

Background Notes on the Book of Exodus

Compiled by Pastor Dave Hentschel

The Book of Exodus (meaning “Exit”) is the epic story of God rescuing the Old Testament people of Israel. Exodus is the second book of the first five books of the Bible (The Torah), following the storyline of Genesis. The Hebrew title “These are the names,” is taken from the first line of the text, naming the twelve tribes of Jacob. Exodus is the story of God remembering His covenant, having compassion on His people who are in bondage to slavery, and bringing them out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, leading them to the promised land. Exodus contains a central affirmation of God’s nature, character and redemptive work, to which the Bible returns repeatedly, “I am the LORD, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” (Ex 20:2). There’s at least two dozen references to the Red Sea crossing in the rest of the Bible that look back upon the Exodus as the watershed moment in Israel’s history. From a Christian perspective, Exodus is foundational to the story of Jesus also. Like the Hebrews, we were in bondage to sin and God sent us a mediator, a redeemer to pull us out of slavery. God bought us back and to set us free. Exodus is not just about “getting out,” God brings us out for a *purpose* - to bring us toward Himself. He pulls us out, and then He pulls us in. Therefore, Exodus is a journey we all must take; a journey from slavery to freedom, from serving the wrong master to serving Yahweh, from a life of bondage to a life of worshiping the one true God in all His glory.

Major Themes of Exodus:

There are several major themes in Exodus such as: 1) God keeps his promises He made to the patriarchs. (Ex 2) 2) God redeems His people from slavery and brings them to freedom. 3) God

thwarts the enemy's plans (Ex 1-2). 4) God is sovereign over all. (Israel, Egypt, Pharaoh and all other gods) 5) The identity of Yahweh is a major theme ("Who is the Lord." Ex 5:2) throughout the book of Exodus. The name of the Lord is revealed in Exodus as "Yahweh," meaning "I Am who I Am" and He is committed to His own glory. 6) God enters a covenant with Israel, His firstborn son (Ex 4:21-24), making them His "treasured possession" (Ex 19:4-6), giving them His Perfect Law and calling them to be holy (Ex 31:13). Exodus also establishes guidelines for the proper worship of Yahweh at the tabernacle and through the Levitical priesthood (Ex 35-40). In this way, 7) Exodus also points us toward the gospel of work of the ultimate redeemer - Jesus Christ.

Exodus and Jesus Christ:

Exodus is foundational to understanding the Gospel and saving work of Jesus Christ. It has been called "the gospel in the Old Testament." In the Old Testament prophets there was a hope of a "second Exodus," fully realized in the coming work of the Messiah. For example, Isaiah says, "It shall come to pass in that day that the LORD shall set His hand again the *second* time to recover the remnant of His people" (Isaiah 11:11-15; 43:16, Jer 31:7-9; 50:4, Ezek 20:33-36; Zech 10:11). For this reason, in Hebrews 2, Jesus is referred to as "the greater Moses." The Gospel of Matthew (quoting Hosea) applies the Exodus story directly to the infancy story of Jesus, saying "Out of Egypt I called my son." It was the Exodus (the Passover) that Jesus was celebrating when he rewrote the script and instituted communion (Luke 22:14-20) to commemorate a new covenant, to replace the covenant of Sinai given in Exodus. The apostle Paul teaches us that Jesus our "Passover lamb" that's been sacrificed (2 Cor 5:7), as His blood as our spotless lamb has been shed for us and applied by faith to the doorposts of our hearts. If there's one Old Testament story that the New Testament invites us to read Christocentrically (with Christ at the center), and apply to us: it's the story of Exodus.¹ Understanding Exodus is one of the keys to understanding the work of Jesus Christ.

The Author of Exodus:

Traditionally, Moses was viewed as the author of Exodus and the entire Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible). There are explicit mentions of Moses writing (Ex 24:4, 34:28), and later biblical authors referred back to Moses as the source of the Law. From the post-exilic era onward, Moses was associated with the Law,² and there was a work commonly referred to as the "Book of Moses,"³ referred to in Joshua (1:8-9) and which was also spoken of in the NT era.⁴ Because of these and many other references, Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch was assumed for centuries. However, despite the tradition handed down from the Jews that Moses was its author, questions about this have arisen regarding the recording of Moses' death (Deut 34), the

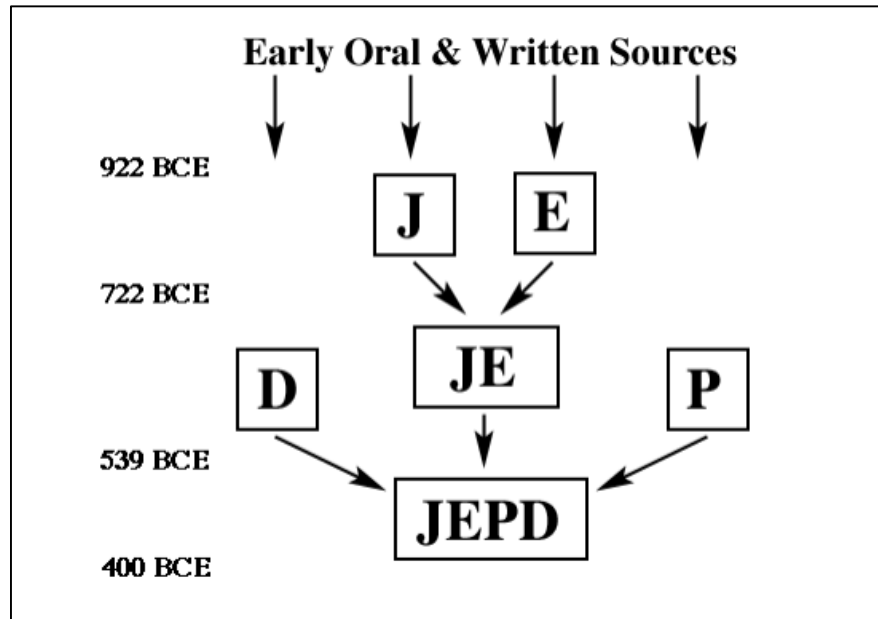
¹ The following NT passages refer back to Exodus: Matt. 5:21; 27; 38, 11:10, 15:4, 19:18; 22:32; Mark 1:2, 7:10, 10:19, 12:26; Luke 7:23, 27, 12:35, 18:20, 20:37; John 19:36, Acts 3:13, 4:24, 7:6, 18, 27-28, 33-34, 40, 14:15, 23:5, Rom. 7:7, 9:15, 25-17, 13:9; 1 Cor 3:1, 3:16, 10:7, 2 Cor. 3:16, 8:15; Eph. 6:2; 1 Pet. 2:9, Heb. 8:5, 9:20, 12:20, Js 2:11.

² 2 Chr 23:18, 30:16, Sir 24:23.

³ Neh 13:1, 2; Ezra 6:18; 2 Chr 25:4.

⁴ Mk 12:26, Lk 16:29, 24:27, 44, Acts 15:1, 21.

mention that Moses was “the most humble man on earth” (Num 12:3), as well as other issues of style and vocabulary.⁵ The documentary hypothesis (The JEPD theory) views the Pentateuch as a “composite work that grew over the course of a half millennium or more.”⁶ (Other critical scholars believed that the entire work was a result of a single, post-exilic author).⁷



The documentary hypothesis was popularized by Karl Graf and Julius Wellhausen in the late 1800s, proposing four separate authors of the Pentateuch: 1) “J” wrote around the 9th century based on the author’s use of Yahweh as a name for God. 2) “E” wrote in the 8th century based on the author’s use of “Elohim” as a name for God. 3) “D” (the Deuteronomist) theoretically wrote in the 7th century around the time of King Josiah, mostly portions related to the laws. 4) “P” (the Priestly source) theoretically wrote in the 5th century wrote the portions related to religious rituals, ceremonies, and feasts. The assumptions of the JEDP theory are that 1) writing was not developed in Moses’ time, 2) Monotheism was a later development (760-750 BC), not during the time of Moses, 3) The prohibition against images couldn’t have been part of early Israelite religion and 4) Many of the stories were historically questionable because of the existence of miracles and the supernatural. In this view, Israel’s history as a nation was thought to develop later (during the time of the monarchy) and its origin story of the Exodus was largely fabricated. In this theory, J and P have radically different theological outlooks and the bible is self-contradictory. This theory calls into question the inspiration of the scriptures, the trustworthiness

⁵ For an overview of the history of OT scholarship including early and medieval criticism, see R.K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969) 3-82; and with specific interest in the Pentateuch, see also Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 38-48, 58-62, 74, 84-85, 92-97.

⁶ Terrence E. Fretheim, *The Pentateuch* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1996), 26.

⁷ One example of this single-post-exilic author theory is found in John Van Seters, *The Edited Bible: The Curious History of the “Editor” in Biblical Criticism* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006).

of the accounts, and the very existence of the men and women of faith who are viewed as heroes. These consequences are significant.

Conservatives have critiqued the JEPD theory for many reasons. First, they have pointed out the *argument of tradition*, there is a long tradition of Mosaic authorship: the Talmud and the Mishnah attribute the Torah to Moses, as does both Philo and Josephus. Furthermore, Jesus referenced Moses many times (Mk 10:1-9; Mk 12:26, Jn 5:45-47, Luke 24:44) as did the other NT writers. (Acts 3:22-23, 1 Cor 9:9, Heb 9:19). Furthermore, the early church Christians also attributed the Torah to Moses, both inside and outside the Bible including Augustine, Leontius, Melito of Sardis (175 AD), Cyril of Jerusalem (348 AD), Hilary 366 (AD) and Rufinus (410 AD).

Second, conservatives also point out the *archaeological argument*, there is a lack of external evidence for these so called source documents. We have hundreds of manuscript copies of the Pentateuch, all of which exist in the form we have today. We have not discovered even one ancient copy of J, E, P or D. Furthermore, there is no ancient record even mentioning the existence of these source documents.

Since the advancement of archaeology over the past one hundred years, many aspects of the theory have been shown to be tenuous. There is now a wealth of information regarding the culture of the early- to mid- second millennium B.C. Ancient Near East that corresponds with the narratives and customs of the Pentateuch. The discovery of one thousand clay tablets at the site of ancient Nuzu (in central Iraq) in 1925 have been very valuable for confirming many biblical names, places, inheritance customs, agricultural practices, and religious practices consistent with what has been found in other mid-second millennium Ancient Near Eastern cultures. Furthermore, the discovery of suzerainty treaties (treaties between a great king and a lesser king) display great similarity to the Law of Moses. Treaties had a specific structure during the second millennium: a prologue, a historic prelude, stipulations, instructions for preservation of the enactments, and curses and blessings that might come about as a result of keeping or breaking the treaty. This form fits the pattern of Exodus 19-24.

Third, conservatives put forward a *literary argument*. Well-reasoned arguments against the JEPD theory have been developing in recent years. Duane Garrett, a critic of JEPD, for example, points out that if you extract the E document from Genesis, you do not have a coherent story.⁸ Some of the reasoning of the documentary hypothesis is circular and therefore not logically sound. For example, one assumes a certain divine name (for example, Elohim) points toward a source (E), but one also assumes the source by the presence of that same divine name. However, there are occasions where the name Yahweh is found in all four sources. And, the divine names were sometimes combined (Yahweh-Elohim). Therefore, the writers must have known both names for God. Compound names for a deity was not uncommon in the ancient near east. The Egyptian god “Amon-Re,” is contemporary an example of this. Therefore, multiple names for God do not necessarily imply multiple authors. And, repeated versions of the same story (“doublets”) were typical of story-telling in ancient times. C. S. Lewis said, "There used to be English scholars who

⁸ Duane Garrett. *Rethinking Genesis*. (Malaysia: Mentor, 2001).

were prepared to cut up Henry VI between half a dozen authors and assign his share to each. We don't do that now... Everywhere, except in theology, there has been a vigorous growth of skepticism about skepticism itself."⁹

Fourth, conservatives put forward a *theological argument*. The notion that monotheism could not have existed in the time of Moses does not fit the data. Free notes, "It is also evident from archaeological discoveries that it was entirely possible for monotheism to exist in the time of Moses, and even before that time. Evidence for this can be seen in the practice of contemporary pagan religions of the same time. For example, a Babylonian find from around 1500-1200 B.C. identifies all the major Babylonian gods with the god Marduk. In this text, Zababa is Marduk of battle, Sin is Marduk as illuminator of night, and Adad is Marduk of rain. Similar practices are observed elsewhere by scholars, even in Syria and Canaan."¹⁰

For all of these reasons, it seems reasonable to abandon the JEPD theory altogether and reconsider the traditional claim of Mosaic authorship. So much speculation and criticism has been done dividing up the text of the Pentateuch into these alleged sources, that the beautiful unity of the whole book of Moses gets lost in the process.

With that said, a caveat is necessary here. It is also evident that while Moses wrote the major part of the Pentateuch, editorial work was done by other inspired prophetic redactors. A problem arises when the following assumption is made by conservative evangelicals: the assumption is that if Mosaic authorship is denied, even in part, then the inspiration of the entire Bible is undermined. From an evangelical point of view, "Mosaic authorship was thought crucial in supporting the historicity of the Bible on which authority was grounded by tying the composition of the books as closely as possible to the events themselves."¹¹ Furthermore, since other biblical texts purport Moses to be the author, one by one, the inspiration of those texts was called into question as well. Soon after one removes the brick of Mosaic authorship, then the entire structure of biblical inspiration collapses. A discredited Pentateuch leads to a discredited Old Testament, which leads to a discredited Bible. Because of this assumption, attempts were made by conservatives to defend even the most difficult texts in the Pentateuch as Mosaic.¹²

⁹ C. S. Lewis, "Modern Theology and Biblical Criticism" (originally titled "Fern-seed and Elephants"), *The Seeing Eye* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 217.

¹⁰ Joseph P. Free, "Archaeology and Biblical Criticism Part III: Archaeology and Liberalism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 113.452 (Oct.-Dec. 1956): 335-336.

¹¹ Childs, *Introduction*, 133.

¹² For example, the German theologian E. W. Hengstenberg stated that, "The Pentateuch itself loudly and repeatedly claims Moses for its author, and those 'contradictory appearances,' to which importance has been attached, on a closer inspection vanish like the morning mist." In the first century, Josephus wrote that Moses recorded his own death. In the eleventh century, Isaac ibn Yashush suggested that part of the Pentateuch was written after Moses, to which Abraham ibn Ezra, a twelfth-century rabbi, rebuked his ideas and suggested that his books be burned. He was later known as "Isaac the blunderer." In the sixteenth century, Andreas van Maes, a Flemish Catholic, suggested there were redactions in the Pentateuch, and his writings were placed on the Catholic Index of Prohibited Books. In the seventeenth century, the French Calvinist Isaac De la Peyrère's works partially denied Mosaic authorship and were subsequently banned and burned by the Catholic Church. He was asked to recant, which he did. These attempts made by conservative scholars to defend Mosaic authorship were largely to no avail, and critical scholarship marched onward.

This is not necessary. The assumption that the inspiration of the Bible hinges on the Mosaic authorship of the entire Pentateuch is a faulty assumption. Other plausible explanations which explain why traditionally these five books were called the “Books of Moses” are available.¹³ Moses may have authored the “original autograph” of the Torah and the core of his teaching served as the basis for the entire Pentateuch we have today. Moses is the dominant figure in four out of the five books. Thus, they are referred to as the Books *of* Moses. The name “Moses” became a shorthand reference for the content in the entire Pentateuch, as its figurehead. The “laws attributed to Moses were deemed authoritative, and conversely authoritative laws were attributed to Moses.”¹⁴ Moses is not the only biblical example of a proper name which over time came to signify something larger than the author himself. Other examples of such a figurehead would be “David” or “Solomon” or “Isaiah.”¹⁵ Over time, it appears that these names began to represent an ongoing legacy of work. It was as though these ancient writers continued to speak through their disciples. In this case, the term “Moses” would be used as a metonymy for “the Law.”¹⁶ These are some plausible explanations for why the Pentateuch was associated exclusively with Moses which could still fit with a conservative view of biblical inspiration.

Due to internal claims, Mosaic authorship cannot be entirely denied outright.¹⁷ However, conservatives are only bound to affirm that which the Bible affirms to be Mosaic. For more information defending Mosaic authorship and criticizing the documentary hypothesis, see Garrett (cited above), Merrill,¹⁸ Smith,¹⁹ or Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*. (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 2017).

¹³ Not all of these suggestions are alternatives compatible with an evangelical doctrine of Scripture.

¹⁴ Childs, *Introduction*, 134.

¹⁵ Examples of these larger than life names used as figureheads are found in many places. “Isaiah” may be referenced as the figurehead of the prophets in Mk 1:2. “Solomon” is used as a figurehead to in Prov 1:1, despite the fact that much of the book was written after his death. It appears as though the name “David” is used as a figurehead for the book of Psalms (and perhaps the entire section of the Writings) in the DSS document, A Sectarian Manifesto, where it reads, “we [have written] to you so that you might understand the book of Moses, the book[s] of the Pr[o]phets, and Davi[d...],” 4QMMT:4Q394-399, Section C.10. Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 363.

¹⁶ A metonymy is “a figure of speech where one word or phrase is substituted for another that is closely associated with it.” A modern example is, “The White House said,” being a metonymy substituted for the “The President said.” Robert Chisholm, *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 35.

¹⁷ Internal biblical claims which testify to an extant document written by the hand of Moses are found in many texts such as Ex 17:14, 24:4, 34:27, Num 33:2, Deut 27:8, 31:9, 31:22, Josh 1:8, 2 Chr 34:14, and NT attestations such as Mk 12:19, Jn 5:46-47 and Rom 10:5.

¹⁸ Eugene Merrill. *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament*. (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011).

¹⁹ Colin Smith, “A Critical Assessment of the Graf-Wellhausen Documentary Hypothesis.” <https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/reformed-apologetics/a-critical-assessment-of-the-graf-wellhausen-documentary-hypothesis/> (Accessed October 8, 2021.)

The Historicity of Exodus:

For many, the events of Exodus are considered mythological.²⁰ As an example of this skepticism, William Dever, a professor of Near Eastern archeology and anthropology at the University of Arizona, states, “Not only is there no archaeological evidence for such an exodus, there is no need to posit such an event ... I regard the historicity of the Exodus as a dead issue.” Here is another example from Herzog, “The Israelites were never in Egypt, did not wander in the desert ... the man Egyptian documents that we have make no mistake mention of the Israelites’ presence in Egypt and are also silent about the events of the Exodus.” (Ze’ev Herzog, Tel Aviv University) Does the book of Exodus story document real history? For the believer, the stakes in this debate are very high. Belief in the Exodus story is foundational to both the Jewish and Christian faiths. If this book is not real history, then the gospel of Jesus Christ is suspect and this story has no claim on our lives today.

Conservative scholars point out that the book of Exodus fits the culture of what we know about Egypt and Israel during that time. Scholars agree that Egypt was a mighty world empire which enslaved foreigners, some of whom worked on their majestic building projects.

Evidence corroborating the overall geopolitical situation described in Exodus:

- ***Leningrad Papyrus*** (1116A) Papyrus from 1450 BC (Thutmose III) mentions immigrants subjected to compulsory labor during the exact time of the enslavement of the Hebrews in the book of Exodus.
- ***Artwork on Tomb of Rekmire***: He served as vizier of Egypt under Thutmose III in the 15th century, artwork depicting asiatic or semitic slave labor, making bricks using mud and straw for construction.
- ***The Louvre Leather Roll*** – artifact from year 5 of Ramesses (1274 BC) reports quota of bricks and failure to meet quota due to lack of straw, resulting in the slaves being punished. (see Ex 5:8)
- ***Archaeological digs have found bricks with and without straw*** being used during this time period, consistent with the architecture and engineering mentioned in Exodus 5.²¹
- ***The organization of covenants*** in the Pentateuch fit the pattern of what we know of other second-millennium treaties in this region. There were 5 elements (witnesses, oath, stipulations, ceremony and curse).
- ***The Israelite “tent” / tabernacle*** of worship has parallels in Egypt and Canaan consistent with this same time period as well.²²

²⁰ For a modern example of skepticism about exodus, see David Ilhan’s lecture here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czwMkj_Yc9c (Accessed October 8, 2021)

²¹ A.A. McRae, “The Relation of Archaeology to the Bible.” *Modern Science and Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen, 1950), 215-216.

²² *ESV Study Bible*. English Standard Version, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 140-141.

Many of the social customs, law codes, slave practices, personal names and place names in the Pentateuch match with specificity the parallel data found during this historic time period (middle bronze period):

Archaeological Timeline	
Stone Age	3200 BC +
Early Bronze Age	3200-2000 BC
Middle Bronze Age	2000-1500 BC
Late Bronze Age	1500-1200 BC
Iron Age	1200-587 BC

Recent archaeological finds actually lend credence to the veracity of the Exodus story told in the Bible as consistent with the facts from the ground: What we would look for in terms of data is 1) Evidence of the Israelites in Egypt (Point A) and 2) We should expect to also see evidence of the Israelites arrival in Canaan (Point B). 3) It would be helpful if there were also evidence of them traveling between Point A and Point B. All such evidence is extensive, including extra-biblical evidence:

Evidence of Israelites in Egypt:

- ***The Tomb of Khnum-hotep II.*** A wall painting was discovered in Beni Hasan (an archaeological site in Egypt) inside the tomb of Khnum-hotep (ca 1870) which contains a scene showing Semitic Bedouin merchants in richly colored-garments entering Egypt around the time of the patriarchs. This find shows there were clearly people (Semites) trading with Egyptians around the time of Jacob.²³ The painting depicts trade routes existed and a similar migration story with Jacob and family described as going to Egypt (in Gen 40-50).
- ***Papyrus Brooklyn:*** A document from 13th Dynasty found in fragmentary condition in upper Egypt (1700-1620 BC) which contains a list of household servants, with original names and new Egyptian names. (Joseph is renamed in Gen 41-45) Many names were Semitic. Several names were Hebrew names (example: Shiphrah, Yakoba, Menahema, Ashera, Dawidi, et al). This is evidence that Hebrew people were living as slaves in Egypt prior to the Exodus period.²⁴
- ***Speos Artemidos Inscription*** contains a saying of Hatshepsut (15th century BC) claims there are Asiatics present (“vagrants” / shepherders) in Egypt who “ruled without the

²³ For more info, see article in Encyclopedia Britannica <https://www.britannica.com/place/Beni-Hasan> (Accessed October 6, 2021).

²⁴ THE TYNDALE HOUSE BULLETIN. A RECENTLY PUBLISHED EGYPTIAN PAPYRUS AND ITS BEARING ON THE JOSEPH STORY. By K. A. Kitchen, 1956.
https://legacy.tyndalehouse.com/tynbul/Library/TynBull_1956_02_01_Kitchen_PapyrusJosephStory.pdf

Sun.” This refers to peoples who did not worship Ra, the Egyptian sun god. (see Gen 46:34)

- **Archaeological findings in city of Avaris / Ramesses (Tell-el-Daba):**
 - 1) tools and weapons from Canaan
 - 2) temple architecture and gods from Canaan
 - 3) sheep remains (long haired from Canaan
 - 4) over 20% pottery Canaanite
 - 5) burials of type found in Canaan
 - 6) monumental tomb with statue of an Asiatic official. (*see picture*)
 - 7) Note - architecture was distinctively Israelite (four-room pillared house plan - see picture in documentary film, “Exodus Revealed.”)
 - 8) Scarab Seals. - there have been found 9 Scarab seals found with the name Yakob-El (dated ca 1700 BC)
- **Mine of Serabit el-Khadim in Sinai.** An Egyptian turquoise mine with inscriptions in an early semitic alphabet (ca 1500 BC) see picture, this seems to be Hebrew graffiti.²⁵
- **Key Question: Were the Israelites present in Egypt during this time period? Yes.**

Evidence of Israelites entering Canaan:

- **The Armana Letters.** There is an invasion of Palestine hinted at in contemporary records that would comport with the Israelite conquest of the land. This is recounted in the famous *Amarna Letters*, which deal with the period from about 1400-1366 B.C., discovered in 1886. These invaders, called “*Habiru*,” could be linguistically equatable with “the Hebrews.” Milkilu, prince of Gezar, to the pharaoh writes, “*Let the king, my lord, protect his land from the hand of the ‘Apiru. If not, (then) let the king, my lord, send chariots to fetch us, lest our servants smite us.*”²⁶ This gives evidence for the Israelites in the land, as the Canaanites are asking Egypt for help, but they send no one.
- **The Merneptah Stele.** This is a 7-foot, black granite monument (a “stele” is a stone monument) held in the Cairo museum which boasts that he (Pharaoh Merneptah, 1224-1214 BC) conquered certain cities in Canaan, “*Canaan is plundered with every hardship .. Israel is laid waste, his seed is not.*” This is obviously exaggerative (the Israelite people, “their seed” exists to this day), but nonetheless this find importantly shows that the Israelites were in the promised land during this era and a people at odds with Egypt. Note, this is the oldest definitive reference to Israel *as a nation* outside of the Bible, and certainly the clearest Egyptian reference to Israel.
- **Evidence of destruction of Canaanite cities mentioned in conquest narratives:**
 - City of Jericho:
 - i. Evidence of wall collapsing outward
 - ii. Evidence of fire
 - iii. Evidence of it being a short siege, grain not plundered. (Josh 6:17)
 - iv. Evidence of pottery and scarabs (dung beetle scarabs) consistent with 1400 BC destruction

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Serabit_el-Khadim

²⁶ Merrill Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, 145-46.

- City of *Hazor*
 - i. Evidence of Canaanite and Egyptian idols / statues destroyed (Deut 12:3) (see picture)
- **Key Question: Is there destruction evidence from key cities (Jericho and Hazor) consistent with late bronze age destruction, confirming biblical record in Joshua? Yes.**

Evidence of Israelites wandering

- ***The Soleb Inscription.*** This is evidence from the journey between point A to point B. Inscription found on an Egyptian monument (in today's Northern Sudan) which mentions the "nomads (shasu) of Yahweh" (1400 BC), it describes the Hebrew people in the lands of Moab and Edom. This find is part of an Egyptian temple built for Amenhotep III (the grandson of the Exodus Pharaoh) which contains this monument with inscription attesting to the different peoples that the Pharaoh had subjugated / under his control. These are people were nomads who worship a God named Yahweh. This shows that the Egyptians know about Yahweh, implying the Hebrews were in Egypt in order to learn about them.²⁷ This is the oldest Yahweh inscription. This places the wandering nomadic Israelites in between Egypt and Canaan.
- **Key Question: Why would the oldest inscription of name of Hebrew god be found on Egyptian monuments?**

Evidence of Plagues consistent with biblical record:

- ***The Ipuwer papyrus:*** (Leiden I 233 recto) An ancient text called "The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage" (copy dates to 1200 BC) is an account of an Egyptian wise man (Ipuwer) complaining to an Egyptian god which describes, in a poetic account, disasters in Egypt that sound like the plagues:
 - 2:9 "the river is blood" (Ex 7:20)
 - 6:3 "grain has perished" (Ex 9:31-32)
 - 9:11 "the land is without light" (9:11)
 - 3:14 "groaning throughout the land" (12:30)

Evidence of Pharaoh and family consistent with biblical record:

- ***Carving of Amenhotep II.*** This find shows this pharaoh shooting arrows through a copper target. Amenhotep II fits chronologically as the Pharaoh of the Exodus. His father, Thutmose III, reigned for 52 years (this also fits the biblical account of Ex 1-4). He was known as an arrogant pharaoh to make claims of great strength.
- ***Elephantine stele*** – This discovery shows Amenhotep went to Canaan and brought back 100,000 slaves. This appears to be a recovery of a slave force for those that left a couple years prior. Possibly this was compensation for what was lost during Exodus.

²⁷ <https://biblearchaeologyreport.com/2019/03/08/three-egyptian-inscriptions-about-israel/> (accessed October 6, 2021).

- ***Erasure of Hatshepsut*** Hatshepsut (princess ruling as Pharaoh for 20 years during coregency of Thutmose III) (1504-1482 BC), she was the only child to survive past infancy. (Ex 2:5) Interesting note, later, her images and her name was erased on paintings, wiped out, and historians do not know why, but perhaps it was because of her association with raising the enemy - Moses.
- ***Dream Stele*** (aka Sphinx stele) This find displays succession issues in Egypt. This is a record of Thutmose IV found in between the paws of the sphinx. He recounts a story as he goes to the Sphinx, he has a dream that he would become the next Pharaoh, the expectation was that his older brother would have inherited that, but he mysteriously disappeared. We don't know what happened, but his brother, Amenhotep, could have been the son who died in the 10th plague. This divine promise from the gods of Egypt makes his ascension look more legitimate.
- ***Writings of Manetho*** - an Egyptian priest historian (300 BC), we have found fragments of his writings, speaks of the people group leaving Egypt settling in Canaan, and names the Pharaoh as "Amenophis" (The Greek name for Amenhotep).

Summary of archaeological evidence for Exodus we have obtained:

- Evidence of slavery, mudbricks, in the time period.
- The presence of Semites in Egypt in time period.
- List of Hebrew slave names in Egypt in time period.
- Ipuwer poetic account of plagues around time period.
- Evidence that Pharaoh Amenhotep II fits psychological profile, matches biblical description.
- Unexplained Erasure of Hatshepsut (princess who was marginalized, possibly for association with Moses) fits text of Exodus.
- Existence of succession issues in Egyptian dynasty fit story of Exodus.
- Evidence of Israelite presence in Canaan after Exodus during conquest.
- Evidence of Israelite wanderings (the "nomads of Yahweh") in between slavery and conquest.

In conclusion, despite the accusation that we have no evidence for the book of Exodus, the opposite is actually the case. Considering all of this corroborating data, radical skepticism about the historicity of the Exodus story is unwarranted. The evidence situates the origin of the text close to the time period of the events it describes and therefore, there is good reason to consider the book of Exodus as a source of actual history.

Objections to Exodus are made in part because of an anti-supernatural bias that rejects the possibility of the miracles of Exodus. For example, if you hold to a naturalistic-materialist worldview, then the burning bush event, the plagues and the parting of the Red sea simply cannot have occurred. However, conservative scholars, who are not close-minded to the supernatural workings of God in our world, see the above data as significant corroboration with the biblical narrative.

One final point, some object to the historicity of Exodus in part because Egyptian historical records make no mention of this spectacular event. This is not entirely accurate as stated above. However, the issue of missing documentation of the Hebrew exodus from the perspective of Egyptian historians is also not surprising. The Egyptians were a proud people and would not mention their defeats in their propaganda. One should recognize that the Bible is unique in its depiction of its heroes as weak, sinful and fallen. If one wanted to concoct an origins story, why would one create a story like this one? Exodus has the Hebrews beginning as slaves in a foreign land, and even afterward, they are still always grumbling, faltering, and worshipping idols. Professor Nahum Sarna states that exodus “cannot be fictional. No nation would be likely to invest for itself, and faithfully transmit century after century and millennium after millennium an inglorious and inconvenient tradition of this nature.”²⁸ Exodus is meant not to glorify the Israelite people, it is far too counterproductive for this end. Rather, Exodus is meant to magnify their powerful and merciful God, Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

The Date of Exodus:

There are different views concerning both the identity of the Pharaoh(s) of Exodus and debate around the exact date, and these two questions are related. There are two main options for dating the Exodus: the early date (ca 1446 BC) and the late date (ca 1250 BC).

Egyptian Chronology (Lasor, ISBE)	
18 th Dynasty	
Thutmose I	1526-1512
Thutmose II	1512-1503
Hatsheput	1503-1482
Thutmose III	1482-1450
Amenhotep II	1450-1425
19 th Dynasty	
Seti I	1317-1303
Rameses II	1304-1227
Merneptah	1227-1317

Argument for the early date (ca 1446 B.C.): In the early date view, Pharaoh Thutmose III (1482-1450 BC) ruled during most of Moses’ life (Ex 1). The events of Exodus then would have occurred during the reign of Amenhotep II (1450-1425 BC).²⁹

1. The primary piece of biblical evidence for the early date comes from 1 Kgs 6:1, which states Solomon built the temple “in the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of Egypt.” We know from other sources that Solomon built the temple in ca 962 B.C.(see also 1 Chron 6:33-37, Num 33:3-38)
2. Jephthah states in Judges 11:26 that it had been 300 years since the conquest of Canaan.

²⁸ Cited in Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties*. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 63.

²⁹ Note, exact Egyptian chronologies differ, for an alternative example, see Kitchen, ABD.

3. Paul states in Acts 13:19, 20 that it was 450 years between the flight from Egypt and the capture of Jerusalem.
4. The Jewish historian Josephus quoted the Egyptian historian Manetho to show that his records mention the Exodus saying that “Tethmosis was king when they went away.”

Argument for the late date (ca 1290-1260 B.C.): The late date view sees the date of the Exodus sometime around 1250 B.C., this would mean the pharaohs of the story would likely be Rameses II and Seti I.

1. In this view, since the naming of the city of Ramses (Ex 1:11) doesn’t fit the early date view (as the early date was prior to the reign of Ramses the great – Ramses II), thus it puts the Exodus later. The city mentioned in Ex 1:11 is often identified as the city of Pi-Ramesse³⁰ built by Pharaoh Ramesses II (see also Gen 47:11).³¹ However, this could be explained in two ways, first, the name Ramesses (“born of Ra”) was no uncommon and attested to earlier, as early as 16th century (Ramose son of Ahmose I, Ramesses I, grandfather of Ramesses II has the same name.) Second, it could be understood as a redaction, edited in later copies for clarification. Later “modernizations” of the Hebrew text designated the city with its updated name but the city itself was in existence under another name before the reign of Ramesses II.³² For another biblical example of this updating of cities, notice the naming of the city of “Dan” in Gen 14:14, called that before Dan was born. Evidence of editorial work is accepted by all scholars.
2. Pharaoh Seti I (1317-1303 BC) was involved with several large building projects (perhaps those mentioned in Ex 1:11). His son Rameses II (1304-1227 BC) continued and completed cities of Pithom and Rameses. The name of this city does not bind one to this later date.
3. Why did late view become the predominant view?
 - a. Albright found destructions in Canaan, dated to 13th century BC.
 - b. Kenyon (in 1960s) dated Jericho destruction at a different time (before 1446 BC), as she did not find Cypriot pottery, so she attributes the destruction to Egyptians or Hyksos in 1550 BC. But a problem was that pottery in Kenyon’s survey focused on poorer quarters of the city, which did not dig up pottery from more wealthy areas, which would have been a marker for 1400 BC destruction. Yet, Wood discovered there was evidence in her logs that she found some of it elsewhere. Kenyon also overlooked Egyptian scarab seals of Hatshepsut, Thutmose III and Amenhotep III that Garstang found in the cemetery. This data changes things significantly.
4. Those who argue for the late date see the Bible’s method of chronological reckoning at times involving *approximation*. This view sees the number in 1 Kgs 6:1 (480) as symbolic (12x40), signifying 12 generations rather than an exact amount of years or twelve “ideal” generations. (Kitchen, 2:702-3). See also Judg 5:31, Ps 95:10. Note - a

³⁰ Note the suffix “mes” means “son of”

³¹ Kenneth A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1966), 57-59.

³² Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), 149-50.

problem with this view is from 1 Chron 6:33-37 which shows 19 generations listed for this time period.

5. Numbers 22:1-4 depicts Moses interacting with the Edomites and Moabites, but scholars say the Transjordan area was largely uninhabited from 1800-1300BC.³³ However, early date proponents state that the King's Highway, a road which passed through an extremely narrow mountain pass could be easily defended by a smaller nomadic people group.
6. Various Palestinian city-states show evidence of destruction during the second half of the 13th century BC including Tell Beit Mirsim, Lachish, Bethel and Hazor.³⁴ This could be consistent with the conquest under Joshua. However, Dr. Charles Dyer notes that the archaeological data from the cities of Jericho and Hazor "are capable of harmonization with the early date and in fact sometimes fit better with that date."³⁵

It is difficult to draw a firm conclusion on the date of Exodus. Those who opt for the late date of the Exodus do so primarily on the basis of archaeological evidence. Those who opt for the early date of the Exodus do so primarily because of the biblical data. Both views have presuppositions that need to be analyzed, and either view can be harmonized with a high view of the Scriptures.

The Ten Plagues

Some biblical interpreters see the ten plagues as directed against ten Egyptian gods, effectively embarrassing and defeating them.³⁶ The plagues demonstrate that the Egyptian gods are powerless.

1. Nile to blood	Hapi, god of the Nile
2. Frogs	Heqet, goddess of birth, with a frog head
3. Gnats	Set, god of the desert storms
4. Flies	Uatchit, possibly represented by the fly
5. Death of livestock	Hathor, goddess with a cow head
6. Boils	Sunu, the pestilence god
7. Hail	Nut, the sky goddess
8. Locusts	Osiris, god of the crops and fertility
9. Darkness	Ra, the sun god (the main god of Egyptian pantheon)
10. Death of firstborn	Pharaoh's firstborn son considered a god

³³ Nelson Glueck, *The Other Side of the Jordan* (New Haven, CT: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1940), 125-47.

³⁴ *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. s.v. "Chronology (OT)," by Kenneth A. Kitchen and T. C. Mitchell, 1:275.

³⁵ Charles H. Dyer, "The Date of the Exodus Reexamined." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 140 (1983) 233.

³⁶ The following chart was adapted from Schnittjer, *The Torah Story*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006). 233.

The Ten Commandments

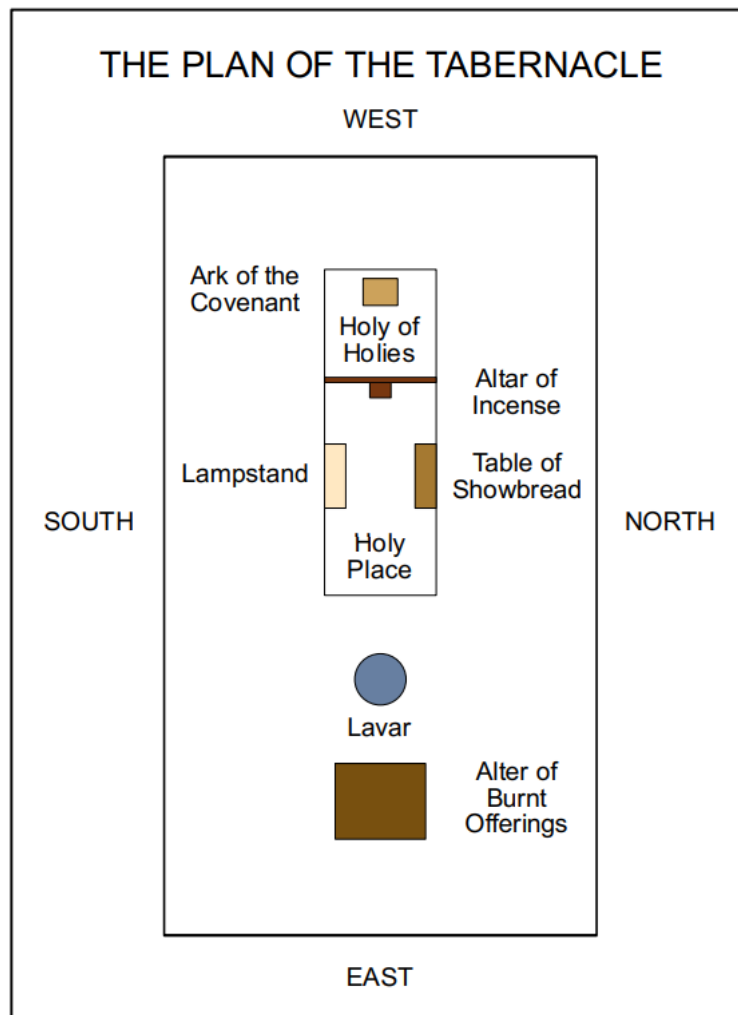
The ten commandments (the Decalogue or “ten words”) are the ten laws in the book of Exodus (Ex 20:1-17, repeated in Deut 5:6-21) that God gave to Moses at Mt. Sinai. They are foundational to understanding the law of God as a reflection of His character and to understanding His covenant with the people of Israel. The Ten Commandments demonstrate that all have sinned (Rom 3:23) and need God’s mercy, available through the provision of sacrifice. Theologians speak of three uses for God’s Law. First, the Law leads us to Christ and convicts us of sin. (Gal 3:23-26). Second, the Law restrains wickedness in this world. Third, the Law is a help to us to learn the nature of God’s will. The third use is a debated topic.

Ten Commandments list & meaning	
1. You shall have no other gods before Me.	There is only one true God. This command teaches monotheism and prohibits worship of any other god as a false god. (Deut 6)
2. You shall make no idols.	There is no physical image that can accurately portray the one true God. Idolatry is one of the number one sins addressed in the Bible.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.	God deserves reverence and honor for He is holy. (Lev)
4. Keep the Sabbath day holy.	Unique among the surrounding nations, God’s people would trust in Him for provision and rest one day a week.
5. Honor your father and your mother.	God established the family and one’s parents should be treated with respect. (Gen 2)
6. You shall not murder.	All human beings are made in God’s image and worthy of dignity and protection (Gen 9)
7. You shall not commit adultery.	Marriage is honored by God and fidelity to one’s spouse reflects God’s fidelity to His people.
8. You shall not steal.	Property rights promoted integrity and hard work amongst God’s people.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	God detests lying lips and protects the reputation of others from slander.
10. You shall not covet.	Contentment with what God has given is built on trusting God.

Not all agree with this way of numbering the commandments. In the Catholic Catechism, the first and second commandments are combined and the tenth is split into “you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” and “you shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.” Considering that the Catholic Church has been accused of idolatry for its use of images and iconography in worship, this may be the reasoning for this difference.

The Tabernacle:

The tabernacle (Ex 26-27) was the temporary tent of worship that the Israelites built according to God's specifications and used until King Solomon built a temple. The word *tabernacle* is a translation of the Hebrew *mishkan*, which means "dwelling-place." The priests sacrificed animals on the altar and once a year, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies as part of the ceremony of the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).



All of these instructions pointed toward a need for the redeemer that was promised (Gen 3:15). When Jesus was crucified, the veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies in the temple ripped from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). He fulfilled for all time the sacrificial requirements and ushered in a new age. (Heb 9:1-14, 10:10).³⁷

³⁷ For more information about the symbolism and significance of this topic, see Henry Saltau. *The Tabernacle, The Priesthood and the Offerings*. (Lowell, IN: Kregel, 1972).

Outline of the Book of Exodus

1. God Hears, and Remembers His Covenant (1:1-2:25)
2. God Comes Down and Calls His Deliverer (3:1-4:17)
3. God Redeems His People (4:18-15:21)
 - a. God Redeems his people through his promise (4:18-7:8)
 - b. God Redeems through the plagues (7:9-10:29)
 - c. The Passover (11:1-13:16)
 - d. The Crossing of the Red Sea (13:17-14:31)
 - e. The Song of Moses (15:1-21)
4. God Leads His People (15:22-18:27)
 - a. The Waters of Marah – Bitter to Sweet water (15:22-27)
 - b. The Provision of Manna and Quail (Ch. 16)
 - c. Water from a Rock at Meribah (17:1-7)
 - d. The War with Amalek (17:8-16)
 - e. Wisdom from Jethro (Ch. 18)
5. God Instructs His People
 - a. Yahweh's Covenant with his people at Sinai (Ch. 19-24)
 - i. Preamble to the Law (Ch. 19)
 - ii. The Ten Commandments (Ch. 20)
 - b. Social laws (Ch. 21-24:11)
 - c. Religious regulations (24:12-40:38)
 - i. Instructions for building the Tabernacle (Ex 25-27)
 - ii. Instructions about priests (Ex 28-30)
 - iii. The Golden Calf (Ch. 32)
 - iv. Moses asks "Show me your Glory" (Ex 33-34)
 - v. Constructing the Tabernacle - God dwells with His people. (Ex 35-40)

Recommended Resources for the study of Exodus:

- Chester, Tim. *Exodus for you*. (Denmark: The Good Book Company, 2016)
- Childs, Brevard. *The Book of Exodus*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974).
- Enns, Peter. *Exodus*. NIVAC series. (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2000).
- Ryken, Philip. *Exodus* (Preaching the Word commentary series. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015).
- Sailhamer, John. "The Pentateuch as Narrative." (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).
- Schnittjer Gary. *The Torah Story*. (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2006).
- Kennedy, Titus. *Unearthing the Bible: 101 Archaeological Discoveries that Bring the Bible to Life*. (Irvine, CA:Harvest House Publishers, 2020).
- Kitchen, K.A. *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003).