

HIGHLIGHTS OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN BIBLE LANDS

by

Fred H. Wight

Copyright © 1955

CHAPTER FIVE

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE LAND OF EGYPT

THE REMARKABLE PRESERVATION of the antiquities of Egypt is due to the fact that rain is so very rare in the land, and also frost is almost unknown. The ancient Egyptians buried their dead in dry earth out of the reach of the water from the overflow of the River Nile. These bodies were fortified against decay by the process of mummification. Many objects were placed in the tombs, and these were designed for the use of the departed in the other world. These articles of archaeological interest have been remarkably preserved through the centuries. 1

PIONEER EGYPTIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

The first systematic examination of Egyptian antiquities. At the time Napoleon I invaded the land of Egypt in 1798, he took with him a group of scholars and artists, and these men made an examination of the old treasures of the Egyptian past. Many of their finds, such as the Rosetta Stone (see Chap. 2), were later given over to the British, but by 1822 these French archaeologists had published a whole series of volumes regarding their researches in Egypt. 2

Early surveys of Egyptian monuments above ground. For half a century after Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, the antiquities of the land were plundered by many in order to make cash profit. In 1850 Auguste Mariette was sent by the Louvre to Egypt. Mariette attempted to curb the plundering and create respect for the old monuments. He worked to secure as many monuments as possible for the Egyptian museum. In the year 1828 Rosellini and Champollion had made a survey and published it in ten volumes. Col. Howard Vyse in 1837 carefully measured the pyramids. In 1840 C. R. Lepsius, a German, traveled in Egypt, Nubia, and Sinai, recording the monuments in a series of volumes. Thus a thorough survey of the monuments above ground was made. 3

The contribution of Sir W. Flinders Petrie. Petrie began his archaeological work in Egypt in 1881 with a scientific survey of the Pyramids of Giza. He paid particular attention to details, whereas former archaeologists specialized in large objects, for the most part. Petrie did not ignore broken pieces of pottery as was done formerly. In fact, he was the one who developed the system of determining the dates of successive strata of occupation by the kind of fragments of pottery found in them. The world owes much to this greatest of the excavators of Egypt. 4

Copying, translating, and publishing Egyptian inscriptions. A very important feature of the temples and other monuments of Egypt were the many inscriptions contained on their sides and walls. One of the important tasks of archaeology, therefore, has been the survey and copying of these inscriptions, as well as their translation and publishing. Dr. James Henry Breasted, the founder of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, undertook this work. He traveled extensively in Egypt, and after a decade of work of copying, translating, and editing of these inscriptions, he published his *Ancient Records of Egypt* (5 vols., 1906-1907). 5

THE AGE OF THE PYRAMIDS

The Pyramid Age of Egypt, when most of the great pyramids were built, was during the Old Kingdom running from 2815 to 2294 B.C. We may say, therefore, that these great monuments of the past were built before Abraham was born. The men of the Pyramid Age, including kings and the wealthy classes, lived in houses made of mud-brick, but their tombs were made of stone. The tomb of the ancient Egyptian was called his “castle of eternity,” for it was considered to be his home forever. 6

It would seem that Job was acquainted with the old Egyptian custom of royal entombment in a pyramid. He wished to be in the land of the dead, “**With kings and counsellors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves**” (Job 3:14). There are some grounds for rendering the words “**desolate [waste] places**” as *pyramids*?

THE AGE OF ABRAHAM

Egypt an open land to strangers. The Bible declares that Abraham went down into Egypt in time of famine (Genesis 12: 9-20). The ancient historian Diodorus stated that before the seventh century B.C. the land of Egypt was not an open land for strangers to enter. Naturally enough, certain Scripture critics used to say that here was an example of an error in the Bible. But a tomb painting coming from Beni Hassan pictures the arrival in Egypt of thirty-seven men who were Semitic traders, and the date of the painting is just short of 2000 B.C. or in the time of Abraham. This shows that the Bible was correct and the old historian was wrong. 8

Camels in Egypt in early times. Genesis 12:16 says that when Abraham was in Egypt, he had camels in his possession. The accuracy of this statement has been called into question because Egyptian tomb paintings and reliefs have not shown camels, although they have shown sheep, oxen, and donkeys. In some circles it has been stated that the camel was not introduced into Egypt before the third century B.C. or even later.

Dr. Joseph Free has made a study of archaeological material bearing on the subject, and has discovered figurines and statuettes of camels, plaques with camel representations, rock drawings and carvings, the bones of a camel, the skull of a camel, and rope made from camel hair. These materials are dated from before 3000 B.C. down to the seventh century B.C., revealing the fact that Egypt was acquainted with the camel during that long period of time. Much of this material indicates the camel was domesticated, a fact often denied by critics.

It needs to be understood, however, that the camel was not in common or general use in Egypt until Greek and Roman times. But with this evidence in view, it is not possible any more for men to say that the Biblical reference to Abraham's camels in Egypt was an anachronism. 9

THE RULE OF THE HYKSOS KINGS

The Hyksos invasion of Egypt. Sometime in the vicinity of 1900 B.C., when Egypt had been ruled by weak kings, there occurred an invasion of Asiatics, for the most part Semites, into the land of Egypt. These invaders were called "Hyksos" and they brought with them a new weapon for which they were famous, namely the horse-drawn chariot. They overcame the armies of the native Egyptian kings who continued to rule in Upper Egypt but only as vassals of these conquerors. These foreign Pharaohs set up their capital at the city of Avaris, probably located in the northeastern portion of the Nile Delta. These Hyksos kings continued on the throne of Egypt until King Ahmose I, the founder of the Eighteenth Dynasty, overcame the city of Avaris in 1580 B.C., and expelled these invaders from the land. 10

The Hyksos kings and Joseph in Egypt. When Joseph arrived in Egypt, the native Pharaohs were not then in power. These Hyksos rulers were considered to be foreigners by the native Egyptians. It was during the reign of these kings that Joseph had his experiences in the land. The Hyksos had been nomads and shepherds, and being Semitic, we find them accepting Joseph's family of shepherds into the land of Goshen, whereas shepherds were an abomination to the native Egyptians (Genesis 46:34).

The Book of Genesis emphasizes the fact that Potiphar was an Egyptian (Genesis 39:1, 5). Potiphar was Pharaoh's officer—why should it be stressed that he was an Egyptian? The answer is simply that Pharaoh himself and some of his officers were not native Egyptians but Hyksos or foreigners, whereas Potiphar was a native Egyptian. 11

Famines in Egypt. Some Bible critics used to question the Genesis account of a seven years' famine in Egypt. But the excavators have discovered inscriptions that tell of other instances of long-lasting famines. In 1890 an American by the name of Wilbur discovered an inscription on a rock on the Island of Sehel in the Nile, which referred to a seven years' famine that occurred in the reign of an early Egyptian king. 12

Many believe that Apepi III was the Pharaoh of Joseph, and an inscription has been found on the tomb of Bebi, one of this king's officials, which speaks of distributing grain to the city every year of a famine lasting many years. The identification of this famine with the one of Joseph's time is a strong possibility. 13

Concerning promotion of slaves. It used to be customary in some circles to cast doubt on the possibility of Joseph as a Hebrew slave becoming a high official in the land of Egypt. But the archaeologists have discovered numerous cases that are strikingly parallel to the Joseph story. Thus a Canaanite by the name of Meri-Ra served as armor-bearer for Pharaoh. Another Canaanite named Ben-Mat-Ana was promoted to become Pharaoh's interpreter. And a Semite named Yankhamu was deputy of King Amenhotep III and was placed in charge of Delta granaries. 14

THE EIGHTEENTH DYNASTY OF KINGS

Character of dynasty and relation to Israel. The Eighteenth Dynasty, which succeeded the Hyksos on the throne of Egypt, lasted for nearly 200 years. All Egypt became a single empire under them. The capital city was Thebes. The kings of this dynasty, instead of building pyramids for themselves, were entombed in the limestone mountain located west of Thebes. Among these tombs that excavators have uncovered was that of King Tutankhamen. These kings were contemporaneous with the oppression of Israel in Egypt, the Exodus, the wilderness wanderings, and the entrance into Canaan. 15

Making bricks without straw being furnished. Bible critics have stated that the use of straw in the making of bricks was rare in ancient days, arguing that the nature of the Nile mud made straw unnecessary. But in the year 1883 Naville succeeded in unearthing what was believed to be storepits at Tell el Maskhuta on the edge of Goshen. He identified the place as the Pithom where the Israelites made bricks. At any rate, the walls of these structures had courses of sun-baked brick, some of which were made with straw and some without. 16

When Nelson Glueck was excavating at Ezion-geber in 1940, he uncovered Solomon's brick smelter which was built with bricks made with straw. A rain and hailstorm washed away half of the little village of Aquaba located nearby, which was made of houses whose mud-brick walls were made of bricks without straw. But Glueck discovered to his delight that the walls of the structure, built by Solomon more than 2500 years ago, were unharmed by the storm. Certainly this demonstrates that the use of straw in bricks adds to their durability. Pharaoh demanded that his work be done well by his slaves. 17

The identification of Pharaoh's daughter. The probable date for the birth of Moses is 1526 B.C, and this falls in the reign of Thutmose I (or Thutmosis I), 1545-1514 B.C. It is at this very time that excavators have discovered the appearance of Hatshepsut, the favorite daughter of Thutmose I (who most probably was the one who rescued the baby Moses from the river). 18

During the latter years of her father's reign, she was associated with him upon the throne. She married her half brother Thotmes the Second, and remained on the throne with him two or three years. Then while her stepson Thotmes the Third was a minor, she acted as regent with full power of royalty. Scarabs with the joint names of Hatshepsut and Thotmes II were found at the mound of Jericho. 19

Josephus called the daughter of Pharaoh Thermuthis which is a feminized form of her father's name. 20

Archaeology and the plagues of Egypt. Concerning the ten plagues of Egypt, the Lord said: **"Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment."** Excavators in the land of Egypt have revealed to us the religious beliefs and practices of the people, showing that the plagues sent upon the land were indeed aimed at the gods of Egypt and the religions of the land.

- The *first plague* turned the waters of the river into blood. Surely, this was directed at the god Nilus, for the River Nile was worshiped as the giver of life and nourishment to the people and the land. But the plague made the water of the river non-usable.
- The *second plague*, or the multiplication of frogs, was intended to insult the goddess Hekt, whose representation was frog-headed, and who was believed to have the power of creation.
- The *third plague*, or the lice, was aimed at the priests of Egypt, who were careful not to wear woolen garments but only linen to avoid vermin, for both man and beast suffered from the lice.
- The swarms spoken of in the *fourth plague* were probably the multiplication of the scarab beetle, which was the symbol of the god Khephera, who was a scarab-headed deity. The priests of this worship wore scarabs for charms.
- The *fifth plague*, bringing murrain on the cattle, was directed against the animal worship so prevalent in the land, which included the gods Apis (a bull), Mnevis (a cow), and the goddess Hathor, who was cow-headed.
- The *sixth plague* of boils was against the god Imhotep, the god of the healing sciences, who was helpless to do anything for those thus afflicted.
- The *seventh plague* of hail was intended for the gods Reshpu and Qetesh, who were thought of as controlling the natural elements with the exception of light.
- The *eighth plague* of locusts was aimed at all the Egyptian gods who were worshiped with a view of insuring good crops, which the locusts spoiled.
- The *ninth plague* of darkness was a challenge to Amen-Ra, who was worshiped as the sun-god.

The *tenth plague*, bringing death to the first-born, was directed especially against Pharaoh himself, there being an official fiction that the first-born son of Pharaoh and his queen was an incarnation of the god Ra, and was thus called a son of that god. One of the titles given Pharaoh's first-born son was an indication that he was supposed to have everlasting life, and yet he died in the plague. 21

But who was this Pharaoh against which this final judgment was especially aimed, and is there any confirmation of the death of his first-born son? In the next section we shall see that Bible scholars are more and more believing that King Amenhotep II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus. The successor to this Pharaoh was Thotmes IV (or Thutmosis IV). There is evidence to indicate that he was not the first-born son of his father, the first-born son having died in the last plague.

Located between the outstretched paws of the great Sphinx of Egypt is a large slab of red granite bearing an inscription which records a dream of Thotmes IV before he became king. As a prince he was one day hunting, and rested at noon in the shade of the Sphinx. He slept and dreamed that the Sphinx, who was believed to be an embodiment of the sun-god, made a promise to him that he should have the Double Crown of Egypt on condition that he would clear away the sand that all but engulfed its body. When the prince became Pharaoh he cleared away the sand. The inscription makes it clear that at the time the prediction was made to him, there was little likelihood of the prince becoming king, no doubt because he was not the first-born son of his father. This all fits in with what the Bible records. The first-born son of the Pharaoh of the Exodus died in the last plague, and so the actual successor was not the first-born son, but another son. 22

The Pharaoh of the Oppression and the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Through the years there have been three theories regarding the identity of the Pharaoh of the Oppression and the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

The first theory argues that the Exodus of Israel was at the time of the expulsion of the Hyksos kings from the land of Egypt, indicating that Israel left when the Hyksos were driven out. The Jewish historian Josephus advocated this idea. But such a view presents many difficulties, chief of which is that it leaves no room for a long period of oppression.

The second theory is that Rameses II (1292-1225 B.C.) was the Pharaoh of the Oppression, and Merneptah (1225-1215 B.C.) was the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Now the traditional date of the Exodus which fits in perfectly with Bible chronology is 1446 B.C. But one can readily see that this second theory cannot be reconciled with this date. Those who accept the theory must necessarily advocate a late date for the Exodus, which is very difficult if not impossible to reconcile with the Bible account.

The third theory is that Thothmes III (Thutmosis III) (1501-1447 B.C.) was the Pharaoh of the Oppression, and Amenhotep II (1447-1420) was the Pharaoh of the Exodus. An important discovery made in the land of Egypt has caused many Bible scholars, who formerly held the second theory, to change over and advocate the third theory. 23

In the year 1896 Sir Flinders Petrie discovered at the city of Thebes an immense black granite stele of King Merneptah. This slab was 10 ¼ feet long, by 5 1/3 feet broad, and 14 inches thick, with inscriptions on both sides. This stele now stands in the Cairo Museum and is called the "Israel Stele." Among other things the king records his victories in the land of Palestine. Israel as a nation is mentioned as having been "desolated" by him. Now, if according to the second theory Merneptah was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, how could he have had a military expedition against Israel after she was settled in the land of Canaan, which this inscription implies? But the discovery of this inscription gives to those who hold the third theory of the early Exodus no difficulty at all. 24

But let us have a further word about Thothmes III, whom we believe was the Pharaoh of the Oppression. Archaeology has revealed to us his real character. He was the greatest military conqueror of all Egyptian history. He was a great builder. He constructed a great temple, using thousands of captives to do the work on it. The obelisk called Cleopatra's Needle was first set up by him. An engraving was found at Karnak which dates back to the reign of this king, and shows a gang of slaves working. The appearance of their faces would indicate they were Semites. The taskmaster set over them was saying to them, "The rod is in my hand; be not idle." 25

How Israel's oppressor helped prepare the way for the conquest of Canaan. It was this Pharaoh (Thothmes III) who commenced a series of military invasions of the land of Canaan, overcoming the defenses of the Amorites and conquering the Canaanites. His immediate successors on the throne followed his example in waging war against the people of Canaan. While he was oppressing the children of Israel in Egypt, he little dreamed that by his conquests in the land of Palestine he was actually helping to prepare the way for Israel's conquest under Joshua by weakening those nations.

Joshua 24:12 represents God as saying to Israel, “**And I sent the hornet before you, which drove them out from before you, even the two kings of the Amorites . . .**” (Exodus 23:28; Deuteronomy 7:20).

Now archaeologists have discovered that King Thothmes III had as his personal badge, “*The Hornet*.” No doubt, therefore, God was referring to him and his “Hornet army” as preparing the way for Israel by his conquests in Canaan. 26

Tablets that throw light on the period of the conquest of Canaan.

1. Discovery of valuable tablets in Egypt.

In 1887 a peasant woman found several hundred clay tablets in rubbish heaps at Tell el-Amarna on the Upper Nile. They were sold from one person to another until Cairo merchant dealers came into possession of many of them, and they did not at first know their real value. Dr. Ernest Budge happened to visit Egypt in order to obtain objects for the British Museum. Quickly ascertaining that these tablets were valuable, he was able to secure 82 of them which he took to London. Finally 60 were placed in the Cairo Museum and 160 of them found their way to the Royal Museum in Berlin. Some of them are in the possession of various individuals, and some were carelessly destroyed. 27

2. Character and language of these tablets.

What had been discovered was some of the official correspondence between kings in the land of Canaan and the Pharaohs of Egypt. This correspondence covers a period of time from near the end of Israel’s experience in the wilderness until the time when she had been in the land about forty years. Most of the tablets were written in the Babylonian cuneiform language, which was the international language for that section of the world in that day. 28

3. Condition of Egypt at the time the tablets were written.

These clay tablets were written to two Pharaohs of Egypt. A few of them came to Amenhotep III, who reigned from 1412 to 1376 B.C. The bulk of them were received by Amenhotep IV (Akhnaton), whose reign covered the period from 1376 to 1362 B.C. It is interesting to know that the last part of the reign of the former of these Pharaohs and the entire reign of the latter was a time of political weakness in relation to foreign affairs. This was the situation during the period of the correspondence contained in the Tell el-Amarna Letters.

The political weakness of Amenhotep III was probably due to his old age, but that of his successor was due to another reason. Amenhotep IV outlawed the state religion of Amen-Ra, established a new religion, and changed his capital from Thebes to Tell el-Amarna, bringing his father’s foreign office papers with him when the change was made. As king he was so busy with his religious reforms that he had little time to be concerned about what was going on in Canaan, even though that land was supposed to be a province of the Egyptian Empire. The appeals for help from that land, therefore, went unheeded. 29

4. Condition of Canaan at the time of the Amarna Letters.

The kings of various cities of Canaan who wrote these letters were supposed to be vassal kings of the Pharaohs. The letters they sent to Egypt reflected a condition in their own land of great turmoil.

They were sending frantic appeals for Pharaoh to send them help against two formidable invaders: one coming from the northeast, and the other which had come from the southeast via Mount Seir. The king of the Hittites is identified as the foe coming from the northeast. Actually we know now that these people did not invade Palestine proper, but at any rate they were threatening to do so at the time of these letters. 30

But who was the enemy coming from the southeast? The king of Jerusalem whose name was Arad-Hiba, calls the invaders, "The *Habiru*." He writes:

The *Habiru* are now capturing the fortresses of the Pharaoh. Not a single governor remains among them to my lord the king: all have perished. . . . May the king send help. Lo, if no reinforcements come this year, all the countries of my lord the king will be utterly destroyed. . . . The land of the king is lost to the *Habiru*. . . . After taking the city of Rubuda, they are now attempting to take Jerusalem. 31

5. Were the "*Habiru*" the Hebrew people?

Scholars are pretty generally agreed that the two words are etymologically and philologically identical. It may be said with certainty that in these letters we have painted for us from the Canaanite point of view the same picture that is given us in the Bible account of the conquest of Canaan. Of course, those who accept a late date for the Exodus find it difficult to fit the Bible story into the scene as created in the Tell el-Amarna Letters. But once the approximate date of 1446 B.C. is accepted as the time of the Exodus, then everything in these tablets fits in perfectly with the situation as given in the Scriptures.

The cities mentioned in the correspondence of the king of Jerusalem include Keilah, Gezer, Askelon, Lachish, Ajalon, Hebron, Gaza, and Gath. These cities are mentioned as being in peril. These are all in the south of Canaan where Joshua gained his first foothold. Bethel and Jericho are not mentioned probably having already been captured. 32

In one of the letters the name *Jashuia* appears, which is no doubt the equivalent of *Joshua*. It is possible, but not at all certain, that this could be a reference to the Joshua of the Bible.³³ In the Nuzi tablets a people also called *Habiru* were enemies threatening the city of Mari. The name at that time meant something similar to nomad when used by people of themselves, and foreign brigand when used of other people. 34

The name Apiru has appeared in a stele at Beth-shan. Here the meaning was "foreign warriors."³⁵

It would seem, then, that the word *Habiru* or *Apiru* cannot be applied to the Hebrew people exclusively, as these instances would indicate. But if the word meant “foreign brigand” or “foreign warrior,” it would apply very appropriately to the Hebrews in these letters, since it was a term used by their enemies in telling of them. 36

EGYPT FROM THE REIGN OF RAMESES III

An Egyptian account of war against “The Peoples of the Sea” throws light on the arrival of the Philistines in Palestine. Inscriptions at the Temple of Medinet Habu in Thebes give the record of Rameses III of his battles with “The Peoples of the Sea.” The following excerpts are taken from this account:

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 . . . They were coming forward toward Egypt. . . . Their confederation was the Philistines, Tjeker, Shekeleh, Denye (n), and Weshesh, lands united. 37

The account proceeds to tell how the Egyptians engaged in land battle with these “Peoples of the Sea.” Following this there was a naval battle against them. Thus Rameses III succeeded in keeping these men from pushing into the rich territory of the Nile River. 38

Now the Egyptian war with these peoples has definite bearing on the settlement of the Philistines in the land of Canaan. The Philistines were part of the confederacy making up “The Peoples of the Sea.” Where did the Philistines come from, and when did they arrive in Canaan? Amos 9:7 speaks of the Philistines having come from Caphtor, and Jeremiah 47:4 refers to “The Isle of Caphtor.” It is generally believed that the “**people of Caphtor**” means the Island of Crete, and that the Philistines came from there before entering Canaan. They are to be distinguished from the native Cretans themselves. They were a seafaring people, and being driven from their homes, they sought a refuge in other lands. They were included in the warfare of “The Peoples of the Sea” with Rameses III, but were prevented by the latter from settling in Egypt. Following this battle which took place in 1194 B.C, they retreated from Egypt and settled in southwestern Canaan. 39

From this time on until the days of David, the Philistines became a formidable foe of the Children of Israel in Canaan. There were Philistines present in Canaan before this mass invasion took place, and they were engaged in the grain export business. (See Genesis 10:14; 20; 21; 26, etc.). 40

An inscription recording an Egyptian invasion of Judah and Israel.

1. Concerning the Pharaoh who made this invasion.

His name is *Sheshonk*, or *Shishak*. He was the founder of the 22d dynasty of Egyptian rulers, and was a very aggressive monarch, ruling from 945 to 924 B.C. He came to power during Solomon’s reign. Previous to this, during the reigns of Saul and David, there were weak rulers on the throne of Egypt.

Solomon was in favorable alliance with this vigorous king, but Rehoboam was not in favor with Egypt. The secession of the ten tribes to form the Northern Kingdom of Israel was Shishak's favorable opportunity to invade the land of the Jews. 41

2. The record of the invasion as given by Shishak.

On the walls of the temple at Karnak, Egypt, King Shishak had carved a large picture of himself in the process of leading as captives by means of cords certain men who have on them labels naming cities of Palestine which the king claims to have conquered in his invasion of the land of Israel. The Old Testament mentions only his invasion of Judah (II Chronicles 12:1-4), but Shishak included Israel and also cities of Edom. Part of a stone stele was dug up at Megiddo which bore a cartouche of Shishak, and thus confirmed Shishak's claims to have invaded the northern dominion. Jerusalem is not in the list of cities conquered in the inscription. According to the Bible the city was spared only because much treasures were given from the temple and the king's palace. 42

The date of this invasion by Shishak is approximately 926 B.C. According to Bible chronology this date falls well within the period of his reign as discovered from archaeological sources.43

The record of this event from the inscription, and the account of it in the Scriptures, therefore, do not contradict each other. Rather, they confirm and supplement each other.

A prophecy and action of Jeremiah confirmed in Egypt. In Jeremiah 43:8-13 the prophet warns the people of Israel who fled to Egypt not to think they would escape from the king of Babylon by going to Egypt. He predicted that the king of Babylon would follow these refugees to Egypt, and would place his throne on the pavement at the entrance to the house of Pharaoh at Tahpanhes.

As a symbol of this, the prophet took some stones and placed them in the mortar of the pavement at the place where Nebuchadnezzar would be seated as conqueror of Egypt. This pavement and the palace of Pharaoh were unearthed by Sir Flinders Petrie in 1886 at Tell Dejrneh, Egypt. There was a platform of brick work, which was located outside the door of the house, and it looks very much as if it was the very platform to which Jeremiah refers in his message, where Nebuchadnezzar was to spread his pavilion. In corroboration of this, three terra cotta cylinders were discovered probably at this place by a native and sold to the Cairo Museum. They contain an inscription telling about Nebuchadnezzar's great building activities at Babylon. It would seem they were placed at this spot to commemorate the visit of King Nebuchadnezzar to Egypt. 44

A prophecy of Ezekiel confirmed in Egypt. The prophet Ezekiel predicted that King Nebuchadnezzar and his Babylonian army would invade the land of Egypt and conquer it (Ezekiel 30:10-12). The extent of the warfare Ezekiel prophesied would be from Migdol (near Suez) to Syene. (Ezekiel 30:6, m. Cf. *Young's Trans.*) Near Syene an inscription has been discovered that is now at Paris in the Louvre, which is the record of an Egyptian prince claiming to have driven back the army of the Babylonians so that they did not succeed in getting beyond the first cataract of the River Nile, which is at Syene.

This would corroborate Ezekiel's prediction regarding the extent of the battle of the Babylonians in the land of Egypt. 45

Light from Egypt on the times of the captivity.

1. An important discovery.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, on the Island of Elephantine (Yeb), located in the Nile River in Upper Egypt, peasants dug up a quantity of wastepaper. Some of it was sold to dealers and found its way to museums, and the Aramaic writing on it was translated by experts. What had been discovered proved to be a collection of correspondence of an official, business or private nature, either written by or to (some were duplicate copies) the Jews of a military colony which had been stationed on this island as an outpost of the Persian Empire. The dates on the letters were between 494 and 400 B.C. From time to time other letters have been discovered and added to these collections. From the letters we learn that these Jews had some time before this built a temple on the island, had offered blood sacrifices there, and had kept the Passover. But they were bemoaning the fact that the Egyptians had destroyed their sanctuary. In one letter assistance is asked for from the governor of Judah in rebuilding the temple. 46

2. An earlier discovery published centuries later.

In 1893 an American named Charles E. Wilbour acquired from native Arab women the first Aramaic papyri letters known to have been taken from the Island of Elephantine. He thought the writing was Phoenician, but was told by a linguist that it was Aramaic. Wilbour died in 1896, but the trunk containing these numerous papyri was shipped to America, where it was in possession of his daughter. After her death it was bequeathed to the Brooklyn Museum. The trustees of the museum assigned to Emil G. Kraeling the task of preparing these documents for publication, and the results are now beginning to appear. These Brooklyn papyri have revealed the fact that the temple on the island, which was built by the Jews and had been destroyed by the Egyptians, had actually been rebuilt. These letters cover the period of time from 451 to 399 B.C. 47

3. The origin of the Jewish colony on Elephantine.

The question has often been asked, Who were they, and how did these Jews come to be located in this faraway place? As it was only about a century and a half after the days of the prophet Jeremiah, it seems most likely that they were descendants of the Jews who fled to Egypt and took the prophet with them (cf. Jeremiah 41-44). 48

Some have suggested that they were descendants of the mixed Jews of Samaria, hence their appeals to the Jerusalem Jews were not readily heeded. 49

4. The heretical worship of these Jews.

It is clear that the belief and practice of these Hebrews were not orthodox. To have a temple anywhere but at Jerusalem would be one indication of this.

Also in addition to their worship of the Lord they worshiped other gods: Amath-Bethel, Anath-Yahu, and Ashi-mah. But had not Jeremiah denounced the Jews in Egypt for worship of heathen gods? (Jeremiah 44:17). 50

5. Bearing on date of Book of Ezra. Some critics of the Old Testament have maintained that the Book of Ezra was written about 250 B.C. This view would essentially deny the authenticity of that section of the book that was written in Aramaic. But these letters coming from the Island of Elephantine were written under date of 500-400 B.C. and in a similar Aramaic as is found in Ezra. Thus it cannot be argued that Ezra must be dated at the late time because of a late form of Aramaic being used. 51

6. Confirmation concerning Nehemiah's adversary.

The Book of Nehemiah speaks often of Sanballat as an opponent of the work of Nehemiah at Jerusalem. From Scripture it would appear that he had some sort of military or civil position in Samaria under King Artaxerxes. This information about this man is both confirmed and supplemented by one of the letters which the Elephantine Jews wrote to the governor of Judah. They mentioned near the close of the letter that they had also written to the two sons of "Sanballat governor of Samaria." 52

Light from Egypt on the use of Aramaic in the Old Testament. In our Bible Jeremiah 10:11; Daniel 2:4-7:28; and Ezra 4:8-6:18 are written in Aramaic instead of Hebrew (called Syriac in common version).

Archaeology helps us explain why these sections, and especially the one in Ezra, were written in this language. A papyrus letter now in the museum at Cairo was originally sent by an official in Palestine to an Egyptian Pharaoh about the time of the Babylonian captivity. Instead of being written in Hebrew, the language of the one who wrote it, or in Egyptian, the language of the one to whom it was written, it was actually written in Aramaic, which was undoubtedly the language of diplomacy, or the international language of that day.

The Aramaic section of Ezra is prefaced with these words (4:7): "**And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian [Aramaic] tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian [Aramaic] tongue.**"

It was this letter that followed, written in Aramaic and sent to a foreign land; additional correspondence, royal decrees, and some narrative material were also written in Aramaic. The Book of Ezra was following the custom of that day of putting international or diplomatic matters into the Aramaic language. 53

1. George A. Barton, *Archaeology and the Bible*, ed. of 1937, p. 5.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
3. Frederic Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology*, pp. 63-67.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 68.

5. Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, p. 65.
6. I. E. S. Edwards, *The Pyramids of Egypt*, pp. 35, 36; Ira Price, *The Monuments and the Old Testament* (ed. of 1925), pp. 18-19.
7. George L. Robinson, *The Bearing of Archaeology on the Old Testament*, p. 37, esp. footnote 19.
8. Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, pp. 53-54; see also *ibid.*, frontispiece for picture of tomb painting.
9. Joseph P. Free, "Abraham's Camels," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. III, July 1944, pp. 187-193; see also Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, pp. 55-56.
10. Free, *ibid.*, p. 55; Edwards, *op. cit.*, pp. 193-194.
11. W. H. Boulton, *Archaeology Explains*, pp. 16-19.
12. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
13. S. L. Caiger, *Bible and Spade*, p. 62; A. Rendle Short, *Archaeology Gives Evidence*, p. 27.
14. Caiger, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
15. Price, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
16. G. Frederick Wright, *Scientific Confirmations of Old Testament History*, pp. 81, 82.
17. Nelson Glueck, "Ezion-geber: Elath—City of Bricks with Straw," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, VIII, No. 4, Dec. 1940, pp. 51, 52.
18. J. McKee Adams, *Ancient Records and the Bible*, p. 235L
19. T. Miller Neatby, *Confirming the Scriptures*, pp. 94, 95.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
21. J. A. Hammerton, ed., *Wonders of the Past*, pp. 667-679; Robinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-44; Boulton, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-23; Harry Rimmer, *Dead Men Tell Tales*, pp. 85-122.
22. Caiger, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74; Adams, *op. cit.*, pp. 236, 237; Edwards, *op. cit.*, p. 106.
23. Adams, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-222.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 219, 221-222.
25. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Short, *op. cit.*, pp. 26, 27.
26. T. Christie Innes, *Thrilling Voices of the Past*, pp. 80, 81; Caiger, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
27. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 57; Kenyon, *op. cit.*, pp. 71, 72; Caiger, *op. cit.*, p. 96.
28. Caiger, *op. cit.*, p. 97; Neatby, *op. tit.*, p. 85.
29. Adams, *op. tit.*, pp. 224, 225.
30. Caiger, *op. tit.*, pp. 98-101.
31. S. L. Caiger, *Bible and Spade* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 101; cf. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 487, 488, also footnote 17.
32. Adams, *op. tit.*, p. 226.
33. Caiger, *op. tit.*, p. 103.
34. Millar Burrows, *What Mean These Stones?*, pp. 92, 95.
35. W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine and the Bible*, p. 206, reference note 8.
36. See also Oswald T. Allis, *The Five Books of Moses* (ed. of 1949), p. 338, reference note 68; Theophile J. Meek, *Hebrew Origins* (ed. of 1950), pp. 6-14; Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, pp. 56, 57.
37. James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), p. 262.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 262, 263.
39. Adams, *op. tit.*, pp. 279-288; Kenyon, *op. tit.*, pp. 97-105; Boulton, *op. tit.*, pp. 31, 32.

40. Adams, *op. tit.*, pp. 199-200.
41. Burrows, *op. tit.*, pp. 98-100.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
43. Adams, *op. tit.*, p. 299.
44. A. Rendle Short, *Archaeology Gives Evidence*, pp. 45-46.
45. T. W. Fawthrop, *The Stones Cry Out*, p. 87.
46. Stephen L. Caiger, *The Old Testament and Modern Discovery*, pp. 27-30; Robinson, *op. tit.*, pp. 67-69.
47. Emil G. Kraeling, "New Light on the Elephantine Colony," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, XV, No. 3, Sept. 1952, pp. 50-67.
48. Joseph Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 231; also W. F. Albright, "Recent Discoveries in Bible Lands," supplement in *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, by Robert Young, p. 36.
49. Robinson, *op. tit.*, p. 69.
50. Kenyon, *op. tit.*, p. 229.
51. Free, *op. tit.*, pp. 240, 241.
52. Pritchard, *op. tit.*, p. 492.
53. Boulton, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-83; *The Biblical Archaeologist*, XII, 1949, pp. 46-52.

~ end of chapter 5 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>
