

ISSUE

20.8

BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
OF CHRIST

Faithful Sayings

February 25,
2018

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon

Ryan Ferguson

Arend Gressley

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Brady McAlister

Walker McAnear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Rusty Scott

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



Is There Evidence for Joseph in Egypt?

By Kyle Pope

Genesis ends with the moving account of Joseph's rise to power in Egypt, allowing for the preservation and migration of his family to Goshen during the famine. It is often asserted, however, that, "Israeli archeologists acknowledge that there is no evidence for the biblical story of Joseph in Egypt. . . This is all myth" (Leupp). Is this true or is there evidence for Joseph in Egypt?

The Limits of Material History

We should first consider the limits of what material evidence actually tells us about the past. In the early days of the Soviet Union, as leaders fell from power, there are examples of photographs being edited to remove people from scenes showing them in groups with other leaders. Most people from the past have no surviving material record of their lives. Even people who once held power and position have no artifacts or documents attesting their existence—but they did exist. Material evidence for people in history is often the exception rather than the rule, especially the farther we go back in time. If political upheaval or religious opposition is a factor, we can expect that opponents may have tried to suppress their memory or influence.

Interpretation of Evidence

When artifacts or documents survive, the challenge is how to interpret them. In Newport, Rhode Island there is a stone tower whose construction scholars have attributed to those as diverse as the Vikings, Knights Templar, Chinese explorers, or even the great-grandfather of Benedict Arnold! Historians and archaeologists seek to use correlations between known and accepted dates to place artifacts or documents in the appropriate context. If

a misinterpretation becomes viewed as accepted fact, any correlations with it are also misinterpretations.

Evidence of Israelites in Egypt

When we consider the question of Israelites in Egypt, the problem has never really been one of evidence—it is a problem of dating and interpretation. While we don't find a monument inscribed with the Genesis account, many archaeological finds coincide with the biblical record. However, because of how things have been dated it's argued they fall too early to match the biblical account. Recent years have seen some challenges to this.

The “New Chronology” Theory

In 1995 David Rohl published a book and a three-part documentary featured on the Discovery Channel entitled *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1995). Rohl is an Egyptologist and a professed agnostic. In these works and in the years that have followed Rohl has argued that anomalies in traditional Egyptian chronology have added more than three hundred years to the traditional timeline of history affecting how many events are

dated. According to Rohl, this has pushed back the dating of events that correlate with the biblical record. This argument, known as the “new chronology” theory, suggests some biblical dates should be moved back and historical dates of Egyptian and Canaanite history should be moved forward.¹

To summarize, Rohl offers evidence to show that two Egyptian dynasties have been arranged consecutively when they actually overlapped. He argues further that an early mistaken identification was made between the historical Pharaoh Shoshenq I and the biblical Pharaoh Shishak. In Scripture, Shishak “**took away everything**” from the temple and gold shields Solomon had made (1 Kings 14:26). The problem is that a conquest list on a wall relief in Karnak of Shoshenq's conquests doesn't include Jerusalem and records more Israelite cities than Judean cities (Levin). In the biblical record Shishak offered refuge to Jeroboam before his reign as king of the newly formed northern kingdom of Israel (1 Kings 11:40). Would a Pharaoh besiege the territory of one to whom he had offered political refuge? Rohl argues the best evidence for the biblical Shishak is Rameses II. This pharaoh was one of the most important in Egyptian history, constructing colossal buildings and waging campaigns into Lybia, Nubia, and against the Hittites as far as Syria. A memorial relief of Rameses II near Luxor supports Rohl's argument, claiming he plundered a city called “Shalem”—the root of the name Jerusalem and an alternate name for the city (cf. Gen. 14:18; Heb. 7:1-2). If this is correct it would change the dating of the reign of Rameses II from 1279–1213 BC to 943-877 BC. This would also move forward the dates scholars assign to many events in Egyptian and Canaanite history.

Rohl also argues that traditional dating rests in an assumption. Exodus 1:11 records that before the Exodus the Israelites were compelled to build the storage cities of “**Pithom and Raameses**” (Exod. 1:11), also spelled “**Rameses**” (Exod. 12:37). This name of the storage city mentioned in Scripture led many to assume that Rameses II must have been the Pharaoh of the Exodus. As a result, many dated the Exodus to his reign.

¹ For a detailed summary of this see the article Rohl co-wrote with Peter James, “A Preview of Some Recent Work in the Field of Ancient History” *SIS Workshop* 5.2 (1982/83): 12-22, available online at: <http://davidrohl.blogspot.com/2012/11/an-alternative-to-velikovskian.html>.

Rohl offers two compelling pieces of evidence that challenge this identification. What has long been considered the oldest reference to “Israel” outside of Scripture is the granite inscription memorializing Merneptah II, the son and successor of Rameses II. In listing kingdoms Merneptah conquered, it lists Israel, but according to the Bible this would fall when Israel was first coming into the Canaan—not yet an established nation. In recent years another artifact has come to light that predates the Merneptah inscription by 130 years, but includes Israel in a similar conquest list. An eighteen-inch granite block housed in Berlin was once part of the pedestal of a statue dating to the dynasty before Rameses. This makes it clear that Rameses II could not have been the Pharaoh of the Exodus if Israel existed in Canaan as a nation before his reign (Veen).

An important detail in the Biblical record comes when Solomon began to build the temple in Jerusalem. 1 Kings 6:1 records that this work began, “in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign” (NKJV). Solomon began his reign in the year 970 BC. The fourth year of this reign would be 966 BC. So 480 years before this would place the Exodus at 1456 BC.

Evidence with the “New Chronology”

So what evidence exists if biblical dates are moved back, and the chronology of Egyptian and Canaanite history is moved forward? Let’s work backwards. What is generally known as the Middle Bronze Age IIB period in Palestine would now fit the period of Joshua’s conquest of Canaan.

- During this period we find the destruction and burning of the city of Hazor and a tablet with the name “Jabin” as a royal name (Ben-Tor). This matches the biblical account (Josh. 11:1-11).
- We find the walls of Jericho falling down and burned after the collapse, with one section of dwellings attached to the wall left intact (Wood). This matches the biblical account (Josh. 6:1-25).

The “new chronology” would move the time of the Exodus to a period of Egyptian history called the Second Intermediate Period.

- At some point during this period something created severe instability in Egypt allowing a race the Egyptian historian Manetho called the Hyksos to take control without battle (Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.73). What if instability caused by plague, death, and the destruction of its army in the Red Sea left Egypt vulnerable after the Exodus? The Bible says they were still forty years after the “destroyed” Exodus (Deut. 11:3).
- A papyrus housed in the Netherlands that likely came from this period describes the Nile turned to blood, death everywhere, and the servants taking possession of the treasures of the rich (Gardiner). This matches the biblical account (Exod. 7-12).
- We have a papyrus that lists Hebrew names among lists of slaves in Egypt (Hayes). These names include feminine forms of two of Joseph’s brothers: *Ashera*=Asher (Gen. 30:13) and *Sekera*=Issachar (Gen. 30:18), *Aqoba*, the feminine form of Jacob, and even *Shiphrah*, the name of one of the Hebrew midwives (Exod. 1:15).
- The storage city the Bible calls “Rameses” was also known as Avaris (Aling). Ex-

cavations have shown that Avaris was the home of Semitic peoples—not Egyptians. At some point there was a sudden departure of these people from this city (Bietak). This is the city from which the Bible tells us the Israelites departed when they left Egypt (Exod. 12:37).

The “new chronology” would move the beginning of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt to the period known as the Middle Kingdom. During this period we find some interesting things in connection with Avaris.

- Very early in this period there is evidence of what archaeologists call a “four-room” house that was typical of the kind of house found among the Israelites (Bietak). The Bible tells us that Pharaoh gave Jacob and his family a place to dwell in Goshen—the area where Avaris is located (Gen. 47:6, 27).
- In this Semitic settlement are the ruins of a large tomb with a statue of a Semitic man of some im-

portance (Schiestl). The Bible says that Pharaoh made Joseph (a non-Egyptian) second to him over all Egypt (Gen. 41:41-45). Was this statue Joseph?

Sources

- Aling, Charles F. “The Biblical City of Ramses” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25.2 (July 1982) 129-137.
- Ben-Tor, Amnon and Maria Teresa Rubiato. “Excavating Hazor, Part Two: Did the Israelites Destroy the Canaanite City?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 25.3 (May/June 1999): 22-29, 31-36, 38-39.
- Bietak, Manfred. *Avaris and Pi-Ramesse: Archaeological Exploration in the Eastern Nile Delta*. Proceedings of the British Academy, 65 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- _____. *Avaris, the capital of the Hyksos: recent excavations at Tell el-Dabca I* (London: British Museum Press, 1996).
- Gardiner, Alan H. *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage from a Hieratic Papyrus in Leiden*. (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1969).
- Hayes, William C. *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom in the Brooklyn Museum*. (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 1955).
- Levin, Yigal. “Did Pharaoh Sheshonq Attack Jerusalem?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 38.4 (July/August 2012) 42-52, 66.
- Leupp, Gary. “Ben Carson, Joseph in Egypt, and the Attack on Rational Thought” *counterpunch.org* Nov. 27, 2015 [online] <https://www.counterpunch.org/2015/11/27/ben-carson-joseph-in-egypt-and-the-attack-on-rational-thought/>
- Schiestl, Robert. “The Statue of an Asiatic Man from Tell el-Dabca, Egypt” *Egypt and Levant* 16 (2006) 173-185.
- Veen, Peter van der, Christoffer Theis, and Manfred Görg. “Israel in Canaan (Long) Before Pharaoh Merenptah? A Fresh Look at Berlin Statue Pedestal Relief 21687.” *Journal of Ancient Egyptian Interconnections* 2.4 (2010) 15-25.
- Wood, B.G. “Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho?” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 16.2 (March/April 1990): 44–58.

