amenemhet III was not Joseph's Pharaoh, what earlier Middle Kingdom ruler might have been Joseph's Pharaoh? There is no evidence that Amenemhet II or Sesostris II saw famine during their reigns, although the Egyptians did not always record economic difficulties.²⁴⁸ Sesostris III seems at first glance to be an unlikely candidate as well. Sesostris III was a great ruler. Egyptian texts record no economic difficulties during his reign. Sesostris III has the reputation for being one of the strongest rulers in Egypt history. The Greek historian Herodotus claimed that Sesostris III "traversed the whole continent of Asia,

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The differences in chronologies can be seen by comparing the "high" and "low" dates suggested by K. A. Kitchen and Susan Cohen. Both listed "low" dates for Middle Kingdom rulers this way: Amenemhat I (1937-1908), Sesostris I (1917-1872), Amenemhat II (1875-1840), Sesostris II (1842-1836), and Sesostris III (1836-1817). Cohen listed "high" dates for these rulers this way: Amenemhat I (1963-1934), Sesostris I (1943-1898), Amenemhat II (1901-1866), Sesostris II (1868-1862), and Sesostris III (1862-1843). Susan L. Cohen, *Canaanites, Chronologies, and Connections: The Relationship of Middle Bronze II A Canaan to Middle Kingdom Egypt*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 13. Kitchen gave the following "high" dates for the same rulers: Amenemhat I (1979-1950), Sesostris I (1959-1914), Amenemhat II (1917-1882), Sesostris II (1884-1878), and Sesostris III (1878-1859). K. A. Kitchen, "The Basics of Egyptian Chronology," 49. K. A. Kitchen, "The Basics of Egyptian Chronology in Relation to the Bronze Age," in *High, Middle or Low? Acts of an International Colloquium on Absolute Chronology Held at the University of Gothenburg 20th-22nd August 1987: Part I*, (Gothenburg: Paul Åströms, 1987), 49. By a "low" chronology, Joseph served Sesostris I. By Cohen's "high" chronology, Joseph served Amenemhat II. By Kitchen's "high" chronology, Joseph served Amenemhat II, Sesostris II, and Sesostris III. His famine years occurred at the start of Sesostris III's reign. Of course, Kitchen would not associate Joseph with these rulers since he defends a 19th Dynasty exodus.

²⁴⁶ Bell, "Climate and the History of Egypt: The Middle Kingdom," 261. Michael Ghil argued for a 7 year Nile flood cycle influenced by the NAO. http://dsc.discovery.com/news/briefs/20050808/bibleclimate_print.html

²⁴⁷ This problem would be less severe if the LXX reading of I Kgs. 6:1 is accepted. It claimed a time period of 440 years instead of 480 years. This would move Joseph 40 years closer to the reign of Amenemhet III.

²⁴⁸ Aling argued that Amenemhat II was Joseph's Pharaoh. Charles F. Aling, *Egypt and Bible History from Earliest Times to 1000 B.C.*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981).

whence he passed on into Europe, and made himself master of Scythia and of Thrace.²⁴⁹ While this section of Herodotus' history was not historically accurate, his claims demonstrated the reputation that Sesostrius III gained among the following generations.²⁵⁰

Sesostrius III's was given credit for being a powerful ruler partly because he was able to regain control of Egypt's delta nomes. Nomes were administrative districts not unlike city states. They were ruled by regional officials called nomarchs. During the 1st Intermediate Period, these nomarchs had become independent. Before Sesostrius III, Egypt's rulers had been unable to regain control of them. Several of the nomarchs demonstrated their power by building expensive tombs. The nomarchs called themselves "Great Overlords." This title was no longer used after Sesostrius III,²⁵¹ and the nomarchs stopped building expensive tombs during his reign. This may suggest that Sesostrius III had the political and military power to regain control of the nomarchs. If so, he must have been a strong ruler.

The same evidence could be used to make a circumstantial case for Joseph's famine during his reign. Genesis 47:13-25 claimed that Pharaoh gained all the money and land in Egypt except the priests' lands. So Joseph's famine would have given Pharaoh control of Egypt's nomes and its nomarchs. Even the nomarchs became Sesostrius III's slaves to buy grain. The nomarchs may have stopped building expensive tombs because they lacked the resources to build them.²⁵² If Joseph came to power while Sesostrius III struggled to regain control of the nomarchs, Joseph's administration may have been involved in this power struggle. While this suggestion is at best only a possibility, it would make Henqu's autobiography an interesting document. Henqu was a nomarch of the Mountainviper nome during the 1st Intermediate Period. He ruled this nome many years before Joseph entered Egypt, but his tomb text illustrated how the nomarchs viewed their power at this time. Henqu called to all of the people in the Mountainviper Nome and all the leaders of the other nomes who passed his tomb. Henqu claimed that he had been a soft spoken person (who was in control of his emotions). He had been honored by fathers and mothers. He had buried old people and had freed youths who had been forced to pull tow ropes for canal boats. Henqu claimed that he had prevented any girls in his nome from being sold into slavery. He also claimed that he had not put any man into fetters because he had wished it to go well with him. Then Henqu wrote,

I gave beer-and-bread to all the hungry of the Mountainviper nome; (12) I clothed the naked one in it. I also filled its shores (13) with cattle, its pastures with sheep and goats. I acted as Headman and Overseer of Upper Egyptian grain in this nome. ... I also resettled the towns that were enfeebled in this nome with persons of other nomes. (19) Those of them who had been servants, I made their positions into those of official(s). (20) I never deprived a man of his property, so that he would complain of me about it to the town god ---- (23) I was beneficial to it with stables for cattle and dwellings for fishermen. I settled all its mounds (24) with people and cattle [as well as] sheep and goats, in very truth ----. (26a) I am also the priest of his town god.²⁵³

Henqu even claimed that he had fed predators like the jackals so that they would not threaten people. Henqu suggested that those who were too young to remember what he had done for the nome should ask their fathers what he had done.

This text illustrates several points about the nomarchs during the 1st Intermediate Period and the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. It illustrates how the nomarchs had gained their independence from central control. It shows the deep resentment they felt toward past abuses of power by the central

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M. Komroff, ed. *The History of Herodotus*, trans. G. Rawlinson, (New York: Tudor, 1928), 114.

²⁵⁰ While Herodotus did at times make rather serious errors, he was in general a good historian. Anthony Sakovich noted in an EEF posting on 8/2/05 that Herodotus was the first western historian to identify: 1) the purpose of the pyramids, 2) the size of the pyramids, 3) the Pharaohs who built each pyramid, and 4) the rations of the workers who built the pyramids. He learned these things by asking Egyptian priests to translate texts for him.

²⁵¹ Callender, "The Middle Kingdom Renaissance (c. 2055-1650 BC)," 167-75.

²⁵² This interpretation would fit with Paul Ray's claim that Joseph's land reforms could have been associated with Sesostrius III's recovery of power from the nomarchs. P. J. Ray, Jr. "The Duration of the Israelite Sojourn in Egypt," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 24 (1986): 242.

²⁵³ Henqu was buried in tomb #67 at Deir el-Gebrawi. Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Autobiographies Chiefly of the Middle Kingdom*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 21-4.

government. It shows their control of grain and agriculture, and their sense of personal responsibility for the welfare of the population within their nomes. If Joseph rose to power during the reign of Sesostris III, he may have been forced to struggle against the nomarchs to gain enough power to accomplish his task.

Circumstantial evidence for high Nile floods early in the reign of Sesostris III can be found in a flood text recorded at the Dal cataract in southern Egypt. This flood text claimed that the Nile River level in the winter of that year was as high as the normal flood line.²⁵⁴ If the river was still in flood during the winter, the annual Nile flood may have been much higher. Circumstantial evidence for unusual flooding may also come from forts that were rebuilt by Sesostris III near the 2nd Nile cataract. The Egyptian fort at Semna was 83 kilometers north of the Dal cataract. The early Middle Kingdom rulers Amenemhet I and Sesostris I had built forts near Semna and the 2nd Nile cataract. Amenemhet II and Sesostris II continued to use these forts. Then Sesostris III rebuilt the fort at Semna 15 meters above the high flood line. Even though the fort at Semna had been built 8 meters above the normal high flood line, the lower levels of the fort had been eroded by flood water. It is possible that Sesostris III rebuilt the fort on higher ground because unusually high flood levels had already appeared during his reign.

In Sesostris III's 8th year, he reopened an old canal around the 2nd Nile cataract. It was dug at the normal river level because it was later reopened by the 18th Dynasty rulers Thutmose I and Thutmose II. The river level had changed by Sesostris III's 19th year. Sesostris III recorded that he had great difficulty passing the 2nd Nile cataract. The water level was too low for him to use the canal that he had opened eleven years earlier. This may suggest a flood level low enough to cause a famine. So even though Sesostris III's reputation would seem to rule out a terrible famine during his reign, it may be that such a famine did in fact occur, and that he might be Joseph's Pharaoh.

J) THE BELIEVING REMNANT LEFT IN PALESTINE

By the end of Israel's Egyptian sojourn, the religion of the Levant had become cruel and wicked. It had not always been that bad. Some knowledge of God survived for a limited time after Jacob went south to Egypt. There are several suggestions of this in the Biblical text. Genesis 25:1-6 noted that Abraham had given presents to Keturah's sons, and sent them to the East. It is hard to know how many of them retained some kind of faith. Genesis 33:16 noted that Esau returned to his home in Seir after his encounter with Jacob. Esau's household may well have kept some level of faith in God. One of Job's friends was named Eliphaz the Temanite. He may very well have been a descendant of Esau since Esau's son was named Eliphaz, and his grandson was named Teman.²⁵⁵ The name Eliphaz could very easily have been a common family name handed down among the Temanites.

Job and his friends Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and Elihu knew God, and knew quite a bit of theology. Job and his friends were often surprisingly astute. In Job 14:13-14, Job struggled with the resurrection. In Job 19:23-27, Job declared that His Redeemer lived and would one day stand on the earth. Job declared that even after his skin had been destroyed, he would still see God. In Job 20:26-28, Zophar declared that the wicked man's portion from God would be complete darkness and unfanned fire when the heavens revealed his iniquity. In Job 31:1-4, Job taught his friends that true righteousness was a matter of the heart instead of simply actions. In Job 31:1, Job argued that he had made a covenant with his eyes so that he would not gaze on a virgin. He knew that righteousness was a matter of his heart and not just a reflection of his actions. These are amazing statements. They have almost a New Testament flavor. Yet they were known and taught by gentiles while Israel sojourned in Egypt.²⁵⁶ At points, Job even had an eschatological flavor. While a number of Old Testament passages mentioned the "last days," the "latter days," or "the end of the days," one of the earliest of these passages was Job 19:25. This verse promised that Job's Redeemer would stand on the earth "at the last."

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²⁵⁵ Bell, "Climate and the History of Egypt: The Middle Kingdom," 238.

²⁵⁶ Gen. 36:10-11.

The name Job appeared in the Mari texts that were written between 1730 BC and 1700 BC. Job at Mari was a prince who lived in the area of Damascus. It is not impossible that this may have been the Biblical Job. He was a prince in the right place, at the right time. Unger, *Israel and the Aramaeans of Damascus*, 7-8. Abraham Malamat noted that the general culture in the book of Job and several details of the text fit with Israel's Patriarchal age. Malamat, "Pre-Monarchical Social Institutions in Israel in the Light of Mari," 165-76.

There has been endless academic debate about when the book of Job was written. Proposed dates for the writing of the book of Job run the range from pre-Mosaic to post-exilic dates. There has been much broader recognition that the story recorded in the book actually happened before Israel left Egypt. Gleason Archer Jr. suggested several reasons why the story recorded in Job should be dated during Israel's Patriarchal Age.²⁵⁷ Wealth in both Genesis and Job consisted in the possession of cattle and slaves. No central worship place was known in either book. In both Genesis and Job, the head of the household offered sacrifices instead of a priestly class. Both books depicted the Chaldeans and Sabeans as nomadic raiders instead of world conquerors. The money unit used in Job was found in Scripture only in Genesis 33:19 and Joshua 24:32. The prologue/epilogue structure of the book of Job resembled early Semitic literature found at Ugarit and in the Akkadian literature. All of this led Archer to suggest that the general cultural setting of Job should be found in the Late Bronze Age rather than the Iron Age.²⁵⁸

The date of Job was important because the basic issue in the book of Job was Job's desire for a covenant lawsuit hearing before God.²⁵⁹ The question of blessing and cursing stood in the background behind the whole account. The treaty motif claimed that obedience to God would result in blessing. Rebellion against God would result in God's curse on all of life. Job was cursed. He lost his family, his wealth, and his social standing. He was left only with a nagging wife. Job's friends asked quite reasonably what Job had done to earn the curses of the covenant. Throughout the book, Job asked for a covenant lawsuit hearing before God.²⁶⁰ Yahweh finally gave Job his day in court. Like a lawyer in court, God asked Job a long series of questions that were designed to prove to Job who he was before God. Job repented of his accusations against God. He bowed before God, and prayed for his friends. Job learned that even the most righteous man of his time could not stand before God on the basis of his own righteousness. He could only stand before God by God's grace and gain His blessings through repentance and faith. While little in Job resembled very closely the specific treaty pattern of Deuteronomy, the basic concepts of the treaty clearly did stand behind the whole book.

Beyond that, the book of Job suggested that the primal history recorded by Moses in Genesis had been handed down in the West Semitic world before Moses was born, and that concepts similar to the treaty motifs had been known from antiquity. In Job 8:8-10, Bildad placed Job's sufferings in a historical perspective. He advised Job, "Ask I pray of the earlier generations, and establish things searched by their fathers, for we are of yesterday and we do not understand that our days are a shadow on the earth." Bildad was arguing that God blessed those who obeyed Him and judged those who rebelled against Him. Bildad was suggesting that the motif of covenant blessings and curses had been handed down from their ancestors. In Job 15:7-8, Eliphaz alluded to creation. He asked Job, "Were you born the first man, or before the hills were you brought forth? Do you hear the consultation of God?" Elihu may also have alluded to Eden in Job 36:24-28. Elihu spoke of God's works which had been sung by men in an oral

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Gleason Archer Jr., "Old Testament History and Recent Archaeology from Solomon to Zedekiah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 127 (1970): 195-211. Internal evidence from the book of Job can be used to argue for either an early or late date for the book's composition.

²⁵⁸ Several observations could be added to this list. Job seemed to know little about the themes of covenant, patriarch, Israel or conquest. The story was not placed in Palestine. It was placed in the land of Uz east of Palestine. The only character in Job who might fit into the rest of Scripture seemed to be Job's friend Eliphaz the Temanite. According to Gen. 36:10-11, the names Eliphaz and Teman can be associated with Esau's descendants, although there is no way to know how many generations removed from Esau this Eliphaz might have been.

²⁵⁹ The legal context of Job can be supported with an observation made by Shalom Paul. He noted that the book of Job contained many legal terms and that these terms were especially common in Job's speeches. Paul noted that Job 5:8 used a legal idiom for putting a case before the authorities that was common in Akkadian texts. Shalom M. Paul, "Unrecognized Biblical Legal Idioms in the Light of Comparative Akkadian Expressions," *Revue Biblique* 86 (1979): 235-36. The legal aspects of Job's story were recently discussed by F. R. Magdalene. Writing from a mainstream critical perspective, Magdalene interpreted Job's lawsuit in the context of the Neo-Babylonian period. She compared Job to 340 litigation records from this era. F. Rachel Magdalene, *On the Scales of Righteousness: Neo-Babylonian Trial Law and the Book of Job*, (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2007). The Mesopotamian legal material in the background behind Job was recently discussed at length in F. Rachel Magdalene, *On the Scales of Righteousness: Neo-Babylonian Trial Law and the Book of Job*, (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2007).

²⁶⁰ Job's requests for a covenant lawsuit hearing can be seen in Job 5:8-9; 9:14-20; 9:32-33; 13:15-18; 23:3-7; 31:35; 35:14; 40:1, and 40:6-8. Job almost seemed to echo Abraham's question in Gen. 18:25 when Abraham asked if the Judge of the whole world would deal justly.

tradition. In Job 36:24-28, Elihu referred to the primal rain and the mist. The Hebrew word “mist” in this verse was *’ed*. This word only appeared elsewhere in the Old Testament in Genesis 2:6 where it described the waters of Eden. In Job 31:33, Eliphaz pointing Job back to Adam’s encounter with God in Eden after the fall. In this verse, Job asked his friends, “Have I concealed my transgression like Adam?” Like Eliphaz, Job was making an argument based on what Adam had done in the Garden of Eden. In Job 33:4-6, Job replied to Eliphaz that the breath of the Almighty had given him life and that he had also been formed out of clay. Elihu answered in Job 34:14-15 that if God would gather to Himself His Spirit and His breath, all flesh would perish and man would return to the dust. These verses seem to be clear allusions to the tradition later recorded by Moses in Genesis 2:7. In Job 22:15-17, Eliphaz may have made an allusion to Noah’s flood. He asked, “Will you keep (or guard) the ancient path which men of vanity trod, who were seized and they had no time. A river overflowed their foundations (although) they had said ‘Depart from us,’ and ‘What can Shaddai do to them?’” If Noah’s flood is interpreted as a river valley event, Eliphaz could have been comparing Job’s denial of guilt with the rebellion that brought judgment to the pre-flood world. Since Job lived before Moses was born, these claims could not have been based on the book of Genesis. However, they do reflect West Semitic knowledge of primal history. Job and his friends understood a surprising amount of sound theology.²⁶¹

To some extent, the tradition of faith represented in Job was preserved in the Levant throughout Israel’s sojourn in Egypt. As Israel left Egypt, a prophet named Balaam still lived in the mountains of Aram, the homeland of Abraham’s family. Numbers 22:8 demonstrated that Balaam knew Yahweh. When Balak’s envoys asked for Balaam’s help, he told them to wait until the next day for an answer. Balaam said that he could not do anything until he had received Yahweh’s revelation about what to do. In Numbers 23:1, Balaam offered seven bulls and seven rams as a sin offering for Balak. This was the sin offering that God commanded Job to offer for his three friends in Job 42:8. So Numbers 23:1 may illustrate how the tradition of faith had been handed down in Transjordan and western Mesopotamia while Israel was in the wilderness. It also demonstrated how that tradition of faith was becoming increasingly corrupted. The gentile tradition of faith still existed in Moses’ day, but needed to be replaced by a young and vigorous Jewish faith. As a true prophet, Balaam received several remarkable prophecies directly from God Himself.²⁶² In Numbers 23:10, Balaam made a very ironic prophecy. He prophesied, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like his!” Unfortunately, this was not to be. Balaam opposed Israel for profit, and he died in God’s judgment. Balaam demonstrated both the continued presence of a non-Israelite tradition of faith and the serious spiritual weaknesses that were afflicting that faith tradition.

Moses met a far more noble and faithful believing gentile in the wilderness. Moses met his future father-in-law, Jethro. He was a priest of Yahweh in Midian. In Exodus 18:12, Jethro offered a burnt offering and sacrifices before Yahweh. Jethro then led Moses and Israel’s elders in a fellowship meal shared in God’s presence. By the time that God reclaimed Israel from Egypt, Jethro was one of the few remaining righteous gentiles recorded in Scripture. Of course, there is no way to know how many other believing gentiles may have lived at this time.

During Israel’s Egyptian sojourn, the religion of Palestine had been undergoing a radical change. During Israel’s Patriarchal Age, the wickedness of the Amorite had been “not yet full.” Melchizedek and Abraham’s allies in Palestine were Amorites in the general sense of the word. Within the valid form of the West Semitic religion, Genesis 14:19 noted that Melchizedek worshiped El Elyon, the Creator of heaven and earth. Abimelech had at least some knowledge of God. In Genesis 20:3, God appeared to him in a dream. Then in Genesis 26:24, he noted that Isaac was now the “blessed of Yahweh.” While Israel was in Egypt, El Shaddai was still being worshiped by Job and all of his friends.²⁶³ Among the invalid forms of East and West Semitic religious traditions, El was a very important deity.²⁶⁴ He was often the Father of the

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²⁶² Num. 22-24.

²⁶³ The name Shaddai appeared 31 times in Job. Albright, “The Names Shaddai and Abram,” 180.

²⁶⁴ El was both the generic word god, and the name of a specific deity. The name El was part of many compound names for deities. For a discussion of the Canaanite god El, see Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 1-76. Roberts, *The Earliest Semitic*

gods. Compounds of “El,” or “Il” were very common. El occupied Mount Zaphon as his holy mountain. During Israel's Egyptian sojourn, divine names like El, Elyon, and Shaddai in the West Semitic world were used less frequently in a valid form of worship and increasingly were used only in the context of idolatry.

Pantheon, 12-3, 31-6, 57-8, 125. The Genesis text included the compound forms El Elyon, El Roi, El Olam, and El Shaddai.