

BEHOLD THE BIBLE

The Origins of Israel

The Middle Eastern Bronze Age (3000-1200 BCE)



End of Bronze Age (circa 1200)

- Political fragmentation
- Economic decline
- Cultural disintegration

**Result: Bronze Age remembered as a
“Golden Age” by later cultures**

Also Israel

- A nation only in Iron Age (1200-300 BCE)
- But traced origins to Bronze Age ancestors (Gen 12-50)
- And to Mesopotamian traditions of world origins (Gen 1-11)
 - But *critical* of “civilization”

Ancestors (Gen 12-50)

- Theme: God’s promise to Abraham of
 - Land
 - Descendants
 - “Blessing”
- Structure: 3 cycles of stories about
 - Abraham
 - Jacob
 - Joseph

Abraham cycle (Gen 12-25)



Mosaic from Beth Alpha synagogue, 6th cent. CE

- Issue: no heir
- Structure: short stories loosely connected
- God: anthropomorphic miracle-worker, Abraham’s “friend”

Jacob cycle (Gen 26-36)



Matsebah from Hatsor

- **Jacob** = Israel's eponymous ancestor
- **Issue:** competing heirs
- **Structure:** Jacob's life story
- **God:** mysterious, threatening, adversary & protector

Joseph story (Gen 37-50)

- **Issue:** move to Egypt?
- **Structure:** tight story of Joseph's fall and rise
- **God:** transcendent, in control

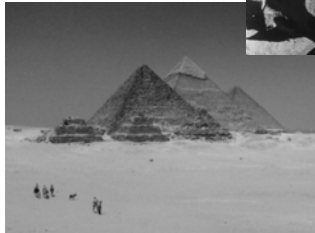


Asiatic's gravestone, ca. 1350 BCE

Influential Exodus

Setting: EGYPT

Ancient



African



A possible background to the Exodus

- Semitic “Hyksos” ruled Egypt from 1750-1550 BCE
- Did later Egyptian kings (Pharaohs) oppress Semites = Hebrews?
- Maybe; but no closer connection of Egyptian history & Exodus is possible

Exodus: THE defining story of Israel and Judaism

- Genesis’ “Golden Age” is over. Exodus depicts:
 - Religious conflict, internal & external
 - God as miraculous, mysterious, transcendent, and more
- God reveals personal name: YHWH (Exod 3 & 6)
- God saves Israel from Egyptian slavery



Sunset on the Nile

“You shall be my treasured possession” (Exod 19:5)

- God claims ownership of Israel
- God becomes Israel’s king by the *covenant* (= treaty, contract)
- Israel becomes God’s people, “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (19:6)



Gebel Musa (Mt. Sinai?)
