

Chronology of the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan

In this two part series biblical historian Richard Paige shows how the archaeological data can be explained.

by Richard H. Paige

PART I 13th or 15th Century?

When was the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan? This is probably the single most complicated area in biblical studies today. The Bible indicates one time period; most scholars believe it was at another time. We need to understand the reason for this confusion.

Basic assumptions

To help us understand why this is such a controversial issue, we need to understand the assumptions various scholars bring to the subject. While there are two basic approaches—either the historical accounts of the Bible were written under divine inspiration or they were not—the situation is more complicated than this.

Some scholars believe that the Bible is inspired in its spiritual message but not in the physical details—especially those relating to historical accounts. Others claim that nothing in the Bible can be viewed as "inspired writings": that the Bible simply records the ideas of men. Yet, while some of this latter group of scholars understandably view the Bible as essentially worthless (as a historical source) unless its statements are confirmed by external evidence, other scholars in this group have a great deal of respect for the accuracy of the text.

What do these assumptions have to do with establishing a date for the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan? A great deal. Those who do not believe the Bible is inspired in its historical material do not feel there's a need to look for a harmony between what the Bible says and what is found

in the archaeological record. They don't get upset when they find discrepancies; they accept only "objective" (i.e., non-biblical evidence).

Those who believe that the biblical account has been inspired to be historically accurate must look for agreement between what the Bible says and what is found in the archaeological record. They are disturbed when historians date a biblical event to a time that cannot be harmonized with statements about that event in the Bible. If discrepancies appear, the chronological placement (rather than the biblical text) must be adjusted. A date that is in accord with the apparent meaning of the biblical text must be preferred, even if there is no evidence outside the Bible that justifies that date.

Scholars shouldn't rush to say that the text is in error whenever they find what seems to be a discrepancy between archaeological evidence and the apparent meaning of the text. One should wait patiently. Later discoveries often explain the difficulties in the text. For example, [I Chronicles 5:26](#), "The God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and the spirit of Tilgathpilneser king of Assyria" (Authorized Version). It looks like God stirred up two kings. But the verse continues, "and he carried them away." Who is "he"? The pronoun and verb are singular, but two kings are mentioned, joined by *wa*, the Hebrew conjunctive for "and."

Why doesn't the subject match the verb? Many explanations were offered to explain this "error" in the text. However, none proved to be necessary. Archaeologists eventually discovered that the Assyrian king Tilgathpilneser gave himself the name Pul when he conquered Babylon. So it was one man; that's why it has a singular verb. The Hebrew conjunctive *wa* (which can also mean "that is to say") should have been translated to reflect this meaning, rather than the more usual meaning of "and." The newer translations have corrected the translation of this verse to accord with this new understanding.

Patience is often needed—until additional information becomes available that will clarify seeming peculiarities in the text. But many modern-critical scholars are impatient, and are quick to advance their personal corrections of the text so that the text will agree with their conclusions.

The year of the Exodus

Editor's Note

The author of this article died in 1994. He taught the ancient Israel courses at Ambassador University and in this article he condensed six lectures concerning the exodus and conquest. Before his untimely death he gave his notes and materials to the editor. This article remains timely and we hope you find it of interest.

If we view the historical material in the Bible as inspired of God, we must place great weight on certain scriptures that concern the date of the Exodus. The most important is [I Kings 6:1](#): "And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel...that he began to build the house of the LORD."

This verse identifies the fourth year of Solomon's reign as being the 480th year after the Exodus. Scholars do not agree exactly when Solomon's fourth year was, but many would accept it as being about 964 to 963 B.C.E. If the Exodus was 480 years before, it would have been about 1443 B.C.E., in the middle of the 15th century B.C.E.

Pharaoh of the Exodus

If one examines Egyptian history (using the "high chronology" for the 18th dynasty), 1443 would place the Exodus in the 10th year of the reign of Pharaoh Amenhotep II (some books prefer the Greek variant Amenophis II). Do the surviving records of ancient Egypt offer any support for this? We have available to us Egyptian records that record the deeds of Amenhotep II (especially his military campaigns). It is interesting to note that the records available to us fail to list any campaigns after his ninth year (1444 B.C.E.). His successor, Thutmose IV, launched no campaigns whatsoever. It wasn't until the reign of the next pharaoh, Amenhotep III, that there was a renewal of Egyptian imperial activity.

This gap is significant because it occurred during the period known as the 18th dynasty of Egypt—one of its most

<h2>18th Dynasty</h2>		
Pharaoh	Low Chronology (Stern 1993:1530)	High Chronology (Stern 1993:1530)
Ahmosis or Ahmose	1550-1525	1570-1546
Amenophis I or Amenhotep I	1525-1504	1546-1526
Thutmose I or Thutmose I	1504-1492	1525-1512
Thutmose II or Thutmose II (died at about the age of 30 after a reign of some 14 years)	1492-1479	c. 1512-1504
Hatshepsut (both stepmother and aunt of Thutmose III)	1479-1457	1503-1482
Thutmose III or Thutmose III	1479-1425	1504-1450
Amenophis II or Amenhotep II	1427-1400	1450-1425
Thutmose IV or Thutmose IV	1400-1390	1425-1417
Amenophis III or Amenhotep III	1390-1352	1417-1379
Amenophis IV or Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten)	1352-1336	1379-1362
Smenkhkare	1338-1336	1336-1361
Tutankhamun	1336-1327	1361-1352
Aya	1327-1323	1352-1348
Haremhab	1323-1295	1348-1320

powerful, most expansionist, most imperialistic periods. Almost every pharaoh in this dynasty campaigned actively somewhere to expand Egyptian power. For example, Thutmose III, the father of Amenhotep II, was one of the greatest conquerors in Egyptian history.

Amenhotep II was following right in his father's footsteps up through his ninth year and then, suddenly, imperial expansion stopped. It wasn't until the days of his grandson that Egyptian power again began to expand.

This is what we would expect, given the events surrounding the Exodus. The army of Pharaoh was drowned in the sea. The Israelites "borrowed" from the Egyptians. The slaves (both the Israelites and the "mixed multitude") left. The plagues would have caused great loss of livestock, the loss of a harvest. These factors would have had a great negative impact on the Egyptian economy.

Also, the last plague killed the firstborn. In Egyptian society, government offices were usually passed from father to son, usually the firstborn. The trained administrative core of Egypt, a lot of top generals, etc., would have been killed. When they all died, it would have left the nation in chaos. It would have taken more than a generation for them to recover enough to be able to launch outward again.

Circumstances of Moses' adoption

Moses was adopted by the "daughter of Pharaoh." What was his potential as an adopted son—what did he give up when he left Egypt? "Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter" ([Hebrews 11:24](#)).

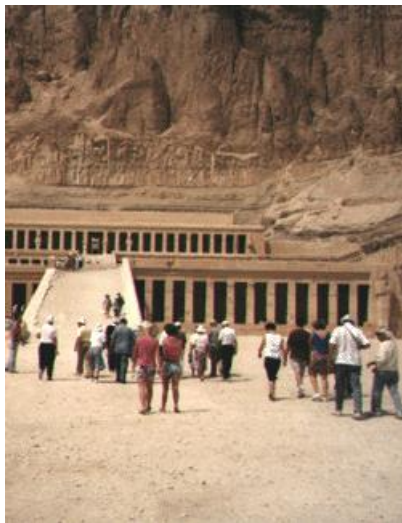
But what did this title mean? In the Egyptian royal family, the throne did not pass to the heir just because he was the son of the pharaoh. Based on the Isis/Osiris myth, a daughter of the ruling pharaoh (known as the "throne princess") was the one through whom the crown was usually inherited. It was the son of the pharaoh *by the daughter of the previous pharaoh* (the throne princess), who usually became the next pharaoh.

If the throne princess was barren, a son of the pharaoh by a secondary wife would usually be designated as the heir. In order to strengthen his claim to the throne, it was a common practice for the heir to marry his sister, or half-sister, who became the new "throne princess. (A man who was not the son of the previous pharaoh might secure the throne by this method as well.) The preferred method of succession to the throne, however, was for the son of the pharaoh and his chief wife (the throne princess) to be the heir. He,

then, was often referred to as the "son of Pharaoh's daughter" to highlight the legitimacy of his claim to the throne.

Thus, when Moses refused to be called "the son of Pharaoh's daughter," he was refusing to become the heir to the throne. He chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt" ([verses 25-26](#)).

While this background information is interesting, is there any likelihood that Moses would have been adopted by a "throne princess" of the 18th dynasty of Egypt?



The Tomb of Hatshepsut, "throne princess" of the 18th dynasty. A BibArch™ Photo.

Scripture tells us that Moses was 80 years old at the time of the Exodus; if we use 1443 B.C.E. as the date of the Exodus, it would place Moses' birth in 1523. The throne princess (daughter of the previous pharaoh) at that time was named Hatshepsut. Hatshepsut was the chief wife of Thutmose II. They were childless. Hatshepsut, then, if we have dated events correctly, would have been the woman who adopted Moses and groomed him to be the next pharaoh. Is there anything in the Egyptian records to suggest that this is what might have happened?

Thutmose II, Hatshepsut's husband, died while Moses was still young. Thutmose II had decreed that Hatshepsut should rule jointly with Thutmose III, his son by a secondary wife. Although

Thutmose III was accorded the royal titles, Hatshepsut effectively exercised the real power alone. Indeed, contrary to all precedent, she declared herself pharaoh. In keeping with this declaration, she had herself depicted in monumental statues as a man—with a masculine physique and even with the traditional false beard. All the traditional titles of pharaoh were appropriated by her, with only one exception—the mighty bull.

Hatshepsut was eventually overthrown by Thutmose III about 1483—when Moses would have been about 40 years old! Was that a coincidence, or were the events related? Could the fact that Hatshepsut's designated successor was found to be a murderer of an Egyptian ([Exodus 2:14-15](#)) have been the key to Thutmose III's success in winning the support of leading Egyptians in his power struggle with Hatshepsut? If this is the case, Moses would have had good reason to flee Egypt.

Additional evidence for a 15th-century date

As we have seen above, [I Kings 6:1](#) indicates that the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan occurred in the 15th century B.C.E. The known facts of Egyptian history seem to accord well with this chronological placement as well. However, at least one other scripture also seems to lend support for a 15th-century date. This is [Judges 11:26](#). This verse relates Jephthah's attempt to counter the Ammonite oppression of the Israelites living east of the Jordan River. Seeking to avoid a military confrontation, Jephthah engages in a diplomatic exchange with the Ammonites in which he states that Israel had been living east of the Jordan for 300 years.

Most everyone agrees that Jephthah lived around 1100 B.C.E. Since Jephthah placed the Conquest about 300 years earlier, it would place that event about 1400 B.C.E., again supporting the traditional 15th-century date.

Finally, let's consider the contribution (although it is minor) of the series of documents found in the royal archives at Tel El-Amarna (the Arabic name for the city that was the capital of Egypt during the reign of Pharaoh Akhenaton). These tablets include the diplomatic correspondence of not only Akhenaton, but that of the last half of the reign of his father, Amenhotep III. These tablets reveal much about the state of affairs in Canaan during the period from 1400 to about 1350 B.C.E.

Since the traditional date for the beginning of the Israelite Conquest is about 1403, the letters might be expected to mention the Israelites. Indeed, the letters from the kings of Jerusalem, Hazor and Megiddo mention a people called *Apiru* who were destabilizing the region.

As modern-critical scholars have correctly pointed out, the term *Apiru* is not necessarily linguistically linked with the term *Hebrew*; nor is it an ethnic term, since it was used from about 2000 to about 600 B.C.E. to describe any group that was outside the established social order. Thus, although no positive correlation can be made (other than the timing of the incursions of these armed "marauders"), the Amarna tablets do offer some general support for the thesis of a 15th-century date for the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest.

Evidence for a 13th-century Exodus

Based on [I Kings 6:1](#), the Exodus can be dated to the middle of the 15th century, coinciding with what appears to have been a rather sudden collapse in Egyptian political and military power. Forty years earlier, we find evidence

of a tremendous power struggle in which an overly ambitious female pharaoh was thwarted in her *previously successful attempt* to block the accession of the "rightful" heir to meaningful royal power. Forty years before that, there is evidence of a childless throne princess, who, conceivably, would have had strong motives to adopt a son—especially one seemingly provided for her by the god of the Nile.

All these details are what we would expect to find in the historical record if the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan took place in the 15th century B.C.E.

So why do many modern-critical scholars insist on a 13th-century Exodus? Even if *they* do, why should we even consider their reasons? First, we must realize that the conclusions of the modern critics are not irrational; they are based on evidence—evidence that we must look at. In the next several pages, I'll attempt to summarize that evidence. Second, we need to know what the criticisms of the traditional date are if we are to seek a satisfactory means of rebutting the criticisms.

As we will see, there are legitimate alternatives to the conclusions of the modern critics—alternatives that do not contradict the biblical account. Although these may be satisfactory to us, we can't expect these alternative answers to convict the modern-critical scholars. For they not only see no need to eliminate any apparent contradictions between the archaeological evidence and the biblical text, but will not accept the biblical text as evidence unless it is supported by unequivocal "extra-biblical" (i.e., archaeological or secular literary) evidence. Given the current state of archaeological knowledge, this is not always possible.

Evidence from Egypt

Scholars did not begin to criticize the traditional 15th century date of the Exodus and the Israelite Conquest until a lot of archaeological research had taken place in Egypt and Palestine. Let's summarize the evidence that led to their conclusion that one should look to a time—other than the 15th century for evidence of these events:

1. The city of Rameses that is mentioned in the biblical text ([Exodus 1:11](#)) as one of the "treasure cities" built by the enslaved Israelites must have been named for Pharaoh Rameses II, who lived in the 13th century. Earlier, scholars had thought the name Rameses was simply a historical update given by a later editor (similar to the mention of the city of Dan in [Genesis 14](#), even though it wasn't named Dan until the time of the Judges). However, archaeologists excavating the city built by Rameses II in Goshen couldn't find any remains of an earlier city from the 15th century.
2. Although she may have been motivated to do so, there are no Egyptian records of Hatshepsut having adopted *anyone* as her son.

3. During the 15th century, the 18th dynasty of Egypt had its capital in Thebes, 400 miles away from Goshen. This would have made it impossible for Moses to relay messages back and forth as described in the Bible.
4. Although conservative scholars have associated the Amarna tablets' references to *Apiru* with the Israelite invaders of Canaan, this association is not conclusive and does *not* constitute proof that the 15th-century invaders of Canaan were Hebrews.
5. Pharaoh Seti I campaigned in Canaan in about 1300 B.C.E. and made no mention of the Israelite tribes. Around the year 1290 (using the "middle chronology" for the 19th dynasty), Rameses II campaigned in Canaan, and he didn't mention the Israelite tribes, either. Moreover, the Bible doesn't mention the military campaigns of either of these pharaohs. This seems to suggest that the Israelites were not then in Canaan (as a 15th-century date would demand).
6. Around 1225, Pharaoh Merneptah campaigned in Canaan, and he *does* mention Israel. (In fact, it is the first documentary evidence that has been found of the name Israel.) Since the earlier pharaohs *failed to mention* the presence of the Israelites, and Merneptah *does*, the conclusion was drawn that the Israelites must have arrived in Canaan between 1290 and 1225, rather than at the end of the 15th century.

Evidence from Edom and Moab

[Numbers 20](#) mentions that Moses sent messengers to the king of Edom, asking permission to pass through his land on the way to Canaan. Edom refused, threatening to fight Israel if they tried to pass through (verse 18). "So Edom came out against them with many men, with a strong hand" ([verse 20](#)). Modern critics claim this implies there was a strong, settled community in Edom. The same thing is implied about Moab, because the Israelites went around Moabite territory, too.

In the 1930s Nelson Glueck (pronounced "Glick"), of Hebrew Union College, conducted an archaeological survey in the lands east of the Jordan River, including the area of ancient Ammon, Moab and Edom. Based on his survey results, he concluded that there were no settled communities in these areas between 2300 and 1300 B.C.E. If Israel had gone through in the 15th century, they could have walked through without asking anyone's permission. Since Israel *did* ask permission, and Moab and Edom did not exist as settled kingdoms until about 1300 B.C.E., the Israelites must have made their requests during the 1200s (the 13th century B.C.E.).

Canaanite cities not destroyed in the 15th century

Interesting as the items above may be—and strong arguments against an Exodus and Israelite Conquest of Canaan during the 15th century B.C.E.—evidence that began to be assembled from the intensive excavation of Palestine west of the Jordan River during the 1930s and 1940s appeared to

be even more damaging to the traditional 15th-century dating of these biblical events.

The 15th century is also known (in archaeological circles) as Late Bronze I. If the traditional date for the Exodus is correct, the Israelites would have invaded Canaan around 1400 B.C.E., the end of the Late Bronze I period. So we should expect to find evidence that certain Canaanite cities were destroyed at the end of the Late Bronze I.

The Bible gives us many details about where the Israelites went and which cities they conquered. [Numbers 21:1-3](#) records the Israelites' first Canaanite conquest. The king of Arad, in southern Canaan, attacked the Israelites. The Israelites eventually defeated him, destroyed his cities and renamed one city Hormah. However, archaeologists found that Arad wasn't inhabited during the Late Bronze I—nothing existed on the site between about 2350 B.C.E. (approximately the end of the Early Bronze III) and about 1100 B.C.E. (Iron Age Ia).

After the Israelites had journeyed around Edom and Moab, they began to enter the territory of King Sihon the Amorite. Sihon attacked, and was defeated and the Israelites occupied Heshbon ([Numbers 21:21-26](#)). However, archaeologists found that Heshbon and Dibon (two cities mentioned in the biblical text as having been destroyed by the Israelites) were not even founded until the Iron Age (about the ninth century B.C.E.).

After the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, they camped at Gilgal, conquered Jericho and Ai, and were tricked into making an alliance with Gibeon. Then the Israelites had to defend Gibeon when Gibeon was attacked by the leaders of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish and Eglon. They chased the Canaanites, and [Joshua 10](#) says they conquered the cities of Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron and Debir. Then, in a northern campaign, after defeating a league of Canaanite kings at the waters of Merom (in upper Galilee), they burned the city of Hazor ([Joshua 11](#)).

What did the modern-critical scholars find when they looked at the archaeological evidence? Let's begin with Jericho. Kathleen Kenyon, as a result of her investigations at Jericho, concluded that the city had been destroyed at the end of the Middle Bronze Age (about 1550 B.C.E.). She also concluded that the city remained uninhabited until around 1440, whereupon it was continuously inhabited until 1325. According to the traditional date for the Conquest, the destruction of Jericho would have been about 1405 B.C.E. But—according to Dame Kathleen Kenyon— there was no sign of any destruction of the city *anytime* between 1440 and 1325 B.C.E.

What about the conquest of Ai? Excavations were carried out by a French team headed by Judith Marquet-Krause in the 1930s and again in the 1960s

by an American team directed by Joseph Calloway. Both teams concluded that Ai was destroyed near the end of the Early Bronze Age (about 2440 B.C.E.), and it remained *uninhabited* until the Iron Ia period (shortly after 1200 B.C.E.). Even then, it was an *unwalled* village. Yet, not only does [Joshua 7:5](#) mention a city gate (implying that Ai had a wall), but two chapters of the Bible are devoted to the conquest of Ai—a city that apparently did not even exist during the 15th century!

What about Gibeon? The archaeologists found that Gibeon was inhabited in the Middle Bronze Age and in the Iron Age, but was uninhabited during the entire Late Bronze Age (about 1550-1200 B.C.E.). What of the cities that attacked Gibeon? Jerusalem did exist—according to the evidence unearthed by the excavations in the City of David. We aren't sure where the sites of Libnah and Eglon are. Jarmuth has been located, but the evidence so far is too inconclusive for archaeologists to make any determinations about its history during the Late Bronze Age.

Hebron apparently did not exist in the 15th century; it has remains from the Late Bronze II (13th century), but not the Late Bronze I period. At the site of Tel BeitMirsim (identified as the location of Debir by W.F. Albright), again, there are no remains from the Late Bronze I. Finally, although there was a destruction of Lachish during the Late Bronze Age, it was apparently destroyed too late in the period to be associated with the 15th century B.C.E.

All this archaeological evidence appears to be in conflict with the dating of the Israelite Conquest in the end of the 15th century (end of the Late Bronze I)—and thus in conflict with the date apparently demanded by [I Kings 6:1](#) and [Judges 11:26](#).

Let's look at northern Canaan. [Joshua 11](#) mentions the Israelite victory over the king of Hazor and kings of other northern areas. Then Joshua burned Hazor ([verse 11](#)). Here—at last—we find a positive match between the Bible and the archaeological evidence! There is a 15th century destruction of Hazor.

Out of a list of 14 cities that figure prominently in the biblical account of the Conquest, we can find positive links with only three of them (Jerusalem, Hazor and Lachish—the last being highly suspect). All the other cities were either apparently uninhabited at the time, or apparently continued to be occupied with no disruption (Jericho), or cannot be identified (Eglon and Libnah), or have been insufficiently excavated for conclusions to be drawn (Jarmuth).

The results of this archaeological research present major problems to those who believe the Conquest was in the 15th century. Although we'll find that there are answers to these problems—to be discussed later—let's continue our examination of the evidence that so strongly influenced the modern-critical scholars, not just *against* the 15th-century date for the Conquest, but in *favor of a 13th-century date*.

Canaanite cities destroyed in the 13th century

By now, I think you can understand why many scholars began to look at [I Kings 6:1](#) more critically. Perhaps, they thought, they weren't getting many "matches" between the biblical accounts and the archaeological evidence because they were looking in the wrong time period. The evidence caused the scholars to question the chronological information given in [I Kings 6:1](#). The scholars hadn't originally been critical of the 480-year figure in the text; it was only in the light of what they considered to be conclusive archeological evidence that they went back to the text and said, "Let's see if the number 480 can be understood in another way."

The critical scholars claimed that the 480 years mentioned in [I Kings 6:1](#) should not be taken literally. It is probably a secondary number derived (they stated) as a result of multiplying 12 by 40, two biblically important numbers. The writer (they stated), writing in the days of Solomon (or later), didn't know how long it had been from the Exodus to the fourth year of Solomon, but thought it was 12 generations. He estimated the length of a generation as 40 years because one generation had spent 40 years in the wilderness before dying out.

However, although individuals do survive longer, 25 years is a better estimate for an average generation. Since the product of 12 generations times the more realistic 25 years per generation is 300, the modern-critical scholars concluded that the Exodus took place about 300 years before Solomon—in the *13th century*. This would have placed the Israelite Conquest about 1225 B.C.E. (the Late Bronze IIb). They then concentrated their attention on the archaeological record from that period.

William Foxwell Albright had conducted a dig at Beitin, a village believed to be the site of the biblical city of Bethel. At the level of the Late Bronze IIb period, he found that a fire had destroyed the whole city. Underneath the ashes were the remains of a very sophisticated culture; above them was an inferior culture. This destruction and sudden cultural change convinced Albright that he had found evidence of Joshua's invasion—destruction of a sophisticated urban Canaanite culture, followed by the Israelites, who had wandered the desert for 40 years. Albright called it "a complete break from

the Late Bronze and the Iron Age strata. It is so complete that no bridge can be thrown across it. We are compelled to identify it with the Israelite conquest."

Archaeologists found more evidence for a late date in northern Canaan. Almost all the northern Canaanite cities were destroyed in the Late Bronze IIb (the 13th century B.C.E.). Albright led the way and others joined, in no small part because Albright was so famous.

Dramatic cultural change in the 13th century

I want to quote extensively from "Is the Biblical Account of the Israelite Conquest of Canaan Historically Reliable?" by Yigael Yadin ([Yadin 1982:](#)). [Editor's note: parentheses show comments that were in the original article; brackets show comments by Richard Paige.]

"All archaeologists agree that at the end of the Late Bronze Age [about 1225]...the material culture we associate with this period abruptly stopped [i.e., the Late Bronze Age culture was suddenly replaced by an Iron Age culture].

"Late Bronze agriculture was based on fortified [walled] city-states. At the end of the period, many of these cities were destroyed. The archaeological evidence shows conflagrations and destructions which cannot be attributed to famine or earthquakes. Sometime later (that is, in a later archaeological stratum), a new and completely different culture developed, sometimes on the destroyed site and sometimes on a new site.

"This new culture (Iron Age culture) was initially rather poor architecturally, so poor it can hardly be called urban. This culture appears to reflect the first efforts at settlement by a semi-nomadic people. While this is the >general pattern, certain destroyed sites were rebuilt immediately with fortifications and the attributes of a proper city.... The fact is, however, that excavation results from the last 50 years or so support in a most amazing way (except in some cases to be mentioned later) the basic historicity of the Biblical account.

"The Biblical narrative in broad outline tells us that at a certain period nomadic Israelites attacked the city-state organization of the Holy Land, destroying many cities and setting them on fire. Then, slowly but surely, the Israelites replaced these cities with new, unfortified cities or settlements. At the same time, they attempted to occupy certain cities but were unsuccessful [[Judges 1](#) lists some cities they tried to occupy but could not].

"The residents of those cities continued to live side by side with the new invaders. As already indicated, this description—leaving out the words 'Canaanite' or 'Israelite'—is exactly the picture which the archaeological finds present to us: a complete system of fortified cities collapsed and was replaced by a new culture whose material aspect can be defined as the first efforts of semi-nomads to settle down."

Though the archaeological data did support *some* of the biblical account, according to Yadin it contradicted many of the biblical details. So, in accordance with the basic assumptions of many modern-critical scholars, Yadin decided that the portions of the biblical accounts of the Conquest that match the archaeological findings should be regarded as authentic reports; the other parts of the accounts (that do not match the archaeological findings) should be viewed as fictional additions. The theory of men like Yadin is that there was a Conquest, but the Bible only incidentally reflects the facts. The narrative, written hundreds of years later, was just an approximation of how the Conquest actually took place, and thus many of its details are hopelessly inaccurate.

Problems with the 13th-century theory

Albright became convinced that the archaeological evidence supported a 13th-century Conquest—but his theory was based in large part on his excavation at Beitin, which he concluded was Bethel. However, while [Joshua 12:16](#) states that Joshua conquered "the king of Bethel" the Bible *does not state* that Bethel itself was destroyed. Indeed, [Judges 1:23-25](#) indicates that it continued to exist as a *Canaanite* center until it was eventually occupied by the "house of Joseph" several decades (at least) after the initial conquest of the land under Joshua. So the archaeological evidence at Beitin can't really be said to "match" the account in the Bible.

What about the Canaanite cities in the north? Many scholars have been impressed by the large number of Canaanite cities that were destroyed and burned in the last part of the Late Bronze Age (just before the beginning of the Iron Age) and see this as the handiwork of the Israelite invaders of Canaan. However, all of these cities were destroyed by fire. The Bible specifically states that Joshua *did not* burn any of the northern cities he conquered *except Hazor* ([Joshua 11:12-13](#)).

There are many other problems if one seeks to claim that the archaeological evidence provides strong support for the idea that the Israelites conquered Canaan during the late 13th century B.C.E. The problem with attempting those that were destroyed in the same part of the Late Bronze Age 11 (13th century B.C.E.) cannot be accomplished any more successfully than the previous effort to match the evidence from the Late Bronze I (15th century B.C.E.). [See summary of the article by J. Maxwell Miller below.]

J. Maxwell Miller: Most of the Evidence Doesn't Fit

J. Maxwell Miller summarized some of the problems with the 13th-century Conquest theory in the beginning of an article in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, July/December 1977, entitled "Archaeology and the Israelite Conquest of Canaan: Some Methodological Observations" ([Miller 1977](#)).

"Albright's proposed correlation of biblical and archaeological data [as being essentially correct if you ignore some of the details] in terms of a thirteenth-century B.C.E. exodus-conquest has served as a standard working hypothesis, especially among English speaking scholars, since the late 1930s....

"As artifactual data relevant to the end of the Late Bronze Age have continued to accumulate from Palestinian sites, the inclination has been to attribute any -approximately thirteenth-century city destruction to the Israelite invaders, regardless of whether the city in question is even mentioned in the biblical conquest traditions. When excavations at the cities which do figure in the conquest traditions have yielded little or no LB [Late Bronze] remains, this negative evidence has been explained away in one fashion or another.

"Actually some of the archaeological evidence which was available during the 1930s, especially that from Jericho and Ai, was already then rather damaging to

Albright's position; and not all the archaeological arguments which he was able to marshal in support of a thirteenth-century exodus-conquest have survived the test of time. Finally [note this] *we have reached the point, it seems to me, where more archaeological evidence must be explained away in order to maintain Albright's position than can be called upon to support it*" Most of the evidence doesn't fit The archaeological situation at the cities which figure prominently in the conquest tradition is as follows. Hormah...Arad, Heshbon, Jericho, Ai, Gibeon and now Jarmuth have yielded little or no evidence of even having been occupied during LB, much less of having been destroyed during the thirteenth century.... Hebron and Debir...appear to have been occupied during LB-Iron I [c.1225-1200], but there is no indication at any of these places of a major destruction which could be attributed to an Israelite invasion.

"Bethel [Beitin] was occupied and destroyed more than once during LB-Iron I. But the Bible conspicuously excludes Bethel from Joshua's conquests.... Eglon has been associated with Tell el-Hesi; but there is little to recommend this identification, which leaves only Lachish and Hazor. Here finally are two cities which the Bible claims to have been conquered by Joshua and where archaeological remains could be interpreted in terms of a thirteenth-century conquest—not a very high percentage."

To be continued in the July-September 2004 issue.

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