

9. THE MIDDLE KINGDOM OF EGYPT

2000-1800 B.C.

The Middle Kingdom of Egypt corresponds with the time of Abraham and the *Patriarchs*, which history is recorded in Genesis 12-50. It includes the eleventh through the fourteenth dynasties of Egypt.

The time period of the Middle Kingdom corresponds with the time God called Abraham Out of his own country at Ur to become the Father of a new nation that would believe God and make Him known in the world. From the beginning, He made it clear that His intention was not just to bless Abraham personally, nor even to bless just his future family. God promised to bless him in order to bless all the families of the earth through him (see Genesis 12:3 and 18:18). God wanted to use Abraham's family to give the world His Word and His Son to be their Savior and Lord, since all spiritual blessings are found in Him (Eph. 1:3). From the beginning God's witness nation, Israel, had much interaction with Egypt.

God wanted Abraham to be a *missionary* to Egypt when he went there in time of famine, since He always wants His people to witness for Him in every place they may go. Abraham knew God and had followed His leading from his home in Ur to the Promised Land. If he had obeyed, he could have become the first missionary to Egypt, to show Pharaoh the glory of the God he and his people had forgotten. Sadly, Abraham lied, telling Pharaoh the misleading half-truth that *Sarah*, his wife, was really his sister. ⁶⁰ As a result of Abraham's lie, Pharaoh put Sarah into his royal harem, and God sent plagues upon him. Pharaoh immediately recognized the plagues as God's judgment and discerned the true situation, showing that he did have considerable understanding of God and of His ways. Pharaoh also speedily removed Sarah from his harem and sent them both away with a rebuke (Gen. 12:10-20). Abraham missed his opportunity to call Egypt back to full faith in God by his own unfaithfulness. Pharaoh's actions show that the rulers of this time, unlike the first rulers, had turned away from God, but not completely. One Pharaoh at least was able to recognize God's hand and was fast to repent of specific sin when he discerned God's judgment. His actions hold out some hope that some in Egypt might have maintained considerable knowledge of God, even through the Ancient and Old Kingdoms when idols were multiplied and most of the Pharaohs claimed to be the god Horus incarnate.

Yet in spite of the spiritual acumen of the Pharaoh who dealt with Abraham on his first foray into Egypt, the Pharaohs as a lot were proud and deceitful, often changing the inscriptions on former monuments in order to take credit for the work of their predecessors, which complication does not make the historian's task any easier. Most of the Pharaohs demanded sacrifices to themselves. Before the death of *Ramses*, in 1224 B.C., for example, he built a temple in which the people were expected to make offerings to him forever.

There is considerable evidence that the Egyptians of the Middle Kingdom practiced magic. Magical ropes are found on many hieroglyphs and in pictures found in many pagan temples. The ropes surround the sacred king's name and presumably are meant to protect him from evil, somewhat like an amulet.

God foretold to Abraham that his descendants would sojourn four hundred years in a land that was not theirs (Gen. 15:12-14), and that later God would judge that nation and bring His people out of it again. It is possible that Abraham himself understood that Egypt was likely to be this land. If he did not, God specifically made that fact known to his grandson, Jacob, when He reaffirmed to him the promise first given to Abraham (Gen. 46:3-4).

Abraham's semi-legitimate son *Ishmael* was half African, his mother being Hagar, an Egyptian servant to Sarah. Ishmael also married an Egyptian girl, making his Arab descendants three-fourths African in their origins (Gen. 16:1-12, 21:21). The descendants of Ishmael lived from Havilah to Shur before Egypt, close to the Egyptians, and intermingled with them throughout history. Indeed, as has been mentioned, it is doubtful that the Africans perceived themselves as Africans at that time. They probably felt closely akin to their eastern neighbors.

God renewed His *covenant* to each succeeding generation of Patriarchs, restating to both Isaac and Jacob His intention and purpose to bless all families of the world through them (Gen. 26:4 and 28:14). God's focus had shifted to Abraham's developing family through which the Saviour would be born, but He had not forgotten Africa nor the other peoples of the world. He reminded each of the Patriarchs that the blessings they would know were not for themselves alone, but specifically destined for all the peoples of the earth. Yet God's time to send another missionary to Africa had not yet come. When *Isaac* considered going down to Egypt, God specially forbade him, commanding him to stay in the land God had shown him. (Gen. 26:3)

The Middle Kingdom era was a time of much construction at Thebes, well to the south, and the capitol of the Kingdom was moved to that city, making Egypt more isolated from the Mediterranean – Near Eastern area. Yet during this time, trade was developed with Nubia to the south and with Syria to the northeast, and the Red Sea canal was started. During this time the Pharaoh Ramses the Great added many structures to Thebes for the glory of his god *Amen-Re*. It was a period of great cultural splendor for Egypt. Portraiture as an art form was developed during this time, and the great classical literature of Egypt was written. Temples and all kinds of sculpture were built on a colossal scale. Spoked wheels were used on chariots. By 1990 B.C. Memphis was the largest city in the world with a population of 100,000 (one-tenth of those being pagan priests). The world's earliest *postal system* was developed in Egypt during this time.

During the Middle Kingdom the worship of the god *Amon*, the "hidden" or invisible god, became more prominent. Like other Egyptian deities, Amon was represented by various animal forms.