



Exodus from Egypt Rewriting the History Books

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Yetziat Mitzraim, our exodus from Egypt, is one of the pillars and foundations of our faith and the focal point of many of our *misvot*. If one looks into modern history books, or reviews the scholarly consensus among mainstream Egyptologists, a slight problem arises. By their account, we were never there and we never left, at least not the way the Torah depicts it.

As believers, the children of believers, the faithful among the Jewish Nation have never been moved by the scholarly consensus in any discipline which contradicts the truths of the Torah. As our rabbis correctly note, time and again claims against the Torah, backed by whatever popular flavor of scholarship the era espouses, have been overturned by later discoveries.

The situation with regard to Egypt however, has caused difficulties for many unfiliated Jews who would like to believe in the Torah, but remain separated from Orthodoxy by “empirical” issues. In fact, a great amount of controversy was stirred up a few years ago when a leading figure in the “Conservative Movement” went on record stating that because of the evidence, or lack of it, he did not believe in the Torah account. The irony of the situation is underscored by the fact that a growing number of secular scholars have uncovered historical evidence and unraveled the facts supporting the Torah narrative.

CONVENTIONAL THEORIES

Our historical tradition places the Exodus at the generally accepted date of 1476 BCE¹. This period correlates with the 18th Dynasty, in which we find many internal and contem-

1 This corresponds to 1310 BCE according to Jewish historical records, which differ from the secular reckoning because of the fact that the secular dating of the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians is mistakenly 166 years early.

poraneous records that document the period very well. The problem vis-à-vis Egypt, is that there is no indication of the servitude of the Israelites, the Ten Plagues, a mass exodus, or any substantial consequential diminishment of Egyptian power, as would be expected according to the events relayed in the Torah.

Egypt’s power and eminence during that period and thereafter, was tremendous and almost unparalleled. Thutmose III, the great conqueror, was the reigning pharaoh at the time and his career has been very well documented. He expanded Egyptian dominion in many regions including Canaan, Syria and Mesopotamia.

According to the Torah’s account, the destruction in Egypt was massive and precluded any national expansion of this kind. The population in Egypt is estimated to have been between 2-4 million at the time. A mass desertion of over two million people and the drowning of the entire army would have left the country debilitated. According to the Ramban and Seforno, the Egyptian army wasn’t able to recover from the chaos for at least 40 years (Ramban, Seforno, Devarim 11:4).

The evidence at Canaan, as related by Kathleen Kenyon, an archeologist that did excavation in Israel in the 1950s, particularly Jericho, also did not support this date or any date within 500 years that conformed to the narrative in Yehoshua. However, a 13th -century date could be made to fit very loosely but not conform at all closely to the description in the *Neveim* (Prophets).

Focusing on the cities of “Pitom and Raamses” mentioned in Shemot, which the Jewish people built for Pharaoh, and the misidentification of the Egyptian king Shoshenk as Shisak of the *Neveim*, led the scholars who could not accept a 15th-century date to key in on a 13th-century exodus date, with Raamses,

who reigned at the time, being the Pharaoh of the oppression and his successor, Merneptah, the Pharaoh of the Exodus. This solidified the 13th-century exodus date which is now accepted in the history books.

Of course placing the Exodus in Merneptah’s reign indicates a date that is incompatible with our tradition. It is also impossible that these two kings were the Pharaohs of the oppression and the exodus respectively, upon comparing the Torah’s account to the details of Raamses’ and Merneptah’s reigns. Additionally, the Egyptians were in a constant state of war at this time with the Hittites. Had a destruction of the Egyptian army occurred, the Hittites would have swept in and taken over the country.

Because of these issues (among others) and the prosperity that characterized Egypt at this time (13th century BCE) academics have concluded that perhaps a few Semitic slaves escaped around that time and the Jewish nation had romantically kept this as a national memory.

So we find that both the 15th-century date (as per our tradition) and the 13th-century date that scholars decided upon leave no room for an Exodus as depicted by the Torah. An exodus of the Torah’s proportions is therefore summarily dismissed by historians as myth. But there is a problem with their conclusions, however – even by academic standards, they are just plain faulty.

REVISIONIST DATING

A growing body of scholars, dubbed lovingly as “revisionists,” have proven, in a fashion undeniable to an unbiased mind, that the entire Egyptian dating and chronology (the so-called current chronology) is faulty. In fact, the current chronology of Egypt has led to anachronisms and misdating all across ancient world history, creating a situation of

collateral damage that is only now being felt and realized by erudite scholars.

Pioneers that noticed the incongruities in Egyptian chronology and ancient world chronologies included the famous physicist, Sir Isaac Newton, and more recently, Velikovsky², Courville³, Bimson⁴, Rohl⁵, and James⁶, just to name a few.

Some of the problems, as we now know, are that many kings listed in Manetho's King List reigned in parallel, rather than sequentially, and there were often co-regencies. This knowledge, among other facts, collapses Egyptian history by as many as 700 years, according to one revisionist scenario. What we now have are different and more realistic dates for the different dynasties that fit better, both with data from other kingdoms, and also the *Neveim*.

Recently mainstream scholars such as Emmanuel Anati⁷ and Rudolf Cohen⁸ have concluded in their work on Canaan that the mysterious invaders from the period known

2 Dr. Velikovsky, a medical doctor by profession, stirred up controversy in the 1950s and 1960s when he challenged and redated much of Egyptian chronology. Although the work in his book, *Ages in Chaos*, among others, hasn't been accepted by mainstream Egyptologists, he inspired an entire new school of revisionists, many of whom were actual Egyptologists by profession.

3 Dr. Courville (Ph.D.) was a professor at Pacific Union College from 1935 to 1949 before moving to Loma Linda University from 1949 to 1970, where he was emeritus professor of biochemistry at the School of Medicine. He published a two-volume, 700-page work in 1971 entitled *The Exodus Problem and Its Ramifications*.

4 John Bimson, Ph.D., is the author of many works, including *Redating the Exodus and Conquest*, which provide evidence that the current Egypt dating is inconsistent.

5 David Rohl, an English Egyptologist, wrote *A Test of Time* addressing this subject, which was marketed in America as *Pharaohs and Kings*. Rohl started out by picking up where Velikovsky left off and together with Peter James proposed an alternative revision to Egypt's current chronology. James and Rohl split ways ultimately, with James proposing an alternate revision.

6 Peter James's acclaimed book *Centuries of Darkness* addresses in detail the faulty chronology and how it caused the fictional dark ages of Greece.

7 Emmanuel Anati is a renowned scholar of ancient art and an archeologist. Anati is founder and Executive Director of the Centro Camuno di Studi Preistorici in Capo di Ponte, Italy, and Professor Ordinarius (ret.) of Palaeo-ethnology at the University of Lecce, Italy. He is the author of *The Mountain of God*.

8 Dr. Rudolph Cohen is a well-known archeologist residing in Israel. Dr. Cohen has been Deputy Director of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) since 1989.

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as the Middle Bronze Interchange, who conquered Canaan, were in all likelihood the Israelites of *Yehoshua* (Joshua). This conclusion calls either for a monumental reevaluation of the current dating systems or some extremely convoluted measures to reconcile the incongruities⁹. In fact, it is now postulated by some that Kenyon erred in her assessment of the situation in Canaan and that she had dated the destruction at Jericho erroneously.

There are many competing revisionist theo-

9 Anati, for example, is forced to invent a "missing" book between *Yehoshua* (Joshua) and *Shoftim* (Judges) to account for the missing time created by the erroneous current chronologies.

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ries placing the exodus in various dynasties to conform better to the evidence. The one we will focus on places the exodus at the end of the 6th dynasty, the end of the Old Kingdom. This has been proposed by scholars such as Anati, Rothstein, Liel, Porter, and others. Given the fact that it is plausible to cut 500-700 years out of the Egyptian Chronology, based on the evidence, placing this dynasty around 1447 BCE (Generally Accepted Dates) makes sense.

A MIDRASH WITH THE ANSWERS

A midrash in Sefer Hayashar states that the Pharaoh of the oppression reigned 94 years

from ages 6 to 100 and the Pharaoh of the exodus reigned three years. Are there historical records that describe an Egyptian dynasty that matches this scenario?

The Pharaoh Pepi II of the 6th dynasty reigned for 94 years from ages 6 to 100 and his successor reigned for roughly three to four years. The end of his reign marked the end of the old kingdom. After his reign, Egypt was thrown into a dark age that lasted over 100 years and was attacked and decimated from within and without. A full fledged national calamity had taken place. Secular scholars who hold to the current chronology have no explanation as to what happened and are forced to speculate that perhaps the Nile overflowed and ravaged the country. Of course it is likely that mainstream Egyptologists are not aware of this midrash – nor would they be impressed if they were, unfortunately.

THE IPUWER PAPYRUS

A curious (or not so curious) papyrus that is dated toward the beginning to middle of the middle kingdom (the kingdom that followed the old kingdom) describes a very interesting scenario, one that according to many can only be describing the end of the old kingdom. The papyrus tells of a national disaster that overtook Egypt in the recent past that was singularly unique in its scope in all the annals of Egypt.

- *"Plague is throughout the land, blood is everywhere." (Papyrus 2:6)*
- *"Gates columns and walls are consumed by fire." (Papyrus 2:10) [compare Shemot 9:23-24]*
- *"The river is blood." (Papyrus 2:10) [Plague of Blood]*
- *"No fruits or herbs are found. Grain has perished on every side." (Papyrus 6:2-4) [compare Shemot 10:15]*
- *"Destruction. The land is darkness." (Papyrus 9:8-10) [Plague of Darkness]*
- *"Men are few. He who places his brother in the ground is everywhere." (Papyrus 2:13) [Plague of the Firstborn]*
- *"Gold, blue stone, silver, malachite carnelian bronze...are fastened to the necks of female slaves."*
- *"Poor men have become the owners of*

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good things. He who could not make his own sandals is now the possessor of riches." (Papyrus 2:4) [compare Shemot 12:35]

- *"Behold the fire mounted up on high. Its burning goes forth before the enemies of the land" (Papyrus 7:1) [compare Shemot 13:21]*
- *"Those who were once Egyptians have now become foreigners" (Papyrus 3:14) [Erev Rav]*

It is hard to doubt that this scenario is anything but the documentation of the Plagues,

and the Exodus – the fall of the Old Kingdom by the decree of Hashem. Nevertheless, it will probably be a good while before academics will admit to the historicity of our sacred texts. Of course, we do not need archeology or any discipline to prove the authenticity of the Torah.

It is somewhat ironic that among all the great lessons we have learned from our sojourn and Exodus from Egypt, we also learn one final lesson: One should never place his faith in the hands of academics. As per the dictum of Hazal (Our Rabbis of Blessed Memory), "Whenever the disbelievers scoff, the answers are always near at hand." 