

From Abraham to Exodus

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In a previous article,¹ I argued that Abraham was a witness to the demise of the Chalcolithic Ghassul civilization of the Negev and the Jordan — En-gedi area, that this demise was ultimately bound up with the biblical narrative of Chedorlaomer of Elam and his associated kings (Genesis 14), and that the demise of Mesopotamian Chalcolithic culture, that is, the end of the protoliterate period, finds its scene against the background of that record.

I also argued that in the times of the Judges² the Israelite nation was responsible for the end of the early Bronze III (EB III) civilization of western Palestine and northern Trans Jordan.

Having addressed the question of the times of Abraham, and also the times of the Exodus and Conquest, it now behoves us to see whether the archaeological record confirms these identifications by also qualifying for us the details of the intervening period from Abraham to the Exodus.

The period that has been identified as significant in the record of Abraham's life is the end of the Palestinian Chalcolithic or the end of the Ghassul period. This period is notable for the disappearance of the Ghassul Chalcolithic culture of the Jordan Valley, En-gedi and the Israeli Negev. In addition we have identified the conquest of Palestine as occurring under the MB I people (Middle Bronze I). The corresponding dates for the two events are 1870 B.C. for the end of the Ghassul period, and the details of Genesis 14. The date for the conquest of Israel, here equated with the MB I era or, more particularly with the end of Early Bronze III (EB III), is put at 1406 B.C.

So we are in fact dealing with a period between the events of Abraham's life described in Genesis 14 and the conquest of Canaan by Israel in 1406 B.C., a period of 464 years. Into that period we must fit the whole of the Early Bronze age of Palestine (west of the Jordan River), that is, Early Bronze I, II and III (see Figure 1).

If this model is correct, then the whole of the Palestine Early Bronze age to the end of the EB III of western Palestine encompasses approximately 470 years.

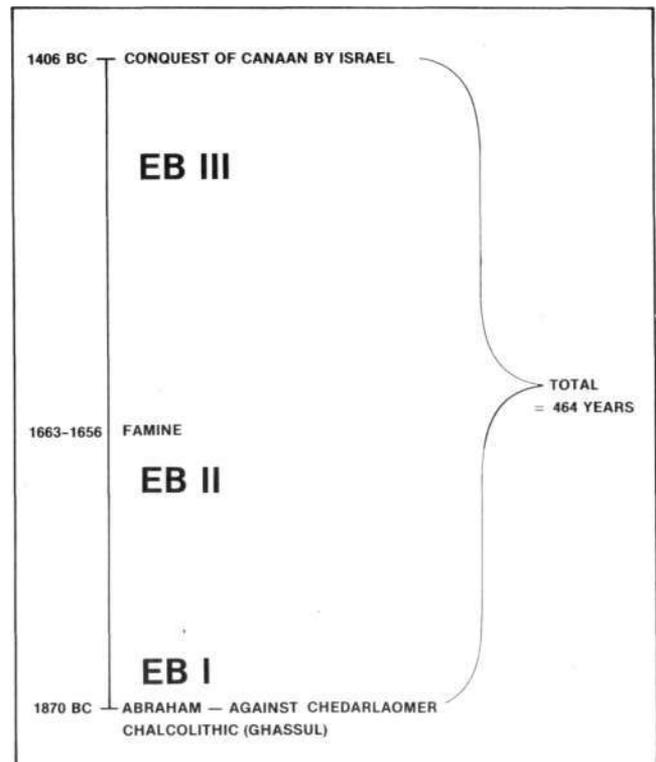


Figure 1. Diagram giving an overview of the period from Abraham to the Exodus and conquest, with time and cultural periods indicated, along with a date for the famine.

By the accepted model it is currently assigned 900 years, from approximately 3000 B.C. to 2100 B.C., that is, almost double the proposed time claimed here.

Nearly halfway through this time period — according to the biblical model — a great famine occurred lasting seven years which affected the entire earth and significantly affected many nations (Genesis 41, especially verses 54-57).

In the archaeological record midway between the beginning and end of the Early Bronze Age (EBA) a significant effect can be noted on the habitation of the land of Canaan. The EB II civilization shrank in area and the further Bronze age was geographically constricted.

It will be reasoned that the most likely explanation of this archaeological phenomenon was in fact the great famine of the Bible in Joseph's day.

There were also two other less significant famines which may also have some relevance:

- (1) During Abraham's life (Genesis 12:10) — on this revised chronology it would have occurred at the end of the Chalcolithic period; and
- (2) During Isaac's life (Genesis 26:1) — perhaps dated approximately 1780 B.C. and fitting on our new time-scale to the Early Bronze I period or EB I/EB II horizon.

A further look at the biblical model provides other significant events which may elaborate on this historical and archaeological model.

OTHER ELEMENTS OF THE BIBLICAL MODEL

Abraham lived for 175 years (Genesis 25:7). At the time of the great battle against Chedorloamer (Genesis 14) he was approximately 80 years old. That means that approximately 95 years of Abraham's life fell within the 464 years as indicated above.

Abraham and his nephew Lot had a number of sons who became significant factors in later Middle Eastern nationhood, and are to be of possible significance for archaeological identifications.

Consider the genealogy as displayed in Figure 2.

THE SONS OF ABRAHAM

- (1) **Ishmael was born in Abraham's 87th year** (approximately). He was 13 years old when the

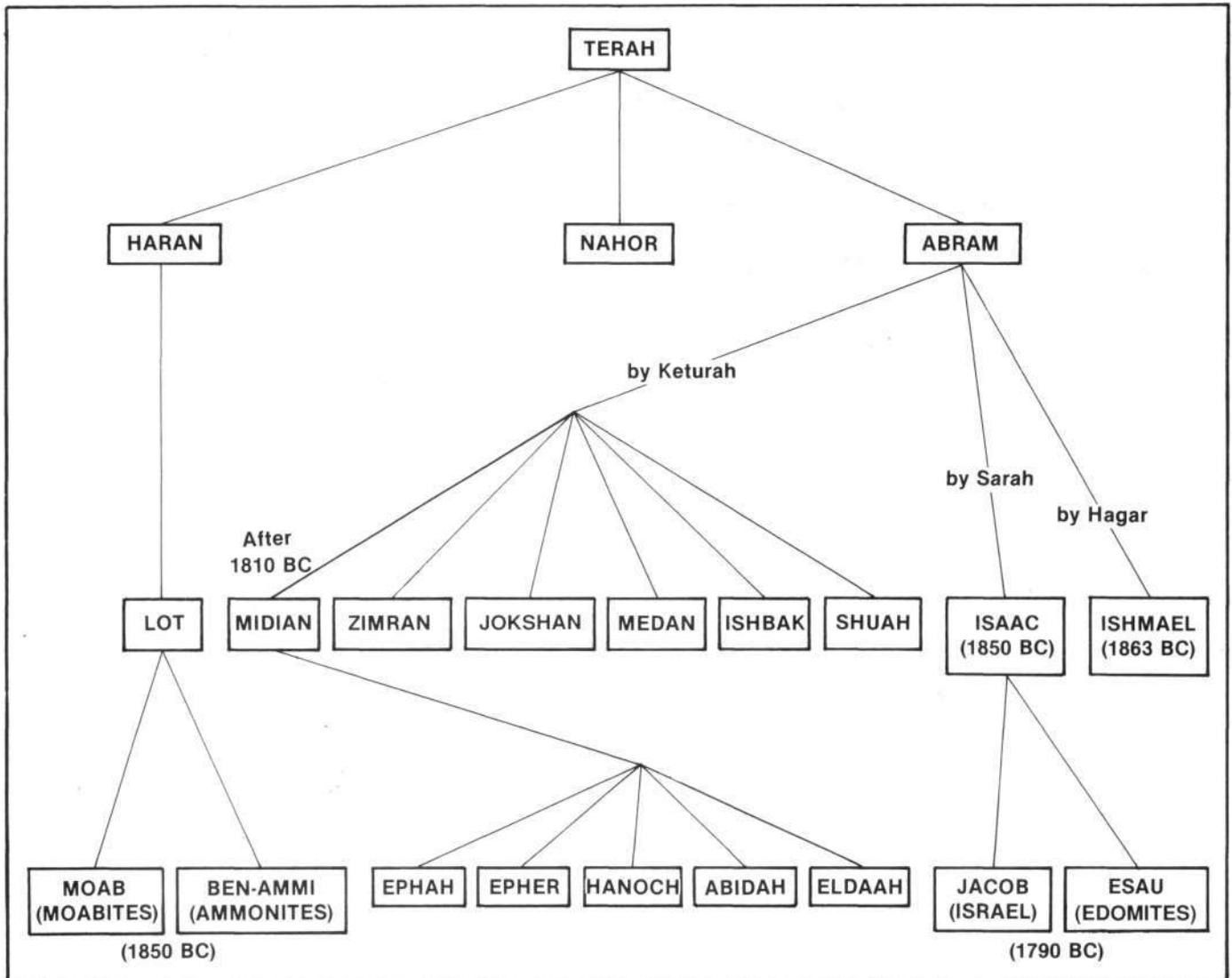


Figure 2. The family tree (genealogy) of Terah and his descendants, including Abram (Abraham).

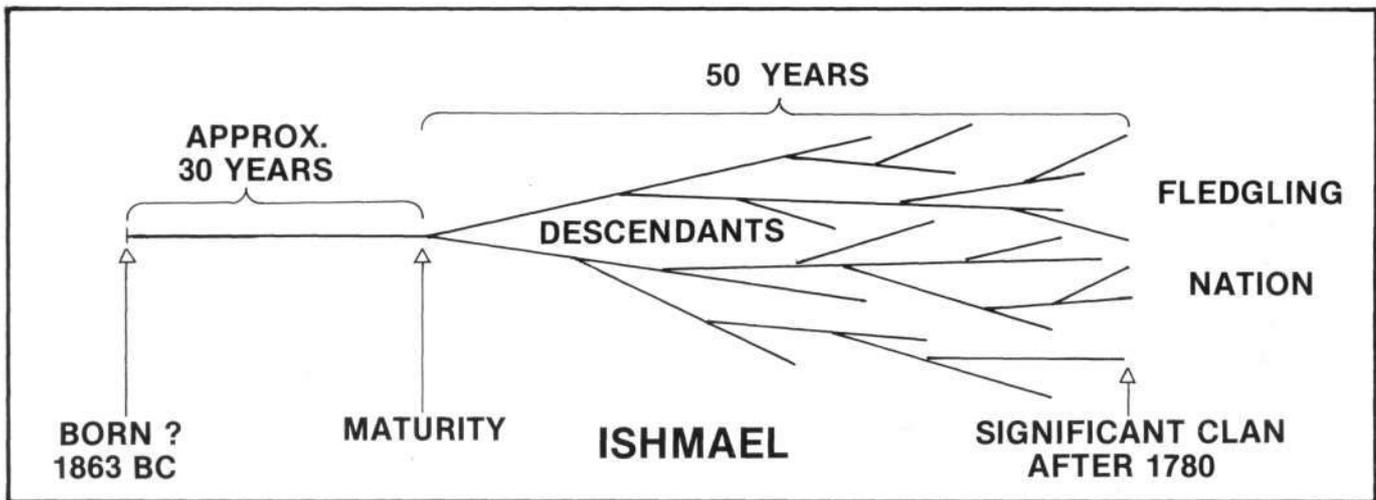


Figure 3. Time-line diagram for the development of a fledgling nation (clan) from Ishmael.

covenant of circumcision was given in Abraham's 99th year, so he was born approximately a year or two before 1860 B.C. If we allow him approximately 30 years for maturity and marriage, and another 50 years for his descendants as a clan to become active even in a minimal way in that area population-wise, then the Ishmaelites would begin to be an active clan (fledgling nation) and archaeologically significant about 1780 B.C.

The early Ishmaelites dwelt **in the Negev** in their earliest days (Genesis 25:18). Against the revised chronology here suggested, this time of early nationhood would begin somewhere around the Early Bronze I period. However, any artifacts corresponding to EB I identified with them would have to presuppose that while they lived in this area, they put their metal technology to work rather than using a Neolithic-type technology (see Figure 3).

(2) **Isaac would have been born in 1850 B.C.** Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat his twelve sons who then moved into Egypt. As a result, the early days of the life of Isaac's descendants, or Israel, would hardly be archaeologically identifiable during these three periods of the Early Bronze.

(3) **Abraham begat other sons** listed in Genesis 25, the most important for our purposes being **Midian** (Genesis 25:2). Other sons mentioned are Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Ishbak and Shuah. In addition the chapter tells us that Jokshan begat Sheba and Dedan. We are further told the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim and Leummin.

Midian had five sons — Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abidah and Eldaah. I will be suggesting at a later period that all these sons can be divided into two groups both called Midian:

- The Generic Midianites. The true descendants of Midian whom I have already attempted to identify with the region west of Moab, but east of the Dead Sea.³
- The other sons of Abraham's wife Keturah. These sons, I suggest, adopted Midian's name. We later meet them in the Book of Judges, particularly in the days of Gideon (Judges 6 and 7).

It is said of all these sons of Abraham by his wife Keturah that he sent them eastward away from Isaac his son and to the country of the east. It should be noted in Judges 6:3 that the Midianites are associated with the Amalekites and the people of the east, but the former Midianites had been destroyed by Moses (Numbers 31).

Sarah died 37 years after Isaac was born (Genesis 23:1). This would bring her death to 1813 B.C. The most logical chronology is that Abraham married Keturah after Sarah's death in 1813 B.C. and that Midian et al were born after this, approximately 1812-1800 B.C. If we work on the basis again of 30 years for Midian's maturity and 50 years more to become active as a clan (fledgling nation), this brings us to 1733 B.C. or approximately 1730 B.C. (see Figure 4). It is at this point they should begin to make their presence felt and perhaps be identifiable in the archaeological record. We would look for that record somewhere in Trans Jordan, particularly in the southern area, possibly in the north-western area of Saudi Arabia, or perhaps even in both areas considering the number of sons to be accounted for here (see Figure 5).

As Midian's effectiveness as a people would begin approximately 1730 B.C. (about 140 years after the end of the Chalcolithic), we would, on the

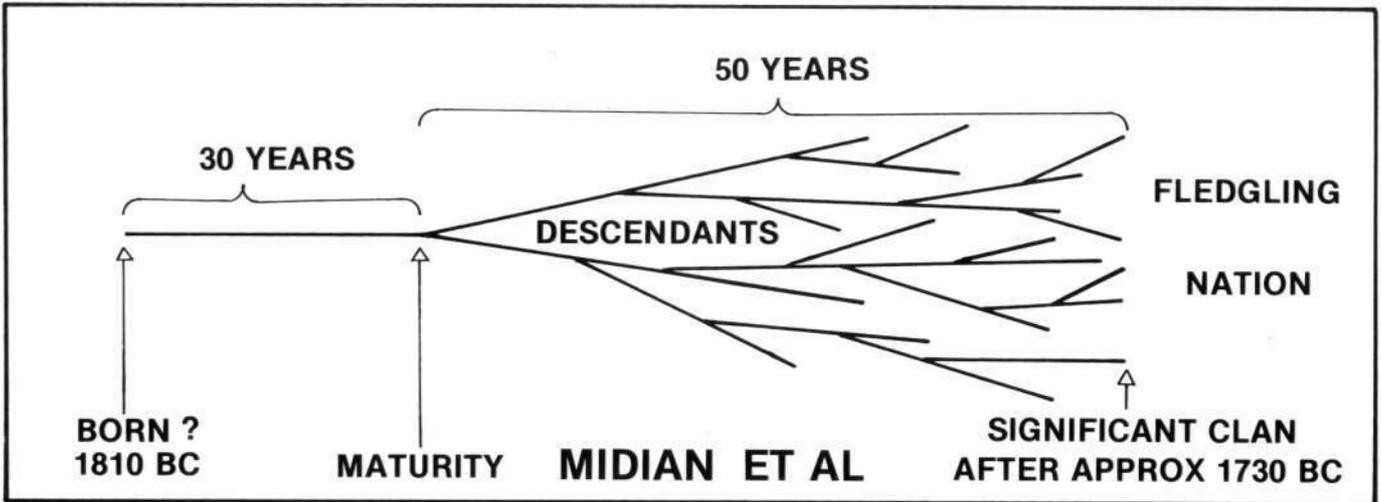


Figure 4. Time-line diagram for the development of a fledgling nation (clan) from Midian.

revised chronology, perhaps be looking for some traces of them at the end of the Early Bronze I and the beginning of Early Bronze II in southern Trans Jordan (see Genesis 25:1-6).

THE SONS OF LOT

Genesis 19:30-38 indicates to us that Lot went into Trans Jordan, and that two sons were born to him incestuously by his two daughters. Their names were **Moab**, from whom sprang the Moabites, and Ben-Ammi, the father of the children of **Ammon**. They were born soon after the catastrophe of Sodom and Gomorrah which we place at approximately 1849 B.C. Thus we would put a date of something like 1845 B.C. through to 1848 B.C. for the birth of these two children. If again we work on the basis of 30 years for maturity and marriage, and another 50 years to become active as a clan effectively for the archaeological record, that brings us to 1765 B.C. at least before we should be able to identify evidence in the archaeological record for these two nations of Moab and Ammon. As this is at least 100 years after the end of the Chalcolithic period of Palestine (here identified with the incidents in Abraham's life in Genesis 14), then we would perhaps expect to find archaeological evidence of the Moabites and Ammonites in Trans Jordan somewhere towards the end of the Early Bronze I period (see Figure 6).

Now the Bible gives us a number of hints as to what we should find in Trans Jordan archaeologically. Deuteronomy 2 tells us that we would be confronted with a number of former inhabitants of the land (probably Canaanites), who were dispossessed by the Moabites, in the later area of Moab referred to as Emim (Deuteronomy 2:10).

To the north-east, we come across the Zamzumim — (Deuteronomy 2:20) who were

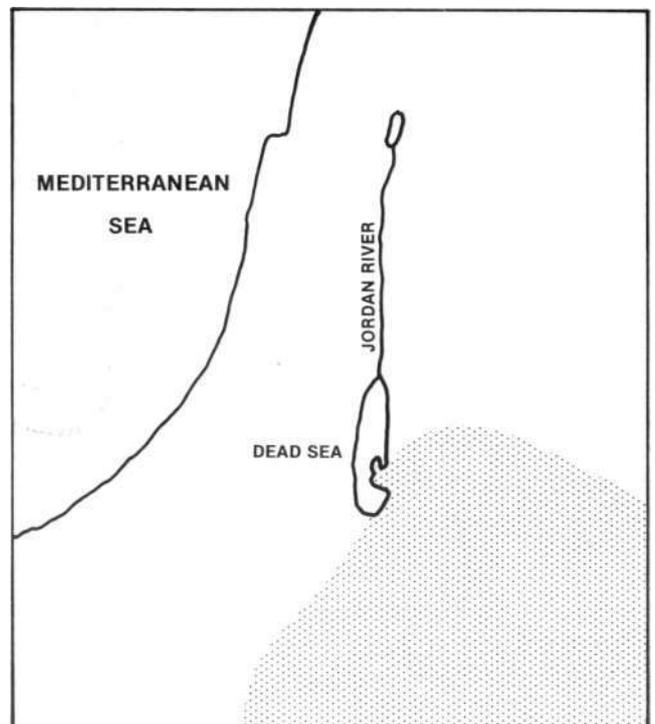


Figure 5. Map showing the geographic location of the approximate area expected to be occupied by the descendants of Abraham by Keturah.

dispossessed by the Ammonites, and in the south we meet the Horites (probably a group of Hivites as Genesis 36:2, 20 and 24 would seem to indicate and positively reject as fanciful the equation Horites = Hurrians). These were dispossessed by the descendants of Esau or the Edomites (Deuteronomy 2:12). In the areas of Moab and Ammon, and the possible Midianite areas west of Moab, we would perhaps then look for activity associated with these

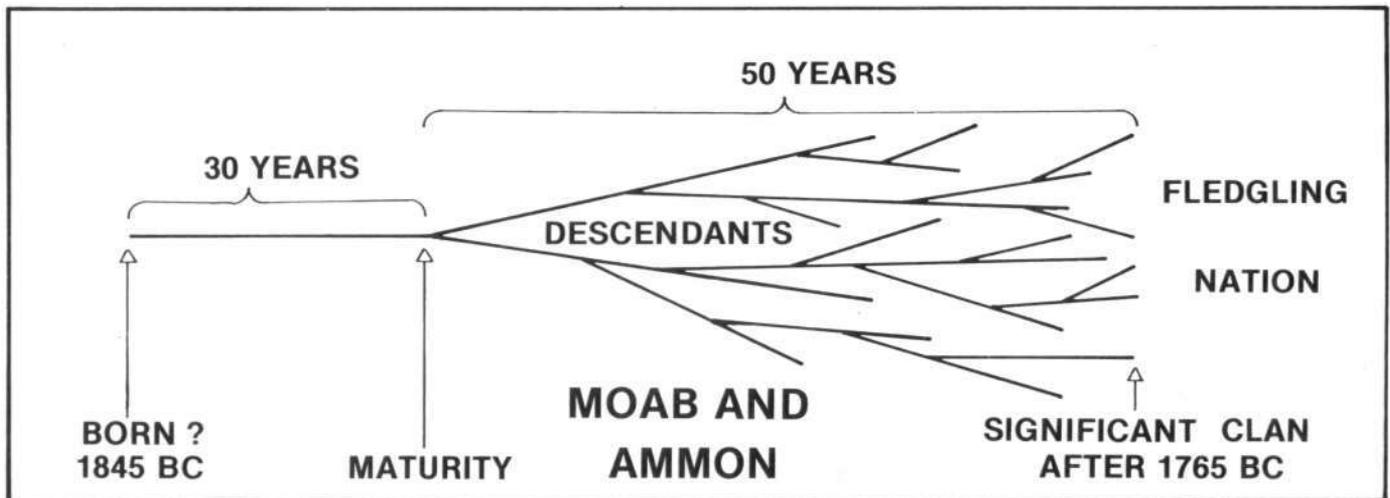


Figure 6. Time-line diagram for the development of fledgling nations (clans) from Moab and Ammon.

acts of dispossession towards the end of the Early Bronze I. We would look for evidence of conquest and of a change of population, but would not rule out surviving elements of the former culture entirely (see Figure 7).

ESAU (EDOM)

Esau's father, Isaac, was born approximately 1850 B.C. His twin sons, Jacob and Esau, were born 60 years later (Genesis 25:26) in approximately 1790 B.C. If again we take 30 years from maturation of Esau and another 50 years to see evidence of his clan's activity archaeologically, we come to 1710 B.C. This is approximately 160 years after the Chedorlaomer incident in the life of Abraham (1870 B.C.) or 160 years after the end of the Chalcolithic era of Palestine, somewhere around the end of Early Bronze I or the early part of Early Bronze II (see Figures 8 and 9).

Genesis 36:31-39 gives us a chronology of the Edomite rulers.

Esau was born 1790 B.C. and was obviously the patriarchal ruler. We would expect him, like Jacob, to probably reach at least a century in age. The first king of Edom should thus be deferred to later than 1690 B.C. or approximately 1700 B.C. (see Figure 10). We would expect on the revised chronology to cover later EB II — EB III in Edom. (For a summary of the pre-Hebrew inhabitants of Canaan and Trans Jordan see Figure 11.) The Edomites intermingled by marriage and conquest with the Horites and dispossessed them (Genesis 36:1-30).

THE GREAT FAMINE -

The next significant event that may be an archaeological marker is the beginning of the great

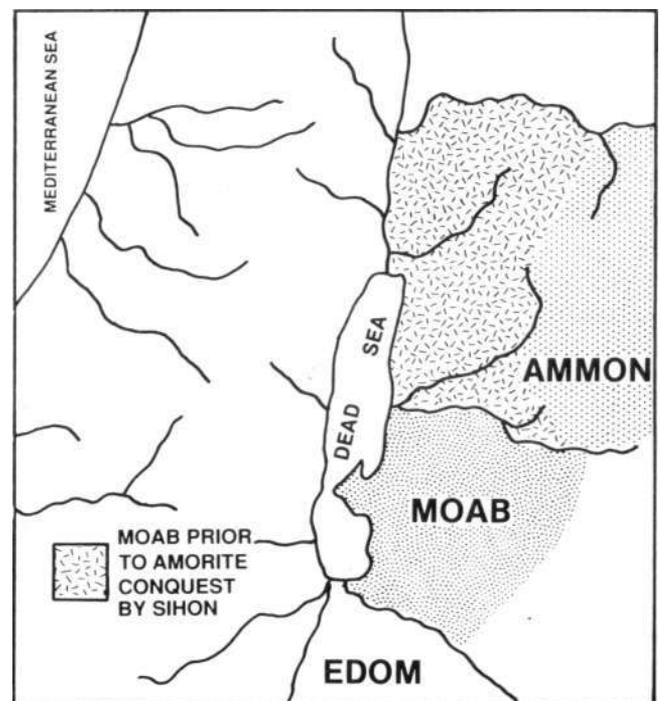


Figure 7. Map showing the geographic distribution of the descendants of Lot.

famine, and the details of Scripture allow us to date the beginning of this famine to approximately 1662 B.C.

A famine of this magnitude of which it was testified, Genesis 47:13, ". . . for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and all the land of Canaan languished because of the famine" (NKJV), should have a massive effect on the population distribution of Palestine, and by its date we would look for evidence in the archaeological records somewhere towards the end of Early Bronze II.

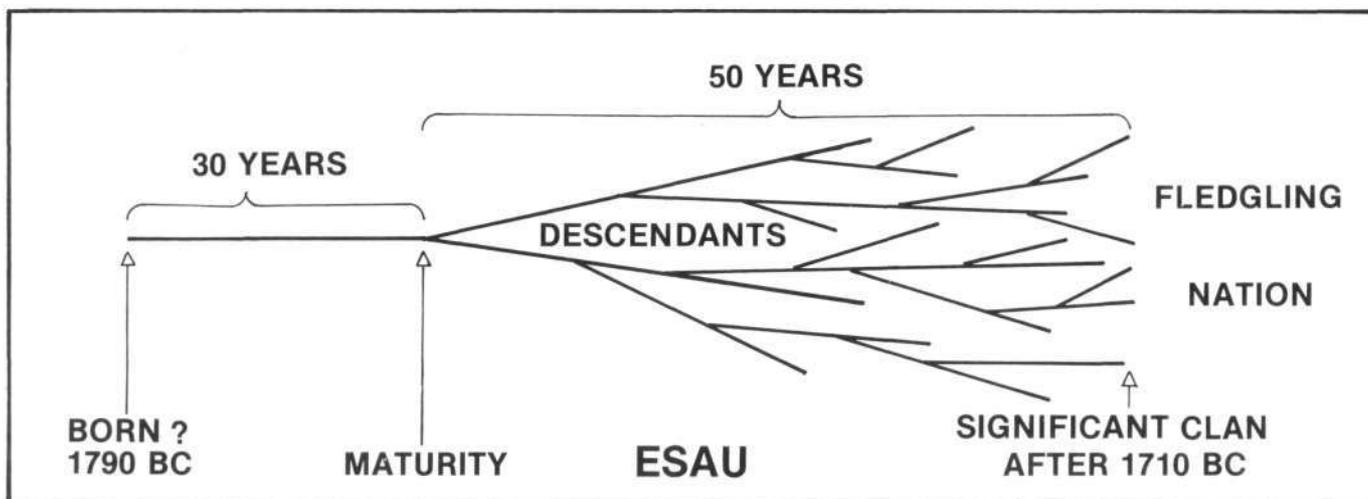


Figure 8. Time-line diagram for the development of a fledgling nation (clan) from Esau.

We have dated the conquest of Palestine and therefore the end of Early Bronze III to 1406 B.C., leaving a total of 256 years from the great famine until the Israelite conquest. On the revised chronology here presented we would expect a large portion of that period to be occupied by Early Bronze III.

The only other point of merit is the incident regarding Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, who attacked the city of Shechem. If this in fact resulted in a cessation of the habitation at Shechem as it appears to have, then we would expect to find a city corresponding in time, and evidencing a habitation break. This would be most likely confined to the Early Bronze I period.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

When dealing archaeologically with Trans Jordan, we find a large deficiency of information, and that because of the dearth of excavation until recently.

I have reasoned that the Ghassul IV culture of Trans Jordan and En-gedi was Amorite in the days of Abraham's early life in Canaan,⁴ and that its demise as recognised culture was due to the conquests of Chedarlaomer (Genesis 14) of Elam, approximately 1870 B.C.

Rarely in the annals of human conquest does such an event totally exterminate a people. We would expect a remnant to have survived in Trans Jordan and to rise culturally. In this case it would be called Early Bronze I but would show Ghassul Chalcolithic affiliations.

The area of Southern Syria and Trans Jordan is associated with the Amorites in biblical thought. Indeed, Southern Syria was called by Mesopotamian peoples 'Amurru' a word derivative from Amorite. It

may be worthwhile extending the hypothesis to cover Jawa in the Black Desert.

In any case Trans Jordan in the EB I should have connections with Trans Jordan Chalcolithic by this hypothesis, and this I have clearly associated with the Amorites. Now the Moabites and Ammonites, the Scriptures tell us, displaced the Emmins and Zuzims (Zamzummim — Deuteronomy 2:20) whom we here reason to be Amorites. According to our scale this would have taken place at approximately the **end of Early Bronze I, so that a cultural discontinuity should occur at the end of Early Bronze I** in the area between Wadi El Hesi (Brook Zered] in the south and Wadi Zerqa (the Jabbok) in the north.

The Early Bronze II of the same area (EB II) here would be equated with Moab and Ammon, plus or minus an admixture of the previous inhabitants (see Figure 12).

At the end of EB II we should expect a contraction of culture and a diminution of numbers due to the great famine, followed by a growth in EB III and IV to correspond to Moab and Ammon in the days of Israel's conquest. Added to this is the fact that the Amorites under Sihon had newly conquered the area between Jabbok and Arnon, and were holding it in captivity — a previous Moabite territory but also later claimed by Ammon (Judges 11:13).

Midian is associated with Moab early and late (Genesis 36:35 and Numbers 25:1, Numbers 22:7, Numbers 31:15-16), and a case has been made for associating the western culture of the Moabite area near the Dead Sea with Midian, e.g. Bab ed- Dhra and Numeira, etc.⁵

This overall picture is just what emerges from the archaeological record as it presently stands, having regard for the present dearth of excavation. That EB was a continuous culture with the defunct

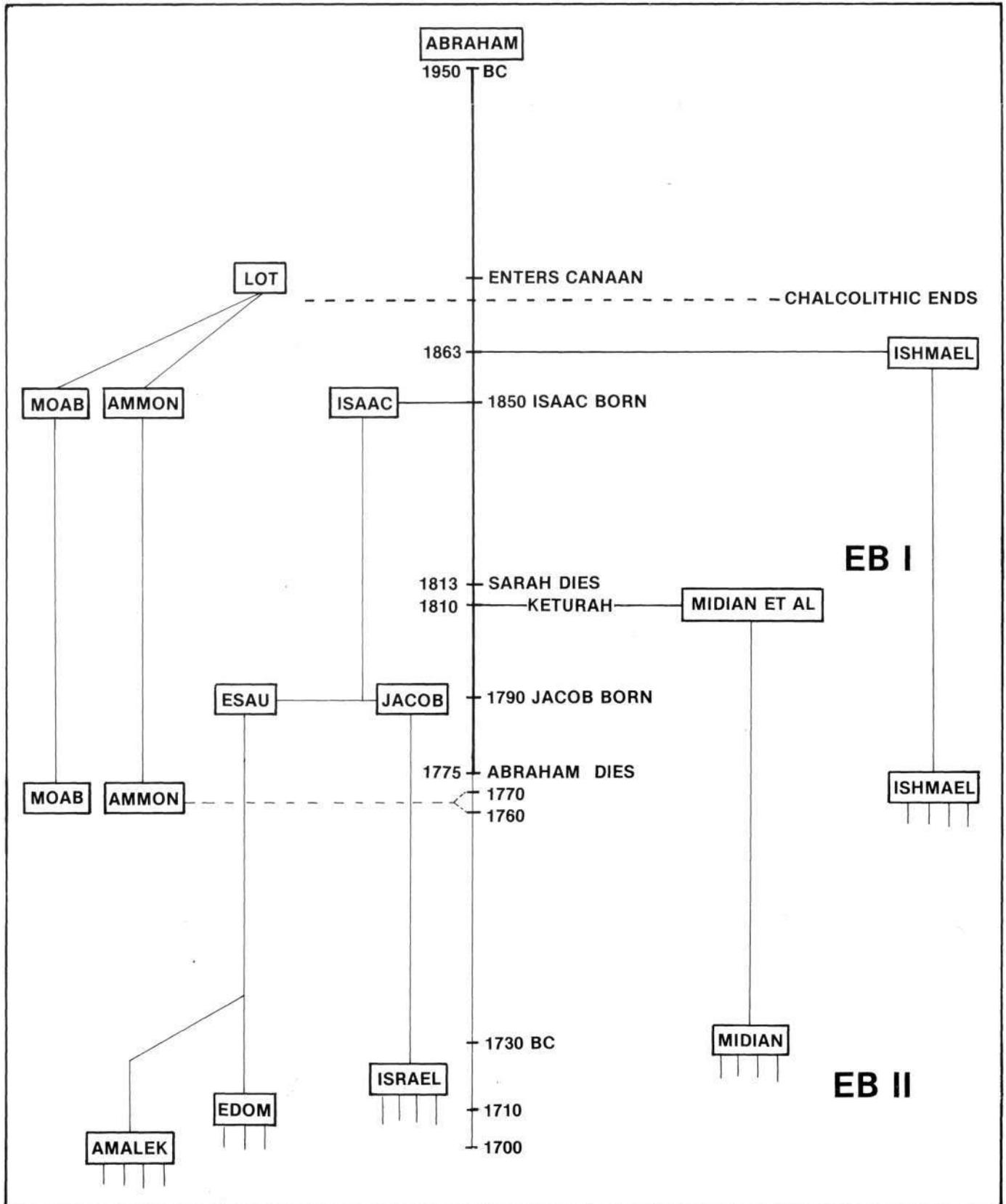


Figure 9. Diagram summarising the time development of the 'Hebrew nations'.

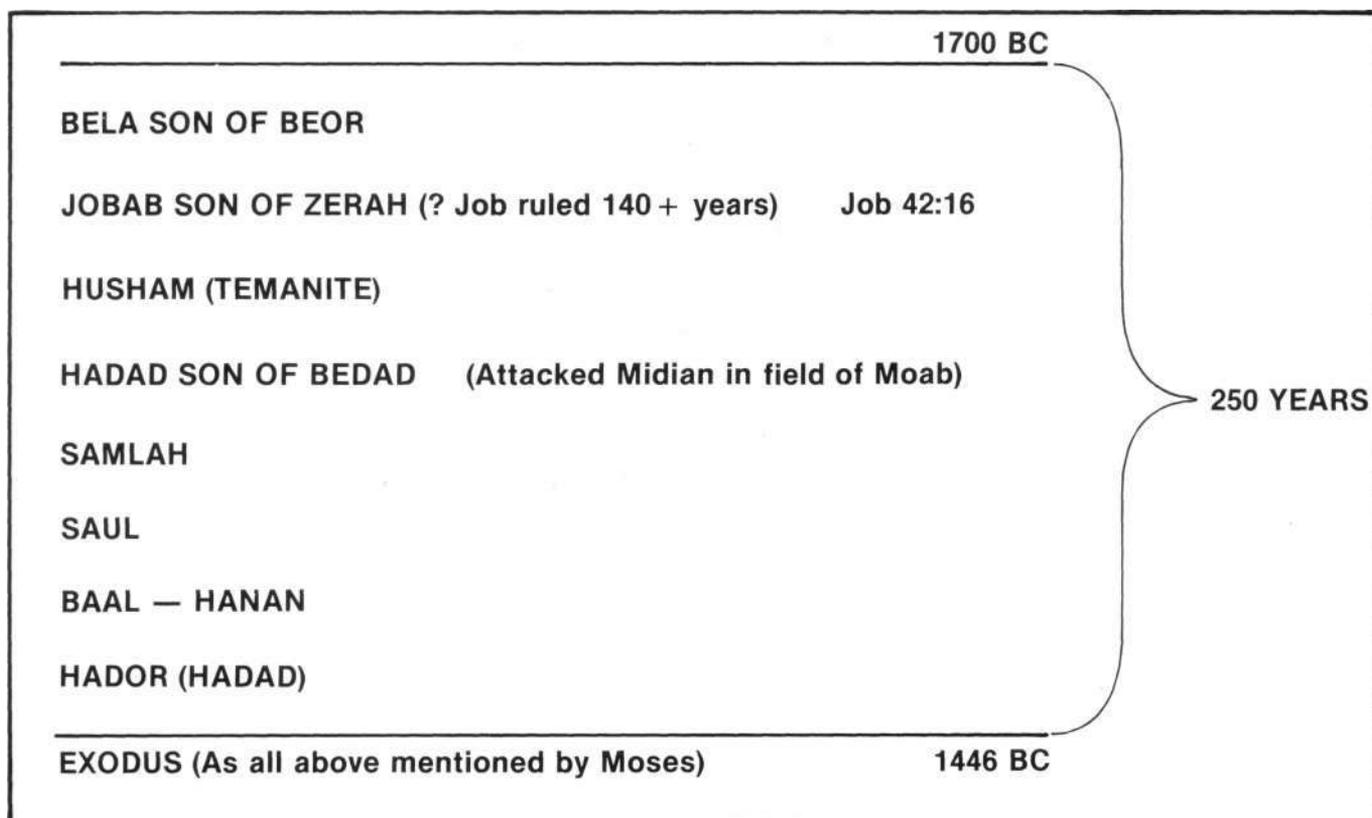


Figure 10. Diagram tabulating the pre-Hebrew inhabitants of Canaan and Trans Jordan whose generations fit into the 250 year period prior to the Exodus.

Ghassulian culture emerges in Leonard's discussion⁶ of the Kataret es-Samra Plateau near the confluence of Jabbok and Jordan (see Figure 12 and 13).

The surface collection from Kataret es-Samra has demonstrated man's presence in this stark region during the second half of the fourth millennium B.C. and, although both the ceramic and lithic material suggest assignment to the Proto Urban/Early Bronze I horizon, they also exhibit frequent ties with the Chalcolithic Ghassul-Beer-Sheba 'culture'.⁶ (Emphasis ours)

In relation to the same general area but at Tell Umm Hammad esh-Sharqiya, Helms says:

*"In general we have begun to show a continuous ceramic development **unbroken perhaps from Ghassul IV onwards** which is enriched or supplemented by 'exotic' wares whose designations as such (exotic) may well be in our minds alone rather than in those of the valley villagers of the later fourth millennium B.C. ... The only new name I have added here is Ghassul 'V, with Hennessy's blessing (personal comment)."⁷* (Emphasis ours)

And further south in the area of the Dead Sea Plain (Bab ed-Dhra and Numeira) the same picture emerges. Concerning the 1981 season of excavations:

*"The interpretation of the EB I A horizon as a representative type of pastoralism with **some continuing links to the Late Chalcolithic** was bolstered. In addition two sets of evidence obtained in 1981 supported the notion of a gradual transmutation from non-sedentary to more permanent occupation of the site."^{*}* (Emphasis ours)

In summary, in Trans Jordan in several areas (while the essential force of the Ghassul culture disappeared) life continued with some modification. There is evidence of continuation of the Chalcolithic culture in the EB I period — in agreement with our new model.

In this area EB I is divided into the two periods EB IA and EB IB with change, but essential continuation, from one to the other.

But at the end of EB IB and the beginning of EB II, violence and conquest became apparent. In our model, this corresponds to the flexing of the young Midianite, Moabite and Ammonite cultures, in action

PALESTINE	TRANS JORDAN	
<p>UP TO 1406 BC</p> <p>7 CANAANITE NATIONS</p>	<p>UP TO 1760 BC</p> <p>ZUZIMS } EMIMS }</p>	<p>END EB I</p> <p>CANAANITES</p>
	<p>UP TO 1730 BC</p> <p>EMIMS — BEFORE MIDIANITE</p>	<p>EARLY EB II</p>
	<p>UP TO 1700 BC</p> <p>HORITES IN SEIR (HIVITE — CANAANITES)</p>	<p>MID EB II</p>
	<p>(The equation Horites = Hurrians has no basis in fact and is here considered fanciful.)</p>	

Figure 11. Table summarising the sequence of pre-Hebrew inhabitants of Canaan and Trans Jordan.

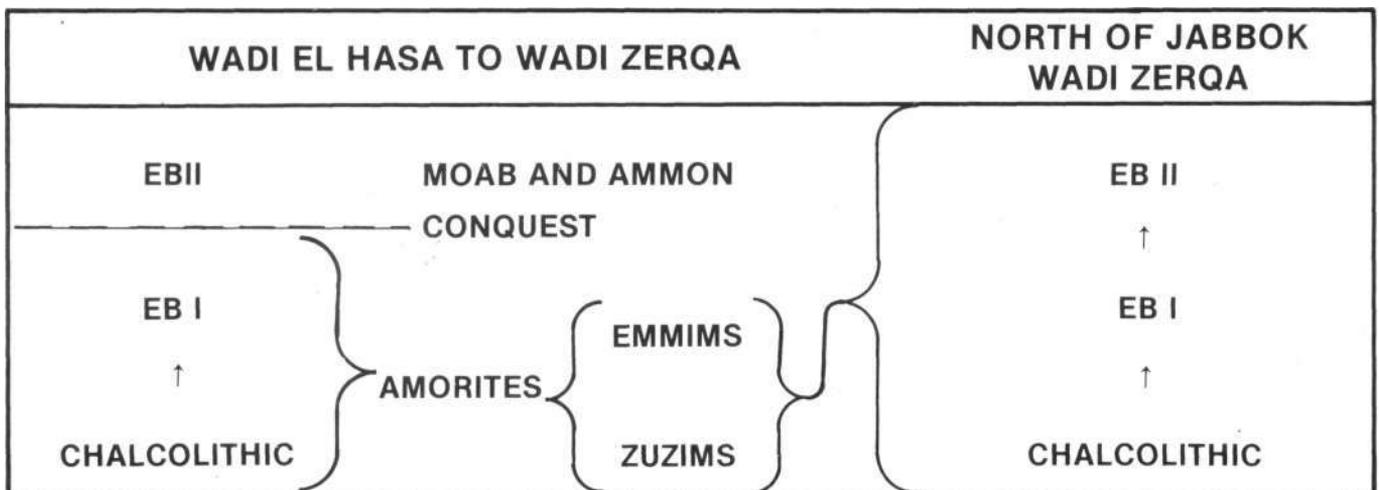


Figure 12. Diagram comparing the Chalcolithic to EB II events and peoples between two areas in Trans Jordan.

against the incumbent Amorites.

As Schaub and Rast point out, in the south:

*"Of particular interest was the burning usually associated with the EB IB structures. . . . That this burning may point to an assault against the EB IB settlement is suggested by unusuai evidence in one of the EB IB tombs."*⁹

And in the north at Tell umm Hammad, Helms states:

*"There is evidence of cultural continuity between stages 2 and 3, with the introduction of other pottery [repertoires.] There is a greater break between stages 3 and 4, the latter (typologically EB II) consisting of at least three phases."*¹⁰ (Emphasis ours)

EB II AND THE FAMINE

The Early Bronze II period of the Holy Land gives different perspectives regionally. The model here proposed equates EB II from about 1770 to 1660 B.C., and in terms of the biblical patriarchs begins around Abraham's death and ends with the great famine, when Israel went into Egypt.

Additional to this model, EB II Trans Jordan between Wadi Zerqa (biblical Jabbok) and Wadi el Hasa (biblical Zered) is proposed as Midianite/Moabite/Ammonite — among a small remnant of Amorites from the defunct former Ghassul, now EB I, culture.

South of Wadi el Hasa we may theorise EB II to be Ishmaelite and the descendants of Keturah (excluding Midian), and the Horites in its more northerly area.

Now all these peoples had close previous connections with western Palestine, so we would not expect a substantial difference in cultural traits both sides of the Jordan. EB II western Palestine would be Canaanite and we would expect a continuation to be obvious between EB I and EB II, whereas in Trans Jordan we expect a discontinuity. This in fact exists (as discussed) between Wadi Zerqa and Wadi el Hasa (see Figure 12 again).

What then do we find in EB II?

Certainly Amiram admits to continuity between EB I and EB II in both western and eastern Palestine, despite apparent differences as well.

Of chalices:

*"Alternatively, it should perhaps be considered as an echo of the chalcolithic tradition, which as we saw above, is also evident in the Gray Burnished Ware of EB I."*¹¹

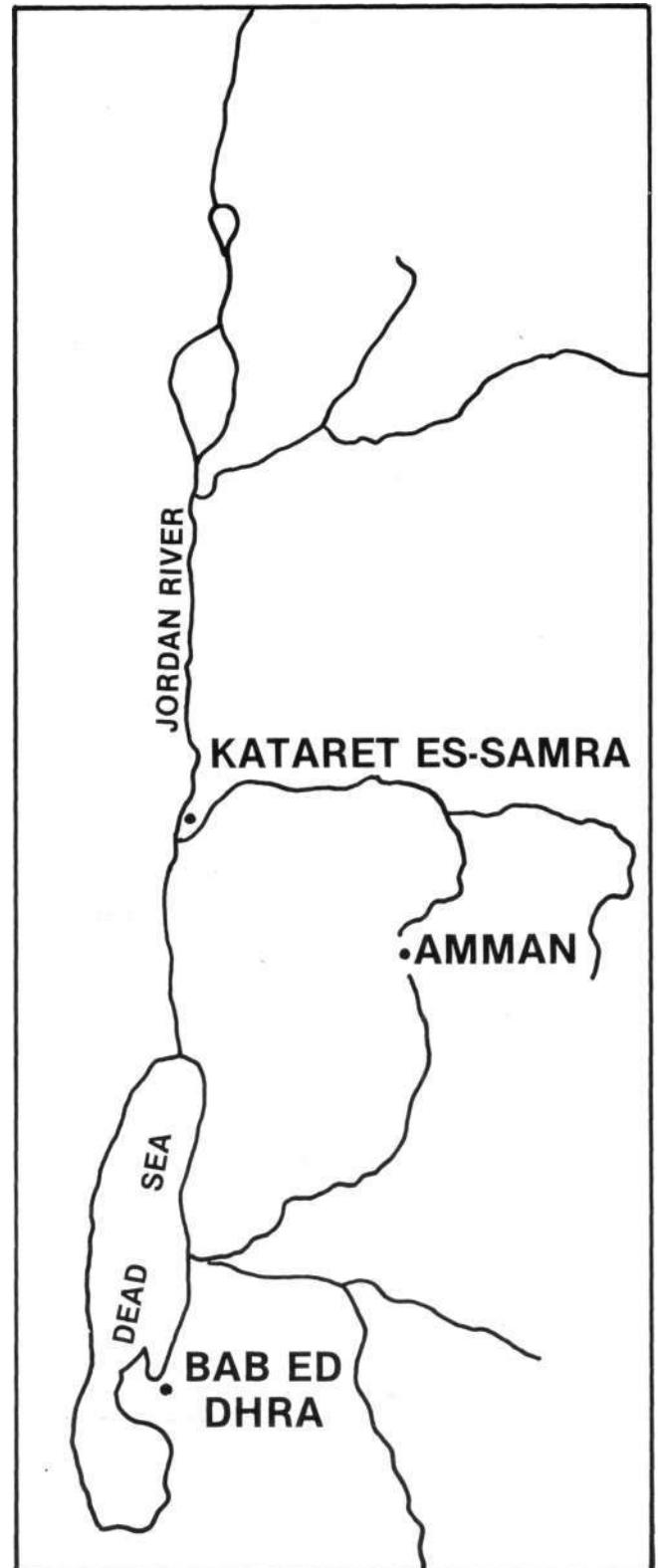


Figure 13. Map showing the location of Kateret es-Samra at the confluence of the Jordan and Zerqa Rivers, and of Bab ed-Dhra near the Dead Sea.

Of amphoriskai:

"Vessels like no. 14, painted in the Southern 'line group' style, continue to appear, but to much lesser extent than in the preceding period."¹²

Of twin-vessels:

"We met this type earlier in EB I."¹³

Of juglets:

"No. 13 is a continuation of juglet and amphoriskos, and shows that this hybrid type TONfews, to appear:-,"¹⁴

Of jars:

"The tradition of the previous period continues though with a number of significant changes . . . Tubular handles, encountered since the chalcolithic period, continue to be made."¹⁵

Thus in Palestine a definite continuity occurs, but in much of Trans Jordan there is discontinuity between EB I and EB II.

EB II moreover was an expansive culture, one of the most expansive, and one of heavy urbanization.

"This period is justifiably designated as the period of urbanization. Large sites and walled cities have been discovered and some partly excavated throughout Palestine from the forested hills of Upper Galilee to the Negev of Arad."¹⁶

THE EXTENT OF EB II

In western Palestine EB II is found from north to south. Essentially three pottery cultures can be distinguished. This suggests the possibility of at least three cultural groups in western Palestine at this time.

These groups are (after Aharoni¹⁷):

In the north —

- (1) A red burnished ware;
- (2) Gray burnished ware (the Esdraelon culture);

And in the south —

- (3) A red banded pottery.

In the south the extent of the expansiveness can be seen, most particularly in the city of Arad. A city on the edge of a wilderness, it produced a number of satellite settlements particularly in mining areas, in the Negev and Sinai (see Figure 14). These areas have been reported by Itzhak Beit Arieh.¹⁸

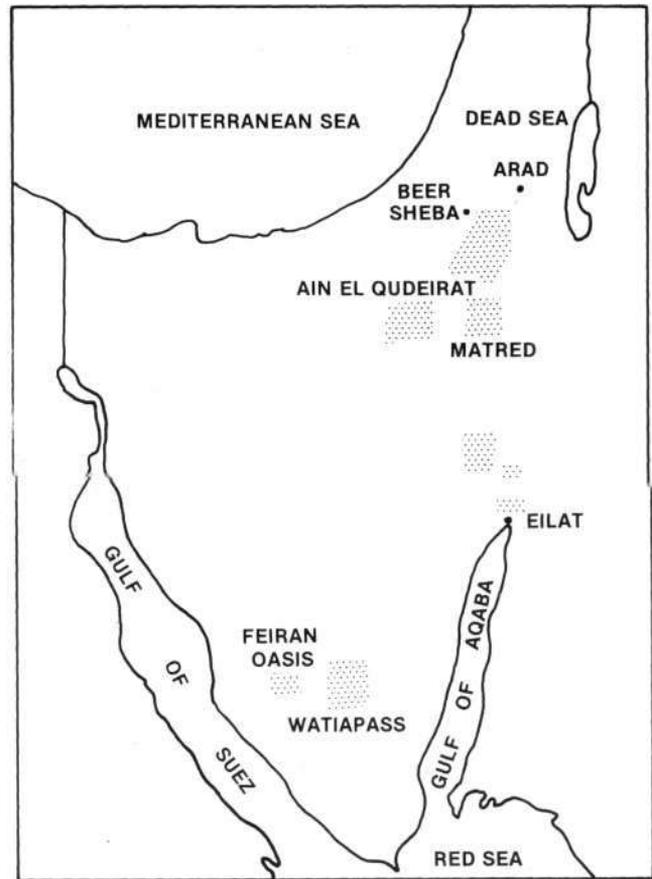


Figure 14. Map showing the location of EB II Arad and the geographic distribution of its satellites.

With such an extreme and active population spread over the Negev and Sinai one could expect firm cultural advancement. But the picture does not emerge of such.

Instead, at the end of Early Bronze II Arad became a ghost town and her satellites disappeared. What was the cause? Amiram¹⁹ produces evidence that level II at Arad was destroyed, and allows the possibility that kings of the later Second Dynasty of Egypt were involved.

Stratum I of Arad, the latest stratum, indicates a short continuation of the EB II population of Arad who survived the attack of the end of Stratum II. Why did they not continue? Why did these civilizations end along with those at Tell Masos, Tell Esdar and Tell Malhata, as well as the satellites in the Negev and Sinai? It is hard to believe that the Egyptian attack ended it all. The Egyptians showed nowhere near the ruthlessness of the later Assyrians and generally were more interested in subjugation than destruction.

I believe the key lies in the climate. Arad and its satellites were always in a fragile position climatically. A famine of the type that Joseph

witnessed would truly wipe them out, especially if they were weakened by a previous attack. The explanation of the EB II demise in the south is in line with the biblical model.

It is on scale chronologically for the famine. On the revised chart²⁰ it is consistent with the archaeological record and it corresponds to a severe famine during the reign of Unas mentioned in Egyptian records, corresponding to the end of EB II Palestine. (Courville²¹ has discussed a possible revised Egyptian chronology of that period.)

In the western Negev Tell Haror (?Gerar) breaks after EB II.²² Less information is available in Trans Jordan. But at Tell urn Hammad,²³ there is a clear end to the EB II occupation followed by a gap. The nature of the end of EB II occupation however is not stated, but a clear gap in occupation thereafter, at that site at least, is mentioned. It is unlikely that this was due to an Egyptian attack.

No interruption was found at Bab ed-Dhra,²⁴ but if our equation with the Midianites is correct then this is consistent.

EB II information is in short supply. The period is ill understood. However, the evidence available suggests a boom in civilization which came to an abrupt constriction, and the great famine would be a satisfactory solution to the problem. Therefore, we should consider dating the end of EB II to around 1660 B.C.

It can be seen that there was a constriction of population (in terms of cities inhabited) at the end of EB II. Particularly was this so in the Negev, and in central Trans Jordan.

EB III (a larger period)

From our initial diagram (see Figure 1), it can be seen that the revised chronology allows 210 years for the EB I and EB II period and a massive 260 years for the EB III. This marked increase in time for the EB III is borne out archaeologically. For example, Tell el Hesi witnesses a significant number of EB III phases, as does Tell Yarmut and Tell Halif. New settlements also occur, e.g. Tel Beit Mirsim.

SHECHEM

The inhabitants of this city were either destroyed or captured by Jacob's family, which would correspond to Early Bronze I—II. The Bible seems to indicate that it was not again occupied until the Israelites returned from Egypt.

Descendants at Hamor and Shechem in the story of Abimelech (Judges 9) are easy enough to account for when we realise that his wives and children were taken captive by Jacob's sons and went with them into Egypt. In a world where tradition was important,

the descendants of those who survived the conquest of Shechem may well have returned to the Shechem area after the conquest and their return from Egypt.

So we should have a Chalcolithic to Early Bronze I or II only at Shechem, followed by a Middle Bronze age, but no EB III according to the revised chronology.

What we find (despite the limitations of the excavation) is an extensive settlement of the Chalcolithic period.²⁵ Occupation in Early Bronze was evident, even if not sufficiently defined.²⁶ The Early Bronze representation was apparently an early part of the Early Bronze.²⁷

The next occupation and major period was the Middle Bronze from MB IIA — MB IIC, with destruction in MB IIC. On the revised chronology this was Israel during the days of the Judges, pottery of MB I being represented before these.

Shechem was rebuilt during LB I and continued through Iron I. This here corresponds to the city of Jeroboam I and probably the Bethel of Northern Israel through the divided Monarchy.²⁸

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