

The Study of Oral Transmission

2. Statements as to precise parts of P, giving correct material from a far earlier period.

Meek, Theophile James, Hebrew Origins (New York: Harper & Row) 1960
(first pub. 1936, rev. ed., 1950, First Harper Torchbook edition, 1960)

pp. 14,15 It has long been the custom to make Abraham, the first person to be called a Hebrew in the Old Testament, a contemporary of Hammurabi, king of Babylon ca. 1728-1686 B.C. The basis of this has been the identification of Amraphel in Gen. 14.1 with Hammurabi, and the other kings mentioned in that chapter with contemporaries of his. Although these identifications are now known to be false, the date for Abraham may still be close to that of Hammurabi, ca. 1750 B.C. If the Benjaminites of the Mari letters are to be identified with the Hebrew tribe of Benjamin, this would make at least some of the Hebrews contemporary with Hammurabi, since the letters belong to this time. This is also the date indicated by the Old Testament itself - the three generations of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, plus 430 years, before the Exodus (Ex.12.40; Gen.15.13), which we date ca.1200 B.C.; and it has other considerations in its favor, like the evidence of ancient documents recounting movements of peoples from the east and north into Syria and Palestine at that time, and the evidence of excavations in Trans-Jordan and the Dead Sea area, which seem to set the nineteenth century as the upper limit for the age of Abraham. This date of ca. 1750 B.C. for Abraham would make the first migration of the Hebrews into Palestine contemporaneous with and a part of the Hurrian migration to the west, and this would seem to accord with the facts as we know them.

p. 16 Hebrew ideas of land tenure, recorded in Num. 36.9 and illustrated by the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21), must have been an inheritance from the Hurrians, among whom the principle of the inalienability of real property was very strong. Rachel's theft of her father's household goods, the teraphim (Gen. 31.19), had long been a puzzle to scholars, but we know now that according to Hurrian law this ensured title to her father's property for her husband Jacob. Esau's renunciation of his birthright for a consideration (Gen.25.31-34) was likewise unparalleled until we found the same thing occurring among the Hurrians.

p. 21 This contemporaneous account of the settlement of the Habiru in Palestine so exactly parallels the Old Testament account of the Israelite conquest of Jericho and the invasion of the highlands of Ephraim under Joshua that the two manifestly must have reference to the same episode.