

**Marc Roby:** We are resuming our study of biblical theology today by returning to our consideration of evidence that corroborates the Bible. We left off, in Session 11, having considered extra-biblical evidence for the Patriarchs, which basically took us to the end of Genesis. Dr. Spencer, what would you like to cover today?

Dr. Spencer: I want to continue going through biblical history in sequence, so that means examining some of the evidence that corroborates the biblical narrative about the Israelites being enslaved in Egypt and then being led out by Moses in what is known as the Exodus, and then being led into the Promised Land by Joshua after wandering in the desert for 40 years. Let me set the stage by giving some approximate dates. Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt a little after 1900 BC, the exodus occurred about 1446 BC, and so the Israelites came into Canaan about 1406 BC.

**Marc Roby:** Alright, what evidence do we have for this part of biblical history?

Dr. Spencer: We don't have any direct extra-biblical evidence for Moses, or the exodus, or the desert wanderings, or Joshua, but we actually have quite a bit of indirect evidence. And, if you think about it for a few moments there are a lot of reasons why we wouldn't expect to find any direct evidence.

**Marc Roby:** Like the fact that these events happened over 3,000 years ago?

Dr. Spencer: Well that would certainly be one good reason, yes. But, in addition to that you wouldn't expect even an exceptionally large group of people wandering in the desert for 40 years while living in tents to leave behind any trail that would be evident to archaeologists after 3,400 years.

Also, when the Jewish nation was in Egypt they lived in the Nile Delta region, which is an alluvial fan mud plain. There is no stone in the area, so stone structures were built out of stone that was brought in from elsewhere, and that stone was then re-used to make new structures. Buildings made out of mud bricks by the Hebrew slaves, or anyone else for that matter, have quite understandably not survived.<sup>1</sup>

Finally, with regard to any possible Egyptian records, there are almost no records from the Delta region because papyri do not survive in that climate. And, as Kenneth Kitchen explains in his book *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, "as pharaohs never monumentalize defeats on temple walls, no record of the successful exit of a large bunch of foreign slaves (with loss of a full chariot squadron) would ever have been memorialized by any king, in temples in the Delta or anywhere else."<sup>2</sup>

**Marc Roby:** I must admit that I can't imagine a Pharaoh advertising such a defeat. But what kind of indirect evidence do we have?

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<sup>1</sup> See, Kenneth A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003, pg 246 (also, his notes on pages 255-256 about the stone from Pi-Ramesse/Raamses being taken to Tanis)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

Dr. Spencer: We have quite a bit. Let me first present evidence for there being a large number of Asiatic slaves in Egypt from the time of Joseph on down to the exodus, and after that I'll present evidence for there being a large influx of Hebrews into Canaan after 1400 BC.

**Marc Roby: Why do you mention "Asiatic" slaves when we're talking about Jewish slaves?**

Dr. Spencer: Asiatic was a general term used by the Egyptians at that time to refer to a number of different people groups living to the east of Egypt, which includes Canaan, and therefore includes the descendants of the patriarchs.

**Marc Roby: Alright, that makes sense.**

Dr. Spencer: So, turning to the evidence, let me just quickly list three things. First, the Annals of Amenemhot II, from around 1900 BC, list Asiatic slaves and prisoners being brought to Egypt.<sup>3</sup> Second, there is a wall painting at the Beni Hasan Cemetery from around 1870 BC, which shows Asiatic slaves.<sup>4</sup> And, third, there is a papyrus, called the Papyrus Brooklyn, from about 1730 BC, which also lists Asiatic slaves.<sup>5</sup> All of these can be looked up online and are presented either by Kitchen in his book or Stephen Meyer in his video series *Is the Bible Reliable?*

In addition, we know that Asiatic slaves were used in building projects from a famous set of wall paintings in the tomb chapel of Rekhmire, from about 1450 BC. You can look at these paintings online and they show Asiatic slaves making bricks out of mud and water in molds.<sup>6</sup> They also show Egyptian overseers with rods. From other sources we also know that they used a 2-level system of oversight, with Egyptian overseers having native foremen under them, just as described in Exodus Chapter 5. We also know from the Louvre leather scroll from year 5 of Ramesses II, around 1275 BC, that they kept careful track of how many bricks were being made. And, finally, we even have a story of two workers fleeing after being beaten by their overseer, which is on the papyrus Bologna 1094.<sup>7</sup> All of this fits the descriptions from Exodus perfectly. I've listed the detailed references in the written transcript for people who are interested, but all of this is either in Kitchen's book or the video series by Meyer and can be found online as well.

**Marc Roby: I am continually amazed at how much we do know about history from so long ago, and how well it fits the Bible's description. What other evidence do we have?**

Dr. Spencer: One more interesting detail discussed by Kitchens is the Egyptian name given to Joseph. We're told in Genesis 41:45 that "Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid pg 636, Fig. 38

<sup>4</sup> *Is the Bible Reliable? Building the historical case*, Dr. Stephen Meyer, The Truth Project, Focus on the Family

<sup>5</sup> Kitchen op. cit. pg. 346

<sup>6</sup> e.g., see <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/tomb-of-rekhmire.html>

<sup>7</sup> Kitchen op. cit. pg. 248

<sup>8</sup> All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® (1984 version). Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com) The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™.

and Kitchen gives a very interesting set of evidence to show that this name fits a known pattern for naming foreigners in Egypt at that time.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, there is one other type of evidence for the Israelites having come out of Egypt that I find very interesting.

**Marc Roby: What is that?**

Dr. Spencer: It is the Egyptian influence seen in the Israelites after they left Egypt. For example, the tabernacle that God instructed them to set up for worship bears an amazing resemblance to one set up by Ramesses II. His was rectangular, like the tabernacle, and unlike the circular or oval camps of the Assyrians. It was divided into two parts with the outer room twice the length of the inner room, like the tabernacle. And the inner room has figures of divine falcons facing each other and overshadowing the royal name with their wings, much like the cherubim in the holy of holies of the Israelite's tabernacle overshadow the ark of the covenant.<sup>10</sup> Now, of course, God did not have to give plans to Moses that in any way copied anything the Egyptians had, but it does make sense that he would give him plans for something with which he was familiar.

**Marc Roby: That is very interesting. What other influences do we see?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, the ark itself is similar to a box found in Tutankhamun's tomb, complete with the rings on the corners and the poles for carrying it.<sup>11</sup> Also, the Sinaitic covenant that God made with the Israelites through Moses follows the form of a Hittite covenant in use in Egypt at the time of Moses, but is different from all covenants made in other periods, and we have 30 examples on which to base the comparison.<sup>12</sup> Let me quote from Kitchen on this point. He wrote, "The particular and special form of covenant evidenced by Exodus-Leviticus and in Deuteronomy (and mirrored in Josh. 24) could not possibly have been reinvented even in the fourteenth/thirteenth centuries by a runaway rabble of brick-making slaves under some uncouth leader no more educated than themselves. ... In short, to explain what exists in our Hebrew documents we need a Hebrew leader who had had experience of life at the Egyptian court, ... In other words, somebody distressingly like that old 'hero' of biblical tradition, Moses".<sup>13</sup>

**Marc Roby: But, of course, God could have disclosed the specific form of the covenant to anyone, he isn't dependent on the knowledge of human beings.**

Dr. Spencer: That's certainly true. But, God's normal mode of operation, as revealed to us in the Scriptures, is to prepare the leaders of his people by sovereignly arranging their education, their life-experiences, and so on. Think of the apostle Paul as an example – in God's providence, Paul was born a Roman citizen, was a brilliant thinker who was fluent in Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, and was a "Hebrew of Hebrews" who received a first-class education in Judaism. God

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<sup>9</sup> Kitchen op. cit. pp. 345-346

<sup>10</sup> Ibid pg. 278

<sup>11</sup> Ibid pg. 280

<sup>12</sup> Ibid pp. 283-288

<sup>13</sup> Ibid pg. 295

is, of course, fully sovereign over how and when people develop their skills and knowledge, and he is not limited by them, but he most often makes use of them.

The other interesting thing here is that we also see clear differences between the Israelites and the Egyptians, which is what we would expect. Kitchen explains that, while the form of the covenant is the same as used by the Egyptians and would have been known to Moses from his time in Pharaoh's household, the legal content has much more in common with the customs of the Semitic Near East.<sup>14</sup>

**Marc Roby: That is all fascinating, and completely consistent with the biblical record. What else do you have for us to consider?**

Dr. Spencer: Well, before we go on I need to mention something more about the date of the Exodus. The book I've been mentioning by Kitchen, while I find it to be very good and to contain a lot of useful information, does advocate a late date for the Exodus, mid-thirteenth century BC,<sup>15</sup> rather than the more traditional date of 1446 BC that I noted earlier. That is one point where I have to disagree with him and I think there is a good article available online that presents a solid case against his view, the reference is in the written transcript.<sup>16</sup>

I should also note that one of the arguments Kitchen uses in support of the late date is the form of the Hittite covenants, or treaties that we discussed earlier. He pins it down to a very tight timeframe, which others dispute because they don't think he has accurately dealt with all of the biblical data. But, whether he is right or wrong does *not* affect the argument we've made here, because we aren't trying to argue over one or two hundred years. The important point is that the Sinaitic covenant agrees with the form of Hittite covenants used in the general timeframe of the mid-to-late 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC and is not representative of the forms in use much later.

Therefore, the biblical minimalist argument that these documents were written perhaps a thousand years later is simply wrong. Also, the fact that Moses would have been familiar with such documents is important.

**Marc Roby: Is there anything else important for us to note about this dispute about the time of the Exodus?**

Dr. Spencer: Yes. One of the other reasons Kitchen has for preferring the late date is that the Bible refers to the city of Ramesses in Exodus 1:11, but Pharaoh Ramesses II lived from about 1303 to 1213 BC, and the city was named after him. So, that name would be a clear anachronism in Exodus 1:11 if the Exodus occurred in 1446 BC.

**Marc Roby: OK, so how do we explain this anachronism if the traditional date for the Exodus is correct?**

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid pg. 298

<sup>15</sup> Ibid pg. 359

<sup>16</sup> Bryant G. Wood, *The Rise and Fall of the 13th Century Exodus-Conquest Theory*, 2008, from <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/04/17/The-Rise-and-Fall-of-the-13th-Century-Exodus-Conquest-Theory.aspx#>

Dr. Spencer: We explain it very easily. As we discussed in Session 11 with respect to the town of Laish being referred to as Dan in Genesis 14:14, this change was made later because the previous name of the city would not be well known. The interesting thing is that Kitchen uses this exact explanation for the name Ramesses being used for the region of Goshen in Genesis 47:11,<sup>17</sup> but doesn't think that is the case in Exodus 1:11.

**Marc Roby: That explanation sounds perfectly reasonable, is there anything else to be said about the dating?**

Dr. Spencer: I think it is worthwhile to briefly mention that when I brought up the tabernacle used by Ramesses II and the box found in Tutankhamun's tomb earlier, both of those pharaohs lived *after* the date of the Exodus, but the point I was making is still valid because those objects demonstrate things that were known by the Egyptians in this general timeframe. It isn't really necessary that they be from before the time of Moses.

**Marc Roby: Very well. Are we finished with this topic?**

Dr. Spencer: Yes, I think this quick survey has made a reasonable case that there is significant extra-biblical evidence for the Israelites having been in Egypt as slaves, and for their having been influenced by their time in Egypt.

Kitchen also gives descriptions of how the various plagues God sent on Egypt could have occurred. And, even though I don't think there is any need to explain the plagues since God can certainly work miracles, some of what Kitchen discusses may explain how the Egyptian magicians could mimic some of the plagues, which I find interesting.

Also, as a final point, there are some people who think that the Ipuwer Papyrus provides evidence that corroborates some of the plagues,<sup>18</sup> although I think it is unlikely since not only secular historians but others as well date this papyrus from well before the time of the Exodus.<sup>19</sup>

**Marc Roby: Alright, you mentioned that you also want to present evidence for the Israelites entering Canaan after 1400 BC, but I think we will have to postpone that to our next session.**

Dr. Spencer: That's fine. But, I do want to mention one change we are making to the podcasts. If any of our listeners has a question he or she would like to ask, we would be very happy to hear it. Questions can be emailed to [info@whatdoesthewordsay.org](mailto:info@whatdoesthewordsay.org), and we will then select questions we think are of general interest and answer them in a future podcast.

**Marc Roby: Great, well I think that concludes our time for today.**

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid pg. 348

<sup>18</sup> Meyer, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., see <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2006/09/20/Debunking-The-Exodus-Decoded.aspx>