

Dating the Exodus – Biblical & Archaeological Evidence

Following are various articles. The first gives the most compressed overview of the arguments and evidence. Subsequent articles provide more details. Links for further reading are also included.

The Date of the Exodus - ESV Study Bible

The Date of the Exodus The following material summarizes some of the arguments for an early date (1446 B.C.) and a later date (c. 1260) of the exodus. The archaeological claims of each side have all been challenged by the other side, but the details of such responses are not included here.

Arguments for an Early Date of the Exodus

These arguments are used to support an “early date” (about 1446 B.C.) for the exodus:

1. First Kings 6:1 says, “In the four hundred and eightieth year after the people of Israel came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel ... he began to build the house of the LORD.” The currently accepted date for the fourth year of Solomon’s reign is 967/966 B.C., and 480 years before that would be 1446. This is supported by 1 Chronicles 6:33–37, which names 18 generations from Korah (in the time of Moses) to Heman (in the time of David), which then requires 19 generations from Moses to Solomon. Nineteen generations in 480 years works out to an average of 25.3 years per generation, a reasonable number that gives confirmation to an actual 480 years in 1 Kings 6:1.
2. In Judges 11:26, Jephthah’s message to the king of the Ammonites says that Israel had already lived in Canaan for “300 years.” This message is dated to around 1100 B.C., which would yield a date of around 1400 for entrance into the land of Canaan, which is consistent with a 1446 exodus.
3. Archaeological data from Jericho, Ai, and Hazor have been claimed to show evidence of destruction in the late fifteenth century B.C., which is consistent with a 1446 exodus and 1406 conquest of Canaan. But there is no evidence of occupation of Jericho in the thirteenth century (as would be required by a later date for the exodus).
4. The Amarna Letters show that Canaanite kings in the late fifteenth century B.C. wrote letters to Pharaoh pleading for help against the ‘apiru who were “taking over” the lands of Canaan. This is consistent with dating the beginning of the conquest by Israel at 1406.
5. Exodus 1:11, which mentions the building of “Raamses,” should not be dated to c. 1270 B.C. (as a “late date” view would hold), because the remarkable multiplication of Israel (Ex. 1:12–22) and the birth of Moses (Ex. 2:2) both occur after Exodus 1:11. But if Moses was “eighty years old” (Ex. 7:7) when he led the people out of Egypt, this would put the exodus at least 80 years after the building of Raamses, or 1190 B.C., which is far too late on either scheme.

In fact, the Merneptah Stele (an inscribed tombstone-like stone slab) describes a military triumph over Israel in Canaan in 1211–1209 B.C.

6. With an early date for the exodus, the time of the Judges takes about 350 years. This is generally consistent with the book of Judges itself, where a simple addition of the length of the reigns of the individual judges gives just over 400 years, and this can be reduced to 350 if there was overlapping of some reigns, but it cannot reasonably be reduced to as little as 170 years, as would be required by the proposed later date for the exodus.

Arguments for a Later Date of the Exodus

In favor of a “later date” (c. 1260 B.C.) are the following arguments:

1. Exodus 1:11 says the Israelites “built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses.” But the city of Raamses (also spelled Rameses; the Egyptian Pi-Rameses) was built by Raamses II, who reigned 1279–1213 B.C. This city is not mentioned in any earlier archaeological records from Egypt. Therefore the Israelites were still in Egypt around 1270 B.C. when Raamses was built. In addition, the other geographical terms in Exodus—e.g., Pithom, Migdol, Yam Sup (the “Red Sea”), etc.—are all attested in thirteenth-century Egyptian texts, whereas they are not attested in the period of the early date.
2. First Kings 6:1 probably uses the expression “480 years” as a representative number to stand for 12 idealized generations of 40 years each. But in reality the period covered 12 generations of only 25 years each, or 300 years. Subtracting 300 years from 966 B.C. gives an exodus about 1266.
3. Egypt had imperial control over Canaan from about 1400–1250 B.C. But there is no Egyptian record of any military conflicts with Israel over that land until the Merneptah Stele, which refers to a victory over Israel around 1211–1209 B.C.
4. The Bible contains almost no mention of conflict with Egypt in Joshua or Judges, which would be strange if the Israelites entered Canaan in 1406 B.C., when the Egyptian Empire had control over Canaan. This makes a late date for the exodus more likely, since Egyptian influence over Canaan was minimal after about 1200 B.C.
5. The covenant forms used at the time of Moses in the biblical narratives show significant parallels to ancient Near Eastern covenants in the thirteenth century but not in the fifteenth century B.C.
6. Archaeological discoveries in Canaan show the complete destruction of some cities (such as Hazor) in the later thirteenth century B.C., which would fit with a date of c. 1260 for the exodus. Further, site surveys seem to show that there was a huge migration into the hill country areas of Canaan in the thirteenth century B.C. There also appear to have been technological innovations in this later period, such as terracing of the land, newer pottery styles, and plaster-lined silos, that favor the later date for Israel’s occupation. Conclusion

Both the early date and the late date are supported by established evangelical scholars today.

In this Study Bible, both the early date (1446 B.C.) and the later date (c. 1260) are included.

Bibles, Crossway (2009-04-09). ESV Study Bible (Kindle Locations 2324-2377). Good News Publishers. Kindle Edition.

The Rise and Fall of the 13th Century Exodus-Conquest Theory

This article was first published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/3, (September 2005) 475-489. Posted here with permission.

This article provides more details about the evidence and discussion about the early vs. later dates.

<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/04/17/The-Rise-and-Fall-of-the-13th-Century-Exodus-Conquest-Theory.aspx#Article>

Biblical Archaeology: Evidence of the Exodus from Egypt

This article gives more details about the available evidence and argues for an earlier date.

<http://www.bibleandscience.com/archaeology/exodus.htm>

Biblical Archaeology Society (BAS)

This booklet presents the evidence and provides a detailed discussion supporting a later date.

<http://opentablechurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/BAR-Ancient-Israel-in-Egypt-and-the-Exodus.pdf>

See more articles and presentations regarding this period:

<http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/category/daily/biblical-topics/exodus/>