

The Biblical Chronologist

WHAT HAS BEEN IS REMOTE AND EXCEEDINGLY MYSTERIOUS. WHO CAN DISCOVER IT?
(Ecclesiastes 7:24)

Volume 2, Number 2

March/April 1996

The Chronology of Egypt in Relation to the Bible: 3000–1000 B.C.¹

The following article synchronizes two independent chronologies: one derived from the Bible, the other derived from the secular history of Egypt. This synchronization lays a scientifically sound chronological foundation for all studies—Biblical, historical, archaeological, geophysical, climatological, etc.—dealing with Egypt in the second and third millennia B.C.

The span of time covered here—two millennia—is comparable in length to that which extends from our present experience back to before the time of Christ. The synchronization of these two ancient chronologies over such a long span of time is a major milestone in the field of chronology building.

The proper synchronization of these two chronologies has only become possible in the last decade. Prior to that time both chronologies were sufficiently in error to preclude any meaningful alignment. The most serious problem was with traditional Biblical chronology. The major breakthrough came in 1990 with the realization that traditional Biblical chronology was missing a full millennium just prior to 1000 B.C.²

The historical chronology of Egypt was also found to be missing a chunk of time. In 1987 Haas et al. reported that radiocarbon dates on samples taken from Old Kingdom monuments were some three centuries older than the historically derived

chronology of Egypt predicted.³ This immediately implied that some 300 years had been left out of the chronology of Egypt by the Egyptologists somewhere during the First Intermediate Period. Such an error during this period is not too surprising. The First Intermediate Period is not only very remote, it is also a time of turmoil in the history of Egypt, and little by way of chronological record has survived from it.

With such large errors present in both traditional Biblical chronology and the modern historical chronology of Egypt, synchronization of the two was impossible. Indeed, they seemed to be telling entirely different, contradictory stories about history. But when the chronological errors were mended, the contradictions disappeared, and a beautiful harmony emerged.

Background to the Chronology of Egypt

The chronology of Egypt has traditionally been divided into a number of periods. From oldest to youngest these are (see Figure 1): Early Dynastic, Old Kingdom, First Intermediate, Middle Kingdom, Second Intermediate, New Kingdom, and Third Intermediate. The “Kingdom” periods are times of Egyptian political strength and generally involve expansion of its borders and its commercial interests throughout the Near East. The “Intermediate” periods generally correspond to times of internal political turmoil and declining international stature and influence.

These major periods are traditionally subdivi-

¹This article is similar in purpose and design to “The Chronology of Palestine in Relation to the Bible: 3000–1000 B.C.” which appeared in Volume 1, Number 4 of *The Biblical Chronologist*. The two articles complement one another and are designed to be used side by side.

²Gerald E. Aardsma, *A New Approach to the Chronology of Biblical History from Abraham to Samuel*, 2nd ed. (Loda IL: Aardsma Research and Publishing, 1993).

³Herbert Haas, James Devine, Robert Wenke, Mark Lehner, Willy Wolffi, and Georg Bonani, “Radiocarbon chronology and the historical calendar in Egypt,” *Chronologies in the Near East: Relative Chronologies and Absolute Chronology 16,000–4,000 B.P.*, ed. Olivier Aurenche, Jacques Evin, and Francis Hours (B.A.R., 5, Centremead, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0DQ, England, 1987), 585–606.

B.C.	Bible		Egypt	
	period	details	period	dynasties
1000	MONARCHY <small>1051 ± 16 B.C.</small>	- Solomon begins to reign -	THIRD INTERMEDIATE <small>1070 ± 15 B.C.</small>	- Dynasty 21 begins -
1100		- David begins to reign -		- Dynasty 20 begins -
1200		- Saul begins to reign -		
		- birth of Samuel -		
1300		- birth of Eli -	NEW KINGDOM	- Dynasty 19 begins -
1400				
1500				
1600			SECOND INTERMEDIATE <small>1550 ± 15 B.C.</small>	- Dynasty 18 begins -
1700	THEOCRACY		1676 ± 40 B.C.	- Hyksos rule begins -
1800				- Dynasty 13 begins -
1900			MIDDLE KINGDOM	
2000		- death of Samson -		- Dynasty 12 begins -
2100		- Jephthah begins to judge -	<small>2028 ± 50 B.C.</small>	
2200		- Tola begins to judge -		- Dynasty 11 begins -
2300		- Gideon begins to judge -		
2400		- Deborah begins to judge -	FIRST INTERMEDIATE	
2500		- Ehud begins to judge -		
2600		- Othniel begins to judge -		- Dynasty 6 begins -
2700		- Conquest begins -		
2800	PROTO-ISRAEL	- THE EXODUS -	synchronized to the Exodus	- Dynasty 7 begins -
2900		- birth of Moses -		
3000			OLD KINGDOM	- Dynasty 5 begins -
		- death of Joseph -		
		- Joseph's famine -		- Dynasty 4 begins -
		- birth of Joseph -		
			<small>2952 ± 51 B.C.</small>	- Dynasty 3 begins -
		- birth of Jacob -	EARLY DYNASTIC	
	<small>3092 ± 16 B.C.</small>	- birth of Isaac -		

Figure 1: Chronology of Egypt synchronized with the Biblical time periods and selected Biblical events in the 2nd and 3rd millennia B.C.

vided by dynasties, which are further subdivided into the reigns of individual kings and queens. Unfortunately, the names of these periods and the definitions of their beginning and ending points are not always uniform, so one needs to be careful when comparing the works of different scholars.

The names of individual rulers can also be confusing. In particular, spellings and pronunciation vary widely, though one can usually easily determine which ruler is intended from the dates and other context.

Scholars differ relatively little in their chronologies of Egypt today. To get a feel for this consider Dynasty 11 once again. Its beginning is variously dated to 2160 B.C.⁴, 2122 or 2080 B.C.⁵, 2180 B.C.⁶, and 2133 B.C.⁷ in four different, modern, scholarly sources. Notice that these representative dates display a maximum divergence of 100 years. Such differences increase as one moves back to earlier times, and shrink as one moves forward to more recent times.

Chronological Details

I have used *The Cambridge Ancient History*⁸ (CAH) chronology as the basis for my chronology of Egypt prior to Dynasty 11. According to the radiocarbon results of Haas *et al.* mentioned above, this chronology needs to be lengthened by about 300 years during the First Intermediate Period. Radiocarbon can only suggest an approximate correction (i.e., about three centuries), but this can be refined by making use of our knowledge of Biblical and secular Egyptian history. Specifically, the

⁴Nicolas Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 390.

⁵K. A. Kitchen, "The Basics of Egyptian Chronology in Relation to the Bronze Age," *High, Middle or Low? Acts of an International Colloquium on Absolute Chronology Held at the University of Gothenburg 20th–22nd August 1987, Part 1*, ed. Paul Astrom (Gothenburg: Paul Astroms Forlag, 1987), 49.

⁶*The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, vol. 4, ed. Ephraim Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 1530.

⁷*The Cambridge Ancient History, 3rd edition*, vol. 1, part 2, ed. I. E. S. Edwards, C. J. Gadd, and N. G. L. Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 996.

⁸*The Cambridge Ancient History, 3rd edition*, vol. 1, part 2, ed. I. E. S. Edwards, C. J. Gadd, and N. G. L. Hammond (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 994–996.

history of Egypt and Biblical history intersect at the Exodus, providing a precise alignment of these two chronologies at this one point.

If what the Bible records about the Exodus is taken seriously one cannot escape the conclusion that the Exodus must have devastated the nation of Egypt. The expected devastation is found in the catastrophic collapse of the nation which terminated the Old Kingdom and ushered in the First Intermediate Period.⁹ The Biblical Exodus is, therefore, synchronous with the beginning of the First Intermediate Period.

The Biblical date for the Exodus is 2447±12 B.C.¹⁰ The CAH date for the beginning of the First Intermediate Period is 2181 B.C. Thus, we need to lengthen the CAH chronology by (2447-2181=) 266 years at all times prior to the First Intermediate Period. This 266 year correction obviously satisfies radiocarbon's requirements of a roughly 300 year correction.

The beginning of the Old Kingdom as well as dynasties 3 through 7 can now be calculated by adding 266 years to their CAH B.C. dates. This yields 2952 B.C. for the start of the Old Kingdom and Dynasty 3, 2879 B.C. for Dynasty 4, 2760 B.C. for Dynasty 5, 2611 B.C. for Dynasty 6, and 2447 B.C. for Dynasty 7.

The uncertainty in the length of the Old Kingdom is difficult to quantify. Based upon the CAH data for individual reigns I feel we must allow a minimum of ±50 years (3σ). When combined with the ±12 years uncertainty in the Biblical date of the Exodus, one obtains a total dating uncertainty for the beginning of the Old Kingdom of ±51 years.

For the remainder of the chronology of Egypt (Dynasties 11 through 21) I have used the dates computed by the conservative scholar Kenneth A. Kitchen.¹¹ Kitchen presents "low" and "high"

⁹Gerald E. Aardsma, "The Exodus Happened 2450 B.C.," *Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Creationism*, ed. Robert E. Walsh (Pittsburgh: Creation Science Fellowship, Inc., 1994), 9–15.

¹⁰Gerald E. Aardsma, "Chronology of the Bible: 3000 - 1000 B.C.," *The Biblical Chronologist* 1.3 (May/June 1995): 2.

¹¹K. A. Kitchen, "The Basics of Egyptian Chronology in Relation to the Bronze Age," *High, Middle or Low? Acts of an International Colloquium on Absolute Chronology Held at the University of Gothenburg 20th–22nd August 1987, Part 1*, ed. Paul Astrom (Gothenburg: Paul Astroms Forlag, 1987), 37–55.

chronology options for the earlier half of this time span. These differ by less than 50 years everywhere. I have chosen the “high” chronology dates because they seem more strongly supported by available data at present and they minimize the stretching of the First Intermediate Period which results from the 266 year correction to Old Kingdom dates discussed above.

I define the start of the Middle Kingdom coincident with the reunification of Upper and Lower Egypt under Mentuhotpe II. Grimal places this event in the twenty-first year of Mentuhotpe II. I have used this definition in conjunction with Kitchen’s dates to compute the date of the beginning of the Middle Kingdom as 2028 B.C. I have assigned an uncertainty of ± 50 years based on known uncertainties and a comparison of Kitchen’s results with those of other modern scholars.

Grimal starts the Second Intermediate Period thirty years following the beginning of Iy’s reign. I have adopted this figure and used Kitchen’s chronology to compute an absolute date for the beginning of this period of 1676 ± 40 B.C.

The beginning of the New Kingdom is defined coincident with the start of Dynasty 18, which Kitchen’s “high” chronology dates to 1550 B.C. I estimate a total uncertainty of ± 15 years at this point.

The beginning of the Third Intermediate Period is defined as coincident with the end of Dynasty 20, which Kitchen dates to 1070/69 B.C. I estimate a total uncertainty of ± 15 years here also.

Panoramic Historical Overview

Early Dynastic

The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived during the Early Dynastic Period. Chronological considerations imply that Abraham interacted with one of the pharaohs of Dynasty 2 in the incident involving his wife, Sarah (Genesis 12:10-20). It is impossible to determine precisely which pharaoh this was because of the large chronological uncertainties at this early time.

Old Kingdom

The pyramids which today symbolize ancient Egypt in the minds of many people were built dur-

ing the Old Kingdom. The Old Kingdom appears to have been a period of stability and great prosperity for Egypt.

Joseph was sold as a slave in Egypt (Genesis 39:1) during the early years of the Old Kingdom, probably during Dynasty 3. His promotion to vizier (Genesis 41:38-45) raises the possibility of identifying him in the secular Egyptian sources. However, all attempts to do so at the present time must be regarded as uncertain and speculative because of the limited secular data bearing on the problem. To illustrate the limitations of our knowledge of this early period consider a few of Grimal’s observations:¹²

The Thinite [Early Dynastic; Dynasties 1 and 2] period is a poorly known phase, essentially because of a lack of surviving texts. . . .

Ironically, the Third Dynasty is less well known than the two earlier dynasties, and there is still no agreement on its origins. . . .

The end of the Third Dynasty was hardly any clearer than its beginning has been, and it has proved difficult to reconcile the documentary information provided by king-lists with the evidence supplied by archaeologists. . . .

It is not yet possible to give a satisfactory account of the Third Dynasty, but archaeological research may yet provide the data for more sense to be made of it.

I have previously suggested—with suitable caveats—the possibility that the vizier Imhotep may be the Egyptian equivalent of Joseph, and Djoser the pharaoh whom he served.¹³ Djoser ruled early in Dynasty 3, whereas Figure 1 shows the end of Dynasty 3 coincident with Joseph’s rise to prominence in Egypt. This seems to imply either that Imhotep is not Joseph or that

¹²Nicolas Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 49,63,66,67.

¹³Gerald E. Aardsma, *A New Approach to the Chronology of Biblical History from Abraham to Samuel*, 2nd ed. (Loda IL: Aardsma Research and Publishing, 1993), 80–82. I have received several interesting letters from subscribers regarding this possibility. I hope to share some of their comments in the next issue.

the chronology of the Old Kingdom should be shortened by about 50 years to bring its beginning closer to 2900 B.C. An unequivocal identification of Joseph with a known Egyptian vizier would resolve this question and provide another synchronism between the chronologies of Egypt and the Bible, further reducing the uncertainty in the chronology of Egypt at this early time.

The devastating seven year famine which caused Jacob's entire family to relocate to Egypt (Genesis 41–47) finds ready support geophysically, archaeologically, and historically.¹⁴ An interesting possibility is that the building of the great pyramids was a consequence of the enormous wealth which accrued to the reigning Pharaoh and his heirs as a result of Joseph's administration of this famine (Genesis 47:13–26).

After some passage of time, but still within the Old Kingdom period, the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt. It is not clear from the Biblical account just how long after the death of Joseph this occurred. However, a considerable length of time seems to have transpired because, according to the enslaving pharaoh "the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we" (Exodus 1:9). Even allowing for political hyperbole it is clear that the Israelite population had grown far beyond the hundred or so (Genesis 46:26,27) of Joseph's day. It is possible that archaeology may eventually provide an answer to this chronological question.

Between the death of Joseph and the birth of Moses there is a Biblical historical gap of roughly 300 years. Following this gap, however, the first fifteen chapters of the book of Exodus are rich with historical details surrounding the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. Here it is possible to unambiguously identify the Biblical pharaohs who were involved.

Grimal lists Pepy II, Merenre II, and Nitocris as the final three rulers of the Old Kingdom, in that order.¹⁵ The secular records show that

Pepy II enjoyed an exceptionally long reign, a fact which harmonizes immediately with the Biblical record. Simple chronological considerations reveal that he is the pharaoh from whom Moses fled¹⁶ and that the Israelites served as slaves throughout the tenure of his reign.

Secular records further show that Merenre II, the son and successor of Pepy II, ruled but a year, also in immediate harmony with the Biblical account. Merenre II is the pharaoh of the Exodus whom Moses and Aaron confronted in the name of the Lord, and who ultimately lost his life in the "Red" Sea.

Queen Nitocris, the wife of Merenre II, was the final ruler of the Old Kingdom. She ruled two years according to the secular sources. It evidently fell to her unhappy lot to try to hold the pieces of the shattered post-Exodus kingdom together. The First Intermediate Period, which her reign introduces—a period which, according to the meager historical evidence, was replete with anarchy and famine—is testimony to the fact that she did not succeed.

First Intermediate Period

The First Intermediate Period—the aftermath of the Exodus—now appears to have lasted more than four centuries. This was a period of internal turmoil for Egypt. Rulers came and went in rapid succession. Manetho, the 3rd century B.C. historian of Egypt, describes Dynasty 7, for example, as "seventy kings in seventy days".

Due to the scarcity of secular records the timing and sequence of Dynasties 7 through 10 has always been very uncertain. The correction of 266 years discussed above means that the modern, conventional thinking regarding this portion of the chronology is in considerable error. Because of the large uncertainties involved at present I have chosen not to attempt a placement of Dynasties 8, 9 and 10 in Figure 1.

During the early portion of the First Intermediate Period the Israelites were involved in the Wilderness Wanderings and the Conquest. They then settled into the Promised Land, and the hundreds of years of the era of the judges, detailed in the book of Judges, transpired.

¹⁴Gerald E. Aardsma, *A New Approach to the Chronology of Biblical History from Abraham to Samuel*, 2nd ed. (Loda IL: Aardsma Research and Publishing, 1993), 68–72; Gerald E. Aardsma, "Evidence for a Lost Millennium in Biblical Chronology," *Radiocarbon* 37.2 (1995): 267–273; Nicolas Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 64.

¹⁵Nicolas Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 390.

¹⁶Exodus 2:15.

Significantly, there is no mention of Egypt in the Bible anywhere during these years. As a consequence of the trauma of the events surrounding the Exodus, Egypt had dropped entirely from the international scene. The secular historical record shows that Egypt made frequent forays into Palestine during all of its Kingdom periods, but it made none during this time. God had judged the nation of Egypt severely, and it did not recover overnight.

Middle Kingdom

In time, Egypt, which had split up politically at the beginning of the First Intermediate Period, was reunified under Mentuhotpe II, thus ushering in the Middle Kingdom.

One of the first things the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom did was erect a string of fortresses along the borders of the eastern Delta region to protect the area and prevent any influx of peoples through the northern Sinai peninsula.¹⁷

The Middle Kingdom period is of particular interest to the student of the Bible for it is during the early part of this period that the book of Judges closes and the Biblical historical record enters eight centuries of silence. One naturally longs for some insight into the nature of the times and the plight of the Israelites during these silent centuries.

The secular sources reveal that the re-establishment of political unity in Egypt permitted the resumption of forays into Palestine. These do not appear to have been numerous in Dynasty 11, but there is evidence that they were frequent during Dynasties 12 and 13. These were not campaigns to secure more territory, but merely to strip the land of anything and everything considered of value to the pharaoh, including gems, metals, livestock, and people to serve as slaves.¹⁸

¹⁷It is a little amusing to see conservative scholars trying to route the path of the Exodus around these fortresses, when these fortresses only came into being 500 years after the Exodus! Their confusion, of course, stems from their failure to recognize that a millennium is missing from traditional Biblical chronology in 1 Kings 6:1. You will notice that the Bible doesn't mention any trouble with Egyptian fortresses or any need to avoid them in its account of the Exodus.

¹⁸Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 80.

No longer can scholars contend that the Middle Kingdom had no interest in Asia: it is now abundantly clear that, in imitation of their Old Kingdom forebears, the Pharaohs of the 12th and 13th Dynasties viewed hither Asia and the Levant as theirs to exploit to the full.

We must picture the Promised Land and its people as subject to repeated scourgings at the hands of the pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom, replete with the return of captured Israelites to a slavery their forebears had known in Egypt centuries before.

But we must not suppose Egypt was the only oppressor at this time. The archaeological evidence seems clear that the old Canaanite urban society which the Israelites had overthrown at the end of the Early Bronze Age III in Palestine and replaced with their own transhumant, nonurban mode of life, began to take new root again, evidently re-propagated from the Lebanese coast. This resurgence is abundantly evident in present-day archaeological remains throughout the land of Palestine.

I have previously suggested that these archaeologically revealed, newly revived Canaanite elements may be equivalent to the Biblical Philistines whom Samson battled.¹⁹ This possibility seems, with further study, ever more likely to me.

Thus, the overall picture which emerges for the Middle Kingdom is one of Canaanite resurgence within the land, with a superimposed external Egyptian dominance. During the early years of the Middle Kingdom the Egyptians were occupied at home and Samson had been raised up to check the advance of the Canaanites/Philistines in Israel. With the death of Samson this check was removed, and at roughly the same time Egyptian oppression began to be felt.

This sequence of events marks a turning point for the people of Israel. Their sovereignty over the land—which had lasted four centuries—came to a fairly abrupt termination and was not regained until early in the Monarchy, some nine centuries later.

¹⁹Gerald E. Aardsma, "The Chronology of Palestine in Relation to the Bible: 3000–1000 B.C.," *The Biblical Chronologist* 1.4 (July/August 1995): 4.

Second Intermediate

The Second Intermediate period is defined by the presence of the Hyksos rulers in Egypt. According to Redford, the Hyksos appear from archaeological work in Egypt to be ethnically indistinguishable from the Canaanite culture which had revived in the Promised Land.²⁰ This suggests the possible identification of the Hyksos with the descendants of the Biblical Philistines of Samson's day.

If this is correct, then the picture which emerges from Biblical and extra-Biblical sources taken together is one of increasing Canaanite/Philistine domination of Israel for several centuries following the death of Samson. With time these Canaanite/Philistines were able to extend their influence into the eastern Nile Delta region of Egypt and eventually gain control of that country. This causes us to see the Second Intermediate period in Egypt as the height of Canaanite/Philistine power.

New Kingdom

Hyksos domination came to an end with the rise of the powerful 18th Dynasty under Ahmose. Israel, however, was unable to regain control of the Promised Land and continued to be oppressed. She was trampled down at will—her lands, her produce, and her people were all up for grabs. Egypt ultimately, brutally, cemented direct control over the entire region, absorbing the Promised Land into its New Kingdom empire.

The Egyptian empire was maintained in the Promised Land until the coming of the so-called "Sea Peoples" around 1200 B.C. The "Sea Peoples" were simply a coalition of people groups from the northwest Mediterranean region who left their homelands in a massive migration by land and sea. It is not clear what factors set them in motion. They swept away the ancient power of the Hittite kingdom in the north and pressed on through Palestine toward Egypt. Their advance was finally halted by Ramesses III of Egypt in a great battle which took place *ca.* 1176 B.C.

The "Sea Peoples" remained in Palestine, initiating the Iron Age I period there. They appear archaeologically to be the Biblical Philistines whom

we encounter in 1 Samuel during the days of Eli, Samuel, Saul and David.

This raises the question of why the Bible uses the same designation, "Philistines" for these obviously new immigrant Sea Peoples at the time of Eli and Samuel as it had used for the Canaanite people nine centuries earlier at the time of Samson. The following points are revealed by Biblical research of this question.

People designated as Philistines were found in Canaan from the time of Abraham (over a thousand years before the time of Samson) onward.²¹ The Bible informs us repeatedly that the Philistines were immigrants to Canaan whose original homeland was Caphtor.²²

Caphtor is generally believed by scholars to correspond to the island of Crete and/or possibly other islands in the Aegean. This, in fact, is the region from which the Sea Peoples came. Thus, the most simple answer to the Philistine question appears to be that the Sea Peoples migration was just the latest episode in a long history of colonization of the coast of Palestine by the sea-going occupants of Caphtor.

Third Intermediate

While Egypt was able to survive the onslaught of the Sea Peoples, it had lost its grip on Palestine within a century of their arrival. Following the reign of Ramesses III, Egypt seems to have entered a period of declining power and influence culminating in the Third Intermediate period, which would last some three and a half centuries. It is during this period of reversed Egyptian fortunes that the Biblical historical narrative resumes and monarchical Israel is born.

During this period and at the close of the span of history of interest to this study, Biblical and secular histories intersect once more with the invasion of Palestine by the Egyptian pharaoh Shoshenq I (1 Kings 14:25–26) *ca.* 925 B.C.

²¹ Genesis 21:32,34; 26:1.

²² Deuteronomy 2:23; Jeremiah 47:4; Amos 9:7. See also Genesis 10:14 which seems to imply an original distinction, albeit close relationship, between the Philistines and the Caphtorim.

²⁰ Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 100.

The Silent Years

The picture which emerges from archaeology and secular history for the 800 years of Biblical silence from the death of Samson to the birth of Samuel is not a very happy one for the Israelites. Immediately prior to this extended period of silence the book of Judges records numerous cycles of national waywardness, oppression, repentance, and deliverance. The strong impression gained from extra-Biblical data is that a period of sustained oppression followed on the heels of the last recorded Judges cycle. The Promised Land was overrun by outsiders for eight centuries, while the Israelites were trampled down.

We must not suppose the Israelites took this sitting down, of course. Indeed, it is just here that secular Egyptian records report the activities of "lawless" bands of Apiru/Hapiru/Habiru/Hebrew, who are found to be conducting what gives every impression of being guerrilla warfare throughout the country. Indeed, one is reminded by their exploits of David and his band of outlaws before David's ascendancy to the throne, and such a Biblical historical analogy probably best captures the intent and mode of operation of these Apiru.

According to Redford the Apiru were even able to establish an independent state, called Amurru by the Egyptians, in the no-man's-land between the extended borders of Egypt and the powerful Hittite kingdom to the north, beginning around 1400 B.C.²³ But these desperado efforts all, ultimately, came to nothing. The Apiru are often seen in the secular records as captives, or dispersed as slaves throughout the contemporary nations. Even Amurru, perhaps the Israelite nationalists' hope of its day, was ultimately swept away, its towns and cities laid waste by the tidal wave of Sea Peoples.²⁴

It seems to me that we must now begin to see this period of Biblical silence as the primary fulfillment of the prophecies which are found at the close of the book of Deuteronomy, specifically Deuteronomy 28:15–68 and 31:14–32:47. These passages predict that Israel will fall away from the Lord af-

ter the death of Moses, and they detail the horror of the judgment which the Lord will bring upon the Israelites in consequence of their sin. The fulfillment of this section of Scripture has traditionally been assigned to the much later (first millennium B.C.) Exiles, and some of these verses do seem most applicable to that judgment.²⁵ But there are other elements of these prophecies which lack obvious fulfillment in the Exiles which do find ready fulfillment in this silent period. Compare, for example, Deuteronomy 28:68 which says:

And the Lord will bring you back to Egypt in ships, by the way about which I spoke to you, 'You will never see it again!' And there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer.

with the historical record which shows that during this period of Biblical silence²⁶

Palestine and the route through Transjordan (the later "King's Highway") were wholly Egyptian possessions. It was here that the policy of deporting to Egypt huge numbers of the autochthonous population [i.e., Israelites], whether hostile or not, was chiefly put into effect, and reached its apogee under Amenophis II [ca. 1427–1400 B.C.], who carried off over 85,000 men, women, and children of all social strata. In consequence the hill country was virtually depopulated and the country severely weakened.

In addition to such specifics these prophecies seem to involve an element of prolonged (generations-long) oppression of the Israelites while they remain resident in the Promised Land. This element of these prophecies does not seem to find obvious fulfillment in the Exiles, but it does do so in what we learn of these eight centuries of Biblical silence from secular sources. Thus, it seems that we should begin to understand these prophecies as having their primary fulfillment in

²³Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 170–172.

²⁴Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 251.

²⁵For example, Deuteronomy 28:36.

²⁶Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 169.

this period of Biblical silence, the Exiles being a secondary fulfillment.

If this is correct, then a “history” of this period of Biblical silence—at least as it was experienced on a day to day basis by the Israelites—is afforded the student of Scripture in these prophecies. One then begins to appreciate these as not merely exaggerated threats, but the actual, protracted experience of the families and individuals of a nation which had forsaken God. When viewed in this light they are difficult to read without weeping.

Psalm 78 also seems to provide a glimpse behind the veil of Biblical silence which shrouds these eight centuries. It recites the nation’s history from the Exodus to the reign of David. Verses 12–53 deal with the Exodus and Wilderness Wanderings, followed by verses 54 and 55 which deal with the Conquest. Then verses 56–64 recount a period of falling away and judgment, followed by verses 65–72 which culminate in deliverance and the establishment of the Davidic kingdom.

It is possible to squeeze this entire psalm into just the historical events which the Bible records, understood within a traditional chronological framework, as has been done for centuries. But two aspects of the psalm seem to point toward a protracted period of judgment which is missing in such a traditional view. First, the intensity of God’s emotion—specifically “When God heard, He was filled with wrath, and greatly abhorred Israel” (v. 59)—seems to imply something unusual. Second, verse 65, which describes the turning point from judgment to deliverance, (“Then the Lord awoke as if from sleep, like a warrior overcome by wine”) implies that God had seemed entirely out of the picture for an extended period.

This reconstruction of Israel’s history may also provide some insight into the reason for the Bible’s silence during this 800 year period. It may simply reflect God’s promised response to the Israelites’ forsaking of Him. In Deuteronomy 31:17–18 He says: “I will forsake them and hide my face from them, . . . I will surely hide my face in that day”. From a purely technical standpoint, the process of recording contemporary history in Scripture requires Divine inspiration,²⁷ and such inspiration is made impossible when God has hid His face. ◇

²⁷2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21.

Biblical Chronology 101

In the lead article of the November/December 1995 issue of The Biblical Chronologist I proposed a new location for the Biblical Mount Sinai.²⁸ While I was preparing that article a subscriber kindly sent me a copy of the book The Mount Sinai Myth²⁹ and asked for my critique of it. Subsequently another subscriber wrote with a similar request. I am supposing that many other subscribers have seen or heard of this book—it is currently being actively promoted by its author, Larry Williams—and would appreciate a scholarly critique of it.

Larry Williams has proposed that the Biblical Mount Sinai should be identified with Jabal al Laws, a mountain in Saudi Arabia (Figure 2). In an effort to acquire evidence to substantiate this idea he and his “cop turned businessman” buddy, Bob Cornuke, have made several Indiana Jones style forays into Saudi Arabia. *The Mount Sinai Myth* sets forth their case and recounts their various adventures in Saudi Arabia.

To the casual observer Williams’ thesis may seem to gather immediate momentum from Galatians 4:25 which mentions “Mount Sinai in Arabia.” But a little study soon shows that Arabia, in New Testament times, included the Sinai Peninsula (where the traditional site of Mount Sinai is located) and the Negev of Israel (where I have suggested Mount Sinai is really located). (You can easily verify this using a Bible atlas or maps of the Mediterranean regions at the time of Paul found in many Bibles.) Significantly, Williams does not attempt to launch his thesis using Galatians 4:25.

I met Larry Williams at a seminar he gave to the staff and faculty of the Institute for Creation Research in San Diego, California back (as I recall) in the late 1980s. Larry is quite open about the fact that he is a businessman, not a scholar. (“We are not scholars, nor are we attempting to make any representation that we are.”³⁰)

I have no doubt that Williams and Cornuke had

²⁸Gerald E. Aardsma, “Yeroham—The True Mt. Sinai?,” *The Biblical Chronologist* 1.6 (November/December 1995): 1–8.

²⁹Larry R. Williams, *The Mount Sinai Myth* (New York: Wynwood Press, 1990)

³⁰Larry R. Williams, *The Mount Sinai Myth* (New York: Wynwood Press, 1990), 24.

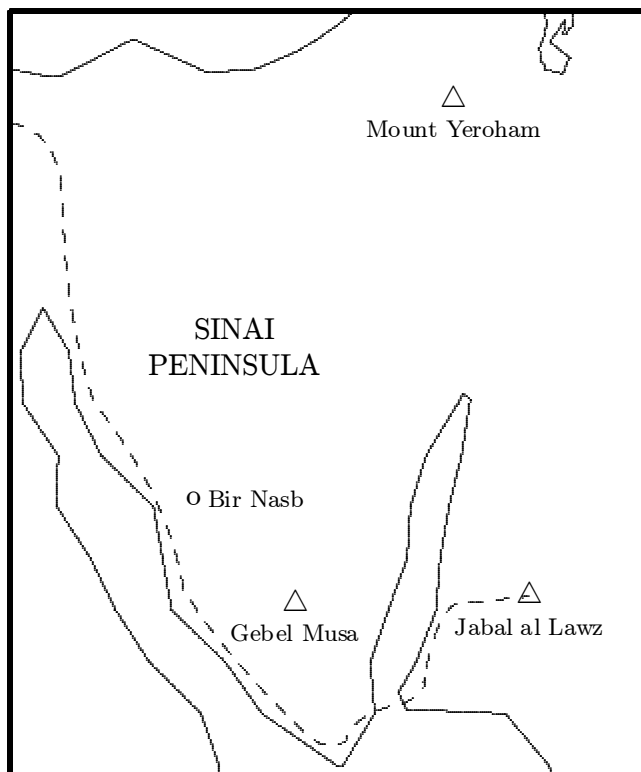


Figure 2: Williams' suggested route of the Exodus (dashed line), suggested location of the "Red" Sea crossing, and proposed identification of Jabal al Lawz with Mount Sinai.

lofty motivations for the activities they describe in their book. Nonetheless, the Indiana Jones approach to archaeology which they chose to follow cannot be applauded. This approach may make for good adventure stories, but it makes for exceedingly poor archaeological scholarship and raises a number of disturbing ethical issues as well.

I will not dwell on any of this, but it does seem important to point out that amateurs can destroy more evidence of greater value than they are likely to ever find by grubbing about freely in ancient archaeological sites. That is why Williams and Cornuke found the ancient sites at Jabal al Lawz and its environs to be surrounded by high chain link fences topped with barbed wire. Saudi Arabia obviously regards its archaeological sites as a priceless, irreplaceable heirloom, as every modern nation does, and wishes to keep amateurs and the general public from unwittingly destroying the precious information they contain.

But let us move on to the factual evidence bearing on the identification of Jabal al Lawz with

Mount Sinai.

The evidence

The photographic and artifactual evidence presented by Williams is most unimpressive, and his identification of various archaeological remains with the Biblical narrative can only be described as extremely far-fetched. Rather than spend any time on these I will focus on the Biblical evidence which led Williams to go looking for archaeological evidence in the first place.

William's argument leading to the conclusion that Mount Sinai must be located in northwestern Saudi Arabia is most clearly presented on pages 16 and 17 of *The Mount Sinai Myth*. This argument is not always clearly separated from another argument which leads to the conclusion that the traditional site of Mount Sinai (Gebel Musa or its near neighbor, Gebel Katharina), in the southern Sinai peninsula, cannot possibly be correct. (It is this latter argument which gives the book its name.) It is, of course, not true that evidence against the traditional site is evidence for Jabal al Lawz, as Jabal al Lawz is not the only alternative. When the two arguments are kept properly separated they are seen to be structured as follows:

Argument 1

Premise 1 *Moses fled to Mount Sinai (Horeb) after he had killed the Egyptian in Egypt.*

Premise 2 *Moses fled to Midian after he had killed the Egyptian in Egypt.*

Conclusion 1 *Therefore, Mount Sinai must be in Midian.*

Premise 3 *Midian is in northwestern Saudi Arabia.*

Conclusion 2 (from C 1 and P 3)

Therefore, Mount Sinai must be in northwestern Saudi Arabia.

Argument 2

Premise 4 *Moses fled Egypt after he had killed the Egyptian.*

Premise 5 *Egypt included the Sinai peninsula at the time of Moses.*

Conclusion 3 *Therefore, Moses must have fled beyond the Sinai peninsula.*

Conclusion 4 (from C 3 and P 1)

Therefore, Mount Sinai must not be located in the Sinai peninsula.

I will begin by showing from Scripture that Conclusion 1 (that Mount Sinai must be in Midian) is, in fact, false.

Observe that Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, lived in Midian. He is called "priest of Midian" in Exodus 3:1, and Midian is where Moses met him after he had fled from Egypt (Exodus 2:15–22; Acts 7:29). Next notice that after the Exodus Jethro came to Moses at Mount Sinai, bringing Moses' wife and two sons to him (Exodus 18:5). Exodus 18:27 informs us that after a brief visit, Jethro "went his way into his own land". Thus, Jethro reentered Midian after leaving Mount Sinai. Therefore, Mount Sinai can *not* be located in Midian; Conclusion 1 is false.³¹

The fact that Conclusion 1 is false has serious negative consequences for the identification of Jabal al Laws with Mount Sinai. If Premise 3 is true (and I know of no evidence contrary to this premise) then we are led immediately to the conclusion that Jabal al Laws can *not* be the Biblical Mount Sinai.

To see this, make Conclusion 1 true be rewording it as, "*Mount Sinai must not be in Midian*". Now add in Premise 3, "*Midian is in northwestern Saudi Arabia*". The conclusion then is, "*Therefore, Mount Sinai must not be in northwestern Saudi Arabia*". As Jabal al Laws is located in northwestern Saudi Arabia, it cannot be the Biblical Mount Sinai.

Now I will move on to Williams' second argument.

I am obviously sympathetic to Conclusion 4 (that Mount Sinai must not be located in the Sinai peninsula) since I believe Mount Sinai should be identified with Mount Yeroham in the Negev of

Israel. However, Williams' argument leading to Conclusion 4 is not valid.

The first problem is that Conclusion 4 depends (in Williams' argument) on Premise 1, and the falsity of Conclusion 1 implies that Premise 1 is false. The logical argument is as follows. Since Conclusion 1 is false, at least one of the two premises leading to it must also be false. The truth of Premise 2 seems unassailable; Exodus 2:15 explicitly supports it, for example. Thus we are led to conclude that Premise 1 is false.

This is not too surprising. Premise 1 claims Moses fled to Mount Sinai after he had killed the Egyptian, but the Biblical text gives no such indication. Moses is first seen at Mount Sinai during his encounter with God at the burning bush. According to Acts 7:29–30 this encounter did not take place until forty years after he had fled from Egypt.

A second problem is that Premise 5 (that Egypt included the Sinai peninsula at the time of Moses) cannot be accepted. Williams has advanced this premise on the strength of some very old (turn of the century) archaeological work by Petrie. Unfortunately, Petrie's chronology of ancient Egypt has subsequently been shown to be badly in error.

Williams' statement: "All of these archaeological findings indicate that Egyptians were active in this part of the peninsula in the 5500–5000 B.C. period"³² clearly reveals a serious lack of chronological scholarship on Williams' part. Few modern scholars, if any, would venture to extend the history of dynastic Egypt more than a few centuries beyond 3000 B.C. today. Williams' assertion obviously derives from Petrie's now defunct chronology. Williams' lack of familiarity with the modern literature regarding Egypt and the southern Sinai has caused him to err in regard to Premise 5.

More recent archaeological work in the Sinai peninsula has led scholars to conclude that Egypt had no significant presence in the southern Sinai peninsula during the traditional period of the Exodus. Specifically, after an extensive survey of this region, archaeologist Beno Rothenberg concluded:³³

³²Larry R. Williams, *The Mount Sinai Myth* (New York: Wynwood Press, 1990), 55.

³³Beno Rothenberg, "An Archaeological Survey of South Sinai," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 102 (1970): 18.

³¹A similar argument can be made from Numbers 10:29–30.

At this stage of our investigation it appears that the Egyptian kings displayed no interest in Southern Sinai, except for the turquoise mining areas and the copper mine near Bir Nasb [both located about 45 miles northwest of the traditional Mount Sinai site—see Figure 2], since almost no traces of any Egyptian occupation were found outside these areas. The ancient Egyptians did, however, hold on to the traffic routes connecting the mines with the Gulf of Suez, where two Egyptian sites were discovered. All other parts of Southern Sinai appear to have remained under the exclusive control of the Bedouin.

and again:³⁴

It appears that during the period of the Exodus, Southern Sinai was controlled by nomads who left no traces of their presence.

Clearly Premise 5 is incorrect. The Sinai peninsula was not part of Egypt during the traditional period of the Exodus.

While Premises 1 and 5 are incorrect, Williams' oft repeated claim that the traditional site of Mount Sinai cannot possibly be correct is still substantiated, though along somewhat different lines than he has argued. The fact that the Israelites did *not* visit the traditional site of Mount Sinai in the southern Sinai peninsula at the time of the Exodus is clearly revealed by the complete absence of any archaeological remains (including pottery shards) even remotely suitable to the Exodus anywhere in the entire southern Sinai. This is why Rothenberg concludes:³⁵

From the Byzantine period onwards, Southern Sinai became a center of pious pilgrimage. Hermits and pilgrims were drawn to the high mountains of South Sinai and established there monasteries, churches and many other places of religious worship. All these places were

somehow 'connected' with the history of the children of Israel or with the memory of Christian saints and rulers, but not one of these sites can serve as scientific testimony for the history of the region in ancient times.

This observational fact—that the southern Sinai is devoid of archaeological remains suitable to the Exodus—holds whether one is working in the traditional (incorrect) Biblical chronology which places the Exodus in the second millennium B.C., or the new (correct) Biblical chronology which places it in the third millennium B.C. Thus, the evidence is firmly in agreement with Williams' title; the traditional site of Mount Sinai is indeed a modern Christian myth. Unfortunately, however, this same fact leads implacably to the conclusion that Williams' proposed path of the Exodus and location of the "Red" Sea crossing—both of which would place Israel in the southern Sinai at the time of the Exodus—are also purely fanciful.

The Mount Sinai Myth may provide some entertaining reading about a modern, real-life adventure, but the theories which motivated the adventure must be regarded as simply untenable. ◇

The Biblical Chronologist is a bimonthly subscription newsletter about Biblical chronology. It is written and edited by Gerald E. Aardsma, a Ph.D. scientist (nuclear physics) with special background in radioisotopic dating methods such as radiocarbon. *The Biblical Chronologist* has a threefold purpose:

1. to encourage, enrich, and strengthen the faith of conservative Christians through instruction in Biblical chronology,
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The Biblical Chronologist (ISSN 1081-762X) is published six times a year by Aardsma Research & Publishing, 412 N Mulberry, Loda, IL 60948-9651.

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³⁴Beno Rothenberg, "An Archaeological Survey of South Sinai," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 102 (1970): 22.

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