**Hourglass study of Exodus, 2020**

**Overview**

[the following is from [biblegateway.com](https://www.biblegateway.com/), taken on 6/3/20, with subheadings added.]

The second book of the Pentateuch is called Exodus, from the Greek word for “departure,” because its central event was understood by the Septuagint’s translators to be the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. Its Hebrew title, *Shemoth* (“Names”), is from the book’s opening phrase, “These are the names….” Continuing the history of Israel from the point where the Book of Genesis leaves off, Exodus recounts the Egyptian oppression of Jacob’s ever-increasing descendants and their miraculous deliverance by God through Moses, who led them across the Red Sea to Mount Sinai where they entered into a covenant with the Lord. . . .

**Significance**

These events made Israel a nation and confirmed their unique relationship with God. The “law” (Hebrew *torah*) given by God through Moses to the Israelites at Mount Sinai constitutes the moral, civil, and ritual legislation by which they were to become a holy people. Many elements of it were fundamental to the teaching of Jesus ([Mt 5:21–30](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt%205:21-Matt%205:30&version=NABRE); [15:4](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matt%2015:4&version=NABRE)) as well as to New Testament and Christian moral teaching ([Rom 13:8–10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Rom%2013:8-Rom%2013:10&version=NABRE); [1 Cor 10:1–5](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Cor%2010:1-1Cor%2010:5&version=NABRE); [1 Pt 2:9](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1Pet%202:9&version=NABRE)).

[the following is taken from Wikipedia, entry on “The Exodus,” taken 6/9/2020]

The Exodus is invoked daily in [Jewish prayers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Jewish_prayers_and_blessings) and celebrated each year at the feasts of [Pesach](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pesach) (Passover) and [Shavuot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shavuot), the two being known respectively as "the time of our freedom" and "the time our Torah was given". The two are closely linked, with Pesach announcing that the freedom it introduces is only fully realised with the giving of the law (the Torah). A third Jewish festival, [Sukkot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sukkot), the Festival of Booths, is associated with the Israelites living in booths after they left their previous homes in Egypt. The festivals now associated with the Exodus (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot) began as agricultural and seasonal feasts but became completely subsumed into the central Exodus myth of Israel's deliverance from oppression at the hands of God. The fringes worn at the corners of traditional Jewish prayer shawls are described as a physical reminder of the obligation to observe the laws given at the climax of Exodus: "Look at it and recall all the commandments of the Lord" (Numbers).

A number of historical events and situations have been compared to the Exodus. Many early American settlers interpreted their flight from Europe to a new life in America as a new exodus. [Thomas Jefferson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Jefferson) and [Benjamin Franklin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benjamin_Franklin) recommended for the [Great Seal of the United States](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Seal_of_the_United_States) to depict Moses leading the Israelites across the Red Sea. African Americans suffering under slavery and racial oppression interpreted their situation in terms of the Exodus, making it a catalyst for social change.

**Structure**

The principal divisions of Exodus are:

I. Introduction: The Oppression of the Israelites in Egypt ([1:1–2:22](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod%201:1-Exod%202:22&version=NABRE))

II. The Call and Commission of Moses ([2:23–7:7](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod%202:23-Exod%207:7&version=NABRE))

III. The Contest with Pharaoh ([7:8–13:16](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod%207:8-Exod%2013:16&version=NABRE))

IV. The Deliverance of the Israelites from Pharaoh and Victory at the Sea ([13:17–15:21](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod%2013:17-Exod%2015:21&version=NABRE))

V. The Journey in the Wilderness to Sinai ([15:22–18:27](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod%2015:22-Exod%2018:27&version=NABRE))

VI. Covenant and Legislation at Mount Sinai ([19:1–31:18](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod%2019-Exod%2031&version=NABRE))

VII. Israel’s Apostasy and God’s Renewal of the Covenant ([32:1–34:35](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod%2032-Exod%2034&version=NABRE))

VIII. The Building of the Tabernacle and the Descent of God’s Glory upon It ([35:1–40:38](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exod%2035-Exod%2040&version=NABRE))

**Authorship**

[The following is from Wikipedia, entry on Exodus, taken on 6/3/20.]

Jewish and Christian tradition viewed [Moses as the author of Exodus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mosaic_authorship) and the entire [Torah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah), but by the end of the 19th century the increasing awareness of discrepancies, inconsistencies, repetitions and other features of the Pentateuch had led scholars to abandon this idea. In approximate round dates, the process which produced Exodus and the Pentateuch probably began around 600 BCE when existing oral and written traditions were brought together to form books recognisable as those we know, reaching their final form as unchangeable sacred texts around 400 BCE.

**Genre and sources**[[edit](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Book_of_Exodus&action=edit&section=6)]

Although mythical elements are not so prominent in Exodus as in [Genesis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Genesis), ancient legends may have an influence on the book's form or content: for example, the story of the infant Moses's salvation from the Nile is argued to be based on an earlier legend of king [Sargon of Akkad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sargon_of_Akkad), while the story of the [parting of the Red Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parting_of_the_Red_Sea) may trade on Mesopotamian [creation mythology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Creation_myth). Similarly, the [Covenant Code](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Covenant_Code) (the law code in Exodus 20:22–23:33) has some similarities in both content and structure with the [Laws of Hammurabi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws_of_Hammurabi). These influences serve to reinforce the conclusion that the Book of Exodus originated in the exiled Jewish community of 6th-century BCE [Babylon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylon), but not all the sources are Mesopotamian: the story of Moses's flight to Midian following the murder of the Egyptian overseer may draw on the Egyptian [*Story of Sinuhe*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Story_of_Sinuhe).[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Exodus#cite_note-11)

**Historicity**

[The following is from Wikipedia, entry on “the Exodus,” taken 6/9/2020.]

The consensus of modern scholars is that the Bible does not give an accurate account of the origins of Israel, which formed as an entity in the central highlands of [Canaan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canaan) in the late second millennium BCE from the indigenous [Canaanite](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canaanites) culture.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGrabbe201736-7)[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMeyers20056%E2%80%937-8)[[8]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMooreKelle201181-9) Most scholars believe that the story of the Exodus has some historical basis, but that any such basis has little resemblance to the story told in the Bible.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEFaust2015476-10)[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERedmount200187-11) There is a widespread agreement that the composition of the [Torah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah) or Pentateuch, the biblical books which contain the Exodus narrative, took place in the [Middle Persian Period](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yehud_Medinata) (5th century BCE),[[11]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERomer20082-12) although the traditions behind it are older and can be found in the writings of the 8th-century BCE [prophets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophet).[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTELemche1985327-13)[[13]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERedmount200163-14)

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The earliest traces of the traditions behind the exodus appear in the northern prophets [Amos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Amos) (possibly) and [Hosea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Hosea) (certainly), both active in the 8th century BCE in northern [Israel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Israel_(Samaria)), but their southern contemporaries [Isaiah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Isaiah) and [Micah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Micah) show no knowledge of an exodus.[[12]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTELemche1985327-13) (Micah 6:4–5 contains a reference to the exodus, which many scholars take to be an addition by a later editor.)[[d]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-25) There is evidence in the Bible itself (mainly in the [Books of Kings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Books_of_Kings)) that the Exodus from Egypt formed a "foundational mythology" or "state ideology" for the [Northern Kingdom of Israel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Israel_(Samaria)).[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAssmann201850-26) Nadav Na'aman argues that it is nevertheless not credible that the story was totally unknown in the south, given the incredible political importance it was to assume for the southern kingdom, as evidenced by reference to it in the [Song of the Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Song_of_the_Sea), as well as [Psalm 78](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_78) and [Psalm 114](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_114).[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTENa'aman201140-27) The story may, therefore, have originated a few centuries earlier, perhaps in the 9th or 10th BCE, and there are signs that it took different forms in Israel, in the [Transjordan region](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transjordan_(region)), and in the southern [Kingdom of Judah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Judah) before being unified in the Persian era.[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERussell20091-28) There is widespread agreement, moreover, that the notion of the revelation of the law in Deuteronomy was originally separate from the Exodus:[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEAssmann2018204-29) the original version of Deuteronomy is generally dated to the 7th century BCE.[[26]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGrabbe201749-30) The contents of the books of [Leviticus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leviticus) and [Numbers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Numbers) are late additions to the narrative by priestly sources.[[27]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDever200199-31) The Exodus narrative was most likely further altered and expanded under the influence of the return from the [Babylonian captivity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_captivity) in the sixth century BCE.[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTENa'aman201140-27)

Scholars broadly agree that the publication of the Torah (or Pentateuch) took place in the mid-Persian period (the 5th century BCE), echoing a traditional Jewish view which gives [Ezra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ezra), the leader of the Jewish community on its return from Babylon, a pivotal role in its promulgation.[[28]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERomer20082_and_fn.3-32) Many theories have been advanced to explain the composition of the first five books of the Bible, but two have been especially influential.[[29]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTESka2006217-33) The first of these, Persian Imperial authorisation, advanced by Peter Frei in 1985, holds that the Persian authorities required the Jews of Jerusalem to present a single body of law as the price of local autonomy.[[30]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTESka2006218-34) Frei's theory was demolished at an interdisciplinary symposium held in 2000, but the relationship between the Persian authorities and Jerusalem remains a crucial question.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEEskenazi200986-35) The second theory, associated with Joel P. Weinberg and called the "Citizen-Temple Community", proposes that the Exodus story was composed to serve the needs of a post-exilic Jewish community organised around the Temple, which acted in effect as a bank for those who belonged to it.[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTESka2006226%E2%80%93227-36) The books containing the Exodus story served as an "identity card" defining who belonged to this community (i.e., to Israel), thus reinforcing Israel's unity through its new institutions.[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTESka2006225-37)

There are two main positions on the historicity of the Exodus in modern scholarship.[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGrabbe201736-7) The majority position is that the biblical Exodus narrative has some ultimate historicity, although there is little of historical worth in the biblical narrative.[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERedmount200187-11)[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEFaust2015476-10)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTESparks201073-1) The other main position, often associated with the school of [Biblical minimalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_minimalism),[[34]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDavies200423-24-38) is that the Exodus has no historical basis. Both positions are in agreement that the biblical Exodus narrative is best understood as a [founding myth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Founding_myth) of the Jewish people, explaining their origins and providing an ideological foundation for their culture and institutions, not an accurate depiction of the history of the Israelites.[[35]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTECollins200546-39)[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTESparks201073-1) A third position, that the biblical narrative is essentially correct ("Biblical maximalism"), is today held by "few, if any [...] in mainstream scholarship, only on the more fundamentalist fringes."[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGrabbe201736-7)

Mainstream scholarship no longer accepts the biblical Exodus account as accurate history for a number of reasons. No modern attempt to identify a historical Egyptian prototype for Moses has found wide acceptance, and no period in Egyptian history matches the Biblical accounts of the Exodus.[[36]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGrabbe201463-64-40) Some elements of the story are clearly meant to be [miraculous](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miracle) and defy rational explanation, such as the [Plagues of Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plagues_of_Egypt) and the [Crossing of the Red Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crossing_of_the_Red_Sea).[[37]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDever200315-17-41) Lester Grabbe argues that "attempts to find naturalistic explanations [for these events] [...] miss the point: the aim of the narrative is to magnify the power of Yhwh and Moses."[[38]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGrabbe201793-42) The Bible also fails to mention the names of any of the Pharaohs involved in the Exodus narrative.[[39]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGrabbe201469-43) While [ancient Egyptian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/AncientEgypt) texts from the [New Kingdom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Kingdom) mention "Asiatics" living in Egypt as slaves and workers, these people cannot be securely connected to the Israelites, and no contemporary Egyptian text mentions a large-scale exodus of slaves like that described in the Bible.[[40]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBarmash2015b2-3-44) The earliest surviving historical mention of the Israelites, the Egyptian [Merneptah Stele](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merneptah_Stele" \o "Merneptah Stele) (c. 1207 BCE), appears to place them in or around Canaan and gives no indication of any exodus.[[41]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGrabbe201465-67-45) The numbers of people involved in the Exodus as given in the Bible are fanciful, as the [Sinai Desert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinai_Desert) could never have supported the 603,550 Israelites mentioned in [Numbers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Book_of_Numbers) 1:46.[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDever200318-19-46) Archaeologists [Israel Finkelstein](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Israel_Finkelstein) and [Neil Asher Silberman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neil_Asher_Silberman) say that while archaeology has found traces left by small bands of hunter-gatherers in the Sinai, there is no evidence at all for the large body of people described in the Exodus story: "The conclusion – that Exodus did not happen at the time and in the manner described in the Bible – seems irrefutable [...] repeated excavations and surveys throughout the entire area have not provided even the slightest evidence."[[43]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEFinkelsteinSilberman200163-47) Instead, modern archaeology suggests continuity between Canaanite and Israelite settlement, indicating a primarily Canaanite origin for Israel.[[44]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEBarmash2015b4-48)[[45]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEShaw2002313-49)

A majority of scholars nevertheless still believes that the Exodus has some historical basis,[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEFaust2015476-10)[[10]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERedmount200187-11) with Kenton Sparks referring to it as "mythologized history."[[1]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTESparks201073-1) Evidence in favor of historical traditions forming a background to the Exodus myth include the documented movements of small groups of [Ancient Semitic-speaking peoples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Semitic-speaking_peoples) into and out of Egypt during the [Eighteenth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eighteenth_Dynasty_of_Egypt) and [Nineteenth Dynasties](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nineteenth_Dynasty_of_Egypt), some elements of Egyptian [folklore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folklore) and culture in the Exodus narrative,[[46]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEMeyers20058-10-50) and the names Moses, Aaron and Phinehas, which seem to have an Egyptian origin.[[47]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERedmount200165-51) The expulsion of the [Hyksos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hyksos), a Semitic group that had conquered much of Egypt, by the [Seventeenth Dynasty of Egypt](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventeenth_Dynasty_of_Egypt) is frequently discussed as a potential historical parallel or origin for the story.[[48]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEFaust2015477-52)[[49]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERedmount200178-53)[[50]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERedford1992412%E2%80%93413-54) Avraham Faust and William Dever argue that a group of Egyptian origin, whom Dever cautiously identifies as "the house of Joseph",[[51]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDever2003231-55) may have joined the Israelites after their initial [formation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnogenesis) in Canaan, and that their story could have become adopted as the national myth of the Israelites.[[52]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEFaust2015476%E2%80%93477-56)[[53]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDever2003229%E2%80%93231-57) It is also possible that oppressive Egyptian rule of Canaan during the late second millennium BCE may have aided the adoption of the story of a small group of Egyptian refugees by the native Canaanites among the Israelites.[[48]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEFaust2015477-52) Most proposals for a historical Exodus of any sort place it in the sixteenth, fifteenth, or thirteenth centuries BCE.[[54]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERedmount200177-58) Alternatively, Nadav Na'aman argues that oppressive Egyptian rule of Canaan during the Nineteenth and especially the [Twentieth Dynasty](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twentieth_Dynasty_of_Egypt) may have inspired the Exodus narrative, forming a "[collective memory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collective_memory)" of Egyptian oppression that was transferred from Canaan to Egypt itself in the popular consciousness.[[55]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTENa'aman201162-69-59)

There is an increasing trend among scholars to see the biblical exodus traditions as the invention of the [exilic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylonian_exile) and post-exilic Jewish community, with little to no historical basis.[[56]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTERussell200911-60) Lester Grabbe, for instance, argues that "[t]here is no compelling reason that the exodus has to be rooted in history,"[[57]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGrabbe201484-61) and that the details of the story more closely fit the seventh through the fifth centuries BCE than the traditional dating to the second millennium BCE.[[58]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEGrabbe201485-62) Rejecting the traditional view that the Exodus records pre-exilic traditions, Philip R. Davies suggests that the story may have been inspired by the return to Israel of Israelites and Judaeans who were placed in Egypt as garrison troops by the [Assyrians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Assyria) in the fifth and sixth centuries BCE.[[59]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDavies2015105-63) Historian Graham Davies has criticized minimalist scholars for relying too heavily on archaeology, stating "a historian cannot simply ignore the textual evidence (both biblical and non-biblical) that is relevant to an issue, and in this case the textual evidence purports, at least, to give a different view from that which archaeologists now tend to favor (or most of them, anyway)."[[60]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Exodus#cite_note-FOOTNOTEDavies200425-64)

[the following is from [myjewishlearning.com/article/exodus-history-or-mythic-tale/](https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/exodus-history-or-mythic-tale/) taken 6/9/2020.]

The historical validity of this narrative is controversial. Some scholars stress the lack of Egyptian evidence testifying to the enslavement of the Israelites, pointing out that very little Egyptian influence is discernible in biblical literature and in ancient Hebrew culture. Other scholars, how­ever, claim that it is highly improbable that a nation would choose to invent for itself a history of slavery as an explanation of its origins. If such a tradition exists, it must reflect an historical truth.

There is no doubt that slavery played a major role in the structure of the Egyptian state. It is also true that some form of single‑god worship was introduced into Egypt by Akenaton in the middle of the fourteenth century B.C.E., and this may have been a source for Jewish monotheism. Finally, the reign of Ramses II (1290-1212 B.C.E.), known for its costly wars and vast building enterprises, may well have been the era of cruel oppression described in Exodus.

But the only contemporary Egyptian source which actually mentions Israel is the stela (pillar with inscription) of King Merneptah from the fifth year of his reign (1207 B.C.E.), recording among his many victories: “Carved off is Ashkelon, seized upon in Gezer…Israel is laid waste, his seed no more.” This inscription implies that an entity named Israel existed in Canaan at the time, yet it is difficult to determine precisely what it was. One thing, however, may be regarded as certain: if the Israelites indeed emerged out of Egypt, their migration took place before the end of the 13th century B.C.E.

Other scholars, however, totally reject the historical validity of Exodus. The story of Ipu‑wer, they say, describes the anarchy in Egypt at the end of the third millennium B.C.E. and has no bearing on the biblical story; and 600,000 men (“not counting dependents”) means that approximately two million Hebrews left Egypt– is it possible that such a vast emigration left no trace in Egyptian sources? The biblical narrative, they point out, is full contradictions concerning the topography and the sequence of events–a feature typical of folktales, not of historical texts.

Between the two opposing views there are several intermediary theories. One hypothesis is that the Israelites left Egypt in two waves, and that by the time the second wave departed–in the middle of the thirteenth century–the first group had already settled in the land of Canaan, mostly around the town of Shechem in Samaria. Another possibility is that there was no organized mass emigration, but rather a constant flow of thousands of people from different Semitic tribes who left Egypt, roamed the desert, slowly infiltrating the land of Canaan where they eventually formed a single nation.

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There is Egyptian documentation about a group from Edom who migrated to Egypt because of famine, starvation, and thirst.[1](https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/pinpointing-the-exodus-from-egypt/#Notes) The migration of the Jacob group to Egypt was similar to this episode.[2](https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/pinpointing-the-exodus-from-egypt/#Notes) In both cases, migrants whose vocation included shepherding were despised by the Egyptians because the latter deified the ram as a holy animal, symbolizing the Egyptian god Amon. Thus, it seems logical that the Egyptians would conscript these starving migrants as lowly physical laborers to build the city of Ramses.

The circumstances of the Jacob-el group’s exodus from Egypt are recounted in many documents, most notably by Manetho, an Egyptian priest writing during the Second Temple period around the third century BCE. His writings are preserved in the work of the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, who lived in the first century CE.

[The following is from [biblicalhistoricalcontext.com/exodus/the-biblical-dates-of-the-exodus/](https://biblicalhistoricalcontext.com/exodus/the-biblical-dates-of-the-exodus/), taken on 6/9/2020.]

With all of the above in mind, a few things should be obvious:

* Far from there being a single “biblical” date for the Exodus, we can extract from the Bible (at least) 4 different dates. And, by definition, each of them are “biblical”.
* The dates we can derive aren’t even close – it’s not like they’re all off by a year or two, there’s a spread of almost *200 years* between the dates.

What are the implications?

* Scripture appears to be uninterested in chronological accuracy, therefore “biblical” dates should not be relied on when creating chronologies
* Face-value interpretation of chronological information in scripture may appear pious, but it’s actually a symptom of a hermeneutic that divorces scripture from reality and is therefore dangerous at best
* If we want to know what happened when, we need to turn to more accurate sources of information, in this case, archaeology

[The following is from [bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/pinpointing-the-exodus-from-egypt, taken on 6/9/2020.]](https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/pinpointing-the-exodus-from-egypt/) It is an edited version of a chapter from a book written in Hebrew, whose translated title is How the Bible was Born, by Israel Knohl, published in 2018.

I SCRIPTURE

*How The Bible Was Born*

According to Manetho, a group called the Hyksos came from Canaan, overran Egypt, were driven out, went back to Canaan, and ultimately settled in Jerusalem. Later, the pharaoh named Amenophis, who wanted to come face to face with the gods, was told by his counselor that only if Egypt was cleansed of lepers would he be able to see the gods. Amenophis collected all the lepers in Egypt together and settled them in a remote city, Avaris, which had previously been the Hyksos’s capital. The lepers rebelled against Amenophis and appointed a leper priest called Osarseph as their leader. Osarseph had previously served at the temple of the sun god (the biblical “On”) in Heliopolis, and he gave the lepers a new religion that was hostile to the Egyptian religion. They despised the Egyptian gods and sacred animals, which they slaughtered, roasted, and ate.

When the lepers were attacked, Osarseph sent messengers abroad to conscript a militia. He approached the Hyksos in Jerusalem, and they arrived in thousands from Canaan to help Osarseph and the lepers, at which point Osarseph changed his name to Moses. Together, the lepers and the Jerusalemites formed a military power that took over Egypt, looted the Egyptian temples, profaned the idols, and slaughtered and ate the sacred animals. Amenophis fled Egypt and went to Ethiopia. Years later, Amenophis left Ethiopia with a huge army and returned to Egypt. Together with his (now grown up) son Ramses, he fought the joint forces of the lepers and the Jerusalemites, and pursued them into the Syrian mountains.

We have here a story of an ethnic group in Egypt that threatened the indigenous Egyptian religion and objected to the worship of Egyptian idols and sacred animals. This group was reinforced by people arriving from the north, from the direction of Canaan, and together they seized power over Egypt, until Pharaoh Amenophis, aided by his son Ramses, drove them out.

Thomas Römer, a scholar working in Paris, noticed the similarity of plot and argued that it was very reminiscent of Pharaoh’s words at the beginning of the book of Exodus:

And the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, and multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them. . . . And he said to his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: come, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply and it come to pass that when any war should chance, they also join our enemies and fight against us and so go up out of the land (Exod. 1:7, 9–10).

Here, too, is a scenario whereby an enemy from within joins forces with an enemy from without. Römer concludes from these literary affinities that the writer of the exodus narrative borrowed these plotlines from Manetho. Either way, this provides convincing evidence that a correlation between these narratives truly exists.

The story of the exodus from Egypt is very complex and may be taken two ways. On the one hand, it is the story of a group of miserable slaves coerced into forced building labor in Egypt. A charismatic leader called Moses emerges, and under his leadership the slaves manage to escape from Egypt: “And it was told to the king of Egypt that the people had fled” (Exod. 14:5). On the other hand, we are told that the Israelites are driven out of Egypt because of the Egyptians’ *fear* of them: “because they were driven out of Egypt” (Exod. 12:39). Also, contrary to the notion that the Israelites were very downtrodden, other verses describe them as leaving Egypt with great wealth: God lends the people favor in Egyptian eyes, and the Egyptians give them gold and silver vessels (Exod. 11:2–3; 12:35–36). There is even a verse reading, “and the people of Israel went up armed out of the land of Egypt” (Exod. 13:18); literally, they were armed soldiers, the precise inversion of a downtrodden people. According to these verses, then, the exodus included a military element: armed Israelite soldiers and foreign mercenaries who came from abroad to help them. This parallel’s Manetho’s account in a profound way.

I think one can point precisely to the time when these events took place, based both on the biblical story and the Manetho tradition. We have to go back to the story of the Egyptian prime minister Bay-Joseph and the child pharaoh Siptah, whom Bay puts on the throne. The widow queen Tausert, Seti II’s daughter by Merneptah’s widow, was active at that time. She ascended the throne after Seti’s death and became the sole ruler of Egypt. Her reign only lasted two or three years, (ca. 1190–1188 BCE), and then something mysterious happened, something wonderfully puzzling. This dynasty came to an end, and a new dynasty arose, the twentieth, established by Setnakhte, Ramses III’s father, who was later to fight the Philistines and other seafaring nations. But Setnakhte’s ascent to the throne was also achieved through war.

We have two Egyptian documents on the subject: one is a huge papyrus, the largest in existence today. It is about 40 meters long and is called the “Great Harris Papyrus.” One part of the puzzle is written on this papyrus, and the other part is to be found on a monument set up by Setnakhte in the city of Yeb, or Elephantine, the same city where many years later Jewish Israelite soldiers lived under Persian rule. These two sources complement each other.

The Harris Papyrus tells of a neglected Egypt, lacking a single ruler. Each region had a local officer or king, and they quarreled and murdered each other. There is also mention of “empty years,” which could perhaps be a reference to the famine. Then it says that someone took over the throne. The word used on the papyrus is “*irsu,*” which can mean “someone who made himself,” or it could be a given name. Since we are not familiar with the name “Irsu*,*” either in Egypt or elsewhere in the region, I favor the first option. This would mean that the text is about someone who appointed himself as a ruler, meaning he was not worthy to inherit the throne of the pharaohs and took power by improper means. It also says he was “*haru,*” meaning he came from Syria, Canaan, or Transjordan, all of which are called “Haru.” So a person of Syrian or Canaanite origin appoints himself as a prince, as a ruler. He levies taxes on the entire country. He and his followers despoil the Egyptian gods and prohibit the bringing of offerings in the temples.

The papyrus goes on to tell of a turning point when the Egyptian gods took pity on the land and restored the son born of them to power. That was Setnakhte, founder of the twentieth dynasty. He restored order throughout the country, executed the evildoers, and cleansed the great throne of Egypt. In other words, following Tausert’s death, a “Haru”—a Canaanite, Syrian, or Transjordanian—came and took over Egyptian rule. He brought with him a large group of followers who objected to the Egyptian gods and their rituals. He and his followers took over the country for a time and exploited it economically. Setnakhte then battled this foreigner, removed him from the throne, stripped him of power, and ascended the throne in his place.

This document was not written at the time of the events described in it but only several decades later, toward the end of the reign of Ramses III, Setnakhte’s successor. I mentioned another document we have, however, which was written soon after the battle for power in Egypt. This second document is a monument discovered in Yabe, on the island of Elephantine, and dated to the second year of Setnakhte’s reign. There it is written that Setnakhte cleansed Egypt of those who had led her in a mistaken direction, who had defrauded her. His enemies were seized with fear and “fled like swallows fleeing the hawk,” leaving behind the silver and gold that Setnakhte’s enemies gave to the Asians they wanted to bring in as reinforcements, as allies. This plan of bringing mercenaries paid with Egyptian silver and gold failed, and Setnakhte drove them all out of Egypt. Following this expulsion of Setnakhte’s enemies from Egypt, the people became God-fearing once more.

If I were to conflate what is written in these two Egyptian sources, the following story of the end of the nineteenth dynasty and the beginning of the twentieth emerges. Tausert died around 1188 BCE, and her death was followed by two years of internal conflict in Egypt, because she did not have any living offspring and therefore no clear heir. Then someone of Canaanite or Syrian origin took over rule in Egypt. This man despised Egyptian rituals and prohibited offerings to the Egyptian gods. He imported allies from Asia—from somewhere in Syria, Lebanon, or Canaan—whom he paid with silver and gold. Setnakhte, founder of the twentieth dynasty, fought against the foreigner and his Asian allies who had taken over the country, and succeeded in driving them out.

Thus, we have three groups of different kinds of sources. We have Manetho, whose story is preserved in Josephus, we have the biblical book of Exodus, and we have Egyptian documents from the twelfth century BCE. I would argue that the same basic story recurs in all three: A group within Egypt that despises Egyptian ritual brings in reinforcements from abroad, from the region of Canaan and Syria. They come to Egypt and join the local group, but the pharaoh, who remains faithful to the old Egyptian religion, manages to defeat them and drive them out of the country. There is also mention of silver and gold given to the foreigners by Egyptian citizens. Manetho says this pharaoh had a son called Ramses, as did Senakhte, whose son Ramses III succeeded him on the Egyptian throne.

I am not the first to see the analogy between these ancient Egyptian sources and the Bible, particularly between the mention of silver and gold on the Yabe monument and the biblical story about the gold and silver vessels the Egyptians gave the Israelites on the eve of their exodus (Exod. 11:2; 12:35). But scholars who have studied this matter in the past thought that the foreigner who took over Egypt and against whom Setnakhte fought was Bay. Moreover, none of them has noted the connection between the story of these events and the story told by Manetho.

This struggle for power in Egypt, occurring several years after the deaths of Bay and Siptah, cannot have anything to do with Bay-Joseph but is actually about another figure—namely, Moses.

Today we know that Bay was executed by Siptah earlier on, so I claim that this struggle for power in Egypt, occurring several years after the deaths of Bay and Siptah, cannot have anything to do with Bay-Joseph but is actually about another figure—namely, Moses. My claim is that the exodus from Egypt occurred in a specific year: 1186 BCE, which was the second year of Pharaoh Setnakhte’s reign. The Syrian leader who despised Egyptian religion and brought mercenaries over from Syria or Lebanon, mentioned in these sources, is Moses.

In summary, I believe the Israelites came to Egypt during the great famine, which began at the end of Ramses II’s reign, around 1225 BCE. They left at the beginning of Setnakhte’s reign, around 1186 BCE. This is a span of about 40 years. If we recall that Moses is described as “a very great man in the land of Egypt” (Exod. 11:3), we now understand that this verse describes Moses’s historical status. He really *was* well known throughout Egypt, and he brought together a group of armed supporters who left Egypt with him and who included a band of mercenaries, the “*erev*.”

The name Moses-Mases is a bona fide Egyptian name, but as is written on the Harris Papyrus, he was Haru, i.e., from Canaan or Syria. As I understand it, Moses’s parents belonged to the Jacob-el group from Edom, who came to Egypt during the famine. In my opinion, he was raised and educated, at least for a time, at the Egyptian royal court, under the protection of Tausert. When Tausert died, he saw himself as the appropriate person to take over the court and ascend the throne of the pharaohs. To do this, he conscripted his people, the Jacob-el group, who were living, enslaved, in Egypt, and then later he brought in reinforcements from abroad, that same “*erev,*” or mercenary army, we have discussed—a foreign legion mentioned on the monument at Elephantine and in Manetho, each in its own way. There followed a struggle for power between opposing forces in Egypt. Moses and his men lost, were expelled from Egypt, and left for Canaan. This, in my opinion, is the story of the exodus of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt.