

CHAPTER 9: THE JUDGES AND A KINGDOM IN REBELLION AGAINST ITS KING

A) CHRONOLOGY VERSUS STRUCTURE IN THE JUDGES

The book of Judges has been notoriously difficult to correlate with historical events in the ancient Near East. The problems are severe enough that some authors have questioned any relationship between Judges and history. It should not be surprising that those who defend the Documentary Hypothesis have seen rather little historical value in the account. They agree that the compiler of the book used various sources, but they disagree widely about how the book's sources were used or how many redactors were involved in that process.¹

One alternative to interpreting Judges as a chronological history has been to see the account as a carefully structured literary document instead of a chronological history. K. Lawson Younger argued that Judges 3:7 to 16:31 was laid out in a geographical pattern. The book began with events in Judah and ended with events in Dan.² D. W. Gooding argued for a more complex structure. He noted that Othniel was the first deliverer and Samson the last. In Othniel's generation, Israel was judged for intermarriage with gentiles, and Othniel's wife encouraged him to drive out the gentiles. Samson's ministry was destroyed by his foreign wives. Gooding noted that the next deliverer after Othniel was Ehud. He claimed to have a secret message for the king of Moab and then killed him with a sword. The deliverer before Samson was Jephthah. He sent messengers to the king of Ammon and tried to settle their differences by diplomacy. Gooding noted that the third and fifth deliverers in Judges also had similarities. In both, the war ended when a woman killed the enemy's leader by crushing his skull. Sisera was killed by Jael's tent peg. Abimelech's skull was crushed by a rock thrown by a woman. Gooding noted that the central story in the Judges was the account of Gideon. Gooding argued that a similar structure can be seen within that story. Gooding argued that an account this carefully structured was probably the work of one author. He noted; "It is highly unlikely that such a carefully maintained symmetry was the work of a multiplicity of compilers each with his own different purpose."³

If the book of Judges is seen as a carefully crafted literary account, there may or may not be any direct relationship between the content of the book and historical events. If Judges is seen as a direct chronological history, the problem becomes finding its true chronology. K. A. Kitchen defended a 19th Dynasty exodus date, so he interpreted the chronology of Judges in that context. If a 19th Dynasty exodus date was used as the basis for Israel's early chronology, Israel would have entered Palestine at some time before 1210 BC. Kitchen argued that the 170 year period from 1210 BC to Saul's enthronement in 1042 BC should be regarded as Israel's period of the Judges. Joshua's entrance into the land would then have occurred shortly before 1210 BC.⁴ Kitchen noted that many people have misunderstood the Bible's chronology, and have read the book of Judges as a chronological succession of events. He argued that this could not be right. I Kings 6:1 noted that Solomon's temple was built 480 years after the exodus. However, the book of Judges does not clearly record a period of 480 years. Adding the figures in the book of Judges gives a figure of 554 years plus the rules of Joshua after the conquest and of Samuel before the United Monarchy. Kitchen noted that a 19th Dynasty exodus around 1260 or 1250 BC would give an interval of 293 or 283 years for the period of the Judges. Kitchen suggested that Othniel judged Judah between 1192 and 1152 BC Kitchen suggested that the Danites seized Laish around 1190 or 1180 BC. Ehud delivered Benjamin around 1182 and produced 80 years of peace in Benjamin between 1182 and 1102 BC. Gideon served in Manasseh for 40 years between 1179 and 1139 BC. Kitchen suggested that Shamgar judged the southwest around 1170 BC. Barak served in Galilee between 1165 and 1150 BC. Ibzan lived in Judah around 1067 or 1060 BC. Deborah then served in Ephraim between 1160 and 1120

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² See the discussion in D. W. Gooding, "The Composition of the Book of Judges," *Eretz-Israel* 16 (1982): 70*-1*.

Lawson is a rather conservative author. K. Lawson Younger Jr. "Judges 1 in Its Near Eastern Literary Context," 207-27 in A. R. Millard et al, *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 216.

³ Gooding, "The Composition of the Book of Judges," 77*.

⁴ Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 159.

BC. Tola judged Ephraim between 1136 and 1113 BC. Jair lived east of the Jordan between 1113 and 1091 BC. Samson judged the southwest around 1080 or 1060 BC. While Samson judged the southwest, Jephthah judged east of the Jordan between 1073 and 1067 BC. Samuel judged Ephraim and Benjamin between 1062 and 1042 BC. Samuel's sons served in Judah around 1045 BC. While Samuel served in Ephraim and Benjamin, Elon served in Galilee between 1060 and 1050 BC. Abdon also served in Ephraim between 1050 and 1042 BC.⁵ Abdon was then still serving in Ephraim when Saul was crowned king.

Defending a 19th Dynasty exodus requires that many of the Judges be contemporaries. All of the Judges and their years of peace must be squeezed into two centuries, and there is limited chronological development through the book. There are two problems with this interpretation of the Judges. The first is that the Judges account seems to describe successive Judges. The second is that the theology of the Judges text was written during the United Monarchy to justify the rise of kingship in Israel. The Judges account traced how Israel's leaders slowly lost their spiritual strength. Israel's faith slowly deteriorated as each person did what was right in his own eyes. This gradual spiritual disintegration is largely lost when all of the Judges are squeezed into a narrow time span. It is fair to ask whether the Judges account actually described Israel's history this way. Whatever other lines of evidence may be applied to the debate, the structure of Judges would seem to support more easily an 18th Dynasty exodus date for the exodus and conquest.

The alternative to a 19th Dynasty exodus model for the Judges is an 18th Dynasty model. This gives many more years to the period of the Judges, but it does not solve all of the chronological problems in the book. Andrew Steinmann recently offered a possible chronology for the Judges based on an 18th Dynasty exodus model. Steinmann argued that Joshua's conquest lasted from 1406 to 1400 BC. He suggested that Joshua and his elders lived until 1379 BC. He assigned 1378 to 1371 BC as the oppression by Cushan-Rishathaim, and suggested 1371 to 1332 BC as Othniel's ministry. Steinmann suggested that the oppression by Eglon lasted from 1332 to 1315 BC, and that the period from Ehud to Shamgar lasted from 1315 to 1236 BC. Steinmann gave Jabin's oppression 1236 to 1217 BC, and he gave Deborah 1217 to 1178 BC. Steinmann argued that the Midianites oppressed Israel from 1178 to 1172 BC, and that Gideon judged the land from 1172 to 1133 BC. He dated Abimelech's reign from 1133 to 1131 BC. He assigned 1131 to 1109 BC to Tola, and he assigned 1109 to 1088 BC to Jair. Then Steinmann argued that the chronology of Judges became more complex. He argued that the oppression by the Midianites lasted from 1088 to 1071 BC, and the Philistine oppression lasted from 1088 to 1049 BC. During these years, Steinmann assigned Jephthah (1088 to 1083 BC), Ibzan (1083 to 1077 BC), Elon (1077-1068 BC), and Abdon (1068 to 1061 BC). Finally, Steinmann gave Samson 1049 to 1030 BC. Steinmann then suggested that Samuel began his ministry in 1060 BC. He crowned Saul in 1048 BC, and he died in 1031 BC.

While Steinmann's dating scheme is not a bad approach to Judges' chronology, it seems somewhat forced and artificial. Why would there be no overlap between judges and no years when there was not a judge in the land? This study will suggest a different possible way to link the history of this period with ancient Near Eastern history.⁶ It will attempt to correlate events in the book of Judges with historical events across the region. This is a controversial approach to the book, and its conclusions will not be widely supported in the field. However, its suggestions may be the only successful way to locate the Judges in history.

B) EARLY OPPRESSIONS

The book of Judges was written during King David's time to justify David's reign. For 400 years, Israel had been a theocracy led by righteous judges who administered God's kingdom without claiming kingship for themselves. The book of Judges argued that this theocracy could not last because Israel

⁵ Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 207.

⁶ This study will suggest a chronology that is largely drawn by putting events in Judges within an Egyptian historical context. Authors like Steinmann suggest chronologies drawn largely from the internal evidence of the book. There are advantages and disadvantages of each approach. Andrew E. Steinmann, "The Mysterious Numbers of the Book of Judges," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48 (2005): 491-500. See also David Washburn, "The Chronology of Judges Another Look," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (1990): 414-25. After 70 AD, Josephus simply added the dates in Judges and claimed that the period of the Judges lasted for 592 years. This is far too long. Charles F. Pfeiffer, *Egypt and the Exodus*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1964), 85. Any chronological approach to the Judges involves difficulties.

gradually fell deeper and deeper into apostasy as each man did what was right in his own eyes. Each successive judge had become less admirable, and each deliverance produced fewer faithful men.⁷

Judges began with a renewed determination to drive the Canaanites from God's land. Yet this new campaign had only limited success. Judges 1 described the regions that Israel had been able to capture and the regions that remained beyond Israel's control. Judges 2 noted that near the end of Joshua's life, Yahweh appeared to Israel as the Angel of the Lord. Yahweh declared that He had promised to keep His covenant with them if they made no covenant with the inhabitants of the land. Yahweh declared that Israel had refused to obey Him and had made treaties with the nations in the Levant. These treaties may be reflected in the Amarna Letters. They had described alliances between the *Habiru* and the kings of Shechem, Hazor, and Ashkelon. Yahweh declared that He would not drive the inhabitants from the land as promised because they had not obeyed His command. The Canaanites who remained would become thorns in their sides.

Judges 2:11-12 noted that Israel turned her back on God and worshiped the Baals as soon as Joshua died. This started a process that continued for 400 years. Israel turned away from God repeatedly. God sold them into the hands of their enemies. They were plundered by the nations and could not stand before them. God raised up judge after judge who delivered the nation. Yet the Israelites did not listen to their judges, and they turned farther away from God as soon as each judge died. Judges 2 ended with the consequence of Israel's rebellion. Yahweh did not drive out the nations from the Levant, but permitted their presence to test Israel. Judges 3 began with a list of the nations that continued to live in the Promised Land. The Israelites lived among the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, Sidonians, and Philistines.

Judges 3:8-11 noted that God's anger burned against Israel and He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim from Aram Naharaim for eight years. Aram-Naharaim was the region within the great bend of the Euphrates in Syria. Aram was mentioned in texts by Amenhotep III and Merenptah. There has been an ongoing debate about who Cushan-rishathaim may have been. Malamat proposed that Cushan-rishathaim may have been an Asiatic usurper who ruled Egypt between 1205 and 1197 BC. This would place Israel's exodus within the 19th Dynasty. Bimson noted that Malamat's proposal has not been widely accepted, and it can not be proven.⁸ The Israelites repented of their idolatry and cried out to Yahweh for salvation. The Lord called Caleb's nephew Othniel to deliver them. The Spirit of Yahweh came on Othniel. He defeated Aram-Naharaim and judged Israel for forty years. Aram Naharaim was the region between Syria and western Mesopotamia.⁹

This oppression could have occurred between Akhenaten's death and the beginning of Horemheb's reign at the end of the 18th Dynasty. This significance of this time period can be understood by looking back briefly at Egyptian history. Before the exodus, Thutmose III had campaigned in Naharaim east of the Euphrates River. He had defeated the kingdom of Mittani which had dominated Upper Mesopotamia and Assyria since around 1490 BC. Hoffner noted that Mittani had dominated the kingdoms of Arrapha in the east, Assyria in the central area, and Mukis in Syria. Hoffner noted that Mittani had reached the zenith of its power under Sausatar around 1450 BC when he was defeated by Thutmose III. Sausatar lost to Egypt much of his territory west of the Euphrates.¹⁰ In his victory stela at Gebel Barkal, Thutmose III claimed that he had plundered and burned the cities in Mittani, and cut down every tree in the

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Deborah led 10,000 men from Naphtali and Zebulun. Gideon saved Israel with 300 men. Samson stood alone against the Philistines while 3000 men from Judah tried to give him to the Philistines. See the discussion in Robert A. Starke, "Samson-The Last Judge," *Kerux* 17 (2002).

Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, 103-04. Bimson noted Yeivin's argument against Malamat's suggestion. Yeivin noted that at the end of the 13th century, no state in northwest Mesopotamia or Syria could have raided Palestine.

The common translation of this name as "Mesopotamia" can be misleading. Aram Naharaim was not the region of Ur, Babylon, or Assyria. It was the western end of the Tigris Euphrates valley. In Gen. 24:10, Aram Naharaim included the city of Nahor where Rebekah lived. In Deut. 23:4, Aram Naharaim included Pethor, Balaam's hometown. In I Chron. 19:6, the Ammonites hired chariots and horsemen from Aram-maacah, king of Aram Naharaim, to oppose David. I Chron. 19:12 refers to the troops of Aram-maacah as Syrians. O'Callaghan claims that Naharaim was the area beyond the Euphrates to the Orontes River, and partly northward into Asia Minor. O'Callaghan, *Aram Naharaim*, 76.

H. Hoffner, "The Hittites and the Hurrians," 197-228 in D. J. Wiseman, ed. *Peoples of Old Testament Times*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 223.

land.¹¹ Thutmose III had not described a great battle in Mittani on this stela because the population had simply fled before him. After this victory, Naharaim sent annual tribute to the Egyptian court throughout his reign. For decades, Egypt struggled to maintain control of Syria and the far western regions of Mesopotamia. Amenhotep II claimed to have campaigned in Naharaim, and to have erected a stela there.¹² Thutmose IV campaigned in Naharaim at the beginning of his reign, and received annual tribute from the region.¹³ Despite these conquests, Thutmose IV recognized that he could not control an area so far from Egypt's borders. So Thutmose IV formed a treaty with Artatama, the Mittani king. During Israel's wilderness years, an extensive correspondence was conducted between the courts of Artatama, Thutmose IV, and Amenhotep III. As a result, Mittani formed a marriage alliance with Egypt, returning to Mitanni control of Aleppo and North Syria.¹⁴ Katzenstein suggested that after this treaty, Egypt's control of its own northern territory was weakened by simple indifference.¹⁵ Egypt's marriage alliance with Mitanni fell apart during Akhenaten's reign because Akhenaten refused to send enough gold to Mittani to continue the relationship. Mittani had a critical need for gold at the time. During Akhenaten's reign, the Hittite emperor Shuppiluliumash I had destroyed the Mittani kingdom and had placed a vassal ruler named Kurtiwaza on the throne at Wassukkanni. O'Callaghan suggested that Mittani fell to the Hittites for the lack of quick and strong Egyptian support.¹⁶ By this victory, the Hittites incorporated North Syria and part of western Mesopotamia into their kingdom.

This new Hittite control of Mittani and North Syria was a serious threat to Egypt. It continued the Hittite expansion across Egypt's northern territories. This threat from the north can be seen in Amarna Letter 157. In this text, Abimilki, the king of Tyre, wrote to Egypt, "... if the king of Ha[tt]e [comes] for hostility against me, then O king, my lord, give me soldiers --- a[n]d chariots [f]or my assistance."¹⁷ This Hittite expansion had also taken away Egypt's control of the Amorite lands along the northern Mediterranean coast. The Hittite expansion into Amorite territory had occurred rather indirectly. At the end of the reign of Amenhotep III, the Amorite king Abdi-Ashirta and his son Aziru had extended their control over several city states along the Mediterranean coast. Egypt's vassals in the region requested help from Akhenaten against Aziru. In response, Aziru had written Amarna Letter 158 to a high Egyptian official named Dudu. In this letter, Aziru complained that he had been slandered to the Egyptian court. Aziru claimed that he had remained a loyal vassal of Egypt, although he did not agree to return the cities that he had seized. However, before the end of Akhenaten's reign, Aziru had formed a vassal treaty with the Hittite ruler Shuppiluliumash, and had ended his vassal treaty with Egypt. Combined with their victory over Mittani, this gave the Hittites control over a large percentage of Egypt's territory north of Palestine.¹⁸

Egypt faced revolt in other areas of Syria and Palestine as well. The cities of Ugarit and Sidon both signed treaties with the Hittites against Egypt.¹⁹ During Akhenaten's reign, several Canaanite city states also petitioned the Babylon king Burnaburiash for assistance against Egypt's control of the region. By the end of Akhenaten's reign, Egypt had lost all of its territories north of Palestine, and Egypt's control of Palestine was at best rather tenuous.²⁰ In this historical context, it is not at all surprising that the Hittites'

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Barbara Cumming, *Egyptian Historical Records of the Later Eighteenth Dynasty*, 3 vols. (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1982), I:2

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"Karnak Building Inscription" of Amenhotep II, Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, II:315-17

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Steindorff and Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East*, 108. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, II:25.

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Hoffner, "The Hittites and the Hurrians," 223.

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H. Jacob Katzenstein, *The History of Tyre*, (Jerusalem: The Schocken Institute for Jewish Research, 1973), 28.

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Hoffner, "The Hittites and the Hurrians," 223. O'Callaghan, *Aram Naharaim*, 89.

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Mercer, *The Tell-El-Amarna Tablets*, II:511.

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Alfred Haldar, *Who Were the Amorites?* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 24.

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Katzenstein, *The History of Tyre*, 28.

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Steindorff and Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East*, 112, 247. There has been nearly endless academic debate over the extent to which Egypt lost control of its northern territories during the Amarna Age. Opinions run from a complete loss of empire on one extreme to the maintenance of full Egyptian power on the other extreme. The best position seems to be a middle course between these extremes.

vassals in Mittani should have attempted to expand their area of control south into Israel's northern territory as Judges 3 indicated. Judges 3:8 noted that northern Israel served Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-Naharaim for eight years. Unfortunately, it is impossible to know exactly when this oppression began. It may have started during Akhenaten's later years, or during the rather brief reigns of his successors Smenkhkare, Tutankhamun, and Ay. This oppression was followed by a period of peace and stability for the northern tribes. Judges 3:11 claimed that the land had rest for forty years. Part of this period of peace may well have occurred during the reign of Horemheb who ascended to the Egyptian throne somewhere between 1353 BC and 1342 BC. He ruled for either 13 or 28 years depending on how the texts from his reign are understood.²¹ Horemheb was a capable ruler. He published a long edict intended to limit political corruption in Egypt, and to end the rampant abuse of the poor.²² He restored the traditional Egyptian religion, and began to dismantle Akhenaten's monotheistic experiment. He made no attempt to regain northern territories lost to the Hittites. However, he did make peace with the Hittites, and stabilized what remained of Egypt's possessions in the north.²³ Horemheb brought stability to the empire throughout his reign. While the evidence is not completely clear, Horemheb seemed to have formed a treaty with the Hittites to prevent direct military attacks on Palestine and Syria by the Hittites or their vassals in Mitanni. The evidence for this treaty comes from the historical prologue of Ramesses II's treaty with the Hittites. Ramesses II's treaty referred to an earlier treaty between Egypt and the Hittites.

Judges 3:12-30 described persecutions by Edom and Moab of regions further south. Judges 3:12 noted that the Israelites had done "evil" in Yahweh's sight. "Evil" in this context may have been used in a technical treaty way to describe breaking Yahweh's covenant. Since Israel had broken Yahweh's covenant, He brought on them the curses of His covenant. Israel was forced to serve the abusive king of Moab instead of the divine King Yahweh who they had rejected. Judges 3:19 noted that Israel had set up idols on the high place at Gilgal.²⁴ This high place was an ancient holy mountain site. It should have been used to worship Yahweh. Instead it was used for revolt against Israel's true king. In God's judgment, the Israelites near Moabite territory were forced to serve Moab's king Eglon for 18 years. When Israel repented and cried out to Yahweh, He raised up another savior for them. Ehud murdered Eglon and led the Ephraimites on an attack against Moab.

Then Judges 3:31 mentioned a persecution by the Philistines in western Judah. Judges 3:31 gave little direct information about which tribes were involved or exactly when the oppression occurred. Since the Philistine territory was along the coastal plains, the oppression might have been limited to the tribes close to Philistine territory. Yahweh gave Judah a deliverer who resembled Samson. The Philistines had bronze weapons. Shamgar killed 600 of them with an ox goad. Shamgar may have come from the north rather than the south since he was called the son of Anat.²⁵ Shamgar may have been a contemporary of Deborah since he was also mentioned in Judges 5:6. The Philistines at this time were still a relatively weak force, although the Israelites had not been able to conquer their territory. Killing 600 of them ended the Philistine threat to Judah for the next 200 years.²⁶

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²² The debates among Egyptologists over the length of Horemheb's reign have been legendary.

²³ "Edict of Horemheb," Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III:23-33. Akhenaten had concentrated wealth and Egyptian agricultural control in the power of a few officials. This led to mass corruption and abuses of power which Horemheb attempted to curb.

²⁴ John Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 239.

²⁵ There has been a lot of academic debate about the nature of a "high place." See the discussion in J. T. Whitney, "Bamoth in the Old Testament," *Tyndale Bulletin*, vol 30 (1979): 125-47.

²⁶ There has been constant debate over whether Shamgar was an Israelite or a Canaanite. He was *ben Anat*, the son of Anat. This name has been found in the Ugaritic texts where it described a strong warrior who may have been a worshiper of Anat. For a summary of issues related to Judg. 3:31, see Adrianus Van Selms, "Judge Shamgar," *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964): 294-309. Snyman also addressed the Shamgar problem. Snyman noted that almost no details are known about Shamgar's life, but Snyman argued that he was not a Jew. Snyman noted that Shamgar killed 600 Philistines. Snyman suggested that this may not have been a literal number since 600 men was the size of a battalion of soldiers. Snyman argued that Shamgar may have been a farmer instead of a warrior. S. D. Snyman, "Shamgar Ben Anath: A Farming Warrior or a Farmer at War?" *Vetus Testamentum*, vol 55 (2005): 125-29.

Bimson argued that Judges 3:31 may not have originally been in this part of Judges. He noted that the LXX distinguishes between Shamgar son of Anath in Judg. 5:6 and Samegar son of Dinach in Judg. 3:31. Bimson noted that some LXX

Those who argued that Israel only appeared during the 19th Dynasty have often equated the Philistines with the Sea People who arrived in the land around 1200 BC. A persecution by the Philistines in Judges 3 would then require a late date for the sea crossing. Yet the Philistines had been present in the Promised Land since the Patriarchal age. The Philistines in Genesis had been part of the Minoan culture.²⁷ After the death of Thutmose III, Minoan Crete had fallen to the Mycenaean Greeks.²⁸ They were a very aggressive and warlike culture. After the Mycenaean invasion, soldiers began to be buried on Crete in full armor. These burials included many different kinds of military equipment. Military themes also appeared on the palace frescoes and archaeological artifacts. William Taylour argued that Mycenaean frescoes and monuments suggest that the Mycenaeans loved strife for its own sake. Chariot themes appeared frequently, along with depictions of the king triumphing over his foes.²⁹ They soon began expanding their influence in the eastern Mediterranean. Knapp noted that the Mycenaean presence can be seen first in Mycenaean style pottery on Crete itself. Linear B script also appeared which was used to write the Mycenaean Greek dialect.³⁰ While the Minoans had struggled to end piracy in the Mediterranean, the Mycenaean's navy carried out profitable raids on foreign territories. Chamoux claimed that the Mycenaeans considered piracy to be a noble calling instead of an evil to be opposed.³¹

The Mycenaean domination of the Minoan world had quite an impact on Palestine. Mycenaean pottery became much more common across the Philistine Pentapolis than it had been before the Mycenaean invasion of Crete.³² Before the Mycenaean Greeks invaded Crete, Mycenaean I and Mycenaean IIA pottery had both been rare in Palestine outside of Ashkelon. After the Mycenaean Greeks invaded Crete, Mycenaean IIB, IIIA, and IIIB pottery appeared at a wide variety of sites, including Ashkelon, Beth Shean, Beth Shemesh, Byblos, Gaza, Gezer, Jericho, Lachish, Megiddo, Ras Shamra, Shechem, Tell Ajjul, Tell Atchana, Tell Beit Mirsim, and Tell es Safiyeh.³³ Mycenaean style pottery also became far more common in Egypt than Minoan pottery had been a generation before this time.³⁴ All of

manuscripts have a very similar reference to Shamgar at Judg. 16:31 after the story of Samson. Bimson suggested that this verse may have been copied at Judg. 3:31 because of a confusion of the two men with similar names. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, 94-5. If Bimson was right, there would be no Philistine oppression of Israel before the Sea People invasion.

Wiseman suggested that the Philistines may have come from Cyprus instead of Crete. Assuming this location for the Philistine homeland, Wiseman suggested that the Philistines in Judg. 3:3 may have imported Cypriot ware to the region before the appearance of Cypriot bichrome ware during the Late Bronze Age. D. J. Wiseman, "Abraham Reassessed," 141-60 in A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman, eds. *Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 150. Hindson noted that Minoan and Mycenaean pottery had been present in Palestine long before 1200 BC. Hindson argued that Abraham would probably have had commercial contacts with the Aegean peoples in Palestine, and that the Aegean people would have been identified with Philistines by later authors. Edward E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1971), 95.

Hatshepsut and Thutmose III may have had a treaty with the Minoans that helped them resist the Mycenaean threat, although the existence of such a treaty has been debated. W. S. Smith noted that a Cretan envoy was pictured on the tomb of Hatshepsut's servant Senmut. Depictions of envoys from Crete have also been found in the tombs of Thutmose III's officials. William S. Smith, *Interconnections in the Ancient Near East*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 68-9. Ward noted that the Phaistos Disc from Crete contained the words "Province of the Philistines" which suggests that Crete was the Philistine homeland. W. A. Ward, "Egypt and the East Mediterranean in the Early Second Millennium B. C." *Orientalia* 30 (1961) 34.

³⁰ William Taylour, *Ancient Peoples and Places: The Mycenaeans*, (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 139

Albright argued that "an unparalleled period of Mycenaean trade expansion eastward began with the fall of Cnossus and continued until the irruption of the Sea Peoples..." William F. Albright, "The Role of the Canaanites in the History of Civilization," 328-62 in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961), 337. For Knapp's comments, see Bernard Knapp, "Bronze Age Mediterranean Island Cultures and the Ancient Near East, Part 1," *Biblical Archaeologist* 55 (1992): 112-20.

³² François Chamoux, *The Civilization of Greece*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), 50.

³³ Vronwy Hankey, "Crete, Cyprus and the South-Eastern Mediterranean 1400-1200 BC," 144-57 in *Acts of the International Archaeological Symposium "The Relations between Cyprus and Crete ca. 2000-500 B.C."*, (Nicosia, 1978).

Frank H. Stubbings, *Mycenaean Pottery from the Levant*, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1951), 53.

³⁴ Smith, *Interconnections in the Ancient Near East*, 68-9.

this pottery was in place before the Sea Peoples' invasion of the Levant around 1200 BC.³⁵ K. Kilian noted that the Mycenaean Greeks had a very unified and organized culture. Each Mycenaean settlement was clustered around the residence of a local *wanax*, or official. The whole culture centered around a class system built on a social hierarchy reflected in clothing, quality of dwelling places, tombs, and cultic rituals.³⁶ The Philistine population in Palestine also became far more militant and aggressive after the Mycenaean Greeks conquered Crete.

C) DEBORAH AND JABIN

As Judges 5:6 noted, Deborah's battle against Hazor occurred in the north while Shamgar was still serving as a judge in the south. Judges 4:1 noted that the sons of Israel had done "evil" in Yahweh's eyes. Taken as a treaty term, "evil" here indicated that they once more broke His covenant and served the Baals. Judges 5:8 noted that the Israelites had chosen new gods for themselves. So Yahweh brought on them the covenant curses and made Israel serve Hazor's king Jabin.³⁷ Hazor oppressed and dominated the northern tribes for twenty years. Jabin had invaded the heart of Israel's territory. This is something that the Egyptians had not done. The Egyptians had only been concerned with the coastal plains and had been content to ignore Israel's occupation of the highlands. Israel's northern tribes began to suffer severely from Jabin's attacks down the Jordan valley. When the Israelites repented of their idolatry and prayed to Yahweh, He raised up the prophetess Deborah to judge Israel. She sat under a palm tree in Ephraim between the holy mountain high places of Ramah and Bethel. The Israelites would go up to her palm tree so that she could determine legal decisions for them. Like most of Israel's judges, her seat under a palm tree indicated that she rejected kingship with its court and palace. She chose instead the life of a servant as Yahweh's representative. Deborah defeated Jabin by getting him to send his chariot force west through the valley of Jezreel into the plain of Esdraelon. The Kishon River meandered through the plain. When the Kishon overflowed its banks, the plain was turned into a mud flat. Jabin's chariots became stuck in the mud, and the Israelites were able to destroy his army.³⁸ Deborah interpreted Israel's victory over Hazor in terms of holy mountain imagery. In Judges 5:3b-5, she sang,

To Yahweh, I will sing. I will praise Yahweh, God of Israel. Yahweh, when You went out from Seir, when you marched from the field of Edom, the earth shook, the clouds dripped water. The mountains shook before Yahweh, this Sinai before Yahweh God of Israel.

Deborah interpreted Yahweh's victory in the context of holy mountain imagery. God had come out of His presence at "this Sinai" to battle for His people.

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Mariusz Burdajewicz argued that the dividing line between the earlier Mycenaean pottery and later Philistine pottery can be seen in the demarcation line between levels 12 and 13 at Ashdod. Burdajewicz noted that Philistine ceramics were easily identified. It was a uniform, homogeneous pottery style that appeared in strictly defined archaeological contexts. It first appeared in the Iron Age I period after 1150 BC. Burdajewicz noted that Philistine type pottery appeared in exactly the areas that the Old Testament claimed were occupied by the Philistines. Mariusz Burdajewicz, *The Aegean Sea Peoples and Religious Architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean at the Close of the Late Bronze Age*, (Oxford: B.A.R. International Series #558, 1990), 3-6. For a description of a Late Bronze Age Mycenaean krater at tell Dan, see James D. Muhly, "Myceneans Were There before the Israelites," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 31 (2005): 44-51.

K. Kilian, "Mycenaean Colonization: Nature and Variety," 445-67 in Jean-Paul Descoedres, ed. *Greek Colonists and Native Populations*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 445

³⁷ After God's judgment on this sin and later deliverance, Deborah sang in Judges 5:31, "Let those who love Him be like the rising of the sun." Loving in this context described a return to proper covenant or treaty obedience.

³⁸ While most of Jabin's chariots were destroyed, it is not impossible that Deborah may have saved a few for Israel's use. While chariots were of limited military value in the highlands, Deborah may have kept a number to defend the Jordan valley or to attack the Canaanites on the coastal plains. Israelites were first depicted at Karnak on Merenptah's Canaanite campaign reliefs. It is interesting that the Israelites were depicted in Merenptah's reliefs as having at least one chariot. For a discussion of Merenptah's reliefs, see Frank J. Yurco, "Merenptah's Canaanite Campaign and Israel's Origins," 27-55 in Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard H. Lesko, eds. *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence*, (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 29. Yurco would not accept this explanation. He would date Deborah substantially after Merenptah.

Deborah defeated a very impressive culture. The city of Hazor had been one of the great cities of the region since the third millennium BC. At one point, Hazor may have had as many as 40,000 inhabitants.³⁹ Before the Canaanite occupation levels at Hazor were destroyed, the city had a magnificent temple with decorated walls, columns, and painted lions. Two other smaller temples have also been found at Hazor from this period.⁴⁰ Abraham Malamat explained Joshua 11:10 in the context of the Mari texts. Malamat noted that Hazor was described in Joshua 11:10 in terms very similar to those used in the Mari texts to describe Babylon, Larsa, and Eshnunna. Each of these cities had ruled over a collection of vassal cities.⁴¹

For many years, there has been a great academic debate about the archaeological evidence for Hazor's destruction. It was popular for many years to date Deborah around 1125 BC because of Albright's excavation at Megiddo. Albright argued that Judges 5:19 depicted Taanach as the chief city in the region instead of Megiddo. Albright argued that Megiddo was in ruins between levels 7 and 6. Albright interpreted the period between these levels as Israel's arrival in Megiddo. While Albright's interpretation of Megiddo's archaeology may be questioned, his date for Deborah has remained popular. It assumes a 19th Dynasty exodus. Bimson traced the evidence for this assumed date. Bimson noted that both Megiddo and Taanach were destroyed around 1125 BC and an occupation gap occurred at both sites. Bimson also noted that Judges 5:19 really only claimed that the battle occurred at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo.⁴² The text did not claim that Megiddo was unoccupied at the time. Bimson argued that there is no archaeological reason to place Judges 4-5 in the 12th century BC.⁴³

Much of the recent debate about Hazor has centered on when and how the 1B and 1A levels of Canaanite Hazor were destroyed. Yigael Yadin described the destruction of Canaanite Hazor in these words.

Our very extensive excavations at Hazor clearly demonstrated that a large Canaanite city was suddenly destroyed and set on fire in the 13th century B.C. (end of the Late Bronze Age), no later than about 1,230 B.C. On the thick debris of the mound of the destroyed Canaanite city, we found a new settlement, unfortified, poor and obviously semi-nomadic in character. The so-called lower city of Canaanite Hazor had been simply abandoned. Hazor could hardly be considered a city at this point. Only in the 10th century B.C. when Solomon rebuilt it did Hazor once again become a major urban center.⁴⁴

Yadin argued that the 1A level at Hazor was destroyed by Joshua because Yadin was committed to a 19th Dynasty model for Israel's appearance in Palestine. However, that created a problem for Judges 5. There was no Canaanite city at Hazor after the 1A level was burned. So Yadin argued that the account of Deborah's battle against Jabin must have been a fictional account with no historical validity. Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger argued essentially the same case although she dated Hazor's 1A level differently.⁴⁵

³⁹ Ronald Youngblood, "Hazor," in *Major Cities of the Biblical World*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 121.

⁴⁰ M. Kochavi, "At that Time the Canaanites were in the Land," H. Shanks, ed, *Recent Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1981) 33.

⁴¹ Abraham Malamat, "Northern Canaan and the Mari Texts," 164-77 in James A. Sanders, ed. *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1970).

⁴² Rainey argued that the battle actually occurred in the center of the plain near the foot of Mount Tabor. In that area, they were defeated, and many were swept away by the Kishon River. Rainey argued that the Canaanites' assembly ground had been at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo. However, they left this region to attack the Israelites. Rainey, "The Military Camp Ground at Taanach by the Waters of Megiddo." 64*.

⁴³ Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, 106.

⁴⁴ Yigael Yadin, "Is the Biblical Account of the Israelite Conquest of Canaan Historically Reliable?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 8.2 (1982) 19. Yadin claimed that Hazor was destroyed no later than 1230 BC because the last Canaanite level contained Mycenaean III B pottery. Yadin accepted Furumark's claim that Mycenaean III B pottery never appeared after 1230 BC. Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger argued that Mycenaean III B pottery actually appeared at Alalakh and Ugarit until 1200 or 1180 BC. Christa Schäfer-Lichtenberger, "Hazor-A City State between the Major Powers," *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 15 (2001): 14-6. This at least makes it possible that the final level at Hazor could have been destroyed up to 50 years later than the date suggested by Yadin.

⁴⁵ Schäfer-Lichtenberger, "Hazor-A City State between the Major Powers," 14-6.

Yadin and Schäfer-Lichtenberger had a valid point. If Israel's early history is understood in a 19th Dynasty exodus model, it is very hard to find a place in history of Jabin's Hazor.⁴⁶ If Seti I destroyed the lower 1B Canaanite city at Hazor as authors like Yadin claim, that places limitations on how the Biblical narrative can be understood.⁴⁷ Ramesses II led his army into Syria and Palestine for the first 21 years of his reign. Yet he did not mention Hazor in the records of his conquests.⁴⁸ Tubb argued that the Egyptians built a fortress at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh late in the reign of Ramesses II. This fortress was on the Jordan River southeast of Beth Shean. It controlled the central Jordan valley until the Sea People invasion of 1200 BC.⁴⁹ Jabin could not have dominated the region after the fortress was established. Ramesses II was followed to the throne by Merenptah. He also invaded Palestine, but his texts do not mention Hazor. The general picture in the Egyptian texts is that Hazor was not an important city at any time after Seti I destroyed the Hazor 1B city. Schäfer-Lichtenberger argued that the Hazor 1A city had so few artifacts that it could not have been occupied for very long. She argued that Canaanite Hazor could have finally been destroyed by Israel, the Sea People, the Hittites, the Egyptians, or one of Hazor's Amorite neighbors.⁵⁰ The most likely time for its destruction was the end of Ramesses II's reign perhaps when he was establishing the Egyptian fort at Tell es-Saidiyeh, but the occupation layer was so limited that it could not have been Jabin's dominant city at the time. By a 19th Dynasty model for Israel's early history, Jabin's Hazor simply wasn't there.

The picture is quite different by an 18th Dynasty model for Israel's early history. By that model, Jabin's Hazor fitted fairly well into the historical setting. By an 18th Dynasty model, it is not impossible that Joshua's destruction of Hazor may have been implied by two of the Amarna Letters. The first was Amarna Letter 148. In this letter, Abimilki of Tyre wrote that the king of Hazor had left the city. He had joined the *habiru*, and he had opposed Egyptian rule.⁵¹ The letter does not suggest why the king of Hazor chose to join the *habiru*. One possibility is that he was part of the population of Hazor when Israel attacked the city and killed its former king. He may have joined the homeless population along with those who had fled the city until they were able to resettle it. Another possibility is that he joined the Israelites to gain permission to rebuild Hazor. While any explanation for his action must be speculative, Joshua's conquest of Hazor provides a credible historical context for the king's choice of a *habiru* life style. The second Amarna Letter that might allude to Joshua's capture of Hazor was Amarna Letter 228. When this letter was written, a king reigned in Hazor once more. He asked the Egyptians to remember what had been done to Hazor's king and to the city. While this request is ambiguous, it could refer to Joshua's destruction of Hazor. In this

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Kitchen suggested that Jabin may have ruled the state of Hazor after the city of Hazor had been destroyed. Kitchen suggested that Jabin's city may not yet have been found. K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Israel and the Old Testament*, 67-8.

Thutmose III claimed that he destroyed Hazor. Diamantis Panagiotopoulos, "Foreigners in Egypt in the Time of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III," in *Thutmose III: A New Biography*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 374. Seti I claimed to have conquered Tyre and Hazor. Seti I modeled his list of conquered cities after the list written by Thutmose III. William J. Murnane, *The Road to Kadesh: A Historical Interpretation of the Battle Reliefs of King Sety I at Karnak*, (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1990), 44. For the text, see K. A. Kitchen, *Ramesseid Inscriptions Translated and Annotated: Translations: I: Ramesses I, Sethos I and Contemporaries*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 26.

The city of Hazor was first mentioned at Mari and in the Egyptian *Execration Texts* from the 19th century BC. Hazor was mentioned in texts written by Thutmose III, Amenhotep II, and Seti I. The city was named in a list of messengers sent to Egypt during the 18th Dynasty. The *Amarna Letters* described Hazor as a dominant city in northern Canaan. Malamat noted that the last Egyptian reference to Hazor before the Israelite conquest appeared in Papyrus Anastasi I which was written in the 13th century BC shortly before the city was destroyed. Abraham Malamat, "Hazor 'The Head of All Those Kingdoms'," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79 (1960) 12-3. Surviving texts often contain holes in the text called "lacunae." It is not impossible that the name Hazor may have once occupied a hole in a text written after Seti I. At the Ramesseum, Ramesses II listed the cities that he conquered in Syria and Palestine. Several names on the list have not survived. For this and similar texts see K. A. Kitchen, *Ramesseid Inscriptions Translated & Annotated: Translations Volume II: Ramesses II, Royal Inscriptions*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 26-7, 48-9, 51-4, 71. The weakness of this explanation is that several conquest lists have been preserved, and Hazor appeared on none of them.

J. N. Tubb, "An Aegean Presence in Egypto-Canaan," in *Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant: Interconnections in the Second Millennium BC*, (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 141-42.

⁵⁰ Schäfer-Lichtenberger, "Hazor-A City State between the Major Powers," 14-6

⁵¹ Yohanan Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 174-75.

letter, the city was becoming powerful once more. The king of Hazor claimed to protect the region for the Egyptians. Yet Hazor was also becoming increasingly aggressive against Egypt's vassals in Palestine. In Amarna Letter 256b, Aiab complained to Egypt that the ruler the city of Hazura has taken three cities from him.⁵² This text demonstrated the same kind of aggression that Hazor poured out against Israel's northern tribes.

At the end of the 18th Dynasty, Egypt's control of the north was weakening while the Hittite Empire was rising to power. The most important Hittite king was named Suppiluliuma. He ruled the Hittites while Amenhotep III, Akhenaten, Tutankhamun, and Ay ruled in Egypt. Suppiluliuma struggled against Mitanni for control of Syria and regions north of it. Looking forward to this conflict, Suppiluliuma spent his first five years building alliances that were intended to isolate Mitanni. Then he defeated Mitanni's allies in Syria. Suppiluliuma seized control of Syria as far south as Upi which was the region around Damascus. Trevor Bryce noted that Suppiluliuma was able to conquer the region both because of his military power and his diplomatic ability. His vassals Aitakkama and Aziru used their alliance with Suppiluliuma to seize territory from their neighbors who were Egyptian vassals. Through most of his reign, Suppiluliuma avoided direct military engagement with Egypt. However near the end of his reign, he attacked Egyptian territory and seized thousands of captives.⁵³ This historical setting suggests that Hazor may have allied itself with the Hittites to resist both Egypt and Mittani. Hazor's expansion into the Jordan valley would then have followed the same pattern seen in Aitakkama and Aziru. When Suppiluliuma died, Mursili I came to the throne. Anthony Spalinger noted that there is rather ambiguous evidence that Egypt may have threatened Syria during his reign. While this attack can not be reconstructed from the existing records with any certainty, Spalinger suggested that the Egyptian army may have encountered local resistance at some point south of Kadesh, and that this attack may have prevented the Egyptian army from reaching Syria.⁵⁴ Hazor may be the best candidate for a local force able to stall an Egyptian advance into Syria.

If Deborah's conflict with Jabin occurred before Seti I destroyed Hazor, Deborah's victory would have occurred during the reign of Pharaoh Horemheb.⁵⁵ During these years, Israelites in the highlands may have been able to exert new pressure against the Canaanite city states in Palestine. This was probably only true of Israelites in the hills. Some Israelites had always lived on the plains among the Canaanite city states. Judges 5:17 described these Israelites. In this verse, Deborah asked why Dan had stayed in ships and why Asher had remained on the shore instead of joining Deborah's battle. The answer normally given to Deborah's question has been that Dan and Asher were closely associated with the Canaanites who sailed out of Tyre.⁵⁶ Stager suggested that the tribe of Reuben was involved in specialized pastoralism and needed Canaanite markets. The Israelite tribes in the central and northern highlands were poor but free. So they responded to Deborah's call.⁵⁷ Israelites on the plains had too many financial commitments to attack the Canaanites.

A witness to Israel's increased military aggression may be recorded on the walls of Horemheb's tomb at Saqqara in Egypt. A text on the walls of Horemheb's tomb depicted Canaanite refugees begging Egyptian officials for permission to enter the northeast Nile delta. The Canaanites claimed that their cities had been burned, and that they had lived like animals in the fields until they had reached Egypt. As Egypt's vassals, the Canaanites had a right to request asylum. Siegfried Horn claimed that Horemheb's tomb depicted Canaanites who had been driven from Palestine by the Israelites.⁵⁸ Horemheb may have led his army north to the Canaanite coast in response to Israel's new strength. He may have hoped to restore Egyptian power on the plains. It is unclear how successful he really was, and there has been a lot

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Mercer, *The Tell-El-Amarna Tablets*, 667.

⁵³ Bryce Trevor, *The Kingdom of the Hittites* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 171-77, 189, 198.

⁵⁴ Anthony J. Spalinger, "Egyptian-Hittite Relations at the Close of the Amarna Period and Some Notes on Hittite Military Strategy in North Syria," *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 1 (1979): 59.

Proposed dates for Horemheb's reign include: Wilson, 1342 BC to 1303 BC, Steindorff and Seele, 1353 BC to 1319 BC, Breasted, 1350 BC to 1315 BC, Kitchen, 1323-1295 BC.

⁵⁶ Katzenstein, *The History of Tyre*, 66-7.

⁵⁷ L. E. Stager, "Archaeology, Ecology, and Social History: Background Themes to the Song of Deborah," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum* 40 (1988): 221-34.

⁵⁸ Siegfried Horn, "What We Don't Know about Moses and the Exodus," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 3 (1977): 22-31.

of academic debate about how much influence Egypt had on the north during his reign. Horemheb died somewhere between 1319 BC and 1303 BC.

D) GIDEON

Deborah was not able to end the sin problem in Israel. Judges 6:1 noted that Israel once more did "evil" in Yahweh's eyes. So Yahweh gave them into the hands of the gentiles. Judges 6:1-7 noted that Israel was oppressed for seven years by the Midianites, Amalekites, and the sons of the east.⁵⁹ This judgment was far more severe than God's previous judgments on His people. At harvest time, these Bedouin from the desert fringe passed through Israel's territory as far as Gaza. They came through the land with many livestock and camels. They numbered like locusts, and just like locusts, they devastated the land. They left Israel no produce or livestock. When Israel's revolt had been broken by such suffering, they cried out to Yahweh in repentance. In response, God sent them a Messenger of Yahweh who convicted Israel of their sin and reminded them of the judgment that had fallen on them. They had worshiped the Amorites' gods even though Yahweh had delivered them from Egypt and had forbidden them to worship other gods. This unnamed prophet declared that they were suffering for their disobedience as God had promised. Then Yahweh Himself appeared to Gideon as the Angel of the Lord, and God brought Gideon into the ranks of His messengers. Gideon did not immediately recognize the Angel of Yahweh, and claimed that God had abandoned His people. When God sent Gideon to deliver Israel, Gideon was rather appalled to realize that he had encountered the Angel of the Lord. Then Gideon tore down Baal's altar and built an altar for Yahweh in its place. Yahweh's Spirit fell on Gideon and he summoned the northern tribes to fight Israel's oppressors.⁶⁰

In seeking a historical setting for Gideon, it is significant to note that the Midianites and Amalekites passed through both Israelite and Philistine territory all the way to the walls of Gaza itself. This would have been impossible after 1200 BC when the Sea Peoples settled into the Philistine Pentapolis. The Sea Peoples turned the Philistines into the strongest military force in the region. A Midianite and Amalekite invasion after 1200 BC would have been crushed instantly by the descendants of the Sea People.

A series of minor Egyptian rulers reigned for perhaps 15 years between Merenptah and Ramesses III. These included Amunmessi, Seti II, Siptah, and Seth-Nakht. The chronology of this period is a difficult problem, and it is hard to know if Gideon's battle could have occurred during these years. It is unlikely that the Midianites and Amalekites would have invaded Palestine earlier during the reigns of Ramesses the Great or Merenptah.⁶¹ Ramesses the Great was one of the strongest rulers that Egypt ever knew. During the first half of his reign, he campaigned in the north constantly. A Midianite or Amalekite invasion during these years would have faced an immediate military response from Egypt. Egypt's continued threat to the north may be implied by the fact that Israel did not establish even a village at the site of Hazor until after Ramesses II died. Also, Merenptah recorded at length the problems that the Egyptian empire faced at the beginning of his reign and how his campaigns solved those problems. He described at length his campaign against the Libyans in the northwest and his campaign in Palestine to put down threatened revolt in the north.⁶² The records of his campaigns include the famous Merenptah

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There has been some debate about the identity of the Midianites. George Mendenhall suggested that the Midianites were the bedouin segment of the population of Moab. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, 163-73.

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Gideon was a complex person. So mainstream critical scholars have consistently tried to divide the account of his ministry into contradictory sources. Block surveyed the approaches taken to the Gideon account within the academic orbit. Then Block argued that Gideon's complexity resulted from the gradual loss of spiritual strength among Israel's Judges. Block argued that this gradual decline was the main theme of Judges. Daniel I. Block, "Will the Real Gideon Please Stand Up? Narrative Style and Intention in Judges 6-9," *Journal of the Evangelical theological Society* 40 (1997): 353-66.

Proposed dates for Ramesses the Great include: Wilson, 1290 BC to 1224 BC, Steindorff and Seele, 1299 BC to 1232 BC, Breasted, 1292 BC to 1225 BC, Kitchen 1279-1213 BC. Proposed dates for Merenptah include: Wilson, 1224 BC to 1214 BC, Breasted, 1225 BC to 1215 BC, Kitchen, 1213-1203. Kitchen noted that it is unclear whether Seti I reigned for 10 or 14 years. Kitchen argued that the beginning of his reign would have to be between 1280 and 1294 BC. K. A. Kitchen, "Ancient Egyptian Chronology for Aegeanists," *Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry* 2 (2002): 9.

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Wood noted that Merenptah's Palestine campaign must have occurred before his 5th year. Yurco argued that Merenptah's fourth battle scene at Karnak depicted Merenptah's battle against Israel. If so, this scene would be the earliest depiction of Israelites in the ancient Near East. His battle reliefs were carved around 1210 BC. Bryant G. Wood,

stela which was the first clear reference to Israel in the Egyptian texts.⁶³ Merenptah's stela demonstrated that an ethnic group called Israel was in Palestine by approximately 1210 BC. In neither Merenptah's Karnak texts nor the Merenptah stela, was there is any hint of a seven year long Midianite and Amalekite invasion of Palestine. Merenptah's problems in Palestine were clearly threatened revolt by vassal rulers, not bedouin incursions. So the bedouin oppression of Judges 6 should almost certainly be sought before the reign of Ramesses the Great. The most likely setting for this oppression was the seven year period before the reign of Seti I.

It is possible that a historical context for Gideon's battle may be found during the reign of Egypt's 19th Dynasty ruler Seti I. The relationship between Gideon and Seti I can not be proven, and evidence can be raised both for and against it.⁶⁴ Yet this suggestion is surprisingly attractive. Seti I sent his army north into Palestine during the first year of his reign.⁶⁵ Seti I fought a group of bedouin named the *Shasu* as he crossed the southern border of the Levant. On Scene #8 of Seti I's Karnak reliefs depicted Seti I returning to Egypt at the end of his northern campaign. The scene depicted Seti I as leading *Shasu* captives back to Egypt. In this text, Seti I explained why he had attacked the *Shasu* bedouin as he invaded Palestine.⁶⁶

Now, one came to tell His Majesty: "The fallen (foemen) of Shasu are plotting rebellion. Their tribal chiefs are united in one place, stationed on the mountain ridges of Kharru. They have lapsed into confusion and quarrelling; each slays his fellow. They disregard the edicts of the Palace."⁶⁷

In this text, Seti I claimed that the *Shasu* bedouin groups had allied with each other, and had attacked Palestine. They disregarded Egyptian laws and by doing so threatened Egypt's control of the Levant. Then the *Shasu* tribes turned against each other. They cursed, quarreled, and killed each other. Seti I responded to the *Shasu* threat by defeating them south of Gaza as he launched his first campaign into Palestine and Syria.⁶⁸

Seti I's description of the *Shasu* sounded surprisingly like Gideon's battle with the Amalekites. So it is important to understand who the *Shasu* were.⁶⁹ The *Shasu* were an ancient people. The name *Shasu* may have appeared in the Egyptian Execration Texts from the Middle Kingdom, and might even have

⁶³"Pharaoh Merenptah Meets Israel," *Bible and Spade* 18 (2005): 65-82.

Merenptah's stela has been used to argue for both an 18th and a 19th Dynasty exodus. It makes a strong case for an 18th Dynasty exodus. If Ramesses II was the Pharaoh of Israel's oppression, the exodus would have occurred during Merenptah's reign. Since Israel left Egypt for the wilderness, Merenptah could hardly have described Israel as a people group in Palestine. However, Merenptah's stela is reasonable in the context of an 18th Dynasty exodus. The name Israel on the Merenptah stela was written with the throw stick, man, woman, and plural sign determinatives. These signs suggest a pastoral society rather than a settled urban population.

Bryant Wood argued that Gideon's son Abimelech destroyed Shechem. Wood dated this destruction between 1125 and 1100 BC. If correct, this date would move both Gideon and Abimelech too far forward in history for a link between Gideon and Seti I to be sustained. Bryant G. Wood, "Abimelech at Shechem," *Bible and Spade* 18 (2005): 46.

The chronology of Seti I's northern campaign is problematic. For a discussion of the Karnak texts of Seti I, see: Anthony J. Spalinger, "The Northern Wars of Seti I: An Integrative Study" *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 16 (1979): 29-47. Kitchen argued that Seti I began his reign between 1279 and 1270 BC depending on how the evidence is interpreted. Kitchen, "Ancient Egyptian Chronology for Aegeanists," 9.

KRI 9:3-5 of the Epigraphic Survey, as quoted in William J. Murnane, "Rhetorical History? The Beginning of Thutmose III's First Campaign in Western Asia," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 27 (1989): 187. See also: Spalinger, "The Northern Wars of Seti I: An Integrative Study," 29-47.

K. A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions: Translated and Annotated: Translations Volume I: Ramesses I, Sethos I and Contemporaries*, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1993), 6-8.

If the association of Seti I with Gideon is not accepted, it becomes necessary to explain why Egypt would allow a force of 135,000 men to rampage through Palestine for seven years during the Egyptian empire. It is fair to ask how Egypt could have let this pass without comment and without intervention. If Gideon's battle is dated after 1200 BC, it is necessary to explain how the Midianites, Amalekites, and sons of the East could have overrun the Pentapolis after it was occupied by the Sea People who were too powerful to be threatened by them.

Raphael Givon, *Les Bédouins Shosou des Documents Égyptiens*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), 3.

appeared in the earlier Old Kingdom mortuary complex of Unis.⁷⁰ Ahmose-Pen-Nekhet claimed that he had fought the *Shasu* in a brief battle as Thutmose II marched north to fight at Niy. Ahmose claimed that the Egyptians had seized countless prisoners from the *Shasu*. Steindorff and Seele suggested that Thutmose II's battle against the *Shasu* was little more than a raid against the bedouin who lived either in the Sinai or in the Syrian desert.⁷¹ The *Shasu* next appeared in texts from the reign of Thutmose III. In his second year, Thutmose III rebuilt the temple at Semneh. On the walls of the temple, Thutmose III claimed that the Egyptian god Khnum was the smiter of the *Shasu*. Then in his 39th year, Thutmose III launched his 14th campaign north of Egypt's borders. As he began this campaign, he fought the *Shasu* briefly and then passed on north into Palestine.⁷²

The name *Shasu* was used to describe a collection of tribal bedouin groups who lived in the semi-arid regions around the Levant.⁷³ They could be found in several areas south and east of Israel's territory, but they were associated primarily with the region of Seir or Edom. Seti I's conflict with the *Shasu* was completed before he arrived at Gaza which was the southern border of Palestine.⁷⁴ The *Shasu* depicted on Seti I's Karnak reliefs had only primitive weapons, but they came in very large numbers. They united and overflowed Palestine all the way up to the Philistine Pentapolis. Murnane argued that the political environment of Seti's battle with the *Shasu* was intriguing. The violence of the wretched *Shasu* was directed at one another, not at the Egyptians. This was true despite the presence of tribal leaders who were gathered together.⁷⁵

The *Shasu* Bedouin and the Amalekites lived in the same area at the same time.⁷⁶ They lived exactly the same kind of life style. Both overran the southern Levant up to Gaza. Both disrupted the whole region. Both turned their swords on each other and killed each other.⁷⁷ It is a fair conclusion that Seti I may have described Gideon's battle. The name *Shasu* may simply have been the Egyptian name for the Midianites and Amalekites. Seti I would then have sent his army north at some point after Gideon's victory. Seti I would have captured or killed many of the bedouin who had survived, and Seti I would have limited the bedouins' ability to threaten Israel in that generation. At the same time, Seti I restored the structure of the Egyptian empire and prevented Israel from making any real headway against Egypt's vassal rulers who reigned in the Canaanite city states.

While Gideon and Seti I broke the bedouin threat, the *Shasu* were not completely removed from Judah's borders. The *Shasu* were also a problem for Seti I's successor Ramesses the Great. Ramesses

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M.G. Hasel, *Domination and Resistance: Egyptian Military Activity in the Southern Levant ca. 1300-1185 B.C.*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), 217.

⁷¹ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, II:51. Steindorff and Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East*, 39.

⁷² Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, II:174, 211.

⁷³ William J. Murnane, *The Road to Kadesh: A Historical Interpretation of the Battle Reliefs of King Sety I at Karnak*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 57. Eliezer D. Oren, "The 'Ways of Horus' in North Sinai," 69-120 in Anson R. Rainey, ed. *Egypt, Israel, Sinai: Archaeological and Historical Relationships in the Biblical Period*, (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1987), 71. Not everyone would agree that the *Shasu* should be identified with the Amalekites. For example, Luckenbill argued that they were the Habiru of the Amarna tablets. D.D. Luckenbill, "The Hittites," *The American Journal of Theology* 28 (1912): 49. The *Shasu* have also been interpreted as Israelites.

⁷⁴ Seti I only had to fight the *Shasu* between Egypt's northeast border fortress at Tharu and "Pekanan." Today, most Egyptologists, Assyriologists, and Aegean scholars understand "Pekanan" to be the city of Gaza.

⁷⁵ Murnane suggested that the *Shasu* attacks were more of an irritant than a threat to Egypt. However, the disruption of trade and military operations that resulted from the *Shasu* attacks had to be stopped. So Seti I fought the *Shasu* to restore order in the region. Murnane, *The Road to Kadesh*, 56-7.

⁷⁶ Seti I fought the *Shasu* south of Gaza. The Amalekites were also found both east and south of Israel's territory in Palestine. In Ex. 17:8-16, the Amalekites came out to fight against Israel almost as soon as the Israelites crossed the Red Sea. Num. 13:29 noted that the Amalekites lived in the Negev. In Num. 14:43-45, the Israelites tried to invade Palestine from the south. They were attacked by the Amalekites and were driven back into the wilderness.

⁷⁷ According to Judg. 7:22, Gideon was able to defeat the Midianites because he caused a battle between the Midianites and Amalekites. In the confusion, the two groups destroyed each other. This fits well with Seti I's claim that the *Shasu* bedouin had killed each other.

captured *Shasu* spies who served the Hittites.⁷⁸ Ramesses also defeated the *Shasu* in a minor conflict. He boasted that he had filled his store houses with captives from Syria and Palestine. Among other peoples in the north, Ramesses the Great claimed to have settled *Shasu* captives in Egypt filling Egyptian store houses with slaves.⁷⁹ Ramesses the Great was followed to the throne by Merenptah. A frontier official during his reign reported that he had either completed or prevented the passing of *Shasu* bedouin through the border fortress to the pools of Pithom. This text depicts the *Shasu* as having a tribal structure. They were depicted as having cattle, and as being associated somehow with Seir or Edom.

The *Shasu* also appear on Papyrus Harris from the reign of Ramesses III.⁸⁰ He claimed to have destroyed the Seirites of the *Shasu* clans. He claimed to have plundered their tents, and to have seized countless captives and cattle.⁸¹ This was interesting because it described the *Shasu* as being a semi-nomadic tent people. Edward Wente noted that the *Shasu* also appeared briefly in a text on the wall of Ramesses III's temple at Medinet Habu. If this text described the *Shasu*, it depicted them as being both captives and mercenaries serving Ramesses III.⁸² Wente also mentioned a settlement of *Shasu* living at Aphroditopolis during the 22nd Dynasty. Donald Redford pointed out that the Egyptian elders despised the *Shasu* and other Bedouin. The Egyptians saw them as being dirty and unkempt. However, Redford argued that young Egyptians tended to see the *Shasu* as symbols for a life of freedom from authority.⁸³ Redford noted an Egyptian text called Papyrus Anastasi. In it, a father scolded his son for associating with the *Shasu*. The father complained that his son had become a thief. He had gone completely to evil. He had lived with the *Shasu* tribes, and had adopted their clothing and appearance.⁸⁴ This text implied that there were several different Asiatic tribes who are all collectively called *Shasu*. It also noted that the *Shasu* were regarded as evil by the Egyptians.

It is interesting that Seti I may also have recorded a brief skirmish with at least one of the Israelite tribes. During his first campaign, Seti I carved two texts at Beth Shean in Palestine. One of these texts noted that Seti I had fought briefly the *Habiru*, who lived in the mountains near the Jordan River. This stela described how Seti I had quelled a disturbance caused by the *Habiru* of Yarmuth. Seti I sent a small force into the hill country, and they returned two days later with prisoners. This text read,

"The 'Apiru of the mountain of Yarmutu, along with the Tayaru [folk, they] are arisen, attacking the Asiatics of Ruhma." Then said [His Majesty]: "Who [do they] think they are, these despicable Asiatics, in [taking up] their [arms] for yet more trouble? They shall find out about him whom they did not know - [the Ruler val]iant like a falcon and a strong bull wide-striding and sharp-horned, [spreading his wings (firm)] as flint, and every limb as iron, to hack up the [entire] land of Dja[hy]!"⁸⁵

While the dates for Seti I's reign have been highly controversial, he ruled for perhaps 18 years with his reign ending somewhere between 1299 and 1279 BC. Gideon may have judged Israel throughout his reign and into the reign of Ramesses II.⁸⁶ Gideon succeeded in driving away Israel's oppressors, but he

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Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt* III:144. Kitchen argued that Ramesses II must have begun his reign by 1270 or 1271 BC, if not later. Kitchen, "Ancient Egyptian Chronology for Aegeanists," 9.

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Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III:198.

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Proposed dates for the reign of Ramesses III include: Wilson, 1195 BC to 1164 BC, Steindorff and Seele, 1198 BC to 1167 BC, Breasted, 1198 BC to 1167 BC, Hopkins, 1182 BC to 1151 BC, Kitchen, 1184-1153 BC.

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Hopkins, David C., "Pastoralists in Late Bronze Age Palestine: Which Way Did They Go?" *Biblical Archaeologist* 56.4 (1993): 200.

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Edward Wente, "Shekesh or Shasu?" *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22 (1963): 167-72.

⁸³

Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times*, 229.

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Papyrus Anastasi 20:2-4, as quoted in Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, 229.

⁸⁵

Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions*, 13. See also: William F. Albright, "The Smaller Beth-Shan Stele of Sethos I (1309-1290 B.C.)," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, #125 (1952), 27-9. Murnane, *The Road to Kadesh*, 62. If an 18th Dynasty exodus is assumed to be true, the *Hapiru* faced by Seti I might have been Israelites, although that is uncertain.

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While exact dates for Gideon can not be determined, Judges claimed that he lived to a great age.

was a much less admirable person than Deborah had been. After his victory, Gideon killed the Israelites in Penuel and beat with thorn bushes the 77 elders of Succoth. Both Gideon and the Israelites of his age were losing their commitment to the governmental principles that Moses had written in Deuteronomy 17. The Israelites asked Gideon to rule over them as a king. Gideon refused. Gideon declared that neither he nor his sons would rule in Israel because Yahweh was their king. However, Gideon took 1,700 shekels of gold for himself from the spoil. Moses had commanded that Israel's rulers must never multiply wealth for themselves. As a consequence of this act, Gideon's gold led Israel further into idolatry.⁸⁷ Gideon also violated Moses' decrees in Deuteronomy 17 by multiplying wives for himself. Judges 8:30 noted that he had a total of 70 sons from his many wives. These sins would find their consequence in the tragic death of Gideon's sons.

This continued context of sin and revolt led to fear and danger. If the link between Gideon and Seti I is accepted, Gideon's last days and Abimelech's aborted rule may have occurred during the reign of Ramesses the Great. He was one of Egypt's most dynamic rulers. Ramesses II reigned for 67 years. For the first 21 years of his reign, he tried to stop the Hittite expansion into Syria. During that conflict, he sent his army north almost every year. He was a dominant presence in the coastal plains of Palestine, Syria, and Lebanon for two decades, and he crushed any Palestinian opposition to Egyptian rule.⁸⁸ During his reign, the number of Egyptian artifacts in Palestine increased greatly.⁸⁹ Egyptian style anthropoid coffins began to appear in tombs at this time. These coffins were probably used to bury Egyptian officials.⁹⁰ James Weinstein noted that Egyptian pottery was found at 13th and 12th century BC sites in southern Palestine, along the coast, on the coastal plain, in the Shephelah, on the plain of Esdraelon, and in the Jordan valley. Egyptian architecture, stone tablets, and statues have been found at the same sites that produced examples of Egyptian pottery. On the other hand, almost no Egyptian pottery has been found in the highlands where most of the Israelites lived.⁹¹ So Egyptian officials were present in the Canaanite city states, but they were not in the highlands which were controlled by Israel.

There is another kind of evidence that the Egyptians were involved in the coastal plains during the reign of Ramesses II but avoided the highlands where Israel lived. Ramesses II frequently identified himself with the Canaanite god Baal, but never with Israel's god Yahweh. During the empire, the Egyptians regarded foreign gods to be manifestations of Egyptian gods. The 19th Dynasty Pharaohs often worshiped the Egyptian god Seth, and then identified Seth with the Canaanite god Baal. For example, in *The Kadesh Battle Inscriptions of Ramesses II*, Egypt's enemies were depicted as claiming that Ramesses II was more than a mere mortal. The text claimed that Ramesses II was the god Seth, great-of-strength, and he was Baal incarnate. The text claimed that the deeds of Ramesses II were the deeds of a god instead of man.⁹²

One argument for a 19th Dynasty exodus has been that Ramesses II's campaigns in Palestine would have been mentioned in the book of Judges if Israel had been in the land during his conquests.⁹³ However, Judges was a very short book to summarize 400 years of Israel's history. The content of Judges was selected to make a theological argument during the United Monarchy. Invasions of Palestine were only recorded in Judges if they contributed to that theological argument. Neither Merenptah's campaign,

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⁸⁸ Judg. 8:27 noted that Gideon made an ephod from this gold, and this ephod was worshiped as an idol.

During his reign, Egyptian temples and governor's residences were built across Palestine. Egyptian temples were constructed at Timna, Beth Shean, Gaza, and perhaps Ashkelon. Raphael Givon, *The Impact of Egypt on Canaan*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 22. Papyrus Harris noted the construction of a temple in "the Canaan," or Gaza, during the 20th Dynasty. It claimed that foreigners from Retenu come to this temple bringing tribute because the temple was divine. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 260-61. This suggested that the Egyptian temples in Palestine were intended partly for the use of Egyptians in the Levant, and partly as centers for the collection of tribute. Egypt did not actively attempt to evangelize Israelites, and Israel did not fall into Egyptian idolatry during the Judges.

⁸⁹ Kochavi, "At that time the Canaanites were in the Land," 34.

⁹⁰ Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible: 10,000-586 B.C.E.*, (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 277-79.

⁹¹ Weinstein, "The Egyptian Empire in Palestine," 1-28.

⁹² Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, II:67.

⁹³ Leon T. Wood, "Date of the Exodus," 66-87 in J. Barton Payne, ed. *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, (Waco: Word, 1970), 77.

nor the Sea Peoples' invasion was recorded in Judges. Beyond that, there are a number of reasons why Ramesses II's campaigns were not included in the Judges account. First, Ramesses II did not invade Palestine in order to gain control of the highlands where Israel lived. Redford noted that Ramesses actively colonized Nubia and Cush south of Egypt. However, he made no attempt to colonize the areas northeast of Egypt. Redford's observation is consistent with the fact that Egypt wanted to rule Palestine but not to incorporate it into Egypt.⁹⁴ Instead, Ramesses II sent his army north in order to oppose Hittite expansion. As such, his battles were fought far north of Israelite territory in Palestine. Ramesses II did invade the coast lands of Palestine during his first two campaigns. However, his real interest was just in securing his supply lines so that he could fight further north. He besieged Ashkelon to put down a rebellion there that the Hittites had inspired. He might also have fought a brief skirmish against the Israelites near Shiloh.⁹⁵ After this, Ramesses II simply sailed along the sea coast and landed at Byblos. The Israelites did not even see the Egyptians pass. So even though Ramesses II campaigned in the north for twenty years, in most of these years he had little impact on the highlands of Palestine which was the heart of Israel's territory.⁹⁶

This should not be surprising. The Egyptians had never had very much interest in the highlands of Palestine. They wanted to control the coastal plains where the Canaanites ruled. However, the Egyptians had always regarded the highlands as useless, inaccessible and irrelevant. The Egyptian attitude toward Syria and Palestine can be seen in two Egyptian texts. Both of these texts were used to teach students how to read hieroglyphic writing. So they were used over a long period of time, and they reflected basic Egyptian feelings and beliefs.

The first text was the story of Sinuhe.⁹⁷ This text was originally written during Israel's patriarchal age. However, copies of it were still being made during the 19th Dynasty. Sinuhe was the story of an Egyptian who fled from Egypt during the 12th Dynasty. He wandered from nation to nation until he ended up in Syria. There he married the king's daughter, and was given a high position in the king's court. Sinuhe's position in court was quite interesting. For years, Sinuhe ruled a Syrian tribe on the coast. He brought justice and ruled with mercy. When Asiatics from the hill country attacked his city state, Sinuhe led the defense of the city. He killed many warriors from the highlands. He seized food, cattle, and slaves from the highlands. These were also the things that the Egyptians tried to do among the coastal city states of Palestine during the Egyptian empire of the 18th and 19th Dynasties. Just like Sinuhe, the Egyptians of the empire were concerned with the defense of the coastal cities against *Habiru* attacks from the highlands. However, again just like Sinuhe, the Egyptians really had rather little at stake in the battle. While Sinuhe had become an important Syrian leader, he never considered himself a Syrian. He was an Egyptian. He always thought that the inhabitants of Syria and Palestine were barbarians. From his perspective, the Syrians of the coastal cities were only slightly less barbaric than the Asiatics of the highlands. Sinuhe was an educated, cultured, and sophisticated Egyptian nobleman. When he had a chance to return to Egypt, he immediately turned his back on everything he had known in the north and returned to civilization. Along the same lines, the Egyptian officials in Palestine never tried to assimilate the region into Egypt. The Egyptian administrators never associated themselves very closely with Palestine or Syria. They pursued Egyptian interests in the region, but were always only in the background behind events.⁹⁸

The second Egyptian text that should be noted here comes from the 19th Dynasty. Faulkner suggested that this letter may have been written during the reign of Ramesses II's successor Merenptah.⁹⁹

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Donald B. Redford, "The Relations between Egypt and Israel from El-Amarna to the Babylonian Conquest," *Biblical Archaeology Today*, (Israel Exploration Society, 1985), 192-205.

⁹⁵ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, IV:77.

⁹⁶ This is consistent with the claim in Judg. 8:28 that Gideon's region was undisturbed for 40 years.

⁹⁷ Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, I:222-29. The Story of Sinuhe describes the land of Yaa in the Levant as being a very abundant land where wine was more common than water. It would be interesting to know if there was some connection between the Middle Kingdom land of Yaa and Yahweh's claim to the ownership of Palestine.

⁹⁸ Lichtheim's translation of Sinuhe includes the following observation, "No Asiatic makes friends with a Delta-man. And what would make papyrus cleave to the mountain?" Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, I:227.

⁹⁹ R. O. Faulkner, "Egypt from the Inception of the Nineteenth Dynasty to the Death of Ramesses III," 217-51 in *The Cambridge Ancient History 2*, pt. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

The text was a letter written by an Egyptian scribe named Hori. Hori's letter explained the problems that the Egyptians faced when trying to drive a chariot across the highlands of Palestine. Hori's letter noted the difficulty of carrying a chariot across ravines full of rocks. It described the threat of ambush behind every rock and shrub. It described the theft of chariot horses and possessions in the night. Hori's letter also described giants in the region who were five cubits tall. Hori's letter showed why the Egyptians considered the highlands to be inaccessible and uncontrollable. The highlands of Palestine were simply beyond their area of concern. The Egyptians raided the highlands for supplies when their army was in the field. The Egyptians did not care what happened in the highlands of Palestine as long as their interests were not threatened. The Egyptians had no desire to extend Egyptian culture or religion to the highlands where Israel lived. The whole Egyptian empire was more or less irrelevant to Israelites in the highlands, except that the Egyptians made it much harder for Israel to defeat Canaanites on the plains. Most of the time, Israelites in the highlands did not have to fear Egyptians on the plains. On the other hand, Israelites who lived among the Canaanite city states were dominated by the Egyptian empire.

Ramesses the Great threatened coastal Judah and Israel as Gideon died and troubles descended on God's people. Gideon had refused to rule Israel as a king because Yahweh was their king. Gideon had declared that his sons would not rule Israel either. Abimelech disagreed. Abimelech was the son of a concubine that Gideon had kept at Shechem. Abimelech murdered Gideon's 70 sons. After killing his half-brothers, Abimelech was crowned king by the inhabitants of Shechem who had encouraged his violence. Shechem was spiritually ambiguous at best. Judges 9:4 noted that the house of Baal-berith was located there, while Judges 9:46 mentioned the temple of El-berith at Shechem. The Hebrew word *berith* means "covenant." The name El could have represented the Canaanite high god El. However, *el* was also the most common West Semitic word for deity in general. Israel's god was often called either *El* or derivatives of the name like *Elohim* or *Eloha*. So the names Baal-berith and El-berith may reflect a theological conflict at Shechem over the identity of the true "God of the Covenant." Was Baal the true covenantal god, or the Canaanite high god El? Was Yahweh the true God of Israel's covenant? Who should they serve?

Since the men of Shechem were not committed to Yahweh's rule in the land, they sought a human king. They supported Abimelech as long as he promised them security. After three years, Shechem turned against Abimelech. In the warfare that resulted, Abimelech was killed. While the Biblical text does not explain why an evil spirit developed between Abimelech and the men of Shechem, Egyptian history may provide a possible context for their rejection of Abimelech's kingship. At some point in that decade, Ramesses II changed his normal policy and led his army inland. In one season, he campaigned in Transjordan, and he attacked cities in Moab and Edom.¹⁰⁰ The exact date and path of this conquest are unclear. Ramesses II might have entered Transjordan from either the north or the south depending on how his account is understood. It is striking that an Egyptian fort was built at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh east of the Jordan River ford. This fort could have been built at any time between the reigns of Ramesses II and Ramesses III. However, Ramesses II's Transjordan campaign was the only Egyptian campaign that clearly occurred in the region. The fort at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh was located about 40 km southeast of Beth Shean. It was built at the northern tip of an alluvial plain that stretched east from the Jordan. The fort controlled: the Jordan River crossing, the Jordan valley at a very narrow point, and the alluvial plain east of the Jordan. This alluvial plain included some of the best farm land in Palestine.¹⁰¹ This fort was a direct threat to Israel's east bank tribes, as well as to the Edomites and Moabites. This campaign represented the only real threat to the Israelite heartland during the Egyptian empire. Ramesses II marched around Israel's territory in the highlands of the Jordan's west bank, although his army may have raided Israelite territory on the west bank to provision his army. Ramesses II did pass close enough to Shechem to threaten the city, and he provided a very serious threat to the east bank tribes. While neither the Transjordan campaign nor Abimelech's death can be dated with any certainty, the Transjordan campaign would have occurred within the same historical horizon as Abimelech's aborted three year rule in Shechem. The possibility should be considered that Abimelech's claims to sovereignty may have been

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Hasel, *Domination and Resistance*, 159. S. Ahituv, "Did Ramesses II Conquer Dibon?" *Israel Exploration Journal* 22 (1972): 141-42.

¹⁰¹ J. N. Tubb, "An Aegean Presence in Egypto-Canaan," 136-45 in W. V. Davies and I. Schofield, eds., *Egypt, the Aegean and the Levant: Interconnections in the Second Millennium BC*, (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 141-43.

rejected partly for fear that Ramesses II would launch an armed response to a *Habiru* claim of sovereignty.¹⁰²

While Ramesses II reigned for 67 years, his northern campaigns all occurred in the first half of his reign. In about 1276 BC, Ramesses II formed a peace treaty with the Hittites. After this treaty was formed, Ramesses II never again sent his army north. For the rest of his reign, Ramesses II dealt with unrest in the south and built monuments to himself throughout Egypt. Ramesses II constructed four 90 foot tall statues of himself at Tanis alone that depicted him as the incarnation of the gods Monthu, Amun, and Atum.¹⁰³ Ramesses II's northern campaigns had used up many of his financial, political, and military resources. His building projects and monuments impoverished Egypt. By the end of his reign, Egypt had fallen into economic chaos. Ramesses II could not even field a strong enough army to defend Egypt's northwestern borders against the Libyan tribes. Egypt was not in a position to threaten Israel.

After Abimelech, the judges Tola and Jair judged Israel. The dates for their ministries can not be determined. They probably judged Israel in the general period from the reign of Ramesses II to the reign of Ramesses III. Judges 10:1 noted that Tola judged in the hill country of Ephraim for 23 years. Then Jair the Gileadite judged Israelite territory on the east bank for 22 years. Jair shared Gideon's sins. He had 30 sons who rode on 30 royal donkeys and ruled 30 cities of Gilead. This bureaucracy nearly constituted a rejection of Yahweh's kingship over the land. The rest of Israel's period of the Judges would be dominated by increasing dangers and difficulties for Israel.

The beginning of these dangers may have been grounded in a policy decision by Ramesses II. He chose to incorporate into his army captured Meshwesh and Sherden warriors.¹⁰⁴ The Meshwesh and the Sherden may have served as mercenaries for Ramesses II, but they were also a threat. A hint of this threat may have been suggested briefly on a stela of Ramesses II in his temple at Tanis. This described the valor of Ramesses II, and ended with the words,

The rebellious-hearted Sherden (Š'-r'-d-ny) - them; mighty ---- ships of war in the midst of the 'sea' - before them.¹⁰⁵

The Meshwesh and the Sherden would prove to be quite a problem for Egypt's future. Incorporating them into the Egyptian army may only have sharpened their interest in the Nile delta.¹⁰⁶ Ramesses II died

¹⁰² Wood argued that Abimelech destroyed Shechem between 1125 and 1100 BC. This would be too late for a linkage between Abimelech and Ramesses II, and it would make the suggestion offered here impossible. Wood, "Abimelech at Shechem," 46.

¹⁰³ E. P. Uphill, *The Temples of Per Ramesses*, (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1984) 130.

¹⁰⁴ As early as his second year, Ramesses II was forced to oppose Sherden pirates who may have come from Sardinia. The captured Sherden were then enlisted into the Egyptian army in such large numbers that they formed a contingent of their own. Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, II:63. Ramesses II then used these Sherden mercenaries as he struggled to stabilize Egypt's northern empire. Wainwright noted that the Meshwesh had first appeared in the Egyptian texts during the reign of Amenhotep III where they had served as cattle keepers with the Libyans. G. A. Wainwright, "The Meshwesh," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 48 (1962): 98-9. A Sherden named Kharoy was recorded as bringing corn to the steward of Ramesses II. Alan H. Gardiner, "Ramesside Texts Relating to the Taxation and Transport of Corn," *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 27 (1941): 54. Both Meshwesh and Sherden fought in Ramesses II's army at Kadesh. Ramesses II described his preparation for battle this way. "Behold, his majesty prepared his infantry and his chariotry, the Sherden (Š' -r' -dy -n') of the captivity of his majesty from the victories of his sword." Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III:136-37.

¹⁰⁵ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III:210.

¹⁰⁶ As his reign progressed, the Libyans, the Meshwesh, and the Sherden became an increasing threat to Egypt's northwestern frontier. Faulkner noted that Ramesses II built a string of fortresses along his western frontier from Rhacotis to El-Alamein. He apparently fought at least one campaign in the west because Libyan captives were used to build the temple of Es-Sebua in Nubia. Faulkner argued that by the end of Ramesses II's long reign, the vigilance of frontier patrols had slackened, and the Egyptian army had been neglected. As a result, the Libyans threatened the western delta. Faulkner suggested that the Libyans were facing famine in their own land, and sought to seize the delta. Faulkner, "Egypt from the Inception of the Nineteenth Dynasty to the Death of Ramesses III," 230-33.

somewhere between 1232 BC and 1224 BC. The Sherden and Meshwesh threat materialized during the reign of his son Merenptah as Asia Minor suffered from a famine.¹⁰⁷

A terrible famine struck the whole eastern Mediterranean basin during Merenptah's reign.¹⁰⁸ A letter found at Ugarit mentioned this famine. The letter was written by the Hittite king in Anatolia. He commanded Ammurapi of Ugarit to provide a ship to transport 2,000 measures of grain to Cilicia.¹⁰⁹ The Hittite king claimed that receiving grain during the famine was a matter of life and death. Ammurapi not only provided ships to transport the grain, he sent grain to Anatolia himself.¹¹⁰ Ugarit also soon suffered from the same famine. The final occupation level at Ugarit was covered with two meters of yellow dust. Schaeffer interpreted this dust as evidence that Ugarit had known drought conditions in its last days.¹¹¹ The drought was also mentioned a generation later by the Hittite king Arnuwandas III. He described terrible hunger suffered during his father's day in Anatolia.¹¹² This famine may have also been mentioned centuries later by Herodotus and Diodorus.¹¹³ Since Ramesses II had formed a treaty with the Hittites of Asia Minor, Merenptah initially sent them grain as famine relief.¹¹⁴

The famine led to refugee flight and attempts at immigration. Ethnic groups from across the eastern Mediterranean basin allied themselves to seize the eastern Nile delta from Egypt. In Merenptah's day, this coalition of ethnic groups was led by the Libyans on Egypt's northwestern frontier. This threat came to a head during Merenptah's 5th year. Merenptah recorded at Karnak a record of Egypt's weakness and the threat faced by the nation: "... the kings of Lower Egypt [rested] in the midst of their cities, enclosed in the state palace, for lack of troops; they had no bowmen to answer against them."¹¹⁵ In other words, the nomarchs in the Nile delta lacked enough soldiers to oppose the Libyan threat to Egypt's borders. Merenptah added:

The despicable, fallen ruler of Libya (Libu), Mariyu son of Didi, has descended upon the land of Tjehenu (in Libya), along with his troops, [... large loss....., and also the] Sherden, the Shekelesh, the Aqa<y>washa, the Lukku and Tursha, and calling up ("taking") every single warrior and every able-bodied man of his country. He has brought (also) his wife and his children [... large loss.....] chief [men] of the camp. He has reached the Western frontier in the terrain of Pi-Ir[u].¹¹⁶

This passage claimed that the Libyans had formed an alliance with the Meshwesh, the Kehek from the African coast and various Sea People groups from Asia Minor and the Aegean, including the Sherden, Sheklesh, Lukka, Tursha, and Akawasha.¹¹⁷ The attack against Egypt's western delta was not simply a military raid. Merenptah noted that the Libyan chief Meryey brought his wife and children to the delta

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The cause of this famine has been widely debated. Suggested causes include a Dorian invasion from the north, the Trojan War, a volcano, an earthquake, disease, and climate change. A combination of these factors may also be possible.

¹⁰⁸ George Mendenhall claimed that almost every site on Greece that had been excavated showed a destruction level between 1250 and 1150 BC. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation*, 148. Rhys Carpenter noted that this famine did not affect Western Europe. However, it did strike Crete, the southern Greek Peloponnese, Boeotia, Euboea, Pholia, and the Argolid. R. A. Bryson, et al, "Drought and the Decline of Mycenae," *Antiquity* 48 (1974): 46.

¹⁰⁹ Richard D. Barnett, "The Sea Peoples," 359-78 in I. E. S. Edwards, et al eds. *The Cambridge Ancient History*, pt. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 369. Albert J. Leonard, "Archaeological Sources for the History of Palestine: The Late Bronze Age," *Biblical Archaeologist* 52 (1989):30.

Michael C. Astour, "New Evidence on the Last Days of Ugarit," *American Journal of Archaeology* 69 (1965):255.

¹¹¹ Claude F. A. Schaeffer, "The Last Days of Ugarit," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 9 (1983): 74-5.

¹¹² G. A. Wainwright, "Meneptah's Aid to the Hittites," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 46 (1960): 25.

¹¹³ Both Herodotus and Diodorus described a famine that struck Syme, Naxos, and Sardis, but it is not clear that this was the same famine. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, 244.

¹¹⁴ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III:243-44.

¹¹⁵ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III:242.

¹¹⁶ Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions*, 4. See also Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III:243.

¹¹⁷ Faulkner, "Egypt: From the Inception of the Nineteenth Dynasty to the Death of Ramesses III," 233.

intending to remain in the land. Merenptah described the fear, chaos, and violence of this period. He wrote:

Lo, his majesty was enraged at their report, like a lion; [He assembled his court, and said to th]em: "Hear ye the command of your lord; I give -- as ye shall do, saying: I am the ruler who shepherds you; I spend my time searching out ----- you, as a father, who preserves alive his children; while ye fear like birds, and ye know not the goodness of that which he does. Is there none answering in ----- [Shall the land be wa]sted and forsaken at the invasion of every country, while the Nine Bows plunder its borders, and rebels invade it every day? Every - takes ----- to plunder these fortresses. They have repeatedly penetrated the fields of Egypt to the [great] river. They have halted, they have spent whole days and months dwelling -----. They have reached the hills of the oasis, and have cut off the district of Toyeh (*T'-yh*). So it has been since the kings of Upper Egypt, in the records of other times. It was not known ----- as worms, not considering their bodies, (but) loving death and despising life. Their hearts are exalted against the people ----- their chief. They spend their time going about the land, fighting, to fill their bodies daily. They come to the land of Egypt, to seek the necessities of their mouths; their desire is ----- my bringing them like netted fish on their bellies. Their chief is like a dog, a man of boasting, without courage; he does not abide - ----- bringing to an end the Pedetishew (*Pa ty shw*), whom I caused to take grain in ships, to keep alive that land of Kheta.¹¹⁸

While fragmentary and incomplete, this passage demonstrated that famine had caused several ethnic groups to invade the western delta causing fear and consternation among the Egyptians. Hunger had driven the invaders as far into Egypt as the Nile itself. They had occupied the northwest delta for months while few dared to oppose them. The famine in Libya in this passage was equated with the famine in Asia Minor that had led the Hittite king to request grain as famine relief from Egypt. This demonstrated that the famine had affected an area far greater than North Africa. Merenptah argued that the Libyans were poorly led and Merenptah was able to defeat them. When this Libyan led Sea People alliance attacked the western Nile delta, Merenptah fought them at *Pi-yer*. Merenptah killed 6,000 of the invaders and seizing many captives. Merenptah's victory was assisted by the fact that the Libyan forces ran out of food and water, and the leaders of the Sea People alliance had turned their aggression against each other.

Shortly after this battle, the *Shasu* bedouin in the southeast Levant were forced to seek shelter in Egypt. A frontier official reported to Merenptah's court:

We have finished passing the tribes of the Shasu (*Š'-sw*) of Edom through the Fortress of Merneptah-Hotepirma, L.P.H., in Theku, (*T-kw*) to the pools of Pithom, of Merneptah-Hotepirma in Theku, in order to sustain them and their herds in the domain of Pharaoh.¹¹⁹

The question is, why did the *Shasu* bedouin seek refuge in Egypt during Merenptah's reign? The answer may be that the famine that had struck North Africa and Asia Minor had also struck the Levant.¹²⁰ The thick dust layer found at Ugarit may substantiate this suggestion.

This famine may have led to a revolt against Egyptian rule in Palestine. The Canaanite city states may simply have been unable to meet their required annual tribute. As soon as Merenptah was able to secure Egypt's western border, he led his army into Palestine. He was forced to recapture Ashkelon which may have been lost at the end of the reign of Ramesses II.¹²¹ Stager noted that Merenptah's siege of

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Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III:243-44. See also Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions*, 4. This text noted that the invaders from Libya loved death and despised life. These words may have used "love," "death," and "life" as treaty vocabulary. The Libyans rejected their vassal treaty relationship with Egypt and invaded the delta instead.

¹¹⁹Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III:273.

¹²⁰

Weiss argued that Greece, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, and Egypt all went into decline in the late 13th and 12th centuries BC. Weiss argued that climate change provides an attractive explanation for this decline. He argued that populations were on the move in this period because of the prolonged drought. Weiss argued that the period from 1420 to 1260 BC was a time of very low solar flare activity just like the European "little ice age" of in the last half of the 17th century AD. B. Weiss, "The Decline of Late Bronze Age Civilization as a Possible Response to Climatic Change" *Climate Change* 4 (1982): 173-98.

¹²¹

Yurco, "Merenptah's Canaanite Campaign," 196.

Ashkelon was depicted on a temple wall at Karnak. The inhabitants of Ashkelon were depicted wearing Canaanite clothing instead of Philistine clothing. Stager argued from this that the Philistines had not yet entered Palestine during Merenptah's campaign.¹²² It could also be that Ashkelon had a mixed Canaanite and Philistine population, and that Merenptah's artists perceived the Canaanites to be the more important segment of the population. This would be consistent with the fact that the Philistines were depicted earlier at Kadesh, but were not even named.

Merenptah's campaign in Palestine was commemorated on the famous "Israel Stela" which included the first mention of the name "Israel" in the Egyptian texts. Merenptah's Israel stela has been a topic of debate for many years.¹²³ Merenptah's stela would seem to make a 19th Dynasty exodus date problematic.¹²⁴ Israel could hardly leave Egypt, wandered for 40 years in the wilderness, enter the land under Joshua, and opposed Egypt within the 13 years of Merenptah's reign. Merenptah's stela would seem to require either the acceptance of an 18th Dynasty exodus, or reconstruction of the history recorded in the Pentateuch, or the complete rejection of the exodus and conquest motifs. This last option has become rather common on the left wing of Old Testament studies. Hasel argued that Merenptah's stela depicted Israel as an agricultural community living in open terrain without the protection of a city state system. Hasel also noted that the stela depicted Israelites wearing Canaanite clothing. He noted that both of these things help to understand the Israelite community during the 13th century BC.¹²⁵ Israelites in the highlands lived a pastoral lifestyle and their material culture resembled Canaanite culture rather closely. This suggested that it may be very difficult to distinguish between early Israelite and Canaanite occupation levels at any site.

The meaning of Merenptah's stela has been debated. The key phrase for understanding Israel's history was, "Israel is laid waste, its seed is not." Hasel noted that the word "seed" has been interpreted either as an ethnic entity or as grain.¹²⁶ If "seed" is understood as "descendant," the phrase could mean that Egypt had defeated a group of Israelites. This interpretation is supported by Frank Yurco's explanation of Merenptah's Karnak inscriptions. Yurco argued that scene #4 of Merenptah's battle reliefs depicted an attack against Israel.¹²⁷ If the "seed" that Israel lacked was grain, Merenptah might have recorded Egyptian provisioning raids.¹²⁸ Such raids would have been especially harmful in the context of a region wide famine. Israel had chosen the fertility god Baal. In response, Yahweh may have used the Egyptians to deprive them of all of their abundance as well as the famine. Merenptah's stela would then have claimed

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Stager, "Archaeology, Ecology, and Social History: Background Themes to the Song of Deborah," 33.

¹²³ For example, Bimson claimed that there was no reason to doubt that the ethnic group named "Israel" on the stela was Biblical Israel. J. J. Bimson, "Merenptah's Israel and Recent Theories of Israelite Origins," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 49 (1991):14. In contrast, Redford branded the text to be a "snippet of doggerel," and argued that there was no evidence that Merenptah attacked all of the places named in the text. D. B. Redford, "The Ashkelon Relief at Karnak and the Israel Stela," *Israel Exploration Journal* 36 (1986):196-97.

¹²⁴ Merenptah's stela has been used as evidence for both an 18th and a 19th Dynasty exodus date. The stela was written in Merenptah's 5th year. This would be around 1230 BC. This is the traditional 19th Dynasty date for the exodus. Since Egypt's army was devastated by Yahweh's judgment at the exodus and the land was left in ruin, it is fair to ask whether Egypt could have launched a major campaign against Palestine in the same year. Even if Merenptah had done so, what would his stela be claiming? Israel was in the wilderness as everyone in the region would have known. The Sinai was not out of touch. It was a well known area that contained Egyptian mining activity.

¹²⁵ Hasel, *Domination and Resistance*, 201. Hoffmeier argued that the use of an Old Perfective with Yenoam, Israel, and Harru grouped these places together. Hoffmeier argued from this that Israel was understood by Merenptah's Stela to be an unsettled population in the northern highlands. Hoffmeier noted also that the "seed" associated with Israel might have been grain instead of descendants. James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 28, 42.

¹²⁶ M. G. Hasel, "Israel in the Merneptah Stela," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 296 (1994): 45. Interpreting "seed" as grain was defended as early as 1912. Hoskins, *From the Nile to Nebo*, 87.

¹²⁷ Wood, "Pharaoh Merenptah Meets Israel," 74. Ramesses III claimed about the Sea People who invaded Egypt that their "seed was not." This could not have referred to grain. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 262.

¹²⁸ At the end of the Egyptian 18th Dynasty, the Hittite king Mursili sent his army against Nuhasse in Syria. Mursili told his army to destroy the city's grain in the field and then to capture the city. Anthony J. Spalinger, "Egyptian-Hittite Relations at the Close of the Amarna Period and Some Notes on Hittite Military Strategy in North Syria." *Bulletin of the Egyptological Seminar* 1 (1979): 63. So an attack against Israel's grain would also have been culturally appropriate.

that Israel was left without seed to plant in the following year. Whichever explanation is accepted, Merenptah's campaign was not mentioned in the book of Judges.

Merenptah was followed by a period of political weakness and chaos in Egypt. The chronology of this period has been debated at length, and the period may have lasted anywhere from 5 to 25 years. Merenptah was succeeded by a half brother named Amunmessi who reigned only briefly. Amunmessi was followed by the rather chaotic reigns of Seti II, Siptah, and Queen Tausert, the wife of Seti II. Their reigns ended the 19th Dynasty. The 20th Dynasty began with Seth-Nakht, who only ruled for two years.¹²⁹ No Egyptian historical texts have been preserved that trace Egypt's relationship with Palestine during these years.

At the end of the 19th Dynasty, political and economic difficulties in Egypt led to social disruption. Egyptian texts complained that every man had become a law to himself because there was no strong ruler in the land. In the Great Harris Papyrus from Thebes, Ramesses III wrote about this time period. He wrote:

The land of Egypt had been cast aside, with every man being his (*own standard of*) *right*. They had no chief spokesman for many years previously up to other times. The land of Egypt was officials and mayors, one slaying his fellow, both exalted and lowly. Other *times* came afterwards in the empty years, and ..., a Syrian (5) with them, made himself prince. He set the entire land as tributary before him. One joined his companion that their property might be plundered. They treated the gods like the people, and no offerings were presented in the temples.¹³⁰

There are striking similarities between this text and Israel's period of the Judges. In both, religious apostasy was coupled with social disruption as each man did what was right in his own eyes. Both argued for the importance of a strong king. The Harris papyrus justified the rule of Ramesses III. In Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1, and 21:25, similar expressions justified David's rise to power as Israel's king.

E) THE SEA PEOPLE

The famine of Merenptah's reign continued to plague the region after his death. Whatever the cause of this famine may have been, it led to a massive disruption of peoples during the reign of Ramesses III. Ethnic groups located in and near the Aegean Sea were forced to leave their homelands in search of habitable land. Modern authors call this collection of ethnic groups the Sea People although the Egyptians did not have a composite name for them. The Sea People moved by land and sea across southern Asia Minor and south along the coast of Syria and Palestine. The Sea People completely disrupted trade in the eastern Mediterranean as they advanced by land and sea. The Sea People included many Sherden from Sardinia. Since the Sherden had served as mercenaries in the Egyptian army for many years, a strong contingent of Sherden was also included in the Egyptian army that would eventually stop the Sea People advance.¹³¹ Sherden involvement with Egyptian culture may have been one factor motivating the Sea People to seize the Nile delta as the Hyksos had done so many years earlier.

The Sea People destroyed cities and cultures as they overflowed the Levant and poured inexorably toward Egypt. Ramesses III described the destruction that the Sea People brought to the region. He wrote:

The foreign countries made a *conspiracy* in their islands. All at once the lands were removed and scattered in the fray. No land could stand before their arms, from Hatti, Kode, Carchemish, Arzawa, and Alashiya on, being cut off *at [one time]*. A camp [was set up] in one place in Amor. They desolated its people, and its land was like that which has never come into being. They were coming forward toward Egypt, while the flame was prepared before them. Their confederation was the Philistines, Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denye(n), and Weshesh, lands united. They laid their hands upon the lands as far as the circuit of the earth, their hearts confident and trusting: "Our plans will succeed!"¹³²

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R. E. Freed, *Ramesses the Great*, (Memphis: The City of Memphis, 1987), 113.

¹³⁰ Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 260.

¹³¹ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, III:43.

¹³² James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East 1*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 185.

Ramesses III identified the more important Sea People tribes. He wrote:

Their main support was Peleset (*Pw-r'-s'-t*), Thekel (*T-k-k'-r'*), Shekelesh (*Š'-k-rw-š'*), Denyen (*D'y-n-yw*, sic!), and Weshesh (*W'-š'-š'*). (These) lands were united, and they laid their hands upon the land as far as the Circle of the Earth.¹³³

Other tribes were also included in the Sea People alliance. Ramesses III noted that the Sea People had destroyed the Hittite empire, Syria, and Cyprus. Abundant archaeological evidence for the Sea People devastation has survived. Catling noted that a disaster ended the Middle Bronze age on Cyprus. Many settlement regions were completely deserted in the 12th and 11th centuries BC. This occurred even to the richest and strongest cities on Cyprus. Catling suggested that this destruction may have been caused by the Sea People. Catling noted that refugees from Ugarit later settled in Cyprus when Ugarit was destroyed by the Sea People.¹³⁴

Stager argued that the Sea People devastation can be traced in destruction levels from Miletus and Tarsus in southwest Asia Minor, to the plains of Antioch, then south to Ibn Hani near Ugarit. The path of destruction then went south through Syria, coastal Canaan, and coastal Philistia.¹³⁵ Arvid was destroyed, as was Sidon, Dor, and Ashkelon. Many city tells in the region contain burn layers from this time period.¹³⁶ The Sea People destroyed especially the Egyptian administrative centers like Aphek.

Ramesses III came to the throne somewhere between 1198 and 1182 BC as the Sea People were attacking the northern Levant.¹³⁷ In his 5th year, the Sea People made their first attempt to seize the Nile delta. The Peleset and Thekel formed an alliance with the Libyans and Meshwesh of North Africa and attacked the western delta. Ramesses III described his first Libyan war by claiming:

The land of Temeh is spread out, they flee. The Meshwesh (*M-š'-w-š'*) are hung up in their land, their plant is uprooted, there is not for them a survivor.¹³⁸

The northern countries are unquiet in their limbs, even the Peleset (*Pw-r'-s'-ty*), the Thekel (*T-k-k' [-r']*), who devastate their land. Their soul came, in the last extremity. They were warriors (*t-h-r'*) upon land, also in the sea.¹³⁹

Ramesses III was able to defeat this initial invasion. This text was the first time that the name "Peleset," or "Philistine," appeared in the Egyptian texts. The Sea People eventually sought a *brt*, or a covenant, with Egypt so that they would not be destroyed.¹⁴⁰ The Sea People in Palestine may have served the Egyptians for a generation, although that has been a controversial question.¹⁴¹

Three years after his first Libyan battle, Ramesses III faced the full force of the Sea People invasion. Ramesses III defeated the Sea People in a naval battle at a Nile River mouth, and in a land

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Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, IV:38.

¹³⁴ H. W. Catling, "Cyprus in the Late Bronze Age," 188-216 in *The Cambridge Ancient History* 2, pt. 2, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 193-210.

¹³⁵ L. E. Stager, "When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 17 (1991): 35.

¹³⁶ Bethel, Lachish, Hazor, and Tell BeitMirsim were all burned between 1250 BC and 1220 BC. Albright argued that these burn layers were caused by Israel's conquest of Palestine. However, the burn layers could as easily have been caused by the Sea Peoples. Albright's excavations were described in Callaway, "Ai (ET-Tell): Problem Site for Biblical Archaeologists" 89.

¹³⁷ There has been an ongoing debate led by the supporters of Ussishkin and Finkelstein about the date of the origin of the Iron Age in Palestine. As part of this debate, it has recently been suggested that Ramesses III may have come to the throne as late as 1000 BC. Positions like this deny archaeological evidence that could be associated with Solomon's reign.

¹³⁸ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, IV:23.

¹³⁹ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, IV:24.

¹⁴⁰ Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, 204.

¹⁴¹ Itamar Singer, "How Did the Philistines Enter Canaan?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 18.6 (1992): 44-6.

battle that may have occurred either in the Levant or at the frontier of the western delta. Three years after the Sea People war, the Meshwesh and the Libyans renewed their invasion of the Nile delta from the West. They once more hoped to settle in the western delta. Ramesses III described this second Libyan war by writing:

As for the (chief of) Meshwesh (*M-š'-w'*, sic!). since he appeared, he went to one place, his land with him, and invaded the Tehenu, who were made ashes, spoiled and desolated were their cities, their seed was not.

Invasion of Egypt

88. They [disregarded] the beauty of this god who slays the invader of Egypt, saying.....: "We will settle in Egypt." So spake they with one accord, and they continually entered the boundaries of Egypt.¹⁴²

This new Libyan invasion was attempted without the help of Sea People tribes from the north. It had little chance of success. Ramesses III killed 2,175 men and enslaved 2,052 captives. After Ramesses III died, Egypt would slowly weaken and invasions from the west would become a renewed problem.

When the Sea People were driven from Egypt they settled in the Pentapolis of Gaza, Gath, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron.¹⁴³ The last Canaanite levels at Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Ekron were destroyed violently and were followed by the first Philistine level at this time.¹⁴⁴ The Sea Peoples were made up of several tribes.¹⁴⁵ The Sheridan may have settled near Megiddo. The Tjekker settled near Dor, as did the Danuna. The Philistines rapidly seized Beth-Shemesh. Philistine pottery began to appear there shortly after the Sea-Peoples' invasion. Philistine pottery also soon appeared at Debir and Eglon. Cities like Beth Shean that had been Egyptian strongholds and administrative centers would now be occupied by Egyptians, Canaanites, and the Sea People, although it would take time for Philistine artifacts to appear at some sites. The Philistines could be recognized in reliefs by their banded head covering with feathers sticking up from the band. The Philistines could also be recognized in reliefs by the appearance of a unique two fingered hand sign that was intended to ward off evil.¹⁴⁶ After the Sea People entered southern Palestine around 1175 BC, they manufactured Mycenaean IIIc1 pottery from local clay. Mycenaean IIIc1 pottery was first found in the Philistine alluvial plain at sites like Ashdod, Ekron, and Ashkelon. It has also been found at a few sites beyond the Pentapolis.¹⁴⁷ There has been a lot of recent academic discussion about the speed that Philistine style pottery appeared beyond the Pentapolis. Egyptian administrative centers like Lachish level VI and Tel Sera level IX did not contain Philistine monochrome pottery until around 1140 BC, and little Philistine pottery appeared beyond the Pentapolis before that time. These Egyptian centers may have been destroyed by the Philistines between 1170 and 1160 BC.¹⁴⁸

Dothan argued that Egyptian style pottery shapes and motifs were then incorporated into Philistine pottery at Egyptian strongholds like Tell el-Farah. Dothan argued that this demonstrated the settlement of

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¹⁴³ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, IV:52.

¹⁴⁴ Wright argued that Ramesses III assigned three southern coastal cities to the Philistines: Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ashdod. The Philistines rapidly seized Ekron and Gath as well. G. E. Wright, "Fresh Evidence for the Philistine Story" *Biblical Archaeologist* 29 (1966) 74.

¹⁴⁵ Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 141.

¹⁴⁶ G. A. Wainwright, "Some Sea-Peoples and Others in the Hittite Archives," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 25 (1939) 148-53.

¹⁴⁷ Wright, "Fresh Evidence for the Philistine Story," 75-6. Wainwright, "Some Sea Peoples," 74.

¹⁴⁸ Stager, "When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon," 35, I. Finkelstein, "Philistine Chronology: High, Middle or Low?" 140-47 in *Mediterranean Peoples in Transition: Thirteenth to Early Tenth Century BCE*, (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1998), 142.

Finkelstein used this as a springboard for lowering the chronology of the monarchy and denying the historical validity of the united monarchy. To make this position work, Finkelstein suggested that there was a third invasion of Sea People into the region around 1140 or 1135 BC. His third Sea People invasion is largely a speculation assumed to make his chronology work. Texts from the period give no mention of such an invasion. Finkelstein's suggestion would attribute to the time of Omri the building activity at Gezer, Hazor, and Megiddo that has usually been attributed to Solomon. See the discussion in Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 139-43.

Philistines in Palestine at a time when the land was dominated by Egypt.¹⁴⁹ This synthesis led to the creation in Palestine of bichrome pottery that has commonly been identified as “Philistine,” although perhaps “revised Sea People pottery” may be more correct.

After the Sea People war, Ramesses III campaigned as far north as the Euphrates. He was able to do so because the Hittite threat had been removed by the Sea People as they passed through Asia Minor. His northern campaign proved to be little more than a raid since Egypt no longer had the ability to control territory that far north. Ramesses III depicted his Syrian war at Medinet Habu. He depicted the god Amon giving him 126 captives, with each captive accompanied by the name of a captured city or country. The list depicted both Semitic and Hittite people. The list was copied from very similar lists by Thutmose III and Ramesses II. One of the captives in the list of Ramesses III was identified by the West Semitic name “Levi-El.”¹⁵⁰ While the identity of “Levi-El” is uncertain, the name might reflect a brief skirmish between a Levitical city in Israel and the Egyptian troops.¹⁵¹ The Medinet Habu depictions of this campaign also showed Ramesses III bringing three rows of Libyan, Syrian, and Peleset prisoners south to Egypt. These prisoners would have created a Peleset presence within Egypt itself.¹⁵¹

The reign of Ramesses III may be an appropriate historical setting for Israel's judge Jephthah.¹⁵² Judges 10:6 noted that Israel once more did “evil” in Yahweh's sight, rejecting His covenant. The Israelites chose to worship the Baals and the Ashteroth, as well as the gods of Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia. Yahweh brought on them the curses of the covenant in increasingly devastating ways. During the reign of Ramesses III, the Sea People from the Aegean had devastated the coastal plains. Then after their defeat in Egypt, they had settled in the Philistine Pentapolis. This brought an incredible cultural change. The Sea People represented an Iron Age culture when both Egypt and the Levant were still in the Bronze Age. The Sea People had superior weapons and they were fierce warriors. Neither Egypt nor any power in the Levant could stand before them for very long. In the next generation, the Sea People presence in Palestine would finally bring an end to the Egyptian empire in the Levant. As the Sea Peoples merged their traditions and cultures, they became the Philistines of the second half of Judges. This dynamic and aggressive Philistine culture would eventually threaten Israel's continued existence.

This change began in Judges 10:7. This verse noted that Yahweh sold Israel into the hands of the Ammonites and the Philistines. This was the first time that the Philistines had proven a threat to Israel since the Amarna age. The name Philistine was in the process of being transformed. Originally the name had applied to a Minoan, and then Mycenaean presence in the Pentapolis. In Merenptah's day, the Philistines were joining forces with a variety of other ethnic groups across the eastern Mediterranean basin to form the Sea Peoples. Eventually, the whole Sea People culture in Palestine would come to be called Philistine.

F) JEPHTHAH

In Jephthah day, Judah was oppressed severely by the Philistines in the west and the Ammonites in the east. The reign of Ramesses III may be a good historical setting for Jephthah for two reasons. The first is that the Philistines oppressed Judah, but they were not yet the dominant power in the region. Judges 10-12 was far more concerned with the Ammonites than the Philistines. During the reign of Ramesses III, the Sea Peoples were only beginning to form an organized culture. They were still under

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Trude Dothan, “The Philistines Reconsidered,” 165-76 in *Biblical Archaeology Today*, (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1985), 170.

¹⁵⁰ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, IV:77.

¹⁵¹ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, IV:72.

¹⁵² Bimson argued for a later date than this. Bimson argued that Jephthah should be dated a decade before Eli and shortly after the Philistine oppression was getting under way. So Bimson dated Jephthah around 1130 to 1120 BC. Bimson argued that the Ammonite oppression would have to be before this time. So both the Ammonite oppression and the first trouble with the Philistines would fall in the decade of 1150 to 1140 BC. Bimson argued that this fits well with the Philistine defeat by Ramesses III in 1190 or 1170 BC depending on which dates for his reign are accepted. Bimson noted that Wood, Wright, and Harrison suggested an 11th century date for Jephthah. Bimson argued that an 11th century date for Jephthah was too late for the beginning of Philistine oppression of Israel. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, 101-02.

Egyptian influence. While the Sea People had devastated cities along the coastal plain, they were not yet in a position to threaten seriously Israel's homeland in the highlands. The Ammonites were a different matter. The second reason that the reign of Ramesses III was a good historical fit was that the Sea People invasion had been prompted by a terrible drought that had affected the entire eastern Mediterranean basin. The *Shasu* refugees who entered Egypt in Merenptah's time demonstrated that the semi-arid regions south and east of Palestine were becoming uninhabitable. The Ammonite lands were sandwiched between Israel's territory and the desert. The Ammonites were semi-nomadic people who lived in a semi-arid land. Drought conditions forced them to seek water and useful land to the west. So they tried to take Gilead from Israel. In Judges 11:13, the Ammonite king demanded that Israel give him the east bank from the Arnon River to the Jabbok. The Ammonites claimed that this territory had been seized from them when Israel entered the land from Egypt.

Jephthah replied in Judges 11:26 that Israel had lived on the east bank for 300 years, and that the Ammonites should have tried to reclaim the land long before this if they wanted to claim it. This verse has been important in the debate between an 18th and 19th Dynasty date for Israel's sea crossing. If Israel entered the land after the death of Ramesses the Great, the period of the Judges only lasted a little over 170 years. Jephthah's claim could only be true in the context of an 18th Dynasty exodus. It is unclear whether Jephthah intended this as a loose approximate or a more specific date. If this verse is taken literally, Jephthah's encounter with the Ammonites occurred around 1106 BC. This would date Jephthah near the end of the Egyptian 20th Dynasty, perhaps in the reign of Ramesses IX. However, Jephthah's claim was more likely to be a loose and hyperbolic figure. If so, Jephthah's claim may not rule out a date for his ministry around 40 years earlier during the reign of Ramesses III.

Jephthah was even less admirable than the judges who had preceded him. Judges 11:1 noted that he was the son of a prostitute in Gilead. He was a violent and reckless man. Jephthah vowed that if God would deliver the Ammonites into his hand, he would either sacrifice or give to Yahweh whatever came first from the door of his house. Judges 11:33 noted that Jephthah slaughtered the Ammonites and drove them from 20 cities in Gilead. As Jephthah returned home, he learned the cost of his rash vow. His daughter and only child ran first from his house to greet him. Jephthah allowed her to run to the mountains for two months and to weep because she was a virgin. Then Jephthah gave her to Yahweh as he had vowed. This passage continues to be debated. It is unclear whether he killed her as a sacrifice or simply gave her to the tabernacle as a slave. The lament over her virginity suggests the latter. Either way, Jephthah was left childless because of his rash vow. After this family disaster, a war broke out between Israelites in Ephraim and Gilead, and Jephthah was responsible for the slaughter of 42,000 men from Ephraim. Jephthah only judged Israel for six years after this, and he died in Gilead.

After Jephthah's death, the Philistines became a far more severe problem for Israel. Egypt's influence in Palestine slowly weakened after the death of Ramesses III. Like their Mycenaean forefathers, the Sea People proved to be a very aggressive population in the Levant. Their aggression was aided by their mastery of iron when Israel could only produce bronze weapons. The Sea People expanded their territory in Palestine at the expense both of the Canaanites and the Israelites. Raban noted that Philistines were settling as far north as the Jezreel valley in the early 12th century, although he suggested that they might have been settled in the region as Egyptian or Syrian mercenaries.¹⁵³

A strong Philistine presence southeast of the Jezreel valley can be seen in level 12 at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh. This was very important because it placed them in Ramesses the Great's old fortress in Transjordan. Since this fortress was located 40 km southeast of Beth-Shean, it would have given the Philistines control of Israelite territory. Tubb argued that the Sea People at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh can be seen in the presence of double-pithos and jar burials in the cemetery.¹⁵⁴ If so, this established a strong Sea People presence that circled the southern highlands with the Pentapolis, Beth Shean in the Jezreel valley, and Tell es-Sa'idiyeh in the Jordan valley. So the Sea People were in a strong position to threaten the highlands. The level 12 fort at Tell es-Sa'idiyeh was destroyed around 1150 BC, perhaps as Israel resisted Sea People attempts to dominate the highlands.

The Philistine threat from the Pentapolis resulted in an enormous cultural change in the highlands. Before this time, the highlands had contained rather few settlements. The Canaanite cities in the highlands

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A. Raban, "The Philistines in the Western Jezreel Valley," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, #284 (1991): 25.

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Tubb, "An Aegean Presence in Egypto-Canaan," 142.

had been destroyed in the 14th and 13th centuries BC as the Israelites struggled to drive the Canaanites out of the land. Three out of every four Canaanite cities in the highlands had been destroyed at this time.¹⁵⁵ Many Israelites in the highlands had followed a traditional *Habiru* life, living in tents as they had in the wilderness.¹⁵⁶ Little evidence has survived for towns in the highlands before the end of the 19th Dynasty. A number of archaeologists have argued from this that the highlands were unoccupied before the end of the 19th Dynasty.¹⁵⁷ However, the archaeological evidence would fit just as well an agricultural population living in tents. Biblical references abound for the continued use of tents in the highlands at this time.¹⁵⁸

As time went on, the Philistines increasingly tried to expand their territory at Israel's expense. This can be seen in I Samuel 7:14. This verse noted that shortly before the rise of Israel's monarchy, Israel had been able to regain cities that the Philistines had previously seized. G. E. Wright argued that the archaeological evidence for Philistine expansion is remarkably clear. By the end of the 12th century, the Philistines had pushed the border of Judah back to the hill country.¹⁵⁹ Many of the Israelites who had been living on the plains amid the Canaanites were driven up into the highlands. When they settled into the highlands, they brought with them the cultural elements that they had encountered on the plains, including trade based agriculture and stone buildings.

Before the Sea People invasion, the highlands had been occupied by Israelites who had lived a more traditional *Habiru* lifestyle. Israelite immigrants into the highlands brought with them elements of the city state culture. This produced a dramatic change in the highlands. In the region from Hebron to Shechem (an area of 4,200 square kilometers) only 23 village sites were present during the Late Bronze Age. During the early Iron Age I, 114 villages occupied the same area. After 1200 BC, small unfortified villages sprung up rapidly on older tells and on hills. 300 new settlement sites have been identified from this time period. Bimson noted that the new Israelite¹⁶⁰ Iron Age settlements in the highland included 68 settlements in Gilead, 96 in Manasseh, 122 in Ephraim, 12 in Benjamin, and 10 in Judah.¹⁶¹

Callaway noted that during the Late Bronze Age, the population of the highlands had relied on subsistence agriculture. They had raised a few cattle, and had produced locally everything that they needed. The Iron Age I culture introduced revolutionary changes. Callaway echoed Albright's suggestion that the Iron Age I culture relied heavily on cisterns to hold rain water. The cisterns allowed them to build towns in places that had been uninhabitable in the past. Terraces came into use to extend the flat area that could be cultivated.¹⁶² The use of cisterns in the highlands has been called into question recently, and

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Kochavi, "The Israelite Settlement in Canaan in the Light of Archaeological Surveys" 54-60.

¹⁵⁶ The Old Testament referred to tent dwellers in Judg. 4:11-4; 5:24; 7:8-13; 8:11; 20:8; I Sam. 4:10; 13:2; 17:54; II Sam. 18:17; 19:8; 20:22.

¹⁵⁷ J. Callaway, "The Israelite Settlement in Canaan in the Light of Archaeological Excavations," 72-7 in *Biblical Archaeology Today*, (Washington: Israel Exploration Society, 1985).

¹⁵⁸ Dothan defended a somewhat similar position. Dothan suggested that the peoples who would become Israel entered Palestine in two great waves. The first wave of Hebrew tribes took possession of the land as early as the second half of the 14th century BC. This group settled into the mountains of upper Galilee. However, the most important part of the Israelite settlement occurred during the later half of the 13th century BC. Dothan suggests that most Israelites lived in small settlements. They were mostly poor people who lived by agriculture. They lived in small un-walled villages, and often lived in underground pits. Trude Dothan, "In the Days When the Judges Ruled—Research on the Period of the Settlement and the Judges," 35-41 in Hershel Shanks, ed. *Recent Archaeology in the Land of Israel*, (Washington DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1981), 35.

¹⁵⁹ Wright, "Fresh Evidence for the Philistine Story," 74.

¹⁶⁰ The new villages were clearly Israelite sites because the occupation level at several sites continued down to the Iron Age II period as Israelite cultural levels. For a description of this cultural change, see Callaway, "A New Perspective on the Hill Country Settlement of Canaan in Iron Age I," 33. L. E. Stager, "Highland Village Life in Palestine Some Three Thousand Years Ago," *The Oriental Notes and News* 69 (1981): 1.

¹⁶¹ Bimson, "Merenptah's Israel and Recent Theories of Israelite Origins," 4.

¹⁶² Callaway, "The Israelite Settlement in Canaan in the Light of Archaeological Excavations," 72-7.

rain water may actually have been held in collared rim jars.¹⁶³ Moshe Kochavi added that a new kind of pottery appeared at the beginning of the Iron Age I period. This new kind of pottery was based on Greek prototypes. Kochavi argued from this that a new people had swept into the highlands from the northwest. Kochavi added that new crops also appeared with the beginning of the Iron Age I period. The Late Bronze Age culture had been based on subsistence agriculture. The Iron Age I culture created a market based, Mediterranean kind of agriculture. Now, olive trees and grape vines began to appear. Olive oil and wine were effective export crops. So a trade based culture appeared overnight in the highlands of Palestine.¹⁶⁴

These were remarkable changes in Israel's culture half way through the period of the Judges. At the same time, the city state cultures on the coastal plains continued largely unchanged until the Canaanites were driven north by Philistine expansion. Several scholars have argued from these changes for a 19th Dynasty exodus and conquest. Since several of these sites continued into the Iron II period as Israelite sites, those who defend a 19th Dynasty origin for Israel have often depicted this Iron I immigration as the arrival of Israelites in Palestine.¹⁶⁵ The archaeological evidence could be explained as adequately by seeing it as evidence for the flight of coastal Israelites into the highland at a time when the region had been used primarily for pastoral agriculture. After all, Merenptah's stela had described Israel as such a culture perhaps three decades before the greatest wave of Sea People entered Palestine.¹⁴

Peckham noted that the city state culture of Palestine had gradually disintegrated after the collapse of the Egyptian empire. By the middle of the 11th century, the Aramaeans had over run Damascus and had consolidated their control of Syria. Palestine was then left without support and was threatened from two directions. Peckham noted that the chronology and sequence of events is not well known.¹⁶⁶ Finkelstein argued that Egyptian activity of some kind continued in the Shephelah, the Jezreel valley, and the southern coastal plain until around 1130 BC.¹⁶⁷

Judges 12:8-15 traced the judges who led Israel as the Philistines consolidated their power. None of these were depicted as being unusually righteous men. Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel for seven years. He had 30 sons and 30 daughters. This suggests that he violated Moses' principles for leadership in Deuteronomy 17. In rebellion against Yahweh, he multiplies wives for himself. After he died, Elon judged Israel for ten years. Then Abdon judged for eight years. Abdon also violated Moses' principles. Abdon had 40 sons and 30 daughters. He allowed them to ride on 70 royal donkeys, which called into question Yahweh's rule of the land. The lack of spiritual leadership led Israel into severe suffering.

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Judges 13:1 noted that Israel once more did "evil" in Yahweh's eyes and violated His covenant. So Yahweh gave them into the hands of the Philistines for 40 years. In Judges 15:17, the men of Judah complained to Samson that his actions had threatened their safety because the Philistines ruled over them. Yahweh would not allow the Philistines to drive His people from the land or to dominate them forever. In Judges 13, Yahweh raised up another deliverer. However, this man's character would prove to be highly problematic. When Judges 13 announced his birth, the text gave no hint that Israel had repented of their sins. Yahweh simply chose in His sovereignty to bring forth a man who would begin the process of delivering Israel from the Philistines. In His sovereignty, Yahweh chose a very unlikely person. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah from the tribe of Dan. Already in Joshua's time, the tribe of Dan had abandoned the territory that Yahweh had assigned to it and had seized Laish on Israel's northern

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Zertal studied the Iron Age I artifacts from Manasseh. Zertal argued that cisterns were not cut at most Iron Age I sites. Only a few cisterns were used in areas where chalk deposits were found, but not in areas characterized by harder Cenomene-Turonian limestone. Zertal argued that large collar-rimmed pottery jars were used for water storage instead. Zertal, "Following the Pottery Trail: Israel Enters Canaan," 34-5.

¹⁶⁴ Kochavi, "The Israelite Settlement in Canaan in the Light of Archaeological Surveys."

For example, Mazar argued that before 1200 BC, many small ethnic groups had populated the highlands instead of the Israelites. See the discussion in Benjamin Mazar, *The Early Biblical Period: Historical Studies*, (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1986), 38.

¹⁶⁶ Brian Peckham, "Israel and Phoenicia," 224-48 in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), 226-27.

¹⁶⁷ Finkelstein, "Philistine Chronology: High, Middle, or Low?" 141.

frontier.¹⁶⁸ Judges 18 would argue that they had done so after making a conscious choice of idolatry. Manoah did not live among the Danites in Laish. He lived in Zorah where the tribe of Dan had gathered in Judges 18:8. Manoah had chosen God's provision in the region that Yahweh had assigned to Dan instead of the abundance of Laish. Manoah had kept Yahweh's covenant. The Angel of the Lord promised Manoah that his wife would bear a son who would begin to deliver Israel. Manoah was commanded that his son must live as a Nazirite all of his life.¹⁶⁹ Then the Angel of Yahweh ascended to heaven in the altar flame of Manoah's sacrifice.¹⁷⁰

As Samson grew, Yahweh's Spirit began to move him, yet his choices were consistently self-destructive and improper. Samson illustrated both the best and the worst in Israel. God's Spirit enabled him to do impossible things, but his own weaknesses brought his destruction.¹⁷¹ As Yahweh's Spirit moved mightily within him, Samson began his attack on the Philistines in Judges 14:1. Samson went down to Timnah and became enamored with a Philistine girl there. George Kelm and Amihai Mazar noted that Timnah was a border town. It was occupied at different times by the Canaanites, the Israelites, and the Philistines. Kelm and Mazar found 18 occupation levels at Timnah. They identified level 5 with the Philistine occupation. This level was a densely occupied urban center that was surrounded by a strong wall. Philistine style pottery was found in that level, and a clay bulla. Kelm and Mazar noted that the Philistine level at Timnah was abandoned in 1000 BC.

In Judges 15:19, Yahweh split the rock at Lehi to give him water. This miracle paralleled the holy mountain stream that flowed from Mount Sinai in Moses' day. Samson deeply frightened the Philistines. They had dominated Palestine by their monopoly of iron. So in Judges 15:15, Samson killed a thousand Philistines with the jaw bone of an ass. Then in Judges 16:3, Samson went down to Gaza which was as deep into the Philistine Pentapolis as he could go. Then he tore the city gates from their posts and carried them to a mountain top opposite Hebron. This would have left the city helpless in the face of an Israelite attack. Gaza was one of the five great cities of the Philistine Pentapolis. If Samson could make a laughing stock of Gaza, he was a direct threat to all the Philistine powers.

Through the deceit of Delilah, Samson was captured. Samson's spiritual weaknesses were his downfall. When Delilah cut his hair, Samson's Nazirite vow to God was broken and he became helpless. Samson could be seen as a picture for all of God's people. God's Spirit had done mighty things through the nation. Yet their spiritual weaknesses had brought them to bondage and captivity. When Samson called out to Yahweh in repentance and faith in Judges 16:28, God gave him back his miraculous strength one last time. Samson brought down the temple of Dagon and killed the whole leadership of the Philistine people. This produced a lack of leadership that would weaken the Philistines as Israel fought them. It would also teach the Philistines that Israel's God could defeat them after all.

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The city of Laish was founded in the 5th millennium BC. It was a large and prosperous city. Kitchen used the archaeology of Laish to argue for a 19th Dynasty exodus. He noted that a Canaanite culture at Laish was destroyed around 1200 BC. It had contained a kind of pottery that was a transition between the Late Bronze Age II and Iron Age IA pottery. The next occupation level at Laish was only an encampment with storage pits of local manufacture. Kitchen suggested that this destruction was caused by Dan as the tribe seized Laish. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 211. Of course, 1200 BC was also when the Sea People were pouring through the Levant and destroying cities as they passed. The Sea People would also have destroyed Laish at this time. So the destruction level could have been caused by either Dan or the Sea People. It is unclear whether a pottery horizon can be distinguished that marks Israel's entrance into the land. It is interesting that the population of Laish after 1200 BC saw a marked change in population. Laish was characterized for a generation by a semi-nomadic culture that lived in tents. Avraham Biran, "Tel Dan: Biblical Texts and Archaeological Data," 1-17 in Michael D. Coogan, et al, eds. *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip J. King*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 5. This semi-nomadic population could have been the tribe of Dan seizing the city. It could also have reflected refugees fleeing from the Sea People's devastation. So the Laish destruction layer at 1200 BC does not really prove very much other than the fact that the city was destroyed by someone.

¹⁶⁹ Samson's birth may have been a great "type" or symbol of Jesus, the great Deliverer whose birth was promised in Gen. 3:15.

¹⁷⁰ This act was an ancient claim of deity in the Near East. In Faulkner's Pyramid Text Utterance 267, an Egyptian Old Kingdom ruler had claimed, "A stairway to the sky is set up for me that I may ascend on it to the sky, and I ascend on the smoke of the great censuring."

¹⁷¹ For a recent archaeological discussion of Judg. 13-16, see John Roskoski, "Locating Etam: Samson's Rock of Refuge," *Bible and Spade* 21 (2008): 12-20.

Samson's spiritual weakness demonstrated that Israel's judges could not preserve Yahweh's kingdom. The author of the book of Judges then continued his argument in a different way. He concluded his account with three of the worst examples of things that had happened during the 400 year history of the judges. In Judges 17:6, the author of Judges argued that Micah made household idols because there was no king in Israel and every man did what was right in his own eyes. In Judges 18:1, the author of Judges argued that the Danites chose idolatry with Micah's idols and seized Laish because there was no king in Israel. In Judges 19:1, the author of Judges introduced another example of the sinful chaos that resulted because there was no king in Israel. A Levite stopped for the night at Gibeah with his concubine. The book of Judges depicted his experiences at Gibeah as the mirror image of the angels' experiences at Sodom in Genesis 19:1-10. Just as Lot had offered his daughters to the men of Sodom, the Levite gave his concubine to the men of Gibeah. In the morning, the Levite found his concubine dead on the doorstep.¹⁷² The Levite cut his concubine into 12 pieces and sent a piece to each of the Israelite tribes. The result was warfare within Israel as the tribe of Benjamin was almost completely exterminated. The conclusion of the whole account was given in the last verse of Judges, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes." This constantly repeated refrain was a direct reference to Deuteronomy 12:8. In Deuteronomy 12:1-8, Moses had commanded that the Israelites were to destroy every high place and every idolatrous shrine in the Promised Land. Moses commanded Israel to seek Yahweh at the place which Yahweh chooses as His dwelling place and the place of His great name. They were not to continue to do what they were doing in the wilderness, when every man did what was right in his own eyes. Through 400 years, Israel had never obeyed this command. The Israelites had always continued to worship at the ancient high places like Bethel and Gibeah. Sometimes they worshiped Yahweh at these sites just as Abraham had worshiped at Bethel. More often than not, the Israelites fell into idolatry at the Canaanite high places. The united monarchy would now address both concerns. The theocracy would be replaced by human kingship. At the same time, the ancient high places would be replaced (at least in theory) by the temple site that Yahweh chose for Himself as His dwelling place.

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Susan Niditch argued that Judg. 19-20 illustrated the collapse of Israel's culture. The lack of hospitality shown at Gibeah echoed the violence at Sodom. Beyond that, the man's insensitivity to his concubine illustrated the collapse of family values and cultural unity. Niditch argued that one of the most important questions in the account was whether the tribe of Benjamin would support the antisocial behavior at Gibeah or support demands for justice. Benjamin's support for evil led to civil war. Niditch argued that the civil war was a holy war because Benjamin had broken its covenant as recorded in Deut. 13:13ff. Niditch noted that the phrase "good for nothing fellows" in Judg. 19:22 echoed the same phrase in Deut. 13:13. Susan Niditch, "The 'Sodomite' Theme in Judges 19-20: Family, Community, and Social Disintegration," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982): 365-78.