

The Historical Reliability of the Old Testament – Part 3

The Exodus

The date of the Exodus

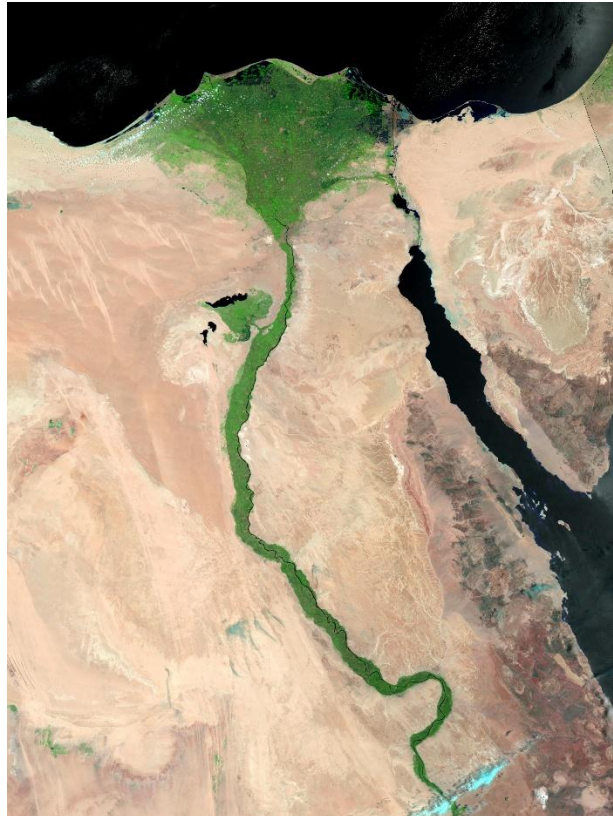
- The Pharaoh is not named in the biblical accounts, and there are no extra-biblical accounts.
- Christians disagree, but two dates are suggested.
 - An "early" date of c. 1446 BC
 - This comes from the most straightforward interpretation of 1 Kings 6:1; other biblical inferences; and some archaeological data.
 - A "late" date of c. 1260 BC.
 - This is supported by the mention of the city of Raamses in Exodus 1:11; the known history of the Egyptian empire; and by other archaeology.
- There is no clear solution to this without more data, but the exodus clearly takes place in the "new kingdom" period of Egypt (c. 1520-1075 BC, sometimes called its golden age). This is long after the pyramids were built, but it was a time of extensive other building projects like Luxor temple.

The city of Raamses

- Exodus 1:11
 - The children of Israel were forced to build the cities of Pithom and Raamses
- Raamses was the name of 11 different Pharaohs between c. 1290 and c. 1070 (If the Egyptian chronology is correct at this point!)
 - Ramesses II built the city of Raamses (or Pi-Rameses) to be a new capital
 - After prospering for a time, this city was eventually abandoned and deconstructed.
 - Its stones were taken and reused elsewhere.
 - Therefore, naming it is an indicator of a contemporary history, not later storytelling

The Nile Delta

- Genesis 47:27
 - The children of Israel settle in Goshen (also called the land of Rameses)
- This area was in the east of the Nile delta, an area of mud, silt and clay that flooded (usually reliably) every year.
 - Not much has been preserved here, unlike the many stone buildings further upstream.



Slavery in Egypt

- We have been able to recover "varied and detailed brick accounts" which show that the type of slave-labour described in Exodus did exist, and uniquely so in the New Kingdom period.
 - They describe many features, such as daily quotas, that we find in the Exodus account.
- The tomb chapel of Rekhmire, c. 1450
 - 'It shows mainly foreign slaves "making bricks for... The temple of Amun..."'
 - 'Semites and Nubians fetch and mix mud and water, strick out bricks from brick moulds, leaving them dry and measuring off their amount. All this is done under the watchful eye of Egyptian overseers, each with his rod.'



The plagues

- It is worth noting that plagues are not fanciful in nature, but for the most part they consist of very ordinary things - pests and disease.
- It is fascinating to realise that the first 8 plagues are explainable as extreme versions of natural events, but it is even more interesting to note that the first 6 are all logically connected
- The first 6 plagues fit well with a physical understanding of the Nile's annual flood. An extreme flood event could cause high levels of red iron-rich sediment to be carried downstream making the river appear as blood.
 - The frogs leaving the water, the mass breeding of mosquitoes, and the subsequent spread of disease can easily be seen as a direct result. This also explains why Goshen is not affected by the plagues.
 - The locust swarm also makes sense of the realities of ancient Egypt



Waters Turn to Blood
Exodus 7:14-25



Amphibians (Frogs)
Exodus 7:26-8:11



Gnats (Lice)
Exodus 8:12-15



Flies
Exodus 8:16-28



Disease on Livestock
Exodus 9:1-7

The Ten Plagues of Egypt



Unhealable Boils
Exodus 9:8-12



Hail and Fire
Exodus 9:13-35



Locusts
Exodus 10:1-20



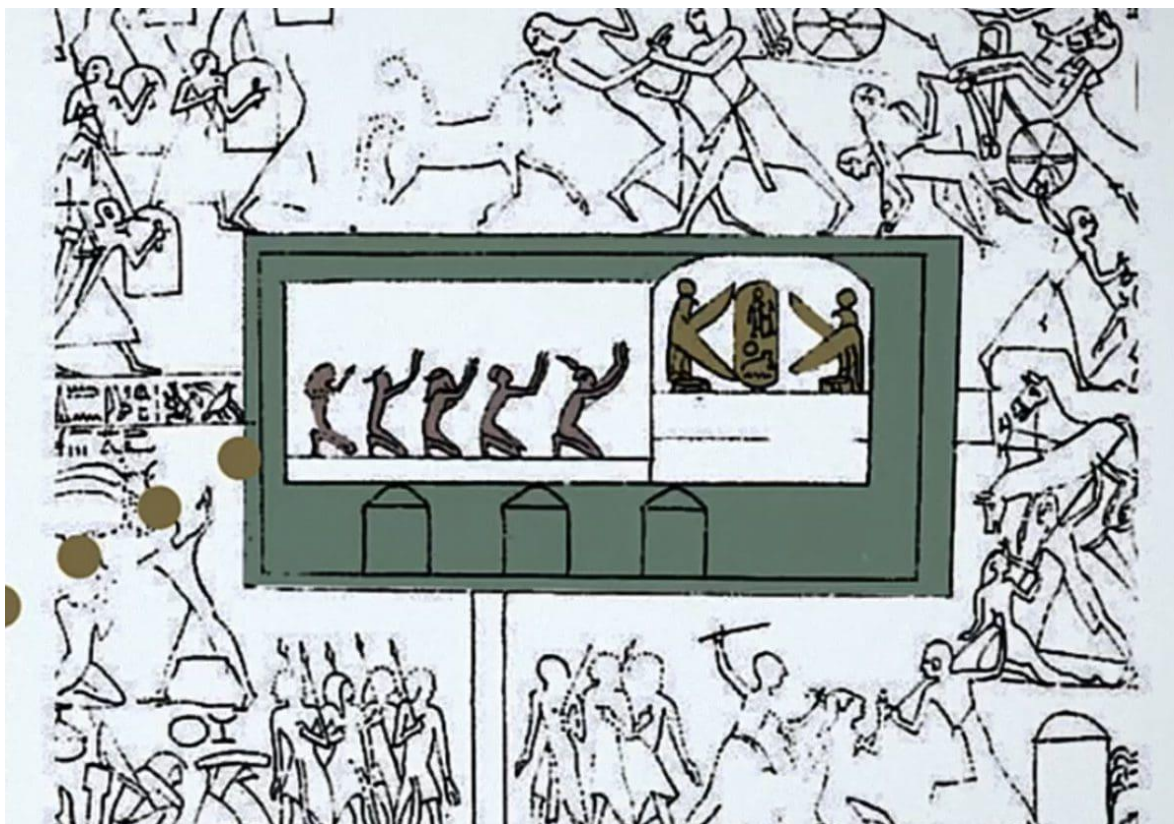
Darkness
Exodus 10:21-29



Death of First-Born
Exodus 11:1-12:36

The tabernacle

- While God gave the specific designs for the tabernacle to Moses, it is clear that the tent shares common design and construction elements (such as wood tenon in socket joints) from the appropriate time period.
- Examples of similarly constructed tents for royal and religious purposes appear in various times and places.
- But the most striking resemblance is to the war tent of Ramesses II, depicted at the battle of Qadesh
 - Notice the division into outer court, inner place of worship, and innermost place where the Pharaoh is represented flanked by falcons.



Conclusion

- The Exodus is a foundational event in the history of Israel, that is echoed all over the Old Testament. It is unthinkable to imagine that it was not a real historical event.

- While the brief glimpse at the evidence does not prove the Exodus, it should help us to realise that the story is believable as a historical account, and the scorn of sceptics is not warranted.