

PATTERNS
of EVIDENCE
EXODUS

A FILMMAKER'S JOURNEY

TIMOTHY P. MAHONY

WITH STEVEN LAW



THINKING MAN MEDIA

PATTERNS OF EVIDENCE: THE EXODUS

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"You never know where a crisis of faith will lead you."— Back Cover

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Summary:

In 2002, filmmaker Timothy Mahoney went to Egypt looking for an answer to one fundamental question: Did the Exodus story as written in the Bible really happen? During the course of his 12-year project, he reviews accepted archaeological viewpoints, compares biblical references to evidence, and presents alternative theories that support the validity of the event called the Exodus. This book tells the story about the creation of his feature documentary film, also titled *Patterns of Evidence: The Exodus*. It's not only a visual companion to the film, giving scenes and diagrams; it's also a narration of his ongoing journey of research and travel, giving perspectives of some of the leading archaeologists, Egyptologists, and political and cultural influencers as they talk about the story of the Exodus. — Publisher

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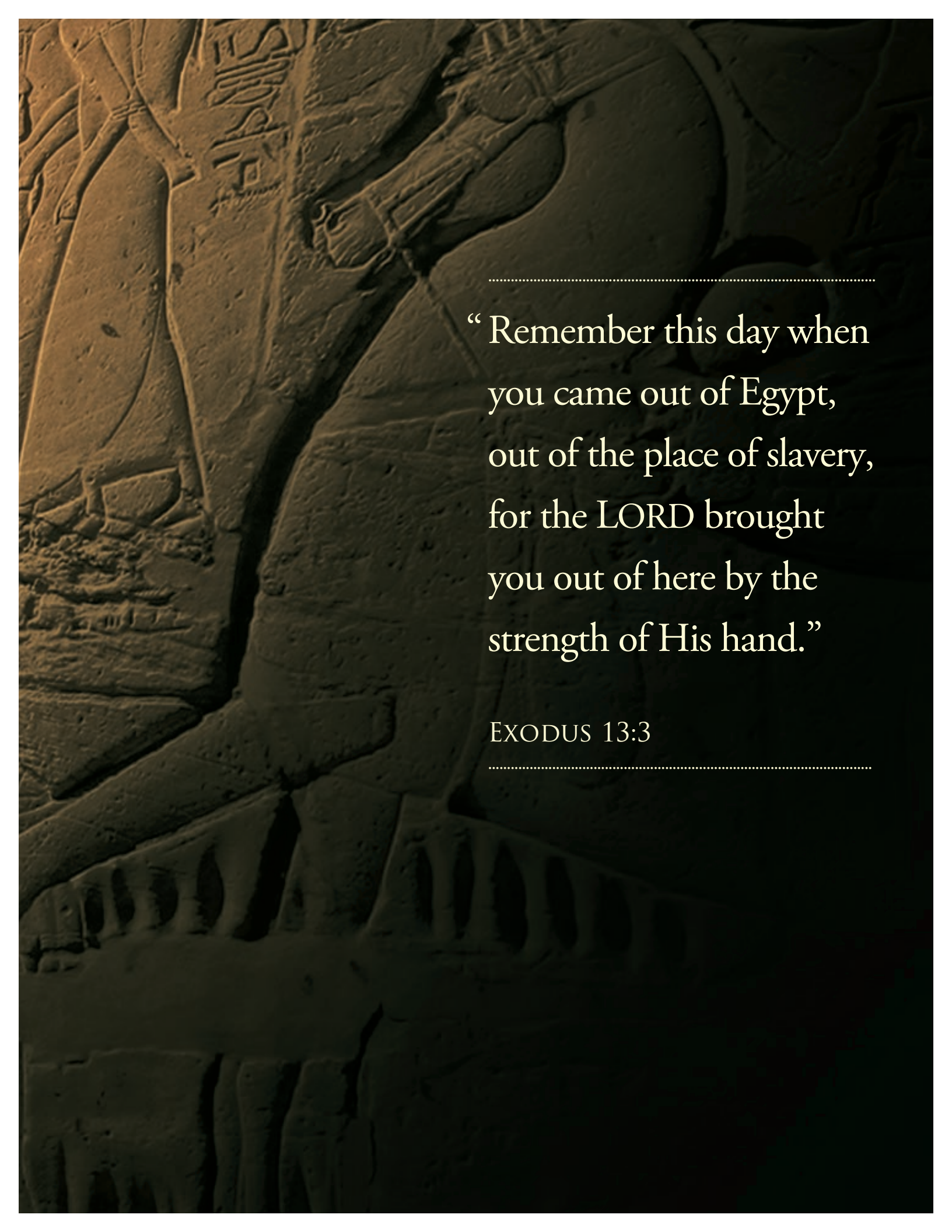
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“Remember this day when
you came out of Egypt,
out of the place of slavery,
for the LORD brought
you out of here by the
strength of His hand.”

EXODUS 13:3

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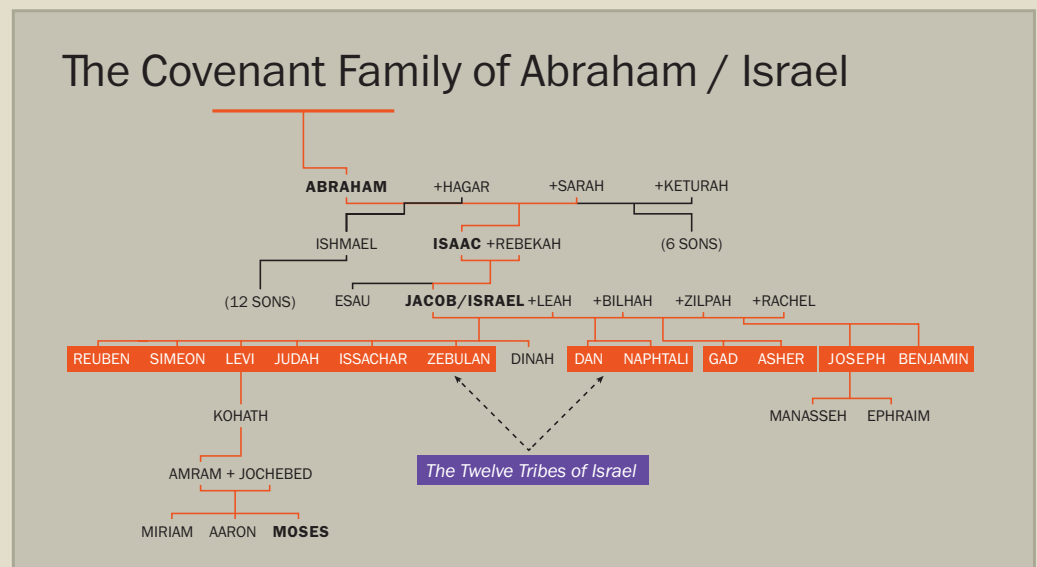


V: STEP ONE: EVIDENCE OF ARRIVAL?

The account of Abraham and his descendants is found in the pages of Genesis, the Bible’s first book. Rabbi Friedman resumed the story.

“The book of Genesis tells us that the first descendant of Abraham to arrive in Egypt was his great-grandson Joseph, one of the 12 sons of Jacob. Joseph’s brothers had sold him as a slave to a caravan of traders who brought him down to Egypt.

According to the Bible, the special Covenant passed from Abraham through Isaac to Jacob (Israel) and his 12 sons including Joseph. Moses came from the line of Levi.



“Then, in an amazing turn of events, he rises to become the highest official in Egypt. He saves the country from a terrible famine and enables his father Jacob and his entire family to settle in the best part of Egypt’s Delta, a place called Goshen.”⁸

My objective was to see if archaeologists had uncovered any specific evidence of this Semitic family group arriving in Egypt as the Bible says. So far I had none. As I sat in the

edit suite and reviewed the footage from my previous interview with Manfred Bietak, all I had were doubts. When I had asked Bietak if he had found any evidence of the early Israelites at his dig site, he had said, “So far not. We only know we have some evidence of shepherds.” But according to the Bible, this was one of the primary locations where the Israelites lived while in Egypt.

I was stuck.

I replayed this clip again and again, and each time the words of Manfred Bietak echoed, “So far not. So far not.”

I stared at the editing screen, my thoughts filling with uncertainty and apprehension. Then, suddenly, something was telling me to go to my library and search out a book I had never taken the time to read. It had been given to me the year before by a musician friend who thought it might be helpful.

Paging through the book, I was startled. The author, a well-known English Egyptologist, had written about Avaris, the same site that Manfred Bietak had been excavating. Was this a coincidence? I returned to the edit suite with the book, *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest*. I saw pictures and graphics supporting a totally different interpretation of Bietak’s finds.

I would soon learn that David Rohl had shaken the world of archaeology when he saw what he believed were major problems with the way Egyptologists had reconstructed history. His solution proposed new dates for events in ancient Egypt that challenged the standard view. While most scholars think that the events of the Exodus happened in the New Kingdom, Rohl places the Exodus in an entirely different period: the earlier Middle Kingdom, where he claims evidence for the Exodus can be seen. And that is remarkable because he is an agnostic and remains unconvinced of the existence of God. Yet he clearly sees archaeological evidence for the biblical Joseph, Jacob, and the early Hebrews in the Nile Delta region of Egypt.

For the first time I had a lead to a new way of interpreting the evidence at Avaris, and I recalled that interpretation plays a big role in how archaeology works. Ze’ev Herzog, the Israeli archaeologist, had said, “Archaeology is about 10 percent data and 90 percent interpretation.”

I knew I had to meet David Rohl, who at the time lived in Kent in southern England. We arranged a date to film in the study of his home, and I traveled by myself with camera and lights. When I arrived, his lovely wife, Ditas, was concerned that I hadn’t

eaten and prepared a late lunch for us. Just like Kent Weeks and other scholars, Rohl's interest in Egypt began as a child when his mother, a college professor, took him up the Nile on King Farouk's paddle-steamer to visit the temples and tombs of the great pharaohs. From that point on, he was changed. He went on to spend his life exploring the Middle East and studying the mysterious inscriptions and hieroglyphs of the pharaohs and what they might reveal about ancient history.



Egyptologist David Rohl believes evidence for the Exodus exists in a period earlier than normally considered.

Rohl was surprised that I had come alone to his home. Like most people I have interviewed, he was expecting an entire camera crew. But I have found that a camera team can be very distracting to an interviewee, and it's more expensive. So I've enjoyed those times when it is just me, the camera, and the scholar, as was now the case.

"Who is David Rohl?" I asked.

"David Rohl is an Egyptologist and a historian who studied these subjects at university. He's also a little bit of a rock and roll star as he has been a musician for many years."

"Were you a composer?"

"Yes. A composer, a musician, and a recording engineer."

"We have a lot in common then. I have done all those things as well."

Surprised, Rohl said, "And I also was a photographer."

"Really?"

"Yes. I was once kidnapped by the Moody Blues."

"What?"

"It's a long story. I was at art college doing a project to photograph their concert when someone asked me to go to the train station and pick up some people. So I went with my "Mini Moke." It's like a 1960s version of a dune buggy jeep, which I had covered in hieroglyphics. I went to the train station and brought back some of the members of the band with their instruments all crammed into my little car."

"That is hilarious."

"The concert was great, and I sent them my photographs. The next time they came back from Manchester on their UK tour, I photographed them again. At the end of the concert they said, "You're not going home. You're coming with us on tour."

I laughed. "So that's how they kidnapped you?"

"Dead right. I wasn't even allowed to go home for a change of clothes. It was a great experience traveling all over the north of England in two shiny black limousines, talking about pretty much everything in the universe. As Moody Blues fans will know, these guys

spent much of their lives searching for answers to the great questions of human existence, which is reflected in their music.”

“So you weren’t really kidnapped, you were adopted.”

“Yes. I was a 19-year-old student, and they made me a part of their family. They are amazing and kind people.”

“How did you get into the studio business?”

“I was always in bands and recording. Eventually, I became Chief Engineer at Strawberry Studios, and with the royalties gained from producing bands and solo artists, I had enough funds to retire from the music business and go back to college and to my love of Egyptology.”

“So you were older when you went to study Egyptology formally?”

“I came to university as a mature student and actually took the rock and roll attitude with me. So I never really sat at the foot of a professor and observed everything without asking questions. I wanted to know why things were being said to me. Why was it that my tutors were telling me certain things? What was their evidence? And this challenge, if you like, to their teaching was very interesting to them as well. I came with a lot of ideas which I had developed over the years and brought them to the professors, and they responded in a very positive way.”

Rohl stopped for a second, considering his next words. “The problem then arises when people, who don’t know you as an individual and don’t have that interaction, tend to think of you as a rebel because you are questioning things that are already well established.”

“Why do these ideas threaten the established thinking?” I asked.

“Because they raise important questions about how we date history.”

“Are historians unwilling to consider new ideas about the ancient past?”

“Well, it is undeniable that there are huge problems raised by the latest archaeological evidence, especially concerning biblical archaeology, a term that has become an embarrassment to scholarship these days. Nobody wants to call themselves a biblical archaeologist anymore. But the issues I and others have identified lie in how we have dated the ancient world, not in the biblical text. And the historical credibility of the Bible is what has suffered as a result.

“And the joke, if you like, is that I have no biblical axe to grind here because I’m an agnostic. I don’t need these stories to be true. But the reality is, although archaeologists

have been looking in all the right places for the biblical stories, they have been looking in entirely the wrong time.”

“Well, if it’s so obvious, why is there so much resistance to this simple new idea?”

“Although the idea is simple, in other words, look for the Bible stories in a different time period, the actual process of restructuring the chronology of Egypt and the ancient world is very complex. And most Egyptologists steer clear of it. They rely on a small group of experts to do the number crunching and when somebody like me comes along and says, ‘Hey, there are major chronological anomalies here, there’s something wrong with your timeline,’ they see it as rocking the boat.”

“So you’re questioning decades of scholarship with what you’re proposing?”

“The simple truth is many scholars don’t understand what I am proposing. I’m in a situation now where I’m fighting for a new idea and I’m getting huge resistance from academia because I am a revolutionary, because I am trying to change things in a dramatic way. I’m not just simply, you know, pushing the envelope slightly. I want to go beyond the envelope and take us to a completely new way of thinking.”

I was looking forward to hearing him present his case, and this would happen on several occasions in England, Egypt, and Minnesota. That very first interview with Rohl was shot in an older video format. Several years later, when high definition video became popular, I needed to replace the earlier footage, and he agreed to meet in the States for another interview. I’ve often wondered why so many experts I’ve had the privilege of filming were willing to participate in a project like this. So I asked him, “Why did you trust me enough to come and be filmed?”

“You asked the best questions,” he said.

I. Avaris: The City Beneath Ramesses

For my second interview with Rohl, I chose the historic James J. Hill Library, built in Saint Paul in 1917. Hill was a wealthy railroad baron who financed this magnificent structure with its marble floors, fine wood paneling, and grand columns flanking the great central hall. The backdrop was stunning and richly set the tone for our dialogue. That morning the weather had turned cold earlier than expected. The snow was falling heavily outside, but inside the great hall it was warm. I could see that Rohl was eager to

get started, and I was worried that we might not finish the interview before the library opened at noon.

Just as we were about to film, Rohl turned to me and said, “I don’t want to be interviewed.”

I looked up. “What?”



“Don’t interview me in the standard way. That’s boring. Let’s just talk, you and me, back and forth.”

David Rohl being interviewed at the James J. Hill Library.

This would be a change from almost everything I had previously done, but at that moment I could see he was right. A bit of sparring would be more entertaining and energetic. I knew time was slipping by. In a split second I went for it and called out, “Quiet! Roll cameras.” After a pause I opened with a broad question. “Considering all your work with the ancient world, what do you think is significant about the Bible?”

“Well, people dismiss the Bible as a work of fiction. But what happens if it’s not? What happens if it’s a real history, a history of a people we call the Israelites? Then it would become the first history book in the world. It predates Herodotus, if you like, by 1,000 years. Herodotus is supposed to be the first historian, but in fact I think Moses is. And it spans about 4,000 years of time as well.”⁹

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It surprised me that Rohl, who doesn't have faith and is undecided about the existence of God, had such respect for the Bible.

His enthusiasm continued. "It's an amazing story of one people from their beginnings to their exile."

"What biblical events are you referring to?"

"From the beginning when Abraham comes into the land in Genesis all the way through to the time of the Israelites' exile and diaspora when they are scattered to all parts of the world. So it's a book that is extraordinarily valuable if it's true. But if it's a work of fiction, if it's a fairy story, if it's been invented, then it becomes a complete nothing."

"Nothing?"

"It's not better than a Harry Potter novel, for instance. So the question is, is it a real history book? And the only way to determine that is to look into the archaeology – what's in the ground – and find evidence."



*Professor Manfred Bietak
uncovering the ancient city
of Avaris.*

Then I brought up the topic I'd wanted to ask about for over a year: why had Rohl and Manfred Bietak reached such different conclusions about Joseph and the early Israelites?

"Tell me, who is Manfred Bietak?"

"Manfred Bietak is probably one of the greatest archaeologists alive today. And he's dug up one of the most important sites in the eastern Delta, a city called Avaris, which

is in the land of Goshen, as the Bible calls it. And I believe this is the place where Joseph and his brethren lived.”¹⁰

Of course, I knew from talking with Bietak that he had a different interpretation. And most Egyptologists believe there’s no evidence of the early Israelites in the city of Ramesses.

I challenged him. “I went to see Manfred Bietak, and that’s not what he said. He’s saying there’s no evidence of this in the time of Ramesses.”

Rohl said, “Exactly right. Most scholars will say if you look at the city of Ramesses, there are no Asiatics there. There are no Semites. There are no western Asiatics living at that particular city. But dig down a little bit deeper and you do find a city full of Asiatics.”

I was surprised and wanted him to clarify what he was saying. “Yeah, but the Bible says it happened at the time of Ramesses. What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that this particular mention of the city of Ramesses – the building of Ramesses – is what we call an anachronism. It’s something that’s been added into the text later by an editor. So what the editor is basically saying is, “This is the place where the Israelites built the store city, and we know it today as Ramesses.”

I was starting to understand the point Rohl was making. Here the Bible’s use of the word *Ramesses* might not be connected to a specific date but only to a place. “Okay, so the people would know the area, the region, and they would know what it’s called today.”

“The people of the Bible would’ve known where Ramesses was and where therefore their ancestors actually built the city. In the ancient times it was called Avaris,” he said.

“Do you have any other examples of that?”

“Yes, there are plenty of examples throughout history. In our British history, for instance, we have the Roman legion, the sixth legion, that built a garrison town at a place called York. We all know York today. But it wasn’t called York at the time the Romans were there. It was called Eboracum. It was only later when the Vikings came and called it Jorvik that it got the name York. So there’s a typical example of an anachronism.”

“So this has happened throughout history?”

“Yes.”

“And in this case, people today know it as York because that’s the name that has become common in their time?”

Rohl nodded. “Yes, they’d identify it as York, just like the people of the Bible would’ve known where Ramesses was, and where therefore their ancestors actually built the city.”

Asiatics

This term is not being used here to describe East Asians. The broad term “Asiatics” identified for the Egyptians their close neighbors to their north and east. Western Asiatics or Semites were the broad cultural group of which the Israelites were a part.

Anachronism

The act of attributing a name, a custom, or an event to a time in which it does not belong.

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Rameses in Genesis

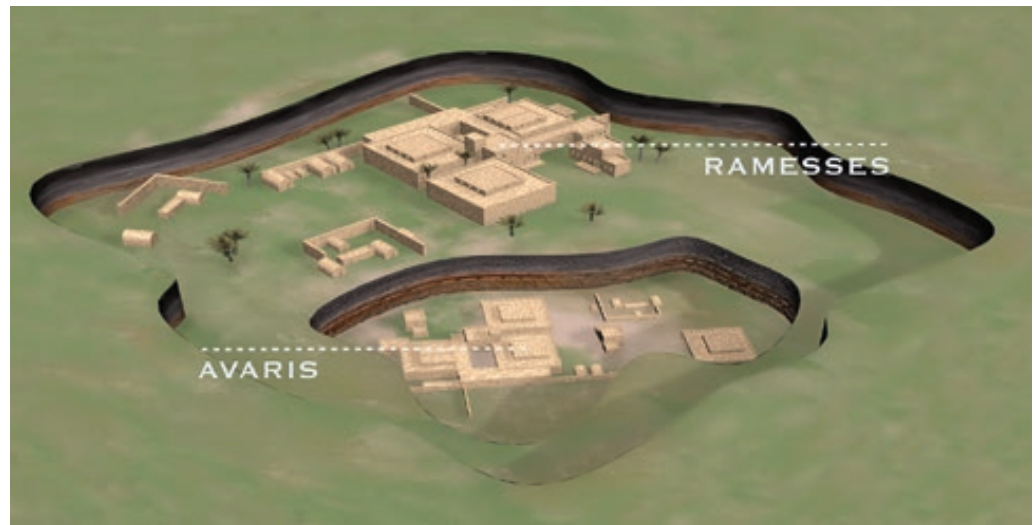
The name “Rameses” is not only used in Exodus 1:11 for the store city built by the Israelites during their slavery; it is also used back in Genesis 47:11 during the time that Jacob’s family moved to Egypt. In Genesis it seems to have the same meaning as the name “Goshen” (compare to Gen 47:6).

Then Joseph settled his father and brothers in the land of Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.
(Gen 47:11)

The remains of the older city of Avaris lie underneath the southern sector of the city of Rameses.

I saw what he meant. We were sitting in the middle of Saint Paul, the capital city of my own state. It was given that name by a Catholic priest who had established a log chapel, which later developed into the Cathedral of Saint Paul. But the settlement on the Mississippi landing had originally been called Pig’s Eye, after a popular tavern established by a French-Canadian fur trapper, Pierre “Pig’s Eye” Parrant. The priest made it known that now the settlement should no longer be called Pig’s Eye but only Saint Paul. Visitors today would never recognize the original name.

Significantly, in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, the word *Rameses* was also used to describe the land where Joseph’s family settled. This reference seemed to be another anachronism using Rameses as a geographical location. It’s an anachronism because, according to the timeline laid out in the biblical story, the settlement of Joseph’s family took place at least 100 years before the building of the city of Rameses mentioned in Exodus 1:11. ¹¹



If the name Rameses in Genesis does not refer to the time of Pharaoh Rameses II, then why should the mention of Rameses in the book of Exodus be any different? If this is the case, then the Bible would not actually be saying that the Exodus took place in the time of Pharaoh Rameses at all. That would just be a mistaken interpretation made by scholars. And if both of these biblical references to the name Rameses are anachronisms, then the Exodus could have happened in a completely different time than the era of Pharaoh Rameses II. ¹²

Sitting in the expansive hall of the library, I glanced over Rohl’s shoulder and down the row of pillars to a set of tall arched windows. As I thought about this question I watched the snow fall gently outside the library in large, soft flakes. I remembered that, according to the Bible, Joseph’s father and brothers were allowed by Pharaoh to settle in the area referred to by two different names, Goshen and Ramesses, thought to be located in the eastern Delta. This family tended livestock. Over the next generations they would multiply into a large population before being enslaved and forced to build a city the Bible calls Ramesses.

Rohl’s next words about this location were profound yet so simple. “Now, this Avaris is the city which lies under the biblical Ramesses. Ramesses of the New Kingdom – Avaris of the Middle Kingdom, the 13th Dynasty. It lies underneath the city that’s mentioned in the Bible. So when Bietak digs up a huge population of Semitic speaking peoples with Semitic culture, living in this city of Avaris for several hundred years, and then at the end of the period these Semites all leave – depart with their belongings and abandon the city – whatever Manfred says, that to me sounds awfully like the Israelites.”

After all the negative conclusions I’d gathered from other scholars, to finally hear of this potential connection between Joseph’s family and the archaeological evidence was fascinating to me, and Rohl’s confidence made me want to know more. Could Avaris really be the place where the Israelites had lived? It seemed to be a possibility because it lies underneath the ruins of the city of Ramesses and would therefore be older. But why was Bietak’s interpretation so different from Rohl’s?

I challenged Rohl again. “Well, what Bietak told me was that there was no connection.”

“Well, look at the evidence of what you’ve got here. Right at the beginning, in the heart of this tiny community of Avaris at the end of the 12th Dynasty, we see a Syrian house appear. The Austrians call them *Mittelsaal* houses,” he said.

“This type of house is found in north Syria, the area where Abraham came from. It’s exactly the same style of house you’d expect Jacob to build for himself in Egypt. And we know that the Israelites sought their brides from Haran in that region. They all went back to get their brides from there. ¹³

“So, the culture that turns up in Egypt at the end of the 12th Dynasty seems to have come from north Syria originally.”

This means that the culture seen at Avaris matches that of the early Israelites.



Syrian Mittelsaal House

This reconstruction of the structure unearthed by the Austrian excavators of Avaris was classified as a “Mittelsaalhaus” or “middle room house.” Common in north Syria during the Middle Bronze Age, this design featured rooms arranged around a central hall or courtyard. The Mittelsaalhaus at Tell e-Dab’a was the first dwelling built on a low southern hill within the area that would become the city of Avaris.



The culture of the earliest residents of Avaris matches that of north Syria around the area of Haran where Abraham came from and where his grandson Jacob spent 20 years of his life.



Egypt's Dynasties

The conventional dates for Egypt's ruling dynasties can be seen above. In times of power and stability, dynasties would rule one after another. In times of weakness and fragmentation, competing dynasties sometimes ruled simultaneously from different parts of Egypt. Most scholars would place the Exodus in the 19th Dynasty, during or after the reign of Ramesses II. Some scholars argue for the 18th Dynasty. However, David Rohl believes evidence in Egypt matching the events related to the Exodus can be found entirely in the 12th and 13th Dynasties of the earlier Middle Kingdom.

The Egyptian-styled palace at Avaris.

II. Joseph: The Search for a Semitic High Ruler

“So is there a connection with Joseph at Avaris?” I asked.

Rohl said, “Well, after this house of Jacob – if we can call it that – is built, eventually it’s flattened, and on top of it an Egyptian palace is constructed. The palace is classic Egyptian architecture this time, but the occupant was not Egyptian.

“The palace had courtyards, colonnades, audience chambers. There was even a robbing room. It obviously belonged to some high official of state who was very, very important to that state. Because when somebody gets a palace like this given to them, it means they’ve been honored for what they’ve done for the state.”



I recalled that the biblical story has Joseph becoming second in command over all Egypt as a reward for interpreting Pharaoh’s dreams. Joseph was also given the daughter of a high priest in marriage, as well as fine garments, a gold necklace, and a signet ring, which signified his new position. ¹⁴

Rohl had a glint in his eye as he relayed the next piece of the story. “Now in the garden behind the palace, the archaeologists found 12 main graves with memorial chapels on top of them.”

“You have 12 graves?”

“We have 12 graves.”

“And why would that be significant?”

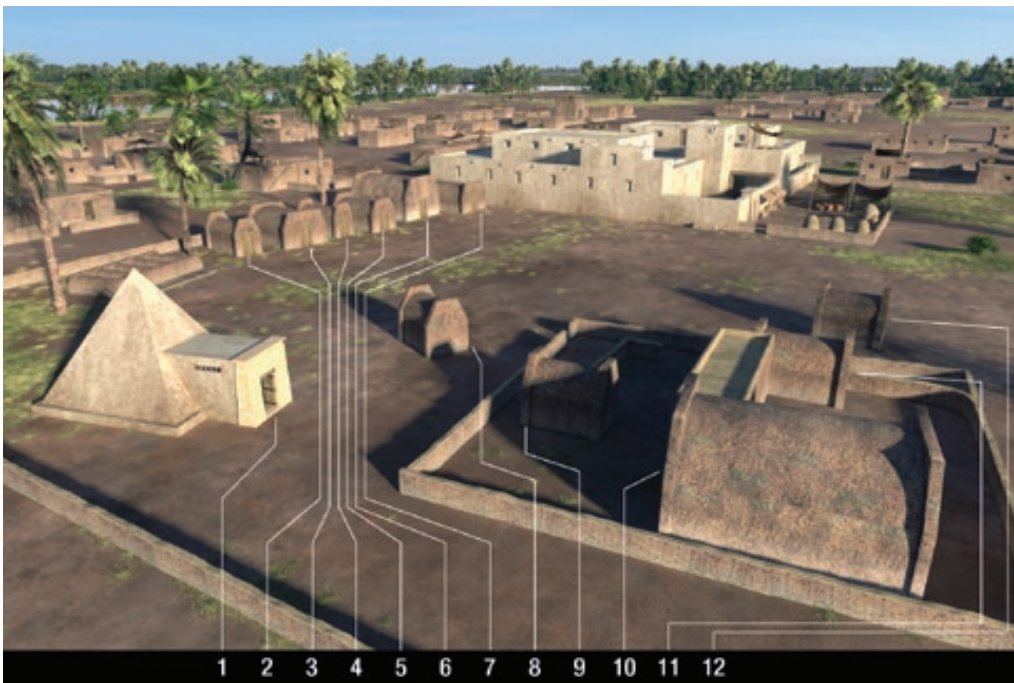
“Well, think about it. How many sons did Jacob have?” he asked.

“He had 12.”

“How many tribes were there?”

“Twelve tribes.”

“Exactly. And what’s also amazing is the palace had a façade, a portico with 12 pillars, just like these,” Rohl said, pointing to the grand columns standing in the hall behind us. “So you’ve got 12 sons, 12 tribes, 12 pillars, and 12 tombs.” ¹⁵



Behind the palace at Avaris, 12 special graves had memorial chapels built above them.



The 12 pillars of the palace.

“Interesting,” I said, contemplating the possible connection.

“Yes. Is that all a coincidence?” He paused and smiled, knowing there was more to come. “Now, one of these 12 graves was very special because it was a pyramid tomb. This in itself is extraordinary because only pharaohs and queens had pyramid tombs at this time. Yet the person buried in this tomb was not a king. Even so, he was honored with a king’s burial.



A reconstruction of the pyramid tomb and chapel found behind the palace.

“And inside the chapel of the tomb was a statue. What we know from the statue is that this man had red hair; he had pale yellow skin, which is how Egyptians depicted northerners. He had a throw stick across his shoulder, a unique symbol of office made



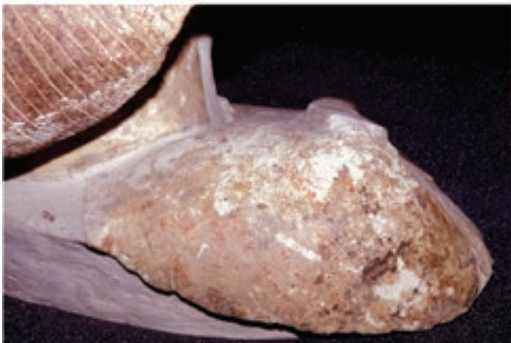
Statue with face broken off.



3D rendering of full statue.

Above: Re-creation of the Semitic official's statue that sat in the memorial chapel of the pyramid tomb.

At left: The head of the statue recovered from the pyramid tomb's chapel.



Statue's shoulder shows paint fragments.



Highlights show the pattern of paint fragments.

for this Asiatic official living in the land of Goshen. And on the back of his shoulder we see the faintest remains of paint – of colored stripes from a multicolored coat. And that matches exactly with the story of Joseph in the Bible. The multicolored coat is a gift, which shows that he was the favorite of the father. And it almost becomes his insignia, this coat. It’s the thing we remember about him most of all.”¹⁶



Egyptologist Charles Aling sees a connection between the statue and the account of Joseph.

“Yes, I remember as a child hearing the story of Joseph and his coat of many colors.”

He nodded. “And not only that but the statue is of superb workmanship.”

“How can you tell?” I asked.

“I attended a conference at the British Museum where one of the speakers was Dorothea Arnold – a renowned art historian from the Metropolitan Museum – and she devoted an entire lecture to the subject of this statue. She was able to determine that the quality of the carving was so sophisticated that it was undoubtedly made in the royal workshops at Hawara where the famous Labyrinth and the pyramid of Amenemhat III stood, and where many of King Amenemhat’s statues were carved. So the man buried in this pyramid tomb at Avaris had a colossal cult statue made for him by royal decree!”

“Do you know of any other statues of a Semite of this kind in Egypt?”

Rohl became serious and slightly shook his head. “No. There is nothing else like this in the whole of Egyptian history. Nothing at all.”

The evidence was so powerful that I wanted to get a second opinion concerning this pyramid tomb and its Semitic occupant that Bietak had uncovered at the location of Avaris.

I went to interview Professor Charles Aling, an Egyptologist who has also investigated the events of the Exodus in Egypt. I did not have to travel far for this interview because the University of Northwestern, Saint Paul, where Professor Aling teaches ancient history, is just across the river from my hometown. He is known as one of the favorite professors among the students there.

It was a frigid winter morning with wind chills well below zero the day we arrived on campus. At the entrance the security guard waved us through as he stayed warm in his little hut. Our car squeaked as it traveled down the long winding drive through a miniature valley formed by the snowbanks piled high on either side. I was hoping we were early enough to find a parking space close to the loading zone. Fortunately there was one. We got out and opened the frozen back door of the truck. It groaned. When it’s really cold like this, sound is different. The sky is bluer, and the air is thinner. I could

see wisps of smoke escaping from the chimneys on the red brick buildings. On days like these you stay out of the wind because it cuts like a knife.

Inside the old Jesuit building, the wood floors had sounds of their own. The creak of footsteps preceded me as I walked down the hall to find Professor Aling's office. I enjoyed the ambiance of the old building with its high ceilings and woodwork. At his door I poked my head in and saw a heavy wood desk piled with papers, and a large bookcase sagging under the weight of hundreds of books. I set down the tripod and decided that the main source of light should come from the multi-paned windows.

"Hello, Tim," I heard a voice say behind me.

I turned. "Hello, Professor Aling. It's good to meet you again." He had just finished teaching his class and was now free. I decided to do the interview right at his desk. I'm sure there was an organization to this desk, but its charming disarray made it look like a set piece from *Indiana Jones*. I positioned him in front of it, sitting in a courtroom-style chair.

"Many scholars claim there's no evidence for the Exodus or for the early Israelites in Egypt. What do you think about that?"

Aling leaned back. "I heard Professor Bietak say once that they have been excavating for 60 seasons at Tell el-Dab'a, but after all that time, they have only uncovered about three percent of the total site. A season lasts about two or three months. They do two seasons a year usually."

"So for about 30 years they've been excavating there?"

"Yep, and they have excavated approximately three percent."

I was surprised. The figure seemed so small to me. They had barely scratched the surface.

Aling went on, "So when people say, 'Oh, there's nothing that's been found to verify the Bible' and so on, they're basing it on awfully slim evidence."

I wanted to hear what he would say about the important tomb that Rohl had connected with Joseph, so I asked him, "Would it be unusual for a tomb to have a statue?"

"No, no, it's not unusual. It's unusual to have one this large. This statue would be probably twice the size of a normal human being."

"What does that tell you when the statue is larger?"

"That it's a very important person," he explained. "Now, of course, this is not a pharaoh's tomb or palace, but the man who lived there, archaeologists can identify his

The colossal statue at the pyramid tomb was about twice life-size.



nationality by looking at the fragments of the statue. The fragments reveal three things: the hairstyle he has, which we often call the mushroom hairstyle; secondly, his weapon, a throw stick that he carries over his shoulder, which we would associate with an Australian boomerang; and then the coloration of the skin. The skin is yellow. All those things indicate that this would have been a Syro-Palestinian.”

I asked Dr. Aling point-blank. “Do you think this is Joseph?”

“Either it is Joseph, or it’s somebody who had a career remarkably the same as Joseph did. It’s just an incredible thing to find this at this time period.”

This certainly supported what Rohl had also concluded. Would there be any more evidence that fit this growing pattern?

III. Pharaoh’s Dreams and Joseph’s Famine Policy

In the ancient world people believed that dreams were significant because they foretold the future. The Bible records many instances when dreams predicted or warned of coming events. The book of Genesis records that Joseph as a young boy had dreams of his brothers and parents bowing down to him. His older brothers were greatly offended because these dreams were implying that Joseph would rule over them. They plotted to

kill him but instead sold him as a slave for 20 shekels of silver. ¹⁷

When I talked with Egyptologist James Hoffmeier, he told me he sees credibility in the details of the Joseph story. He explained, “There are a number of little details in the narratives that specialists in Ancient Near Eastern studies have noticed. For instance, the slave price of Joseph. He was sold for 20 shekels of silver, which sounds like a bargain price because later on in history we know that the price of slaves had moved up to 30 shekels of silver by the middle and later part of the second millennium BC.”

“Did the slave price remain at 30 shekels?” I asked.

“When we get to the first millennium, it moves up to 50 shekels. And in the first millennium during the Persian period, the price goes way up off the charts. So 20 shekels fits the price of slaves from ancient documents from the early part of the second millennium BC.”

“Why is this significant?”

“That’s the kind of detail in the story that is not only authentic, but hardly one that a later writer a thousand years later could have dreamt up and got it right, knowing the economic considerations of the day.”

Hoffmeier was arguing against Israel Finkelstein’s claims that these early events in the Bible were compiled from myths and stories many centuries after the lives of Joseph and Moses. He was saying the slave price given in the account matches the specified time period too accurately to have been invented.

I asked Professor Hoffmeier about another aspect of the story, Joseph’s interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams. “How important were dreams in the ancient Egyptian world?”

“We have these wonderful stories of Joseph interpreting dreams in the book of Genesis. Most people in the ancient world believed that dreams were a way in which a deity would communicate with a human directly. And so dreams were taken very seriously. We know this, thanks to a papyrus in the British Museum, the Chester Beatty papyrus. There were dream interpretation manuals in Egypt, which apparently would have been held by priests at temples.”

“How did they use these manuals?”

“Apparently you could go on your way to work in the morning, swing by the temple and check with a priest and say, ‘Look, I dreamt so and so last night. What does it mean?’ And he could go through the scroll and find something similar. These dreams are arranged in two categories: those that have good outcomes and those with bad outcomes.”

“That relates very specifically to the story of Joseph,” I added.

Hoffmeier nodded in agreement. “It seems as if Joseph is presented as a wise man who can interpret dreams without the benefit of the dream interpretation manual. So that very nicely fits into an Egyptian setting.”

The important details of the biblical story were proving to help us in the investigation. Now it would be necessary to look for details in the next events of the Genesis narrative that Rabbi Friedman continued to unfold, Joseph’s rise from slavery to rule in Egypt.

“The Bible tells us that Joseph, with God’s help, interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh. These dreams were about cattle coming out of the water of the Nile. In the first dream seven fat cows came out of the Nile, and in the second dream seven lean cows came out of the Nile and devoured the seven fat cows. Joseph was able to save Egypt by warning Pharaoh of a coming calamity: seven years of plenty would be followed by seven years of

*Fishermen on the banks
of the Nile River.*



terrible famine. Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph's ability to explain the dreams that he put Joseph in charge of preparing for the famine, and made him second in command over the entire country. " 18 19

In my interview with David Rohl he also expanded on the Bible's account of Joseph's interpretation of the dreams. "It's an extraordinary story, but the clue here is that these cows are coming out of the Nile. It's the Nile itself, which is the cause of both the plenty and the famine."

I echoed his thoughts. "So there's some type of connection to the Nile."

Rohl continued, "Yes. Now, what mechanism could have caused that? People often imagine that a low Nile, low inundations, or when the fields are not flooded, can cause famine. Well, they probably could, but it's not going to stop you from planting your crops if the water doesn't flow over the land for a couple of months of the year. What matters is the other way around, when there's so much water coming in that the land is flooded for too long and you can't plant your crops in the ground and then you don't get any harvest. Now if that happens for seven years on the trot, you're going to get a really major famine. I think that's what happened."

It reminded me of where I live. When the spring rains come after a heavy snow season, the river valleys can flood the fields for such a long time that the farmers can't plant. I added, "And then the other thing that happens is all the rain goes into one area of the country like the Midwestern United States, but it doesn't go in another area like California and the Southwest. They are in a drought."

"Yes, that's very similar to what's transpired in the biblical story," he replied. "Something's happened further upstream in the river. The river Nile has its sources up in central Africa and the Ethiopian Highlands, for instance. And normally in spring, it rains a lot in that area, and that water flows down the river and floods the Nile. So what happens if this rainfall was four or five times the normal amount?"

"The river would flood," I said.

"Exactly. To four or five times the normal level. It would take so long to disappear. I think that's what happened. Now what mechanism could have caused that? I think it's possible we've got a shift of the climatic zones."

"So do you think there was no rain where Joseph's family was up in Canaan, but it was raining somewhere else?"

Rohl said, "What has happened is the tropical zone around the equator has shifted

northwards, causing rain to fall far more heavily on the Ethiopian Highlands. And what that does is push the dry Saharan climate into the land of Israel, into the area where Jacob and his family were living. So they were suffering drought while the Egyptians were suffering high floods at the same time. So you end up with a situation of high floods in Egypt, which is causing famine because they can't plant their crops, and Jacob is in a parched landscape, desperate to bring his people into Egypt, which of course is what happens when Joseph saves Egypt from the famine. Pharaoh invites the rest of his family to come down to settle in the land of Goshen."

That was an interesting theory, so I asked, "Do you see anything in Egyptian history that shows this kind of flooding happening?"

He smiled. "We have something quite remarkable. When we look for these high Niles, if you go right down to the southern border of Egypt, at a place where the water comes through a gorge, we find inscriptions on the cliff face marking the heights of the Nile during the inundation, during the flood, and they're four times higher than they normally are in this period. So there's a massive amount of water entering Egypt at the time, and it takes so long to dissipate out to the Mediterranean."

"So the high flooding causes serious problems."

"They can't plant their crops, and therefore they don't get a harvest, and therefore you get famine."

"So, this record shows that it happened over a series of years?"

"Yes," he said, "consecutive years, right in the time of this king Amenemhat III. That for me is Joseph's famine. The reign of this pharaoh was in the Middle Kingdom, conventionally dated around 1850 BC."²⁰

"Has anything else been found that connects Joseph to this flooding in Egypt?"

"There's a canal, or a waterway, which flows parallel to the Nile and enters into a large lake area called the Fayum. The Fayum was like an oasis basin to the west. It's in the Sahara Desert. This canal has the name Bahr Yusef, which means the waterway of Joseph. And this goes back thousands of years as far as we can tell."

"Interesting," I said. "So there's actually a canal that has the very name of Joseph. Why do you think the canal has that name?"

"Because I think he made it," Rohl replied. "I think it was under his instructions as vizier of Egypt that that canal was cut. It's a brilliant idea. It diverts 50 percent of the water to the Fayum Basin and saves the rest of Egypt from flooding."



The Bahr Yusef, or waterway of Joseph, was originally constructed in the 12th Dynasty of the Middle Kingdom.

I was intrigued by the concept that flooding could cause a famine just as easily as drought. “So what you’re suggesting is that Joseph anticipated these floods that could wipe out the cropland, and he prepared for them by creating a canal to siphon off the water?”

“Exactly. Reduce the water by half and you get back to the land of plenty again – back to the situation where the water levels are just right for growing crops.”

“Can you still see the canal today?”

“Yes, absolutely. It’s nearly the size of the Nile itself. It’s a huge waterway. What’s interesting about the construction of this water diversion system is that it is known to have been developed in the same period as the early settlement at Avaris in the Middle Kingdom.”

“Fascinating. Does the name go all the way back to the time of Joseph?”

“The name Bahr Yusef is Arabic, and scholars don’t know what it was called before the Arabic period, which began in 639 AD. I think the name was not simply invented at that time but instead was based on an ancient tradition, which held that Joseph was the builder of the canal. But the one thing we do know is that the waterway itself was actually made around the time of Pharaoh Amenemhat III, which coincides with the early development of Avaris.”

Whether David Rohl’s theory is correct or not, it seems plausible that this water diversion system would have been helpful in drought as well as in high flooding. In low-flood years the meager amounts of water could have been conserved in the basin and channeled into smaller canals surrounding the Fayum in the following months.

When I had first interviewed Israeli President Peres, he talked at length about the stories of the Bible. I wanted to find out his perspective on the destiny of Joseph and his rise from slavery to a position of second in command in Pharaoh’s court. “If you look at the way the story is written,” I said, “God chose Joseph for a mission to save his family, Egypt, and the surrounding nations.”

Peres was thoughtful. “I read somewhere that Tolstoy said that this is the greatest story ever published in human literature – the story of Joseph and his brothers, and his going to Egypt. Joseph was the first Jewish advisor on the Earth. And he advised the most powerful empire in the vicinity. He conquered the heart of everybody he saw, men and women. It’s really a fascinating story. So a child that has imagination could get enough food for the rest of his life in Joseph and the Passover.” ²¹



The Joseph Canal as it looks today.

IV. The Rise of Pharaoh's Power

Rabbi Friedman went on to tell the biblical story of Egypt's preparations for the coming famine. "Joseph gathers up all the grain during the seven years of plenty in Egypt. He gathered as much as the sand of the sea, and then the famine comes to the entire region, and only Egypt has bread. So everyone comes to Joseph for what they need for survival.

"When their money runs out, they sold their animals. When that ran out, they sold their land, and eventually they sold themselves. So Pharaoh by the end of the seven years owns everything in Egypt."²²



Archaeologist Bryant Wood at his home in Pennsylvania.

I flew alone to Pennsylvania to see Dr. Bryant Wood, an archaeologist who has spent many years studying the Exodus and the Conquest. It was my understanding that he had insights into Egypt's history and its possible connection to the story of Joseph. I hoped the rental car I was getting at the airport had good windshield wipers. With the heavy rain coming down that evening, I would need them. I drove for almost an hour down the Interstate before I reached my hotel around midnight. But that was okay. Now I was only a few miles from the Woods' home.

When I woke up the next morning, there were slivers of light outlining the window in my dark room. I got up and peeked through the drapes. The rain had passed, and the

morning was turning into one of those beautiful summer days after a storm has cleared the air. Driving down the highway through the Pennsylvania farmland, I took notice of how nice it was for the Woods to live in such a peaceful setting. I turned past a cornfield and down a tar road where milking cows were lazily chewing grass in the meadow. The road then turned and led me into a newer development of homes.

It was Dr. Wood's wife, Faith, who met me at the door.

"Come in, come in," she said with a big smile.

"Thank you."

"Bryant will be down in a minute. Just make yourself at home."

When I arrive at a new location I always try to figure out the best setting for the interview. The Woods had a large living room that extended into their dining room. The warm reflection of the morning sun was coming in from the east through two patio doors. For a while this would work as a fill light for the filming, so I set the gear up in the living room and was almost ready when I heard him coming down the stairs.

"Hello, you must be Tim Mahoney."

"Yes, I am."

"Glad to meet you. Did you have any trouble finding us?"

"None at all," I said. "Your directions were very clear."

I would guess he was in his early 70s. He wore glasses, his hair was neatly combed, and when he smiled, it was genuine because he smiled with his eyes. The maroon shirt he had on bore the logo for the *Associates for Biblical Research*, an organization for which he was the research director.

"I was just printing off some information about my work that I thought you might like to have for your project," he said as he sat down in the chair in front of the camera. Sitting opposite him, I made some last minute adjustments to the camera's focus.

"Excellent. We're creating quite a library now," I admitted.

Curious, he asked, "Who have you interviewed so far?"

"Well, quite a few. Professor Ken Kitchen, Jim Phillips, Jodi Magness, Israel Finkelstein, Norma Franklin, Manfred Bietak, Charles Aling, David Rohl, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and Shimon Peres to name a few."

"Well, that's quite a collection, I must say."

"Yes, it is." I was a bit distracted. There was something buzzing in my headphones, something in the background. Where was it coming from? Oh, there it was. It always

happens around kitchens.

I smiled. “Would you mind if I unplugged your refrigerator for the interview? I can hear it humming through your microphone.”

“Oh, yes, certainly.”

“I promise to remember to plug it back in, but just to be sure let’s tell Faith. We know she’ll remember.” It’s always good manners to remember to plug things back in when finished, especially refrigerators. There have been a few times when I forgot.

Finally we were ready. I leaned over, started the camera, and said, “Tell me about your background.”

Wood gave me a charming grin. “I had 13 years with GE, dealing with nuclear reactors, and was involved most of the time with testing the nuclear reactor, gathering data relative to those tests, analyzing the data, and then publishing the results. So, when I got into archaeology I discovered that this background was very, very helpful because I’m doing pretty much the same thing with regard to ancient questions, biblical questions.”

“Could you elaborate on some of these similarities?”

“Archaeology is gathering data, pottery, architecture, and so on, things we dig out of the ground. And by analyzing the data, then we can reach conclusions.” He paused for a moment. “I find that others in this field do not have this approach. They do not have technical backgrounds, scientific backgrounds. Many times they will say, ‘Well, such and such archaeologists believe this, so we should all follow that esteemed authority figure’ or ‘Most scholars believe this.’”

“Why is that a problem?” I challenged.

“Well, that’s not the scientific approach. The scientific approach is to analyze the data, reach conclusions based on that data, and then publish the results, and that’s the approach that I take in the field of archaeology.”

I think Wood was trying to impress on me that just because a view has the support of the majority of scholars doesn’t mean that it’s always right.

I remembered the biblical story of the famine and wondered if there ever was a time in Egyptian history when a dramatic shift of wealth and power occurred between the people of Egypt and the pharaoh. When I asked Wood about this idea, he told me something surprising.

“Well, if you examine Joseph’s famine policy, you’ll see he was very astute. He didn’t simply give the grain away, as some kind of giant welfare program. He sold the grain,

and so the people had to buy the grain. So over those seven years all the wealth of Egypt came into Joseph, which meant that it came to Pharaoh, because Joseph was sort of the chief steward, you might say, for Pharaoh.”

“Do you see anything similar in Egyptian history?”



Throughout much of the Middle Kingdom’s 12th Dynasty, the regional governors (or nomarchs) had tremendous wealth and power. At one point the influential status of the nomarchs suddenly ended as all the wealth and power shifted to the pharaoh.

“We find something very significant happening at this exact time. Egypt was divided up into areas called nomes, kind of like districts, all over the country. Prior to the time of Joseph, the leaders of these nomes – nomarchs they were called – had tremendous wealth and tremendous power. ²³

“We get to a point in Egyptian history when suddenly that all changes and all the wealth is concentrated with the pharaoh. What on earth happened here? If you read the Egyptian history books, there is no explanation for it.”

“None at all?”

“They don’t know what happened or how it happened. I mean this was a tremendous socioeconomic change in Egypt, a very conservative country, which does not change easily, but suddenly the whole thing is turned upside down. Instead of the nomarchs having all this power and authority and wealth, it’s all concentrated with the pharaoh.”

“So what do you think happened?”

“Well, we have the answer in the Bible, and it’s Joseph’s famine policy, and he brings the wealth into Pharaoh. And it fits exactly with Egyptian history.”

Was this just a coincidence?

The interesting thing is that David Rohl had mentioned another detail that matched the occurrence of famine and central control at this time in Egypt. While we were talking at the great library in Saint Paul, he told me, “We have this new administration that sets

PATTERNS OF EVIDENCE: THE EXODUS

up in Egypt, an agency called the Department of the People's Giving, where the people grow their crops and bring them to government storehouses where they're kept and then, apparently, in times of crisis, the food's then redistributed back to the people. This Department of the People's Giving exactly fits the Joseph story."

Hearing all of this from Aling, Wood, and Rohl was making me step back and think to myself, *It's not very likely all of this could be a coincidence.*



Rohl believes the time of the famine occurred during the overlapping reigns of two important Middle Kingdom pharaohs.

Rohl told me he believes that this upheaval occurred around 1850 BC, during the overlapping reigns of two important Middle Kingdom pharaohs, Senusret III and his son Amenemhat III. Rohl identified features on both their statues that suggest some kind of hardship was in the land at that time.

"That sounds interesting," I said. "Tell me more about those features."

"Amenemhat is depicted with worry lines. His ears are turned out so that he can listen to the concerns of the people. He's got a frown on his face. He looks like a very concerned pharaoh, a very human pharaoh. He's not depicted in the usual bland way that you see on all the other statues of past and future pharaohs," explained Rohl.

“What do you conclude from this?”

“I think that this indicates there are serious problems in the land. The people are struggling to survive, and he is showing you sympathy for that struggle in his face. So I think that’s an important sign that this is the era of famine. And guess what – he builds his pyramid right next to Bahr Yusef, the Waterway of Joseph.”

In our research we came across another interesting example in the archaeology of Egypt that demonstrates the tremendous growth in the pharaoh’s wealth and power during this Middle Kingdom period. Archaeologists uncovered a series of Egyptian super-forts built on Egypt’s southern Nile border with Nubia. The discovery of these forts baffled archaeologists because their advanced architecture appeared to be thousands of years ahead of their time and the size of these forts was far larger than any military need.

These fortresses resembled great medieval castles with walls about 33 feet high and 16 feet thick. They contained moats, drawbridges, bastions, buttresses, ramparts, and even catapults. The largest of these super-forts covered 40,000 square meters (an area equivalent to almost seven American football fields, including the end zones). Some of these forts were started by earlier pharaohs, but their later funding and development to super-size were done by Senusret III, who reigned concurrently with Amenemhat III and built 11 forts in all. Sadly, all of these forts were covered by Lake Nasser when the Aswan Dam became operational in 1970.²⁴

Again, the biblical story states that all the wealth and power came into the pharaoh during this time of famine. Did this fuel the tremendous building activity of these super-forts in southern Egypt?



The statues of Amenemhat III (seen at top) were depicted in a more serious and realistic way than typical pharaohs (as seen below).

V. The Egyptian Tomb of Joseph?

David Rohl and I had been talking for almost an hour, yet the time had swept by so fast I hardly noticed. I had just heard a number of amazing similarities in Egypt that supported the story of Joseph’s rise to power and the policies he may have instituted during the time of a great famine. But Rohl wasn’t finished. He had one more amazing connection based on the evidence at the pyramid tomb of Avaris.

By now I knew him well enough to tell that his next point would be really dramatic. “The crucial clue for me, which says that this man with the multicolored coat is Joseph,



Joseph tells his family that they must take his bones with them when they leave Egypt.

is found in the story of Exodus. When Joseph is on his deathbed, he tells his brethren that when they leave they must take his body with them to the Promised Land. But what matches the story even more incredibly is that that pyramid tomb was empty when the archaeologists found it. There was nothing in it at all apart from a few fragments of this smashed statue. There were no bones; there were no mummy beads, no coffin wood, nothing. It was cleaned out.”

“Was it a grave robber?”

“No! What grave robber is going to take the bones? Bones are intrinsically of no value whatsoever. Nobody takes the bones. Only people who are treating the body with reverence take the bones. The body was taken out, and all the grave goods were taken out.”

“So what do you think happened?”

“I think this is the tomb of Joseph – the pyramid tomb of Joseph – honored by Pharaoh with a colossal statue. When Moses decided to take the people out of Egypt, he made sure he fulfilled that promise to Joseph, to take the body out of the tomb and take it to Shechem and bury him in the Promised Land.” ²⁵

VI. Shechem: A Place of Conflict and Promise

The Bible claims Joseph’s bones were buried in a town known as Shechem. When Abraham first came into the land of Canaan, God spoke to him at Shechem and promised him and his descendants the land. Perhaps this is why Joseph asked his descendants to take his bones with them to the Promised Land to rebury them there. He didn’t want his remains to be left behind in Egypt. ²⁶

Shechem is where many believe Joseph’s bones were finally laid to rest. The shrine of Joseph there has been considered a holy site for centuries and throughout the ages has been venerated by many Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims. Today Shechem is known as Nablus on the West Bank, a city populated by well over 100,000 people. ²⁷

In the year 2000, just hours after the Palestinians gained control of the West Bank, the shrine of Joseph in Nablus was attacked and damaged by a mob during the Second Intifada demonstrations. Since that time, the tomb has been repaired, but this is still a politically sensitive area.

The stories from the Bible tap into deep emotions and unresolved conflicts that go back for centuries on all sides. This was one reason I was reluctant to investigate these ancient events. But I also experienced a positive side to this complex story when I filmed in Israel with both Israelis and Palestinians. We became a great production team, working together as friends. In Egypt as well, our crew was from different religious and political backgrounds. They were all good people, and without them, I couldn't have done it. Going to the Middle East taught me that most people around the world want very much the same things: food, shelter, a way to make a living, and of course a future for their families.

One day while in Minnesota, I went to my co-producer, Pete Windahl, and asked, "Can you find out if Biblical Productions can get us to a location in the West Bank?"

"Where?"

"To Nablus. It's the place where Joseph's bones were said to have been buried, and I would really like to see it."

"It could be tricky."

"See what you can do," I said. As usual, Sharon Schaveet came through.

Weeks later, our crew was traveling up a steep road to the ruins of a Byzantine church and castle situated on top of Mount Gerizim. It overlooked the city of Nablus. We had gotten permission to go to the mountain but not to the shrine of Joseph in the city just below.

When we arrived, the wind was blowing low clouds through the ancient ruins. The view over the valley was spectacular. I yelled to the cameraman, "Follow me! We've got to hurry before the sun burns these clouds off."

"Where are we going?"

"To the edge."

The mountain was several thousand feet above sea level, and there we were, standing in clouds as they passed through us. It was a gift I didn't want to miss. I walked along the edge of a stone wall above a drop-off as my cameraman filmed me. The backdrop was the valley below and, beyond that, more mountains. For a moment I envisioned what this land might have looked like thousands of years ago – shepherds with their flocks grazing peacefully beneath the shelter of the mountains. Directly below me I noticed more ancient ruins. The Bible records that Shechem was a place of much blessing and promise, but it had also seen much conflict and tragedy throughout its history.



*The Shrine of Joseph
photographed in the 1800s.*



*The view overlooking the
modern city of Nablus
(ancient Shechem).*

“They’re gone,” I shouted to the cameraman. The last of the clouds faded away. “Did you get the shot?”

He put up his thumb and nodded yes.

It was from this vantage point that we zoomed in on the shrine of Joseph. This was as close as I could get for now. It was just too risky to call attention to ourselves by setting up a film crew down there.

After we returned from that trip, I wasn’t very satisfied with the results. “Pete, that just wasn’t enough.”

“I’ll see if we can get something better.”

Pete talked with Sharon Schaveet, and she hired a local cameraman who filmed the shrine and the nearby archaeological site more extensively. When the new footage came, it was very exciting to finally see what we were dealing with. In time, I would come to realize how significant the ancient area of Shechem is, and how well the archaeology fits the stories of the Bible. But a fuller look at those connections will have to wait for now.



Central Park in New York City, several blocks from Jackie Mason’s home.

VII. A Lesson From the Life of Joseph

What can we learn about conflict and forgiveness from the story of Joseph, whose life began with great tragedy? I discovered one answer to this question in an interview with comedian Jackie Mason. I got the idea to interview Mason after talking with Michael Medved, who was in town hosting a “Night at the Oscar’s” at the Saint Paul Hotel. As we sat in the hotel restaurant for coffee the next morning, I talked to Michael about the intrinsic Jewish nature of the Exodus story. I asked if he knew of any noteworthy Jewish people that I could interview. He paused to think. Then a smile came over his face, and he reluctantly said, “Well, what about Jackie Mason?”

“The comedian?” I laughed, which is what comedians want you to do.

“Yes. Don’t laugh. When Jackie was a young man, he was ordained as a rabbi, and I think he comes from a long line of rabbis.”

I thought for a moment about the few times I had seen him do his act. He certainly was a unique personality, and I grinned. “Well, that certainly would be an interesting interview.”

I contacted Mason’s agent, and we went back and forth for a while. Just when I

thought we were done talking, the agent would call back. It seemed that Mason was intrigued. We finally reached an agreement, and I flew to New York City. When we met at his apartment just a few blocks from Central Park, Mason started to give me the tough guy routine, which is a little humorous in itself since I'm about twice his size. He stood in front of his dining room table and gave me a serious look. "Okay, what's this all about anyway? Why are you making a film about the Exodus? What kind of thing is this? What are you – a part of a religious cult or something?"

I didn't say anything for a moment. I was thinking, *Hey, I just flew here to film you. I thought you wanted to be interviewed.* Then the idea came to me to tell him about my childhood. I told him about my dad roughing me up as a kid and my parents' divorce. Jackie listened intently as I shared how my mother tucked me in at night and said bedtime prayers. She was the one who told me the stories from the Bible, and now I just wanted to know if they were true or not. I could tell my story connected with him.

When I finished talking, he was done questioning me and kindly showed me into his living room. "No problem. You can set up your gear right over here. Where's the rest of the crew?"

"I am the crew."

He left for a few minutes so I could set up. The big challenge was Jackie's living room. It was full of mirrors and windows. Every background reflected the camera and lights. I did manage to find one wall where Mason could not see his own reflection.

I got him settled and opened the interview with a little humor. "So you're Jewish?"

"Well, I came from a family of rabbis, and it was considered my destiny to become a rabbi, and I felt that I owed it to my father and everything that he lived for and everything that was his most guiding principles in life. That's why I went into it. Then I became a rabbi and I realized that I was much more interested in jokes. And jokes to me create happiness, and it won't help me exactly fulfill all of his mission, but at least I'll fulfill part of his mission."

"So what kind of jokes are we talking about?"

"The joke that gets the biggest laugh in my act is when I talk about the Lord saying to Moses, 'Come forth.' We all know what happened. Moses came fifth, and the Lord lost two dollars."

I smiled. "What else you got?"

"I go to a temple that's so reformed that the rabbi is a Gentile. And they have a big



Jackie Mason being interviewed at his home in New York.

sign in the front that says 'No Jews Allowed.' There is one temple that's so reformed that it's closed on Jewish holidays."

That one made me laugh out loud.

He told another one. "Then I imitate the Reform rabbi speaking, 'I walketh, I talketh, I seeth, I goeth,' and the Lord said to Moses, 'Where?' and Moses said, 'What are you talking about?' And the Lord said to Moses, 'Take me back to my people – where are my people?' and Moses said, 'What do you want from me? They're in Miami Beach.'"

Mason continued using humor, but after a while both of us knew it was time to get serious. Then I asked him a question that brought forth a response I didn't expect to hear from a comedian. "Jackie, why is Joseph such an important character in the Torah?"

"We learn so much about life from Joseph. We learn the principle of forgiveness, for instance, how he forgave his brothers for all their transgressions."

I knew what he was talking about. The Bible states that early in his life Joseph was betrayed by his jealous brothers who tossed him into a pit and planned to kill him, but then they changed their minds and sold him as a slave to traders on their way to Egypt.

He became more passionate. "When somebody treats you like that, for you to forgive them is totally inconceivable to people."

"You're right."

"The easiest thing is retribution because hate comes naturally whenever somebody commits any kind of crime against you – or perception of a crime."

The Bible says that after Jacob died, Joseph's brothers feared he would kill them in revenge, but he didn't. Instead he assured them that though they had meant their deed for evil, God had meant it for good. ²⁸

"The principle of forgiveness should be the greatest principle, and it's the most desecrated and neglected of all the great humanitarian principles of life," he said.

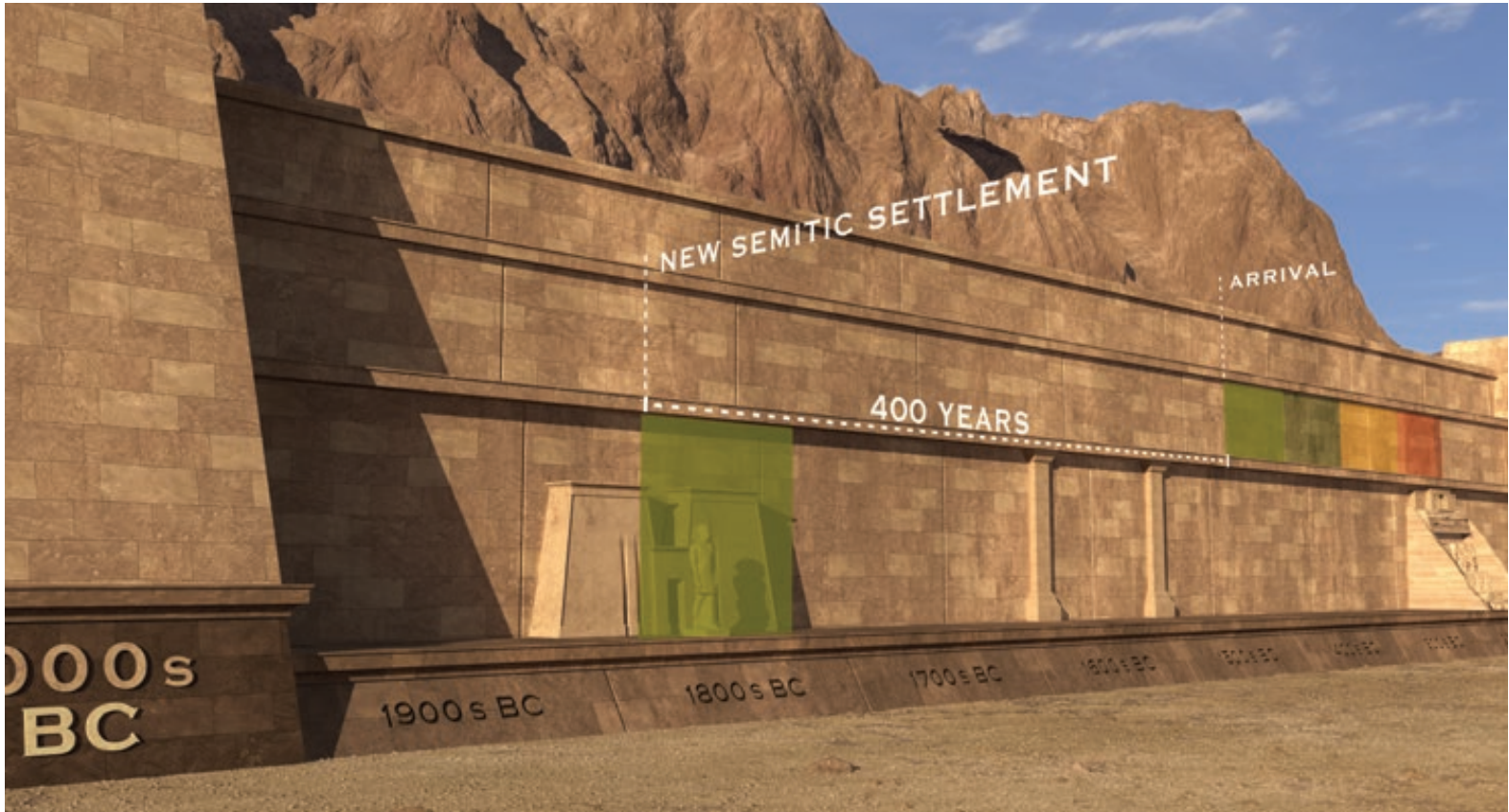
"Do you think the story of Joseph and his brothers was a true story?"

Mason was adamant. "I think Joseph was positively a literal story. It positively had to be a true story because there are too many events that happened that strike anybody who studies the Bible as a simple reality. This cannot be contrived. This cannot be introduced as some kind of fable."

"Why not?"

"Because a fable can never reach us in those terms and strike the hearts of people the way that did."

After the interview I looked directly at Mason and said, “Your father the Rabbi would be very proud of you.”



VIII. Arrival Summary and Timeline

The amount of archaeological evidence matching the first step of **Arrival** in the biblical sequence seemed overwhelming to me:

- The Syrian-styled house that appeared in the Delta along with a palace fit for royalty whose occupant was a high Semitic official from the Canaan area, who wore a multicolored coat,
- The Waterway of Joseph, contemporary with the rise of Avaris,
- The end of influence and wealth for the regional governors as the power of Pharaoh reached new heights,

The 400-year distance between the new Semitic settlement at Avaris and where Arrival evidence would be expected in the Ramesses Exodus Theory.

- Yet, this event happened at a time in the Middle Kingdom when the statues of the pharaohs were depicted in a uniquely careworn way – the tell-tale signs of a kingdom in distress,
- And the empty tomb of the Semitic Ruler.

As we sat in the great hall of the library in Saint Paul, I asked David Rohl a nagging question. “Why haven’t Professor Manfred Bietak and others considered the possibility of a connection here?”

“Because in the scheme that’s used by scholars to date all these events, they’re way too early. They’re much too early to be Israelites.”

For a moment I thought back to the interview with Bietak. “You’re right. Bietak said that to connect the people he found at Avaris with the proto-Israelites was ‘a very weak affair.’”

Rohl leaned back in his chair. “Well, that’s a great way out of this situation, isn’t it?”

Come to think about it, I had noticed that many scholars do not like to use the term *Israelite*. Looking at Rohl, I said, “Yes, he used the word *proto-Israelite*.”

Rohl nodded his head as if he had heard this all before. “Right. And many scholars do. What they’re basically saying is, ‘We’re quite happy for you to use these events and these personalities, these people from earlier times, and make them the basis of the biblical story, but that doesn’t make them the real people of the Bible.’ I’m basically saying, ‘Well, why not call a spade a spade?’”

Our time in the great library was over, and we walked out into the city of Saint Paul. I was coming to a deeper realization of the controversy surrounding the Exodus on so many levels – religious, political, and archaeological. It is religiously controversial because it raises questions about the historical credibility of Judaism and Christianity. It is politically controversial because it implies a piece of land was given by God to Abraham and his descendants, the children of Israel. And it is archaeologically controversial for anyone to suggest that this specific evidence at Avaris matches the story of Joseph and the early Israelites’ arrival in Egypt. This is because the Avaris evidence is much earlier than the time the Israelites were supposed to be in Egypt according to conventional thinking. But at this stage I had to remind myself to be open-minded. I needed to stick with one of the main guidelines of the investigation and look for a pattern of evidence wherever it might exist. 🪄

ENDNOTES

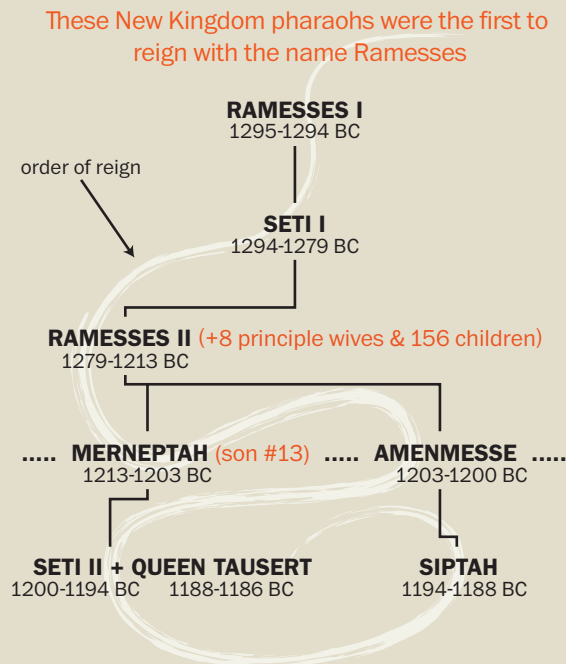
Chapter 1

- ¹ Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2007), 102.
- ² *Ibid.*, 8.
- ³ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 237.

Chapter 3

- ⁴ The 19th Dynasty of Egypt's New Kingdom included the first pharaohs named Ramesses.

The Family of the 19th Dynasty



⁵ He took him outside and said, “Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then He said to him, “Your offspring will be that numerous.”

¹³ Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know this for certain: Your offspring will be foreigners in a land that does not belong to them; they will be enslaved and oppressed 400 years.

¹⁴ However, I will judge the nation they serve, and afterward they will go out with many possessions. ¹⁵ But you will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age.

¹⁶ In the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.”

¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “I give this land to your offspring, from the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates River.” (Genesis 15:5, 13-16, 18)

These events are then fleshed out over the following six books of the Bible.

Chapter 5

- ⁸ The account of Joseph being sold to traders who take him to Egypt can be found in Genesis 37:12-36. Joseph’s rise to power and his subsequent rescue of Egypt from the famine is recounted in Genesis 41:37-57.
- ⁹ Many consider the first major writer of history in Western literature to be the Greek historian Herodotus, who traveled extensively in the fifth century BC investigating the traditional accounts of the wars and major events in the cultures surrounding Greece. Herodotus recorded his findings in a book called *The Histories*. The Bible attributes Moses, who lived during the time of the Exodus, as the author of the first books of the Bible. Many scholars today doubt this and claim that the books of the Bible were written many hundreds of years after the time of the Exodus. However, if Moses really did author the early Bible, this would make him earlier than Herodotus by about 1,000 years.
- ¹⁰ The land of Goshen, where the Israelites settled, is first mentioned in Genesis 45:10 and described in verse 18. Similar mentions can be found elsewhere, such as in Genesis 47:1, 4, 6, and 27.

Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the region of Goshen. They acquired property in it and became fruitful and very numerous. (Gen. 47:27)

- ¹¹ How do we know that the second mention of Ramesses in the Bible was about 100 years after the first? The first mention of Ramesses is “the land of Ramesses” that Jacob’s family moved to in Genesis 47:11. The second mention of Ramesses is the supply city built by the Israelite slaves in Exodus 1:11.

We know that there were at least 100 years between the two references because Joseph was 30 when he stood before Pharaoh (Gen. 41:46). Then came seven years plenty followed by two years of famine before Jacob and his family arrived in Egypt (Gen. 45:6):

- Therefore, Joseph would have been 39 when Jacob arrived and settled in Ramesses.
- It was 71 years later that Joseph died at the age of 110 (Gen. 50:26).
- After this, all of Joseph’s brothers died. Levi lived to 137 (Ex. 6:16) and was at most ten years older than Joseph, so he died at least 17 years after Joseph.
- After an unspecified number of years, the remainder of that generation died, and after that point the new pharaoh arose who did not know Joseph, and at some point he enslaved the Israelites who eventually built the city of Ramesses (Ex. 1:6-11).

So it seems likely that more than 100 years passed between the initial settlement of Jacob in the land of Ramesses and the building of the store city of Ramesses after the **Slavery** step began.

- ¹² The Bible itself clearly shows other cases of anachronisms in the form of updated city names. The city of Dan is referenced in Genesis 14:14. However, we know from Judges 18:29 that the city was originally called Laish and not named Dan until after the Conquest, when the tribe of Dan took over the city and renamed it. The renaming of the city occurred decades after the death of Moses, who is credited with writing Genesis. Therefore, the city could not have had the name Dan at the time of Moses and certainly not at the time of Abraham. Several other passages also use later city names even though they happened in earlier periods of the story,

before the more recent version of the name was instituted. For example, the name of the city of Luz was changed to Bethel in Genesis 28:19, but the name “Bethel” is used for this city back in Genesis 12:8 and 13:3 with no mention of its former name.

- ¹³ The family of Jacob had strong connections to Haran, which today is located near the border between Turkey and Syria:
- Jacob’s grandfather Abraham lived in Haran before he came to Canaan (Gen. 11:31-32, 12:4-5).
 - Jacob’s father, Isaac, got his wife from Haran. Abraham had insisted that he marry from among his relatives, so he sent his servant back to Haran, where he found Rebekah, the sister of Laban, and brought her to Isaac. (Gen. 24:2-4, 29).
 - Jacob also had strong ties to Haran. He went back to Haran, where he married the daughters of Laban (Gen. 27:43, 29:19-20).
 - Jacob ended up living in Haran for 20 years and had 11 sons and a daughter during that time (Gen. 31:41).
- ¹⁴ Genesis 41:37-46 tells of Pharaoh rewarding Joseph for his wisdom in interpreting his dreams that warned of the coming famine.
- ¹⁵ Jacob’s 12 sons are listed in Exodus 1:1-5. The story of their births by four different mothers can be found in Genesis 29:31 - 30:24 and also Genesis 35:16-19.
- ¹⁶ The story of Joseph’s multicolored coat can be found in Genesis 37:3-4. We know from the Bible that Joseph’s original coat never made it to Egypt (Gen. 37:29-33). However, it is certainly possible that Jacob had a new coat made for his favorite son after they reunited in Egypt.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than his other sons because Joseph was a son born to him in his old age, and he made a robe of many colors for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not bring themselves to speak peaceably to him. (Gen. 37:3-4)

- ¹⁷ Joseph’s dreams of his family bowing down to him, and the account of his brothers selling him as a slave to Midianite traders, can be read in Genesis 37:5-11 and

PATTERNS OF EVIDENCE: THE EXODUS

37:18-28. The detail of 20 shekels is referenced in the last verse.

- ¹⁸ Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams and is made second in command of Egypt in Genesis 41:1-46. In Genesis 45:6 it is made clear that there will be neither planting nor harvest during the seven years of famine.

For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there will be five more years without plowing or harvesting. (Gen. 45:6)

- ¹⁹ The Bible records that seven years of plenty were followed by seven years of famine. Eventually, everyone in Egypt was forced to sell their land in order to continue buying grain for their survival. A 20 percent tax was levied on all the produce of the land, and only the priests were exempt from selling their land and paying the tax.



The stone on Sehel Island mentioning seven years of famine and a tax that the priests were exempt from.

Interestingly, very similar conditions are recorded on a large rock face in the middle of the upper Nile River at the First Cataract below Aswan. The stone resting on Sehel Island is called the Joseph Stone by some. It may preserve the faded memory of a seven-year famine just as described in the Bible. It is believed to have been made in the Ptolemaic period, perhaps between 332-180 BC, by a group of Egyptian priests who claimed ownership of the surrounding land and exemption from paying the tax as overseers of its collection. To make this claim,

they appealed to an ancient story.

The inscription purports to be an account from the time of Pharaoh Djoser of the Old Kingdom's Third Dynasty (conventionally dated to around 2660 BC) and speaks of a great famine caused by seven years of extreme drought, followed by a time of plenty. This is followed by an official decree enacting a 10 percent tax on all the harvest and commerce in the land.

While this is very similar to the biblical account, the dates of the inscription as well as the various details it describes, come from a wide variety of time periods. These hieroglyphs may represent a historical composite, echoing events from the distant past. The account on this stone perhaps combined the Bible's great famine with various details from other parts of ancient history that were superimposed one over the other. Scholars find such telescoping of history in other Egyptian documents.

²⁰ A chart depicting these years of high floods can be found here: David M. Rohl, *Exodus – Myth or History?* (Minneapolis, MN: Thinking Man Media, 2015), 96.

²¹ The Bible depicts Joseph being favored in several places:

- Joseph was his father's favorite son (Gen. 37:3-4)
- Joseph gained favor with Potiphar (Gen. 39:2-5)
- Potiphar's wife loved Joseph (Gen. 39:6-7)
- Joseph gained favor with keeper of the prison (Gen. 39:21-23)
- Joseph gained favor with Pharaoh (Gen. 41:37-40)

²² The account of Joseph's Famine Policy (storing grain and then selling it to the Egyptians and all the neighboring lands) can be found in Genesis 41:47-49, 41:53-57, 45:6-7, and 47:13-26. Joseph's efforts brought all the wealth of the nations into Pharaoh's hands, and that wealth and power were sustained by the policy of an ongoing 20 percent tax on Egypt's produce.

²³ An example of the opulent tomb of one of the last powerful nomarchs can be seen at Beni Hasan, which is covered in chapter 6, section 1.

²⁴ An article about the super-forts (*The Middle Kingdom Egyptian Fortresses in Nubia* by Brian Yare, published in January 2001) can be found here:

<http://www.yare.org/essays/fortresses.htm>

²⁵ The account of the burial of Joseph's bones in Shechem can be found in these verses:

PATTERNS OF EVIDENCE: THE EXODUS

Joseph said to his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will certainly come to your aid and bring you up from this land to the land He promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” So Joseph made the sons of Israel take an oath: “When God comes to your aid, you are to carry my bones up from here.” (Gen. 50:24-25)

So He led the people around toward the Red Sea along the road of the wilderness. And the Israelites left the land of Egypt in battle formation.

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, because Joseph had made the Israelites swear a solemn oath, saying, “God will certainly come to your aid; then you must take my bones with you from this place.” (Ex. 13:18-19)

Joseph’s bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the parcel of land Jacob had purchased from the sons of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for 100 *qesitahs*. It was an inheritance for Joseph’s descendants. (Josh 24:32)

- ²⁶ Abraham’s first stop when he arrived in Canaan was Shechem, where God again promised him the land and Abraham built an altar to the LORD (Gen. 12:5-7).
- ²⁷ Information about Joseph’s Tomb throughout history can be found here:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph's_Tomb
- ²⁸ The story of Joseph forgiving the treachery of his brothers can be read in Genesis:
- Joseph is betrayed, thrown into a well, and sold to slave traders (Gen. 37:16-36).
 - Joseph forgives his brothers (Gen. 45:1-15).
 - Joseph reassures his brothers after Jacob’s death (Gen. 50:15-21).

Chapter 6

- ²⁹ The Israelites’ great multiplication, and their wealth as they lived in the best of the land of Egypt, is depicted during and after Joseph’s life in Genesis 47:11, 27 and in Exodus 1:6-7. Jacob’s family, numbering 70 members at the time of their arrival in Egypt, can be seen in Genesis 46:26-27.
- ³⁰ This quote and more information about Father Lucien Galtier can be found here:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Parrant