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Dating Scriptures

It is both important and useful to date biblical scriptures, because this means that we can determine when particular events happened. For example, what time period a particular king ruled, where he ruled and who he ruled over.

Archaeology is probably the best method of dating scriptures, as it is accurate and scientific. However, it can cause problems. It can cause disagreements between Rabbis and archaeologists, and even between Rabbis themselves, who have different opinions and ideas about what actually happened, furthermore if the biblical information contradicts the archaeological information, or vice versa.

For example, if one archaeologist finds evidence from a period of time and another archaeologist finds evidence of the same event but claims that it dates to a different time period.

Instances in which such disputes have occurred are; who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus? And were the Israelites ever in Egypt?

There are several candidates for the notoriety of having been the Pharaoh of the oppression, under whom the "bondage of the Israelites ended in a systematic attempt at their extermination." Most scholars identify him as being the "splendour loving and tyrannical Rameses II". The exodus itself is thought to have occurred under the rule of Merneptah an "obstinate and vain despot" (the son of Rameses II).

However, some scholars date the Oppression and the Exodus in the century prior to Rameses II and connect it with "the religious revolution of Ikhнатon". This Pharaoh abolished the belief in countless gods of the Egyptian Pantheon; he then committed himself entirely to the worship of the sun. His new monotheistic belief was totally opposite to his previous belief of multitudinous deities. Scholars believe that there is "some relation between the faith of the Israelites and the solar monotheism of Ikhнатon"; Israelite influence must have been to a certain extent accountable for this "assault on the gross idolatry of Egypt". This is evidence that the Israelites were in Egypt.

Other Egyptologists disagree with this theory and believe that Thotmes III (a century before Rameses II) was the Pharaoh of the Oppression.

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One of the most important reasons which encourage both sets of scholars to disagree with the general theory that Rameses II was the Pharaoh of the Oppression is that a scripture of Merneptah was discovered in 1896 and it is alleged that the name 'Israel' occurs on it. The inscription is a "song of triumph" of Merneptah describing in pretentious language his victories in Canaan. He boasts that "Canaan is seized with every evil... *Ysra'el* is desolated, its seed is not". The expression '*Ysra'el is desolated*' leads the scholars to state that the Israelites "in those days must have been in possession of Canaan" and thus the Exodus must have taken place "long before the time of Merneptah".

However, it is not definite that the words '*Ysra'el is desolated*' refer to Israel at all...

Professor Kennet takes the phrase as being similar to that relating to Ashkelon and Gezer and as a result simply "stating that Merneptah had devastated the district of 'Jezreel'".

And if '*Ysra'el*' does mean Israel, then it refers to the settlements in Palestine by Israelites from Egypt before the Exodus. And it is "These settlements which Merneptah boasts of having devastated during his Canaanite campaign". There is thus no logical reason for disagreeing with the current theory that the Pharaoh of the Oppression was **Rameses II**, with his son Merneptah as the Pharaoh of the Exodus.