

Exodus: Introduction

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Much like Genesis, Exodus is a powerful and dramatic book of beginnings. Genesis depicts the beginning of the world, the human race, and the nation of Israel. Exodus depicts the descendants of Israel beginning to become a well-organized nation.

Genesis and Exodus should not be viewed as two isolated books, but Exodus picks up where Genesis left off with the death of Joseph around 1805 BC. The central story in Exodus is the deliverance of the Israelites from captivity in Egypt. As Wolf says, “Exodus is a book of salvation and deliverance, relating how the Israelites gain their freedom from Egypt under the mighty hand of God.”¹

Summary Statement: Exodus describes: the enslavement and oppression of the Israelites; the preparation and call of Moses; the conflict between Yahweh the God of Israel and the gods of Egypt (represented by Pharaoh); the exodus of the Israelites; their establishment as a nation in covenant with the Lord; their rebellion; and the Lord’s provision for their ongoing relationship, symbolized by His presence at the tabernacle that they built for Him.²

I. Title: Exodus

A. Hebrew Title

The Hebrew Title of the Book of Exodus is *Sefer Shemot* (“Book of names”) and it is derived from the opening words, “*ve’elleh shemôth,*” which mean, “And these [are] the names.” Sometimes the book is simply referred to as “*shemôth,*” or “names.” Wolf comments, “Unlike “in the beginning” for Genesis, the Hebrew

¹ Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 149.

² Dorian G. Coover-Cox, “Notes on Exodus,” *The Holman Christian Standard Study Bible*, Blum and Howard, eds. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 95.

title does not fit the overall content of the book very well, but it does link Exodus with Genesis 46:8, where the names of Jacob’s sons are also given.”³

Genesis 46:8a: Now these are the names of the sons of Israel, Jacob and his sons, who went to Egypt.

Exodus 1:1: Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob; they came each one with his household.

B. English Title

The English title “Exodus” is an anglicized version of a Greek word that means “exit” or “departure.” The Greek word for “Exodus” is found in Exodus 19:1: “In the third month after the sons of Israel had *gone out* of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai.” So, our English title “Exodus” came to us from the Greek LXX via the Vulgate.

C. Author

For an extensive discussion of authorship, see my notes on the authorship of the Pentateuch as a whole and my rejection of the Documentary Hypothesis.

Technically, the book of Exodus is an “anonymous” work and does not state an author. However, at several places the book of Exodus does refer to occasions when Moses made a written record of events (17:14; 24:4 – 7; 34:27 – 28). One example will suffice:

Exodus 17:14: Then the LORD said to Moses, “Write this in a book as a memorial and recite it to Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”

Moses could have written the book at several intervals: after the Israelites finished building the tabernacle, at the start of their second year after leaving Egypt, or before his death in the land of Moab. Moses may have written the book at various intervals over a long period of time.

³ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 149.

II. Competing Models for the Conquest of Canaan

In order to understand some of the scholarly debates about the date of the Exodus, it is important to have a basic introduction to competing models for the conquest of Canaan. The Bible clearly says the Israelites conquered Canaan in a military campaign. Other explanations have been offered by liberals and you need to be aware of these arguments. To understand these different models, you need to understand just a bit of archeological history. A straightforward reading of the Bible places the conquest of Canaan starting around 1400 BC. When archeologists started digging around in Israel in the late 1800s and early 1900s, they didn't think the data supported that date, but instead began arguing for a date around 1200 BC.

A. The Conquest Model

The Conquest Model is a straightforward reading of the Biblical text: Israel invaded Canaan from the East Side of the Jordan River and destroyed their enemies in a military campaign led by Joshua.⁴ My conviction is Israel left Egypt sometime around 1450 BC or soon thereafter and the campaign to conquer Canaan began around 1400 BC.

B. Liberal Scholarship: The Social Revolution Model

Of many wrong-headed explanations for the conquest of Canaan, one of the most humorous, from my perspective, is the Marxist-inspired *social revolution model*. According to this theory, the earliest Israelites were originally disaffected Canaanites who fled their oppressive overlords in the urban centers in the Mediterranean coastal regions and headed for the hill country of central Canaan (modern Israel). When these disaffected people entered the hill country, they met a few Yahwists – worshippers of the deity Yahweh – who had lived in southern Canaan under Egyptian influence or perhaps had escaped from Egypt. These two different groups entered into a covenant with each other and became Israel. Though there are many versions of this theory, most of the models of Israelite

⁴ Howard has a sentence that seems contradictory on page 75 of his *Historical Books*: “The archaeological evidence of destructions ca. 1200 BC would seem to have confirmed that these destructions did take place, and many scholarly treatments incorporated this evidence into the Biblical accounts.” Yet, he just spent a lot of time explaining how the destruction ca. 1200 BC was probably not from the Israelite invasion! It's just confusing and needs to be edited if this book is ever reprinted. Howard, *Historical Books*, 75

origins circulating in academia today are variations on this theme of indigenous origins.⁵

A form of the social revolution model was advocated by George E. Mendenhall (1916 - 2016), a professor at the University of Michigan, in his 1973 book *The Tenth Generation: The Origins of the Biblical Tradition*. Mendenhall first proposed this idea in a 1962 article in *The Biblical Archeologist*. He suggested a group of disaffected people left urban centers for an agrarian / pastoral life and that the “earliest Israelites actually had been under the domination of the Canaanite cities, and had successfully withdrawn.”⁶ Norman Gottwald, an American Marxist and former professor at New York Theological Seminary, developed the social revolution model in much more detail in his 1979 book, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel, 1250-1050 B.C.E.*

As the Social Revolution model has been modified over the years, the theory emphasizes that the beginning of the Israelites can be traced back to lower-class Canaanites like peasant farmers, sheep and goat herders, itinerant metalworkers, priests renegade from the official urban-based Canaanite pagan cults, and mercenaries, and other nomads who were living in an oppressive Egyptian feudal system of the Canaanite city-states along the coast between 1300 and 1200 BC. According to some forms of this theory, these people worshipped one god – *El*. These rebels who worship *El* make their way to the safety of the central highlands where they encounter a man named Moses who has led a small group of rebels dedicated to worshipping a god named *Yahweh*. The two groups join together to give us *Israel*.

Consider well the date Mendenhall proposed this idea – the 1960s! At that time, Marxism was in the air on college campuses! Basically, Mendenhall transforms the Israelite conquest into a Marxist revolt! He asserted the Ancient Israelite settlement of Israel was actually the result of a cultural egalitarian revolution within Canaanite society. Well, I’ve provably over-stated Mendenhall’s reliance on Marxist theory, but as soon as his theory was published, people from the radical left immediately jumped on the idea and embraced it and they did so

⁵ This paragraph is summarized from Ralph K. Hawkins and David Ben-Shiomo, “Khirbet el-Mastarah: An Early Israelite Settlement?,” *Biblical Archeological Review* 44.4 (July / August 2018); 40 – 41.

⁶ George Mendenhall, “The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine,” *The Biblical Archeologist* 25.3 (September 1962): 77.

because they agreed with the Marxist critique of history as a series of class struggles. Borrowing from Mendenhall, liberals began advocating the Israelite “conquest” as Marxist class struggle pitting the oppressed peasantry against the dominant capitalist city-state structure in Canaan. Joshua grabbed the hammer and sickle and placed a red flag right in the center of Canaan!

Howard is too gracious in his critique. The “revolt model” for Israel’s conquest of Canaan is Marxist bunk that was snatched up by all the pot-smoking hippies who survived the 60s without overdosing. Well, I probably shouldn’t publish that line in a journal article, but it is great rhetoric and it is exactly what I think about this nonsense!

C. The Settlement Model

The Settlement Model was championed by Albrecht Alt (1883 – 1956) a German, Lutheran scholar. Alt did not take the Bible at face value, but saw it as a source of information. He suggested the Israelites were a loosely connected group of pastoral nomads from independent tribes who gradually infiltrated Canaan, eventually taking over. Once in the land, the tribes banded together into a loose confederation that became “Israel.” To put it another way, Alt saw the Israelite takeover more akin to the colonization of North America by the British as opposed to D-Day. For Alt, there was not Exodus from Egypt and no military conquest of Canaan, at least not before King David. Alt’s approach and conclusions were developed further by his student, Martin Noth, whose history of Israel became a standard work on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1950s and 1960s. Basically, Alt was applying a hypothetical sociological theory to a situation from which he was separated by 3,000 years!

D. John Bimson

John Bimson is an Old Testament tutor at Trinity College Bristol. He has proposed a reinterpretation of the archeological data. Basically, he claims

destruction in Israel dated to around 1550 BC should be revised to 1420 BC or thereabouts, thus fitting nicely with an early date for the Exodus and the invasion.

E. Conclusion

As you might expect, I support the conquest model. The Biblical text does acknowledge that a mixed multitude went with Israel out of Egypt – Exodus 12:38 and Numbers 11:4. So, the group leaving Egypt may not have been completely homogenous. They were not an undifferentiated ethnic unity. Howard says, “Both alternative models (and their offshoots) are, at root, profoundly skeptical of the biblical records as they now stand, and they essentially are alien models imposed on the biblical data.”⁷ Howard also makes a good point when he says, “Nowhere in Joshua does Israel win a battle on the basis of superior force in an all-out, frontal offensive attack.”⁸ Rather, they use intrigue and are helped mightily by God’s supernatural intervention.

III. Date

Now that we have been introduced to competing models for the conquest of Canaan, we can explore discussions on the date for the Exodus. The most debated aspect of the Book of Exodus is the date of the Exodus itself. If one asserts Moses as the author, dating the Exodus event determines the date one will advocate for authorship.

Summary: There are three schools of thought about the date of the Exodus:⁹

*Early Date: circa 1446 BC (I advocate this)

*Late Date: circa 1290 – 1266 BC

*No Date: Exodus is a myth/legend invented by later generations (Some form of the social revolution model)

A. Key Biblical Texts and an “Early Date”

⁷ Howard, *Historical Books*, 79

⁸ Howard, *Historical Books*, 79

⁹ Augustine said the Exodus occurred at the “very end of the reign of Cecrops the king of the Athenians, when Ascatades ruled over the Assyrians, Marathus over the Sicyonians and Triopas over the Argives.” Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, Loeb Classical Library, vol. 5, Eva M. Sanford and William M. Green, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 399, XVIII.xi.

From a strictly Biblical point of view, four passages of Scripture are vital for establishing the date of the Exodus:

Genesis 15:13: God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years.

Exodus 12:40: Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.

Judges 11:26: [Jephthah speaking] While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time?

1 Kings 6:1: Now it came about in the four hundred eightieth year after the sons of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD. [See also 2 Chronicles 3:2]

How are we to reconcile all of these dates and bring them into some order? I will attempt a very brief suggested explanation.

1. Genesis 15:13 says the descendants of Abram would be oppressed for 400 years and Exodus 12:40 says they were oppressed for 430 years. The easiest explanation is to say that Genesis 15:13 is an approximation and Exodus 12:40 gives the precise number. There is no need to see a contradiction.
2. Based on 1 Kings 6:1 and 2 Chronicles 3:2, we know that Solomon began to build the temple in 966 B.C.
3. Based on 1 Kings 6:1, if we add 480 and 966, we arrive at 1446 BC as the date for the Exodus.
4. If we add 1446 and 430 [from Exodus 12:40], we can determine that Jacob arrived in Egypt circa 1876 BC, during the Egyptian Middle Kingdom era.
5. Since Jephthah lived around 1100 BC, the “300 years” referenced in Judges 11:26 would place the conquest of Canaan somewhere around 1400 BC.

6. Based on Judges 11:26, a date of 1400 BC for the conquest of Canaan correlates well with a 1446 BC date for the Exodus since the initial generation to leave Egypt wandered in the Desert for 40 years. Thus, if we subtract 40 from 1446 BC, we arrive at a date of around 1406 BC for the actual invasion of Canaan. Note, the Judges 11:26 reference to “300 years” may be an approximation much as “400 years” is an approximation in Genesis 15:13.

7. Accordingly, a possible scenario for the Pharaohs in power during the Exodus event follows this chronology:

Thutmose III (reigned 1495 – 1450 BC) was the pharaoh of the oppression and the pharaoh from whom Moses ran. Moses spent most of Thutmose III’s reign in the desert for forty years. However, I must add that all of these conclusions are based on how one dates the reign of Thutmose III. For example, Edwin Yamauchi says, “The “early date” of the exodus (ca. 1440 BC) would mean that Thutmose III was the pharaoh of the Exodus.”¹⁰ Others suggest Thutmose III died around 1425 BC. So the dates of the reign of Thutmose III vary in the sources, thus shifting the chronology.

Thutmose III had experienced a major foreign policy problem with Canaan. Around 1457 BC, an Egyptian army led by Thutmose III had a major battle at Megiddo versus a Canaanite army led by Durusha, king of Kadesh. The area of Canaan was composed of various city states, and most of them were Egyptian vassals. But the Canaanites began rebelling under the leadership of Durusha. Concerning the battle itself, the main strength of Thutmose III’s army was its chariots. The Egyptians were able to move their entire army through the Aruna Pass, a surprising move which caught the Canaanites out of position. After winning the battle, the Canaanites remained under siege in Megiddo while Thutmose III attacked various other points in Canaan.¹¹ This incident indicates the unsettled nature of the region during the time of the Exodus, and may be in the background of the refusal to let Israel go: Though Moses didn’t tell the Egyptians Canaan was Israel’s goal, the Pharaoh may have suspected as much and perhaps didn’t want reinforcements going to a problem area.

¹⁰ Edwin Yamauchi, “Political Background of the Old Testament,” *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*, Dockery, Matthews, Sloan, eds. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 315.

¹¹ For a summary of the battle, see Martin J. Dougherty, et al, *Battles That Changed History* (London: Amber Books, 2010), 10 – 19.

Amenhotep II¹² (1450 – 1425 BC) – The pharaoh of the plagues. Amenhotep II is depicted in ancient texts as a strong warrior and military pharaoh who made several campaigns into Canaan and then abruptly stopped his military activity.¹³

Thutmose IV – a younger brother of Amunhotep II. Some surmise that Amunhotep II's son was killed in the tenth plague, thus he was followed by his brother and not a son.

“The Dream Stele” of Thutmose IV is an enormous upright slab placed by Thutmose IV at the bottom of the Sphinx. The monument claims that Thutmose IV was walking near the Sphinx during the middle of the day one afternoon, right at the time of day when the sun is at its zenith. He decided to rest in the shadow of the Sphinx. At the very moment when the sun was at its Zenith, Thutmose IV claims the god Horem-Akhet-Khepri-Re-Atum came to him in a dream and basically told him that if he cleared away the sands that had been building up around [the Sphinx], the god would make sure that Thutmose IV was the ruler of a unified upper and lower Egypt. Why is this monument important for Biblical studies? Because Thutmose IV also indicates in this stele that he himself was *not* the firstborn of Amenhotep II, leading some to speculate that we have an allusion to the tenth plague in which his older brother died.

The information I have given in these seven points is an argument for an *early date* for the Exodus. Please remember, it is difficult to arrive at precise dates for the reigns of the Pharaohs.¹⁴ I offer this proposed chronology with humility, and I grant uncertainty in the details.

B. The Argument for a “Late Date” for the Exodus

1. The Late Date Argument

The noted Biblical scholar John Bright argued for a “Late Date” for the Exodus of approximately 1290 BC. Bright argued that the reference to “480 years” in 1 Kings 6:1 is not to be taken as a precise count. Instead, he suggests that the number “480” is a round number composed of twelve generations of forty years each. He argues this because of the use of “40 years” as a reference to a

¹² Also spelled *Amunhotep*.

¹³ Ralph L. Smith and Eric Mitchell, “Exodus,” in *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2003), 527.

¹⁴ For example, Wikipedia cites 1427 – 1401 BC as the dates for Amunhotep II's reign.

generation in the Old Testament. In Bright's hypothesis, the key is to understand "480" as a reference to 12 generations. Some of these generations may be as short as 25 years. Thus, $12 \times 25 = 300$. If one adds 300 years to the known date of 966 BC when Solomon started building the temple, then one arrives at a date somewhere near 1266 BC for the Exodus. This is the "late date" argument.

2. Which Pharaoh?

But why would Bright appeal to this argument when it seems more contrived? Bright is trying to reconcile the Biblical text with those who suggest very strongly that Ramses II was the Pharaoh of the Exodus, thus necessitating a date somewhere between 1300 – 1200 BC for the Exodus. Why do some scholars want to argue that Rameses II was Pharaoh? Because two passages of Scripture mention locales named "Rameses."

We must be clear that Exodus never tells us the exact name of the Pharaoh who was the ruler during the Exodus. The royal title "Pharaoh" means "Great House" in Egyptian. This title is used for each ruler of Egypt mentioned in Genesis and Exodus and no specific name is given.

3. The name "Rameses" in the Bible

While no ruling Pharaoh is specifically named in the Bible, the name "Rameses" as in "Rameses II" does occur in two passages with specific references to cities named after Ramses.

Genesis 47:11: So Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had ordered.

Exodus 1:11: So they [the Egyptians] appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses [*sic?* HCS has *Rameses*].

First, who was Rameses?¹⁵ The name "Rameses" means "Re is born." Re was the sun god for the Egyptians. The name "Rameses" served as the family name of

¹⁵ To add to the confusion about the spelling of this Pharaoh's name, some even transliterate his name as *Ramesses*.

eleven Pharaohs of Egypt during the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties (ca. 1293 – 1070 BC). Sometimes this era is referred to as the “Ramesside period.” Here are some of the key Egyptian kings of this era:

Rameses I: Rameses I ruled Egypt from 1293 – 1291 BC. He was an army general who founded the nineteenth dynasty.

Seti I: Seti I¹⁶ ruled Egypt from approximately 1291 – 1279 BC and was the son of Rameses I. He conducted military campaigns in western Asia Minor, defeating Hittites and conquering several cities in Palestine.

Rameses II: Rameses II ruled Egypt from 1279 – 1212 BC and was the son of Seti I. Wolf gives his dates as 1290 – 1224 BC. The competing dates simply indicate the inability to arrive at a conclusive dates for many ancient monarchs. Students should assume that dates for very ancient kings are usually approximations. However, his reign probably overlapped with that of his father. One author explains, “Unfortunately it is not known how long Sety I occupied the throne. . . . Towards the end of his reign – we do not know exactly when – he appointed his son and heir Rameses as co-regent while the latter was still ‘a child in his embrace.’”¹⁷ He is famous for fighting a great battle with the Hittites at Kadesh in Syria. He was an extremely active builder. He founded the city known in the Bible as “Ramses” (Exodus 1:11).

Merenptah: Merenptah ruled Egypt from 1212 – 1201 BC and he was a son of Rameses II. He is important because a stele set up to record some of his victories includes the words “Israel is desolated and has no seed”; this is the first specific extra-Biblical reference to ancient Israel yet to be discovered.¹⁸

Since the Bible mentions the name “Rameses,” many scholars have suggested that the Exodus occurred during the reign of Rameses II or perhaps his son, Merenptah. Edwin Yamauchi says, “The “late date” of the exodus (ca 1270 BC) would indicate that Ramesses II was that pharaoh.”¹⁹ The well-crafted cartoon movie *Moses: Prince of Egypt* asserts Ramses II as the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

¹⁶ Seti’s name is sometimes transliterated as *Sety*.

¹⁷ Jacobus Van Dijk, “The Amarna Period and the Later New Kingdom,” in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, Ian Shaw, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 288.

¹⁸ This summary of these Pharaohs is drawn substantively from James M. Weinstein, “Ramesses,” in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, Paul Achtemeier, ed. (New York: HarperCollins/The Society for Biblical Literature, 1996), 913.

¹⁹ Edwin Yamauchi, “Political Background of the Old Testament,” 315.

4. Response to the Late Date And the Use of the Name “Rameses”

a. How do we explain the use of the term “Ramses”?

The reference to the “land of Rameses” in Genesis 47:11 is an alternate name for the “Land of Goshen” where the Israelites were settled. Bergen suggests that the reference to Rameses in Genesis 47:11 “may be the result of a later scribe updating the place names, since the city named Pi-Rameses served as Egypt’s capital only from 1295 – 1065 BC – much later than the time of Jacob.”²⁰ Wolf makes a similar argument. Referring both to Genesis 47:11 and Exodus 1:11 he says, “Apparently in both cases earlier names were updated by a later editor who used the more recent name.”²¹

b. The Length of Ramses’ Reign and the Story of Moses

Wolf argues the length of the reigns for both Sety I and Ramses II do not correlate well with the Biblical chronology of the life of Moses. Moses fled Egypt from Egypt for forty years until the pharaoh who sought his life died. This fits better with the chronology of the life of Thutmose III.

C. The Exodus and the “Hyskos”

When discussing the history of ancient Egypt, one of the most fascinating and debated topic is the identity of the “Hyskos.”

1. Who were the Hyskos?

Our term “Hyskos” originates in an ancient Greek transliteration of an Ancient Egyptian term meaning “foreign ruler” or “ruler of foreign lands.” Around 1667 BC, a group of invaders captured the Egyptian capital of Memphis. These invaders were apparently Semitic in some way, shape, or form. By “Semitic,” we mean that they were from a people group in some way related to the same people group from which Abraham came. These foreign rulers ruled Egypt as the Fifteenth and Sixteenth dynasties from around 1667 – 1559 BC (Wolf suggests 1700 – 1550 BC). The term “Hyskos” was a name given to these foreign rulers of Egypt by an Egyptian priest named Manetho. Manetho lived many centuries after

²⁰ Robert D. Bergen, “Notes on Genesis,” in *The Holman Christian Standard Study Bible*, Blum and Howard, eds. (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 86.

²¹ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 171.

the Hyskos and wrote about them between 300 – 200 BC. The Egyptians who lived under their rule many centuries before Manetho called them “*Heqau khasut*,” which when translated into Greek and then to English comes out as “Hyskos.” Eventually, Pharaoh Kamose (ca. 1576 – 1570 BC) and his successor, Pharaoh Ahmose (ca 1570 – 1546 BC) ejected the Hyskos from Egypt and returned native Egyptian rule.²² Precise identification of the Hyskos is difficult because they left behind no inscriptions in their native language, but a number of their personal names have turned up on seals and dedicatory texts. Analysis of these names indicates they derive from a West Semitic dialect.²³ Furthermore, native Egyptians destroyed Hyskos monuments when the Hyskos were finally ejected from power. It is of interest to note that the Hyskos center of power was the northeast Nile delta region, the area where Israelites also were located.

As a side note, Flavius Josephus actually equates the expulsion of the Hyskos from Egypt with the Exodus of the Hebrews, but this is not likely.

2. Hyskos and the Exodus

Wolf rightly summarizes why there is interest in the Hyskos when he says, “Since the Israelites were themselves Semites who had produced one prominent leader in Egypt [Joseph], there is a great deal of interest in their relationship with the Hyskos.”²⁴ To what degree, if any, does the Hyskos rule of Egypt affect the dating of the Exodus? Most of the arguments about the Hyskos and Israelite presence in Egypt attempt to address a statement found in Exodus 1:8:

Exodus 1:8 - 10: A new king who had not known Joseph came to power in Egypt. He said to his people, “Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and powerful than we are. Let us deal shrewdly with them; otherwise they will multiply further, and if war breaks out, they may join our enemies, fight against us, and leave the country.

²² James M. Weinstein, “Hyskos,” in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, Paul Achtemeier, ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1985; 1996), 444.

²³ This is the opinion of Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 100.

²⁴ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 172.

There are several schools of thought about the Hyskos.

a. As noted above, Josephus attempted to equate the ejection of the Hyskos with the Exodus itself. Neither advocates of the early or the late date embrace this idea to day. According to this position and others like it, the Hyskos were actually the Israelites.

b. Some have suggested that the Hyskos were actually in power when Joseph was elevated to the second position in the kingdom. Since the Hyskos were from a similar people group, this would explain the willingness of the ruling administration to place such trust in Joseph. However, as suggested above, Jacob would have arrived in Egypt around 1876 BC, too early for the Hyskos to have been in control.

c. Some have suggested that the reference to a “new king” in Exodus 1:8 is in fact a reference to the Hyskos and that it was the Hyskos who were afraid of the Israelites. However, it seems unlikely that the Semitic Hyskos would have had antagonism towards their fellow Semites – the children of Israel.

d. Some have suggested that the “new king” of Exodus 1:8 was either the aforementioned Pharaohs Kamose (ca. 1576 – 1570 BC) or his successor, Ahmose (ca 1570 – 1546 BC).

e. Dr. Branch’s opinion: As best as I can discern, I think Wolf is right when he says Joseph was “dealing with a native Egyptian dynasty”²⁵ (See Genesis 43:32; 46:34). I suspect that while the Israelites were living in Egypt, the Hyskos took over. These were probably years of great prosperity for the Israelites since their rulers were also of Semitic origin (long lost cousins!). I believe the reference to the king who “did not know Joseph” is alluding to the return of native Egyptian power to the throne.

²⁵ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 173.

After being under the rule of the Hyskos, the Egyptians were probably antagonistic towards other people of Semitic origin.

3. Wacky Ideas from Charles Taze Russell Just for Fun!

Charles Taze Russell, the founder of what is now known as the Jehovah's Witnesses, advocated quite a number of wacky ideas, but none more than his interest in the pyramids of Egypt and the Great Pyramid at Giza in particular. Russell believed Hebrews built the Great Pyramid under Hyksos rule under God's direction. Using measurements from the Great Pyramid, he predicted Armageddon would occur in 1914. A major problem – among many! – with Russell's prediction is that the Pyramid kept growing! I being facetious, but when Russell's prediction didn't come true, he made different predictions based on measurements of the Great Pyramid. The problem is the Pyramid apparently had grown by several inches to give him more years for crazy predictions to hopefully work out.

D. Other Factors: “The Sea Peoples”

Another factor influencing the date of the Exodus is the identity and timing of the invasion of Egypt and Palestine by the “Sea Peoples.” Wolf only mentions this in passing, but it is a very important issue.

1. Who were the “Sea Peoples”

Ancient Egyptian sources record a violent invasion from the North of people called “The Sea People.” These people were apparently of Greek origin from the Aegean or northern Mediterranean. Many hypotheses have been suggested for their migration: volcanic destruction, famine, the simple desire for plunder, etc. Most of them probably came from Crete.

Here is one plausible and accepted timeline of their invasions:

- 1208 BC - King Merneptah of Egypt turned back an incursion by the
Sea Peoples
and Libyans at the Nile Delta.
- 1180 BC - The Hittite empire fell.

- 1180 to 1176 BC - The Levant fell (eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean)
Except for the Phoenician cities.
- 1176 BC - King Ramses III of Egypt stopped the Sea Peoples attacks by land and by sea, allowing them to keep the land they had taken.

2. Why are they important?

Why should a preacher care about the identity of the Sea People? The Egyptians called the Sea Peoples *Perasata*, which is probably the origin of the Biblical word *Philistine!* As Israel invaded Canaan from the East, the *Philistines* had invaded it from the west.

E. The “Habiru”

Wolf addresses the issue of the “Habiru” on pages 176 – 177. Who are the Habiru and why should you care? They are a people group mentioned in the Amarna Tablets. As is obvious, “Habiru” [sometimes spelled as *'Apiru*] and “Hebrew” sound very similar. So, some people identify them with the ancient Hebrews. Others say that they are different from the Hebrews.

1. The Amarna Tablets

(El) Amarna is a city in Middle Egypt between Cairo and Luxor. The archaeological site near the modern city, called Tell El-Amarna (The hill at El-Amarna) is the remains of the ancient Egyptian capital Akhetaten which thrived for a brief period in the 1300s BCE. This served as the capital for two Pharaohs: Amunhotep III (ca 1390 – 1352) and Akhenaton (ca 1352 – 1336). Please don't get hung up on the precise dates. Wolf says these two Pharaohs reigned from circa 1400 – 1360 BC. Akhenaton ruled under the name of “Amunhotep IV for the first three years of his reign, but he then changed his name to *Akhenaton*, which means “Effective for the Aten.” This signals his belief that the power of light as manifested in the sun disk, or Aten, was the ultimate force in the universe. In the eighth year of his reign, all other gods appear to have been banned and the Aten elevated to the one and only god.

Students of the OT should be aware of Akhenaton because he is sometimes credited as the origin of Israel's monotheism. Egypt was thoroughly polytheistic, but Akhenaton elevated worship of Aten (the sun disk) above all other gods. Technically, this was *henotheism* and not monotheism. Furthermore, the center of Akhenaton's religion was Akhenaton himself. Donald Redford explains:

The central and fundamental position occupied by Akhenaten in the new order knows no parallel among the early Hebrews. He [Akhenaten] occupies “center stage” in every

scene of art, he alone knows his “father” the sun disk, he receives obeisance and worship equally with the disk. Great stress, perhaps to the point of being the single most important feature of Akhenaten’s system, is laid on the filial link with his father the sun disk; and widest variety of imagery is employed in the texts to describe the relationship. . . . As is becoming increasingly clear, the sun disk crystallized in Akhenaten’s thinking from an apotheosis of his own father Amenophis II, whose sobriquet significantly was the “Dazzling Sun Disk.”²⁶

Before I comment, know that Redford does not believe Israel adopted Monotheism until late in the monarchy under the influence of the prophets, a position I reject. But his point here is well taken: People who claim supposed parallels between Akhenaten’s religion and Israelite monotheism show an ignorance of what Akhenaten’s religion was all about!

In 1887, some local Egyptian peasants found a few tablets buried in the ruins of the Akhetaten palace complex at Amarna and sold them to antiquities dealers. Later excavations recovered the rest, beginning with the work of English Egyptologist William Matthew Flinders Petrie in 1891-92.

The Amarna Tablets were written during a very brief period historically: the second half of the fourteenth century BCE (1400-1300 BCE), the “New Kingdom” period in Ancient Egypt and late Bronze Age in Palestine. The actual duration of the correspondence is likely not much more than 25 years total. The tablets take us intimately into one of the most popularly recognized periods in ancient Egypt with connections to Nefertiti and her husband Akhenaten, sometimes credited with being one of the first monotheists. The clay tablets are mainly diplomatic letters (with a few myths and epics) written in cuneiform script (wedge prints made in wet clay then baked), often covering both sides of a tablet for efficiency. From the side view they often resemble fat hamburger patties! They were originally part of a court archival office. Topics addressed in the letters include:

- Exchanges of gifts between rulers (e.g., fancy furniture, gold, linen, etc.)
- Diplomatic marriages (one letter from a Babylonian king asked for proof that his sister, one of Pharaoh’s earlier wives, is still alive before sending the Pharaoh his daughter as a new wife!)
- News about events in distant cities: Byblos, Tyre, etc.
- Requests for grain and other foodstuffs, lumber, ships, military aid, etc.

²⁶ Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 381.

- Vassals' concerns about the rising military threat of the Hittites on the northern borders of Egyptian influence and concern from Jerusalem and Gezer, too, about the military threat from the 'Apiru.
- A few contain myths and legends.²⁷

The tablets are written mostly in Akkadian, but apparently it is a western dialect of Akkadian.

2. The *Habiru*

Several of the Amarna letters are from leaders of cities in Palestine and Syria. In these letters, they complain about a group of people known as the *Habiru* who have invaded the land. For example, the letters from Jerusalem (*Urusalim*) from 'Abdi-Heba (EA 285-290) are full of dire news of invasions and desertions by local mayors to the Habiru/'Apiru--"Lost are the lands of the king"--and imploring the king of Egypt for military rescue. "As the King (of Egypt) has placed his name in Jerusalem forever, he cannot abandon it!" (EA 287)

While conservative scholars immediately identified these *Habiru* with the Hebrews, whose conquest of Canaan is mentioned in the Bible (e.g., the book of Joshua), other scholars have doubted the connection, since the term was used widely in the Ancient Near East for foreign marauders or mercenaries, some who were even part of the king of Babylon's army. Carol Redmount describes the Apiru/Habiru as "a loosely defined, inferior social class composed of shifting and shifty population elements without secure ties to settled communities," described as "outlaws, mercenaries, and slaves" in ancient texts. So, the term Habiru had a wide variety of meanings in antiquity.

A number of names of Canaanite (Kinahni) cities come up in the Tablets: Ashkelon (Asqaluna), Gaza (Hazzatu), Gezer (Gazru), Hazor (Hasura), Joppa (Yapu), Lachish (Lakisa), Megiddo (Magidda), Shunem (Sunama), and others.

3. Suggested Relationships between the Habiru and the Hebrews

The Habiru and the Hebrews are Equivalent: Since the Amarna letters date from after 1400 BC and come from cities in Palestine/Canaan, it is tempting to identify the Habiru with the Hebrews. Weaknesses with this view include 1) the broad way in which the term Habiru was used in

²⁷ Much of my summary of the Amarna Tablets comes from The West Semitic Research Project of the University of Southern California. See "The Amarna Tablets" at www.usc.edu/dept/LAS/wsrp/educational_site/ancient_texts/elamarna.shtml. Electronic resource accessed July 10, 2012.

antiquity and 2) the fact that the record of the Habiru activity in the Amarna letters does not exactly correspond with the record of the invasion found in Joshua.

There is no relationship between the Habiru and the Hebrews

The Habiru correspond to the Invasion of Cushan-Rishathaim

Judges 3:7 – 8: The sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth. Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, so that He sold them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim king of Mesopotamia; and the sons of Israel served Cushan-rishathaim eight years.

In my opinion, the Hebrews may have been called “Habiru” by their contemporaries, but not all the Habiru were Hebrews. Habiru may have been an ANE term for “outlaw”!

F. Conclusion

Here, I will give my opinion and my best educated guesses on several issues.

1. The weakest part of the “early date” argument is explaining the use of the term “Ramses” to identify locations in Egypt.
2. The weakest part of the “late date” argument is the special pleading used to condense 480 years to mean a shorter period of time.
3. Liberals typically do not believe the Exodus happened. Instead, they think the Israelites gradually migrated from Egypt to Canaan or they assert some form of the social revolution model. Later generations embellished the stories and added fanciful details. You will encounter people who claim, “Archaeology has established that the Exodus as presented in the Bible never happened and it is a myth.” When you read things like this, do not panic. Archeology has not “proven” any such thing. What archeology does show is a chaotic and tumultuous situation in ancient Palestine around the time that the Exodus from Egypt and invasion of Canaan would have occurred. We should not be surprised to discover details such as this.
4. A straight forward reading of the Biblical text favors an early date. I suspect that Joseph came to power under an Egyptian dynasty. Not too long after his death, the Hyskos took over and were probably very friendly to the Israelites. After the Hyskos got kicked out, the Egyptians were probably not too pleased with the Israelites. Somewhere around 1446 BC, the Israelites were delivered from Egypt. The fact that their Exodus is not mentioned on Egyptian inscriptions does not surprise me since the Egyptian Pharaohs were somewhat egotistical: They didn’t like to leave records of massive defeats. Somewhere around 1400 BC, the Israelites finally started their invasion of Canaan. Not soon after they invaded from the East, the Philistines invaded from the West. This explains the numerous struggles between them as recorded in the Bible.
5. What do we say about the Habiru? I am open to the idea that the Habiru are in fact the Hebrews. However, I rather suspect that the term *Habiru* was a word with a broad range of meaning. It is not unreasonable to assume that small groups of Israelites may have made their

way out of Egypt prior to the Exodus itself. If so, could some of these people have joined with other Semitic people and harassed Canaan? Furthermore, most discussions assume the accuracy of the authors of the Amarna letters. It is at least possible that in some of the letters, the Canaanite rulers may have confused the Hebrews coming from Egypt with the long-standing *Habiru* with whom they were familiar. The data is tantalizing, yet frustrating at the same time. I guess I am trying to be reserved in my judgment since I'm still sifting through the data myself. Again, contemporaries of the Hebrews may have referred to the Hebrews as "Habiru," but not all "Habiru" were Hebrews.

To summarize, I believe Moses authored the Pentateuch containing the book of Exodus sometime after 1450 BC or thereabouts. I grant it is possible to hold to a later date for the Exodus and affirm a high view scripture. I do not want to be needlessly dogmatic, but I do not find evidence for a late Exodus to be convincing, though others do. The liberal position that relegates the story of the Exodus to pious fiction is untenable and a lie from the Devil.

Many critics of Scripture have pointed out that, as of yet, no archeological evidence has proven the existence of a large Hebrew settlement in the northeast to eastern side of the Nile Delta from between 1800 to 1400 BC. Television programs or documentaries frequently interview a scholar who says something like, "There is no evidence for the Exodus "myth"." But keep in mind that the Israelites were slaves, and as such would have been living in mud houses. As Kim Phillips, a research associate at Tyndale House at Cambridge notes, "Of course, the alluvial mud of the East Delta region, together with the moist climatic conditions, mean that relatively few mud-brick structures survive at all (Israelite or otherwise)."²⁸

IV Purpose and Scope of Exodus

Summary statement: "The book of Exodus was written to describe the difficulties of the Israelites in Egypt and the faithfulness of God who rescued them from their bondage."²⁹ E. J. Young explains more fully how Exodus functions within the Pentateuch: "The second book of

²⁸ Kim Phillips, "The Rekhmire Tomb Scenes," December 7, 2021, <https://tyndalehouse.com/explore/articles/the-rekhmire-tomb-scenes/>.

²⁹ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 150.

the Pentateuch serves as a connecting link between the preparatory history contained in Genesis and the remaining books of the Law.”³⁰

A. Exodus and the Promises to the Patriarchs

Genesis 35:11 – 12: God also said to him [Jacob/Israel], “I am God Almighty; Be fruitful and multiply; A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from you. The land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land to your descendants after you.”

God promised the patriarchs that their descendants would become a great nation. This is fulfilled in Exodus 1:7.

Exodus 1:7: But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

The Hebrew term for “increased greatly” literally means “swarmed.” But remember, God also told Abraham that his descendants would endure slavery in a foreign land (Genesis 15:13). The reference to a change in dynasties in Exodus 1 explains how the slavery came about.

B. Redemption

For Israel, the great themes of salvation and redemption were inextricably linked with the Exodus from Egypt.

While accomplishing His purpose of deliverance from Egypt, God also revealed something of His character, disclosing that He is the “Great I AM” and He would be with His people in their distress (Exodus 3:12, 14).

C. God’s Wrath

In the plagues on Egypt, we see God’s wrath. Wrath and redemption are intertwined in Exodus giving us a picture of God’s nature. Preaching that over-emphasizes one at the exclusion of the other is not Biblical preaching.

D. Redemption, Wrath, and Passover

³⁰ E. J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964; reprint 1989), 62.

During the tenth and final plague, God instituted the feast of Passover, which became a calendar-changing event. Ultimately the two themes of redemption and wrath meet at Calvary, and Calvary itself is pre-figured by the Passover.

E. The Giving of the Law

In Exodus 20, God gives the Ten Commandments, His instructions for living for His covenant people. Notice that the Law follows the Passover and the exodus. This is consistent with the New Testament in which Regeneration precedes Sanctification. So in this way, Exodus is instructive for the Christian life.

V. Literary Structure

A. Within the Pentateuch

The structure of Exodus is simple at one level: chapters 1 – 19 are narrative and chapters 20 – 40 are legislation. The transition between chapters 19 and 20 is should be seen as a major transition within the entire Pentateuch and not just within Exodus itself. E. J. Young explains: “This [Exodus 20] marks the first great division in the Pentateuch. Up to this point the Law was distinguished primarily by narrative; from here on it is characterized by legislation.”³¹

B. Link to Genesis

Exodus 1 and 1:1 – 6 in particular provide a link to Genesis by referring to the twelve sons of Jacob who are also listed in Genesis 46.

C. Outline

Part 1: Historical Narrative 1 - 19³²

The Oppression of Israel	1:1 – 22
The Birth and Call of Moses	2 – 6
The Ten Plagues	7 – 11
The Exodus and Journey to Mount Sinai (Passover Exodus 12)	12 – 19

Part 2: Legal Section

The Ten Commandments	20:1 – 21
Covenant Stipulations	20:22 – 24:18

Part 3: Worship

Instructions for Building the Tabernacle	25:1 – 31:11
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³¹ E. J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 62.

³² Wolf divides this 1 – 18, but I like my division better.

The Sabbath	31:12 – 18
False Worship: The Golden Calf	32 – 34
Building the Tabernacle	35 – 40

VI. Liberation Theology

A. Gustavo Gutierrez

Gustavo Gutierrez is the John Cardinal O’Hara professor of theology at Notre Dame University. Born in Peru in 1928, he is considered the “father” of liberation theology. Gutierrez served among the very poorest of the poor in Peru. From this experience, he developed a concern for poor and the way they are treated. If you have never been outside of the United States, it may be difficult for you to understand how *poor* the *poor* actually are.

B. What is Liberation Theology

Liberation Theology emerged from Central and South America and is basically a synthesis of Marxist critique of class warfare and Christian theology. Liberation Theology posits that God always sides with the poor and the oppressed. Why are we discussing this here? Because the hermeneutical key for Liberation Theology is the Exodus. Gutierrez uses the Exodus as proof that God sides with poor people when they are being exploited by a rich ruling class. Wolf is right when he comments on Liberation Theology and says, “Often capitalism is identified as the villain that perpetrates social and economic injustice, and Marxism is appealed to as a solution to the dilemma.”³³

C. Different Varieties of Liberation Theology

1. Feminist Liberation Theology
2. Black Liberation Theology
3. LGBT Liberation Theology
4. Redneck Liberation Theology (OK, I made that up, but rednecks are oppressed too!)

D. Very Brief Analysis

1. What Liberation Theology Gets Right

An old cliché says, “Even a broken clock is right twice a day.” Liberation theology is right at two points:

First, Christians have sometimes over-emphasized the danger of personal sin while ignoring systemic, evil systems. For example, state-sponsored lotteries are a systemic evil that exploit poor people.

³³ Wolf, *The Pentateuch*, 155.

Second, not all forms of capitalism are a good thing. There really are extremely poor people in the world who get exploited.

2. What Liberation Theology Gets Wrong and Why It Should be Rejected

First, as Wolf notes, the primary message of the Bible is in fact that individual humans are in rebellion against God. Liberation Theology misses this and does not proclaim the New Birth.

Second, Liberation Theology always assumes that classes must be in conflict and the ultimate goal of a utopian, classless society is a good thing. Neither of these ideas is consistent with Scripture. Attempts to bring Utopia on earth via human means usually end in the deaths of millions of innocent people.

Third, Liberation Theology almost always assumes that if someone is poor, that person is poor because someone else is exploiting them. This is not the case. Many people are poor because of poor use of debt, greed, failing to save money, laziness, sloth, sexual immorality, or just generally being foolish.

Fourth, and closely related to the previous point, Liberation Theology promotes a “victim” attitude that only fosters further poverty and does not promote responsibility for one’s actions.

Fifth, Liberation Theology assumes someone is wrong to acquire wealth. Jesus did strongly warn about the dangers of trusting in wealth. Also, for many wealthy people, their wealth becomes an idol and an impediment to faith in Christ. Yet, the Bible does not say one is wrong to work hard, save money, and provide a good quality of life for one’s family. Liberation Theology discourages entrepreneurship and makes anyone who wants to “make a mark” in the world feel guilty. Many of the young preachers of late who rant against wealth seem very influenced (perhaps unconsciously) by Liberation Theology at this point. While they rant against the wealthy,

it seems oblivious to them that the buildings in which they worship, the Baptist schools they attend, and the salaries they receive come from *somebody who was making some money!*

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