

~ON 2 (124)

[The name of a person and a place]

- An ancient and renowned city in Egypt, located a short distance Northeast of Cairo, on the East bank of the Nile and near the point where the rivers waters divide to begin the formation of the Delta region.
- In Egyptian records the city's name was written as *Junu*, while Assyro-Babylonian records mention it as *Ana* or *Unu*. The Egyptian name is thought to mean, **City of the Pillar**, perhaps referring to the obelisks, tall, tapering columns topped by a pyramid-shaped point, for which the city was famous, or the name may relate to the sacred stone, called the *benben*, connected with the worship of the sun-god Ra or Re.
- The Greeks called the city Heliopolis, meaning, **City of the Sun**, because it was the chief center of Egyptian sun worship.
- **On** first appears in the Bible record as the city of the priest Potiphera, whose daughter Asenath was given to Joseph as his wife.
- After that Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenathpaneah and gave him Asenath the daughter of Potiphera the priest of **On** as a wife. And Joseph began to go out over the land of Egypt. (**Genesis 41:45**)
- And before the year of the famine arrived there were born to Joseph two sons, whom Asenath the daughter of Potiphera the priest of On bore to him. (**Genesis 41:50**)
- The name Potiphera itself includes the name of *Ra*, the sun-god.
- In course of time the priesthood of **On** became very wealthy, rivaling the priesthood of Memphis in this respect and being surpassed only by the priesthood of Thebes, Biblical No-amon.
- Connected with its temple to the sun, a school was operated for training priests and for the teaching of medicine. Greek philosophers and scholars were drawn there to learn the priestly theology, and **On** became celebrated as a center of Egyptian wisdom.

- The prophet Jeremiah was inspired to foretell that King Nebuchadnezzar would overrun Egypt and break to pieces the pillars of Beth-shemesh, which is in the land of Egypt.
- And you must say to them; This is what Yehowah of armies, the God of Israel, has said; Here I am sending and I will take Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will place his throne right above these stones that I have hidden, and he will certainly extend his state tent over them. (Jeremiah 43:10)
- And he must come in and strike the land of Egypt. Whoever is due for deadly plague will be for deadly plague, and whoever is due for captivity will be for captivity, and whoever is due for the sword will be for the sword. (Jeremiah 43:11)
- And I will set a fire ablaze in the houses of the gods of Egypt, and he will certainly burn them and lead them captive and wrap himself up in the land of Egypt, just as a shepherd wraps himself up in his garment, and he will actually go out from there in peace. (Jeremiah 43:12)
- And he will certainly break to pieces the pillars of Beth-shemesh, which is in the land of Egypt, and the houses of the gods of Egypt he will burn with fire. (Jeremiah 43:13)
- Beth-shemesh corresponds somewhat to the Greek name Heliopolis and means, **House of the Sun**. Hence the reference here is likely to the city of **On**, and the pillars that were to be broken may well refer to the many obelisks around the temple of the sun.
- Ezekiel's prophecy contains a similar warning.
- 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)
- As for the young men of **On** and Pibeseth, by the sword they will fall, and into captivity the cities themselves will go. (Ezekiel 30:17)
- Here the **Hebrew** vowel pointing of the name varies from that of Genesis so that the name literally is Aven, **Hebrew**, *'a'wen*. Some scholars suggest that this was **done** as a play on words, since Aven

means, **Hurtfulness, Something Hurtful**, and **On** was a center of **idolatry**.

- This may also be the case at;
- In that day there will prove to be five cities in the land of Egypt speaking the language of Canaan and swearing to Yehowah of armies. The **City of Tearing Down** will one city be called. (**Isaiah 19:18**)
- Where the **Masoretic** text refers to **one** of the five cities in the land of Egypt speaking the language of Canaan and swearing to Yehowah as, **The City of Tearing Down**, **Hebrew**, *'Ir ha-He'res* .
- The **Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah** has *'Ir ha-Che'res*, meaning, **City of the Sun**, thus pointing to **On, or Heliopolis**. Here again there may be an intentional play on words, *He'res*, **tearing down** being substituted for *Che'res* , another Hebrew word for **sun**, less common than *she'mesh*; in view of Yehowah's intention to **destroy the idolatrous city of On**.
- The paraphrase of this portion of the verse found in the Aramaic Targums reads: **City of the House of the Sun**, which is to be destroyed.
- Besides the foretold destructive invasion by Nebuchadnezzar, **On**, or **Heliopolis**, evidently suffered a further blow when Cambyses II conquered Egypt. According to Strabo, Greek geographer who lived near the start of the Common Era. [**Geography, 17, I, 27**]
- By Strabos time **Heliopolis** had lost its position of importance and was partially deserted. Today, the village called **Al-Matariya** occupies part of the ancient site, and all that remains there of the earlier splendor is a single obelisk of red granite dating from the reign of Sesostris I. Other obelisks from **Heliopolis** are now to be found in New York, London, and Rome.