Old Testament Introduction
The Bible’s Buried Secrets
Chapter 15, Exodus

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/bibles-buried-secrets.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qalTJzk4kO0>

***About the Video***

What is for the most part an exact copy of the video script follows. There are a few places where individual speakers could neither be heard nor understood: for this we apologize. Every effort was made to be precise: there were just spots that defeated us. Since this is a quote in its entirety it seemed unnecessary to mark it with quotation marks. The notation for each speaker is tedious enough: Narrator, Reader, etc. If you discover bothersome errors, please reply to this website and point them out. You may verify the script more easily by starting to replay it where the “time” stamps indicate discussion begins. The second of the above links is free from advertising and thus easier to use.

***Overview***

Whenever *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* insists that convergence is the thing to be sought, it produces a denial that the biblical evidence exists or is credible in any way. The justification for this rests on supposed Egyptian or other artifact evidence that does not exist. Neither the Merneptah Stele, nor The Tel Zayit alphabet, nor Tanis have produced any credible evidence, not one shred. As opposed to this, the Bible leaves a cohesive, relatively easily followed record.

The video did not find; yet, we did find useful information from Tel Zayit, Amarna, and Tell El-Dab’a.[[1]](#endnote-1) From Tel Zayit, we learned that it is unlikely that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible in paleo-Hebrew, since paleo-Hebrew does not seem to have been invented before 1000 BC: certainly not as early as 1406-1366 BC, when Moses probably led the Exodus. From Amarna, we learned that Akkadian Cuneiform is the international lingua franca of the era; thus, the great probability that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible in Akkadian Cuneiform. From Tell El-Dab’a, we learned that there is a whole world of evidence yet to be uncovered that will provide information about the Ramessides long before Ramesses II, and long before the town of Ramesses was awarded the honorary title, Pi. We know that this wealth of information exists because of ground penetrating radar (GPR).

There is no evidence for any groups of writers offered in *The Bible’s Buried Secrets*. All that exists is the oft repeated refrain that such writers created Torah. The basis for this regurgitation of the Wellhausen theory is never really discussed. We are expected to accept this theory of a group of writers on the basis of repetitious fiat alone. I guess, if you repeat a lie, long enough and loud enough, folks are supposed to believe it.

The practice of replacing reality with philosophical idealism is common enough. It is in no way scientific. It meets none of the criteria for scientific endeavor, even in the loosest sense. It must finally be discarded as pietistic truisms, which amount to so much rot. Truisms are nice, but they rarely square with the real world.

***Script***

Exodus (time 23:20)

Quote:

N: This convergence[[2]](#endnote-2) between archaeology and the bible provides a time frame for the Exodus. It could not have happened before Ramesses became king around 1275 BC,[[3]](#endnote-3) and it could not have happened after 1208 BC,[[4]](#endnote-4) when the stele of pharaoh Merneptah, Ramesses II’s son specifically locates the Israelites in Canaan.[[5]](#endnote-5) The Bible says the Israelites leave Egypt in a mass migration of 600,000 men and their families.[[6]](#endnote-6) And then wander in the desert for forty years. But even assuming the Bible is exaggerating, in a hundred years of searching, archaeologists have not yet found evidence of migration that can be linked to the Exodus.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Dever: No excavated site gives us any information about the route of the wandering through the wilderness, and Exodus is simply not attested anywhere.

N: Any historical or archeological confirmation of the Exodus remains elusive. Yet, scholars have discovered that all four groups of biblical writers contributed to some part of the Exodus story. Perhaps, it is for the same reason its message remains powerful to this day. Its inspiring theme of freedom.

Meyers: Freedom is a compelling notion and that is one of the ways that we can understand the story of the Exodus from being controlled by others to controlling one’s self; the idea of a change from domination to autonomy. These are very powerful ideas that resonate in the human spirit. And the Exodus gives narrative reality to those ideas.[[8]](#endnote-8)

Unquote.

***Convergence***

No convergence exists between archaeology and the bible, not for the Exodus or for the forty-two years that follow it doesn’t. The false connection between Ramesses II and the Exodus was an understandable romance in 1884, when Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie first came to Tanis. At first blush the artifacts found at Tanis where overwhelmingly impressive. Everyone jumped to conclusions. Those conclusions were all wrong. Today, the world needs to know better. Why should we continue to be steeped in a century-old ignorance?

The location was wrong. The Ramesside artifacts found at Tanis were hauled in from another location, twelve miles to the south. There is no evidence of Canaanite, Hyksos, or Semitic activity at Tanis; all such activity appears to center around Avaris/Piramesse/Qantir and that area. The Tell El-Dab’a region has yet to be sufficiently explored.

The time is wrong. Egyptian dating is very uncertain: it is filled with gaps, holes, and unidentified periods. Since Flinders Petrie began the first Egyptian explorations, the estimated BC time span of Egyptian chronology has dropped from 5510 to 3500 years, a 57% error. Massive dating problems remain unsolved. Most of the data hangs on one pharaoh, Ramesses II. Hopefully, we are getting closer to the truth.

Only one safe scientific conclusion may be drawn. The pharaohs of Joseph and of Moses and the Exodus remain unknown, shrouded in the mysteries of Egypt. We can find better fits in the dating scheme of things, as it now stands; yet this too is just so much subjective wishing in the wind, without more evidence. Until a firmer Egyptian history is established, we don’t know much of anything about any “convergence between [Egyptian] archaeology and the period of the biblical Exodus (1406-1366 BC).”

***Hypothesis***

However, we have been able to construct a fresh working hypothesis, based on the Septuagint, and the currently published Egyptian dates. We have discovered amazing interlacing or convergence for this evidence with Hatshepsut, Thutmose Ⅱ, Thutmose Ⅲ, Amenhotep Ⅱ, and Prince Amenhotep, son of Amenhotep Ⅱ, who may have died as a child. We believe that there is a strong possibility that Amenhotep Ⅱ is the pharaoh of the Exodus. It is at this convergence that the trail of evidence disappears for forty-two years.[[9]](#endnote-9)

*The Bible’s Buried Secrets* begins with the rash assumption that “It could not have happened….” Yet it both can and it did happen. With the relatively firm dating of Shishak, the dates for Solomon will be fixed at 970-930 BC. These dates are supported by tracing the Hebrew kings all the way from Solomon to the Persians, Greeks, and Romans. There are very few chronological problems left to solve for that period of Judaic history. Egyptian history, on the other hand, is very muddy. If Solomon’s dates are fixed then David’s dates are fixed at 1010-970 BC; The Exodus dates are fixed as well at either 1406 BC (LXX) or1446 BC (MT).[[10]](#endnote-10) Neither of these two options is compatible with any proposed dates either for Ramesses II or for Merneptah.[[11]](#endnote-11) If the dates for Exodus are firm then dates for Abraham and Joseph are also firm at circa 1806 BC and 1621 BC, depending on which stages of their lives are under discussion.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Once again, *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* begins with question begging logic: it assumes that “the Bible is exaggerating;” that Torah is the result of four or more convergent “groups of biblical writers;” and that this rests not in historical reality, rather in an “inspiring theme of freedom.”[[13]](#endnote-13) By assuming the conclusion, *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* circumvents any need for rational evidence or logic.

***Futility***

The fundamental futile error of seeking to find archaeological evidence for the next forty years of Exodus and two more years of Transjordan conquest is hoping to find any evidence at all.

If we seek the Red (or Reed) Sea crossing, we have hundreds of miles of coastline to explore. By the way, the red or reed very likely refers to the papyrus plant, iconographic of Lower Egypt, which was found all along the Red Sea as far south as Kush (Sudan).[[14]](#endnote-14) The point of departure for the Israelites could be anywhere along that LE, ME, UE Red Sea line; a location closer to Thebes (UE) is indicated: since it is unlikely that pharaoh would have stooped to LE to talk with Moses. Pharaoh stayed on his throne.

Once in the Sinai desert, we are searching for artifacts from tent dwelling, animal herding nomads, who founded no permanent settlements, who establish no lasting civilization, who are only present for forty years during which they wander all over Sinai, whose principle stopping place appears to be mount Sinai. From such a sojourn, we expect to find nothing at all.

Picture, if you will, moving a city with a population of the size of Houston, Texas, every few days. We make camp one day; a few days later, we break camp, and move on: what little we have is precious, so nothing is left behind. There are no permanent structures or artifacts. A few broken items would have been abandoned: most of these would crumble to dust from exposure to desert heat and cold. Even pottery shards would be ground to powder by the passing herds. Since the encampment is so large, one tribe may have been pitching camp at the new location, while another tribe was breaking camp at the old location. The tribes maintained visual contact with each other for safety from attacking enemies. We follow the water; we visit old established wells and oases; our lives depend on it. When we leave, the shifting desert sands swallow everything. A short time later, other Bedouins visit the same wells and oases: if there is any evidence left at all, it cannot be distinguished. We travel near the outskirts of Edom; Edom is a gigantic empire; in contrast to Edom, Israel is a tiny ant passing through the night. The Edomites are also a nomadic pastoral people; they dress and talk much as we Israelites do: other observers cannot tell us apart. The only lasting difference between Edomites and Israelites at this time is that they have established cities; we have tents. We come and go like ghosts, in a few years, nobody remembers we were there. Any remaining evidence seems to come from Edomite patrols. The shifting desert sands have swallowed everything. We left no trace behind.

Dever’s futility is that he expected to find something, anything at all.

***Paucity***

There are pharaohs of Egypt, living in established capitals, for whom we cannot establish so much as the certainty of their name, or dates, or presence, or any evidence other than that recorded on a document similar to that of the Table of Nations in the Bible.[[15]](#endnote-15) Moreover, if the paucity of evidence calls the historicity of the Bible in question, why doesn’t the greater paucity of evidence call the historicity of Egypt into question?[[16]](#endnote-16)

The Egyptians made glorious and vast claims about the unification of their kingdom. Contrary to this, their behavior exhibits an incredible pettiness. Their leaders regularly robbed their own historic tombs, defaced their own historic monuments, destroyed their own historic documents, and in general deprecated their predecessors. If two pharaohs ruled at the same time, they talked smack to each other. Such cheap and tawdry rivalry is rare, even among politicians. Rather than being a unified kingdom, Egypt must be characterized as a kingdom torn by family rivalries and community feuds. Egyptian leaders were far more interested in a display of glory, a desire to impress and intimidate, than they were in building a nation. Everything about the Egyptians reeks of competition, oppression, and slavery. If anyone should be prone to exaggeration it would seem to be the Egyptians.

There is no evidence here that casts doubt on either the reality or the date of the Exodus. Nor is there any substantiation for the claim of four groups of writers. The idea that we may rewrite history as it pleases us, replacing reality with the philosophical idealism of freedom is novel, but also lacks evidence. Freedom must always be or become a substantial reality; talking about freedom is an indication of slavery: it is not freedom at all.

***Conclusion***

Whenever *The Bible’s Buried Secrets* insists that convergence is the thing to be sought, it produces a denial that the biblical evidence exists or is credible in any way. The justification for this rests on supposed Egyptian or other artifact evidence that really does not exist. Neither the Merneptah Stele, nor The Tel Zayit alphabet, nor Tanis have produced any credible evidence, not one shred. As opposed to this, the Bible leaves a cohesive, relatively easily followed record.

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[[18]](#endnote-18)

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zayit_Stone>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amarna_letters>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tell_El-Dab%27a>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Avaris>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qantir>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ground-penetrating_radar> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. There is no convergence here. The fact of the true location of Pi-Ramesses being at Qantir rather than Tanis requires the complete rethinking of the whole Pithom and Ramesses relationship. Insufficient information is forthcoming concerning either Qantir or Avaris, even though Qantir was identified (1966-69, 1975 …). Avaris (from 1885) contains artifacts going back to Minoan civilization (2600-1100 BC): this means that the Ramesses family could stem from as early as Minoan civilization. Bietak has written extensively about his involvement in the Tell El-Dab’a/Avaris/Qantir/Piramesse area: still, we need much, much more evidence from this region.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manfred_Bietak>

If we did attempt to force an Exodus date based on Tanis, this would mean that the Exodus took place after 1039 BC: for the oldest dated artifacts at Tanis are attached to this date. Even if older datable artifacts should be found at Tanis, we would still be left with a date no earlier than 1077 BC, when Smendes begins the twenty-first dynasty. If this were fact, the Exodus could not have taken place at all: for this date is subsequent to both the Amarna and the Merneptah evidence. If this were fact, the standard Merneptah interpretation is contradicted and Israel is not present in the central highlands. If this were fact, then David cannot possibly be an Israelite king, ascending to the throne of Judea in 1010 BC, or to the throne of all Israel in 1003 BC. Moreover, the Ark cannot have been absent for twenty years, and all the evidence found in Exodus through 1 Samuel falls to pieces: it could not have happened. Fortunately, for us it is Tanis itself that in in error. We have to take our eyes off of the spectacular appearance of Tanis and go in search of real evidence. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Our date for the ascension Ramesses Ⅱ is 1279 BC, which we believe is the more up-to-date consensus. The opinion voiced in the video, can only be maintained if one clings to the very myopic view that Ramesses Ⅱ is necessarily the pharaoh of the Exodus. The only real reasons for holding this view are: the spectacular display at Tanis, which is mythically misleading; and similarities concerning the name Ramesses. If we date based on Pi-Ramesses, we are forced to retreat at least as far as 1292 BC, when Ramesses Ⅰ ascends. Then we realize that long before Pi-Ramesses, Ramesses existed as a prominent, yet ignoble town, before it earned the title, Pi. Since the Tell El-Dab’a region still awaits a more complete excavation, we can only anticipate the factual evidence yet to be found for Ramesses, the ignoble town and ignoble family.

If we wished to reduce this Ramesside Exodus to the absurdity of its claim, why not any one of the titled Ramesses Ⅰ through Ⅺ. Yet, once we have taken that turn; surely, we realize that there must have been an ignoble Ramesses family, ancient predecessors to Ramesses Ⅰ.

The whole idea of a Ramesses Ⅱ Exodus is simply untenable once the romance of Tanis is removed from the picture and Tell El-Dab’a is factored in. Because of the numerous dating conflicts, the Ramesses Ⅱ Exodus was never a very good idea anyway: not for the scientist who demands meticulous handling of all evidence. Now, the way is clear to finding a much earlier Exodus, so that the absurdly restrictive time window proposed by the video narrator, just got much larger, over a century larger. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. To make 1208 BC into the terminus ad quem for the Exodus is yet another myopic absurdity. Even if the Amarna evidence provides no direct identification of any Israelite presence; Amarna does establish a cultural milieu, which requires serious explanation. It is this cultural milieu that fits the evidence of Joshua through 1 Samuel like a glove. What other massive popular migration is taking place in the region defined by the Amarna evidence? There is none! By default, we conclude that Amarna proves something is going on, most probably the Israelites, we just cannot be more specific: there are no other choices. This means that the terminus ad quem for the Exodus must be pushed back at least a century: for the Amarna evidence shows without any doubt that something is disturbing the Levant; that this is pharaoh’s problem to fix, hence the complaints are all written to him, 382 of them; and that this problem probably originated from Egypt: hence, an Exodus. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. This dating can only stand on the presumption of a Ramesside Exodus, which we have already shown to stand on precarious grounds. A Thutmose Ⅲ/Hatshepsut/Neferure Exodus provides a far superior historical fit. When once we get over the fact that the MT date for Exodus (1446 BC) is untenable; and realize that the LXX date for Exodus (1406 BC) provides better evidence from every perspective: then it becomes clear that Amenhotep Ⅱ (1425-1398 BC) might be the perfect fit for the pharaoh of the Exodus, while child prince Amenhotep, his son, could be the son that dies on Pesach. According to these dates, Hatshepsut is now the ideal candidate for being Moses’ adopted mother. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. There is no good reason to suspect that the increase in Israelite population from seventy-four to two-million souls, in two-hundred-fifteen years is at all extraordinary. This is a 4.86% growth in population: toward the higher range of fertility; yet, not unheard of either; this would equate to average family sizes of six (four children) or slightly less, marriage around age fifteen, and a seventy-year life expectancy: under these conditions the two-million mark would be easily reached in two-hundred-fifteen years. Larger families would produce greater results: so a 4.86% population growth rate is not at all spectacular. It is only due to many global disasters that the statistically average growth rate of a little over 1% is as low as it is. Besides, the count is described as a mixed multitude, which suggests that all who adhered to Israel were not of Israel. The biblical record expresses that alarm exists among the Egyptians at the rate of population expansion among the Israelites (Exodus 1:9-10). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Exactly what sort of evidence did anyone expect to find after a large multitude of nomads wandered across the desert, dwelling only in tents, building no cities, whose only lasting structures would have been wells? Finding the occasional un-datable broken clay cup is the quest for a grain of sand in a land of sand, a particular un-datable needle in a needle stack. What would be alarming would be the finding of anything. What could possibly be there? Moses’ broken tablets? The golden calf ground to powder? A tent peg? [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. To what end? To the fabrication of unrealistic histories? To the falsification of numerous dates? Meyers’ generalizations and opinions on the subject at hand are irrelevant. All such idealistic utopian discussion of freedom is worthless, if God did not, in fact, come to the Israelites and set them free. In this cosmic step, God proceeded to work out this phase in His plan of freedom and forgiveness for all mankind. We fail to see the benefit of such a chimerical, counterfeit, and specious vanity of freedom; when what humanity needs is the genuine, bona fide, blue ribbon, 24-carat, sterling article. This sort of fake fantasy freedom is the result of the muddled thinking of one who has their feet firmly planted in midair. It’s all vapor… smoke and mirrors. Faith must rest on fact, or it is non-existent.

This is really a rather clever way of peddling Existentialism. The video sets out to sell the idea that the Bible cannot possibly be true. Then the, “Let’s take a leap in the dark”, solution is offered as a Band-Aid. When the attempt is made to pull the rug of true freedom out from under our feet; a cloud of imaginary freedom is quickly inserted, so that we won’t be hurt when we fall down.

Alvin Plantinga provides adequate rebuttal to the mentality of Meyers’ muddled mysticism, especially in his discussion of warrant. What philosophical warrant do Christians have for drawing the conclusions they must draw?

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alvin_Plantinga>

<http://www.andrewmbailey.com/ap/Pluralism.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.swrktec.org/> Chapter 14, Pi-Ramesses, pages 2, 12-18, 19, plus all the endnotes referenced on pages 12-18 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. We have discussed this difference before. There is no technical problem here: it is a matter of simple addition. The problem is a matter of text criticism. MT dates the Exodus at 480 years prior to the fourth-year of Solomon’s reign (970 – 4 + 480 = 1446). LXX dates the Exodus at 440 years prior to the fourth-year of Solomon’s reign (970 – 4 + 440 = 1406). We formerly proposed that the resolution is that LXX counts from the end of the forty years of wandering, while MT counts from the beginning of the forty years of wandering. Today, we simply believe that MT errs. Since LXX predates MT by several centuries, this difference would be explained by a MT scribe attempting to correct a perceived error in the text. It is this fact that LXX predates MT by several centuries, which provides one line of evidence that leads to the conclusion: LXX is superior to MT.

Egyptian sources have no such problem. For the greater part, Egyptian records reveal no textual variation; because, for the greater part, Egyptian records have no information at all: it’s just blank.

In the worst-case scenario, we have an unexplained forty-year error, which considering the errors of other methods is a very small nit to pick, indeed. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. We remember also that Merneptah hangs on the broken threads that the word for Israel may not be Israel at all; furthermore, Merneptah provides no certain location. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. If it were necessary for our discussion, the Bible provides more than ample means for tracing the lives of both Abraham and Joseph from birth to death. We doubt that such accuracy can be established for any Egyptian of the period. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. We are not minimizing the importance of freedom, especially as it is so thoroughly expressed in Torah. Our protest is to the idea that freedom developed in the mind of man as a philosophical necessity and ideal. We assert, without apology, that real freedom exists only as the gift of Yahweh, and man learned it because Yahweh taught it at Sinai. To remove Yahweh from the evidence as the Central Character, and the Prime Mover in the Exodus reality, is an attempt to destroy that reality. The Israelites were empowered to be good historians, because they sat at the feet of the Perfect Historian. The evidence for this is overwhelming. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papyrus>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papyrus\_stem\_(hieroglyph)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papyrus_stem_%28hieroglyph%29)

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nymphaea_caerulea>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Upper_and_Lower_Egypt>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Hapy\_tying.svg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File%3AHapy_tying.svg)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papyrus\_stem\_(hieroglyph)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papyrus_stem_%28hieroglyph%29) [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. The monuments with lists of pharaoh’s scarabs is contrasted with Genesis 10. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seventeenth_Dynasty_of_Egypt>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abydos_Dynasty>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sixteenth_Dynasty_of_Egypt>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fifteenth_Dynasty_of_Egypt>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourteenth_Dynasty_of_Egypt> [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. This is the realm or genre known as science fiction. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
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