

THE BIBLE AND THE AMARNA DOCUMENTS.

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Amarna, situated 300 miles up the Nile, was the capital of one of the Pharaohs, Amenophis IV. After his death Amarna was abandoned and it has been left in ruins to this day. In the winter of 1887 an Egyptian peasant woman, poking in the ruins for antiques, came across some wooden chests which were ready to fall to dust, in which she found a stack of more than 300 brick tablets, inscribed on both sides and on the edges with signs well known to scholars of the Assyrian language. The treasure was at once seized by the Egyptian government and the tablets were deposited in the great libraries of the world. At first Renan and Schrader declared the find a fake. Sayce dated the documents from 680 B. C., the time of Esarhaddon, when Assyria, as far as was known, had first come into touch with Egypt, but it was soon ascertained that they were a part of the archives of Amenophis IV and of his father, the greatest of all the Pharaohs, whose Memnon statue is sung by Homer when he tells of Thebes and her 100 gates. Each brick was a letter from some viceroy or vassal or royal friend of Egypt in Western Asia, from Babylon and Nineveh, from Tyre and Sidon, from Damascus and Jerusalem. Some of these bricks are 10 x 18 inches and contain 200 lines, altogether they have as many lines as half of the five books of Moses. All of them were written within 20 years, and thus they focus light on that period of the world's history, a period that had been barren in the annals of hither Asia. It is of special interest to students of the Bible because these letters come in between the close of Genesis and the opening of Exodus, between the careers of Joseph and Moses. Biblical scholars say that they are of "inestimable value", the "most important records ever found in connection with the Bible",

“the most marvelous of all archaeological discoveries in Egypt”, “the most interesting mass of documents surviving from early times in the east”, “the most valuable source of information relative to Egypt and Western Asia”, and, best of all, they are “real, true documents, not exaggerated stories such as are found on ancient monuments”. Thutmosis III had inscribed on the walls of Karnak the names of 119 towns which he had captured in Palestine, and Ramses II made a similar list.

The Amarna letters, which Amenophis IV received, between these two reigns, refer to 130 towns, 100 of which have been identified. Shishak invaded Palestine in the days of Rehoboam and boasted of 190 towns that he had taken. All of these contemporary lists of towns corroborate the gazetteer or Doomsday Book, as Dean Stanley called it, found in the book of Joshua. Those who deny that the book of Joshua is a contemporary document, freely admit that the author was an antiquarian who had access to contemporary documents. The list of names found in the Amarna letters which correspond with places mentioned in the Bible is too long to be published here, but I will be glad to furnish the names and references to any student who wishes to use them.

There is an especial interest attaching to the ruins of Lachish, for a letter from Lachish led to the exploration of its ruins when a brick tablet of the same period was found there. The same result followed in the exploration of Taanach near Megiddo. But the supreme interest attaches to the name Jerusalem. At Urusalimu, as it was called, there was a viceroy named Abd Chiba, who sent 27 appeals to Egypt for help against the Hebrews. These Hebrews must have been nomads from the desert, Ishmaelites, Amalekites, or Edomites, descendants of Abraham the Hebrew. One of their chieftains was called Elimelech, a name that recurs in the book of “Ruth”. Abd Chiba means servant of Chiba. Chiba was a god of the Hittites. Ezekiel (16:3) says of Jerusalem, “thy father was an

Amorite and thy mother a Hittite". The other old name of Jerusalem was Jebus, and the Jebusites were Amorites. Dr. Driver says: "It was commonly supposed that the old name of Jerusalem was Jebus, but the Amarna letters show that this was not the case." Those who argued from the statement (Judges 19:10), "Jebus, which is Jerusalem", that the writer was not a contemporary because he lived when the old name had given way to the later name of the city, can use that argument no more. The Amorites are mentioned in 21 of the Amarna letters as "Amurru". Jacob said to Joseph (Gen. 48:22): "I have given thee a portion which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow", and Mamre also, the friend of Abraham, was an Amorite.

Canaan begat (Genesis 10:15) Sidon, and Heth and the Amorite. In the Amarna letters appear Zimrida of Sidon, Abd Chiba the Hittite and Aziru the Amorite prince in Kinahhi. This is the earliest reference to the land of Canaan. That part of the world was known in Babylon as Amurru. Another name for Palestine, met with in the Amarna correspondence, is Charu, which is the same word that is found in the Hebrew of Deuteronomy (1:20; 3:25) to designate the mountain of the Amorites.

There is a singular coincidence as to the river Kishon, where Sisera gathered 900 chariots of iron (Judges 4:13). It was at the same spot, centuries before, that Thutmosis III captured 924 chariots of iron. The first use horses were put to was to draw chariots, and Pharaoh's horses were imported from the region of the river Kishon.

There was a city named Kirjathsepher or Book City (Joshua 15:15), which has caused much trouble to unbelievers, who would not believe that there were any libraries in Palestine in the days of Joshua. The papyrus Anastasi, written during the reign of the Pharaoh of the oppression, translates the name of the town, Bati pupa

ira, with the determinative for writing. Kuenen said in 1866: "In the days of Moses there was very little writing." In 1886, just before the discovery of the Amarna letters, Dillmann used the argument that Deuteronomy must have been composed long after the events described, because "the author everywhere supposes that the art of writing was perfectly common." The Amarna letters prove that the art of writing was perfectly common in Palestine centuries before Moses was born. For a thousand years the culture of Babylon had spread over Western Asia. In one of the letters the Prince of Gebal says: "Look at the archives and see how I have conducted myself." Though Moore's commentary on "Judges" appeared after the discovery of the Amarna letters he persists in the arbitrary change of Book City to Border City. He also stands by the revisers of the Old Testament who had changed (Judges 5:14) the "pen of the writer" into the "staff of the marshal". Error dies hard. The witness swore that the horse was ten feet high and he will not retract his absurd statement. The Amarna letters completely refute the view of Wellhausen, Kuenen, and Robertson Smith as to the lack of culture in Palestine. Smith says (*Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, p. 333): "For the nomads of Goshen to become civilized inhabitants of the cities of Canaan is impossible. The Canaanites with their rough peasant life of nature were on a par with the rough Israelites from the desert."

The Amarna letters contain much more than lists of towns and rulers, they photograph the life of the country. Though all were written in Babylonian script, they contain explanatory notes in dialects different from the Semitic of Babylon, showing that the common speech was different from that of culture and diplomacy. This accords with the impression left by the Bible that the Canaanites were not of the same stock as the Hebrews.

The Amarna letters are full of salutations that sound as if taken from the Bible. "I am the footstool, the dust

of the feet of my Lord, the King." Abd Chiba, ruler of Jerusalem, uses expressions that remind one of two other rulers of that city, Melchizedek and David. "Neither my father nor my mother appointed me in this place but the mighty arm of the King." "The King has put his name on Jerusalem forever. Therefore, he cannot forsake the land of Jerusalem." Prince Tagi uses language like that of the Psalmist: "Though we arise to heaven or descend into the earth, still our heads are in thy hands." The sending of messengers from Babylon to inquire after the health of Hezekiah is recalled as we read of the complaint of Burnaburias, king of Babylon, because the king of Egypt had not sent an embassy to inquire after his health. He was not satisfied until an envoy showed him on the map how far away Egypt was and that news of his sickness could not have reached Amenophis. The same king demands that the Egyptians who had murdered his messengers should be put to death. "Let the blood which they shed come back on them." The suffering of the family of Achan for Achan's sin was in accord with Egyptian penology, for Amenophis IV writes to Aziru: "If you continue unfriendly you shall die, you and your family."

Most of the idols that the Israelites were commanded to destroy are mentioned in the Amarna letters, such as Dagon and Moloch, Baal and Ashera, Nebo and Mammun, Shemesh and Rimmon.

The Amarna letters help us to understand the conquest of Canaan by Joshua. Amenophis III had driven the armies of Babylon east of the Euphrates and the armies of the Hittites north of Damascus, and had complete control of the land of Canaan. His son, Amenophis IV, was a weak ruler and neglected the petty principalities into which the country was divided. The letters are full of complaints and mutual jealousies. Up and down the length and breadth of the land there was civil war, a battle of kites and crows. When the great Ramses II ascended the throne, he too kept Babylon and Assyria

east of the Euphrates and forced the Hittites to remain north of Damascus. The treaty between Ramses and his rival, the king of the Hittites, was inscribed on a silver plate and brought to Egypt and a copy of it has been found in Boghaz Koi in Cappadocia, the capital of the Hittites. It not only fixed the boundary line between the two empires but it also secured an alliance for mutual defense and promulgated a fugitive slave law, guarding the returned runaway slave against punishment by death for himself, his wife, or his children, and against mutilation of eyes, ears, lips, hands, or feet. The custom of mutilating captives prevailed in the East for a thousand years, for when Alexander the Great reached Persepolis, he found 800 Greeks who had lost hand or foot, ear or nose by the cruel punishment of the Persians. One thousand gods and goddesses of both empires were invoked as witnesses to give to the keeper of the treaty, health, long life, offspring, land, and servants, and to punish the violator of the treaty in his house, his land, and his servants. The Hittites were the first to violate the treaty, for when Mernephtah succeeded Ramses II, they called on the northern races to combine against Egypt, from Lycia, Mysia, Caria, Paphlagonia, and Mesopotamia, from the Troad, Sardinia, Etruria, and Lybia. Professor Petrie found in the ruins of the temple of Mernephtah a stele of Amenophis III on the backside of which Mernephtah had inscribed 28 lines of a song of triumph over these enemies. "The Hittites are quieted. Gaza is taken. Jenoaam is brought to nought. Askelon is carried. Palestine sits like a widow. Israel has no seed." This is the first reference to Israel on the monuments, and the determinative used designates not a land but a people. Israel may well have escaped while the Egyptians were fighting against the Lybians and the northern pirates who had invaded the delta of the Nile. As Israel had disappeared in the desert of Sinai, the monarch could think of no more fitting words to describe their condition than

to say that they were without seed. Before the forty years of wandering in the wilderness were over the power of Egypt was broken. She had cleared Palestine of Babylonians, Assyrians, and Hittites, and then withdrew herself, leaving none but seven petty tribes of Canaanites to dispute the ground with Joshua. Joshua met no great antagonist. It was not till the time of Samson and Saul that the Philistines sailed from Crete and conquered the country.

The Amarna letters give us the names of the kings who were ruling Egypt, Babylon, and Assyria at that time. As each of those empires kept careful records of the years of each dynasty and of each king, it will not be long before these three eras will be brought into harmony with each other and the Amarna letters will be the means of bringing order out of the confusion in which ancient chronology still flounders. In Egypt the testimony of the monuments and of the historian Manetho has been set aside and dates have been determined independently by appeal to astronomy, to the rising of the dog star and of the new moon. Mahler, explaining the plague of darkness by an eclipse of the sun, thinks he knows the year, the month, and the day of that event, March 27, 1335 B. C. He overlooks the fact that the darkness covered Egypt only, not the land of Goshen where the Israelites were living in the light. The result of the appeal to astronomy has led to wide disagreement among historians. Lehmann says that Mahler's astronomical views must be treated like any other hypothesis. Wiedemann declares that "dates are fixed only as far back as 664 B. C. Before that point up to 1750 B. C. dates may be wrong 200 years, and still earlier dates differ 1,000 years." Following the sothic era, determined by the rising of the dog star, the 13th dynasty began either in 1786 B. C. or in 3246 B. C. Petrie says that logically the date of the 18th dynasty should be fixed 120 years earlier than the generally accepted date. Lauth puts Ramses II of the 19th

dynasty, 230 years earlier than the commonly accepted date. This confusion is due largely to the question whether more or less of the early dynasties were contemporary with each other. With such disagreement among scholars, Budge says that there can be no science of the chronology of Egypt.

As to the chronology of ancient Babylon there is coming to be an agreement as to the date of the reign of Hammurabi. L. W. King, Lehmann, Rost, Banke, Hommel, and Eduard Meyer have agreed on about 1950 B. C. This is a date that nearly harmonizes with the chronology of the Bible, for Hammurabi was none other than Amraphel, the contemporary of Abraham. The book of Exodus (12:40) records the years of Israel in Egypt as 430. The book of I Kings (6:1) reckons 480 years from the exodus from Egypt to the building of the temple in the fourth year of King Solomon. The fourth year of Solomon is fixed by Hommel as 958 B. C., a date that agrees with the Greek historians who put the reign of Solomon's friend, Hiram, king of Tyre, from 969 to 936 B. C. Adding 480 and 430 to 958, we find as the date the Bible gives to Jacob's entry into Egypt the year 1868 B. C. Adding to this figure the 180 years of Isaac, we meet with Abraham in the year 2048 B. C., a date between 2100 B. C., which Oppert and Winckler have agreed upon for the rule of Hammurabi and 1950 B. C. the more generally accepted year. When Egyptologists agree among themselves as to who was the pharaoh contemporary with Hammurabi it will be an easy matter to determine the date of Amenophis IV of the Amarna letters and of Ramses II, the pharaoh of the oppression and of Mernepthah, the pharaoh of the exodus.