

**A Survey of Israel's History**  
by  
**Leon Wood**

**Chapter 6**  
**"Life in Egypt"**

Exodus 1-14; Psalm 105:17-39; Acts 7:15-36; Hebrews 11:22-29

**A. FOUR PERIODS OF EGYPTIAN RULE**

The second millennium B.C. in Egyptian history was marked by four distinctive periods of rule. First came the powerful Twelfth Dynasty, lasting from c. 1991 to c. 1786 B.C.<sup>1</sup> During this time the country was stabilized following a period of divided feudal lordship, and the Pharaoh ruled once more with full authority. Lower and Upper Egypt were united. The capital was located at Ith-taui, south of the great capital of the Old Kingdom, Memphis. The country prospered and conditions for the most part pleased the people. Egyptian pottery found in neighboring countries indicates that trade relations existed. The period was one of Egypt's strongest and her influence in the world extended far beyond her borders.<sup>2</sup>

The second period was that of the Hyksos,<sup>3</sup> a foreign people who now came into Egypt and took over the throne. Though their exact origin still remains a mystery, it is quite clear that they were Asiatics who gradually infiltrated Egypt during the latter half of the eighteenth century. The strong Twelfth Dynasty had been succeeded by much weaker kings of the short-lived Thirteenth and Fourteenth Dynasties,<sup>4</sup> in whose days the infiltration took place. About 1730 the newcomers took over rule in the northeastern Delta, establishing their capital at Avaris;<sup>5</sup> and about 1680 they succeeded in displacing the Egyptian ruler at the main capital, Memphis, and so assumed control over all Egypt, even including Nubia to the south for a time.<sup>6</sup> The Hyksos were not really numerous during these years, but remained dominant by holding key positions. They adopted Egyptian ways<sup>7</sup> and appear to have been accepted by the Egyptian people at first, though being hated later. There is no evidence of extensive warfare even when they made conquest of the country. They left few records, however, and not much is known of them for sure.

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1 These dates are from R. A. Parker, *The Calendars of Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), pp. 63-69, with which Albright, *BASOR*, 127 (1952) agrees. Cf. W. F. Edgerton, "The Chronology of the Twelfth Dynasty," *JNES*, 1(1942), pp. 307-14, who differs slightly. For general discussion, cf. H. E. Winlock, *The Rise and Fall of the Middle Kingdom* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1947).

2 This period is known as Egypt's Middle Kingdom. The fascinating story of Sinuhe occurred at this time. He fled from Egypt, traveled through the East and returned, the story giving valuable information regarding life of the day; cf. *ANET*, p. 418.

3 This period is called the Second Intermediate. Cf. R. J. Engberg, *The Hyksos Reconsidered* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); W. C. Hayes, *SE*, II, pp. 3-8; J. Van Seters, *TH*.

4 These dynasties, so designated by Manetho, apparently ruled contemporaneously.

5 This occasion is commemorated on a New Kingdom stele stating that it took place 400 years prior to the reign of Horemhab, the last king of the Eighteenth Dynasty. For discussion, cf. Van Seters, *TH*, pp. 97-103.

6 Manetho names the ruler who took Memphis in 1680 as Saluti and says the Fifteenth Dynasty began with him. Manetho assigns both the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Dynasties to the Hyksos, though these were likely contemporary like the Thirteenth and Fourteenth.

7 The rulers used Egyptian titles and throne names, writing them in the Egyptian hieroglyphics. They admired Egyptian art, for they made copies of Middle Kingdom originals of statues, reliefs, and other works. That they took over the Egyptian gods, Seth and Ra, shows that they even accepted much of the Egyptian religion.

The third period was that of the strongest dynasty of all, the Eighteenth.<sup>8</sup> During this time Egypt enjoyed her most influential role in world affairs. A first endeavor was ridding the land of the hated Hyksos. This was begun already by the Seventeenth Dynasty;<sup>9</sup> but it was Ahmose (1584-1560), first ruler of the Eighteenth, who captured the Hyksos capital, Avaris, and drove the foreigners far north into Palestine. With him, too, native rule became solidified, and with his grandson, Thutmose I (1539-1514), came the beginning even of empire status for Egypt. This Pharaoh's army campaigned as far south as the Third Cataract of the Nile and as far north along the Mediterranean coast as the Euphrates River. Later his grandson, the great Thutmose III (1504-1450), generally considered Egypt's most capable ruler, surpassed him in marching yet farther and establishing recognized boundaries. The son of Thutmose III, Amenhotep II, was also gifted as a military commander. At this time, Egypt's army was the strongest in the world, spearheaded by the chariot corps. With good crops at home, advantageous trade relations with neighbors near and far, and now rich booty from successful conquests, Egypt reached a zenith of prosperity. The country also enjoyed the finest in educational and cultural advantages.

The fourth period was that of the Nineteenth Dynasty,<sup>10</sup> nearly as strong in world influence as the Eighteenth. The period lasted one hundred nine years, of which sixty-six were under the rule of Rameses II (1304-1238).<sup>11</sup> He and his predecessor, Seti I, sought to reestablish the northern boundary of Thutmose III, and, though they fell short of this goal, did secure full control once more over all Palestine and southern Syria.<sup>12</sup> Rameses II was a builder as well as military strategist, as witnessed by structures he erected or enlarged in nearly every major city of both lower and upper Egypt.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the Nineteenth Dynasty prosperity continued, and Egypt remained the dominant world power.

## B. EGYPTIAN LIFE

Egyptians lived near and depended greatly on the Nile River.<sup>14</sup> Annual flooding by this long waterway brought new fertile soil and initial deep wetting so that continued irrigation through the growing season produced excellent crops. Without the Nile, Egypt would have been mere desert. The country was long and narrow, with most of the people living within a few miles of the Nile's banks. A delta, formed by the Nile fanning out into numerous branches as it neared the Mediterranean, provided broader areas for farming. The land of Goshen, given to Jacob's family, lay on the west of the Delta. Present day Cairo lies at its southern end just over a hundred miles from the Mediterranean. The Delta region was called Lower Egypt and the area south, Upper Egypt, these terms given in view of the Nile flowing from south to north.

Religion played a major role in Egyptian life.<sup>15</sup> The people believed in many gods, often

8 Cf. Steindorff and Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East* (rev. ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); also Hayes, *SE*, II, pp. 42-325.

9 The Seventeenth Dynasty dates from about 1660 B.C. It took over in Thebes from the Thirteenth which had continued in the Thebes area after the Hyksos conquest. The last ruler of the Seventeenth, Kamose, already took back much Egyptian territory from the Hyksos, pushing at least as far as the Delta. Ahmose, first of the Eighteenth Dynasty, was his younger brother; cf. Hayes, *SE* II, pp. 8-9.

10 Cf. Hayes, *SE*, II, pp. 326-434 besides general works. It should be realized that the Eighteenth, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Dynasties constituted Egypt's New Kingdom period.

11 For discussion of this date, cf. *supra*, chap. 5, p. 90, n. 30.

12 Cf. *supra*, chap. 5, p. 107, n. 100.

13 Hayes, *SE*, II., p. 342.

14 For a recent popular study, cf. Bruce Brander, *The Nile River* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 1966).

15 Hayes, *SE*, I, chap. vi, "The Religion and Funerary Beliefs in Ancient Egypt," pp. 75-83.

identifying them with birds and animals. Every community had gods which were particularly venerated. The will of these gods, thought to be discernible in a variety of ways, governed decisions of life. In addition to the local gods there were national deities, thought to be higher in rank, though actually not influencing personal life patterns as much as the local gods. Horus, the falcon god, rose from local to national status when Lower and Upper Egypt were first united under King Menes.<sup>16</sup> During the old Kingdom, the god Ra was honored as chief deity. For most of the second millennium, however, Amon (sometimes identified with Ra as Amon-Ra) carried this distinction. Thebes was his main center of worship, and immense temples, particularly Karnak and Luxor, were erected to him there. His priesthood wielded enormous power, controlling vast tracts of land and insisting on contributions from people already poor. The priests exerted extensive influence politically. Amenhotep IV (1384-1367) of the Eighteenth Dynasty sought to break from their hold and establish a revolutionary monotheistic cult to the god Aton (changing his own name to Akhenaton, accordingly) in a new capital at Tell el-Amarna; but when he died all reverted to the established pattern.

A major feature in Egyptian religion was the belief in life after death. People believed that a record of their deeds was weighed after death to determine their continuing status in the after life. People desired adequate material provisions for the future existence, thus giving stress to burial preparation. Bodies were embalmed and fine tombs constructed. Pharaohs of the Old Kingdom built the immense pyramids as their places to be buried. Food, drink, furniture, and other necessities of life were included in the tombs. In earlier days, even servants were slain and placed beside their masters' bodies. Poor people could not prepare as lavishly as rich, but still they did as much as they could.

### C. JACOB'S DESCENDANTS IN EGYPT

On the basis of the chronology established in the prior chapter, Jacob and his family arrived in this Egyptian milieu during the first period of rule in the second millennium, that of the Twelfth Dynasty. Since the date of the arrival was c. 1876 B.C.,<sup>17</sup> the Pharaoh would likely have been Senusert (Sesostris) III (1878-1871), one of the most aggressive of the Dynasty. He made conquest as far south as the Second Cataract and north through all of Palestine. He dug a canal from the Delta to the Red Sea and reopened another at the First Cataract. His predecessor, Senusert II (1894-1878), would have been the man whose dream Joseph interpreted and who made Joseph his vizier.

Given the fertile land of Goshen, and being unusually blessed by God, Jacob's descendants prospered. God gave Jacob seventeen years to see this prosperity; and the satisfaction he experienced must have been gratifying, after suffering so much disappointment earlier in life. Crops grew and the population increased until "the land was filled" (Ex. 1:7) with the children of Israel. This does not mean that they spread throughout all the land in both Lower and Upper Egypt. This would not have occurred for the reason especially that every shepherd was "an abomination unto the Egyptians" (Gen. 46:34). The Egyptians would not have permitted this

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16 Manetho identifies Menes as the first king of permanently united Egypt, the first of the First Dynasty. Cf. Alan Gardner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 66-67; Finegan, *LAP*, pp. 82-83.

17 *Supra*, chap. 2, p. 34, n. 32. It is of interest that considerable evidence exists in Egyptian papyri that a large Asiatic slave population lived in Egypt during the latter part of the Twelfth and especially the Thirteenth Dynasty. This cannot reflect Israel's enslavement as a nation, however, for this did not ensue until the Hyksos' time. Some Israelites may have been taken earlier as slave-servants, but probably most of these were Asiatics of other origins. Cf. Van Seters, *TH*, pp. 90-92 for discussion and references.

kind of intermingling. For the most part, the sons of Jacob remained together, but, doing so, expanded their holdings to fill the Goshen area completely.

Joseph lived seventy-one years after the coming of his family to Egypt.<sup>18</sup> This means that he died c. 1805 B.C., during the reign of Amenemhet III (1841-1797), approximately twenty-five years prior to the end of the Twelfth Dynasty. Apparently Joseph continued in high office even after the famine and, if so, would have been able to do much for the benefit of his loved ones. It is easy to believe that the finest in irrigation equipment, farming tools, and home conveniences were provided. Life would have been good for Israelites as long as Joseph lived.

#### **D. OPPRESSION INSTITUTED (Exodus 1:8-22)**

Prior discussion has revealed that the King who arose and "knew not Joseph" was the first of the Hyksos.<sup>19</sup> This one likely was the very first of these rulers, who, in the initial stages of their control, ruled only northeastern Egypt and established Avaris as capital. Goshen was in the area and no doubt was included in this first stage of conquest. If so, the year was about 1730 B.C.,<sup>20</sup> some seventy-five years after Joseph's death. These intervening years likely had continued as years of prosperity for the Israelites. The Egyptian Pharaohs would have permitted them to live quite as before, both because of respect for the memory of Joseph and because there was no urgent reason to change. It is probable that the special benefits provided by Joseph ceased, but these would not have been so needed by this time, with a position of strength having already been attained.

1. *Slavery imposed (Exodus 1:8-14).* But now matters changed. A rigorous servitude was imposed on the dwellers of Goshen. Exodus 1:8-10 records the reasons. First, the new Hyksos ruler "knew not Joseph"; that is, he did not have historical knowledge of Joseph, nor did he have reason to respect it if he had. He headed a new dynasty of a foreign rule, so that former allegiances or obligations were of little consequence. Second, Israelites were seen to be "more and mightier" than the Hyksos. As has been pointed out, the Hyksos were never of great number, and Jacob's family could have easily outnumbered them by this time. The new ruling family would not have wanted a strong, unified, foreign group to continue unchecked as a potential source of trouble. Third, a military alliance with the former regime was seen as a possible way in which this trouble might come. The deposed rulers, whose dynasty had befriended this group of people, might now call upon them for support in re-establishing the old *status quo*.

Accordingly, a decision was made to enslave the people. Their potential for trouble would be removed both by taking away freedom to move about and work as they wished and by placing "taskmasters" over them to make sure that all energy was expended in hard labor. Further, not only would this keep them in control but also provide valuable labor for building projects, such as the cities of Pithom and the new capital Raamses (Avaris).<sup>21</sup>

The Hyksos did gain in labor contributed and also prevented any alliance between the deposed Egyptians and Israel -- if indeed such a possibility really existed -- but they did not succeed in

<sup>18</sup> *Supra*, chap. 2, p. 35, n. 37.

<sup>19</sup> *Supra*, chap. 2, pp. 35-38.

<sup>20</sup> The alternative is that this one was Saluti, the Hyksos who took over all Egypt about 1680 B.C. He was likely a still more aggressive person.

<sup>21</sup> *Supra*, chap. 2, p. 35, n. 40.

curtailing Israelite population growth. Exodus 1:12 states that "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." Population growth was necessary if Israel was to become nation-size by the time of the Exodus, and God blessed them to that end. The rapid rate of increase<sup>22</sup> continued as before.

2. *Male babies ordered killed (Exodus 1:15-22)*. In time another measure to hinder this growth was instituted: all male children were ordered to be killed. This order was not given by the Hyksos, however, but by one of the Eighteenth Dynasty.<sup>23</sup> This follows from the fact that Moses was born while the order was in effect. Since Moses was eighty years old<sup>24</sup> at the time of the Exodus (1446 B.C.), his birthdate may be figured as c. 1526 B.C., during the reign of Thutmose I (1539-1514), the third ruler of that dynasty.

The order came in two stages, which may have been separated by several years. The first stage was a directive to Hebrew midwives<sup>25</sup> to kill every male Hebrew child at the moment of birth (Ex. 1:15-21). It was probably issued by either Ahmose (1584-1560) or Amenhotep I (1560-1539), the first two rulers of the Eighteenth Dynasty. It was a vicious order and would have been very effective had it been obeyed. However, thanks to courageous midwives, it was not, the excuse being given that the Hebrew women were quick in giving birth so that midwives could not arrive in time to do the evil deed.

The second stage of the order was issued, as observed, by Thutmose I, the first great empire builder of Egypt. It was a public order directed to every Egyptian, that all male children of the Hebrews be thrown into the Nile to drown (Ex. 1:22). This was surely one of the most inhuman directives ever issued by a public official; but it is, in a measure, understandable in view of the circumstances. The Israelites were becoming very numerous, now that three and one-half centuries of rapid growth had elapsed. Thutmose I was involved in enlarging Egypt's borders, which meant that most of his army was out of the country for extensive periods of time. He did not want this foreign people to increase and become still a greater threat while his home force was so small.

### **E. MOSES<sup>26</sup> (Exodus 2:1-10)**

While the new order was more effective than the first,<sup>27</sup> it did not keep one very important person from entering Israelite history. That was Moses, the one whom the king, had he known his destiny, would have been the most interested in disposing. God's special protection was over him, however, for he was planned as Israel's great deliverer.

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22 *Supra*, chap. 5, p. 85.

23 Any Egyptian dynasty now would have desired such a controlling measure for several reasons: first, the historical tie with Israelites would now have been forgotten; second, instead would have existed an awareness of Asiatic kinship between these who remained and the hated, departed Hyksos; and third, the numbers of the Israelites would now have grown much larger than at any time prior to the Hyksos period.

24 Ex. 7:7. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness and was 120 at his death (Deut. 34:7).

25 Only two midwives are named, Shiphrah and Puah (Ex. 1:15), but these may have been the superintendents. Likely there were more than two to serve the number of Hebrew families then living.

26 The name, Moses, finds meaning both in Hebrew and Egyptian. In Hebrew *mosheh* means "drawn out" (Ex. 2:10), and in Egyptian *mos* means "child," it being the same element as found, for instance, in Thutmose, which means "child of Thot."

27 At least Moses' parents found it advisable to hide the baby and then make an ark to place him in the river.

1. *Early home (Exodus 2:1-10)*. Moses' father, Amram,<sup>28</sup> and his mother, Jochebed, were both descendants of Levi (Ex. 6:16-20). They already had two children: Aaron, three years old, and Miriam, perhaps about seven.<sup>29</sup> It is certain that the home was a center of godly instruction; for Moses, there only during his beginning years, was still highly influenced by it years later in the Egyptian palace. At that time he admirably chose to identify himself with his own people and so "share ill treatment with the people of God," rather than enjoy "the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25). Other homes among the Israelites, after so many years since Joseph, probably had become cold toward the God of their fathers, but not that of Amram and Jochebed. Their piety, no doubt, was a factor in God's selection of them to be the parents of Moses.

Moses is described as a "goodly" child, a matter which would only have intensified the parents' desire to have his life spared (Ex. 2:2-10). They hid him at home three months, in defiance of the King's commandment, and then, when this was no longer possible, laid him in a basket of bulrushes (papyri) which they placed in the river, leaving his sister to watch. Under God's providential care, the daughter of Thutmose I came to bathe,<sup>30</sup> found the baby crying, and, at the sister's suggestion, hired Jochebed to care for the child until he should be weaned, apparently not knowing that Jochebed was the baby's own mother. Jochebed thus had her son back, now legally safe, and was even to be paid for caring for him, all of which certainly prompted great thanksgiving in her heart. In perhaps four or five years,<sup>31</sup> however, she had to give him up to the palace where he became the legal son of Pharaoh's daughter.

2. *Hatshepsut, Pharaoh's daughter*. This daughter may have been the renowned Hatshepsut, who in time came to declare herself supreme ruler in Egypt. For a woman to assume such a position in that day was most unusual, but Hatshepsut was a most unusual person.<sup>32</sup> She had a strong personality and remarkable gift for leadership, which she used in advantageous circumstances to claim the throne.<sup>33</sup> She proclaimed herself ruler of both Lower and Upper Egypt and took a special king's name, Kamare, as well as most of the normal royal titles.

Hatshepsut was the only living child of Thutmose I and his official wife, Ahmose.<sup>34</sup> Four children had been born: two sons, Wadmose and Amenmose, and one daughter besides Hatshepsut, Nefruibity. It is all but certain, however, that each of the others died early in life, leaving Hatshepsut as sole lawful heir to the throne; as well as the only one who could really be identified as the daughter of Pharaoh who found Moses.<sup>35</sup>

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28 Cf. *supra*, chap. 5, p. 86, n. 14 for evidence that Moses' father was not the same Amram as the grandson of Levi (Ex. 6:16-18).

29 Ex. 7:7 gives Aaron's age. Miriam is probably correctly identified with the older sister who watched Moses when he was placed on the river. If so, she was old enough to assume this responsibility.

30 With the capital then at Thebes, this princess must have been visiting in the north near the Goshen area. Such trips were not unusual, however, cf. *supra*, chap. 5, pp. 103-104.

31 Moses would hardly have been younger than this, for he certainly was influenced by early home instruction years later in his choice to go to his own people, and also the princess would not likely have wanted to care for him much younger.

32 Two prior queens in Egypt's history had assumed supreme headship, but neither had posed and dressed as a man as did Hatshepsut; cf. Gardner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 183.

33 Since the Egyptian word for *king* is written the same as *queen*, it cannot be said for sure that she applied the masculine term to herself. However, her reliefs and statues depict her often in masculine clothing, wearing the ceremonial beard.

34 Cf. Steindorff and Seele, *When Egypt Ruled the East* (rev. ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 36-46; Hayes, *SE*, II, pp. 78-83.

35 It is possible that this daughter may have been of a lesser wife, of course. However, it seems more than coincidental that one of Hatshepsut's stature, who could provide every advantage for Moses, lived at this very time. Also, it would have taken someone of her strength and daring to rescue a Hebrew baby and even rear him

Because she was not male, Hatshepsut could not directly accede to the throne. Thutmose I had a son by a lesser wife, and he was now married<sup>36</sup> to Hatshepsut so that her legal title might work in his behalf. He took the name Thutmose II (1514-1504). This man was weak both in body and personality, quite in contrast to the robust Hatshepsut; and he was dominated in his rule by her and the queen-mother, Ahmose, also a woman of strength. To Hatshepsut's advantage in this was the fact that she held the people's favor, since her birth was royal on the part of both parents. One daughter only, Nefrure, was born to Thutmose II and Hatshepsut, and so once again a son of the Pharaoh by a lesser wife was brought forward as successor. He too may have been married to the daughter, royal in blood from both parents, though no certain evidence has been found in this instance.<sup>37</sup> This successor assumed the name Thutmose III (1504-1450). It was when Thutmose II had died and this young Thutmose III was about ten years of age that Hatshepsut took the daring step of assuming full control of the kingdom. Thutmose III clearly had been crowned before she did so and reigned perhaps a year.<sup>38</sup> But then she did seize his crown; and it was not until her death twenty-two years later (1503-1482), following a most impressive reign,<sup>39</sup> that he was finally able to take the headship back again. That he harbored great bitterness toward her as a result is witnessed by his multiple defacements of her name and representation from monuments and temples.<sup>40</sup> He clearly wished to obliterate her memory from the minds of the people. This same man went on to become the greatest ruler Egypt ever knew.<sup>41</sup>

3. *Moses at the palace.* We may safely think of Moses, then, as having been reared by this remarkable woman. It was she who found him in the river and later received him into the palace at Thebes as her adopted son. Thebes was a city of splendor at the time and offered the finest in cultural benefits. Being the center of Amun worship, great religious buildings abounded and educational advantages were the best the world afforded. Hatshepsut, intellectually endowed herself, would not have been satisfied with anything less than the finest education for her son. Her own daughter, Nefrure, died while still little more than a child,<sup>42</sup> which left Moses to receive all Hatshepsut's attentions.<sup>43</sup> He would have been provided the finest in tutors, and his own mental capacity would have been able to absorb all that was taught. That he did profit greatly was verified years later by Stephen saying, "Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22).

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right at the palace in defiance of the king's command.

36 Brother-sister marriages were accepted in ancient Egypt where it was believed that even the god, Osiris, had married his sister, Isis.

37 Cf. discussion by Hayes, *SE*, II, pp. 81-82; 105-106.

38 During this year, Hatshepsut permitted herself to be represented on public monuments standing behind her stepson, bearing only titles which were hers as wife of the deceased Thutmose II.

39 During her reign, Egypt enjoyed the highest economic prosperity since the Twelfth Dynasty period. She built

40 For instance at Hatshepsut's great funerary complex at Deir el Bahri, though the buildings were spared, the names and figures of Hatshepsut were methodically obliterated wherever found. This involved destruction of much relief sculpture and more than 200 statues and sphinxes, which adorned the courts and colonnades.

41 Hayes describes him as "Incontestably the greatest Pharaoh ever to occupy the throne of Egypt," *SE*, II, p. 116.

Steindorff and Seele state, "If any Egyptian ruler deserves to be honored by being designated 'the great,' he is a far more fitting candidate than any other"; *op. cit.*, p. 66.

42 If she married Thutmose III, it was when both were still ten years of age or less.

43 Moses was older than the daughter too. Born c. 1526 B.C., he would have been 22 years old when Thutmose III was made king in 1504 B.C. Hatshepsut was married to Thutmose II probably just before his accession 1514 B.C. which makes their daughter something less than 10 at this time.