

## ~MEMPHIS (452)

### (Mem'phis)

- History
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• One of the **capitals** of ancient Egypt, identified with the ruins at **Mit Rahiney**, about 23 kilometers (14 miles) South of Cairo, on the West side of the Nile River. **Memphis** was for long the most important city in Lower Egypt, that is, the Delta region and a small section to the South thereof.

• For, look! They will have to go because of despoiling. Egypt itself will collect them together. **Memphis**, for its part, will bury them. As for their desirable things of silver, nettles themselves will take possession of them, thorny bushes will be in their tents. (**Hosea 9:6**)

• The city is called **Moph** in the **Hebrew** text, rendered, **Memphis**, in most English translations. Elsewhere it is referred to by the **Hebrew Noph**.

• The princes of Zoan have acted foolishly, the princes of Noph have been deceived, the keymen of her tribes have caused Egypt to wander about. (**Isaiah 19:13**)

• Even the sons of Noph and Tahpanes themselves kept feeding on you at the crown of the head. (**Jeremiah 2:16**)

• The word that occurred to Jeremiah for all the Jews that were dwelling in the land of Egypt, the ones dwelling in Migdol and in Tahpanhes and in Noph and in the land of Pathros, saying; (**Jeremiah 44:1**)

• Tell it in Egypt, O men, and publish it in Migdol, and publish it in **Noph** and in Tahpanhes. say; Station yourself, making preparation also for yourself, for a sword will certainly devour all around you. (**Jeremiah 46:14**)

• Make for yourself mere baggage for exile, O inhabitress, the

daughter of Egypt. For **Noph** itself will become a mere object of astonishment and will actually be set afire, so as to be without an inhabitant. (**Jeremiah 46:19**)

- This is what the Sovereign Lord Yehowah has said; I will also destroy the dungy idols and cause the valueless gods to cease out of **Noph**, and there will no more prove to be a chieftain out of the land of Egypt, and I shall certainly put fear in the land of Egypt. (**Ezekiel 30:13**)
- And I will set a fire in Egypt. Sin will without fail be in severe pains, and No itself will come to be for capture by breaches, and as regards **Noph**, there will be adversaries during the daytime! (**Ezekiel 30:16**)

## .. History

- According to legend, recounted by Greek historian **Herodotus [II, 99]**, **Memphis** was established by a ruler named Menes, no historical evidence has been found, however, for this supposed founder of the First Dynasty of Egyptian rulers.
- **Memphis** geographic situation was ideally suited for a capital city of this land of the Nile. Lying just a little south of the apex of the Delta, that is, the point where the Nile River divides up into its branches, it could exercise control not only over the Delta region to the north but also over the traffic on the Nile.
- Desert and mountains made difficult any approach to the city from the West, and the Nile itself and the hills beyond served as a protection from the East.
- Thus, **Memphis**, on the border between Upper, southern, and Lower, northern, Egypt, anciently held the key to all Egypt, much as modern Cairo does today in a nearby location.

## .. Commercial

- The city was a great commercial center throughout its history, declining only after the Greek conquest when Alexandria on the northern coast became the country's most thriving port.
- According to some historians, **Memphis** became widely reputed for its glass manufacture, Rome being a principal importer of its wares.

Acacia trees were also cultivated in the area to supply wood for making furniture, ships for Egypt's navy, and military weapons.

## **.. Political**

- Politically, also, **Memphis** held great prominence, particularly during the period Egyptologists call the Old Kingdom and on down into the Middle Kingdom.
- Most historians believe that the seat of government of the earliest dynasties was at **Memphis**, though perhaps moving to Thebes, Biblical No-amon, about 480 kilometers (300 miles) farther South, for a time. It seems likely that the capital was still at **Memphis** when Abraham visited Egypt and had his experience with the ruling Pharaoh.
- Now a famine arose in the land and Abram made his way down toward Egypt to reside there as an alien, because the famine was severe in the land. (**Genesis 12:10**)
- And it came about that as soon as he got near to entering Egypt, then he said to Sarai his wife; Please, now! I well know you are a woman beautiful in appearance. (**Genesis 12:11**)
- So it is bound to happen that the Egyptians will see you and will say; This is his wife. And they will certainly kill me, but you they will preserve alive. (**Genesis 12:12**)
- Please say you are my sister, in order, that it may go well with me on your account, and my soul will be certain to live due to you. (**Genesis 12:13**)
- So it happened that, as soon as Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians got to see the woman, that she was very beautiful. (**Genesis 12:14**)
- And the princes of Pharaoh also got to see her and they began praising her to Pharaoh, so that the woman was taken to the house of Pharaoh. (**Genesis 12:15**)
- And he treated Abram well on her account, and he came to have sheep and cattle and asses and menservants and maidservants and she-asses and camels. (**Genesis 12:16**)
- Then Yehowah touched Pharaoh and his household with great

plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. (**Genesis 12:17**)

- With that Pharaoh called Abram and said; What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? (**Genesis 12:18**)
- Why did you say; She is my sister, so that I was about to take her as my wife? And now here is your wife. Take her and go! (**Genesis 12:19**)
- And Pharaoh issued commands to men concerning him, and they went escorting him and his wife and all that he had. (**Genesis 12:20**)
- The Biblical evidence seems to indicate that during the Israelites sojourn in Egypt the Egyptian capital was in Lower, Northern, Egypt within reasonably easy access of the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were dwelling.
- Accordingly Joseph came and reported to Pharaoh and said; My father and my brothers and their flocks and their herds and all they have come from the land of Canaan, and here they are in the land of Goshen. (**Genesis 47:1**)
- And from the whole number of his brothers he took five men, that he might present them to Pharaoh. (**Genesis 47:2**)
- Moses meeting Pharaoh by the Nile River would appear to favor the capitals being at **Memphis** rather than down in the Delta region, as some suggest, for the Nile split into several branches upon reaching the Delta.
- Go to Pharaoh in the morning. Look! He is going out to the water! And you must put yourself in position to meet him by the edge of the Nile River, and the rod that turned into a serpent you are to take in your hand. (**Exodus 7:15**)

### **See Also GOSHEN 1**

- Because of its prominence, **Memphis** figures in several prophecies involving Egypt. At;
- Even the sons of **Noph** and Tahpanes themselves kept feeding on you at the crown of the head. (**Jeremiah 2:16**)

- The prophet spoke of **Noph**, **Memphis**, and Tahpanes, a city in the Delta region, as feeding on Israel at the crown of the head, that is, stripping Israel and making it as if bald. This meant a humiliation for God's professed people, accompanied by mourning.
- And he proceeded to go up from there to Bethel. As he was going up on the way, there were small boys that came out from the city and began to jeer him and that kept saying to him; Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead! (**2 Kings 2:23**)
- And the Sovereign Lord, Yehowah of armies, will call in that day for weeping and for mourning and for baldness and for girding on sackcloth. (**Isaiah 22:12**)
- In the case of both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, Egypt, as here represented by **Memphis** and Tahpanes, proved to be a futile source of hoped-for aid and support, while at the same time showing itself ready to exploit God's covenant people for selfish advantage.
- And Ephraim proves to be like a simpleminded dove without heart. To Egypt they have called, to Assyria they have gone. (**Hosea 7:11**)
- Woe to the stubborn sons, is the utterance of Yehowah; those disposed to carry out counsel, but not that from me, and to pour out a libation, but not with my spirit, in order to add sin to sin. (**Isaiah 30:1**)
- Those who are setting out to go down to Egypt and who have not inquired of my own mouth, to take shelter in the stronghold of Pharaoh and to take refuge in the shadow of Egypt! (**Isaiah 30:2**)
- And the stronghold of Pharaoh must become even for you men a reason for shame, and the refuge in the shadow of Egypt a cause for humiliation. (**Isaiah 30:3**)
- Twenty-three years old was Jehoahaz when he began to reign, and for three months he reigned in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah. (**2 Kings 23:31**)
- And he began to do what was bad in Yehowah's eyes, according

to all that forefathers of his had done. (2 Kings 23:32)

- And Pharaoh Nechoh got to put him in bonds at Riblah in the land of Hamath, to keep him from reigning in Jerusalem, and then imposed a fine upon the land of a hundred silver talents and a gold talent. (2 Kings 23:33)
- Furthermore, Pharaoh Nechoh made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in place of Josiah his father and changed his name to Jehoiakim, and Jehoahaz he took and then brought to Egypt, where he eventually died. (2 Kings 23:34)
- And the silver and the gold Jehoiakim gave to Pharaoh. Only he taxed the land, to give the silver at the order of Pharaoh. According to each one's individual tax rate he exacted the silver and the gold from the people of the land, to give it to Pharaoh Nechoh. (2 Kings 23:35)

## •• Religious

- **Memphis** was a center of religion and of learning in Egypt, but back in the **Eighth Century B.C.E.**, Isaiah foretold that the vaunted wisdom of the princes, perhaps priestly princes, of **Noph**, **Memphis** would fail and Egypt would be misled.
- The princes of Zoan have acted foolishly, the princes of Noph have been deceived, the keymen of her tribes have caused Egypt to wander about. (Isaiah 19:13)
- Such counselors evidently fostered a false sense of security in Egypt as regards the aggressive power of Assyria.
- Memorials of Ethiopian King Tirhakah's reign over Egypt have been found at **Memphis**. Though Tirhakah managed to survive his encounter with Assyrian King Sennacherib in Canaan, **732 B.C.E.**
- He heard it said respecting Tirhakah the king of Ethiopia; Here he has come out to fight against you. Therefore he sent messengers again to Hezekiah, saying; (2 Kings 19:9)
- Sennacherib's son Esar-haddon later shattered the Egyptian army, forcing them to retreat to **Memphis**. Esar-haddon's own record of the subsequent conflict reads; **I led siege to Memphis, his, or Tirhakah's royal residence, and conquered it in half a day by means of**

mines, breaches and assault ladders, I destroyed it, tore down its walls and burnt it down. [Ancient Near Eastern Texts, edited by J. Pritchard, 1974, p. 293]

- Apparently a few years later Egypt's forces retook **Memphis**, massacring the Assyrian garrison. But Ashurbanipal, son of Esarhaddon, marched into Egypt and drove the rulers out of **Memphis** and back up the Nile, southward.
- When Assyria went into decline in the latter part of the **Seventh century B.C.E**, **Memphis** came back under full Egyptian control. Following Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's desolation of Judah in **607 B.C.E**, Jewish refugees fled into Egypt, taking up residence in **Memphis** and other cities.
- The word that occurred to Jeremiah for all the Jews that were dwelling in the land of Egypt, the ones dwelling in Migdol and in Tahpanhes and in **Noph** and in the land of Pathros, saying; (**Jeremiah 44:1**)
- Through his prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Yehowah condemned them to disaster and foretold that Nebuchadnezzar would strike Egypt a devastating blow, with **Memphis**, **Nop**, experiencing the full force of the attack.
- Therefore this is what Yehowah of armies, the God of Israel, has said; Here I am setting my face against you for calamity and for cutting off all Judah. (**Jeremiah 44:11**)
- And I will take the remnant of Judah who set their faces to enter into the land of Egypt to reside there as aliens, and they will all certainly come to their finish in the land of Egypt. They will fall by the sword, and by the famine they will come to their finish, from the smallest one even to the greatest one, by the sword and by the famine they will die. And they must become a curse, an object of astonishment and a malediction and a reproach. (**Jeremiah 44:12**)
- And I will hold an accounting against those dwelling in the land of Egypt, just as I held an accounting against Jerusalem, with the sword, with the famine and with the pestilence. (**Jeremiah 44:13**)
- And there will come to be no escapee or survivor for the remnant

- of Judah who are entering in to reside there as aliens, in the land of Egypt, even to return to the land of Judah to which they are lifting up their soulful desire to return in order to dwell, for they will not return, except some escaped ones. ([Jeremiah 44:14](#))
- The word that Yehowah spoke to Jeremiah the prophet as regards the coming of Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon to strike down the land of Egypt. ([Jeremiah 46:13](#))
  - Tell it in Egypt, O men, and publish it in Migdol, and publish it in Noph and in Tahpanhes. Say; Station yourself, making preparation also for yourself, for a sword will certainly devour all around you. ([Jeremiah 46:14](#))
  - Make for yourself mere baggage for exile, O inhabitress, the daughter of Egypt. For **Noph** itself will become a mere object of astonishment and will actually be set afire, so as to be without an inhabitant. ([Jeremiah 46:19](#))
  - This is what the Sovereign Lord Yehowah has said; I will also cause the crowd of Egypt to cease by the hand of Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon. ([Ezekiel 30:10](#))
  - He and his people with him, the tyrants of the nations, are being brought in to reduce the land to ruin. And they must draw their swords against Egypt and fill the land with the slain. ([Ezekiel 30:11](#))
  - And I will make the Nile canals dry ground and will sell the land into the hand of bad men, and I will cause the land and its fullness to be desolated by the hand of strangers. I myself, Yehowah, have spoken. ([Ezekiel 30:12](#))
  - This is what the Sovereign Lord Yehowah has said; I will also destroy the dungy idols and cause the valueless gods to cease out of **Noph**, and there will no more prove to be a chieftain out of the land of Egypt, and I shall certainly put fear in the land of Egypt. ([Ezekiel 30:13](#))
  - The Babylonian attackers of **Memphis** would confidently attack the city in broad daylight.
  - And I will set a fire in Egypt. Sin will without fail be in severe pains, and No itself will come to be for capture by breaches, and



as regards **Noph**, there will be adversaries during the daytime!  
(**Ezekiel 30:16**)

- **Memphis** again came in for a severe defeat at the hands of Persian King Cambyses in **525 B.C.E**, thereafter becoming the seat of a Persian satrapy.
- The city never fully recovered from the effects of this conquest. With the rise of Alexandria under the Ptolemies, Memphis declined steadily and by the seventh century of the Common Era had become vast ruins.
- **Memphis** was among the foremost sacred cities of ancient Egypt, along with nearby On, Heliopolis.
- And before the year of the famine arrived there were born to Joseph two sons, whom Asenath the daughter of Potiphara the priest of On bore to him. (**Genesis 41:50**)
- Especially important were the shrines dedicated to the god Ptah and to the sacred bull Apis. The god Ptah, according to the **Memphite theology** devised by the priests of **Memphis**, was the creator, sharing this distinction with other gods such as Thoth, Ra, and Osiris, and his mythological activity apparently was modeled on the actual role of the Pharaoh in human affairs.
- Classical historians describe the temple of Ptah at **Memphis** as being periodically enlarged and beautified. Enormous statues adorned it.
- The Apis bull, a specially marked live bull, was kept at **Memphis** and worshiped as the incarnation of the god Osiris, though in certain legends it is also connected with the god Ptah.
- At its death, public mourning was carried on, and an impressive burial of the bull was made at nearby Saqqara, When the tomb there was opened in the last century, investigators found the embalmed bodies of over 60 bulls and cows.
- The selection of a new Apis bull and its enthronement at Memphis was an equally elaborate ceremony. This worship may have influenced the rebellious Israelites in their idea of worshiping Yehowah through a golden calf.

- Then he took the gold from their hands, and he formed it with a graving tool and proceeded to make it into a molten statue of a calf. And they began to say; This is your God, O Israel, who led you up out of the land of Egypt. (**Exodus 32:4**)
- When Aaron got to see this, he went to building an altar before it. Finally Aaron called out and said; There is a festival to Yehowah tomorrow. (**Exodus 32:5**)
- The worship of the foreign goddess Astarte was also prominent at **Memphis**, and there were temples to Egyptian gods and goddesses such as Hathor, Amon, Imhotep, Isis, Osiris-Sokar, Anubis, and others. This whole array of ancient deities and their idols was due for destruction by divine judgment.
- This is what the Sovereign Lord Yehowah has said; I will also destroy the dungy idols and cause the valueless gods to cease out of Noph, and there will no more prove to be a chieftain out of the land of Egypt, and I shall certainly put fear in the land of Egypt. (**Ezekiel 30:13**)

## •• **Royal Burial Sites**

- Evidence of **Memphis** past importance is seen from the vast burial grounds close by the ancient site, these areas containing some 20 pyramids or royal monumental tombs.
- The prominence of **Memphis** as a royal burial site doubtless is reflected in Hosea's prophecy against faithless Israel in the **Eighth Century B.C.E**, to the effect that Egypt itself will collect them together, **Memphis**, for its part, will bury them.
- For, look! They will have to go because of despoiling. Egypt itself will collect them together. **Memphis**, for its part, will bury them. As for their desirable things of silver, nettles themselves will take possession of them, thorny bushes will be in their tents. (**Hosea 9:6**)
- Among the pyramids found at Saqqara, near **Memphis**, is the Step Pyramid built by King Djoser, Third Dynasty, considered to be the oldest freestanding stone structure known. Farther to the West-northwest of **Memphis** are the far more impressive pyramids of Giza and the Great Sphinx.

- Today these tombs and similar stone structures are all that remain to indicate **Memphis** past religious glory. As foretold, the city has become a mere object of astonishment.
- Make for yourself mere baggage for exile, O inhabitress, the daughter of Egypt. For **Noph** itself will become a mere object of astonishment and will actually be set afire, so as to be without an inhabitant. (**Jeremiah 46:19**)