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### Abstract:

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# The Home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites: Is Yahweh’s Promise a Significant Historical Synchronism?

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In multiple passages in the Hexateuch, Yahweh promised that the Israelites, the descendents of Abraham the Hebrew, would inherit “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8)—a Promised Land occupied by three major groups of people: Canaanites, Hittites, and Amorites. That biblical Canaan, “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates” (Gen 15:8), was occupied by a people generally known as Canaanites and Amorites, among others, is well known and documented through the Bronze Age. But this swath of the Levant was not “home” to the Hittites until Late Bronze II, a fact that may serve to specify a historical window for the entrance of Joshua and the Israelites into Canaan. Coupled with the fact that the multiple biblical lists of occupants of the Promised Land never include an Egyptian presence, a timeframe for Joshua’s conquest of Canaan is perhaps narrower still. It was an Egyptian-less land with a significant Hittite presence that Yahweh promised to deliver into Israelite hands, and this scenario fits uniquely into a rather narrow time-slot during the 14<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>1</sup>

Two biblical facts support the idea that Israel’s Promised Land at the time of the Conquest was not “home” to the Egyptians: (a) Egyptians are never included in any people lists for the land of Canaan; and (b) at no point during the narrative of the book of Joshua do the invading Israelites ever encounter Egyptians or Egyptian troops. Indeed, it was an Egyptian-less land that God promised them. Of course, both the early (15<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and late (13<sup>th</sup> century BCE) dates for the Exodus and Conquest fall during the Late Bronze Age, a time corresponding to the Egyptian New Kingdom Period, and noted for Egypt’s domination of Canaan and Syria. Most of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasty kings pressed their interests into the Levant. Notable pharaohs who exerted hegemony over significant portions of the Levant, particularly Canaan, include Tuthmosis I, II, and III, Amenhotep II, and Tuthmosis IV of the Eighteenth Dynasty, and Seti I, Rameses II, and Merneptah of the Nineteenth Dynasty.

Once Ahmosis, first king of the Eighteenth Dynasty, had driven the hated Hyksos from Lower Egypt, it didn’t take long for the soon-to-come Tuthmosid bloodline to pursue imperial expansion northward to the Euphrates River. The height of Egyptian hegemony and presence in Canaan and Syria occurred during the 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE during the reigns of Tuthmosis III, Amenhotep II, and Tuthmosis IV—a father-son-grandson sequence that prided itself in its Euphrates northern border. The final stage of Egypt’s Levantine domination, and the peak of

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed discussion and documentation of the relevant biblical, Levantine, Egyptian, Hittite, and Mittani chronological data behind my comments herein, see S. Collins, “Using Historical Synchronisms to Identify the Pharaoh of the Exodus,” *Biblical Research Bulletin* V.8 (2005).

their strength in Asia, occurred during the reign of Tuthmosis IV when he succeeded in making a treaty with Artatama, king of Mittani (northern Mesopotamia). The Mittani king was now guardian and guarantor of Egypt's Euphrates border, while combined Egyptian and Mittani strength secured Mittani's corridor to the Mediterranean through northern Syria. It was a perfect setup for both "brothers." However enraged the Hittites were by this "snub" from Egypt (Mittani was a perennial enemy of the Hittites), there was nothing Hatti could do to pursue its interests in acquiring a Mediterranean corridor of its own in the face of the new Egypto-Mittanian alliance. For the meantime, the Hittites were just sadly out of luck.

Thus, from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century BCE down to about 1406 BCE (a good "average" date for the end of Tuthmosis IV's reign) the following occurred: (a) Egypt dominated Canaan and Syria to the Euphrates—biblical Canaan; and (b) the Hittites were completely excluded from the Levant. Biblically speaking, down to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE, the Promised Land was dominated by the Egyptian hegemony, and the Hittites were politically and militarily absent. Therefore, through the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE, it would have been impossible for Joshua and the Israelites to have waged a conquest campaign against an Egyptian-less land in which Hittites were ensconced. The historical circumstances were not in place through which Yahweh's promises to Israel could be realized with any level of precision.

One might object by observing that there were Hittites in Canaan even before the time of Joshua (Gen 15:20; 23). However, both textually and archaeologically, the Hittites of Abraham's day were probably only "sons of Het" (בני־חת) who came to the Levant as isolated Anatolian immigrants and did not constitute a political or "people group" presence of any consequence. The archaeological record supports this general absence of Anatolian peoples in the Levant, but does affirm that some families did, indeed, immigrate to Canaan (such as the isolated Khirbet Kerak Ware potters of the Galilee during EB III). The fact of the matter is that if Joshua and the Israelites had crossed the Jordan River into Canaan anytime during the 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE, they would have faced formidable Egyptian resistance, and the Hittite presence would have been nowhere to be found. Through the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century BCE, Egypt kept a tight grip on Canaan and Syria, while Mittani, and later the Egypto-Mittanian alliance, effectively locked the Hittites out of the region. But this historical situation would soon undergo a dramatic change.

After the death of Tuthmosis IV, whose reign marked the height of Egyptian supremacy and prestige in the Near East, the sun set rather quickly on the Golden Empire. Why Egyptian records have skirted, with profound silence, the reign of Amenhotep III remains an enigma. Although the mightiest kingdom on earth had passed into his hands, Amenhotep seemed ill-equipped and, worse, unwilling or unable to maintain the vast empire carved out during the previous century of great, even magnificent, Tuthmosid pharaohs. He had inherited an Egypt with a now-traditional northern border at the Euphrates and reaching five cataracts of the Nile southward into Africa. But it seems that Amenhotep had little or no taste for the domination of foreign lands, and his policies regarding the maintenance of the Asiatic provinces, in particular, were, for all intents and purposes, nonexistent. In short, for some mysterious reason, the Egypt of Amenhotep III shrank back within its pre-imperial borders, while marshalling vast amounts of wealth for internal building projects and bolstering its image of opulence—as if to say, "So what if we no longer have the wherewithal to maintain imperial traditions, we're doing just fine down here...just look around!"

As Amenhotep III, for whatever reasons, turned his back on his father's treaty with Mittani, the great Hittite warrior-king, Suppiluliumma, eyed the deteriorating Egyptian/Mittanian

situation with great interest. Without a doubt, the Hittite king remembered the history of how Hatti had been snubbed by Egypt when Tuthmosis IV embraced Mittani instead of Hatti as a northern ally. What Suppiluliumma knew about the internal goings-on in Egypt no one knows for sure. But at least one thing is certain: he knew that it was time to settle an old score with Egypt by attacking Mittani with impunity and, eventually, a few decades later, wiping that Mesopotamian kingdom from the face of the earth. Without hesitation or fear of Egyptian reprisal, Suppiluliumma attacked the Mittani capital, then carved out a long-coveted Hittite corridor to the Mediterranean coast. Hatti marched. Mittani fell. Egypt sat motionless—as paralyzed as the great granite statues Amenhotep III had erected in his own honor.

After Amenhotep died, pharaoh Akhenaten attempted to reverse Egypt's downward spiral by adopting revolutionary religious reforms. The traditional Egyptian gods were replaced by a quasi-monotheism based on the Aten, the sun-disk. The old gods had not protected the Black Land, and it was now threatened with utter collapse. But the Aten proved unequal to the task of restoring the glory of Egypt. The Hittites waxed stronger and were now solidly entrenched in the northern Levant, while the southern Levant writhed in chaos without any hope of assistance from Egypt. Within a few years after Akhenaten's death, Egypt's once-magnificent Eighteenth Dynasty collapsed in what can only be described as embarrassment and disgrace. Then, sometime between 1340 BCE and 1320 BCE (depending on the chronology used), the Egyptian military commander, Horemheb, who longed for the glory-days of the Empire, wrested control of what little remained of the Eighteenth Dynasty and turned Egypt around by the sheer force of his will and administrative skills. Whether pharaoh Horemheb is to be considered the last king of the Eighteenth Dynasty or the first king of the Nineteenth Dynasty is moot. The fact is that Horemheb laid the foundation for the rise of the Nineteenth Dynasty, once again launching military "tours" into the southern Levant and handpicking the first Ramesside pharaoh—an old army buddy, Rameses I. But it was during the reigns of Seti I and Rameses II that Egypt experienced renewed vigor and reasserted its military might in the southern Levant. However, the Hittites continued their presence in the northern Levant until the collapse of their empire about 1205 BCE.

Thus, it is within the terminal parameters of: (a) Egypt's absence from the Levant (ca. 1380-1300 BCE—encompassing both high and low chronologies), and (b) Hatti's domination of the northern Levant during the same period, that the situation in Israel's Promised Land matched the oft-repeated socio-political components expressed and implied by Yahweh himself: "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates—the land of the Hittites,...Amorites, Canaanites..." (Gen 15:18-21); "I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites..." (Ex 3:8); "I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites... a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3:17); "When Yahweh brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites..." (Ex 13:5); "My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of the Amorites, Hittites,...Canaanites..." (Ex 23:23); "I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites..." (Ex 33:2); "I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites..." (Ex 34:11); "Now when the kings west of the Jordan heard about these things—those in the hill country, in the western foothills, and along the entire coast of the Great Sea, as far as Lebanon (the kings of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites...)—they came together to make war against Joshua and Israel" (Josh 9:1).

If one puts any credence whatsoever in the accuracy of the biblical description of the land promised to the Israelites, then the Conquest event cannot be reconciled with the time period before the reign of Amenhotep III or after the reign of Horemheb, for Joshua encountered no Egyptian presence in Canaan and was assured that he would not. On the other hand, the Hittites had no controlling presence in the Levant until the latter years of Amenhotep III's reign in the second quarter of the 14<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Biblically, Joshua and the Israelites entered an Egyptian-less land wherein the Hittites controlled and administered significant territory. And whether one views the biblical record of these data as prophecy and fulfilling history, or simply as history written (accurately!) after the fact, it must be admitted that what the Hebrew Hexateuch describes is a socio-political situation in Canaan that existed for less than fifty years during Egypt's so-called Amarna Period. The convergence of these data effectively rules out the possibility of a Conquest before about 1380 BCE or after 1300 BCE. This seems to be a compelling historical synchronism between ancient Near Eastern history and the biblical record, when both are taken seriously.