

of the capital Baghdad (founded by the Arab rulers of the area in 762) were Jews. They played a prominent role in the establishment of Iraq as a nation; according to Mordecai Ben-Porat, chairman of the Babylonian Jewish Heritage Centre in Israel, as quoted by the *Jerusalem Report*, "Iraq's first minister of finance, Yehezkel Sasson, was a Jew, as was the deputy president of the Supreme Court. Jews played a key role in establishing the Iraqi judicial and postal systems, the railways, the customs bureau, and they were dominant in the chamber of commerce".

Things began to be less favourable for the Jews, however, after Iraq became independent, especially as conflict between Jews and Arabs developed in Palestine. After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 things rapidly worsened. In 1950 the government revoked the import and export licences of Jewish trading firms, devastating them, Jews in public service positions lost their jobs, and Jewish communities were the subject of several bomb attacks. The Israeli

government arranged flights to Israel, and from August 1949 to the end of 1952 120,000 Jews emigrated from Iraq to Israel, mostly on these flights, the project being named 'Operation Ezra and Nehemiah'. Only 17,000 Jews remained in Iraq.

Iraqi Jews flourished in Israel, despite initial difficulties caused by the infant nation having to absorb large numbers of immigrants from various countries. A few years later eleven per cent of Israel's teachers and seventeen per cent of Israel's doctors were Iraqi Jews. After the overthrow of the monarchy in Iraq in 1958, things worsened for the remaining Jews in Iraq, especially after Saddam Hussein seized control in 1979. Numbers gradually reduced as they died out or escaped. After the overthrow of the Saddam régime, a reporter for the *Jerusalem Post* visited Baghdad and looked for surviving Jews. He found a pitiful remnant, desperately poor and mostly elderly, but still retaining sabbath worship in an obscure synagogue.

## The Amalekites

### 2. Were they the Hyksos?\*

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**I**MMANUEL VELIKOVSKY, perhaps the most famous revisionist of the chronology of ancient times, proposed that the Amalekites were the notorious Hyksos invaders of Egypt.<sup>1</sup> He collated ancient records of great upheavals in Arabia that may have been the cause of a westward migration of the Amalekite tribes, and propounded the theory that they entered Egypt just after the Hebrews left. This would certainly have been an ideal opportunity to invade, for Egypt was ruined (Ex. 10:7) and leaderless (Ps. 136:15) in the aftermath of the ten plagues and the Exodus. In an age when neighbouring countries soon dominated any nation that showed signs of weakness, it is unlikely that Egypt was allowed to recover in peace. Such a chance to overrun the perennially fertile delta, and plunder the treasures of the usually impregnable Egyptian empire, was indeed a rare windfall.

#### The Hyksos and the Amalekites compared

By comparing Egyptian literature regarding the Hyksos invaders with Arabian historians' de-

scriptions of the Amalekites, Velikovsky highlights some strong parallels. Manetho was an anti-Semitic Egyptian historian who wrote in Greek. His work did not survive, but on the subject of the Hyksos invasion he was cited at length by Josephus:

"Tutimaheus [a Pharaoh]. In his reign, I know not why, a blast of God's displeasure broke upon us . . . A people of ignoble origin from the east, whose coming was unforeseen, had the audacity to invade the country, which they mastered by main force without difficulty or even a battle";

"Some say that they were Arabians";

"Their race bore the generic name of Hycsos [Hyksos], which means 'king-shepherds'. For *Hyc* in the sacred language denotes 'king', and *sos* in the common dialect means 'shepherd' or 'shepherds'; the combined words form 'Hycsos'";

\* Quotations from the RSV unless stated otherwise.

1. *Ages in Chaos*, 1952, ch. 2.

"[The Hyksos] savagely burned the cities, razed the temples of the gods to the ground, and treated the whole native population with the utmost cruelty".<sup>2</sup>

In the remnants of Egyptian literature the Hyksos invaders are called 'Amu', and it is stated in the Ipuwer Papyrus that they came from Asia. They were a people imbued to the core with a spirit of destruction. As far as is known, no monuments of any historical or artistic value were erected under their rule, and no literary works survived their dominion in Egypt, with the exception of lamentations by their Egyptian victims, such as those contained in the Ipuwer Papyrus.

The memory of the wickedness of these nomads is preserved by Manetho (see above). He provides the information that after the Hyksos invaded the country—murdering, raping, pillaging and burning—they established a dynasty of Hyksos pharaohs, the King-Shepherds.

Several Arabian writers record an invasion of Egypt by the Amalekites. The oral traditions that survived were written down in the ninth to the twelfth centuries A.D. Some of these accounts are patently fanciful or historically garbled, but the essence remains: that at some point in history there were Amalekite Pharaohs who exploited and debased the wealth and might of Egypt.

Velikovsky quotes excerpts from the works of several of these historians to demonstrate the similarities with Egyptian accounts of the Hyksos:

"The Amalekites reached Syria and Egypt and took possession of these lands, and the tyrants of Syria and the Pharaohs of Egypt were of their origin";

"An Amalekite king, el-Welid, son of Douma, arrived from Syria, invaded Egypt, conquered it, seized the throne and occupied it without opposition, his life long";

"When this conqueror came to Syria, he heard rumors about Egypt. He sent there one of his servants named Ouna, with a great host of warriors. El-Welid oppressed the inhabitants, seized their possessions and drew forth all the treasures he could find";

"The Amalekites invaded Egypt, the frontier of which they had already crossed, and started to ravage the country . . . to smash the objects of art, to ruin the monuments";

"There were Egyptian Pharaohs of Amalekite descent".<sup>3</sup>

### Egypt in eclipse

The Scriptures furnish no information about what happened in Egypt after the Israelites departed. It is likely, however, that Egypt's empire, ecology and economy were severely damaged, and took many years to recover. From the conquest until the time of King Solomon, the only 'southern' enemies of Israel were Amalek and Midian. There are no Biblical references to military expeditions by the pharaohs, or even to an Egyptian political presence. Yet during all this long era, according to the conventional chronology, Canaan was dominated by Egypt. Velikovsky's revised chronology places the Israelite wanderings, the conquest and the judges in the same period as the Hyksos/Amalekite rule over Egypt. If this is a correct association, then Amalek was indeed the main southern power during the era of the Judges, as the Bible record indicates ([see below](#)). The pattern of devastation that the Amalekites pressed upon rural Israel during the time of the Judges (Judg. 6:4-6) is very similar to the King-Shepherds' exploitation of Egypt's resources: "The Amu approach in their might and their hearts rage against those who are gathering in the harvest, and they take away [their] kine from the ploughing . . . The land is utterly perished, and naught remains".<sup>4</sup>

By accepting this theory for the present, some further insights arise from the Biblical records. Velikovsky believed that Israel and Amalek passed each other in the Sinai, both nations hurriedly migrating in a time of widespread upheaval. But, as shown in [Part 1](#), the Amalekites had been active near the borders of Egypt for quite some time before the Exodus (Gen. 14:7). During Israel's march through the Sinai Peninsula, Amalek made persistent raids upon the stragglers, culminating in a full war at Mount Sinai. This pattern does not describe two displaced companies passing each other, but Israel invading the territory of Amalek.

About a century before the Exodus, the pharaoh who "did not know Joseph" and enslaved the Hebrews was afraid of an invasion by unnamed enemies: "Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest . . . if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us" (Ex. 1:8,10). He may well have been referring to the Amalekite

2 All quotations from *Ages in Chaos*, ch. 2.

3 All quotations from *Ages in Chaos*, ch. 2.

4 *Papyrus Ermitage* 1116b, cited by Velikovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

tribes who were active along the routes through the Sinai and the Negev. Perhaps they seemed to be likely allies of Israel because of their nomadic origin and common Semitic ancestry. Pharaoh and the people were uneasy (v. 12), for by then the regional advantage gained for Egypt by Joseph's policies had nearly abated. After the ten plagues and Egypt's spectacular decline, the opportunistic Amalekites, who before had not been quite strong enough to challenge Egypt, could simply 'expand' into the Nile delta from their territory in Sinai without a fight.

If the Amalekites took their chance to overrun Egypt soon after Israel left it desolate, they also retained their influence in the Arabian Peninsula during the period of the Judges and early Kings. In this time they extended their power into Canaan, in alliance with their eastern brethren, the Ammonites, Moabites, Midianites and Bne-Kedem ("the people of the east"), as shown in [Part 1](#). Somehow, in the time between the Exodus and mid-Judges, the Amalekites had increased dramatically in numbers, for when they encamped with the Midianites and the Bne-Kedem in the Valley of Jezreel, they appeared to Israel as "locusts" and "sand on the seashore" (Judg. 7:12, NASV). This may have been the result of living off the fat of the eastern Nile delta, where conditions had once also helped greatly to increase Israel's birthrate.

During this period, therefore, the Amalekites were not just dislocated tribes of 'Bedouin' bandits, but the mightiest among the nations at the time. Just before the conquest, Balaam blessed Israel with the words, "his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted" (Num. 24:7). This was no great blessing unless Agag was the best current example of a powerful ruler. When Balaam cursed Amalek he described them as "the first of the nations" (v. 20). They were not, of course, the 'first' in reference to origin, so this phrase is interpreted to mean, 'the first nation to attack Israel'. In the light of their proposed prominence at the time, it would also refer to their numbers, status and other dominant qualities (such as ferocity). Thus, by the end of Israel's forty years' wanderings, the Agags may have been the rulers of both Egypt and Arabia. This explains the long 'Dark Age' for both Egypt and Israel, in which the oppression from the Amalekite invaders was so pervasive that neither nation could thrive.

Did the Israelites know that Egypt had been invaded by the king-shepherds? Velikovsky has

retranslated a verse in Psalm 78 referring to the plagues upon Egypt: "He [Yahweh] cast upon them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them" (v. 49, AV). By a change in one letter this can read, "sending king-shepherds among them".

#### Forty years of change

During the period of the wilderness wanderings and the conquest it appears that there was a decline in the Amalekite presence in the Kadesh district. When Israel defeated them at Rephidim and advanced on the Kadesh district a year later, the Amalekites were displaced from their ancient territory (Gen. 14:7) into the northern Negev (Num. 13:29). Here they joined with the Canaanites and Amorites in routing Israel during the attempt to enter Canaan from the south (14:43-45). Then, aware that Egypt was wide open for invasion, they left the Negev and, flowing into the delta, established themselves there and began to dominate the Egyptians.

By comparing Biblical references to the enemy nations at the beginning of the forty years with those at the end, this changing scene is verified. When the twelve spies went into the land and came back to report to the people, the territories of the enemy nations were these: "The Amalekites dwell in the land of the Negeb; the Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country; and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan" (13:29). At the end of the forty years, when the king of Arad attacked the nation at Mount Hor, the Negev was no longer occupied by Amalekites, but by Canaanites (21:1-3). Where had the Amalekites gone? They had moved down into Egypt, leaving the Canaanites free to expand into the Negev. Thus, when the Israelites came to fight with the king of Arad at the end of the forty years, there were only Canaanites in the Negev. In between these incidents there is no record of any clashes with the Amalekites, and the explanation for their absence during this time is that they were preoccupied with their invasion and domination of Egypt.

Thus, shortly after the Exodus, Yahweh drew the Amalekites down into Egypt, which enabled His people to remain unmolested by them in the Negev for the duration of their wanderings. After the incident at Hormah in the first year from the Exodus, the Amalekites do not appear again until the time of Ehud the judge (Judg. 3:13). This appears to be at least fifty years into the era

of the Judges (vv. 8,11), which followed about thirty years of conquest under Joshua. Amalek's migration to Egypt some years before the conquest also helps to explain why the tribes of Judah and Simeon only encountered Canaanites in their southern campaign and had some success in claiming their inheritance (1:9,17).

### Saul and Amalek

At the end of the period of the Judges the people requested a king to lead them into battle (1 Sam. 8:19,20), which in this time of oppression and fear seemed to be a high priority. King Saul recognised very early in his reign that Amalek was the main obstacle to a secure kingdom for Israel. Perhaps he should be commended more than he often is for the zeal he displayed in meeting these expectations, for "he did valiantly, and smote the Amalekites, and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them" (14:48). Saul was subsequently commanded to annihilate Amalek (15:3), and was also triumphant in this campaign (vv. 7,8). Even though he disobeyed Yahweh by keeping their king alive and preserving the spoil, he effectively broke the back of the Amalekite power (v. 20).

Velikovskiy attributes the liberation of Egypt from the Amalekites to this defeat of them by Saul. At the time when Saul went to war against the Amalekites, however, their territory was from "Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt" (v. 7), which area excludes Egypt itself. King Agag was captured, not in Avaris, the Hyksos capital in the Nile delta, but in "the city of Amalek", which at this time lay within Kenite territory (v. 6). So it would appear that the Egyptians had managed to liberate themselves just before the era of the Israelite kings, and that the Amalekites had regrouped in the Negev. Thus, when Saul overthrew the Amalekites, they were operating from a city (or cities) at the interface of Philistia and southern Judah.

'Havilah to Shur' is the vital clue to the extent of Amalek's range in Saul's day. From Genesis 25:18 we learn that Havilah is on the way ("as you come") to Assyria (*Green's Interlinear*). It was most likely the gateway to Assyria, just as Shur was to Egypt. The territory between these cities represents the entire domain of the Arabs.

Havilah was therefore at least twice as far from Israel to the northeast as Shur was to the southwest. This would seem to be an unlikely distance for Saul to go campaigning, some 1,000 kilometres (600 miles) in all. As the Bible only

describes the one action in southern Judah in which Agag was taken captive, 1 Samuel 15:7 is best understood as meaning that Saul struck a mortal blow at the centre of the Amalekite operations, causing the collapse of their entire empire "from Havilah as far as Shur".

### Where was the city of Amalek?

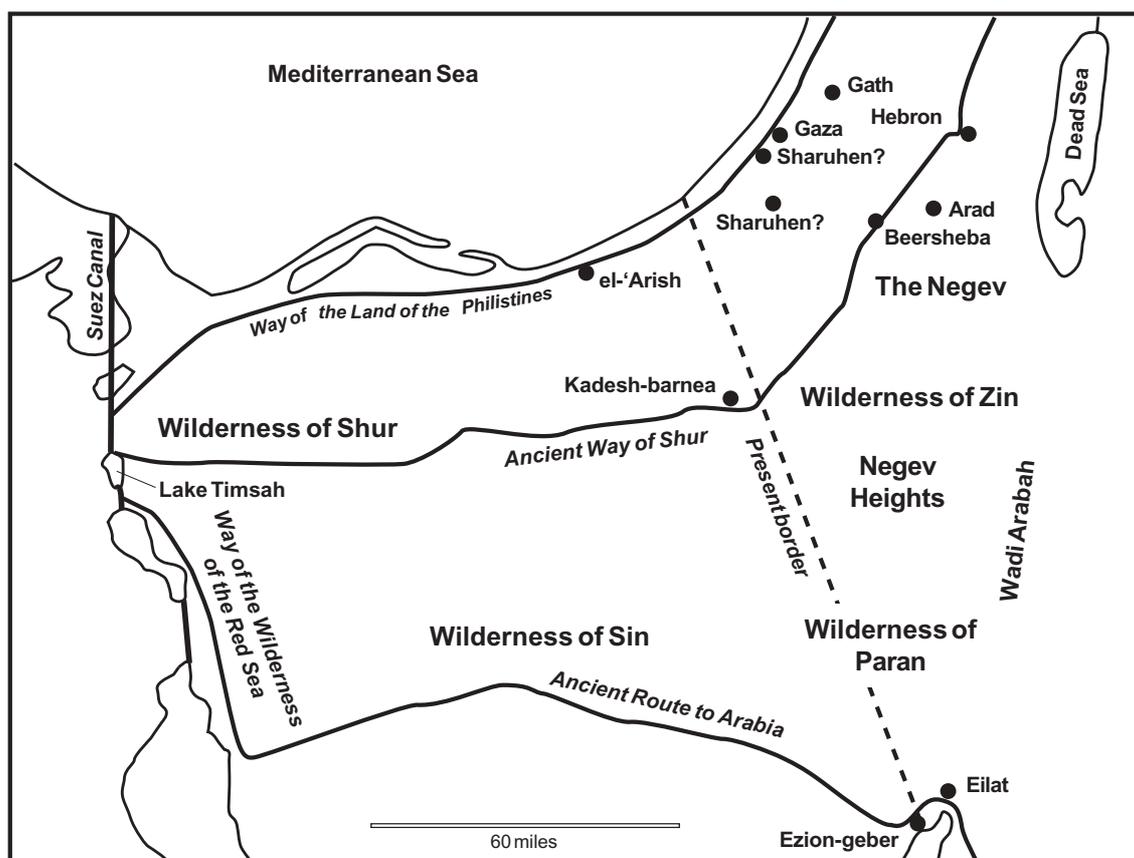
Egyptian sources for the defeat and expulsion of the Hyksos refer to the capture of their capital Avaris in the Nile delta region and to the siege of a city called Sharuhén. Sharuhén is the name of one of the cities of the tribe of Simeon (Josh. 19:6), whose inheritance lay within the borders of Judah (v. 1). It is listed among the thirteen cities of Beer-sheba, which confirms its location towards the southwestern limit of the land. When the Hyksos/Amalekites were expelled from Egypt, they may have taken over this marginal town of Judah and made it their new capital.

No doubt when the Amalekites settled in their new capital they redoubled their old habits of plundering the people of Israel (1 Sam. 14:48), at which time Saul, eager to prove himself as the new king, began to fight with them. Before Saul set out to destroy Amalek, he numbered his troops in Tela'im (15:4), which is probably the same as Telem, another city of southern Judah (Josh. 15:24).

The site of the Amalekite stronghold ambushed by Saul is likely to have been that today known as [Tel Sharuhén](#) (called by the Arabs Tell-el-Far'a) on the southern bank of [Nahal Besor](#) (Wadi Gaza), about twenty-five kilometres (fifteen miles) south of Gaza.<sup>5</sup> It lies between the Way of Shur and the Way of the Land of the Philistines, about thirty kilometres (eighteen miles) west of Beer-sheba (see [map](#) opposite). It has strata from Middle Bronze Age IIb to Roman times, and the earliest stratum has Hyksos structures.

Saul ambushed the "city of Amalek" from the valley beside it (1 Sam. 15:5). The word for "valley" (*nahal*) means torrent-bed, and every city of these times (except Arad) was built beside such a source of water. In this case the reference is to [Nahal Besor](#) ("brook Besor"), which also appears

5. Another candidate for Sharuhén, and one that is preferred by some archaeologists, is Tell el-Ajul. This tel lies in the Gaza Strip amongst the Philistines and on the ancient coastal highway. The earliest stratum of this city is also Hyksos, and, like Tell el-Far'a, it overlooks the valley of Nahal Besor.



in a later conflict between the Amalekites and David (1 Sam. 30:9,10).

[Tel Sharuhen](#) is a very high, impressive tel with sweeping views of Philistia to the west and southern Judah to the east. Any army approaching over the plains could easily be seen. Close to the tel, however, [Nahal Besor](#) is a deep winding ravine full of lush vegetation, which twists and turns in several places, making it possible for a large army to approach without detection.

The location of Tel Sharuhen suggests that the Amalekites and the Philistines had a cooperative relationship against their common enemy, Israel. Perhaps the Philistines gave Sharuhen to the exiled Agag for the same reason that Achish later gave Ziklag to David: to enlist his help in opposing Israel. Arab sources indicate that the Philistines intermingled with the Amalekites,<sup>6</sup> sought their favour and provided them with metalwork and pottery. When Saul was finally defeated by the Philistines in Mount Gilboa, it was an Amalekite (far from home, and thus possibly attached to the Philistine host) who claimed to have despatched him (2 Sam. 1:8,13).

If the Hyksos/Amalekite identity is correct, then one thing seems to be certain: the Egyptians were busy trying to maintain their recent liberation and keeping the Hyksos away from their border around the same time that the young King Saul began his campaigns. Israel and Egypt pinned the King-Shepherds between them, and finally managed to break their hold in the region.

#### David and Amalek

Saul insisted that he had annihilated the Amalekites according to Yahweh's command (1 Sam. 15:15,20), but this is not the last mention of them in Scripture. Although their king was killed and the inhabitants of their capital were massacred, other Amalekites 'from Havilah to Shur' remained to stage a comeback. The Amalekites were difficult to eliminate because of their 'wilderness' battle skills and decentralised lifestyle. The physical character of the country they occupied necessitated a nomadic life, which they adopted to the fullest extent. Their wealth

6. As cited by Velikovsky, *op. cit.*, p. 93.



**Tel Sharuhen, situated on the southern bank of Nahal Besor, and the most likely site of the Amalekite city taken by Saul.**

consisted in flocks and herds, and it appears that they took their households along with them, even on their military expeditions (Judg. 6:5).

During David's exile from Saul, some Amalekites were still found to the south of Philistine territory, and he regularly made forays against them (1 Sam. 27:8). He persecuted them with unending success during the one year and four months that he was under the patronage of Achish, king of Gath (27:7,11; 29:3). Desperate to build up their numbers and wealth again, Amalek raided Philistia and Judah from the south, and overcame and burned Ziklag while David and his men were marching north with the Philistine forces marching against Saul (30:1-2,14). They took captive all the women and children and plundered every last thing of value, much of which must have previously been theirs. In those days, when survival depended upon population, the taking of captive women was a common practice (Deut. 21:10-14) and a short-cut to building tribal strength.

This sudden invasion from the south is consistent with the situation of the Amalekite nation at the time. Only a generation before, they had been proud rulers over Egypt and Arabia and had reached the zenith of their power and popu-

lation. But now, after their expulsion from Egypt and their decimation at the hands of Saul, the situation was very grim for the survivors. After their capital was burnt, they had been forced to retreat further to the south of Nahal Besor, probably towards the Kadesh district.

The pattern of assault on Ziklag was the same as that which the Hyksos employed when they invaded Egypt about 500 years before: "They savagely burned the cities . . . carrying off the wives and children into slavery".<sup>7</sup> David and his men feared the very worst for their families, and not only because Amalekite cruelty was legendary. They themselves had never spared a soul in all the raids on Amalek from their base in Ziklag (1 Sam. 27:9,11) and probably believed this raid to be an Amalekite act of revenge.

Perhaps the most telling hint in Scripture that the Amalekites and the Hyksos overlords of Egypt were the same people is found within this account. When David courageously led his men in pursuit of the Amalekite marauders, they found an unconscious Egyptian in the open country who had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and nights. He was "a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite" (30:13), and his master had abandoned him when he fell ill. His



**Nahal Besor, the brook Besor of 1 Samuel 30:9, and probably the valley of 1 Samuel 15:5.**

admission reveals a very striking detail. The man spoke of his being a 'servant' and the Amalekite a 'master', as though this was the order of the day. By what other means than the Hyksos/Amalek identity could an Egyptian, the son of a proud and ruling nation, be the servant of an Amalekite, a poor nomad? This unfortunate man and his heartless master were already the last in their respective roles. The Amalekites were in retreat and decline, and only 400 men escaped David's subsequent retaliation.

Velikovsky comments on the events of this period: "On the ruins of the great Amalekite Empire two kingdoms rose simultaneously to freedom and power: Judah and Egypt. The inheritance was divided between them. Judah absorbed the Asiatic provinces of the Amalekites from the Euphrates in the north to the border of Egypt in the south".<sup>8</sup> Expansion was also eastward; David and Joab led the army of Israel against Moab, Ammon, Edom and Aram (Syria) (2 Sam. 8; 12:26-31), and, bereft of their Amalekite allies, they all fell before Israel. David dedicated precious metals that he had taken from the Amalekites (8:12; 1 Chron. 18:11), yet no specific

campaigns against Amalek are recorded at this time, so it seems that the enemy was already greatly diminished. Thus the Dark Age in the Near and Middle East was over and King Solomon inherited a wide and peaceful realm.

Some Amalekites managed to survive through the period of the Kings until Hezekiah's time. Then 500 men of the tribe of Simeon went to dwell in Mount Seir (the Central Negev in this context) and "destroyed the remnant of the Amalekites that had escaped" (1 Chron. 4:42,43). These were probably the descendants of the "four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled" from David and his men after the Ziklag incident (1 Sam. 30:17). Thus, by the time of the Assyrian invasion, Amalek's national destruction, as prophesied by Balaam (Num. 24:20), was complete. They may never have been exterminated entirely, however, as evidenced by the appearance of Haman the Agagite, an evil man of influence in the Persian period (Est. 3:1; cf. 1 Sam. 15:8).

(Concluded)

7. Manetho, quoted by Josephus, *Against Apion*, I, 76.

8. Velikovsky, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-6. See 1 Kings 4:21.