



1: The Setting

“At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child. For three months he was cared for by his family. When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.” Acts 7:20-22

BACK TO JOSEPH

The account of the Israelites’ journey from Egypt to Canaan is a remarkable story. What a grand display of God’s might, patience, and forgiveness. From the plagues that brought to its knees the most powerful nation in the world to the terrifying sights and sounds at Mount Sinai, we are in awe of the majestic power God holds in his hands. Add to that display the merciful patience God demonstrated toward his grumbling and thankless children, and the forgiving love he promised in the sacrificial lamb.

The book of Exodus begins with the statement that *“Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died,”* and *“then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt”* (Ex. 1:6,8). Much happened between the time of Joseph’s days in Egypt and the days leading up to the Exodus. New dynasties ruled the land, and the small clan of Jacob’s family grew so incredibly that the Egyptian authorities were concerned that the descendants of Jacob were becoming too numerous to control. For fear that the children of Israel would rebel at any time, the Pharaoh decided to place them into slavery and forced labor.

Scripture tells us that the time spent in Egypt amounted to 430 years. On a history timeline that would place the exodus at about 1500 BC. Exodus 12:40 states: *“The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years. At the end of 430 years, on that very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.”* Galatians 3:16,17 says: *“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ. This is what I*

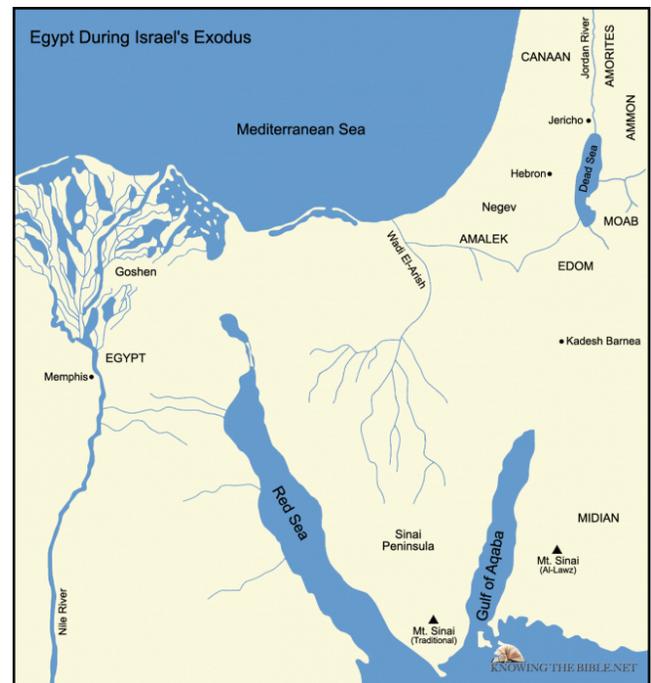
mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.” Genesis 15:13: *“Then the LORD said to Abram, ‘Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for 400 years.”*

Note: Traditional experts believe that the Israelites were in the land of Egypt for the full 430 years. This would easily explain why the Pharaoh had not heard of Joseph. There have however been recent studies that suggest that these dates may be several hundred years too late, and that the actual 430 year clock began ticking with the promise given to Abraham.

Also note, if we consider that the duration of the Old Testament was about 4000 years, it would mean about 2500 years had passed prior to the Exodus account with 1500 years remaining before the birth of Christ.

IN THE LAND OF GOSHEN

(Read Genesis 46-50)



At the close of Genesis 45 Jacob (Israel) moved his family to Egypt where he would find food during the famine and be reunited with his beloved son Joseph. During that trip, God appeared to Jacob in a dream and told him that his children would become a great nation while living in Egypt. God further assured him, *“I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again”* (Gen. 46:4).

This clan migration included Jacob’s entire family of seventy people plus their cattle. As they neared Egypt, Judah was sent ahead to ask Joseph for

directions to Goshen. The Israelites would settle in eastern Goshen which is located in the northern Nile delta area of Egypt. (See Gen. 47:5,6,11,27.) At times this was also called the land of Rameses (Gen. 47:11). It was an area about 75% the size of Rhode Island or about 900 square miles. The land was very fertile for crops and ideal for grazing flocks and herds. Pharaoh gave his permission for the family of Jacob to settle in Goshen and tend their flocks there. He was so impressed with their ability to raise cattle that he placed them in charge of his personal livestock (Gen. 47:6).

The early years in Goshen were difficult because these were still years of famine, yet the Lord was with his people, and they *“increased greatly in number.”*

Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years and died there at age 147. Upon his death he asked Joseph to promise that he would be buried in his own grave at Machpelah in Canaan. (Already buried there were Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah.) Jacob was given a royal funeral including the Egyptian practice of forty days for embalming. All of Egypt mourned Jacob’s death for seventy days. Afterward, Joseph asked Pharaoh for permission to travel back to Canaan to bury his father. Not only did Pharaoh grant permission, but he sent along with Joseph the top Egyptian officials and dignitaries as well as his personal chariots and horsemen. Scripture says, *“it was a very large company”* (Gen. 50:9).

Note: *Joseph lived and died with the hope that one day his people would once again return to their homeland in Canaan. Notice what Scripture says in Genesis 50:25,26 (the final two verses of Genesis): “And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, ‘God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.’ So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.”*

Discuss: **God gave to Abraham and his descendants the land of Canaan. Yet, how many times did the Lord remove them from that Promised Land? Name some similarities between Pharaoh’s decree to drown the Hebrew boys and Herod’s decree to kill the babies at the time of Jesus’ birth.**

THE NUMBERS

In Genesis 12:2 God said to Abraham, *“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.”*

Exodus 1:7 states that *“The Israelites were exceedingly fruitful; they multiplied greatly, increased in numbers and became so numerous that the land was filled with them.”* Jacob’s family arrived in Egypt with seventy people and 430 years later left with a nation nearing two million people. Exodus 12:37 mentions 600,000 men on foot. Including women and children, it comes to an estimated two million people. These were all descendants of Jacob, his twelve sons, and fifty-one grandsons. (See Gen. 46.)

There may have been others who joined the Israelites as they left Egypt. Later, some of these Egyptians became a thorn to God’s people. Exodus 12:38 tells us that, *“Many other people went up with them”,* and Numbers 11:4-6 further explains, *“The [foreign] rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!’”*

Note: *The book of Genesis centers around families or clans. We begin with Adam and proceed to Noah. Next we follow the family of Abraham. With the beginning of the book of Exodus our scope widens from a family history to the history of a great nation.*

Discuss: **With a group as large as two million people, what would be some of the logistical problems the people would encounter in the wilderness?**

JOCHEBED AND AMRAM

Joshua 24:14 leads us to believe that after so many years in slavery many of Jacob’s descendants had fallen prey to the Egyptian way of life including their false religion: *“Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.”* In Ezekiel 20:7,8, the Lord further reminds his people of their past transgressions, *“I said to them, ‘Each of you, get rid of the vile images you have set your eyes on, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me and would not listen to me; they did not get rid of the vile images they had set their eyes on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt.’”* However, that was not true among all the Israelites. In Exodus 2 we meet Jochebed and Amram, a devout Hebrew couple who raised three faithful children who became leaders among their people. Both were from the family of Levi.

(We learn in Exodus 6:20 that Jochebed was actually Amram's aunt.) Amram died at the age of 137.

Moses was the youngest child with Aaron three years older and Miriam about ten years older. Nearing the time of Moses' birth, Pharaoh ordered the midwives to abort all male babies born to Hebrew women. They refused, and gave the excuse that the Hebrew women were of a strong nature and gave birth before the midwives could arrive. Thus Pharaoh decreed that all Hebrew infant boys must be drowned in the Nile River. Although this certainly grieved Moses' parents, we are given a glimpse into the strength of their faith in Hebrews 11:23 where we read that, *"By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict."* These words imply that Moses' parents knew he was a very special child. (Reference Acts 7:20: *"At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child."*) They held to the promise that one day the Lord would liberate Abraham's seed.

They formed a basket to hold the baby boy as he floated among the reeds along the Nile River. Perhaps Moses' parents knew that Pharaoh's daughter bathed there, and perhaps Miriam's offer of using Jochebed to nurse the baby was part of the plan. It may also be likely that while Moses was nursing, the princess was allowed to visit the baby. During those early years Moses grew to love his parents and the Lord.

As a son of the royal princess, Moses received the best education the Egyptians could offer. Acts 7:22 mentions that *"Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action."* Such education included mathematics and science as well as warfare and weaponry. Moses also learned to read and write, which served him well when he penned the first five books of the Bible. Like David in the courts of King Saul and Paul at the feet of Gamaliel, the Lord was training Moses for a great undertaking.

Note: *The Hebrew word used for the basket in which Moses was placed is found in only one other place in the Bible—the ark that carried Noah and his family. The Bible says that Moses was about three months when he was placed in the Nile River. It also relates that Pharaoh's daughter knew immediately he was a Hebrew infant. That recognition could have been because Moses was circumcised or that he was wrapped in Hebrew blankets.*

Discuss: How might one explain the words of Acts 7:22 where it says Moses was powerful in speech when we know he pleaded with the Lord to find a spokesperson

for him in Exodus 4:10? How are the two "arks" similar?

AARON AND MIRIAM

"I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam" (Micah 6:4). Moses' brother and sister were also given roles as leaders of his people. Aaron was married to Elisheba and had four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. At Mount Sinai, Aaron would be appointed to the office of High Priest and his four sons would be appointed as priests.

Prior to the exodus, Aaron became Moses' spokesperson. Later Aaron served faithfully in his office as a type of Christ, offering forgiveness to the people. Yet even he had his moments of weakness, including the golden calf that he fashioned with his own hands (Ex. 32:2-4), and his collusion with Miriam to speak out against Moses (Num. 12). Aaron was not allowed into the Promised Land for the same sin as that of Moses at the waters of Meribah. He died and was buried on top of Mount Hor in the land of Edom at the age of 123 years. His death was mourned for thirty days and his high priesthood was passed on to his son Eleazar.

Note: *Sadly, two of Aaron's sons met untimely deaths. While in the wilderness, Nadab and Abihu offered unauthorized incense to the Lord and were immediately burned to death. Moses told Eleazar and Ithamar to remove the bodies of their brothers and to bury them, however, they were ordered not to mourn their deaths. (See Leviticus 10:1-6.)*

Miriam was the older sister of Moses who guarded him as he floated in the Nile River. We hear nothing of her until Pharaoh's army was destroyed at the Red Sea. Here she is called a prophetess or one who was inspired to teach. With tambourine in hand, ninety year old Miriam led the women in a rousing song of victory over the Egyptians (Ex. 15:20,21). Later we read of Miriam's sin as she and Aaron tried to usurp Moses' power. As the likely instigator, she was stricken with leprosy and forced to leave the camp for seven days. Miriam's death is briefly mentioned in Numbers 20:1.

Discuss: How does that fact that three great leaders (Moses, Aaron, and Miriam) were born into the same family reflect on their parents?

JETHRO (REUEL), ZIPPORAH, GERSHOM, ELIEZER (Read Exodus 2:11-22)

As Moses grew, he became more concerned about the plight of the Hebrews. Certainly it must have caused him great anguish knowing that not only his people, but his very family was being tortured under

the bondage of slavery while he enjoyed luxury in the royal palace. (Ref. Hebrews 11:24: *“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.”*) And so he went to visit his people. While there he witnessed an Egyptian overseer beating a Hebrew slave. Moses’ anger burned and he killed and buried the Egyptian. The very next day his actions were exposed when a fellow Hebrew said he saw the entire incident. Word immediately reached Pharaoh who issued an order to capture and kill Moses. Quickly Moses fled to the Sinai Peninsula and the land of Midian, where he met the family of Jethro, the priest of Midian. (Midian was a son of Abraham and Keturah.)

Note: *There is some confusion regarding the names of Jethro. It is possible that the name Jethro (“his excellence”) may be his honorary title. Reuel (“friend of God”) was likely his proper name.*

While tending Jethro’s flocks, Moses met God in the burning bush atop Mount Horeb, the mountain of God. Here God gave Moses detailed instructions regarding the exodus of his people. God also promised there would come a day when his people would worship him again on that same mountain range. *Moses was very uncertain of the Lord’s plans and repeatedly questioned God’s strategy. First Moses asked, “But who am I to go to Pharaoh,” to which God replied, “I will be with you” (Ex. 3:11,12). Again Moses asked “Who shall I say sent me?” Again the Lord answered, “I AM has sent you” (Ex. 3:13,14). A third time Moses wondered “What shall I do if they do not believe?” And God patiently gave Moses three miracles displaying God’s power (Ex. 4:1-8). (This was the first time in the Bible that the power of doing miracles was bestowed upon a person.) Again Moses argued, “I am not eloquent,” to which God answered, “I will help you speak” (Ex.4:10,11). Finally Moses begs that God should, “send someone else,” to which the Lord angrily conceded to send Aaron as Moses’ spokesperson. Lest we judge Moses too harshly for his reluctance to return to Egypt, let us not forget that Moses left Egypt because he was a targeted man (Ex. 2:15).*

Note: *Horeb and Sinai are sometimes used interchangeably, however it is likely that Horeb was the range of mountains in which Mount Sinai was located. Also, Moses may have complained of his lack of eloquence, but we note that he was a master of eloquence when we read the five books he wrote.*

Moses’ wife, Zipporah, was one of Jethro’s seven daughters. They had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. When Moses returned to Egypt for his meetings with Pharaoh, his wife and sons accompanied him.

However, on that trip Moses became deathly ill. It seems that the Lord was telling him that even against his wife’s wishes, he must have his sons circumcised as a symbol they too were God’s children. Zipporah, upon recognizing the problem, took a sharp stone and circumcised the boy(s?). It is quite possible that Moses’ wife and sons then returned to Midian and weren’t united with him until the Israelites reached Mount Sinai. (See Exodus 18:5,6.) It is interesting to notice the minor part Moses’ wife and sons played in the account of the exodus or the wilderness wanderings. Neither son was named Moses’ successor. There is no further mention of Gershom or Eliezer.

Note: *In regard to the placement of Horeb and Mount Sinai, there is some confusion yet today whether Mount Sinai was actually in the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula between the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba (traditional site) or east of the Gulf of Aqaba in Saudi Arabia. The Arabian area is considered the home of the Midianites which causes many to accept that site, although it can be argued that the Midianites were a nomadic people and were known to also live west of the Gulf of Aqaba. This study will assume the traditional Sinai Peninsula location as the site of Mount Sinai and the Horeb range. Today the monastery of St. Catherine’s lies at the bottom of the traditional Mount Sinai.*



JOSHUA

Included in the list of those who played a major role from Egypt to Canaan we cannot exclude Joshua, a man of the tribe of Ephraim. Joshua served his Lord well throughout his years. Someone once called him a slave, spy, soldier, servant, statesman and saint. Nothing is mentioned of him until war was about to break out at Rephidim against the Amalekites in Exodus 17. We meet him again when Moses asked him to go with him up Mount Sinai in Exodus 24. Joshua is well known for his and Caleb’s faithfulness to the Lord as two of the twelve spies who went into Canaan. Joshua was about 55 years old at that time. Their report back to the people showed a powerful and steadfast faith. *“If the LORD is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them”* (Num. 14:8,9).

Moses commissioned Joshua to succeed him just prior to his death. *“Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses”* (Deut. 34:9). *“That day the LORD exalted Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses”* (Josh. 4:14).

Joshua’s calling was to rid the Promised Land of the evil and pagan inhabitants and divide it up among the tribes of Israel. This project took more than seven years to complete. Joshua faithfully carried out the Lord’s command as Joshua 11:23 explains, *“So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions. Then the land had rest from war.”*

Perhaps Joshua is best remembered for the beautiful words he spoke just before his death, *“As for me and my household, we will serve the LORD”* (Josh. 24:15). Joshua was a true hero of the faith!

Discuss: How was Joshua a type of Christ?

WHICH PHARAOH?

There is considerable confusion when we ask who the Pharaoh was at the time of the exodus. Some sources claim the exodus would have been around the 15th century B.C. That leaves two possibilities for the Egyptian dynasty in power at the time. Thutmose III would have likely been Pharaoh of the oppression and Amenhotep II the Pharaoh of the exodus. Others suggest the 1300s B.C. would lead us to believe that Rameses II was Pharaoh of the oppression and Merneptah was Pharaoh of the exodus. There is some confusion because Egyptian history is difficult to trace.

Several times Scripture mentions the city of Rameses. (Genesis 47:11 as a place where the Israelites settled; Exodus 1:11 as a city the Hebrew slaves built; Exodus 12:37, Numbers 33:3,5 as the city from which the Israelites left following the Passover.) These references could lead one to deduce that the Israelite’s time in Egypt was during the reign of Rameses II “the great”—a 19th dynasty king of Egypt. The problem however is that little evidence has been found to corroborate that timeline. Consequently secular historians argue that the Bible is misleading and the exodus never occurred.

New evidence however may dispute the former dates of the Israelite’s time in Egypt. Some Bible historians now suggest that the city of Rameses

mentioned in Scripture refers to a city that was renamed Rameses years later. Moses used the term Rameses for that city since it was the name most recognized by readers. (*“Rameses”* means *“son of Ra—the sun god”* and was used to honor several Pharaohs.)

Evidence also may prove that a more likely possibility exists that Sesotris III (12th dynasty) was the Pharaoh during the enslavement, Amenemhet III was Pharaoh at the time of Moses’ birth, and Neferhotep I was Pharaoh at the time of the exodus. The argument proceeds as follows (ref. *Answers in Genesis*): Sesotris I had a chief treasurer who wielded much authority and was well respected—possibly Joseph. During the reign of Sesotris III slaves built the city of Rameses and used mud and straw for the building material. Amenemhet III had two daughters but no sons. One daughter, Sobekneferu was childless—possibly Moses’ adoptive mother. Graves of infants plus discovery of homes with wooden boxes containing infants buried underneath the floors have been found dating to that time—possibly the slaughter of Israelite infants. Neferhotep I’s mummy has never been found—was he the Pharaoh who drowned with his charioteers? Neferhotep I’s son never reigned—did he perish in the death of the firstborn? Just a few years later a foreign enemy quietly overtook Egypt called the Hyksos dynasty. Could they have overtaken the Egyptians since their army was depleted and lying at the bottom of the Red Sea?

This is speculation that certainly can be argued by learned people, yet once again it proves that Scripture contains true and perfect history and that historians would do well to begin basing their findings on Scripture to discover the truth.

Discuss: How does the unbelieving world calculate history differently from God’s people? How many pieces were needed to be in just the right place for the exodus to occur? Compare that to God’s preparation for the birth of Jesus. What does that say about God’s guiding our footsteps?

CLOSING VERSE

THE CRADLE OF THE NILE

*Just a baby in a cradle
In the waters on the Nile,
Then a leader moves a nation,
Like an army, rank and file.
This is how God works His wonders,
Without trumpet or display,
And we know not what is rocking
In the cradle of today.
(Alfred Hough)*