

CHAPTER XI

PALESTINE IN THE PATRIARCHAL AGE

THE TALE OF SINUHE. COMMUNICATION BETWEEN EGYPT AND PALESTINE.
ASIATICS IN EGYPT.

1. The Tale of Sinuhe.---In the year 1970 B.C., when Amenemhet I died and was succeeded by Sesostri I, an Egyptian of high rank, named Sinuhe, for some reason now unknown to us, fled from Egypt to Asia. The details of his escape from Egypt are not of interest to the Biblical student, but his description of the hardships encountered in the desert and of his experience in eastern Palestine are of great value, as they afford us our earliest descriptions of that country outside the Bible. The following extract begins just after Sinuhe had told how he escaped the guards in the fort, which stood at the eastern frontier of Egypt.

I went on at the time of evening,
As the earth brightened, I arrived at Peten.
When I had reached the lake of Kemwer,
I fell down for thirst, fast came my breath,
My throat was hot,
I said: "This is the taste of death."
I upheld my heart, I drew my limbs together,
As I heard the sound of lowing cattle,
I beheld the Bedawin.
That chief among them, who had been in Egypt, recognized me.
He gave me water, he cooked for me milk.
I went with him to his tribe,
Good was that which they did (for me).
One land sent me on to another,
I loosed for Suan,
I arrived at Kedem;
I spent a year and a half there.
Emuiensche, that sheik of Upper [Ru]tenu, brought me forth

Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, I

Saying to me: "Happy art thou with me,
He said this (for) he knew my character,
He had heard my wisdom;
The Egyptians, who were there with him, bare witness of me.

The Amorite chieftain then questioned Sinuhe concerning his flight. He gave evasive answers, merging with his reply a long hymn in praise of the king. After this Emuiensche said to him:

"Behold, thou shalt now abide with me;
Good is that which I shall do for thee."
He put me at the head of his children,
He married me to his eldest daughter,

He made me select for myself of his land,
 Of the choicest of that which he had,
 On his boundary with another land.
 It was a goodly land, named Yaa;
 There were figs in it and vines,
 More plentiful than water was its wine,
 Copious was its honey, plenteous its oil;
 All fruits were upon its trees.
 Barley was there and spelt,
 Without end all cattle.
 Moreover, great was that which came to me,
 Which came for love of me,
 When he appointed me sheik of the tribe,
 From the choicest of his land.
 I portioned the daily bread,
 And wine for every day,
 Cooked flesh and fowl in roast;
 Besides the wild goats of the hills,
 Which were trapped for me, and brought to me;
 Besides that which my dogs captured for me.
 There was much---made for me,
 And milk in every sort of cooked dish.
 I spent many years,
 My children became strong,
 Each the mighty man of his tribe.
 The messenger going north,
 Or passing southward to the court,
 He turned in to me.
 For I had all men turn in (to me).

The tale goes on concerning the personal prowess of Sinuhe, who, in his old age, returned to Egypt and made his peace with the king.

2. Communication between Egypt and Palestine.---This document from the early patriarchal age reveals a close relationship between Egypt and Palestine. There was frequent communication between Kedem and Egypt; messengers went to and fro. The Egyptian language was understood at the court of the Amorite

chieftain. These conditions throw light on the narratives of descent of Abraham and Jacob to Egypt. Sinuhe's description of his life necessarily reminds one of the descriptions of Palestine so often met with in the Pentateuch, Joshua, and the prophets, "a land flowing with milk and honey." (See, for example, Exod. 3: 8, 17.)

3. Asiatics in Egypt.---The entrance of Abraham and later of Jacob and his sons into Egypt during time of famine (Gen. 12:10 and 47:5-12) is strikingly illuminated by the following reports of officials stationed at fortresses on the Egyptian border.

The first of these texts was inscribed in the tomb on Harmhab, the founder of the nineteenth dynasty, though there is reason to believe that it was written during the reign of Amenophis IV of the eighteenth dynasty (1375-1357 B.C.). Some of the lines are broken. It reads as follows:

.....Asiatics; others have been placed in their abodes.....they have been destroyed, and their town laid waste, and fire has been thrown.....[they have come to entreat] the Great in Strength to send his mighty sword before.....Their countries are starving, they live like goats of the mountain, [their] children.....saying: "A few of the Asiatics, who know not how they should live, have come [begging] [a home in the domain] of Pharaoh....., after the manner of your fathers' fathers' since the beginning under.....Now, the Pharaoh.....gives them into your hand, to protect their borders."

The second text comes from the reign of Merneptah (1225-1215 B.C.). It reads as follows:

Another matter for the satisfaction of my lord's heart [to wit]: We have finished passing the tribes of the Shasu of Edom through the fortress of Merneptah-Hotepirma.....in Theku, to the pools of Pithom, of Merneptah-Hotepirma.....in Theku, in order to sustain them and their herds in the domain of Pharaoh....., the good sun of every land.....I have caused them to be brought.....other names of days when the fortress of Merneptah-Hotepirma may be passed,.....

These texts make it evident that at different periods of Egyptian history Asiatic tribes in time of famine and stress sought and found refuge in Egypt as the Israelites are said to have done.

Taken from Breasted, *Ancient Records, Egypt*, III, p 7.