
ISRAEL & THE HEBREWS

In 1896 an inscription was discovered in Egypt which is one of the oldest known references to the land of "Israel".

The inscription is dated to approx 1210 B.C. during the Biblical period of the Judges. It records victories achieved by the Egyptian pharaoh Merneptah over the peoples in neighboring lands. It reads:

"The princes are prostrate saying: "Shalom!" (Peace). Not one of the nine bows lifts his head; Tjehenu is vanquished, Khatti at peace, **Canaan is captive**, Yanoam made nonexistent; **the foreign people of Israel are laid waste**, bare of seed."



Reading from Right to Left
"Israel/ the foreign people"
Merneptah Stele

The inscription also mentions the land known as **Canaan**, in which God had brought the Israelites into the land to possess.

Of course, typical of a proud Egyptian ruler, Merneptah exaggerated his victory over the Hebrews since Israel would later become a powerful nation under God's protection.

Although it is technically true that this is the first reference to "Israel" outside the Bible, there are

earlier references to the children of Israel who were also known as the Hebrews.

During the reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, approximately 1470 B.C., there is a reference in Egyptian records to the Hebrews. This is very interesting since Hatshepsut is considered by many to be the pharaoh's daughter who drew Moses from the water and Thutmose III is considered by many to be the pharaoh of the Exodus. The inscription is found in a tomb belonging to an Egyptian named Puyemre. On the walls of the tomb is a scene depicting men working a wine press. Beneath the scene are the words: "Straining out wine by the **Apiru**". The name "Apiru" is the Egyptian word phonetically equivalent to the word "Hebrew".

Another early mention of the Hebrews as well as their advance into the land of Canaan is found in letters known as the Amarna letters. These letters were written by Canaanite leaders requesting aid from the Egyptians in stopping the advancing Hebrew armies. One such letter also gives reference, indirectly, to the leader of the Hebrews, Joshua. It states:

"May the king, my lord, know that the **chief of the Apiru (Hebrew) has besieged the lands** which your god has given me; but I have attacked him. Also let the king, my lord, know that none of my allies have come to my aid, it is only I and Abdu-Heba who fight against the '**Apiru (Hebrew) chief.**'"
Amarna letter #RA xix p.106 Anet 487

Another fascinating inscription has been found which dates to the reign of Thutmose III. According to the Bible, Jacob was given a new name by God who said he would be called Israel (yisra'el) in Genesis 32:28. Yisra meaning "To prevail" and "El" meaning God. According to the Bible, Jacob and his sons entered into the land of Egypt when his son Joseph became second to Pharaoh (Genesis 47:11)

where their descendants lived until the time of the Exodus. Amazingly there is an inscription from the time of Thutmose III at Karnak which lists cities and territory in Canaan under his control. One name on the list is the territory referred to as "**Jacob-El**" and another is "**Joseph-El**". (ANET 242)

That is just totally Awesome!

Another tribal territory of the Hebrews is mentioned in Egyptian records from the reign of Ramses III which mention the priestly tribe of Levi, inscribed with the words "**Levi-EL**"

There is even more evidence

For example, we know that the Hebrews were divided into tribes and that one of their main means of livelihood was raising sheep. Today we would call them bedouin shepherds. The Egyptians had a name for them which was "Shasu" (those who traveled on foot). This was a generic term for tribes from many different places. But sometimes they got specific. For example, there is an Egyptian inscription from the time of Amenhotep III which mentions the "**Shasu of Yhw (Yahweh)**" (The foot tribes that followed Yahweh, the God of the Bible") This is likely a reference to those Israelites who did not reside in a specific city.



Inscription reads:
"Shasu of Yhw"
Yahweh = Jehovah

Other inscriptions back up this connection of the Hebrews with specific Shasu tribes. For example there is a reference from a military campaign of the Egyptian Pharaoh Seti I which identifies the Apiru (Hebrews) and Shasu as being the same.

Known as the Beth-Shan steles, both of which account the same military campaign of Seti I into the land of Israel during the first year of his reign

The first stela ANET 254(a) states: "**Year 1** . . . **the foe belonging to the Shasu** are plotting rebellion. Their tribal chiefs are gathered in one place, waiting on the **mountain ranges of Kharu** (Israel/Syria).

Another inscription from Seti 1 again from Year 1 states: "**Year 1** of the King . . . The desolation which the mighty arm of Pharaoh . . . made among the **foe belonging to Shasu** from the fortress of Sile to the **Canaan.**" ANET 254(c)

The second BethShan Stela of Seti I, which records the same military campaign, states:

"The **Apiru of Mount Yarmuta** with Teyer have risen in attack upon the Asaiatics of **Rehem**. . . His majesty commanded a certain number of people from his infantry and his numerous chariotry that their faces turn back to the foreign country of **Djahi**" (The Watershed country stretching from the Dead sea north along the Lower Jordan to the sea of Galilee then north along upper Jordan river stretching as far north to the Orontes river, this was in the hands of Israel during their conquest of Canaan.) ANET 255

Since there is only one Mountain range mentioned in the BethShan steles and that is Mount Yarmuta of the Apiru. The Apiru and Shasu in these inscriptions can be pretty well assumed as being the same enemy the Egyptians said they were fighting against.

Another Egyptian inscription from Pharaoh Amenhotep II also make a connection between the Apiru and Shasu. At the end of his second Asiatic campaign (1420 BC) Amenhotep II erected a stele at Memphis on which he gave a list of booty he had collected on which he list the Apiru and Shasu side by side.

It states: List of the plunder which his majesty carried off: "Princes of Retenu (Syria): 127, Brothers of princes: 179, **Apiru: 3600 , Shasu (Bedouin): 15,200.**" ANET 247

GOD'S GREATEST WORDS TO ISRAEL

And it shall come to pass, That whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know; "Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. "For David says concerning Him:

'I foresaw the LORD always before my face, For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken. Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad; Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope. For You will not leave my soul in Hades, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; You will make me full of joy in Your presence.'

"Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. "Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God

had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, "he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:

'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." '

"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?"

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:21-38 (NKJV)

Sources:

The Holy Bible, Author: The Lord God

Scripture taken from the New King James Version unless noted.

www.bible.ca - Merneptah stele - Israel section translation

http://en.wikipedia/wiki/Merneptah_Stele

In 1896 Flinders Petrie located the stele at Thebes

The stela sizes is roughly 10 feet in height by 5 feet wide

The stela is dated to 5th year of Merneptah (1209-1208 BC)

Ancient Near Eastern Texts - Relating to the Old Testament

Author: James Pritchard:

ANET 246 - "List of his booty: . . . Canaanites: 640"

ANET 247 - "List of the plunder which his majesty carried off: Princes of Retenu (Syria): 127, Brothers of princes: 179, Apiru: 3600 , Shasu (Bedouin): 15,200.

ANET 254(a) states: "Year 1 . . . the foe belonging to the Shasu are plotting rebellion.

ANET 254 states: "foe belonging to Shasu from the fortress of Sile to the Canaan."

ANET 255 " states: "The Apiru of Mount Yarmuta with Teyer have risen in attack upon the Asaiatics of Rehem.

ANET 242 Thutmose III inscription, list "Jacob-EL", and "Joseph-EL"

ANET 243 Rameses III inscription mentions "Levi-El"

ANET 487 "May the king, my lord, know that the chief of the Apiru (Hebrew) has besieged the lands . . . it is only I and Abdu-Heba who fight against the 'Apiru (Hebrew) chief." Amarna letter #RA xix p.106

ANET 259 mentions the "Shasu (Bedouin) tribes of Edom", (reference Pritchard - Footnote 2 .

ANET 262 - The Egyptians called the Edomites (the descendants of Israel's brother Esau) the "Shasu of Edom" Summary of the Northern wars from Ramese III says: "I destroyed the people of Seir (main territory of the Edomites) among the Shasu (Bedouin tribes)

http://www.archaeowiki.org/Topographical_List,_First_Campaign_of_Thutmose_III

Actual List from Thutmose III Listing "Jacob-El" and "Joseph-El":

Egypt, Trunk of the Tree By Simson Najovits, pg 179-180:

Topographical List from Karnak

Thutmoses III - Jacob-el, Joseph El, Shasu Springs

Rameses II - Jacob-el, Joseph-el,

Rameses III - Jacob-el, Joseph-el, Levi-El, Asher

The Shasu of Yahweh source:

Amenhotep III - 1386-1349 BC. Topographical List - 1386 BC. In the temple of Amon in Soleb there is a topographical list from the time of Amenhotep III (1408-1372 BC). In column IV. A2 is written "ssw yhw" which means "Yahweh of the land of the Shasu" (Giveon 1964, 244; Redford 1992, 272; Astour 1979, 17-34). In the ancient Near East a divine name was also given to a geographical place where the god was worshiped (Axelsson 1987, 60). This is the first clear extra-biblical evidence of the name "Yahweh."

One name in the mentioned lists from Soleb and Amarah in Nubia Sudan - 'Yhw (in) the land of the Shasu.'

Shasu of Yahweh is a term that appears in Egyptian inscriptions of the 18th and 19th Dynasties (c. 1540-1190 B.C.). One, found at Amarah or Amrah in Upper Nubia, dates to the reign of Seti I (c. 1300 B.C.). An earlier inscription, probably from the reign of Amenhotep III (c. 1400 B.C.) was found at the Temple of Amun in Soleb, Sudan

Hatshepsut is considered by many to be the pharaoh's daughter who drew Moses from the water. It is also interesting to note that a majority of inscriptions relating to Hatshepsut were defaced by the Egyptians in an effort to try to erase her name from Egyptian records. Could this have been done because they hated the stepmother of Moses? This very Moses who was God's instrument in bringing the Egyptians to their knees as a result of the plagues God had sent against them.

Art: Pen and Ink illustration of Merneptah inscription mentioning "Israel, the foreign people" based upon photo.
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Art: Pen and Ink illustration of inscription mentioning "Shasu of Yaweh" based upon photo.
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