

BACKGROUND OF EGYPT

Bordered by the Mediterranean Sea on the north, the Sinai Peninsula and the Gulf of Suez on the east, and the Lybian desert on the west, Egypt is a land with a rich and well-recorded ancient history. Some of our knowledge of Egypt's ancient history stems from the work of the Egyptian priest Manetho (c. 270 B.C.), who records events of 31 dynasties, beginning c. 3200 B.C. The chart which follows begins with Ahmosis I, the founder of the eighteenth dynasty. According to the "early date" theory of the Exodus (adopted here), the Pharaoh of the Exodus was probably Amenhotep II; according to the "late date" theory, the Pharaoh was probably Rameses II.

EGYPTIAN PHARAHOHS

Ahmosis I	1570–46 B.C.	Amenhotep IV	1379–62 B.C.
Amenhotep I	1546–26 B.C.	Smenkhkare	1364–61 B.C.
Thutmose I	1526–12 B.C.	Tutankhamon	1361–52 B.C.
Thutmose II	1512–04 B.C.	Ay	1352–48 B.C.
Thutmose III	1504–1450 B.C.	Horemheb	1348–20 B.C.
Hatshepsut	1504–1483 B.C.	Rameses I	1320–18 B.C.
Amenhotep II	1450–25 B.C.	Seti I	1318–04 B.C.
Thutmose IV	1425–17 B.C.	Rameses II	1304–1236 B.C.
Amenhotep III	1417–1379 B.C.	Merneptah	1236–1223 B.C.

THE EXODUS

The date of the Exodus, the date of Jacob's entrance into Egypt, and the date of the writing of the Book of Exodus have all been debated by biblical scholars.

1. *The date of the Exodus.* Some scholars date the Exodus in the 13th century B.C. (ca. 1290, in the reign of Rameses II) while others date it in the 15th century B.C. (1446, in the reign of Amenhotep II).

Support for the early date comes from the biblical record and archeological evidence. First, in 1 Kings 6:1 the time between the Exodus and the beginning of Solomon's temple construction (in the fourth year of his reign) was 480 years. Since the fourth year of Solomon's reign was 966 B.C., the Exodus was in 1446. Also in the time of Jephthah (ca. 1100 B.C.) Israel had been in the land for 300 years (Jud. 11:26). Therefore 300 years plus the 40 years of the wilderness sojourn and some time to conquer Heshbon places the Exodus in the middle of the 15th century.

Second, archeological evidence from Egypt during this period corresponds with the biblical account of the Exodus (see Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954, pp. 140-5; and Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1964, pp. 215-6). For example, though Thutmose IV succeeded his father, Amenhotep II, Thutmose was not the eldest son. (The eldest son was killed by the Lord on the night of the first Passover, Ex. 12:29.) Amenhotep II (1450-1425 B.C.) repressed insurgents in the early part of his reign. Semites were forced to make bricks (cf. 5:7-18). Several of the Pharaohs of Egypt's 18th dynasty (ca. 1567-1379 B.C.) were involved in building projects in northern Egypt. "Since Eighteenth Dynasty Pharaohs were very active in

1Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.

Palestinian campaigns, it would seem reasonable that they would have established garrisons and store cities (cf. 1:11) somewhere in the Delta regions to facilitate movement between Syro-Palestinian sites and Egypt itself” (John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, p. 27).

Third, events in Palestine about 1400 B.C. correspond with the Conquest under Joshua. Archeological evidence suggests that Jericho, Ai, and Hazor were destroyed about 1400. One scholar has concluded, “All the accredited Palestinian artifactual evidence supports the literary account that the Conquest occurred at the time specifically dated by the biblical historians” (Bruce K. Waltke, “Palestinian Artifactual Evidence Supporting the Early Date of the Exodus,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129. January-March, 1972:47).

Arguments for a late date of the Exodus (ca. 1290) are answerable. First, advocates of the late date refer to the enslaved Israelites being forced to build the “store cities” of Pithom and Rameses (1:11). Archeological evidence, it is argued, suggests that these cities were built in the reign of Rameses II (ca. 1304-1236 B.C.), who then would have been the Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus. However, those two cities were built at least 80 years before the Exodus. (Moses, 80 years old at the time of the Exodus, 7:7, was not born until after the events recorded in 1:11.) This would place the building of Pithom and Rameses *before* the rule of Rameses II.

This means that the city of Rameses could not have been named for the monarch. How then is the reference to Rameses to be explained? Rameses may have been a common name during the time of the Hyksos kings of Egypt (1730-1570 B.C.) Rameses means “begotten of Ra [Re],” the Hyksos’ sun god. Also the name of the city was originally spelled Raamses (Heb., ראTMאμσεεס; cf. ASV, NASB) whereas the Pharaoh’s name was spelled Rameses or Ramesses (*Ra-mes-su*).

Second, advocates of the later date for Exodus argue that conditions in the Transjordan area do not coincide with an early date for the Exodus. Archeologist Nelson Glueck found no evidence of settlements in Edom, Moab, and Ammon from 1900 to 1300 B.C. Therefore Moses could not have encountered strong opposition there until later (in the 13th century).

Two replies may be given to this argument. Settled populations need not have existed at that time; the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites may have simply had military control of those territories though they were semi-nomads. Commenting on Numbers 20:14-17 Unger noted that “there is nothing in the passage which would demand a developed urban life in Edom or require the building of stout fortresses” (*Archaeology and the Old Testament*, p. 151). Also Glueck’s methods have been questioned by other archeologists and more recent findings suggest that some settlements were in the area, particularly at Tell Deir -Alla (H.J. Franken and W.J.A. Power, “Glueck’s *Explorations in Eastern Palestine in the Light of Recent Evidence*,” *Vetus Testamentum* 21. 1971:119-23).

Third, late-date Exodus advocates argue that archeological evidence points to widespread destruction in Palestine in the 13th century but not in the 15th century. However, with the exception of Jericho, Ai, and Hazor, Joshua’s military tactics did not involve destruction of the cities conquered (cf. Josh. 11:13). Waltke notes, “Other historical events could account for these layers of destruction; namely, the raids into Palestine carried out by Merneptah of Egypt circa 1230 B.C. or the raids of the People of the Sea circa 1200 B.C. by the Israelites in their continuing seesaw struggle with the Canaanites during the time of the Judges” (“Palestinian Artifactual Evidences,” pp. 35-6).

2. *The date of Jacob’s entrance into Egypt.* If the date of the Exodus is 1446 B.C. then certain biblical notations help establish other important dates. Since the duration of the wilderness sojourn was “430 years to the very day” (Ex. 12:40-42), Jacob moved to Egypt in 1876. (See the chart “Chronology of the Patriarchs,” near Gen. 47:28-31.)

3. *The date of the writing of the Book of Exodus.* The journey from Egypt to the Sinai wilderness took exactly three months (Ex. 19:1-2). It would seem logical that Moses composed the book during or shortly after the encampment at Sinai (1446 B.C.). Thus the book covers events that occurred sometime before Moses' birth in 1526 (chap. 2) to the events surrounding Mount Sinai (1446).²

PAGAN EGYPTIAN GODS

Religion in ancient Egypt was characterized by a complex polytheism, as a wide variety of local deities and nature gods were worshiped by the people. Many gods were associated with fertility and agriculture, and the protection of virtually every aspect of life was ascribed to some deity. The ten plagues were direct challenges to the worship of Egyptian deities who were thought to protect Egyptian life and property. In this way the supremacy of Yahweh, the God of Israel, was vividly demonstrated.

THE TEN PLAGUES OF EGYPT

Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, refused to release the Hebrew people from slavery and allow them to leave his country. So the Lord sent ten plagues upon the Egyptians to break Pharaoh's stubborn will and to demonstrate His power and superiority over the pagan gods of the Egyptians.

These plagues occurred within a period of about nine months, in the following order:

1. The water of the Nile River turned into blood (7:14–25).
2. Frogs overran the countryside (8:1–15).
3. People and animals were infested with lice (8:16–19).
4. Swarms of flies covered the land (8:20–32).
5. Disease killed the livestock of Egypt (9:1–7).
6. Boils and sores infected the Egyptians and their animals (9:8–12).
7. Hail destroyed crops and vegetation (9:13–35).
8. Swarms of locusts covered the land (10:1–20).
9. Thick darkness covered Egypt for three days (10:21–29).
10. The Egyptian firstborn, both of the people and their animals, were destroyed by God's death angel (11:1–12:30).

In all of these plagues, the Israelites were protected, while the Egyptians and their property were destroyed. The Hebrews were delivered from the final plague when they marked their houses, at God's command, by sprinkling the blood of a lamb on their doorposts. The death angel "passed over" the Hebrew houses.

At this final demonstration of God's power, the Pharaoh gave in and allowed Moses and the Israelites to leave Egypt. This deliverance became one of the most memorable occasions in Hebrew history. The Passover is celebrated annually even today to commemorate God's deliverance of the Hebrew people from slavery.

THE TEN PLAGUES ON EGYPT

²Walvoord, John F., and Zuck, Roy B., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press Publications, Inc.) 1983, 1985.

The Plague

1. Blood (7:20)
2. Frogs (8:6)
3. Lice (8:17)
4. Flies (8:24)
5. Livestock diseased (9:6)
6. Boils (9:10)
7. Hail (9:23)

8. Locusts (10:13)
9. Darkness (10:22)
10. Death of firstborn (12:29)

The Effect

- Pharaoh hardened (7:22)
- Pharaoh begs relief, promises freedom (8:8), but is hardened (8:15)
- Pharaoh hardened (8:19)
- Pharaoh bargains (8:28), but is hardened (8:32)
- Pharaoh hardened (9:7)
- Pharaoh hardened (9:12)
- Pharaoh begs relief (10:11), promises freedom (10:17), but is hardened (10:20)
- Pharaoh bargains (10:11), begs relief (10:17), but is hardened (10:20)
- Pharaoh bargains (10:24), but is hardened (10:27)
- Pharaoh and Egyptians beg Israel to leave Egypt (12:31–33)

God multiplied His signs and wonders in the land of Egypt that the Egyptians might know that He is the Lord.³

³Thomas Nelson, Inc., *Nelson's complete book of Bible maps and charts: Old and New Testament [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1996.