

## 12. LATE DYNASTIC PERIOD – DECLINING POWER IN EGYPT

1100-400 B.C..

During the Late Dynastic period, ten dynasties ruled Egypt -- the twenty-first through the thirtieth. During the first of those, Egypt became divided, one group of kings ruling in the delta and priest-kings ruling at Thebes. During this dynasty, they also became dependent upon Libyan mercenaries. *David* was king of Israel during this time, and his son King *Solomon* made an alliance by marriage with Egypt, but Egypt later invaded Israel and plundered the *Temple* of God *Solomon* had built there.

The next dynasty, the twenty-second, was composed of kings of *Libyan* origin. Growing dissension encouraged invasion by the *Nubians*. *Shishak* (*Shashanq*), was the first ruler of this dynasty, and the first specified by name in the Biblical account. He invaded Israel during the reign of *Rehoboam* (I Kings 14:25).

Then Egypt was briefly ruled by the kings from southern Egypt during the twenty-fourth dynasty (two kings), then by the Nubian pharaohs in the twenty-fifth. The fourth of these was *Tirhakah* (*Aalji Mefer-Tem-Ra Tahar Qa*) during the reign of *Hezekiah*, king of Judah.

In 671 B.C. the Assyrian *Esarhaddon* captured the Egyptian capitol at Memphis, but no sooner had he withdrawn his troops than the people rebelled. He set out two years later to take the city again, but died on the way. His son *Ashurbanipal* received rule of part of the *Assyrian* kingdom, and soon reconquered Memphis. He extended Assyrian rule as far as Thebes, sacking that city.

In the twenty-sixth dynasty, independence from Assyria was achieved and Egypt had a strong commercial fleet, trading with Greece. Ruling from the delta city of Sais, the Pharaohs extended Egyptian rule as far as *Napata* in the south and controlled the coast of Libya and the *Sinai peninsula*. During this time *Necho II* (610-595) began a canal connecting the Nile with the Red Sea, and sent *Phoenician ships* exploring who circumnavigated the continent in about three years time. Pharaoh *Ahmoese* refurbished Sais, and Egypt enjoyed a prosperous time of flourishing commerce. *An old man, he died just as the Persians approached in battle*. His son *Psamtik III* was easily defeated at the Battle of Pelusium and the *Persian Cambyses* ruled. He honored the Egyptian gods and took the title of Pharaoh, but proved to be an increasingly despotic ruler. Heading home to Persia when he heard of an insurrection there, he died on the way. *Darius* soon gained control of Persia.

In the twenty-seventh dynasty the Persians were expelled with help from the Greeks and a real Egyptian king enthroned again at last. During the twenty-ninth dynasty, Pharaohs from the *Delta region* ruled briefly, with the thirtieth and final dynasty bringing the rule of the last native pharaohs and the reconquest of Egypt by the Persians.

During this time (753 B.C.) the city of *Rome* was founded in Italy, a late development in contrast to the ancient cities of Egypt. Romans, however, subsequently reckoned their dates from the founding of Rome using the acronym AUC, meaning “anno urbis conditae” or “ab urbe

condita.” By 660 B.C. the Egyptian city Memphis was the fourth largest city in the world with a population of 99,000 (following *Nineveh*, Loyang, and Yenhsiatsu) 62 This was the first known time that Egypt fell behind other world cities in population.

The *Khons Temple* at Karnak was the only major temple completed during this era. Even so, the Late Dynastic period was a time of thriving craftsmanship. Bronze casting was perfected and skilled metal work done. It was a time of new realism in sculpture. As Nubian rulers encouraged study of the past, a new cultural renaissance began. Incised inscriptions were faultlessly made. Pharaoh Achoris erected numerous monuments and Egyptian art went through its last flowering. Glassmaking continued to improve. During this time Darius I of Persia commanded the codification of Egyptian law.

## LITERATURE

Herodotus, the Greek historian 490-431 B.C., wrote about Egypt in his “Histories”. He made many practical observations, including the fact that Egyptians wrote right to left, instead of the opposite which was more common at the time. He described the priests and the wonders of Egyptian architecture and the Nile River. His writings are considered a valuable source of information, although their accuracy in some things has been questioned, especially the accuracy of stories he related second hand.<sup>i</sup>

## RELIGION

In anticipation of the Temple that his son Solomon would build, David wrote Psalm 68, in which he speaks of envoys coming to Jerusalem to worship God in the Temple from Egypt and Ethiopia (verse 31. David saw the Temple not just as the glory of his people Israel, but as a call to worship for all the peoples of the earth.

Solomon, one of the greatest of all Israel’s kings, made an alliance with Egypt by marrying the Pharaoh’s daughter (I Kings 3:1). Her father was probably either *Siamun* or *Psusenne II*, last kings of the twenty-first dynasty, (Libyan pharaohs). The Egyptian princess was present in Israel through the great period of the Temple building. She was witness to Solomon’s great wisdom, and quite possibly the author of the observation that his wisdom was “greater than all the wisdom of Egypt” (I Kings 4:30). It is possible that through her communication with her homeland, the *Queen of Sheba* was drawn to visit Israel. The Queen may have been from Africa, or from an African-Arabian kingdom. Some have felt she was from the Sudan-Kush area (1 Kings 10:1-13). Ethiopian legends attributed their monarchy to a son supposedly born to the Queen by Solomon. (See chapter on Ethiopia.)

Solomon extended the borders of Israel until they met the border of Egypt to the southwest (I Kings 4:21). He made a beautiful house in Jerusalem for his wife, Pharaoh’s daughter (I Kings 7:8), so there was doubtless frequent communication between the two countries and ample opportunity for Egypt to see firsthand the glory of God. Trade between the two Kingdoms must have flourished Solomon’s throne was inlaid with *ivory* that probably came from Africa, from the Sudan or the *rain-forest* near there. Solomon ran a prosperous import-export business in horses and chariots between Egypt in the south and Asia Minor in the north (I Kings 10:28-29).

A large group came from Egypt to the dedication of Solomon's Temple to God (I Kings 8:65). Perhaps the princess' own family was there. They must have heard Solomon's dedicatory prayer, in which he showed concern that all nations might know God's name. Surely at that time they had an opportunity to learn of the true God their fathers had forsaken long ago.

One of Solomon's adversaries was an *Edomite-Egyptian alliance* headed by *Hadad*, an Edomite prince who fled to Egypt when only a boy, when David conquered Edom, including probably his father. The Pharaoh not only gave Hadad refuge, but made a close marriage alliance with him. When Hadad heard that David was dead, he returned to Edom, causing trouble for Solomon. The Bible explicitly says God raised up this adversary (I Kings 11:14), possibly to keep Solomon from becoming proud.

It is a matter of great shame and sorrow that in his later life Solomon allowed his foreign wives to turn his heart toward other gods so that he forsook the example and witness he had earlier given to Egypt and to other lands as well. Again, a man who had served as a great witness to Africa failed. Pharaoh's daughter, however, does not seem to have been the main temptress, but rather Solomon's *Moabite and Ammonite* wives (I Kings 11:4-6).

Other kings of Judah continued to have contact with Africa, allowing some witness of the true God to be made known even in the midst of their own failures.

King *Jeroboam* fled to Egypt to escape when Solomon ordered him to be executed for his rebellion. *Shishak* offered him asylum there, and the two probably laid plans or at least planted the seeds of thought for Shishak's later invasion against Jeroboam's rival, *Rehoboam* (Jeroboam ruling the northern kingdom called Israel and Rehoboam ruling the southern kingdom called Judah).

Rehoboam, Solomon's son, was king in Judah, but it is not likely that he was any witness for the true God, since he later introduced idol worship into the land, probably due to the influence of his mother, an ardent Moabite idolator, and the unfaithfulness of his father in later years. In the fifth year of the reign of Rehoboam, Shishak, Pharaoh of Egypt of the twenty-second dynasty, together with the Libyans, Libyan mercenaries called Sukkim, and Cushites – in essence, all of North Africa – invaded Israel as far as Jerusalem (ca. 975 B.C.). They took the gold shields Solomon had made and the temple treasures (2 Chronicles 12:2-4), showing contempt for Israel and for her God. Pharaoh Shishak wrote about this exploit of the *temple of Arnuk* at Karnak (at "Thebes).

King *Jehoshaphat* of Judah (ca. 897 B.C.) built ships specifically to go to *Ophir* for gold, but they were wrecked at Ezion-Geber before setting sail. (Ophir is identified as part of the eastern coastal area of Africa and part of the western coastal area of Arabia. This shows that the area was widely known for its gold (I Kings 22:48).

*Hoshea*, a king of Israel in *Samaria*, an evil king but not amongst the worst, tried to break away from bondage to the Assyrians. He sent envoys to make an alliance with Pharaoh so *Sais* or *Osorkon*, and refused tribute to Assyria. This act resulted in Hoshea's imprisonment and the defeat of the northern kingdom of Israel. Whether Egypt intended to help or not is not stated in

the Biblical record, but it is explicitly stated that God was angry with His people for turning to the nation from whom His hand once delivered them, and that this, added to their other sins, brought final judgment upon them. (2 Kings 17).

*Tirhakah*, a Cushite Pharaoh, wittingly or unwittingly aided *Hezekiah*, king of Judah (ca. 710 B.C.). He attacked *Sennacherib* of Assyria as he was set against King Hezekiah of Judah at Jerusalem, dividing his attention and diverting Sennacherib's full attention away from Hezekiah's plight (2 Kings 19:9). Sennacherib had been taunting Hezekiah, saying that if he was trusting in Egypt, that was like leaning on a bruised reed, and if he was depending on the Lord, they had already defeated Him by taking away His altars. God told Hezekiah that he would work so that when Sennacherib received a certain report, he would return to Assyria and God would have him killed there. As God had promised, Sennacherib received a report that he was being attacked by Turhakeh of Egypt. That night an angel slew 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. Sennacherib withdrew and returned to Assyria, where he was assassinated by one of his own countrymen while worshipping in his idol temple.

*Zerah* the Ethiopian with 300 chariots fought King *Asa* of Judah, but God helped Asa to rout them (2 Chronicles 14:9-13). *Uzziah*, king of Judah, was also known as a strong king clear down to Egypt (2 Chronicles 26:8), and was a king who sought God and gave glory to Him for his victories.

*Pharaoh Neco* (second king, twenty-sixth dynasty, ruled 610-595 B.C.) allied himself with Assyria against the growing power of Babylon and killed King *Josiah*, the last of the godly kings of Judah, in a battle against Assyria (2 Kings 23:29). He then deported the new ruler of Judah, Josiah's son *Jehoshaz*, to *Riblah*, his military headquarters to the north of Israel, where he died. Pharaoh Neco replaced him with his own hand-picked as ruler of Judah, -- *Eliakim*, Jehoahza's older brother, changing his name to *Jehoiakim*, and obliged him to pay heavy tribute to Egypt (2 Kings 23:33-35). Later Jehoiakim was also conquered by Babylon (2 Kings 24:7).

During the last days of Judah, a Cushite official in Jerusalem named *Ebed-Melech* showed kindness to Jeremiah by bravely interceding for him and ultimately freeing him when he had been imprisoned in a muddy pit because King *Zedekiah* did not like his prophecies (Jer. 38\_7-13). Because of this act, God rescued him when the Babylonians overtook the city (Jer. 39:15-18). God promised, "I will save you; you will escape with your life, because you trust in me" (Jer. 39:18).

During the final siege of *Jerusalem* (586 B.C.), *Pharaoh Hophra* (fourth king of the twenty-sixth dynasty) marched out to help Jerusalem, causing a temporary withdrawal of the *Babylonian* forces. Later, when the Egyptian army withdrew, the Babylonians returned, sieged and destroyed the city, including the Temple built by Solomon (Jer. 37:5-8, ch. 39).

One of the witnesses who was faithful was the prophet *Jeremiah*. He was spared by the Babylonians when they conquered Jerusalem. Many of the remaining people wanted to flee to Egypt for safety. Jeremiah delivered God's warning that they must not go, but they refused. Apparently Jeremiah was obligated to go with them. He was taken to *Tohpanhes* in Egypt, where he continued to live for God and to speak and write the prophecies God gave him.

Amongst Jeremiah's prophecies are a number of judgments specifically directed to places in Egypt. While the Jewish remnant were in Egypt, many of their wives were drawn into the Isis goddess cult and began burning incense, pour out drink offerings and making cakes to Isis, the Queen of Heaven. They blamed God for the destruction of Jerusalem and credited the goddess Isis with their momentarily improved situation in Egypt (Jeremiah 44:15-20). Many of Jeremiah's warnings were directed to his faithless brethren, while others were directed at the Egyptians and other nations. For instance, the prophecy of Jeremiah 46:25 is directed against "the multitude of No" (Thebes, in the Delta area). God says He will punish them, along with Pharaoh, and all Egypt, and their gods. He will punish the Pharaohs who claimed to be gods, and all who trusted in them. Jeremiah also prophesied against the people of *Noph (Mephis)* because they saw the destruction of Jerusalem, yet refused to listen to the warnings of the prophets (Jeremiah 44:1). This passage is significant because it shows clearly that God sent the prophets not only to Israel, but to Egypt as well, and held them responsible to turn from idols to God because of the message the prophets brought. Because they refused, Jeremiah said Memphis would become a waste (Jeremiah 46:19). Jeremiah prophesied that God would hand over Pharaoh Hophra (called Apries by Greek historians) to his enemies, just as He had the faithless *Zedekiah*, king of Judah.

Other prophets had also spoken concerning peoples of Africa. Isaiah (ca. 714 B.C.) prophesied against Egypt in chapters 19 and 20 and against Ethiopia in chapter 20, but his prophecies are sprinkled with grace, looking forward to a time when Cush will bring presents to the Lord (18:7), and there will be an altar to the Lord in the heart of Egypt, and a monument to the Lord at its border" (Isa. 19:19) . . ." so the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and in that day they will acknowledge the Lord" (19:21) . . ." The Lord will strike Egypt with a plague; he will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the Lord, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them" (19:21) . . ." the Lord Almighty will bless them, saying, 'Blessed be *Egypt my people*'" (19:25). But Isaiah also scolded Israel for making an alliance with unrepentant Egypt in 30:13-16.

*Ezekiel* (ca. 589 B.C.) pronounced judgment upon Egypt because of her proud Pharaohs and her idols (Ezekiel 16:20, ch. 29-30), assuring us that the goal of the judgments is that the peoples of Egypt will know that God is the Lord. To this end, God will break Egypt's power, disperse her amongst the nations, then restore her to her land, but never again to world power. He also mentions soldiers of Phut from Africa as being in the army of *Tyre* with soldiers from other nations, which army God will judge.

Finally, the prophet *Nahum* (ca. 713 B.C. used the destruction of Thebes by *Assurbanipal* (666 B.C.) as an example to warn *Nineveh* of God's coming judgment upon them (Nahum 3:9), and *Zephaniah* predicted the fall of Ethiopia, along with that of other nations (Zeph. 2:12).

The fortunes of Cush were largely interwoven with that of Egypt from the New Kingdom on. The word "Ethiopian" comes from two Greek words meaning "burnt faces," which describes how the Cushites appeared to the lighter-complected Greeks. Jerusalem 13:23 also mentions the Ethiopians as being dark skinned. The area of Nubia was ruled by Egyptian pharaohs beginning with the New Kingdom, and the culture of the region became distinctly Egyptian at that time. It was during this period that Moses married an Egyptian woman (Numbers 12:2). However,

Ethiopia broke away and became independent during the last days of the New Kingdom, in the time of David and Solomon. David wrote a prophetic psalm, predicting that with the building of God's temple in Jerusalem, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God" (Ps. 68:13). His prophecy was fulfilled when the Queen of Sheba, ruler of a kingdom probably extending through Ethiopia, Somalia and the western coast of Arabia, visited Solomon at Jerusalem. She has been identified as Makeda, daughter of king *Arive-Negus*. She may have come to know God, and passed this knowledge on to her son, who became *Emperor Menelik I*. Old Ethiopian texts report that a serpent or dragon-god cult called *Arwe* existed side by side with the practice of Mosaic law. King *Arwe-Negus* was apparently the shaman of the serpent cult, and according to tradition was capable of changing himself into a serpent. Other Cushitic groups (the Beja and Aguew) worshipped the spirits of natural objects like trees, rivers, mountains and animals and made annual or seasonal offerings to them. Semitic groups from southern Arabia worshipped nature in its terrestrial and celestial forms. Some influential travelers proselytized for their own local gods, resulting in some religious diversity.

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<sup>i</sup> "Herodotus, Dynastry XXVI, by Matt Bune, internet