

Robert Vannoy, Exodus to Exile, Lecture 2A

Date of the Exodus Conclusions, Oppression of Israelites, Plagues on Egypt

Review

1. Exodus 1-11, The deliverance from Egypt

B. The problem of the date of the Exodus

We were discussing Exodus 1-11, “The deliverance from Egypt,” and we were under B on your lecture outline, “The historical setting” or “The problem of the date of the Exodus.” The eighteenth dynasty date is called the early date for the Exodus, around 1446 B.C.; the nineteenth dynasty date is called a late date for the Exodus, around 1250 B.C. We looked at some of the major arguments that have been advanced initially for the late date. I think by far the strongest argument is the first one. Exodus 1:11 says that the Israelites were placed in forced labor to build these storage cities for the pharaoh. The pharaoh of course is not named, that is part of the problem. But the store cities were Pithom and Rameses. Of course, Rameses was a nineteenth dynasty pharaoh. So we discussed the additional arguments that were less strong, because they were largely arguments from silence or inference.

The second argument was the archaeological surveys of trans-Jordan by Nelson Glueck. He was concerned that there wasn’t sedentary population in the trans-Jordan, that is, in the areas of Moab and Edom, for five centuries prior to 1300. So if you had an early date for the Exodus, there wouldn’t have been any settled population in Moab. Yet you read in Numbers the Moabites came out and forced the Israelites to go around. They had fields and vineyards, that sounds like a sedentary population at the time of the Exodus and the conquest.

The third argument was on the basis of destruction levels in certain Canaanite cities that are mentioned in the book of Joshua as having been taken by Joshua at the time of the conquest. Those destruction levels were in the time of 1250-1200 B.C., which is the end of what is called the Late Bronze Age. Now of course the question then becomes, who was the agent of destruction? Was it the Israelites at the time of the conquest? That’s an assumption—it might have been, but it’s by no means certain. But that’s one of the

arguments for the late date—those destruction levels at the end of the Late Bronze Age.

The fourth argument is an argument from silence. There's no reference in the book of Judges to the Palestinian campaigns of the pharaohs Seti and Rameses. We know Seti and Rameses marched their armies through the land of Canaan. If the conquest had taken place in the 1400s, you'd be in the period of Judges at the time of Seti and Rameses. Why is there a reference to other oppressing peoples but absolutely no reference to the Egyptians?

Then the last thing I mentioned really isn't an argument for the late date, but it sets a terminus for the late date, from what's called the Merneptah inscription where he mentions Israel. Sometimes it's called the Israel stele or the Merneptah stele. It can be dated with his reign to approximately 1220. So here you'd say as far as an end terminus for the late date, you can't push it down below 1220 on the basis of extra-biblical references to Israel in Canaan.

Towards the end of our class session I began the argument for the early date—the eighteenth dynasty date. And again the first argument I think is the strongest, and that's based on the text of 1 Kings 6:1, which is 480 years after the Exodus, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, he began to build the temple. And here you get the time. We can date the fourth year of Solomon's reign to 966/967—add 480 years and you get the early date at 1446 B.C. So then you'd be back to a time of Thutmose and Amenhotep for the pharaoh of the oppression and the pharaoh of the Exodus.

The second argument that we looked at was that Thutmose III was a great builder with a long life span. We know that he put a lot of people to work in his building projects. We also know he had a long life span, which fits with the chronology of Moses' long life. So that's the second argument. It used to be said that there's no evidence of eighteenth dynasty construction up in the delta part of Egypt, but in the 1990s, evidence was found of eighteenth dynasty construction in the delta area. So that evidence counters that argument.

The third argument we looked at, which is not very strong, is the references to the Habiru in the Amarna letters, which are letters between city states and the kings in

Canaan and the Egyptian pharaohs that talked about attacks by these people called the Habiru. Then the question becomes: are the Habiru really Hebrews? A lot of people who tended to sound a lot alike were grouped as Habiru. I mentioned last week K. A. Kitchen's statement that the Hebrews may have been Habiru but not all Habiru are Hebrew. The designation "Habiru" seems to be more identified with a social class rather than an ethnic group. They seemed to have been nomadic kinds of people that wandered around, settled from time to time, and who were mercenary in character. But they were all over the Middle East for a long span of time. There are even Habiru in Egypt after the Hebrews left. So that whole issue is not totally clear, although some have attempted to use it as support for an early date for the conquest by the equating the Habiru with the Hebrew group of people.

4. Early Date Argument 4: Jericho – Kenyon Versus Bryant Wood

There's one additional argument that I want to mention that has sometimes been used, but again, which is not totally clear or unchallenged; and that is an argument from excavations at Jericho, the city that Joshua took immediately after crossing the Jordan River and entering the land at Canaan. There's been a long history of excavation at that site. Initially excavations were done by Germans in the early 1900s—and later in the 1930s by an Englishman named John Garstang. John Garstang concluded that the city was destroyed around 1400 B.C. And if you look at his case for that, you would say that fits an early date—if 1446 is the time of the Exodus, you take off 40 years in the wilderness and you come up to the time of Canaan, about 1400. So after the 1930s there was a fair degree of consensus. Archaeology had connected to the conquest and had corroborated precisely what the Bible says. But then in the 1950s there was another English archaeologist by the name of Kathleen Kenyon. Kathleen Kenyon did a lot of excavations there, and she came to the conclusion that the level of the site that Garstang assigned to the time of the conquest was wrongly done. She concluded that that level was really a destruction of about 2300 B.C., long before any possible time that the Israelites could have been the agents of that destruction. Then she said, after that 2300 B.C.

destruction, the city was rebuilt and was then again destroyed at the end of the Middle Bronze Age. The Middle Bronze Age is 2000-1500. She said it was destroyed again at about 1580, shortly before the end of the Middle Bronze Age. That would have been also prior to the time of the Israelite conquest on the basis of an early date, but she said subsequent to that, the site was really unoccupied. There were no significant levels from 1500 down to 1200. So her work raised a host of questions about the conclusions Garstang had come to. Then the question was raised as to whether archaeology supports an Israelite conquest at almost any time because down to 1200, you would think even then there would have been more significant destruction on the site.

I passed out a sheet that has a photocopy of a short article from Time Magazine, March 5, 1990. The article is a brief summary of an article published in BAR, that is, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, written by Bryant G. Wood entitled, “Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho?” What Bryant Wood did was go back over the reports published by Kathleen Kenyon on her excavations at Jericho. Kathleen Kenyon, by the time Wood wrote his article, was already long gone. She died in 1978. She lived from 1906 to 1978. She was director of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem. She was obviously a respected scholar. She published her findings from the excavations she did at Jericho and drew her conclusions. Bryant Wood went back over her published excavation reports and used those reports to draw different conclusions from the evidence than Kathleen Kenyon had drawn. So if you look at that summary of Bryant Wood’s article from the summary in Time Magazine, you notice in the end of that first paragraph, the writer of this article says, “The late British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon established in the 1950s that while the ancient city was indeed destroyed, it happened around 1550 B.C., some hundred and fifty years before Joshua could have shown up. But archaeologist Bryant Wood, writing in the March/April issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, claims that Kenyon was wrong. Based on a re-evaluation of her research, which was published in detail only recently, Wood says the city’s walls could have come tumbling down at just the right time to match the biblical account.” I don’t think that’s so much the point here. Just looking to see what evidence there is or isn’t. But the next paragraph—“Kenyon’s date of Jericho’s

destruction was based largely on the fact that she failed to find the decorative pottery, imported from Cyprus, that was popular in the region around 1400 B.C.” Now notice, again, that’s negative evidence. She *didn’t* find something, not that she *did* find something—the fact that she didn’t find something—“Its absence, she reasoned, meant the city had long since become uninhabited. But Wood, an ancient pottery expert now at the University of Toronto, argues that Kenyon’s excavations were made in a poorer part of the city, where the expensive imported pottery would have been absent in any case. And he says that other pottery, dug up in Jericho in the 1930s, was common in 1400 B.C.” So you get into a discussion of the evidence and to some extent into this question is the absence of evidence. Just because you don’t find it, does that mean it wasn’t there? There was lots of it that wasn’t found. He gives other reasons for coming to the conclusion that it was destroyed around 1400 B.C. If you look at the third column, second paragraph, it talks about radiocarbon dating, but then at the end of that, “Egyptian amulets found in Jericho graves can be dated around 1400 B.C.” So it sounds like it was indeed inhabited around 1400. Wood is saying, “Looks to me as though the biblical stories are correct.” So that discussion really is ongoing.

I might say we’ll come back to that when we look at the book of Joshua in the early chapters where it speaks about the dating of Jericho. We’ll look at that in a little more detail. But I want to mention that most of the Late Bronze Age materials (1500-1200 B.C.) of the Jericho mound has been removed either by erosion and simply mining of whatever was there by people, as well as archaeological work on the mound. Particularly the early Germans who disturbed the mound and who didn’t have the types of methods we have today to report everything and take pictures of everything; and a lot of that Late Bronze Age mound is gone and will never be recovered. So I think that it will be difficult to draw conclusions on the basis of the destruction of Jericho. But if you agree with John Garstang’s original conclusions and then Bryant G. Wood’s conclusions drawn from the reports from Katherine Kenyon, you come up with the 1400 date for the conquest of Jericho, which fits with the early date of the Exodus.

So those are the arguments for the early and late date for the Exodus. I think you

can see that we could spend a lot of time on each one of them in much more detail. I don't think it warrants time in this course to do that, however. I think you can see from what we've said, this is going to be an on-going discussion, but I don't think there are any conclusive arguments on either side. But the discussion will go on.

5. Vannoy's Analysis of the Date of the Exodus

I want to just mention a couple things that at least in my mind weigh the balance of evidence toward an early date conclusion. I tend to think the time was the eighteenth dynasty rather than the nineteenth dynasty—and a couple comments in that regard. First thing I want to mention is that chronology of the period of the judges is much more difficult to harmonize with the late date than it is with the early date. And the reason for that is: if you take a late date, say 1290 for the Exodus, 966 for the fourth year of Solomon's reign—you only have 324 years to work with—324 years. For a late date, there are 324 years between the time of the Exodus—1290 to 966 B.C. If you take the early date, 1446 to 966, you have 480 years. If you look at the book of Judges and add up all the chronological references in the book—times of oppression and rest cycles, you will get a total of 410 years. And then you have to add to that the time from Eli to Solomon's 4th year—Eli was a judge at the beginning of 1 Samuel—so you have Eli, you have Saul, you have David, and you go onto Solomon. That is another 116 years minimally—you have to add the years of the wilderness wanderings—there's another 40 years. You have to add that time of Joshua after the time of the conquest. So all the book of Joshua, say you add another ten years. What do you get there? You have 576 years. Now obviously the real problem here is those chronological figures in the book of Judges. There must have been overlap between the times of oppression and rest, and there must have been more regional times of situations than national; and that's fine. If you have 576 years, that doesn't fit into 480 years either; even with the early date of the Exodus, you have to have overlaps. You have to compress. My point is that it's much more difficult to compress that 576 down into 324 than it is into 480. So it seems to me

that chronology in the book of Judges more likely points you toward an early date for the Exodus rather than a late date for the Exodus.

Second comment. One of the arguments for the late date that we mentioned was the destruction levels of Canaanite cities at the end of the Late Bronze Age, 1250 to 1200, as being evidence for the Israelite conquest at that time. That argument is increasingly coming into question. How many cities were said to be destroyed—explicitly destroyed—and burned? Just three, that's all—Jericho, Ai and Hazor. It says that in others he conquered and killed the people, it doesn't say he destroyed the city. So people were beginning to talk about a modified conquest of cities in the sense that when Israel came in the conquest, they didn't completely destroy all these cities. They came in and settled down in these cities and lived there, although they did kill the inhabitants. But we shouldn't be looking for destruction levels in all these cities. So then the question is: who were the agents of destruction from 1250 to 1200? All you can do is speculate. If you go back to that 19th dynasty, Merneptah—that's the one who had that inscription about Israel being into the land of Canaan—talks about raids up into the land of Canaan. Maybe some of the cities were destroyed by Merneptah? At about 1200, there was an attack on Egypt by what are called the Sea Peoples, most of whom came from Crete. Those Sea Peoples were repulsed by the Egyptians. In other words, the Egyptians forced them off. So they came up and settled on the southern coast of the land of Canaan in the area of Gaza and the coastal plain. They became the Philistines. Now of course we know the Philistines were the problem with Israel in the time of the Judges. But that was about 1200 B.C. Maybe the Philistines were the agents of destruction when they came in and settled where some of those towns had been. Maybe some of those sites were destroyed by the Israelites in the struggles with the Canaanites during the period of the judges. It's hard to say, but I don't think you can say that the destruction levels of those cities at 1250 to 1200 is necessarily a strong argument for the late date of the Exodus. So that is being increasingly questioned.

If you look at Hazor, for example, one of the sites that is said to have been destroyed by Joshua, there were destruction levels at Hazor at 1400, 1300, and 1230.

Now it's often been argued that this 1230 destruction level is during the time of the Israelite conquest. But that's not the only destruction level at Hazor. You go into these destruction levels and there are no signposts that say this city was destroyed by whomever—it's an open question.

Now one further comment on this, and this is where this really gets complicated. There's a book listed in your bibliography by John Bimson called *Re-dating the Exodus and the Conquest*. John Bimson wrote a book-length treatment of this in which he gets into very technical arguments, but the point of his argument is to change the dating of the archaeological period for the Exodus. I have on the overhead there the traditional way of dating archaeological periods, and how you establish periods is a complex matter in itself. But what he argues is that the Middle Bronze Age, which traditionally ends at 1500, should be pushed down closer to 1400. So he wants the date of the end of the Middle Bronze Age to be lowered by a century approximately. Now there are destruction levels at a number of these sites at the end of the Middle Bronze Age, and if you lower the date of the Middle Bronze Age into the 1400s, then those destruction levels at the end of the Middle Bronze Age will be moved down into the 1400s. In that way even Kathleen Kenyon's 1530 date for the destruction of Jericho is going to be down into the 1400s. That is an ongoing discussion and argument.

6. Conclusion Following Allan MacRae

I think, by way of conclusion, if you look at your citations, page 7, middle of the page, down to the bottom from an essay by the founder of this institution, Allan MacRae, on this question of the date of the Exodus. I'm not going to read those paragraphs but go to his last paragraph on page 8, he says, "The arguments as to an early or late date of the Exodus often seem to be given in the manner of a lawyer determined to prove a particular point, rather than of a researcher seeking for light in order to determine something that is not yet known. Some new discovery may make the matter absolutely final, but up to the present it must be considered a question on which we do not yet have sufficient light." Now he wrote that many years ago. I do not think this situation has changed dramatically

since that time. If anything, I think the evidence is stronger for an early date conclusion today. I think what he is arguing for is proper methodology and mental attitude toward issues of this sort. I think he's right. We should be looking for the information that might help to clarify the picture rather than get on the crusade that if you don't agree with an early date for the Exodus that some people suggest, then you don't really take the Bible seriously, because 1 Kings 6:1 says, "480 years after the Exodus was the fourth year of Solomon's reign," "proving" the early date of 1446. There are people like that. I think MacRae's approach is the proper approach given the evidence.

C. Oppression in Exodus 1:1-2:25

All right, let's go onto C, which is the oppression in Exodus 1:1-2:25, and we'll get into the biblical text. If you look at the oppression in those first two chapters of Exodus, as well as chapter 5, in reference to making bricks with or without straw, I think what you see is that there were several phases of oppressions over a period of time. The reason that the Egyptians felt they should put the Israelites to work was because of their multiplication and numbers.

1. Exodus 1:7-10 Oppression

You read in chapter 1 verse 7, "The Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly numerous, so that the land was filled with them." What that statement tells us confirms what had been going on since the late chapters of Genesis—if you look at Genesis 47:27—when Joseph's brothers and his father eventually followed him to Egypt and settled down, we read, "The Israelites settled in Egypt, in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number." So already in the time of Joseph, it's telling you that the Israelites were increasing. There's a 480-year period between the end of Genesis and the opening of Exodus.

In 1:7 of Exodus it says that they are becoming exceedingly numerous. So the pharaoh says in verse 10, "Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous. And if a war breaks out, they will join our enemies, fight against

us, and leave the country.” I think what’s interesting there is they really don’t want them to leave the country; they want them to stay there. What they want is to exploit them and use them and benefit from their presence, but they want to control them. So they determine to put slave masters over them—verse 11. They put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor. And that’s the first phase, you might say, of the oppression or bondage.

Now some have said this oppression is the first example of anti-Semitism in human history—something that’s been going on from that day until today. It’s remarkable that it seems to be something that is still with us. You might say that, but I think there’s more than that—something deeper with more significance than just anti-Semitism. I think the root of what you find here is an expression of something rooted back in Genesis 3:15, or after the fall of man into sin, God says there will be conflict between the seed of woman and the seed of the serpent—Satan. You have the kingdom of God in opposition to the kingdom of Satan. You have two kingdoms that clash with and are at enmity with each other. Here is a manifestation of that enmity between those two peoples. So the first step of that first phase is to put slave masters over the Israelites to afflict them so that they won’t become too numerous or powerful so that they could become a threat to Egypt’s own security by siding with Egypt’s enemy.

2. Exodus 1:12-14 Hard Labor

But the problem is as soon as they do that, what happens? Verse 12, “The more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread.” The oppression didn’t work, so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. So what did they do? That first stage of the oppression has a second step. They turned to scourge them. They oppressed them more. Verse 14, “They made their lives bitter with hard labor, brick and mortar with all kinds of work in the fields. And through all their hard labor, the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.” They increased the oppression, hoping to control the multiplication of the Israelites. So they make the bondage more severe. So the first phase is hard bondage in two steps.

3. Exodus 1:16-18 Killing Male Children - Midwives

But that doesn't work so there's a second phase of oppression and that is killing the male children. Again you have two steps. First step is in verse 16 where the pharaoh tells the Hebrew midwives, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe the ones on the delivery stools, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." At least there they thought they could control the method of the military threat by killing the males. But again that is frustrated because the Hebrew midwives don't cooperate. We read in the next verse, "The midwives feared God and didn't do what the king of Egypt had told them to do, but let the boys live." So you get a second step there, and instead of just these midwives being instructed to kill the male children of the Hebrews, you read in verse 18 that the King summoned and asked them why.

4. Exodus 1:22 – Male Children into the Nile River

Then in verse 22 Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: every boy that is born, you must throw into the Nile. So in Exodus 1:22 that mandate to kill all the male children is extended to all the Egyptian people to cast every male child into the Nile. It doesn't say explicitly every Hebrew male child, but I think in this context, that is what is in focus. Every Hebrew male child—cast him into the Nile River. So two steps again. Nahum Sarna, who writes the Exodus commentary in the Jewish Publication Society on Exodus, makes this comment, "Faced with an irreconcilable conflict between obedience to the sovereign's depraved law and allegiance to the higher moral law of God, the midwives chose in favor of the transcendent imperative of morality. Their noncompliance with the law, however, was not publicly announced but privately effected on obvious prudential grounds." This tyranny constitutes "history's first reported act of civil disobedience in defense of a moral imperative." That's an interesting statement—"civil disobedience in defense of a moral imperative." Pharaoh tells the midwives: kill all the male children, and it says they feared God. They did not do what the king of Egypt told them to do; they let the boys live. He goes on to say it is stated that they were actuated by fear of God and praise frequently associated with norms of moral and ethical behavior—fear of God

connotes a conception of God as one who makes moral demands of humankind. It functions as the ultimate restraint on evil and thus supreme stimulus for good. Fear of God—stimulus for good—the ultimate restraint on behavior. You do away with God, and there is no restraint.

5. Reversal - Moses

But you notice what happens here: all these efforts are frustrated so that after that command to all Egyptians—throw any male child into the Nile River—what happens? Moses is born and he's put in that basket, and his life is preserved, and he grows up in the house of the pharaoh and ultimately becomes the savior who delivers Israel out of Egyptian bondage. So the text highlights the futility of these efforts of the Egyptians to control the Israelites among them.

6. Second Phase of Oppression after Moses Returns – Bricks without Straw

I mention here chapter 5 as another chapter that is part of the oppression. Exodus chapter 5 is after Moses comes back and asks pharaoh for permission to go into the wilderness and worship the Lord. The Pharaoh doesn't grant that permission, but what does he do? We read in verse 6 of chapter 5, "The same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: 'You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks. Instead make them gather their own straw, but require them to make the same number of bricks as before.'" So apparently straw was used in some way for making the bricks, and it was supplied; but now because of his request, Pharaoh intensifies the oppression by not providing the straw, telling them they have to find their own straw. You go down to verse 12, where we read. "The people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. The slave drivers kept pressing them, saying, 'Complete the work required of you for each day just as when you had straw;' and the foremen appointed by Pharaoh's slave drivers beat them, saying, 'Why didn't you meet your quota just as the day before?'" Verse 18, "You will not be given any straw; you must produce your full quota of bricks." The end of this chapter tells

about the way the oppression was intensified by withholding straw—the Israelites being forced to get their own straw and sometimes having to use stubble instead of straw. This raises the question of what the function of the straw was in making bricks. Look at the bottom of page 8 over to page 11 in the bottom of your citations. This is taken from “The Relation of Archaeology to the Bible” by Allan MacRae where he discusses this and what he points out is that it used to be thought that straw was used as a binding agent. In other words, if you’ve got a long piece of straw going through the brick, it kind of holds the clay together as a binding agent. But the problem with that was how then did the stubble function? What’s the point if you can’t get long strands of straw? What’s the point of putting stubble into brick? He cites some scientific experiments that indicate that the placing of the organic matter in certain kinds of clay makes the clay more workable, more plasticity, by means of some chemical reaction. What MacRae suggests is that the Egyptians had discovered something that they might not have understood all the chemistry of, but if you mix the organic matter with the clay, it made it easier to mold the bricks out of clay than if you didn’t have organic matter. It’s just an interesting side feature to that third intensification of the oppression on Israel.

7. Motyer on the Oppression

So that’s all under the oppression, Exodus 1:1-2:25 and chapter 5. Look at your citations page 11, bottom of the page. J. Motyer, who published lectures called *Old Testament Covenant Theology*, makes this statement about this oppression. He says, “Even more significant than the actual occurrence of the word 'covenant' is the situation in which the book of Exodus is set. I have already mentioned the genocidal impulses of Pharaoh. This is the content of chapter 1: the king of the world, Pharaoh, had determined on the utter destruction of this people.” Now I don’t think Pharaoh was determined on utter destruction. I think he wanted to control them. But I don’t think that really affects his point very much. He says, “Little did he know that he was in this way challenging the promise that God had made to Abraham, in other words the most fundamental reality about the people of Israel. For at the beginning of God's dealings with Abram, as he then

was in chapter 12, there was the promise of the preservation of Abram and his descendents. God said ‘I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse.’ Pharaoh, therefore, all unwitting was setting himself up to challenge the covenant. When his covenant was challenged God rose to defend it.” He was oppressing the very people that God said, “Whoever blesses you, I will bless; whoever curses you, I will curse.” “Therefore both its vocabulary and also its own chosen setting proclaim to us that the book of Exodus is the continuation of the covenant narrative.” In other words, that promise that God had given to Abraham that God would raise up a seed through Abraham, that a nation would come out of Abraham, and that He would put his blessing on that nation that is continuing on. That is still something that is very actual in all this interaction between the Egyptians and the Israelites in the early chapters of Exodus.

D. The Deliverer – Moses – Exodus 3:1-7:13

Let’s go on to D, “The deliverer – Exodus 3:1 to 7:13.” Of course, the deliverer is Moses who is born right after that final phase of the killing of the male generation at the end of chapter 1. Chapter 2, Moses is born and becomes the leader who delivers Israel out of Egypt. Moses is certainly one of the greatest personalities of the entire Bible; when we think of the great characters of the Bible we think of Moses, Abraham, David, and Christ in the New Testament. But he’s one of the great personalities of all human history. I don’t think there’s any question about that. His historicity—that is, his real existence as a historical person in the historical context in which these narratives are set—I would say today is generally accepted but not completely. There are still Bible critics around who question whether or not Moses was a real historical figure or some sort of legendary or mythical creation from ancient fairytales. John Van Seters, who is a very active Old Testament scholar, has written a number of books. His article in the *Encyclopedia of Religion* on Moses, published in 1987, says, “The quest for the historical Moses is a futile exercise. He now belongs only to legend.” In other words, there’s an example of somebody who doesn’t think Moses ever lived. The German scholars Martin Noth and Gerhard von Rad both wrote world histories of Israel and ascribe a relatively minor role

to Moses. They feel Israel didn't have a people in a mass exodus that came up into the land of Canaan. So you have these kinds of negative critics around.

But if you look at your citations on page 12, the second entry there is from the third edition of John Bright's *The History of Israel*. John Bright was a student of W. F. Albright who wrote a standard text on the history of Israel. Notice what he says, "Though we know nothing of his career, save what the Bible tells us"—in other words, there are no extra-Biblical references to Moses. That's one of the reasons his existence is questioned—"the details of which we have no means of testing, there can be no doubt that he was, as the Bible portrays him, the great founder of Israel's faith. Attempts to reduce him are extremely unconvincing. The events of Exodus and Sinai require a great personality behind them. And a faith as unique as Israel's demands a founder as surely as does Christianity—or Islam, for that matter. To deny that role to Moses would force us to posit another person of the same name!" Actually we do know quite a bit about the life of Moses—admittedly based entirely on the biblical records. But why should the biblical record be disqualified as a source of information about the lives of the individuals of Israel during the time of Moses? We'll come across quite a bit of material when we progress about Moses.

I think as far as his significance or importance, Vos puts it pretty well, again on page 12 of your citations, where he looks at Moses both retrospectively and prospectively. He says, "For one thing he was, retrospectively considered, instrumental in bringing the great patriarchal promises to an incipient fulfillment, at least in their external, provisional embodiment. Israel became in truth a great nation, and this was due not exclusively to their rapid increase; the organization received through Moses enabled them to attain national coherence. Moses likewise led them to the border of the promised land." That is Jericho in the land of Canaan. Moses came right to the verge of the entrance into the promised land, looked across and saw it, but didn't actually enter. So retrospectively Moses brings the patriarchal promises to incipient fulfillment. Moses occupies a dominant place in the religious development of the Old Testament.

He's also placed not merely at the head of the succession of the prophets but over

them in advance. There was no prophet like Moses. He was not just a prophet, but the greatest of all the prophets. His authority extends over subsequent ages. The later prophets did not create anything new, although they did predict some things. The later prophets call Israel back to the foundation Moses laid. Now they do talk about the things God will do in the future, beyond their own time. But fundamentally they call Israel back to its Mosaic foundation. Vos goes on to say, “It is true, Moses can be coordinated with the prophets. Nevertheless the prophets themselves are clearly conscious of the unique position of Moses. They put his work not so much on a line with their own, as with the stupendous eschatological work of Jehovah for his people expected in the latter days. According to Numbers 12:7, Moses was set over all God's house. It is entirely in keeping with this prospective import of Moses and his work, that his figure acquires typical proportions to an unusual degree. He may be fitly called the redeemer of the Old Testament.” And of course in that sense, he is looking forward to Christ. “Nearly all the terms in use for the redemption of the New Testament can be traced back to his time.” We’re not going to work that out with his birth, but his redemption was certainly a very significant event with what’s going on in the Exodus in the land of Egypt. So those are some comments about Moses.

E. The Plagues, Exodus 7:14-11:10

Let’s go onto E, “The plagues, Exodus 7:14-11:10.” I might mention—the plagues are also described in poetic narratives in Psalm 78:43-51 and Psalm 105:27-36. They are historical Psalms that go back in poetic form, recording events of Israel’s history. Of course, the Exodus was the significant event that led to Israel’s formation. It’s been common to refer to these series of miraculous occurrences that led to Pharaoh’s release of the Israelites from bondage as “plagues;” that is a term that’s used in the biblical text. If you look at 9:14, you read, “For this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people.” The full force of my plagues—that’s a word that comes from *nagah*. But more often these “plagues” are referred to in the biblical text as either signs or wonders. Signs are *’ot*, and wonder is *mophet*. The NIV

interestingly translates that “wonder” sometimes as “miracle.” But “signs and wonders” are used more often than “plagues” to designate this series of divine interventions that led to the Exodus from Egypt. And I think that language—signs and wonders—is helpful because it gives us more insight into the significance and intent of these events. When you ask what was God doing and what was his intent in bringing these series of events on the Egyptians and the Israelites, I think you have to start with looking at Moses’ request to Pharaoh, “Let the Israelites go into the wilderness and worship.” In chapter 5, the first few verses, you read, “Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, and this is what Yahweh”—The NIV says the LORD or Yahweh—the proper name of Israel’s deity, perhaps we don’t know how it is pronounced— “This is what Yahweh, the God of Israel, says, ‘Let my people go so that they may go and worship in the desert.’” What’s Pharaoh’s response? “Who is Yahweh that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know Yahweh! And I will not let Israel go!”

If you go to chapter 7:3, there the Lord says, “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt with mighty acts of judgment. I will bring out my division, my people the Israelites, and the Egyptians will know that I am Yahweh when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.” In other words, why this series of signs and wonders? Pharaoh had said, “I don’t know Yahweh. Why should I let you go and worship Yahweh?” These signs and wonders are done so that Pharaoh will know who Yahweh is—that he exists and that he’s powerful. That becomes a theme that really runs through here. The plagues are Yahweh’s answer to Pharaoh’s question in 5:2—who’s Yahweh? I don’t know Yahweh.

We looked at 7:5, now look at 7:16 and 17, “Then say to him, Pharaoh, ‘Yahweh the God of the Hebrews has sent me to say to you, “Let my people go so they may worship me in the desert but until now you have not listened.” This is what Yahweh says, “By this you will know that I am Yahweh.”’” Who is Yahweh? I don’t know Yahweh. Look at 9:13 and following. “The Lord said to Moses, ‘Get up early in the morning to confront Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews says,

“Let my people go so that they may worship me. At this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you, against your people, against your officials.”” Why? ““So that you may know that there is no one like me in the whole earth.”” Chapter 9 verse 16, “For by now I could have stretched my hand and struck you and your people with plague that would have wiped you off the earth.” He could have done that instantaneously. He doesn’t. “But I have raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” Yahweh is going to demonstrate who he is, and that he is powerful. So that Pharaoh can do nothing else but recognize that he exists and that he is powerful. Look at verse 27 of chapter 9, “Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. ‘This time I have sinned,’ he said, ‘Yahweh is in the right; I and my people are in the wrong. Pray to Yahweh for we have had enough and I will let you go.’” Moses replied, ‘When I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to Yahweh. The thunder will stop and there will be no more hail, that you may know that the earth is Yahweh’s. But I know that you and your officials still will not fear the Lord God, Yahweh.’” So the plagues are a demonstration to Pharaoh of the existence and power of Yahweh because in that first encounter with Moses, Pharaoh said he didn’t know who Yahweh is.

But it wasn’t just a demonstration to the Egyptians, it’s also a demonstration to the Israelites. Look at chapter 10, the first few verses, “The Lord said to Moses, ‘I have hardened his heart and the heart of his officials so that I might perform these miraculous signs and wonders among them and that you might tell your children and your grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them and that you may know that I am Yahweh.’” So it’s not just the Egyptians who are to learn from this, but it’s the Israelites as well. So they can experience God’s existence, power, and pass that on down to the future generations, “that you may know that I am Yahweh.”

Look at Deuteronomy 4:34 when Moses is later commenting about this. He says, “Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by tests, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by

great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?” Look at verse 35. What a striking statement! “You were shown these things,” why?, “so that you might know that Yahweh is God.” Besides him there is no other. “You were shown these things so that you might know that Yahweh is God.” And then that added statement, which is striking at this point in Old Testament revelation that is clear and simple, as strong a statement as you’ll find anywhere, “There is no other God.” There is only one God.

Now, the Israelites needed this. If you go back to Exodus 5, a question was put to Pharaoh at the beginning of chapter 5, Pharaoh said I don’t know Yahweh, and then there was that oppression with bricks without straw. And the Israelites don’t like it so if you go down to the end of the chapter, you see in verse 21, these foremen of the labor forces come to Moses and Aaron and say, “May the Lord look upon you and judge you. You’ve made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and put a sword in their hand to kill us.” Moses turned to the Lord and prayed, “Why have you brought trouble against your people and not rescued your people?” And over in 6:9, “Moses reported this to the Israelites; they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and bondage.” The Israelites were discouraged, and the Lord was going to demonstrate to them his existence.

We speak of these signs and wonders, and *‘ot*, is the word in Hebrew for sign. *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (TWOT) says, “a sign is an action, event, by which a person recognizes, learns, remembers, or perceives the authenticity of something.” That is what’s going on here. Both Pharaoh and Israel are learning about the authenticity of Yahweh through what’s going on in the signs and wonders

1. Ten Plagues

There are ten plagues. They are arranged in three sets of three with the climax in the tenth plague, which is the death of the first-born. So the first nine plagues are arranged in three groups of three plagues each with the climax in the death of the first-born. The first plague in each group—numbers 1, 4, and 7—is introduced by a warning being given to Pharaoh early in the morning when he went to the Nile River. And you see

that in 7:15 where it says, “Go to the Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out for a walk. Wait on the bank of the Nile to meet him.” Exodus 8:20 says, “Then the Lord said to Moses, get up early in the morning to confront Pharaoh as he goes to the water and say to him.” And 9:13, “The Lord said to Moses, get up early in the morning and say to Pharaoh, this is what the Lord says.” So you get the same for the first plague for each of those sets of three.

The second plague in each group—2, 5, and 8—is also introduced by a warning but delivered to the Pharaoh presumably at his palace rather than out by the Nile. You find that in 8:1, 9:1 and 10:1, “The Lord said to Moses.” 9:1, “The Lord said to Moses” and 10:1, “The Lord said to Moses, go to Pharaoh for I have hardened his heart.”

The last plague in each series—3, 6, and 9—seems to have commenced without any warning. In 8:16, you read, “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Tell Aaron, “Strike the dust of the ground throughout all the land of Egypt, and all the dust of the land will become gnats.”’” See, no introduction, he just does it. 9:8—“The Lord said to Moses, take handfuls of soot from a furnace, toss it into the air it will become dust over the land of Egypt. Festering boils will break out.” So he just does it. And 10:21, “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand toward the sky so the darkness will spread over Egypt—darkness that can be felt. So Moses stretched out his hand and total darkness covered all Egypt.” So there seems to be a structure and a pattern when we look at the ways these conflicts are arranged.

The first plague in each set has a purpose attached to it, and that’s something we’ve already looked at. In 7:17, the purpose is, “By this you will know that I am Yahweh.” 8:22, “On that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen where my people live, where no swarms of flies will be on them. And you will know that I am Lord,”—again a purpose clause. And 9:14, “I will send the full force of my plagues against you and your people so that you may know that there is no one like me in the whole earth.” The first three plagues—the water turned to blood, the frogs and lice—convinced the magicians and the sorcerers of Egypt that there’s more than magic involved in what is going on. God was at work.

In 7:11, where all this starts, after the Lord had told Moses and Aaron in verse 8, “Throw your staff before the Pharaoh and it will become a snake,” they do that in verse 10, and you read in verse 11, “Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers of Egypt who did the same thing by their secret arts each one threw down his staff, which became a snake.” So they kind of duplicated in some way what Moses and Aaron had done. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. “Yet Pharaoh’s heart became hard and he would not listen.” In 7:22, with the water turned into blood, you read that the Egyptian magicians did the same thing. So Pharaoh’s heart became hard. In 8:7, with the frogs, “The magicians did the same thing with their secret arts. They made frogs come out from the land of Egypt.” But when you get to 8:18, with the gnats, you read when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts but they couldn’t. The gnats were on man and animals. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “‘This is the finger of God.’ But Pharaoh’s heart was hard.” So after those first three, the Egyptian magicians are convinced there’s something far more powerful at work than mere trickery.

2. Discrimination Between Egyptians and Israelites in the Plagues

One more comment and we will take our break, with the next six plagues after these first three, with the possible exception of the locusts, you find a discrimination in the effects of the plague between the Egyptians and the Israelites living in Goshen. The Israelites are spared the effects of the plague while the Egyptians are not. I think the purpose here is to make very clear that Yahweh is working on the behalf of his people. In 8:21-23 with the flies you read, “If you do not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you, your officials and your people and into your houses... I will deal differently with land of Goshen, where my people are. No swarms of flies will be there.” Why? Again, “So that you will know that I am Yahweh,” I will make a distinction between my people and your people. So starting with the flies, you get that distinction and you find that in 8:21-23, with the cattle in 9:4, 6, and 7. Exodus 9:4, “The Lord made a distinction between the livestock.” You have with the boils in 9:11, the magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and all the Egyptians. You have it

with the hail in 9:26, “The only place that did not hail was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were.” As I mentioned, nothing is said about the locusts one way or the other. But with the darkness in 10:23, you read, “No one could see anyone else yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.” So certainly there was a discrimination between the Egyptians and the Israelites and perhaps with the locusts as well.

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