

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

The Mysterious Habiru

In our attempt to understand events surrounding Abraham, and the people of Israel, we must keep certain factors in mind.

The family of Terah was not an isolated social unit which somehow inherited all of Adam's genes while the rest of the world ran on without that benefit. There may have been hundreds of such family units scattered around the Near East. The Akkadian *Adamatu* illustrate those Adamic blood lines. Terah was part of a Semitic stock which had divided into various branches and groups including the Akkadians, Amorites, old Assyrians, old Chaldeans, Canaanites, and so on. The family of Terah was merely part of that tribal and linguistic diversity.

By the time of Abraham the Semitic languages had developed various branches and dialects. The clay-tablet records from Sumeria, Babylonia, Mari, Canaan and Egypt show the diversity in 2000 BC. Hebrew was not some magical language which had been preserved intact from the time of Adam; it was one branch of the Semitic languages which had developed its own peculiarities. Fortunately, for us, it retained those roots which we now recognize in the world-wide name phenomena. Some scholars speculate that the people we know as the Hebrews did not use that language as their original tongue but adapted it from their Canaanite neighbors when they moved into that territory^{HOI}. However, the weight of linguistic evidence from around the world speaks against such supposition. We simply do not have sufficient knowledge of those times to say which language resided in which territory by which group of people and how the people and the languages may have moved and mixed from one area to another. But we now know with a wealth of explicit evidence that Hebrew was the path God used to keep his secrets.

Those Near East scholars who worked from 1850 to 1950 saw themselves as extremely fortunate to be opening new vistas into the planetary past. In their pride they strained to show erudition and expert knowledge in effort to elevate their reputations. Such motivations naturally colored their thoughts and their actions. They rigidly classified languages and groups, hardly providing room for dialectal variations or social diversity. In the technical reports one reads such phrases as "barbaric Canaanite" or "mixed Babylonian." Hebrews were Hebrews; Babylonians were Babylonians; Sumerians were Sumerians; a great mixing and blending of people is not openly acceded. Yet the high assimilation of Sumerian culture by the Akkadians, and Akkadian influence upon the Sumerians, is witness to a process of cultural exchange and integration.

Scholars debate whether Abraham was a nomadic shepherd; most believe he was; some say he was of Bedouin stock. The biblical accounts show that he lived in a pastoral environment but the data are not clear. When Terah moved his family from Ur to Haran it seems he moved from one urban setting to another. But when Abraham moved to Canaan he lived in tents. The Genesis accounts surrounding Abraham take place in a tent-living, stock-grazing environment. The story of Jacob's marriage into

the family of Laban takes place in a similar environment. Yet Abraham's nephew Lot dwelt among the cities of the valley, Gen 13. According to Gen 14:12 he actually dwelt in Sodom. The accounts show that the Hebrew people could adapt to different conditions and that their life style and place of residence depended upon economic circumstances. We would be in error to say that Abraham was a shepherd of Bedouin stock; he adapted to a shepherd life until he could establish himself in the land that had been promised to him. Other families of similar Semitic stock probably lived in towns, and worked as farmers, artisans, as military people, and in numerous other occupations. Rigid classification by scholars on origins and cultures obscures this diversity.

The mythologized report of the origins of the tribes of the earth descended from the sons of Noah are obviously confused. Ham was the father of the people of Africa, yet some of the Semitic tribes of Arabia were listed as his descendants. Shem should have been the father of the Semites yet Lud, his son, is thought to mean a non-Semitic people living in Anatolia, while the list also includes the non-Semitic Sumerians. Japheth was the father of all the people to the north and east, the Indo-Europeans. The total number of tribes listed are seventy, a magic number for Jewish scribes. The lists were hardly a reliable record. Shem was "*the father of all the children of Eber*," Gen 10:21; Eber was his great grandson. Laban was Abraham's great nephew; Bethuel, Laban's father was Abraham's nephew. Yet both are described as Arameans, Gen 25:20, not as Hebrews. Aram was the eponymous ancestor of the Arameans, while Arpachshad, the brother of Aram, was the forefather of the "sons of Eber," the Hebrews. These descriptions show that the Jewish scribes who made up the lists did not fully understand their source material; they did not adhere to sensible grouping of the different eponymous ancestors, names, and people. The Hebrew designation could not mean pure blood stock.

As the Hebrew tribes were instructed to confess, "*A wandering Aramean was my father*," Deut 26:5.

The above factors are all pertinent to a more comprehensive view of the origin of the Hebrew people. While the biblical accounts are brief and confused, they directly enlighten historical data which has been accumulated over the past hundred years.

Before proceeding to that historical data I shall first show the origins of the name from the Semitic verb root system. This will permit ready reference as I proceed into discussion.

Many Near East scholars believe the name "Hebrew" derives from Eber, the eponymous ancestors of the Hebrew people. In Hebrew, the Hebrew name is *Ibri* (Ibree), suggested as a possible contraction of *Eberi* (Eberee). Possible shifts of *Ibri* to *Ibru*, with an initial "H" added, then gave us *Hibrew* or *Hebrew*. Contrary to such speculation, the name comes directly out of the verb root *awbar*, meaning "to cross over."

The *Ibri* name, with plural *Ibrim*, is used in a number of passages in Genesis and Exodus, but always as identification to foreigners. In the Jewish tradition this designation is not used among Hebrew people; they understood themselves as *benai Israel*, the Sons of Israel. Abraham is thus called an *Ibri* in Gen 14:13. Joseph is known as an *Ibri* in Gen 39:17. Moses saw an Egyptian smiting an *Ibri* in Exod 2:11.

This designation was being used as late as Jeremiah: *"that everyone should set free his Ibri and Ibreyah servants"* so that none would serve his Jewish brother, Jer 34:9.

Refer to Table 29-1. *Ibree* is from the Kal form, the feminine singular imperative, *"One Who Has Crossed Over."*

TABLE 29-1

	Past		Future		Present	Imperative
Person and Number	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural		
Kal form: awbar, ebor -- "to pass," "to cross"						
I (we)	awbartee	awbarnu	e'ebor	na'awbor	obar obereh	ebor
You (m)	awbartah	awbartem	ta'ebor	ta'awbru	(obrah)	ibree
You (f)	awbarteh	awbarten	ta'awbree	ta'awbornah	obreem	ibru
He	awbar		ya'awbru	ya'awbru		ebornu
(They)		awbru		ta'ebornah	obreeth	
She	abrah		ta'awbor			
Pi'el form: iber, awber -- "to impregnate"						
I (we)	ibartee	ibarnu	e'awber	na'awber	m'awber	awber
You (m)	ibartah	ibartem	ta'awber	ta'awbru	m'awbereh	awbree
You (f)	ibarteh	ibarten	ta'awbernu	ta'awbernah	(m'awbrah)	awbru
He	iber		ya'awber	ya'awbru	m'awbreem	awbernah
(They)		ibru				
She	ibrah		te'awber	ta'awbernah	m'awbroth	

Note that other forms appear in the tabulation. *Eber* shows as *Ebor*, the masculine singular imperative, an easy shift in pronunciation. Furthermore, *iber* appears in the Pi'el form, *He impregnated*. If surrounding people recognized Abraham and his descendants as *Iberi*, an easy substitution for *Ibri*, they were unwittingly admitting to a special role promised by God. Still more, the *ibri* and *iber* words are inflected to *ibru*, both in the Kal imperative, and in the Pi'el past plural.

Obviously, there is no need to speculate on the origin of the Hebrew name, or on its associated forms, as erudite scholars are wont to do in order to show their erudition.

I shall now go on to demonstrate how the Hebrew people were known to the

ancients in the Near East regions, their widespread social impact upon other cultures, the manner in which they left a record of their existence, and how special they considered themselves to be.

Egyptian Historical Texts (Middle to Late 2nd Millennium BC)

1) In an Egyptian tomb, belonging to one Puyemre, was carved on the stone walls a scene depicting men working at a wine press. Beneath the picture was a title which ran:

Straining out wine by the *Apiru*.

The date of the tomb is believed to be during the reign of Hatshepsut and of Thutmose III, circa 1470 BC^{HAB}.

Scholars immediately recognized the similarity of the word *Apiru* to *Hebrew*, with a scene depicting manual labor, as described in Exodus for Hebrew people under bondage in Egypt. The date would correspond with the date of the Biblical account of the people of Israel in Egypt.

2) At the end of his second Asiatic campaign Amenhotep II erected a stele at Memphis on which he gave a list of booty he had collected, circa 1420 BC^{HAB}.

List of the plunder which his majesty carried off:

Princes of Retenu (Syria):

127 Brothers of princes:

179 *Apiru*:

3600 Shasu (Bedouin):

15,200 Khuru (Hurrians):

26,300 Neges (Nuhashians): 15,070

The list appears to be given in descending order of social status. First are listed princes, then brothers of princes, and third *Apiru*. The *Apiru* rank below royalty but above the Bedouins, Hurrians, and Nuhashians. The *Apiru* are differentiated from the Bedouin; the *Apiru* are of a higher social class.

The *Apiru* are obviously countable; they are a recognizable group distinct from others. If the *Apiru* were Hebrews it may be that many of those in bondage arrived there as captives; not all were necessarily descended from the original twelve tribes.

3) During a campaign in Palestine Seti I erected a stele at Beth-shan on which he made the following remark, circa 1300 BC^{HAB}:

This day, then, one came to tell his majesty that the *Apiru* of Mt. Yarmut together with the *Tayaru* . . . are engaged in attacking the Asiatic nomads of *Ruhma*.

The *Tayaru* are understood by most scholars to be a nomadic group. *Yarmut* is

written as Jarmuth in Josh 21:29 in some English translations. It was a location assigned to the tribe of Issachar. Beth-shan was located to the east of Mt. Gilboa near the upper end of the Jordan river on the line dividing the tribes of Issachar and Manasseh.

Obviously, the Apiru were engaged in open warfare against residents of the land of Canaan, in a setting typical of the book of Joshua, and at a period when the Hebrew tribes were attempting to gain control of the land, as we know it from the Bible. However, the books of Joshua and Judges do not describe Egyptian presence in Canaan at that time. Perhaps the Jewish scribes who compiled the accounts were reluctant to show such presence for fear of degrading the glory of their forefathers. The unopposed conquest of Canaan by the Tribes is denied in this report from Egypt. The report confirms an hypothesis that the Apiru are Hebrew (*Ibree*) people.

4) From the *Papyrus Leiden*, dated to the reign of Ramses II, circa 1250 BC, the following statement is made in a letter:

Issue grain to the men of the army and to the Apiru who draw stone for the great pylon of Ramses II.

Again we see Apiru in bondage in Egypt down to the time of Ramses II. They were being used as quarrymen and manual laborers.

5) In a list of items dedicated by Ramses III, circa 1170 BC, to the temple of Atum at Heliopolis are included:

**Soldiers
Sons of Princes
Maryannu
Apiru
Settlers who were in Egypt.**

The term Maryannu is associated with Apiru/Habiru in other texts. The term is believed to derive from an Indo-European word *mary*, meaning a noble or member of a social elite. Near East scholars believe it means foreign warriors. In this list there is no apparent attempt to rank by social class.

6) A list of men sent to quarry in Wadi Hammamat by Ramses IV, circa 1140 BC, included:

**5000 men of the army
2000 men of the temples
800 Apiru.**

These references to the Apiru in Egyptian documents and on monuments show their presence in Egypt, and their social importance, for more than 300 years. The span of dates covers the period of the exile and well after. If we assume either a fifteenth or thirteenth century exodus, Apiru are still visibly present in Egypt after that event. Not all Apiru left Egypt; some remained behind. Apparently, some

believed in Moses' exhortation to flee, and some did not.

7) One other document is pertinent. In a story in *Papyrus Harris* is an account of Thoth, a general of Thutmose III. There the name *Apir* appears, without the u ending of *Apiru*. The Egyptian general was besieging the port of Joppa and carrying on negotiations with the chiefs of Joppa for their surrender. The general asks the chiefs to permit his Maryannu to bring his horses into the town:

... because otherwise the Apir will pass near and steal them.

The name *Apir* is similar to *Iber* and strengthens the association between *Apiru* and *Hebrew*.

Canaanite Texts (Middle to Late 2nd Millennium BC)

In 1887 an Egyptian peasant woman discovered a collection of cuneiform tablets at Tell El-Amarna in Middle Egypt. They were located in a room of a palace buried in sand. They contained the archives of the Asiatic campaigns of the Pharaoh Akhnaton in the mid-fourteenth century BC. (Amarna had been newly built as Akhnaton's capital.) The tablets were letters of correspondence to Amenhotep III, the father of Akhnaton, and to Akhnaton himself. A very few were to Tutankhamen, his successor and son-in-law. They were written by Canaanite scribes who were located in Palestine, Phoenicia, and southern Syria. They were mostly in the Akkadian language, *full of canaanitisms in grammar and vocabulary*. Occasionally a letter was written in Canaanite with scattered Akkadian formulas and ideograms^{NET}. They described mostly a state of anarchy then in Palestine.

These historical records show that Egypt had previously taken control of Canaan but that law and order had deteriorated; local princes and tribal chiefs were trying to overthrow their Egyptian rulers. Akhnaton apparently was preoccupied with other matters. He was vigorously pursuing a program to reform the religion of Egypt. With his mind and energies devoted to that enterprise, and to the establishment of his new city at Amarna, he may have had little time to tend to the affairs of the empire. Furthermore, he had antagonized the powerful Egyptian priesthood; they were intent on removing him from power. Amidst this unsettled period *Habiru* tribes were on the move in Canaan.

Er-Heba, the Egyptian ruler in Jerusalem, wrote a series of letters to the king in which he complained about the *Habiru*. The *Habiru* were plundering the lands of the king. Er-Heba wanted to know why the king was favoring them in this way; why was he not sending archers to protect his, the king's, properties. If he did not send military help the whole land would be given to the *Habiru*.

The letters contain not only the familiar name Jerusalem but also other names from the Bible^{HAB}:

Hebrew Name	Amarna Name
Y'rushalem	Urusalim
Lakisha	Lakisi
Ashkelon	Asqaluna
Goth	Kinti
Gezer	Gazri
Shechem	Saakmi

Out of seven references by Er-Heba to the *Habiru*, four of the names are given as *Habiri*. The Habiru and Habiri names were fully interchangeable. Their similarity to the *lbru* and *lbri* names, can be easily seen in Table 29-1.

If the events of this period were those described by Joshua in the Bible they would place the Exodus prior to the fourteenth century, in agreement with more traditional estimates.

The activities of the *Habiri* in southern Palestine concerns many scholars; they believe this area was not attached to Israelite territory until much later. However, Chapters 10 to 12 in the *Book of Joshua* describe just such conquest, with the very names listed in the Amarna tablets, including Lachish, Gezer, Gath, and the king of Jerusalem. A quote from one tablet shows the state of affairs:

See the deed which Milkilu and Shuwardata have done to the land of the king, my lord! They have the troops of Gezer, troops of Gath, and troops of Qeila. They have seized the land of Rubute. The land of the king has fallen away to the Habiri. And now, even a city of the Jerusalem district, Bit-nin-ib by name, a city of the king, has fallen away to the side of the people of Qeila. Let the king listen to Er-Heba, your servant, and send an army of archers that they might restore the land of the king to the king. For if there are no army of archers the land of the king will fall away to the Habiri.

Other evidence strengthens a postulate that the *Habiru/Habiri* were Hebrew people. In the Bible two names are coupled together in lists of the tribes. In Gen 46:17 the sons of Beriah are given as *Heber* and Malchiel. In Num 26:45 the sons of Beriah are listed as *Heber*, the family of the *Hebri*, and Malchiel, the family of the Malchieli. This same name association is in one of the letters of Er-Heba where he remarks that

This deed is the deed of Milkilu and the deed of the sons of Labaya who have given the land of the king to the Habiri.

Another illustration is found in another letter among the Amarna tablets where Er-Heba states that Labaya gave Shechem to the *Habiri*.

While these are the only explicit references to the *Habiri* in the Amarna tablets many other tablets contain similar descriptions of unrest, and activities of groups hostile to Egyptian interests who were called SA-GAZ, from an ideogram used in

Akkadian writing. Scholars debated identification of the SA-GAZ for many years until it was discovered in other Near East documents that the SA-GAZ ideogram was an equivalent for the *Habiru/Habiri*.

Rib-Addi, the royal governor of Gubla, (Hebrew Gebal, also known as Byblos, just south of modern Beirut), dated the uprising of the native Canaanite tribes of southern Syria, of Phoenicia, and of Palestine, from the return of Thutmose IV from his Asiatic campaigns, circa 1410 BC. His address was to Amenhotep III:

Since the return of your father from Sidon - from his days the lands have been going over to the SA-GAZ.

This report is an explicit historical reference to the conquest of Canaan by Hebrew tribes.

If general unrest existed in the area from southern Syria through Canaan down to the Negev it would have been possible for those tribes to move readily into and through the area. One reason for their forty-year trek in the wilderness may have been Egyptian control in the promised land. As that control relaxed the door was open for their movement into those regions.

The ideogram SA-GAZ and the name Habiri was not limited to the Israelite tribes. If the mixture of blood lines was strong in the Phoenicians, the Amorites, and other Semitic tribes, the designation *Habiri* may have been applied to all of them. This is illustrated by Rib-Addi at Byblos calling the area *the land of the Amurru*, that is, the land of the Amorites. The designation fits well with the location of the Amorites during this period. The Amurru were also regarded as SA-GAZ. Rib-Addi's arch foe was Abdi-Ashirta, prince of the Amurru, a SA-GAZ man.

The entire region was in upheaval; the Israelite tribes entered into, and became part of, that restless scene. The widespread unrest should not be attributed solely to the Israelite tribes; the biblical accounts, slanted to give glory to Israel, are an indication of general territorial rebellion against Egyptian authority.

The SA-GAZ hired out as mercenaries. Biridiya, prince of Megiddo, complained about the sons of Labaya, a rebel prince:

Now behold the two sons of Labaya have given their money to the SA-GAZ and to men of the land of Kashshi to make war against me.

Acts of pillage, looting and murder were commonplace. This is indicated clearly in Judges 9 where Abimelech sought rulership at Shechem. After a speech to the townspeople they gave him seventy pieces of silver with which he hired *worthless and reckless fellows* who followed him.

The SA-GAZ designation is evidenced further in letters from various local governors, including those of Sidon, Tyre, Tubihi, Hazi and others. Zimrida of Sidon states that:

All the cities that the king gave in my charge have gone over to the SA-GAZ.
In another letter one Biryawaza, a local loyalist governor, states that rebel

troops:

Its horses and its chariots they have given to the SA-GAZ.

In still another letter the SA-GAZ army made war on Mayarzana of Hazi, seized the town of Mahzibti, and set it afire. This action corresponds to the activities described in Joshua 6:24 and 8:19.

The events surrounding Mayarzana of Hazi are very similar also to those described in Joshua 11, and his battles with the king of Hazor. The SA-GAZ, under a rebel leader, Amanhatbi, seized the cities of Mahzibti, Giluni, Magdali, and Ushte and burned them. Joshua seized the cities of Hazor, Achshaph, Shimron, and Madon and burned them, 11:13. In the El-Amarna letter the SA-GAZ raided Hazi but Mayarzana, with unspecified allies, repulsed the SA-GAZ and killed them. Joshua burned the chariots with fire, 11:6,9, a foolish action for such valuable weapons of war, while the SA-GAZ brought their chariots to a local rebel governor who had gone over to their side.

These descriptions from historic records show that military activities in the land of Canaan were not at all with the glory portrayed in the Bible. They reduce those glamorized accounts to reality.

In a few of the El-Amarna tablets it is stated that the SA-GAZ supported the loyalist governors. Apparently they did not all identify with rebellion; they were not a united group with one political conviction. The evidence from Syria and Palestine in the El-Amarna letters shows also that the SA-GAZ/*Habiri* were not identified with any particular tribe or group of people. They could hire out as warriors of rebel leaders, and they used the lack of Egyptian power as a convenience for acquiring control of the territory.

The identification of groups of *Habiri* (SA-GAZ) and their activities corresponds well to the conquest of Canaan described in the book of Joshua. The Amarna letters suggest that this class of people held unique status in the Near East. Although not of tribal identity, with a specific geographical location, it was given special regard. The location of the SA-GAZ/*Habiri* in southern Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine suggests that the term was used generally for the Semitic tribes of those areas. It described a particular Semitic stock which, by historical times, had divided into numerous tribes and separate, identifiable ethnic groups. The *Ibir* were merely another branch of that special genetic stock. While the term *Ibri* clung to the Hebrew people for another thousand years, (witness Jeremiah), the *Habiru/Habiri* designation eventually was lost among other groups with that special blood.

The glorified accounts of the conquest of Canaan cannot be considered in isolation from the political environment of the day, nor disregard the activities of neighboring Semitic people. The framework which gave rise to the biblical accounts was complex, and laden with many inglorious elements.

Sumerian Texts (Early 2nd Millennium BC)

The earliest known reference to the *SA-GAZ/Habiru* are from Sumer and date from the Third Dynasty of Ur, circa 2000 BC. A Sumerian renaissance began under Gudea of Lagash and reached its political and economic peak under the kings of the Third Dynasty. A special mark of this period was the rise of Semitic elements to social attention. This included not only native Akkadian speaking Semites, but also an infiltration of western Amurru (Amorites). Concurrent with this influx of western Semites the terms *SA-GAZ/Habiru/Habiri* begin to appear in Sumerian documents. The documents show that the *SA-GAZ* were a new element in society, that they were attempting to establish themselves, and that the judicial system was having difficulty defining their legal status. One document reads:

Nannakiag, son of Lugaladda, said to the ensi (Judge?): Anzika, the SA-GAZ, is not my man. Ur-Mami was sent with him as supervisor. Nannakiag cleared the man with regard to what he said. He did not confirm him regarding SA-GAZ (activity?).

The text seems to say that Nannakiag had suffered some wrong and had first accused the *SA-GAZ* man. The case was brought to court whereupon Nannakiag states that Anzika was not the one who did it. He cleared him concerning the *SA-GAZ* activity. The activity seems to have a pejorative air about it, as though the *SA-GAZ* were engaged in conduct that was regarded as acceptable among themselves, but that was not permitted in Sumerian society.

This state of affairs is suggested again in another document which reads:

Ku-u, Dada-u-numun, Nur-ili, and Zulala were judges. The SA-GAZ sued but was unable to substantiate his case.

In still another, mutilated, text:

If a man rented a boat, and he set it on a journey, for him, the owner, and its journey . . . he altered, and the . . . of the . . . boat was employed for SA-GAZ activity, the man who rented the boat, the boat he shall restore.

In all cases quoted here it appears that the social roles of the *SA-GAZ* are being defined.

Some of the documents show *SA-GAZ* receiving rations of cattle and sheep from court livestock. Apparently the *SA-GAZ* were in government employment; the livestock were used as payment for services.

In another case clothing were given to sergeants of the *Habiri*, demonstrating that the *SA-GAZ/Habiri* were employed in military service. According to army records:

Four suits of clothing for the sergeants of the Habiri (were) received by Ibni-Adad . . . out of the midst of the treasury of Bit-Shamah from the hand of Ili-ippalsa. Month of Nisanu, 11th day, year Rim-Sin became king.

The Sumerian records all show that the SA-GAZ/*Habiri* were active in service roles in the community, as the Israelites served in Egypt, and as later Jews served in the court of Nebuchadnezzar.

Akkadian Texts (Early 2nd Millennium BC)

Excavations at Kultepe and Alishar in ancient Anatolia, now modern Turkey, uncovered several hoards of letters, and legal and economic texts, belonging to Assyrian trading stations of the old Akkadian period. This location is beyond the Anti-Taurus mountains far distant from the cities of Sumer. Among these documents was a letter from one Assyrian merchant to another requesting that he seek the release of *Haberi* men who were in custody at the palace of Shalahshuwe, an unidentified neighbor, possibly north of Alishar.

Concerning the Haberi men of the palace of Shalahshuwe who are present in custody, I sent word to you thus: Consult there with the princes and the chamberlains as to whether they will return them or will not return them. Then send word to me. If they will not return them, redeem those men. Whatever the ransom for them the palace asks of you, let me know in your message that I may send it to you. Let your hand seize those men. Whatever response the palace makes to you concerning those men, let me know in your message. The men have much ransom money.

The name *Haberi* here is essentially *Iberi*. From this ancient record we see that the Haberi are located in central Anatolia and show the widespread dispersion of those people in 2000 BC. In this document they are considered worthy of ransom and are being detained apparently for that purpose, although the merchant hopes to effect their release without such exchange. If the recipient of his letter is uncertain of the cost he is reminded that the *Haberi* themselves have much money and could use it for their own release. In any case, the author of the letter wants to make sure they are released. He held them in high regard.

An Amorite kingdom dominated Mesopotamia during the 18th century BC, from Babylon in the south, to Asshur in the northeast, to Haran in the northwest, and across to the Mediterranean. This Mari period was unsettled with a half-dozen larger states composed of smaller clustered kinglets. Amidst the strife among these petty kings appear SA-GAZ/*Haberi*. One document states that Yapah-Adad had built up the town of Zallul on the banks of the Euphrates and, with 2000 *Haberi* soldiers, was

then located in that town. In another document Izi-nabu, a Yamubalite chief, had 30 *Habiru* men march in his charge. In still another letter in which the destination and sender have been lost 3000 asses of the *Haberi* are mentioned. (Note the corresponding use of asses by the Hebrew tribes described in the Old Testament. Note also the interchange of the *Haberi* and *Habiru* inflectional endings.) In other letters the *Habiru* men went by night and seized the town of Yahmumam, attempted to seize other towns, and raided Luhaya seizing 500 sheep and 10 men. The *Haberi* were part of the Amorite population.

In a letter from Babylon, the famous Hammurabi instructs a certain Sin-idinnam to send an overseer of SA-GAZ men to him when he receives the tablet. In another document twelve SA-GAZ names are listed. They are mostly Akkadian with two Amorite names, showing that the SA-GAZ/*Haberi* were spread throughout the region, with names other than Hebrew Semitic.

In one Alalah text it was stated:

Year Irkabtum, the king, Shemuma, and the Habiru soldiers made peace.

The Habiru were an important segment of society. They were held in sufficient regard that a treaty with them marks a significant date.

In another text from Alalah a prince named Idrimi went into exile.

My horse, my chariot, and my groom I took and departed. The wasteland I crossed and into the midst of the Sutu warriors I entered. With them I spent the night in my covered chariot. The next day I moved along and went to the land of Canaan. In the land of Canaan the town of Ammiya is located. In Ammiya dwelt people of Halab, Mukish, Ni and Amau. When they saw that I was the son of their former lord they gathered about me and said: It has been much for you, but it will cease. Then I dwelt for seven years among the SA-GAZ warriors. I interpreted (the flight of) birds; I inspected (the intestines and livers of) lambs; and thus seven years of Adad/Teshup turned over my head.

The insights we receive from these materials is highly informative. We have firsthand accounts by men who lived in those times. Idrimi must have been descended from the SA-GAZ/*Habiru*; he returned to them when he went into exile. They commiserated with him and reassured him. In his exile he took up quiet domestic activities and watched birds for the signs that he could return to his former lordship. He had returned home for his exile.

In other texts from Alalah lists of SA-GAZ/*Habiru* soldiers are given. They come from wide areas of the country and serve in all levels of activity, as foot soldiers and as charioteers, alongside Maryannu. One name in the lists is *Ibri-beli*. In still another list is a census of the sheep holdings of various SA-GAZ. The texts show them to be a heterogeneous group at all levels of society, from Princes down to lowly foot soldiers and sheep herders.

Nuzi Texts (2nd Millennium BC)

The *SA-GAZ/Habiru* were highly active in the Hurrian principality of Nuzi. Texts from that region are significant in that they describe *Habiru* as selling themselves in service to local officials.

Sill-Kubi, a Habiru, by his own statement into service to Tehiptilla, son of Puhisenni, made himself enter.

Apparently, the Habiri sold themselves into service throughout the Near East and North Africa.

Other individuals who called themselves *Habiru* made the same voluntary entrance into service, including both men and women. In one case Tuntukatil, a *Habiru* woman, with her offspring, made herself enter into service with Tehiptilla. In another case Atal-Teshup, a *Habiru*, together with the people of his household, sold themselves into service.

These records probably were made as official statements of contract among the parties.

In other, more detailed records, the conditions of contract are stated.

Nan-Teshup, a Habiru, made himself enter into service to Tehiptilla, son of Puhisenni. If Nan-Teshup should infringe the agreement and leave the house of Tehiptilla he must compensate Tehiptilla with a substitute man as able as he.

We do not know the length of the term of this agreement but it seems to be for the lifetime of Tehiptilla. In another text the agreement for departure from the household of Tehiptilla is the payment of silver and gold minas. This is also found in other texts where one makes the remark, *We are not maid-servants*. They were to pay a tenfold mina of gold for release from the service.

Some of the terms of contract with Habiru were not pleasant:

Sin-balti, a Habiru woman, made herself enter as a maid-servant into the house of Tehiptilla. If Sin-balti should infringe the agreement and go into another house Tehiptilla may put out both eyes of Sin-balti and sell her for a price.

This contract is similar to conditions specified in the *Code of Hammurabi*, where the loss of an eye or of sale into slavery was permitted. A blind servant would not be sellable; we must deduce that the conditions were specified to prevent breaking of the contract. Sums of 10 gold or silver minas probably were made with the same expectation; anyone who possessed that kind of wealth would not have to sell himself into servitude. Of course, he could always be redeemed by someone else.

In some cases a person might sell another into service. Mar-Ishtar, a *Habiru* of the land of Akkad, thus sold his son Zilgenuri. According to the agreement, if he withdrew his son from service he had to give ten slaves for Zilgenuri. Again, this was a condition which could not reasonably be fulfilled.

In other documents the contracts call for the benefit of food, shelter and clothing in return for entry into service by the *Habiru*. Economic benefit appears to be the reason for most of the agreements. The *Habiru* came upon hard times and sold themselves in return for such protection. But they were regarded as a special group; they were distinguished from ordinary slaves. Although they were compelled, presumably by necessity, to exchange their services for food and clothing, they did not sell their persons. In none of the contracts is a price paid, or money exchanged. This contrasts sharply with contracts involving outright self-enslavement.

These were labor contracts, not slavery contracts. They were the same form of contract used by Joseph to sell the Hebrew tribes into service with the Egyptians. The provision which permitted them to provide substitutes or money shows they were free to go if they could meet the terms of the agreement. Also, the terms of the contract are reminiscent of adoption contracts. In those agreements the adoptee is to serve or respect the foster parents throughout the latter's lifetime. There is a similarity between the punishment for repudiating the connection with the Nuzi official and that of denying one's foster parents.

The Romans had a practice of clientage in which individuals belonged to a household, not as free guests, and not as slaves. These dependents, or clients, lived under conditions of protected freedom. They included refugees who sought a protector, or slaves who had been granted release by their masters but who needed the protection of the household. In both cases they had conditional freedom as members of the household but were subject to the will of their patron.

In the feudal system of medieval times a similar agreement could be arranged. The following is the blank form of application which was used by the Franks of the 7th century for commendation to a noble.

To that magnificent lord _____, I _____:

Since it is very well known to everyone how very little I have wherewith to feed and clothe myself, I have therefor sought your piety, and your good will has allowed me to hand myself over or commend myself to your guardianship. This I have done in the following manner: that you are to aid and succor me with food and clothing insofar as I shall be able to be of service to you and shall deserve it.

As long as I live I am to provide service and honor to you in accordance with my status as a free man.

During my lifetime I shall not have the power to withdraw from your guardianship and power, but all the days of my life I am to remain under your power and your defense. Hence it is agreed that if either one of us wishes to make any changes in this agreement he shall pay _____ shillings to his companion and this agreement shall remain in force.

Wherefore it is agreed that they should make up or confirm between them two documents with the same meaning as this form. This they have done^{IEH}.

Divine Designations

One of the most curious aspects of the *Habiru* name is its association with divinity. Several examples can be cited.

1) In a series of Hittite treaties from Boghazkoi in Anatolia long lists of gods are invoked to protect the treaties. They include gods from many different regions and people. The curious nature of this invocation is illustrated by a treaty with Egypt^{NET}. This list begins with the Sun and storm gods:

**The Sun-god of Heaven,
the Sun-goddess of Arinna,
the Storm-god of Heaven,
the Hattian Storm-god,
Seris and Hurris,
Mount Nanni and Mount Hazzi,
the Storm-god of Halab...**

And so on. The list continues with patron gods:

**... the Patron-god,
the Hattian Patron-god,
Zithariyas,
Hapantalliyas,
the Patron-god of Karahna,
the Patron-god of the shield, Ea,
Allatum...**

And so on. The list continues with warrior gods:

**... Hantdassus of Hurma,
Abaras of Samuhas,
Katahhas of Ankuwa,
the Queen of Katapa,
Ammammas of Tahurpa,
Hallaras of Dunna,
Huwassanas of Hupsina,
Tapisuwa of Ishupitta...**

**and so on to ...
and the Hapiri gods, ...**

In reading the long list one immediately recognizes that it was intended to cover every possible god and divine authority known to the authors, of native or foreign origin, to guarantee that the treaty could not be revoked by technical lapse, and that no god would be insulted by failure of mention.

Significantly the *Hapiru/Habiri* gods had special mention, although they are not identified by names. They also could not be forgotten.

2) In a list of gods in the temple of Adad in Assyria is the following:

**Adad
Shala
Nidaba
HABIRU
Kube
Statue of the king
Sherish
Hermesh
Ningersu
Total: 10 gods in the temple of Adad.**

The *Habiru* obviously have an important place among the divinities, ranking even with a statue of the king, who was regarded as a god. This mention of the *Habiru* among a list of gods shows explicitly that they were regarded with origins in divinity. They were different from ordinary people, including rulers and magistrates.

3) Several Assyrian omen texts were discovered:

If a halo surrounds the moon and a planet stands within it, the SA-GAZ will rage. If on the 12th day, moon and sun appear together, the reign will come to an end, the people will perish, the SA-GAZ will cut off the head. If a foetus . . . the Habiri will enter . . .

In one case a SA-GAZ appears in a star list.

These texts are sinister. We do not know their significance from the brief remarks but it appears that the *Habiri* were associated with ominous celestial phenomena and with some unknown affliction of the foetus. They were thought to carry divine powers.

4) In Egypt the *Apir* name appears a number of places combined with a divine name. The titles suggest specific identification as *Apir* gods.

Apir-Baal Apir-El Apir-Dager (a god) Apir-Isis Satisfied and so on.

From Anatolia, to the Mesopotamian basin, to Egypt, the *Habiri* were regarded with special social and religious status. Based on the historic evidence, an association of the *Habiri* with divinity cannot be avoided. While the exact significance of each of these references is unknown, it would not have been possible for the people who lived, worked, and traveled with *Habiri* to ignore the divine association. That factor must have been present in the mind of everyone. It was universally recognized and accepted.

The *Habiri* take on a status which is reminiscent of Gilgamesh in the old Assyrian myth. In that tale he was regarded as part god and part man. The evidence reviewed here suggests also that the *Habiri* were regarded as containing divine blood. Their line of descent from the gods was remembered. They were of special genetic stock.

The Form of the Habiru/Habiri Name

In the tabulations provided by Moshe Greenberg^{HAB} the *Habiru/Habiri* name appears about 75 times, excluding the SA-GAZ. Of those less than half are *Habiru*; the remainder are *Habiri* (or *Haberi*). *Habiru* appears mostly in the Nuzi texts; *Habiri* appears mostly in the Tell El-Amarna and Boghazkoi texts. It seems safe to conclude that both were interchangeable but that one was preferred over the other by local pronunciation. There can be no serious objection to equating the u and i terminations, since both are merely inflectional variations of the basic Hebrew verb.

The question then is the initial sound. How does the Ha- relate to the I- or the E- of *Ibri/Eberi*?

In Hebrew the initial phoneme for the basic root is an *ayin*. This shows in the corresponding Egyptian A form. When taken over to Akkadian it becomes Ha-. The further question is the sound formed in the pronunciation of the *ayin*. It is a guttural sound but was formed to obey the vowel inflections. In modern scholarly written texts this is denoted by 'A or 'I, with the reverse apostrophe. This appears as 'Aber, or as 'Iber.

The guttural pronunciation was not easy for all people, and shows in English translations as the modern A or I. The Hebrew guttural sounds, (identified as consonants by most Semitic scholars), showed the same difficulty in pronunciation when the Greeks borrowed the alphabet from the Phoenicians. The location of aleph as the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet was borrowed directly as the first letter alpha of the Greek alphabet and became our vowel A. The location of the Hebrew *ayin* is in the same position as the Greek and western O, following L, M, and N. These gutturals were both borrowed as vowels.

Another guttural with difficulty in other languages was the hard Kh. It shows as H or as K, and even as G, depending on context and on the language of the borrowing culture. The earlier reference to *Heber* and *Hebri* were H substitutions for the hard Kh.

Greenberg^{HAB} shows translation of the name Halbi in texts from Ugarit as Aleppo in English. Here the Ha- is understood to be an A. Pritchard^{NET} also shows several examples of this same relationship:

Hamani becomes Amanus, Humri is the biblical Omri, Hathiribi is Athribis, and so on.

Therefore the Ha- form would be rendered in English as A- or perhaps O-, since the two are interchangeable in pronunciation. *Habiru/Habiri* would normally be translated into English as *Abiru/Abiri*.

But another difficulty faces us. The *ayin* is pronounced as A- in the raw root, but as l- in imperative and Piel forms. *Awbar* becomes *Iber* or *Ibri*. Therefore *Abiri* would become *Iberi*, depending on the form used, but all derived from the same root.

On this basis it seems that *Iberu* is merely another way to pronounce *Apiru/Habiru*.

We shall refer to the *Iberi* name again in following chapters.

Summary

From this survey of the Habiru/Haberi of the ancient Near East, dating throughout the second millennium BC, we note the following:

1) They must have existed long prior to 2000 BC. The evidence suggests they had a history predating the first documents available to us. One questionable notation in Egypt would date them to the Old Kingdom, hundreds of years earlier than Abraham. Their true antiquity is uncertain. 2) They are scattered all over the Near East from Egypt to Sumera, to the extremities of Assyria, along the coast of the Mediterranean through Canaan, and deep into the regions of Anatolia. They are not limited to any one geographical locale, any one tribe, any one country, or any other definable ethnic group.

3) Many of their names are not Semitic. This led scholars to conclude that they were not exclusively Semitic people but rather a special social class that included many Semites. They argue that all cultures follow habits of naming children after ancestors through long-established practices. Therefore the many non-Semitic names would mean that the *Habiru* were of a social category other than Semitic. However, an alternate argument can be made. If *Habiru* women married non-Semite husbands, or if Semitic *Habiru* men married non-Semite women, as our thesis supposes in a great mixing of Adamic stock, the path of inherited names would not be simple. Many of those classified as *Habiru* might carry non-Semitic names.

4) This special group is difficult to define. They appear at every level of society, in many different social capacities. They are both rural and urban; they contract their services; they are in bondage in Egypt. They do not fit into any simple social category.

5) Their bondage in Egypt is now better understood. It was an economic bondage contracted during a time of need. They bought food and shelter in Egypt by selling their services, under established practices of those days. Succeeding generations were born into that bondage for lack of means to buy their freedom. The Egyptians probably perpetuated severe conditions in order to preserve a source of cheap labor. When Egypt was ravaged by plagues in extraordinary geological and meteorological events, Exod 7 to 10, State control may have been in havoc. The Israelites seized that opportunity to make their escape.

6) The documentary evidence shows they were extremely versatile and socially flexible. Although they were regarded with extra social respect they did not often

assume positions of leadership.

7) Many elements of the *Haberi* groups readily engage in warfare. They are found in military activities in Sumeria, Boghazkoi, Palestine, and Syria. They hire out as mercenaries and use all the weapons of war, including chariots. Although the biblical narrative does not show the Hebrews using chariots, (they burned those they captured), we do not know how much of the record has been omitted or altered. The nature of their mercenary employment, and the remarks made about their threat in the lands, suggest they were fearless fighters.

8) The *Hebrew/Eberi* tribes were *Habiru/Haberi* but not all *Habiru/Haberi* were *Hebrew/Eberi*. The Israelites came out of that special people and thus acquired the *Eberi/Ibri* name. The statement in Genesis that Shem was the father of all the children of Eber now takes on a different meaning. The *Hebrew/Haberi/Ibri* were the children of Eber, as that genetic line was remembered by the later Jewish scribes. Eber was a Semite, a son of Shem; this was the tradition as it was understood in the 6th century BC, at the time of the Babylonian captivity.

9) The *Habiru/Haberi* term drops out of use in later Near East documents near the end of the second millennium. Records show that application of the *Eberi/Ibri* name is then limited to the Hebrew tribes. Apparently the *Habiru/Haberi* were a social class who lost their unique identity. Their blood lines became submerged by interbreeding with other people, and could no longer be distinguished. The Hebrew people attempted to preserve the genetic lines, and thus preserved the *Haberi* distinction.

10) The Abrahamic groups were chosen because they still held a strong portion of that red Adamic blood. God selected this group also, out of all the *Haberi*, because of their religious attitudes. The promises to Abraham carried a deep significance that modified their religious and social conduct down through the generations.

The strength of that tradition is witnessed yet today among the Jews who believe they are fulfilling the promises of the Old Testament, and that they have a right to the lands promised to Abraham. A few simple sentences written millennia ago carry the weight of destiny and modify the lives and actions of people living today.

11) The *Habiri* had no fixed place in the social order where they chose to live. They were accepted in a foreign sense, not as part of a local social group. They cannot rightfully be considered nomadic, although they wandered from place to place. The movements of Terah, Abraham, and other members of that family were merely following the habits of the general *Habiri* people. This is the reason the Sumerians were attempting to define their social roles. They truly were "wandering Arameans."

But the promises to Abraham were intended to bring an end to that unsettled existence. He was to acquire a permanent home, "in the land of milk and honey."

Finally, we note that these "wandering Arameans" were the path through which the ancient Semitic linguistic world memories were preserved. They certainly played a vital role in reconnecting us with the remote history of our planet. They also brought a genetic line down into historic times, with Abraham chosen as the outstanding representative of that blood blessing.

This brief survey casts light on the antecedents of the Hebrew people, the Sons of Israel. It offers us some insight into the selection of Abraham as the "father of