

# **Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 12, Archaeology of the Exodus and Wilderness**

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This is Dr. Jeffrey Houdon in his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 12, Archaeology of the Exodus and Wilderness.

One of the defining moments in biblical history is the Exodus from Egypt of the Hebrew people.

And this has been a topic that has been studied and researched since the birth of modern scholarship. And we're going to review a little bit about Egypt, and then look at some of the evidence that has been brought forth for the Exodus. And again, Egypt is divided into Upper Egypt, which is Southern Egypt and Lower Egypt.

Now there are two major schools of thought as far as when the Exodus took place. We're going to unpack that in a little while. But it's important to point out that if the Exodus took place in the 18th, during the 18th dynasty, the earlier, we would say the early date, the capital of Egypt was at Thebes, modern Luxor, down here in the south or Upper Egypt.

If it took place during the 19th dynasty, during the reign of Ramses II, particularly, the capital of Egypt was up here at Memphis, close to the Delta. So that's the two capitals that we deal with. But as we remember before, Egyptians called themselves a black land, which again bordered the Nile River.

And the areas to the west and east were desert, and that was called the red land. And here's another picture of it here of the Egyptian Empire. That's during the 18th dynasty at the height of their power.

The beautiful painting here, of course, of Moses being rescued by Pharaoh's daughter. And again, you see the motif of Moses in a tar covered basket. And again, you see the imagery of the Ark and salvation through this young Egyptian princess.

Now, some have argued that perhaps if the Exodus is an early date Exodus, and perhaps if Moses III was a Pharaoh, this Pharaoh's daughter may have a name, and that name possibly could have been Hatshepsut, who actually ruled as Pharaoh for a time. Chronologically, some scholars recognize that there is a possibility, especially if Moses was born around 1526, that she could have been Pharaoh's daughter and been the one who rescued Moses and ultimately served as a stepmother. That is an

interesting hypothesis. It is interesting to conjecture surrounding this because she has a beautiful mortuary temple that is a very popular tourist attraction in Egypt.

I was there last month. You can see her images being defaced or her defaced images after her reign. She was discredited. And so why was that? Well, possibly because of her relationship with Moses.

It's an attractive theory, but as far as I know, unprovable as yet. Interesting thing I want to show here is some high tech, recent high tech work done on mummies. And this is a mummy of a young woman that was born much later, turn of the era.

Her facial reconstruction was done by the University of Melbourne. And you see here, you look into the eyes and face of an ancient Egyptian. However, caveat here, this again is the turn of the era, so much later, and probably some, some Greek blood, foreign blood in her, and hence the lighter skin, but a very pretty young woman that, again, gives us an idea of what ancient Egyptians look like.

Okay, as I mentioned before, there are two main questions about the Exodus that archaeology has attempted to answer. The two questions are if and when. First of all, did the Exodus take place? Many critical scholars naturally say no.

They will argue that perhaps small groups of slaves may have escaped and run away from Egypt, but nothing on the large scale as recorded in the Bible. On the other side, conservative Bible scholars and many Egyptologists surprisingly say yes. And there is no, on the onset, I have to say that there are no smoking guns that actually, you know, actually prove or give powerful evidence for the Exodus.

But there are a lot of circumstantial evidences that support the biblical account, even though the Egyptian records are silent. And for good reason, Egyptian pharaohs and officials would never, ever admit publicly such a humiliating and devastating event. So, it's understandable that you won't find Egyptian records that, that record this, this event.

However, perhaps circumstantial evidence can fill in the gaps. The second question is when. Most scholars support one or two dates for the Exodus, the early date being during the 18th dynasty.

That's when Egyptian power was at its height, particularly the reign of Thutmose III. Again, on the basis of 1 Kings, that Exodus would have taken place around 1445 BC. The other date is a late date.

And that would have taken place in the 19th dynasty, another powerful Egyptian dynasty under Pharaoh Ramses II. And that would have taken place around 1290 BC. There are arguments for and against each.

There's a, another even later date that has been proposed fairly recently. But those are the two main camps. A couple of books that I do recommend to study for further study about, about this.

This is an edited work by Hoffmeier, Millard and Gary Rendsburg. Rendsburg again, argues for a much later date that I don't think has a whole lot of support, but he argues for that. But this is a series of articles or chapters by different scholars dealing with this issue.

Alan Millard, one of the editors and an excellent scholar from England, is the author of this book. I also highly recommend *Israel in Egypt* by James Hoffmeier.

And there are two editions. In the first edition, he's more open to an early date. In the second edition, he's much more strongly connected with a late date.

But he gives a lot of this circumstantial evidence showing against support from the ancient documents, ancient sources, ancient data that argue for, you know, the historicity of the Exodus. Excellent work. How do we know the Exodus actually took place? Well, if you look in Judaism and understand Judaism, the Exodus is really the central historical event of the Jewish people.

And when you celebrate Pesach or Passover with a Jewish family, it is celebrated, honored, remembered, and recalled again and again. In fact, they tell their children in a very ceremonial type of way: remember, remember, remember. And when you have such a, this such deeply embedded recollection and memory and respect for this event, scholars have to argue that there's some kernel of truth here.

When they have a religious festival and everything surrounding this, this very ancient event, something had to have happened. Secondly, the second bullet point here is that it's very difficult to imagine that a nation, a people, would invent such a tale where their origins are embedded in slavery. If you look at ancient Near Eastern culture and ancient Near Eastern historiography, as it existed back then, all of their ancestors and sisters were great warriors, nobles, kings, and royalty.

Nobody would ever invent a story of slavery as the origin of their people. So that gives powerful evidence. The biblical account itself provides many hints of an Egyptian sojourn of Egyptian origin for the Israelite people.

Names such as Moses, Hophni, and Phinehas are clearly Egyptian, and place names in Exodus, such as Piton and Ramses, were known cities in Egypt. So there is some connection there, and we mentioned some of that before.

The 10 plagues, most of the 10 plagues, and we'll unpack this later, against Pharaoh were actually polemics against the Egyptian pantheon of gods. And these demonstrated one after another their impotence before Yahweh. And again, we'll unpack that in just a minute.

As we said before, the silence of Egyptian texts is completely understandable, as no kingdom or world empire such as Egypt would record such an embarrassing and devastating event. We already saw Akhenaten, the heretic monotheist pharaoh. Again, this is an 18th-dynasty pharaoh.

He worshipped Aten, the sun god, and built an entirely new capital, abandoning the capital at Karnak or Luxor. Scholars, of course, have questioned whether his new religion was actually an adaptation of some aspects of the Hebrew monotheistic religion. The coincidence is striking because of the chronology, if it was an early date Exodus. Okay, as you remember, there were 10 plagues against the Egyptians.

The first one was water to blood. There is, again, a god of the Nile. And these are, again, challenged; because of this, the lifeblood, so to speak, of Egypt becomes blood itself.

There is, again, some Egyptian connections there with the Egyptian accounts as well. Swarms of frogs, again, an Egyptian deity, swarms of flies, cattle, and so on. A lot of these are, again, Egyptian gods or deities that are humiliated because of their impotence against Yahweh, or the god of Moses.

The death of the firstborn, of course, the 10th plague. Pharaoh himself is mocked, because Pharaoh, again, is a deity, but yet his own son dies. So, these are all done, or a lot of them are done, as polemics.

Now, Nahum Sarna was a Hebrew scholar, and wrote an excellent book called *Exploring Exodus*. He also gives natural explanations for some of these plagues, and whether or not you can accept those or choose to accept those. There are some interesting coincidences here.

For instance, the water to blood, he argues that heavy rainfall in Ethiopia caused flooding. And so, the reddish soil that far south was mixed in with the waters of the Nile and gave it a reddish hue. And then, of course, he goes down and gives arguments for how these phenomena could have happened naturally.

Except for the last ones, that was clearly a supernatural event. Okay, we're going to look at the two dates for the Exodus, the two main schools of thought, and evidence for an early date, again, around 1445 BC. The first point is that it fits much better with biblical chronology.

In a 430-year sojourn in Egypt. And so that, again, agrees with chronological dates in the early days of the Exodus. And so, it fits well in the book of Judges and, of course, in 1 Kings.

Moses himself had an 18th dynastic name. Again, Ahmose, Thutmose, and so on. You can see the connection there.

A logical choice for a boy raised in the court of a pharaoh, such as Ahmose or Thutmose. But highly unlikely during the 19th dynasty. Not impossible, but highly unlikely.

Thutmose III, the leading candidate for an early-date pharaoh of the Exodus, was not succeeded by his oldest son. Why? There could have been a lot of reasons, but one of those could have been that he died in the 10th plague. Uncertainty in Egyptian chronology allows for either Thutmose or Amenhotep II to be the pharaoh of the Exodus.

Both Thutmose III and Amenhotep II launched multiple military campaigns into Canaan and farther north. Thutmose was the most powerful Egyptian pharaoh in history. During his reign, the Egyptian empire enjoyed its greatest extent of rule.

And this is, it is tempting to connect him with the Exodus because you've got this most powerful human agent, powerful human ruler, humbled and broken and deemed impotent before the God of his slaves. You see, you can see the irony there. On one of my earlier trips to Egypt, I actually got to visit the tomb of Thutmose III.

Now, the tombs of the new kingdom were in a place called the Valley of the Kings on the western side of the Nile. And it was a labyrinth of rooms. And, of course, it had been robbed in antiquity.

Everything was bare. There were still beautiful paintings and murals on the walls. But it was just a huge underground rock cut complex.

Then we went to King Tutankhamen's tomb, the famous Tutankhamun, where his tomb was found intact. It was two chambers, a tiny little thing. And of course, you have all the buzz and the media around King Tut's tomb because the treasures were there.

You can only imagine. And as we were visiting Tutankhamun's tomb, what was here when he was buried? It must have been incredible, incredible wealth, incredible relics, Egyptian relics, and objects that were packed in that tomb, all gone, unfortunately. But when you compare the two, both the same dynasty, by the way, very, very vastly different.

Here's a breakdown of the pharaohs of the 18th dynasty. And Hatshepsut, you see, served as regent and then by herself. And you can see Thutmose's dates there.

Thutmose IV and Amenhotep II. These are all pharaohs that fall in the general time frame of the Exodus. And by the way, there's King Tut there at the end.

He was probably murdered. Again, there is a lot of speculation about that. And, of course, a heretic pharaoh, Amenhotep, or Akhenaten, rather, that served his monotheistic deity, Aten.

So, if Thutmose III is the pharaoh of the Exodus, we have his mummy. There is his face. And did that face interact with Moses and refuse to let God's people go? You could be looking into the pharaoh's face that was a pharaoh of the Exodus.

Now we move to the late date. And again, this is approximately 1290 BC. And that's a different dynasty, the 19th dynasty.

The point for this is that the account of Joseph seems to fit best during the Hyksos rule in Egypt. Exodus 1:8, when a new king rose over Egypt who did not know Joseph. This king would have been Ahmose.

In Exodus 1.9, again, Joseph's rise to power as vizier seems to fit better with fellow Asiatics ruling Egypt. This is not, again, it's not impossible that he served earlier under the Middle Kingdom, but it seems to fit better here. The cities Pithom and Ramses, which are the two cities mentioned in Exodus, Exodus 1.11, are clearly 19th dynastic names for cities in the Nile Delta.

And these are the cities that the Israelites built. However, these cities existed also in the 18th dynasty but under different names. And so these two names could be updated names in the biblical text.

Finally, the 19th dynasty pharaohs ruled from Memphis in the north, as I showed on the map, which seems to correlate with the various meanings between pharaoh and Moses. It seems to correlate more closely. If Moses had to go and appear before Pharaoh and say, let my people go, and it was in the 18th dynasty, he'd have to sail up to Memphis.

He'd have to sail up the Nile all the way up to Luxor and Karnak to meet with Pharaoh. Whereas here, Memphis is very close to the land of Goshen, the Nile Delta, where the Israelites were, and that would be much logistically a much simpler task. Now, that doesn't mean that an 18th dynasty pharaoh didn't have a palace close to the land of Goshen.

They certainly did, I'm certain, but it seems to fit a little bit better for the 19th dynasty context. 19th dynasty pharaohs are listed here, and clearly, the pharaoh that seems to be the most likely is Ramses II. Now, the chronology here does not match.

I'm using both high and low chronology, so I apologize for that. But for the 1290 Exodus, with the high chronology, Ramses would have ruled earlier. We also have the mummy of Ramses II, who lived into his 90s.

You can still see his hair on his head. He was an incredible builder. Most of the monumental construction that you see that has survived from ancient Egypt, outside the pyramids and some other things, is a result of his reign.

Just an incredible amount of monumental work was done during his reign, and he was a very powerful pharaoh. Interesting here, not necessarily related to the Exodus, but this is the mummy of Queen Tai. And look at the, she still has hair on her head there.

Her chest cavity had been broken open, and her organs were removed. Amazing preservation that they were able to do when they prepared bodies for burial back then. Now, everything concerning the Exodus, the route, the time, everything's open to question.

As I mentioned before, and I'll unpack a little bit now, scholars have symposia and meetings and argue back and forth about who was the pharaoh of the Exodus, what was the route of the Exodus, and where exactly the Sea of Reeds or Yam Suph that the text mentions. All of these are open questions. It's tantalizing.

And every so often, we hear of new evidence or a new inscription or something that may shed light on that. But a lot of work has been done on the Eastern Nile Delta, a lot of mapping and excavations and surveys, trying to determine, number one, the route of the Exodus and find evidence, 18th or 19th Dynasty evidence in that area, as well as where was the crossing, where was the Yam Suph or Sea of Reeds, as the Bible says. But, again, the two names that we do have are Pithom and Ramses, and these two cities, we're fairly certain of their location, and we know that these were cities built by the Israelites.

Okay, interesting depiction here, a wall mural, and we'll look at this for just a few moments here. This was, again, attributed to Seti I, earlier Ramses II's father, 19th Dynasty, and it depicts, kind of an unrealistic scale, but it depicts Seti and his army returning from an Asiatic campaign, in other words, going up to Canaan and then returning to Egypt via the Sinai Peninsula. And, of course, Seti and his horse and chariot are the major, large figures here.

And they're coming to the border of Egypt, which is mentioned in the Exodus narrative, the wall or shore of Egypt. Okay, and that wall or shore of Egypt has a moat with crocodiles and has a series of forts and gates to cross. Here's the bridge here, and fortresses, and here and here are also fortresses as he's crossing the Sinai.

Again, nothing's done to scale, obviously, but it covers the whole campaign or the return campaign. These are captives that are marching ahead of him, going back into Egypt as captives. And, of course, all the Egyptian people welcomed Seti and his army as victorious, and this victorious expedition comes back to Egypt.

Now, the Bedouin or the people that lived in the Sinai, the Egyptians called them Shasu. There have been scholars who believe that these Shasu are actually another name for the Israelites who served as slaves in Egypt. Routes for the Exodus.

As you can see, there are many variations. German scholars suggested way up here on an isthmus because of Baal Zephon. They found a later Persian period temple up here and thought that that might be a clue of where it was.

We do know where the Israelites did not go, and that was the way of the land of the Philistines. That was the major road across northern Sinai that went right up into Canaan. They avoided that route because, for one, there was a series of Egyptian forts.

And we'll show a picture of what those looked like. They dotted that route, again, probably at least a day's march between them. And so, they did not go that route.

They probably went to the south or somewhere on a different southerly route. And again, this is a problem with lots of questions and very, very few answers. Here's a picture of these Egyptian forts that were built across Sinai.

They were usually built at a water source, a pool or a spring, or large cisterns there. And they had supplies and food, so an Egyptian army could move across Sinai relatively quickly. Hoffmeier has excavated a site in the Nile Delta called Tell el-Borg, and you see that depiction of that typical Egyptian fort on the cover of his final report.

As I said, the Bible clearly states that the Lord told the Hebrews not to go the way of the land of the Philistines, which was the shortest, but go to the south or somewhere, just simply another route. And the issue is we have an itinerary. We have a list of place names that the Israelites camped at and marched through, but these cannot be matched with Arabic place names today because their ancient names were forgotten centuries, perhaps millennia ago.



And that's sad, but when we have names, we can't use them. When we don't have names, we can. And again, Biblical historians and students, you know, scratch your heads.

Why didn't Moses write down the names of the Pharaoh? So, we have clearly a date to work with. And this is, I believe, done theologically. Again, your name is your identity.

It gives you standing. And because even though Pharaoh was very powerful, humanly speaking, he was impotent. He had no name.

He was totally powerless before God. So theologically, there's that reason. It still pains us wishing we had a name to go by, though.

Now, in southeastern Sinai, there's a fascinating site called Serebit el-Khadim. And this is an Egyptian mining operation. And they had temples there as well.

And these have been studied. This site has been studied because it has a lot of pictographs, such as this one here, that show a transition, so to speak, from pictographs to an alphabet. And these seem to be in 24 symbols or drawings.

And, of course, this was probably an evolutionary process. There's debate on when this happened. It could have happened at Egyptian palaces or chancellories under the Hyksos.

It could have happened earlier. But perhaps it originated here, or in a place like this, where simplified writing using just 28 or 30 letters instead of a wide range of pictographs, letters based largely on sound rather than on the meaning, on depicting something, might be part of the puzzle of how the alphabet was created. But it was clearly done by Semites, whether it was by the Hyksos or by others.

And that was a way of, again, simplifying their way of communicating by writing. This is a famous ostrakon that was found at Erb Yitzhitzarda in Israel. During the period of the judges, you see the alphabet again being developed here.

You see some very early script, alphabetic script. If you know Hebrew, you look at this and it doesn't make any sense at all. But it's a very, very early Hebrew that's based, again, on this really crude pictograph slash alphabet writing that was found at this mining site in Sinai.

By the way, interesting just to point out here, the Hebrew letter A, or Aleph, actually started out as a figure depiction of a bull, and then it was stylized and twisted and ultimately became our letter A over the centuries. It's really interesting to study the

progression of the alphabet. As we mentioned, the archaeology of the sojourn after the Israelites left Egypt is also problematic.

Davies, a British scholar, has written a book called *The Way of the Wilderness* and deals with that. Hoffmeier, as a follow-up to his *Israel in Egypt*, wrote a book called *Ancient Israel in Sinai* and tries to answer questions about, for instance, the itinerary of the Israelites, where they went, where the location of Mount Sinai is, which we'll unpack in just a moment. It's very, very difficult to do because of the names being forgotten and lost over the centuries.

Now, the depiction of the sites, descriptions of the sites, and if you can follow a route, you can make some conjectural points and suggestions where these sites were, and that's what is often done. Here's a beautiful picture of the Sinai Peninsula, the southern mountainous Sinai Peninsula. Horeb and Sinai are names used many times in the Old Testament and apparently are synonymous.

But the truth, like everything in this part of the lecture series, everything here is debated. We're simply not certain. Now, if you go to Sinai today, and again, I was there last month, I hiked up, it was a five-hour hike, and hiked to the top of Jebel Musa, the mountain of Moses, or supposedly traditional Mount Sinai.

I saw the sunrise. It was a beautiful vista from the top of that mountain, an arduous hike. As I went down, I toured the St. Catherine's Monastery, saw where the burning bush was, and saw that great Byzantine site, incredibly still there after so many hundreds of years.

But is this the place? Is this the place that Moses received the Decalogue? And it may be. Queen Helena thought it was in the fourth century AD. But how many hundreds of years is that after the event? Was there anybody there to give her proper, correct information? We don't know.

So, there are other candidates as well for Sinai. Now, one popular, the one that you've seen or heard about, many of you have heard about or seen in the press or on TV, is the idea that Mount Sinai was in Arabia, specifically a place called Jebel Al-Laz in northern Saudi Arabia. And surprisingly, there's some interesting arguments that support this site.

First of all, we know that Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, was a Midianite priest and that Moses fled to Midian when he was 40 years old. At that time, Midian was, I should say, in northern Saudi Arabia, southern Jordan, a mountainous region called the Hejaz. And there were cities.

This was very likely ancient Midian. But it can also be argued that ancient Midian also spilled over into the Sinai Peninsula itself. So that is a possibility as well.

There are, there is an itinerary in the Book of Numbers that seemed to argue for a pilgrimage route into this area in Transjordan in northern Saudi Arabia, rather than Sinai, to visit Mount Horeb. Frank Moore Cross mentioned this, and Frank Moore Cross recognized some of the positive aspects of this conjectural view. All right.

The actual arguments surrounding this site have kind of a dramatic story, and this is written up in the book *Gold of the Exodus*. So, Americans actually sneaked into Saudi Arabia, took pictures, and, you know, found what they claimed to be a lot of the monuments around Sinai and Sinai itself. Looks like a burn top to the top of the mountain here.

But there are some serious problems as well. One is the time it takes to go from the border of Egypt shore to get to Sinai, and three days is simply not enough time to get over to Sinai or get over to Arabia. And the second one is to cross the Gulf of Aqaba, or the Gulf of Eilat here, which is basically a trench.

You'd have to have mountain climbing equipment to climb down, even if it was drained of water, and climb back up. If they did go that way, more than likely, they'd have to go around the northern edge of the Gulf. Arguments that there are islands here that they could go across seem to lack conviction.

So, it's an interesting theory, and there are arguments that seem to support it, but there's also some serious problems as well. Here's a picture of Jebel Musa and St. Catherine's Monastery. Interesting.

In antiquity, of course, this was the wild west. There was no civilization around here. It's very desolate today as well.

But St. Catherine's Monastery was basically a castle, and there was no gateway, so to speak, to enter. You had to be lowered and raised in a basket to get access to the site. Today, of course, that's changed, but it's a very interesting place to visit.

Here is a view from the top of the chapel on top of Jebel Musa, the view across southern Sinai. While they were at Sinai, after the law was given, Moses had the tabernacle built as a place for the Lord to travel with and reside with his people. This is interesting because the tabernacle enclosure and tent have interesting parallels with the Egyptian royal tents of the 19th dynasty, specifically Ramses II, when he fought against the Hittites at Kadesh in Syria.

The Pharaoh's camp has a very similar floor plan or appearance from afar, and that was possibly why the Moabite king, Balak, thought that there were Egyptians down in the plains of Moab rather than Israelites, because he saw the tent and the tabernacle and thought that that was an Egyptian royal encampment. So, there's a

lot of interesting points to that as well. Here is the Ramses II's camp and the tabernacle, very, very similar in their basic layout.

Altars in high places. This is a high place at Petra, much later, it's in Abitian. This is earlier at Megiddo, probably early Bronze Age levels there.

But the altar that was outside the tabernacle, again, is a variation of that and perhaps echoes some of those features on those two. The one site we do know, relatively certain, that the Israelites encamped at for their 40-year sojourn was Kadesh Barnea. And that name, because it was visited continuously because there was a spring there, Ein Kadesh, or Ein Kedes in Arabic, preserves that name.

And there was Midianite pottery from the time of the Exodus found at this site. So that's a powerful testimony that this is the actual site of Kadesh Barnea. It's located just inside the border of Egypt, Sinai border, across from the Israeli border.

But the later Iron Age fort, perhaps a series of them, perhaps just two, was excavated in the 1970s and 80s when Israel occupied the Sinai. It was published by and written up by Rudolf Cohen. Moshe Dotan excavated it earlier during Israel's 1956 occupation of Sinai.

So, very interesting that we do have one very clear candidate here for an important itinerary site during the sojourn, and that is Kadesh Barnea. By the way, T.E. Lawrence visited this site and also made a mock-up or a top plan of that fort. Mount Hor, again, during the sojourn, Aaron passed away, and that little white cupola, that little structure up there, is the top, the summit of Mount Hor, where he was buried.

Now again, that's a late tradition as well, Byzantine, and it's just the same as the Jebel Musa. Was this the Mount Hor that Aaron was buried at? Perhaps, perhaps not. We simply cannot be certain.

Now, after the sojourn, the children of Israel traveled up along the desert route because the kings of Edom and Moab would not allow them entrance to the king's highway, the easier route with more food and water sources. But King Sihon of the Amorites, who ruled from a site called Heshbon, is the summit of biblical Hisban, as it looks today, he not only prevented them or refused their entry but actually went out to fight them. And they had a battle at Jahaz and Moses and the children of Israel conquered or defeated Sihon the Amorite and his army and occupied Heshbon.

Now, this is, again, a lot of personal connection here because Andrews University, where I work, excavated the site of Heshbon, as I mentioned before, for many years, up until recently, and worked at the site for many seasons. I served at the site and worked as a student and as a staff member, but we never found any strong, clear evidence for the Late Bronze Period, the time of Moses. We found wonderful

remains and ruins from the Medieval Period, from the New Testament Period, even from the Old Testament Period, including a very large 17 by 17 meter pool, which we'll show here.

But nothing from the time of Moses. And this again shows the limitations of archaeology. Sometimes archaeology does not preserve what we are fairly certain happened there.

And we'll again unpack that in a minute. Heshbon has 21 recognized strata or layers, occupational layers. And the earliest occupation there that has been found is roughly the last part of the 13th century.

Very early Iron Age 1 or Late Bronze Early Iron Age 1 transition. That means very early in the period of the Judges is what we have found. Very early.

The site is very strategically located. It's on the edge of three different regions, the Ammonite Hill Country to the north, the Mishor to the east and to the south, and to the west, the Arboreum drops down into the Jordan Valley, just north of the Dead Sea. It has an incredible field of view from the summit of Heshbon.

It's a place of power because you've got such a commanding view of the surrounding countryside. Here is Heshbon as it appears today. It's called a tell.

It's actually a hilltop. The strata are very tightly packed and complicated, but it is possible. And we're not absolutely certain there was an occupation there at the time of the Exodus, but there was.

They didn't leave a whole lot of archaeological materials for us to find. And again, this is a history of Heshbon from the Sihon, the Amorite city, to the Israelite settlement. And then 8th and 6th centuries, you've got various polities at the site.

The Ammonites, the Moabites, the Israelites, and probably for a short time, the Judeans from Judah controlled this area. This is the actual song of Heshbon in Numbers 21. Heshbon is mentioned nearly 40 times in the Bible.

The destruction of Heshbon and the defeat of Sihon is also mentioned numerous times. And again, because of the deeply embedded remembrance of this event, biblical scholars say, yeah, it should have happened. It should have happened.

It's not something that was made up. So how do we explain that? Well, going back to this text here, if you read the text carefully, it talks about Sihon and the Amorites coming to the land relatively recently. They appeared in the area.

And the Amorite, the name Amorite means westerner. So again, the people of the region didn't exactly know who they were. They didn't have a specific name, or it was just a general name, westerner.

They defeated the Moabites and carved out territory for themselves down to the Arnon River. And so, they defeated the Moabites and set up their kingdom. Now, that kingdom doesn't necessarily mean that they built palaces and temples and brick-and-mortar houses.

They had recently come into the area. They could have still been living in tents. And that perhaps helps understand the lack of finds from the late Bronze Period at Heshbon, because perhaps it was not buildings that the children of Israel destroyed, but rather tents.

And those don't leave any archaeological evidence. Again, this is conjectural, but possibly a good explanation for those passages. Heshbon later became a Solomonic district.

And you can see this header and stretcher, Ashlar Masonry, that we uncovered at Heshbon. And that seems to date to the time of Solomon. And Solomon made Heshbon, according to his administrative district list, the capital or district capital of one of his districts.

So, this again gives a problem of Heshbon. This is a picture from the summit looking south and an aerial view of the site. And this is that same pool, 17 meter pool, rock cut right into the bedrock that we did some excavations on the last few years.

Later on, Heshbon was possibly a royal estate during Solomon's reign. Hence, the passage in the Book of Ecclesiastes, or excuse me, Song of Songs, mentions that the eyes of his beloved, the Shulamite girl, are like the pools of Heshbon. And we did find a large monumental pool, huge pool, near the summit of Heshbon, which could have been maybe a double pool since it was in the dual form during the time of Solomon.

But a huge pool existed there during the Old Testament period. Balak, the Moabite king that Moses and the people of Israel dealt with, possibly ruled from this site. Now, this is a little deceiving because this is a crusader castle, a place called Al-Karak.

But underneath that castle, totally obliterated, unfortunately, by the Latin kingdom as they constructed that, was the Moabite capital of Kir haresheth or Kir haheres, different names for it, that was a capital of the Moabites from, we assume, the time of Balak all the way through the monarchy. Al-Karak is situated on the Wadi Al-Karak that goes right down to the Dead Sea and comes out at the site of Biblical Sodom. Finally, we have Balaam the Seer, and in Numbers 22-24, the king of Moab, Balak, hires a kind of witch doctor, a spiritual guy that comes and is going to curse Israel.

Again, Moab is up on the plateau, probably the plateau above or the biblical Mishor, the tableland, or the Karak plateau or the Daban plateau, somewhere up there. And the children of Israel down in the plain below, camped. And so he hires this witch doctor or seer named Balaam to come and curse the people.

But of course, as we know, all the oracles that Balaam gave were blessings to Israel because God spoke through him and he spoke the words that God gave him, which made the Moabite king extremely angry. But that's a great story, great account in Numbers. Now, in 1967, the Dutch archaeologist Henk Franken was excavating at Tal Deir al-Ala in the Jordan Valley north of Moab.

I mentioned this before, but when we were talking about inscriptions, but found a plastered wall on a temple or shrine in that city that had writing on it. And you can see a piece of it here. You can see the broken up plaster and they carefully removed that from the wall and came up with this text here, a very early Ammonite slash Aramaic text from the ninth to eighth century BC.

It mentions Balaam the seer as a revered figure. So contemporary to Moses, not quite, but very ancient. The way Balaam is depicted, he is a figure in history that they revere.

So, an incredible find, again, 55 years ago now, that again proves or almost you could argue proves the existence of Balaam as a historical figure. So again, nothing concrete, no smoking gun here. But find after find, again, gives evidence, indirect evidence, but evidence nonetheless for the historicity of these accounts.

Thank you.

This is Dr. Jeffrey Houdon in his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 12, Archaeology of the Exodus and Wilderness.