

ISSUE

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BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

November 29,
2015

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Jeff Nunn

Kyle Pope

Deacons:

Steve Dixon

Ryan Ferguson

Arend Gressley

Ben Hight

Jack Langley

Blake McAlister

Brady McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Rusty Scott

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



Did the Exodus Really Happen?

By Kyle Pope

In the spring of 2001 David Wolpe, the “rabbi” of Sinai Temple, the largest conservative Jewish congregation in Los Angeles, made history by stating during a Passover sermon:

... Virtually every modern archaeologist who has investigated the story of the Exodus, with very few exceptions, agrees that the way the Bible describes the Exodus is not the way it happened, if it happened at all (Tugend).

Students of the Bible and biblical archaeology are not surprised by such claims. Many scholars and archaeologist hold similar views, and this has led countless souls to choose either to abandon faith or to refuse to consider biblical teaching at all. While Wolpe claimed, “it doesn’t matter” if it really happened or not (Wolpe), Christians must recognize that it matters a great deal. The Exodus was promised to Abraham long before it took place (Gen. 15:13-14; Acts 7:6). It became the focal point of Israelite history and the point back to which all successive generations looked for their national identity. The Exodus prophetically foreshadowed Jesus’ own time in Egypt when His family escaped from Herod (Hos. 11:1; Matt. 2:15). Jesus affirmed the reality of events crucial to the Exodus, including the giving of the Law (John 7:19), manna (John 6:31-32), and Mosaic messianic prophecies concerning the Messiah (John 5:45). Jesus’ disciples recounted the Exodus as a historical fact (Acts 7:36; 13:17; Heb. 3:16; Jude 5) and even compared baptism to the crossing of

the Red Sea—proclaiming Jesus as the “**rock**” that sustained the Israelites (1 Cor. 10:1-4). Quite simply, if the Exodus didn’t happen the gospel itself is a myth!

Patterns of Evidence: Exodus

In the face of this conflict there have been many attempts to resolve these issues, but some recent work has proposed an intriguing theory with which serious students of the Bible should become familiar. In August of 2015 filmmaker Tim Mahoney released a documentary entitled *Patterns of Evidence: Exodus* (Thinking Man Films, 2014, Film). The film was narrated by Kevin Sorbo and features figures as notable as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli President Shimon Peres, notable Egyptologists, archaeologists, professors, and even David Wolpe (mentioned above). The film traces over a decade of Mahoney’s personal travel and

investigation to uncover the true nature of the evidence for the Exodus.

At the beginning of the film Mahoney acknowledges his own belief in Jesus, but sets out to objectively consider the evidence related to this issue. In the first part of the two-hour film Mahoney takes the viewer through the arguments and evidence offered by the majority of scholars dismissing the historicity of the Exodus. Mahoney relates his own discouragement at this stage of his investigation in the face of such seemingly insurmountable evidence. The last portion of the film, however, offers a collection of evidence that establishes a compelling theory which, (if valid) forms *patterns of evidence* that not only demonstrate the historicity of the Exodus but have the potential to radically alter the traditionally accepted chronology of much of ancient history.

The “New Chronology” Theory

A major figure in this investigation is Egyptologist David Rohl—a professed agnostic. In 1995 Rohl published a book and a three-part documentary featured on the Discovery Channel entitled *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1995). In these works and in the years that have followed Rohl has argued that anomalies in traditional Egyptian chronology have added more than three hundred years to the timeline of history affecting how we date many events in the ancient world. According to Rohl, this has unnecessarily pushed back the dating of events that correlate precisely with the biblical record. Mahoney interviews Rohl throughout his film about his (so-called) “new chronology” theory.

The first problem rests in an assumption. Exodus 1:11 records that before the Exodus the Israelites were compelled to build the storage cities of “**Pithom and Raamses**” (Exod. 1:11), also spelled “**Rameses**” (Exod. 12:37). Rameses II was one of the most important Pharaohs of Egyptian history, constructing colossal buildings and monuments and waging major campaigns into

Lybia, Nubia, and against the Hittites as far as Kadesh in Syria. This name of the storage city mentioned in Scripture led many to assume that Rameses II must have been the Pharaoh of the Exodus.¹ As a result, many dated the Exodus to his reign, traditionally dated from 1279–1213 BC. Unfortunately, while history has preserved an abundance of information about his reign, it does not preserve evidence of biblical plagues, the Exodus, or the destruction of his army in the Red Sea during his reign.

Mahoney and Rohl offer two compelling pieces of evidence that challenge this identification of Rameses II as the Pharaoh of the Exodus. What has long been considered the oldest reference to “Israel” outside of the Bible is found on a granite inscription memorializing the deeds of Merneptah II, the son and successor of Rameses II. In listing kingdoms Merneptah conquered it lists Israel. Although Rameses reigned more than 60 years, Merneptah reigned for less than ten years after his father’s death (1213-1204 BC). That would not allow enough time for Israel to be an established nation in Canaan by his time.² In recent years an artifact has come to light that predates the Merneptah inscription by 130 years but also includes

¹ It should be noted that the name Rameses is used in the Pentateuch as a synonym for Egypt—“**the land of Rameses**” (Gen. 47:11). The name means “begotten of Ra” (the name of the Egyptian god of the Sun). According to inscriptions it was called *Per-Ramses* even before the time of Rameses II (Aling).

² The hieroglyphs used for the name of Israel in this inscription use a determinative that indicates an ethnic group rather than a geographic territory, but that doesn’t change the problem of Israelite chronology. For more on this inscription see my study “The Seed of Israel” *Biblical Insights* 1.7 (July 2001) 23. This was written before the publication of the Berlin Pedestal inscription from the traditional view that Rameses II was Pharaoh of the Exodus.

Israel in a similar conquest list. An 18 inch granite block housed in Berlin was once part of the pedestal of a statue dating to the dynasty before Rameses. This makes it clear that Rameses II could not have been the Pharaoh of the Exodus if Israel existed in Canaan as a nation well before his reign (Veen).

Mahoney draws attention to an important detail in the Biblical record that comes when Solomon began to build the temple in Jerusalem. 1 Kings 6:1 records that this work began, “**in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign**” (NKJV). It is widely agreed that Solomon began his reign in the year 970 BC. The fourth year of this reign would be 966 BC. So 480 years before this would place the Exodus at 1456 BC, some 200 years before the time of Rameses II. So, if scholars look to the time of Rameses II for the Exodus it is no wonder they don’t find evidence!

Significance of an Early Dating of the Exodus

Does an earlier dating of the Exodus provide evidence supporting the biblical account? Some would say *yes*, but this is where Rohl's "new chronology" figures into the equation. Rohl (independent of any religious objective) argues that additional corrections to traditional Egyptian dating resolve it completely. Mahoney does not explain details of Rohl's Egyptian "new chronology," but in Rohl's own documentary he makes his case.

To summarize, Rohl first offers evidence to show that two Egyptian dynasties have been arranged consecutively when they actually overlapped. Second, he argues that an early mistaken identification was made between the historical Pharaoh Shoshenq I the biblical Pharaoh Shishak. In Scripture, Shishak brought 12,000 chariots and 60,000 horsemen and **"people without number"**

against fortified cities in Judah (2 Chron. 12:2-4) and **"took away everything"** from the temple and gold shields Solomon had made (1 Kings 14:26). The problem is that a conquest list on a wall relief in Karnak listing Shoshenq's conquests doesn't include Jerusalem and records more Israelite cities than Judean cities (Levin). In the biblical record Shishak offered refuge to Jeroboam before his reign as king of the newly formed northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 11:40). Would a Pharaoh besiege the territory of one for whom he had offered political refuge? Rohl argues the best evidence for the biblical Shishak is actually Rameses II. On a memorial relief of Rameses near Luxor it claims he plundered a city called "Shalem"—the root of the name Jerusalem and an alternate name for the city (cf. Gen. 14:18; Heb. 7:1-2). If this is correct it would change the dating of the reign of Rameses II from 1279–1213 BC to 943-877 BC. This would also move forward the dates scholars have assigned to many events in Egyptian and Canaanite history.

Evidence with the "New Chronology"

So what evidence of the Exodus exists if the date of the Exodus is moved back, and the chronology of events in Egyptian and Canaanite history is moved forward? Actually, the problem has never really been one of evidence—it is a problem of dating. Many things archaeology has uncovered coincide perfectly with the biblical record, but because of the way things have been dated it has been argued that they fall far too early to match the biblical account. What evidence exists if the "new chronology" is accurate? Consider the following:

Evidence of a Conquest of Palestine

What is generally known as the Middle Bronze Age IIB period in Palestine would now fit the period of Joshua's conquest of Canaan.

- During this period we find the destruction and burning of the city of Hazor and a tablet with the name "Jabin" as a royal name (Ben-Tor). This matches the biblical account (Josh. 11:1-11).

- We find the walls of Jericho falling down and burned after the collapse, with one section of dwellings attached to the wall left intact (Wood). This matches the biblical account (Josh. 6:1-25).

Evidence of a Departure from Egypt

The “new chronology” would move the time of the Exodus to a period of Egyptian history called the Second Intermediate Period.

- At some point during this period something created severe instability in Egypt allowing a race the Egyptian historian Manetho called the Hyksos to take control without battle (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.73). Some have suggested this was the Israelites or the race of the Pharaoh who did not know Joseph (Exod. 1:8). What if instability caused by plague, death, and the destruction of its army in the Red Sea left Egypt vulnerable after the Exodus? The Bible says they were still “**destroyed**” forty years after the Exodus (Deut. 11:3).
- We have a papyrus housed in the Netherlands that likely came from this period describing the Nile turned to blood, death everywhere, and the servants taking possessions of the treasures of the rich (Gardiner). This matches the biblical account (Exod. 7-12).
- We have a papyrus that lists Hebrew names among lists of slaves in Egypt (Hayes). These names include feminine forms of two of Joseph’s brothers: *Ashera*=Asher (Gen. 30:13) and *Sekera*=Issachar (Gen. 30:18), *Aqoba*, the feminine form of Jacob, and even *Shiphrah*, the name of one of the Hebrew midwives (Exod. 1:15).
- The storage city the Bible calls “**Rameses**” was also known as Avaris (Aling). Excavations have shown that Avaris was the home of Semitic peoples—not Egyptians. At some point there was a sudden departure of these people from this city (Bietak). This is the city from which

the Bible tells us the Israelites departed when they left Egypt (Exod. 12:37).

Evidence of a Sojourn in Egypt

The “new chronology” would move the beginning of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt to the period known as the Middle Kingdom. During this period we find some interesting things in connection with Avaris.

- Very early in this period there is evidence of what archaeologist call a “four-room” house that was typical of the kind of house found among the Israelites (Bietak). The Bible tells us that Pharaoh gave Jacob and his family a place to dwell in Goshen—the area where Avaris is located (Gen. 47:6, 27).
- In this Semitic settlement are the ruins of a large tomb with a statue of a Semitic man of some importance (Schiestl). The Bible says that Pharaoh made Joseph (a non-Egyptian) second to him over all Egypt (Gen. 41:41-45). Was this statue Joseph?

Conclusion

Mahoney ends his film acknowledging that he is a filmmaker and not an expert in these fields, but he expresses his conviction that this evidence deserves consideration by the public. Rohl's "new chronology" has its critics, and only time will tell if it withstands the test of further analysis and scrutiny. I too am no expert, but in the face of a world quick to dismiss biblical accounts, Christians should at least become familiar with arguments credible scholars have made and evidence that potentially matches the very events recorded in the inspired text.³

³ *Patterns of Evidence: Exodus* may be viewed on *NetFlix* or online: <http://www.patternsofevidence.com/> *Pharaoh's and Kings: A Biblical Quest* is posted on *YouTube*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9j0NP178bz0>

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