

11. THE NEW KINGDOM OF EGYPT

1600-1100 B.C.

At the beginning of the New Kingdom, Pharaoh Ahmose I ousted the Hyksos invaders, restoring home rule to Egypt. Later, Thutmose III expanded Egyptian rule as far as the Euphrates river, making Egypt ruler of a widespread empire. Many other outstanding rulers came out of the eighteenth dynasty as well – *Maaphepsut*, *Amenhotep IV* (also called *Akhenaton*), *Tutankhamen* and *Haremhab*. Then, the more competent Thutmose III and Rameses II distinguished themselves by maintaining Egyptian power and repelling the Hittite threat. However, under *Merneptah*, the military power of Egypt declined. During the twentieth dynasty, the *Rameside Pharaohs* ruled (Rameses III-XI), and invasions were repelled from Libya and sea peoples. However, Egypt lost its Asiatic dependencies, and poverty and lawlessness within the country itself increased.

CITIES, BUILDINGS AND TEMPLES OF THE NEW KINGDOM

The great temples built to pagan deities at this time dominated the cities around them. Amenhotep III built a temple at Luxor, Hatshepsut built one at *Deir el Bahri*, Ramses II built one at Thebes, and a rock-cut temple was built at *Abu Simbel*. Elaborate tombs were also built in the Valley of the Kings and the Hypostyle Hall at *Karnak*. It was a time of energetic building activity. Thutmose III was considered the ablest of all the pharaonic builders. The world's two largest cities were still in Egypt: Thebes, with a population of 100,000, and Memphis, with a population of 74,000.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE NEW KINGDOM

Glassworking reached new heights during the New Kingdom. The first definitely dated glass dates back to 1550 B.C., although glass beads had been produced much earlier. Pressed and molded glass was being produced by 1200 B.C. After the dynasty of Tutankhamen, the art of glassworking went into decline and was lost for a thousand years. The Greeks and Romans later had to reinvent it all over again. The New Kingdom was a time of opulent craftsmanship in carving. In addition, much literature was produced.

RELIGION IN THE NEW KINGDOM

The great activity of this period in building temples to honor deities shows that the people as a whole had not responded to the faithful witness of Joseph. The change in rulers explains the sudden change of heart of the Pharaohs. Instead of befriending God's missionary family and allowing them, at least, freedom of worship, the new Pharaohs made them slaves to build the Pharaonic treasure cities of Pithom and Raamses, treated them cruelly, denied them *freedom of worship*, and twice tried to institute a program of systematic genocide against them (Ex. 1:8-22).

Sometime during this period, probably around 1290 B.C., God sent his second and greatest missionary team to Egypt: *Moses and Aaron*, who confronted the wicked, stubborn and deceitful Pharaoh and his court magicians. The signs Moses and Aaron performed at God's bidding, and the judgments God sent to Egypt were directed specifically against their false deities, clearly and

powerfully intended to show anyone of open heart and mind that their idol gods were unable to help them, but that there was a supreme God who had power over all their idols, and power to help them in the hardest of difficulties (Exodus 5-12, Numbers 33:4).

In the first *plague* God turned *water to blood*, demonstrating his power over *Hapi*, Isis, and guardian of the Nile, as well as the Pharaoh himself, in a sense “made” the Nile. In the second plague, He filled the land with *frogs*, showing His power over *Heget*, the frog-headed goddess of birth. In the third plague, he changed the dust of the earth into swarms of *gnats*, (or mosquitos), implying power over *Set*, god of the desert. In the fourth, he sent swarms of *insects* (or flies) upon them, showing his power over *Uatchit*, *the fly-god*. In the fifth, he sent a sudden *epidemic* which brought death to their livestock. This was clearly aimed to show God’s superiority over *Hathor*, the cow-headed goddess, *Mnevis*, the sacred bull of Heliopolis, and *Apis*, the bull-god and symbol of fertility. Since the Egyptians kept many of these sacred animals in their temples, pampering them as gods, their sudden death must have been a strong signal indeed of God's power. In the sixth plague, God sent *boils* on both people and animals. This showed his power over *Sekhmet*, the goddess who had power over disease, *Sunu*, the pestilence god, and Isis, the goddess of healing. In the seventh plague, God sent a destructive *hailstorm*, showing His power over *Nut*, a sky goddess, Osiris, god of crops and fertility. *Set* god of storms, and *Seth*, protector of crops. In the eighth, He sent swarms of destructive locusts to eat their food and crops, reaffirming His priority over these same gods on whom the Egyptians depended for success in agriculture. In the ninth plague, God sent sudden *darkness* over the land for three days, showing power over the deities the Egyptians held especially powerful – the sun gods named *Re*, *Aten*, *Atum*, and *Horus* and the sky goddesses Nut and Hathor. Finally, God sent the death of the firstborn, demonstrating that He was greater than *Min*, the god of reproduction, Isis, the goddess who protected children, Heqet, the goddess of birth, and Pharaoh’s *firstborn* son, thought to be the incarnation of the god Horus. Of course, all were clearly directed against the power of the Pharaoh himself, who ruled a god-king, and who clearly sought eternal status. (Gen. 7-12). 61

There are signs that the people commonly practiced magic and the ancient arts of *cursing*. A curse on a tomb in Thebes is enjoined on anyone who might dare to disturb it. Objects Found in Tutankhamen’s tomb appear to have magical intent. There is the eye of Horus to protect against sickness. Both men and women wore *jewelry* for magical protection. Of course, the plagues showed the futility of *charms and amulets* for protection and demonstrated that God’s power was far superior to all their magical practices. Even in the beginning of the contest with Pharaoh, before the plagues started, God showed His power over the magicians. The first contest involved Aaron casting down his rod to become a serpent. The magicians of Pharaoh duplicated this, but Aaron’s *serpent (rod)* swallowed up their (Gen. 7:1-12). The magicians also duplicated the turning of water to blood and the appearance of frogs, but from that time on were not able to duplicate the rest of the plagues (Gen. 7:22, 8:7 and 18). The magicians, at that point, recognized that “This is the finger of God” (Ex. 8:19), and told the Pharaoh so. As if in confirmation of this, during the plague of the boils, the magicians were so smitten that they were not even able to stand (Ex. 9:11).

The Pharaoh did not heed God’s message – either the warnings and pleas of Moses and Aaron or the visual demonstrations of God’s power, nor the admission of his own magicians. Although at one point it seemed he might be getting the message (Ex. 9:27), he soon reversed his position,

hardening his heart as before. Throughout the contest, his basic position was not changed from that which he originally boasted, “who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice . . . I know not the Lord” (Ex. 8:2).

This Pharaoh apparently believed in his own infallibility and invincibility – much like the original Pharaohs. He could not be depended upon to keep his word. He did not value truth and honesty, but changed his mind on a whim without explanation to anyone. How many times in contest with Moses? After his firstborn son died, he hastily commanded Israel to leave Egypt, but then changed his mind and chased after them. Pitting the best of the military strength of Egypt against the Lord was disastrous – his entire army was drowned in the Red Sea which God had opened for His people but closed upon the army of Pharaoh with all their chariots and horses.

The plagues or judgments and the overthrow of Pharaoh’s army provided a mighty testimony to everyone in the whole land that their “gods” were powerless, and that the Lord’s might was supreme. Indeed this was God’s plan from the beginning, for He declared, “. . . the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord” (Ex. 7:5). To Moses He explained, “and in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth” (Ex. 9:16) . . .” and the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord (Ex. 14:18). The judgements were seen and experienced, not only by Pharaoh, but throughout the whole land. When the Nile turned to blood, it was known to all, for the lives of all were dependent upon that river. Darkness covered the whole land. Frogs, lice, etc. came into every home. Boils broke out on every person. When the people of Israel put the blood of the lamb over their doorpost, doubtless they were observed by their Egyptian neighbors, and probably many asked questions and were told why they were doing it. It is possible that some Egyptians could have believed God and obeyed his command as well as the Israelites. In every home where the people believed and obeyed God’s command, the family was safe, but in all the others the oldest child died. We do not know of any who turned to God, but it is possible some did. Certainly they had abundant testimony and abundant opportunity! It is possible that the plagues were known not only in Egypt but in Cush to the south and in Sudan to the east, which border directly on Egypt. Certainly the news must have spread far, for when Joshua crossed the Jordan river some forty plus years later, Rahab of Jericho said, “we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of The Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt . . . Joshua 2:10). If the Canaanites knew, it is highly probably that all of Africa north of the rain forests also knew.

During the *Exodus* the people of Israel quickly lapsed into the Egyptian-style idolatry with which they had been surrounded in their former homeland. They made a golden image of the Egyptian bull-god Apis, claiming it was the Lord who had delivered them from slavery in Egypt (Ex. 32:4). They declared this a feast to the Lord (Ex. 32:5), but this *syncretism* was not accepted by God, but punished quickly and severely (Ex.. 32:19-20).

During the *Exodus*, Moses, God’s appointed leader, married an Ethiopian woman, his first wife apparently having died previously. *Miriam and Aaron* complained about this, probably because the woman was dark-skinned, but God rebuked them strongly, striking Miriam with leprosy until she repented (Nr. 12:2). Apparently Moses had no children by his second wife (I Chr. 23:15).

The time frame of the New Kingdom includes not only the time of Israel's exodus, but their wilderness wanderings, entry into and conquest of the promised land, and the period in which the judges ruled (Bible books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua and Judges). During this time Egypt did not have direct relations with Israel, although it seems likely Israel was just becoming established as a nation in her own land, and the later years of the judges were years of spiritual decline, apathy and anarchy.

One of the Pharaohs of the New Kingdom, *Amenhotep IV*, a ruler of the eighteenth *dynasty* who ruled somewhere from 1600 to 1350 B.C., tried unsuccessfully to overthrow polytheism and Amen worship. He ordered the name Amen removed from inscriptions and abolished the priesthood of that deity, hoping to replace this with the worship of Aton, a single, universal god, the source of all life. *Aton* was received as one, self-created, self-subsisting, self-existing god, needing none other. This seems like a return to more Biblical principles, but Aton was represented by the *sun's disk* and strongly identified with the sun. Amenhotep changed his own name to Akhenaton in honor of the new deity, abandoned Thebes and built a new capitol called *Aknetaten*, also called Amarnah or Tallal-Amarnah. He built temples to Aton and himself officiated as the high priest of the new religion. Some of the literature he wrote in support of the new religion sounds quite Biblical. His "Instruction of Amenhotep" is very close to Proverbs in spirit in choice of phraseology, yet Proverbs had not yet been written. His "Hymn to Aton" declares:

How manifold it is, what thou hast made,
O sole god, like whom there is no other!
Thou didst create the world according to thy desire,
Whilst thou wert alone.
All men, cattle and wild beasts,
Whatever is on earth, going upon its feet,
And what is on high,
Flying with its wings!

Yet Amenhotep's attempts at *reform* ultimately failed. Within 25 years after his death, his capitol was in ruins and his memory was treated with contempt. Some have suggested that the reason he failed was that Aton was not presented as a god for the people. He and his own royal family worshipped Aton privately, but the people were denied direct access to the deity. Why he did this is unknown. Perhaps he felt the people were not ready to accept the reform, perhaps there were pressures unknown to us, or perhaps he was just selfish or considered the people unable of comprehending this deity. For that matter the very idea that he denied access to the people is only conjecture. Perhaps he tried and failed, or was opposed by powerful idol-priests.

Was Amenhotep a *seeker* after truth who moved back in a more Biblical direction, even if falling short of understanding God completely? Or was he just another idolator, substituting his pet deity for others and making grandiose claims for him? It seems that the former might have been the case, and if so at least one more family in Egypt's history followed the truth of God, even if they were unable to introduce it officially to the nation. Ultimately, God is the One who will judge Amenhotep, as He will each one of us. We can only guess about this Pharaoh's heart before God, but we can be sure that "the Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Timothy 2:19)./

KING TUT

The son of Akenaton was the famous King Tutankhamen, who ruled in about 1300 B.C. He is famous because his tomb alone escaped the plundering ploys of grave robbers and remained untouched until this century. In his tomb were found a throne of ebony and ivory and a box with two balls of hair wrapped in linen which some believe represents a marriage contract.

The hieroglyphic symbols for Tutankhamen's name refer to Amen, Egypt's protective god, and literally mean "living image of amen," evidence that the Pharaohs still claimed divinity, or that it was ascribed to them by the people.

RELATIONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES DURING THE NEW KINGDOM

During the eighteenth dynasty, Sudan became a tributary to Egypt, contributing greatly of its wealth. The Nubian area was conquered up to the foot of the fourth cataract of the Nile. However, wars broke out with the Nubians and their allies again during the nineteenth dynasty.