

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 11

Joseph-Moses: Archaeology and Egypt Part 3

A trip to the Cairo Museum feels like a visit to a movie set. You are transported immediately into an ancient world, where monuments, statues, and paintings stir up clear images of history from thousands and thousands of years ago.

Hany, an educated Egyptologist whose soft voice and clear descriptions added to the mystique, recently guided us through an “after-hours” Museum visit. We were alone in these large rooms with pieces of the past that seemed to come alive. I am confident that if I listened carefully enough, the history would echo into audible noises I would understand.

The most stunning and moving moment came when we entered the room of mummies. We saw a collection of mummies, dead bodies that had been preserved and lay before us in glass cases, unwrapped to enable us to see their smallest features—fingernails, toenails, teeth, and more.

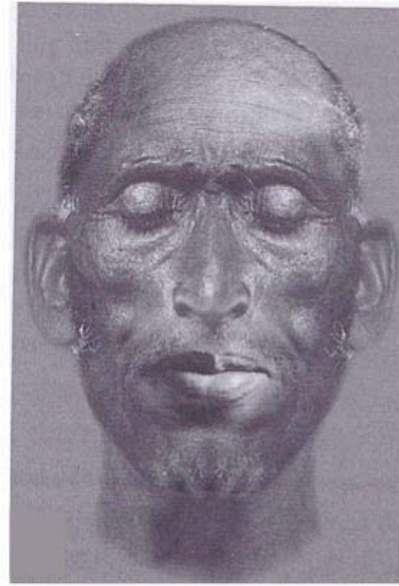
There was one mummy I wanted to see more than all the others: Ramesses II. I believe this was the man before whom Moses stood and demanded the release of God’s people from the bonds of slavery. Finally we came to his mummy, lying in a glass case. I bent down, truly just inches from his face, observing the wisps of surprisingly long hair still left on the back of his head.

The hair was yellowish and Becky asked Hany what we all wondered, “Did Ramesses II have blond hair?” Hany explained that the chemicals of mummification had left the hair that color, for Ramesses II had white hair upon his death. This made sense, as Ramesses II reigned as sole Pharaoh over Egypt from 1279 BC until his death in 1213.¹

Caroline Wilkinson is a world-renowned specialist at facial reconstruction from the remains of deceased people. Using the mummified soft tissues of Ramesses II, she completed a facial reconstruction that takes one even beyond the reality of the mummified remains.² Looking closely at her rendering, I suspect that Ramesses II may have had a few more wrinkles upon his death (he died at age 90). She seems to have reconstructed his face as it would have been in mid-life!

¹ The authoritative work on Ramesses II is Kitchen, K. A., *Pharaoh Triumphant The Life and Times of Ramesses II, King of Egypt* (Aris & Phillips Ltd 1985).

² See Wilkinson’s chapter “The Facial Reconstruction of Ancient Egyptians” in David, Rosalie, ed., *Egyptian Mummies and Modern Science* (Cambridge 2008) at 162ff.



Wilkinson describes a six-step process to rendering the facial reconstruction of Ramesses II from his mummified remains.

Was Ramesses II the Pharaoh of the exodus? We cannot say with certainty. As we discussed in the last lesson, the clues certainly lead me to that conclusion, but the clues also leave open other possibilities as well, and there is no shortage of ideas about the exodus pharaoh's identity.³ Rather than give pro and con to each view, we will continue to look at the archaeology and the Biblical passages consistent with the Ramesses II view. Of course much of the material we consider is equally applicable to other time periods and other pharaonic identifications as well.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL FACTORS

Our last lesson covered the archaeological factors beginning with Joseph's slavery under Potiphar and going through the passage in Exodus 1:8 "Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph." It is here we resume our study.

³ Rather than reproduce the chronology and background information in last lesson, we simply refer those interested to that material, available for download at: www.Biblical-Literacy.com.

- **Fear of the Israelites** (Ex. 1:9-10). Pharaoh’s reason for enslaving the Israelites is a fear that they were “too many and too mighty” and should they continue to multiply and “if war breaks out,” the Israelites might join the Pharaoh’s “enemies and fight against us.”

Last week we discussed the chronology that would have placed Joseph’s service of Pharaoh and his rise to power as occurring during the reign of the Hyksos kings. This was a one-hundred-year period scholars label “The Second Intermediate Period” where Egypt was divided into two lands, a northern Egypt ruled from Avaris by the Hyksos kings and a southern Egypt ruled from Thebes.⁴ The knowledge we have of the Hyksos kings comes only from Egyptian sources, and the archaeological discoveries of their capital city Avaris (“Tel el Dab’a”).

From these sources scholars know clearly that the Hyksos rulers and people were in fact from the area of modern Israel/Syria/Palestine/Lebanon. All of their names are West Semitic (a predecessor language to Hebrew, Aramaic and other related tongues). The Egyptians called them *aamu*, which is most always translated “Asiatics.”⁵

Eventually the Southern Kingdom of Egypt conquered the Hyksos capital of Avaris and while all details are not clear, many of the “nomads of Asia” fled back to the east.

After the expulsion of the Hyksos, a number of West Semites still remained in Egypt.⁶ It makes sense that the victorious Pharaohs of the new reunited Egypt would fear a growing population of Israeli foreigners whose language and history linked them to the century of foreign invaders, now repelled. This historical consistency certainly makes sense of Pharaoh’s concern about a potential over populating Israeli mass, as well as one where they had freedom to any significant degree.

- **The building of Pithom and Raamses** (Ex. 1:11). The Biblical account explains that Pharaoh “set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy

⁴ The ruler at Avaris claimed to rule both upper and lower Egypt, but scholars recognize that his claims were not necessarily reflective of truth! Shaw, Ian, *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford 2000) at 195.

⁵ *Ibid.* at 187. See also the thorough explanation by Redford, Donald B., *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton 1992) at 100ff.

⁶ Hoffmeier gives analysis of the archaeological excavations at the Hyksos capital at Tell el-Dab’a (“Avaris”) which shows that once conquered by the Egyptians, the city was not obliterated. Continued use of a temple patronized by the Semitic people indicates that a number of Semites remained behind after the expulsion. See Hoffmeier at 64-65.

burdens.” Most notably the Israelites “built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses.”

What were these cities? Can archaeology confirm the cities existed in the right time period? Were they “store cities”? Were they built with mortar and brick (Ex. 1:14)?

The identity of the cities has been subject to considerable debate. James Hoffmeier does a good job of giving the historical development of the various theories over whether the cities existed and, if they did, over which dig has uncovered which city.⁷ The names of both of these cities are Hebraic terms for Egyptian words.

Pithom is universally recognized as standing for the Egyptian *Pi(r) – (A)tum*, which means the “domain of Atum” (Atum being the primeval father Egyptian god who was responsible for creation). On this there is no dispute.⁸ The dispute arises over which city was deemed the “Domain” or “House” of Atum at the time of the exodus? Scholars have debated this point for over 100 years. Some scholars place the location as the modern Tell el-Maskhuta, an older view from earlier Egyptian archaeological efforts.⁹ Others consider the remains at Tell er-Retabeh as ancient Pithom.¹⁰ The details of the debate are beyond this paper; however, the analysis by Hoffmeier in his recent book brings the debate current and certainly convinces me that the old view of Tell el-Maskhuta is not the most likely candidate.¹¹

So if we narrow our focus to the remains at Tell er-Retabah, what do we find? Hans Goedicke, the Johns Hopkins director of the digs at Retabah in the late 1970’s, and Michael Fuller, the project’s geoarchaeologist, has

⁷ Hoffmeier, James, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition*, (Oxford 2005).

⁸ Kitchen, K. A., *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Eerdmans 2003) at 256.

⁹ Redford, Donald, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (2001) vol. 3 at 50ff.

¹⁰ Kitchen at 256ff. See also Manfred Bietak’s chapter “Comments on the Exodus” in Rainey, A. F., *Egypt, Israel, Sinai: Archaeological and Historical Relationships in the Biblical Period*, (Tel Aviv University Press 1987), at 168f. Bietak is the principal archaeologist supervising the dig at Avaris, the Hyskos capital.

¹¹ See chapter four in Hoffmeier’s *Ancient Israel in Sinai*.

shown that the city was in a major rebuilding effort during the nineteenth dynasty, which is that of Ramesses, so the time is certainly right.¹²

Kitchen provides details of other finds at Retabah that support his conclusion that it was Pithom, including a “temple of Ramesses II honoring Atum” and the twin statues of Ramesses II and Atum.¹³ Certainly the city would meet the description of both something Ramesses II was having built and something properly described as a domain/house of Atum (“Pithom”).

A similar debate raged over the identity of “Ramesses.” The latest scholarship has given as yet unrefuted arguments that the Scriptures are referring to the excavated city of “*Pi-Ramasse*.”

This vast city was built as a palace home by Ramesses II, hence the name.¹⁴ *Pi-Ramasse* was a massive construction project. Eric Uphill termed it, “the vastest and most costly royal residence ever erected by the hand of man.”¹⁵ The palace and official center covered over six square miles, including the massive store areas necessary to feed not only the populace, but also the animals (like the horses in the extensive chariot stables).¹⁶

Also worth note is the work done in the last 15 years with a caesium magnetometer, which has shown almost 100 hectares of a city filled with “mud-brick walls.”¹⁷ Added interest on this city is found in its abandonment soon after the time of Ramesses II. This magnificent complex was built when a tributary of the Nile River ran in its midst. Soon after Ramesses II died, the Nile shifted, left this great city, and the city was soon abandoned to time.

One final note on brick manufacturing: one of the most famous tomb reliefs related to this issue was found on the tomb of a vizier Rekhmire (c. 1450 BC). This shows many foreign slaves “making bricks for the workshop-

¹² See the unpublished references and Internet cites noted by Hoffmeier, *ibid.* at Chapter 4, footnotes 84ff.

¹³ Kitchen at 257.

¹⁴ As with Pithom, “Pi” is the Egyptian for “house” or “domain” hence “Pi-Ramasse” is the house of Ramesses. Ramesses I was not the prolific builder like Ramesses II. Ramesses I only reigned for 16 months and built no cities.

¹⁵ Uphill, Eric, *The Temples of Pi-Ramesses*, (Aris and Phillips 1984).

¹⁶ *OEA*, vol. 3 at 48.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

storeplaces of the Temple of Amun at Karnak in Thebes.”¹⁸ Kitchen calls it a “vivid visual commentary” of the exodus description seeing pictures of “Semites and Nubians fetch and mix mud and water, strike out bricks from molds, leaving them to dry and measuring off their amount.”¹⁹

Kitchen also published a translation of a relevant leather scroll now kept in the Louvre. This scroll dates to “Year 5” of Ramesses II, hence 1275 BC. This scroll set out the Ramesside procedure. There were forty junior officials (the “overseers” referenced in Exodus 5:6) responsible for 2,000 bricks daily made by the men grouped under various foremen. These bricks were closely counted, and the junior officers kept a rod to enforce discipline as necessary.²⁰

These archaeological finds are fully consistent with the Biblical passages that speak of the Israelite slavery to Pharaoh.

- **The birth of Moses** (Ex. 2:1-10). Moses – a dominant, if not *the* dominant person in the Old Testament—got his start under what seems to be unusual circumstances. Pharaoh had ordered the Egyptian midwives to kill all male children. But one woman figured a way to keep her child. She hid him for three months and then,

When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank (Ex. 2:3).

At first blush, this passage seems most unusual. Yet archaeology has uncovered many ancient passages from the Ancient Near East that have a mother putting her newborn into a basket in a river to be found by someone else. Donald Redford has analyzed 32 examples of this “exposed child motif.”²¹ Some scholars try to use various other accounts as the source or inspiration for the Moses story. What those many stories in fact show, is that placing a baby in strategic places by a river bank served much the same function as the medieval practice of leaving a baby at the steps of a monastery or nunnery. This is not surprising in the days when running

¹⁸ Translation by Kitchen, see *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, at 247.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.* at 247f.

²¹ Redford, Donald, “The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child (cf. Ex. ii 1-10),” *Numen* 14 (1967) 209ff.

water was not found in homes, since women made multiple daily treks to certain spots at rivers to get their water. It was a natural place to leave a baby to be found by a woman who cared for a home.

Close examination of the passage reveals more. The passage is written in Hebrew, but uses some peculiar Hebrew words which clearly come from Egyptian counterparts.

“Basket” is a prime example. The Hebrew for basket here is *tebat*, which comes straight from an Egyptian word for basket (*db3t*).²² While the English Standard Version uses “basket” 32 times translating the Hebrew Old Testament, this unusual Hebrew word is found in the Bible only twice—here and as a word for Noah’s ark! It certainly lends credence to the common author of both stories and the Egyptian education of that author!

A second word of note is translated “bulrushes.” Until fairly recently, the Egyptian heritage of this unusual Hebrew word was not readily understood. However, there have been numerous finds of the related Egyptian word in documents that date from the Ramesside period, as noted by Hoffmeier (footnote 20).

A third word of note is “pitch.” Again this Hebrew word (*zapot*) is found only twice in the Bible (here and Isa. 34:9). While Hoffmeier makes an argument for this word being of a common origin as the Egyptian word for resin or a type of oil, I do not find his argument persuasive. So we note it for those interested in further study.

The Hebrew words translated “reeds,” on the other hand, is clearly from an Egyptian word (*twfy*). This is the same word that is used subsequently in the “Red Sea” or “Reed Sea,” depending on translation.

Notice also that the ESV gives the “river” bank as the place the mother put Moses. Yet the Hebrew word translated “river” is not the usual Hebrew for river. It is in fact a Hebrew word that is a transliteration of the Egyptian word for the Nile River.

A final word of note is translated “bank” as in “river bank.” There are five Hebrew words for the lip or bank of a river. This one chosen here is the

²² We should note here that Egyptian transliterates into English symbols in a most bizarre way. The number “3”, apostrophes turned backwards, and other features make a non-Egyptologist wonder if there should not be a better way! The clearest scholastic references for this section are found in Hoffmeier, James, *Israel in Egypt, The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford 1997) at 138ff.

one that clearly relates to a word commonly used by the Egyptians of that time in referring to the bank of the Nile.

The author of this passage in Exodus was clearly writing with a good knowledge of the contemporary usage of certain terms in Egypt during the very time period explored in this lesson for the Exodus. We must also consider one more word, and that is the name, “Moses.”

The key passage notes that while Moses was nursed by his mother, a time came when he was returned to Pharaoh’s daughter, “When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, ‘Because,’ she said, ‘I drew him out of the water.’ (Ex. 2:10). Here there is both agreement and dispute.

No scholar really disagrees that “Moses” in its Egyptian form was a typical name used in the Ramesside period for Egyptian royalty. It is formed into a number of Pharaoh’s names as noted in the italics: *Amenmose*, *Thutmose*, *Ahmose*, *Ptahmose*, *Ramose*, and even *Ramesses*!

The disagreement arises over the way Moses is spelled in the Hebrew. So exactly how the name came into Hebrew is not totally clear, yet the name itself fits Egypt and the time of the exodus.

- **Moses served in Pharaoh’s court** (Ex. 2:10-14). We will refrain from mentioning the idea that this seems to be the first mention in history of a tennis match. (Whoops! Too late!).

This passage is another that Hoffmeier and others use to help date the time of the Exodus. During the “New Kingdom” period (1550-1069 BC), which is the time of Ramesses II, archaeology has produced a substantial amount of evidence that the royal household maintained a nursery that included a number of foreigners as children, at least in the earlier part of the period. But interestingly, it is the *only time period* for which we have evidence of this. Hoffmeier sets out extensive records and documented examples before concluding,

The picture of Moses in Exodus 2 being taken to the court by a princess where he was reared and educated is quite consistent with the emerging information about the *k3p* [“nursery”] in the New Kingdom, *the only period for which there is evidence of foreigners being included in this royal institution.* (Emphasis added).²³

²³ *Ibid.* at 143.

- **Moses and the plagues** (Ex. 7:14-12:30). The ten plagues that God wrought upon Egypt are both a source of wonder and surprise. The plagues are clearly written (and occurred) in a way that made them easy to remember. They are set out in three series of three plagues, followed by the exceptional final plague (number ten). The pattern of the three series is consistent across the board:

	<u>Plague</u>	<u>Forewarning</u>	<u>Time of warning</u>
1 st series	1. Blood	Yes	In the morning
	2. Frogs	Yes	None
	3. Lice	No	None
2 nd series	4. Insects	Yes	In the morning
	5. Pestilence	Yes	None
	6. Boils	No	None
3 rd series	7. Hail	Yes	In the morning
	8. Locust	Yes	None
	9. Darkness	No	None

Before I had studied much in the areas of Egyptology, I was always struck by the seeming absurdity, if not outright stupidity of Pharaoh in his interactions with Moses. Had I been Pharaoh, I reasoned, I might have not relented and released the Israelites from the very first plague (Nile turned to blood), but somewhere by plague 3, 4, or 5, I most certainly would have! I decided that this might be the import of God hardening Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 4:13, 7:3, 9:12, 10:1, etc.). Still, Pharaoh certainly seemed to be hardening his own heart as well! (Ex. 8:15, 9:34).

Studying the plagues from noted Egyptologists, however, changed my view on this somewhat. I believe that these first nine plagues were miraculous works of God, but they were also related to semi-common events in the life cycle of Egypt. It is as if God took some rare, but not unheard of occurrences in Egypt and magnified them to proportions never before seen.

Some have taken this "natural" feature of the first nine plagues and used it as an argument that, (a) they were written exaggerations of normal events, or (b) God's miraculous works involved timing and interpretation of natural

events rather than something truly “miraculous.” I think both are wrong. These events by God were miracles even to Pharaoh as they occurred. Yet once they passed, Pharaoh lapsed into the rationalization that they may have been no more than an unusually bad case of a known occurrence.

Consider the various plagues:

1. Blood. God turns the Nile into blood, along with all the ponds, canals and tributaries that adjoined it. Even the water in jars (taken from the Nile?) was blood. Interestingly Pharaoh’s magicians seemingly duplicated this miracle. History and science has shown that the Nile does on occasion turn blood red. Australian English scholar Greta Hort (1903-1967) is often cited for her 1957 publication entitled “Plagues of Egypt” which set out her scientific theories of natural events that would have made up the plagues.²⁴ She opined that extreme high flooding of the Nile could bring “Roterde” (“red earth particles”) and flagellates (which contribute to form “red tides”). This, she reasoned, would kill fish, breed infections, and would also be duplicable by Pharaoh’s magicians.
2. Frogs. God brought massive amounts of frogs onto the land, another feat duplicated by Pharaoh’s magicians. Pharaoh asked Moses to make them leave, whereupon the frogs on land died in massive numbers. Hort pointed out that this occurred just seven days after the red flood and argued that the frogs brought infection with them, resulting in their death. Certainly the reproduction of frogs was not itself a miraculous plague. The miracle of this plague was the quantity and the following death on demand.
3. “Lice”. I have been to Egypt. They have plenty of insects without a divine plague! Still there was something special about this third plague. The ESV translates the insects as “gnats.” Other scholars consider them to be lice (King James Version) or even mosquitoes (Jerusalem Bible). Pharaoh’s magicians could not repeat this super-abundance of insects, and they were starting to accede that “This is the finger of God.” But not Pharaoh!
4. “Insects”. Here again is a translation issue. There is a “dog fly” or “stable fly” which is what the translators of the Hebrew Old Testament in Greek thought was meant (the “Septuagint”). This vicious blood-sucking fly normally attacks animals for sustenance, but is willing to feast upon humans when the time is right! These flies did not affect the

²⁴ *Zeitschrift für Alt Testamentliche Wissenschaft* 69 (1957) at 84-103 and 70 (1958) 48-59.

Jewish area of Goshen, but covered the remaining parts of Egypt. Pharaoh seemed to relent on this plague, only hardening his heart after the flies left.

5. Pestilence. Some disease set in on the livestock of the Egyptians, missing those of the Israelites. Hort saw this pestilence as a by-product of anthrax, which was part of the frog's malady in plague two. Whatever it was, it did not impress Pharaoh enough to let God's people go. His heart hardened and the plagues continued.
6. Boils. These skin infections Hort considered a result of the fly bites in plague four. Flies carrying anthrax she believed more likely to bite the lower extremities as opposed to wasps that might target the head. Citing Deut. 28:35 ("The LORD will strike you on the knees and on the legs with grievous boils of which you cannot be healed") as an indicator the boils were primarily on the lower part of the body, she considered this a logical effect of what had preceded. This plague notably affected the magicians, but Pharaoh still would not relent.
7. Hail. Here Hort left the "natural events" she thought could flow from an overly flooded and infected Nile. Hailstorms are apparently rare in Egypt, and this hail came down big, hard, and destructively everywhere but Goshen where the Israelites were dwelling. There is a note added in the Exodus narrative that accurately reflects the growing seasons of Egypt, "The flax and the barley were struck down, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud. But the wheat and the emmer were not struck down, for they are late in coming up" (Ex. 9:31-32). This occurrence allows the dating of at least this plague. The time where flax and barley could be ruined but the wheat and emmer (spelt) remain is around February in Egypt. This helped Hort establish a logical time for each plague, showing how they would have occurred in the sequence set out in Exodus: Flooding occurred in July/August; frogs swarmed and died in August/September; insects would swarm in October/November; flies would swarm and bite anywhere from October to the following February; the pestilence plague would set in during January; the boils blister also in January; and the hail in February. February and March is also the time set for the next plague.
8. Locusts. When Moses announced coming locusts, in numbers and with damage that would wreck Egypt's economy, Pharaoh nearly let the Israelites go. Pharaoh was willing to let the men go, but insisted on the women and children staying behind (collateral for their return?). So the plague came. The wariness of Pharaoh shows that he was aware of the

damage that locusts could do. Massive locust attacks are still not understood, but certainly occur in Africa.²⁵

9. Darkness. Hort sets out the darkness as sand storms (“*khamisin*”) so powerful they whipped up dense dark dirt. The timing for these storms, still known in Egypt, does correspond in a chronological order with the earlier eight plagues. These sandstorms would have been in a March/April time frame. Hoffmeier writes of being caught in these in Egypt where car lights were necessary even in the middle of the day.²⁶ This again nearly moved Pharaoh, but he would not grant a full release including cattle. This brought the climatic plague that broke all the rules.
10. Death of the firstborn. The final plague is recounted in Exodus 12. Scripture dates it as “the first month of the year. It is “Passover.” On a western calendar it falls in either March or April, again fitting with the time cycles given by the likely natural occurrence of the other plagues. But there is nothing natural about this plague. It is the one that brings the people out of bondage. It forms the basis of the Lord’s Supper. It is a ritual observant Jews still practice today. From this curse, the people were let go from Pharaoh. Next lesson, we interrupt our archaeological tour to delve into this and other ritual features in more detail.

Before closing, the plague section we note some information about Ramesses II as detailed in Kitchen’s famous work *Pharaoh Triumphant The Life and Times of Ramesses II, King of Egypt*. The Pharaoh before Ramesses II was his father, Pharaoh Sethos I. Sethos I set up Ramesses with wives and a Prince’s life early. In his mid-teens, Ramesses had his firstborn son, Amen-hir-wonmef (also called Amen-hir-khopshef). This son rode with Ramesses into battle, and received tribute by carvings and paintings setting him with his father. After Ramesses II became Pharaoh, his firstborn was still working closely with his father as the senior prince in line for the throne. In time, Prince Amen-hir-wonmef became a “General-in-Chief.” But something happened to the Prince by year 20 of Ramesses II’s reign. The young man was no longer heir apparent and was apparently dead, although Ramesses II did not have any cause of death recorded. Certainly, as Kitchen suggested, the Prince’s death meets the criteria of what Exodus recorded with the death of the firstborn.

²⁵ See the January 7, 2005, National Geographic article by Brian Handwerk reproduced at: http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/01/0107_050107_tv_locust_plague.html

²⁶ Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt*, at 148f.

Ramesses II himself died at age 90, after 66 years of reigning as sole Pharaoh. Testing done on his mummy in Paris in 1976 and 1977 revealed atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and a massive dental abscess that likely could have caused an infection that killed him. His skeleton indicated he walked with a slight limp and leaned forward aggressively in his stride.²⁷ His mummification took 70 days. If you get to Cairo, go see him!

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“Behold the hand of the LORD will fall with a very severe plague.”* (Ex. 9:2).

Over and over the plagues occurred with the writer singling out the “hand of the LORD” or the “outstretched arm of the LORD.” There is a deliberate play on this phrase, evident to one touring the antiquities of the Pharaohs. Many times we see Pharaoh memorialized with an arm outstretched smiting his enemies. He even carried the title of “Lord of the strong arm.” The Egyptians considered Pharaoh, and Pharaoh considered himself, as god on earth. Yet neither he, nor his gods were any match for YHWH Almighty. God’s deeds declared his victory total and complete.

Consider that in light of your own life. How many times have we seen seemingly insurmountable problems and circumstances in our lives. Yet the real strength, the saving outstretched arm belongs to the LORD.

2. *“But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he did not let the people go.”* (Ex. 9:7).

God brought plagues upon Egypt; he intervened in history and sent forth a message that Pharaoh refused to hear. Pharaoh could write it off to circumstances, maybe bad luck. Pharaoh saw his own magicians bring frogs out of the Nile (although how they could differentiate between those brought by God and those by the magicians escapes me!) The problem of people treating deeds of God as natural or random occurrences goes deep. Many of the very events that authenticate the exodus narrative are ignored by people who resolutely resist the idea of the divine—at least of divine intervention. James encouraged the early church, “Do not be deceived, my

²⁷ David, Rosalie, *Conversations with Mummies: New Light on the Lives of Ancient Egyptians*, (Madison Press 2000) at 108ff.

beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above” (James 1:16-17). Do not take your eyes from the Son. See his handiwork—in the heavens, in the world, and in your life. Be grateful for what you see.

3. “*Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ...*” (1 Cor. 11:14).

It fascinates me to read the writings of the various scholars write on the exodus. Some write to show the exodus was a fiction, made up by people removed from the alleged event by almost a thousand years. These skeptics give their arguments, publish their papers, sell their books and move on. Then there are scholars who believe that Scripture records genuine events. These are not third-rate scholars who write sloppy scholarship in an effort to bolster those who believe. They are first-rate scholars who take the arguments of the skeptics head-on. In reviewing the first part of this paper, my D.Phil. student son emailed me,

My only thought when reading these lessons has been: if the evidence and the best arguments are as described, every clear thinker familiar with the evidence should be on Kitchen's side. This makes me suspicious, because you say in the beginning of this lesson that there are a lot of people that don't take Kitchen's side. Presumably these are people with some credibility in the field, so either I have to believe that each of them is not thinking clear or not familiar with all of the evidence presented in these lessons, or I have to believe that there is more evidence and argumentation out there that makes their positions more plausible than set out in these lessons.

He makes a good point. Is it that clear? What are the arguments against Kitchen, Bietak, Hoffmeier, and others? The bizarre part to me is the silence by the skeptics. The believing scholars address the skeptics arguments in scholastic publications but the skeptics stay mute in reply. Perhaps a torrent of future publications is coming, but at this point it is as if the skeptics have made up their minds, and the evidence is not worth defending or debating.²⁸

²⁸ One scholar reviewing this lesson correctly noted in response to this point for home, “Those outside of these scholarly debates would be surprised at the level of elitism and snobbery among biblical scholars, especially those on the left. There is a kind of group think, an established orthodoxy, that reigns powerfully in theological academia. Certain positions are considered firmly established and almost sacrosanct—including the documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch, the mythology of the Exodus, the priority of Mark, the pseudepigraphy of the Pastoral Epistles, etc.--and those who would question these, even with very good evidence, are often dismissed as biased believers using poor scholarship (and there certainly have been many

Which leads me to the final point for home. Do not believe everything you read. Please understand that there are those who write erroneously (even sometimes those you might agree with!) Read with care, seek God's discernment, and take counsel from people deserving of respect. There is great truth in God's word. There is also a movement afoot to deceive. It's been around since Eden.

WANT MORE?

Find as many parallels as you can between the Passover and the Christian faith. Email them to me at wantmore@Biblical-Literacy.com.

fundamentalist scholars whom this criticism would fit). It is, as you note, commonplace for good evangelical commentaries to engage liberal arguments, but for liberal commentaries to ignore the work of conservatives. Many of these "established" positions are based on early arguments that have since been proven false (such as some of the arguments against Mosaic authorship), but the positions are too widely and dearly held, and too many other positions and conclusions (and even careers) are at stake, for scholars to be willing to seriously entertain changing their views..”