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IN REVIEW

Pinpointing the Exodus from Egypt

An edited chapter from איך נולד התנ"ך [*How The Bible Was Born*]

The Great Harris Papyrus, sheet 43, King Ramses III is depicted in full regalia before the holy family of the ancient city of Memphis. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Narrating Judaism Autumn/Winter 2018

By Israel Knohl

THE COVENANT BETWEEN GOD and Abraham in Genesis 15:13 includes the prophecy: “And they [i.e., future

oppressors] will enslave them [i.e., the Israelites] and torture them for *four hundred years*.” When the story of the exodus is told in Exodus 12:40, however, a different timeline is described: “And the Israelites dwelt in Egypt *four hundred and thirty years*.” How do we reconcile this numerical conundrum? *Was the Exodus an historical event? If it was, when did it happen?*

First, we must consider which historical details in the Joseph and exodus stories, respectively, may be corroborated with events recorded in Egyptian inscriptions and archaeological findings. The first thing to know is that a great famine—like that mentioned in the Joseph story—occurred around 1200 BCE, give or take 25 years. To anchor the Joseph story in historical fact, we must assume that he was active during this period, around 1200 BCE, during the great famine crisis.

When Joseph’s brothers arrive in Egypt, Joseph discusses with Pharaoh where they should live. Genesis 47:11 says, “And Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and he gave them an estate in the land of Egypt in the best of the land in the region of Ramses.” Scholars usually repudiate the notion that Israelites settled in the region of Ramses, since he would not rise to power for many years. However, new

evidence shows that the Israelites actually did come to Egypt during the reign of Ramses II, due to a great famine around 1225 BCE; those at the time of Joseph who settled in the region of Ramses, however, can be correlated with the Jacob-el people from Edom. There is Egyptian documentation about a group from Edom who migrated to Egypt because of famine, starvation, and thirst.¹ The migration of the Jacob group to Egypt was similar to this episode.² In both cases, migrants whose vocation included shepherding were despised by the Egyptians because the latter deified the ram as a holy animal, symbolizing the Egyptian god Amon. Thus, it seems logical that the Egyptians would conscript these starving migrants as lowly physical laborers to build the city of Ramses.

The circumstances of the Jacob-el group's exodus from Egypt are recounted in many documents, most notably by Manetho, an Egyptian priest writing during the Second Temple period around the third century BCE. His writings are preserved in the work of the Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, who lived in the first century CE.

IN SCRIPTURE

This essay is an edited version of a chapter from *איך נולד התנ"ך* [How The Bible Was Born], by Israel Knohl, Kinneret, Modi'in, 2018 [Heb.], 384 pages, ₪ 96 [\$26].

According to Manetho, a group called the Hyksos came from Canaan, overran Egypt, were driven out, went back to Canaan, and ultimately settled in Jerusalem. Later, the pharaoh named Amenophis, who wanted to come face to face with the gods, was told by his counselor that only if Egypt

was cleansed of lepers would he be able to see the gods.

Amenophis collected all the lepers in Egypt together and settled them in a remote city, Avaris, which had previously been the Hyksos's capital. The lepers rebelled against Amenophis and appointed a leper priest called Osarseph as their leader. Osarseph had previously served at the temple of the sun god (the biblical "On") in Heliopolis, and he gave the



How The Bible Was Born

lepers a new religion that was hostile to the Egyptian religion. They despised the Egyptian gods and sacred animals, which they slaughtered, roasted, and ate.

When the lepers were attacked, Osarseph sent messengers abroad to conscript a militia. He approached the Hyksos in Jerusalem, and they arrived in thousands from Canaan to help Osarseph and the lepers, at which point Osarseph changed his name to Moses. Together, the lepers and the Jerusalemites formed a military power that took over Egypt, looted the Egyptian temples, profaned the idols, and slaughtered and ate the sacred animals. Amenophis fled Egypt and went to Ethiopia. Years later, Amenophis left Ethiopia with a huge army and returned to Egypt. Together with his (now grown up) son Ramses, he fought the joint forces of the lepers and the Jerusalemites, and pursued them into the Syrian mountains.

We have here a story of an ethnic group in Egypt that threatened the indigenous Egyptian religion and objected to the worship of Egyptian idols and sacred animals. This group was reinforced by people arriving from the north, from the direction of Canaan, and together they seized power over Egypt, until Pharaoh Amenophis, aided by his son Ramses, drove them out.

Thomas Römer, a scholar working in Paris, noticed the similarity of plot and argued that it was very reminiscent of Pharaoh's words at the beginning of the book of Exodus:

And the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, and multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them. . . . And he said to his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: come, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply and it come to pass that when any war should chance, they also join our enemies and fight against us and so go up out of the land (Exod. 1:7, 9–10).

Here, too, is a scenario whereby an enemy from within joins forces with an enemy from without. Römer concludes from these literary affinities that the writer of the exodus narrative borrowed these plotlines from Manetho. Either way, this provides convincing evidence that a correlation between these narratives truly exists.

The story of the exodus from Egypt is very complex and may be taken two ways. On the one hand, it is the story of a group of miserable slaves coerced into forced building labor in Egypt. A charismatic leader called Moses emerges, and under his leadership the slaves manage to escape from Egypt: "And it was told to the king of Egypt that the people had fled" (Exod. 14:5). On the other hand, we are told that the Israelites are driven out of Egypt because of the

Egyptians' *fear* of them: "because they were driven out of Egypt" (Exod. 12:39). Also, contrary to the notion that the Israelites were very downtrodden, other verses describe them as leaving Egypt with great wealth: God lends the people favor in Egyptian eyes, and the Egyptians give them gold and silver vessels (Exod. 11:2–3; 12:35–36). There is even a verse reading, "and the people of Israel went up armed out of the land of Egypt" (Exod. 13:18); literally, they were armed soldiers, the precise inversion of a downtrodden people. According to these verses, then, the exodus included a military element: armed Israelite soldiers and foreign mercenaries who came from abroad to help them. This parallel's Manetho's account in a profound way.

I think one can point precisely to the time when these events took place, based both on the biblical story and the Manetho tradition. We have to go back to the story of the Egyptian prime minister Bay-Joseph and the child pharaoh Siptah, whom Bay puts on the throne. The widow queen Tausert, Seti II's daughter by Merneptah's widow, was active at that time. She ascended the throne after Seti's death and became the sole ruler of Egypt. Her reign only lasted two or three years, (ca. 1190–1188 BCE), and then something mysterious happened, something wonderfully puzzling. This dynasty came to an end, and a new dynasty arose, the twentieth,

established by Setnakhte, Ramses III's father, who was later to fight the Philistines and other seafaring nations. But Setnakhte's ascent to the throne was also achieved through war.

We have two Egyptian documents on the subject: one is a huge papyrus, the largest in existence today. It is about 40 meters long and is called the "Great Harris Papyrus." One part of the puzzle is written on this papyrus, and the other part is to be found on a monument set up by Setnakhte in the city of Yeb, or Elephantine, the same city where many years later Jewish Israelite soldiers lived under Persian rule. These two sources complement each other.

The Harris Papyrus tells of a neglected Egypt, lacking a single ruler. Each region had a local officer or king, and they quarreled and murdered each other. There is also mention of "empty years," which could perhaps be a reference to the famine. Then it says that someone took over the throne. The word used on the papyrus is "*irsu*," which can mean "someone who made himself," or it could be a given name. Since we are not familiar with the name "Irsu," either in Egypt or elsewhere in the region, I favor the first option. This would mean that the text is about someone who appointed himself as a ruler, meaning he was not worthy to

inherit the throne of the pharaohs and took power by improper means. It also says he was “*haru*,” meaning he came from Syria, Canaan, or Transjordan, all of which are called “Haru.” So a person of Syrian or Canaanite origin appoints himself as a prince, as a ruler. He levies taxes on the entire country. He and his followers despoil the Egyptian gods and prohibit the bringing of offerings in the temples.

The papyrus goes on to tell of a turning point when the Egyptian gods took pity on the land and restored the son born of them to power. That was Setnakhte, founder of the twentieth dynasty. He restored order throughout the country, executed the evildoers, and cleansed the great throne of Egypt. In other words, following Tausert’s death, a “Haru”—a Canaanite, Syrian, or Transjordanian—came and took over Egyptian rule. He brought with him a large group of followers who objected to the Egyptian gods and their rituals. He and his followers took over the country for a time and exploited it economically. Setnakhte then battled this foreigner, removed him from the throne, stripped him of power, and ascended the throne in his place.

This document was not written at the time of the events described in it but only several decades later, toward the end of the reign of Ramses III, Setnakhte’s successor. I

mentioned another document we have, however, which was written soon after the battle for power in Egypt. This second document is a monument discovered in Yabe, on the island of Elephantine, and dated to the second year of Setnakhte's reign. There it is written that Setnakhte cleansed Egypt of those who had led her in a mistaken direction, who had defrauded her. His enemies were seized with fear and "fled like swallows fleeing the hawk," leaving behind the silver and gold that Setnakhte's enemies gave to the Asians they wanted to bring in as reinforcements, as allies. This plan of bringing mercenaries paid with Egyptian silver and gold failed, and Setnakhte drove them all out of Egypt. Following this expulsion of Setnakhte's enemies from Egypt, the people became God-fearing once more.

If I were to conflate what is written in these two Egyptian sources, the following story of the end of the nineteenth dynasty and the beginning of the twentieth emerges. Tausert died around 1188 BCE, and her death was followed by two years of internal conflict in Egypt, because she did not have any living offspring and therefore no clear heir. Then someone of Canaanite or Syrian origin took over rule in Egypt. This man despised Egyptian rituals and prohibited offerings to the Egyptian gods. He imported allies from Asia—from somewhere in Syria, Lebanon, or Canaan—whom he

paid with silver and gold. Setnakhte, founder of the twentieth dynasty, fought against the foreigner and his Asian allies who had taken over the country, and succeeded in driving them out.

Thus, we have three groups of different kinds of sources. We have Manetho, whose story is preserved in Josephus, we have the biblical book of Exodus, and we have Egyptian documents from the twelfth century BCE. I would argue that the same basic story recurs in all three: A group within Egypt that despises Egyptian ritual brings in reinforcements from abroad, from the region of Canaan and Syria. They come to Egypt and join the local group, but the pharaoh, who remains faithful to the old Egyptian religion, manages to defeat them and drive them out of the country. There is also mention of silver and gold given to the foreigners by Egyptian citizens. Manetho says this pharaoh had a son called Ramses, as did Senakhte, whose son Ramses III succeeded him on the Egyptian throne.

I am not the first to see the analogy between these ancient Egyptian sources and the Bible, particularly between the mention of silver and gold on the Yabe monument and the biblical story about the gold and silver vessels the Egyptians gave the Israelites on the eve of their exodus (Exod. 11:2;

12:35). But scholars who have studied this matter in the past thought that the foreigner who took over Egypt and against whom Setnakhte fought was Bay. Moreover, none of them has noted the connection between the story of these events and the story told by Manetho.

This struggle for power in Egypt, occurring several years after the deaths of Bay and Siptah, cannot have anything to do with Bay-Joseph but is actually about another figure—namely, Moses.

Today we know that Bay was executed by Siptah earlier on, so I claim that this struggle for power in Egypt, occurring several years after the deaths of Bay and Siptah, cannot have anything to do with Bay-Joseph but is actually about another figure—namely, Moses. My claim is that the exodus from Egypt occurred in a specific year: 1186 BCE, which was the second year of Pharaoh Setnakhte's reign. The Syrian leader who despised Egyptian religion and brought

mercenaries over from Syria or Lebanon, mentioned in these sources, is Moses.

In summary, I believe the Israelites came to Egypt during the great famine, which began at the end of Ramses II's reign, around 1225 BCE. They left at the beginning of Setnakhte's reign, around 1186 BCE. This is a span of about 40 years. If we recall that Moses is described as "a very great man in the land of Egypt" (Exod. 11:3), we now understand that this verse describes Moses's historical status. He really *was* well known throughout Egypt, and he brought together a group of armed supporters who left Egypt with him and who included a band of mercenaries, the "*erev*."

The name Moses-Mases is a bona fide Egyptian name, but as is written on the Harris Papyrus, he was Haru, i.e., from Canaan or Syria. As I understand it, Moses's parents belonged to the Jacob-el group from Edom, who came to Egypt during the famine. In my opinion, he was raised and educated, at least for a time, at the Egyptian royal court, under the protection of Tausert. When Tausert died, he saw himself as the appropriate person to take over the court and ascend the throne of the pharaohs. To do this, he conscripted his people, the Jacob-el group, who were living, enslaved, in Egypt, and then later he brought in

reinforcements from abroad, that same “*erev*,” or mercenary army, we have discussed—a foreign legion mentioned on the monument at Elephantine and in Manetho, each in its own way. There followed a struggle for power between opposing forces in Egypt. Moses and his men lost, were expelled from Egypt, and left for Canaan. This, in my opinion, is the story of the exodus of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt.

Notes:

1. Papyrus Anastasi VI.
 2. I discuss the issue of Jacob-el in Edom in Israel Knohl, “[Jacob-el in the Land of Esau and the Roots of Biblical Religion](#),” *Vetus Testamentum* 67, no. 3 (July 2017): 481–84.
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Israel Knohl is the Yehezkel Kaufmann Professor of Bible at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His numerous publications include *Messiahs and Resurrection in “The Gabriel Revelation”* (Continuum, 2009); *The Divine Symphony: The Bible’s Many Voices* (JPS, 2003); *The Messiah Before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (University of California Press, 2000), published

in eight languages; and *The Sanctuary of Silence* (Fortress, 1992).

8 Comments



Michael D Woods on April 4, 2022 at 1:22 pm


You will remember that when Jacob and his sons (Joseph's family) went to Egypt, they were assigned the land of Goshen. That's a corner by the Nile, the Mediterranean, and an arm of the Red Sea. They might have lived quite peaceably there and been put to corvee labor during non-working seasons between planting, harvest, and planting again. That would:

1. lead to a later legend of being slaves
2. explain the crossing of the Red Sea because there's still a submerged land bridge up there that could be exposed by "a strong east wind all night" as in Exodus but leave mud to bog down pursuing chariots, and
3. be very convenient for leaving Egypt because Goshen is already almost out of Egypt.

REPLY




TbD on January 28, 2022 at 7:01 pm



The end of Genesis remarks that Joseph's family of 70 went to Egypt due to famine. How could that one people grow to 2.4 million in 40 years? Don't the Torah specifically state the Hebrews were in slavery for 400 years?

REPLY

Geoffrey Sea on December 27, 2020 at 9:18 pm



If you start with the assumption that an Exodus occurred, then one is bound to find some likely date. You have begged the question and supported a gigantic fiction. One might as well ask what the exact date was than Captain Ahab harpooned Moby Dick. The probability that an Exodus occurred in 1186 BCE vanishes in comparison to the probability that no Exodus occurred at all. All of the archaeological and linguistic evidence shows that the Israelites developed peacefully in Canaan as Canaanite — there was no sojourn in Egypt, there was no Moses, there was no Exodus, and there was no conquering war. It's all just a nice story book, like Moby Dick.

That view is supported of course by the impossibility of fixing a date, with estimates ranging from 1600 BCE to 1100 BCE, along with the utter absence of any evidence of Israelite slaves in ancient Egypt, and the absence of any archaeological evidence in Sinai. If Mount Sinai was a real place, where is it? Why was the site not preserved and revered? Why has it not been a site of pilgrimage for Jews for 3,000 years not to mention modern tourism?

But the big problem is that your date is nonsensical in the general chronology of Genesis and Exodus. If the Israelites left Egypt around 1186 BCE, that means that they entered Egypt around 1586 BCE. But that is impossible because Abraham, from Ur, was said to

be a Chaldean (according to Genesis) or a Sumerian assuming he predated the Chaldeans. The Chaldeans did not exist until 900 BCE at the earliest, so you have Moses predating Abraham. On the other hand, if Abraham was born in Sumer, then he dated to before 2000 BCE and standard estimates similar to yours put him at about 2200 BCE. But if that was the date of Abraham then you are suggesting that four generations of his family spanned 600 years. That, of course, is impossible under any chronology. The whole thing is just an absurdity.

REPLY



George Henry Watson on April 14, 2022 at 2:16 am

It is not an absurdity.

Your absolute claim is absurd.

Nothing prevents Joseph from going down to Egypt Land,

in fact we know the story of Joseph being sold into slavery is correct.

There may not have been 400,000 Hebrew Men who left Egypt, it may have been 4,000.

All quite plausible.

REPLY



Ayelet HaShachar on April 14, 2022 at 3:35 am

..and the consensus of university professors across Europe

was that Troy was a fiction, and that we had nothing to learn from Homer's stories. It took an amateur archeologist to uncover the great city. Does that mean that every detail of the great legend of the war between Athens and Troy happened as Homer says? Or was it, as a professor of mine once referred to these great stories, "true myth?" Dr. Donald Kagan, of blessed memory, talked about reaching the level of "higher naiveite" in regards to what he read of Homer. This idea which he explained as the state that one reaches after passing through the stages of lower naiveite where one believes everything, to the university student who believes nothing. I think that this approach can be applied in general to ancient studies/legends/myths. When I read words like "fiction," and "nonsensical," I know that I am dealing with the university student that has adopted the uber-critical approach, or someone who, like the fundamentalist, has their own agenda, The world of Biblical studies is a minefield of politics, agendas, and big "B" believers both in favor and against the Biblical narrative. I choose to apply Dr. Kagan's approach, although I did not get the opportunity to ask him how he felt his approach did or did not apply to Biblical scholarship. However, it seems to me that Dr. Kohl might be a practitioner of the "higher naiveite" and I find his article quite interesting.

REPLY



JC on August 1, 2020 at 6:00 pm

Perhaps there's more reasonable overlap as well? In the Exodus account, Moses killed an Egyptian taskmaster and thus had to seek refuge in Midian for several years. That aligns with losing his

royal/great status as per other accounts.

Then he comes back 40 year later with Aaron (per exodus) but perhaps also with others of that family/tribe/nation (the foreign mercenaries mentioned). He comes back to (according to Exodus) rescue the people, but pretty clear the Egyptians would see that as hostile.

It's pretty clear from Exodus that the gold/silver was "given" under duress, hence aligns with plundering. Pretty common sense that Egyptian history would exaggerate up the foreign threat and claim they "drove out" the foreign people even as common sense that the Exodus account would claim victory and rescue and a noble cause.

Very interesting parallels whether or not you believe the Bible in a divine sense, regard it as a meaningful history book, or just think it's a collection of stories.

Thanks for sharing your views and studies!

REPLY



David Meyers on April 7, 2020 at 2:11 pm

Interesting discussion. I notice no mention of Akhenaten, to whom some have attributed a move toward monotheism and abandonment of the ancient Egyptian gods. Can you please comment? Thanks.

REPLY



Reader on February 19, 2020 at 12:25 am

Dear Writer

Dear Writer,

I trully enjoyed reading your article/research; it was very informative. I believe fully in the Biblical text, but love history and getting details and context that I can't get from the Bible alone. Your article, paired with the biblical account, makes the story come alive with more detail and insight. I am able to see a bigger story with this article than I did before.

While, from what you have written, it seems you don't take the biblical account as the actual story – and while i am persuaded that the biblical account is – I really enjoyed your work.

Kind regards,
Reader.

REPLY

WIKIPEDIA

Israel Knohl

Israel Knohl (Hebrew: ישראל קנוהל; born 13 March 1952) is an Israeli Bible scholar and historian. He is the Yehezkel Kaufmann Professor of Biblical studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a Senior Fellow at Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. His books deal with the integration of scientific and archaeological discoveries with the biblical account, early Israelite beliefs, a survey of Israelite cult, and how and where the Israelites originated.

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ישראל קנוהל



Born March 13, 1952

Nationality Israeli

Occupation Biblical scholar

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Biography

Israel Knohl was born in Giv'at Aliyah, Israel. After serving in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) he completed a Bachelor's degree in the Talmud Department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. For his graduate work he switched to the Bible Department and completed his PhD in 1988 under the supervision of Moshe Greenberg, with a dissertation on the relationship between the Pentateuchal Priestly source and the Holiness code.

Knohl lives in Jerusalem and is the father of the three children. His brother, Elyashiv Knohl, was the rabbi of Kibbutz Kfar Etzion.

Academic career

Following a postdoctoral fellowship at Princeton he joined the faculty of the Bible Department at Hebrew University, where he served as the Chair of the Department from 1999-2001. Presently he is the Yehezkel Kaufmann Professor of Biblical studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and a Senior Fellow at Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem. He has served as a visiting professor at Berkeley, Stanford, Chicago Divinity School, and Harvard.

Views and opinions

Knohl identifies as a religious Jew and claims that biblical criticism is not necessarily at odds with traditional Jewish beliefs. He points out that the view that the Pentateuch was composed by multiple authors is supported by a number of Jewish authors, beginning in the Bible itself, and culminating with Abraham ibn Ezra and Hasidei Ashkenaz.^[1]

Published works

Knohl's first book, *The Sanctuary of Silence*, was originally published in Hebrew. Based on his doctoral dissertation, it relates to his theories about the dating of the Priestly source. Knohl proposes that the Priestly source (P) dates from a much earlier period than is usually assumed and that the Holiness code (H) represents an addition to the law code of P, rather than the standard interpretation which is the reverse. Knohl suggests that H might have been inserted into P as a response of the Temple priesthood to the growing prophetic movements. Knohl's view has been widely accepted by scholars, most notably by Jacob Milgrom in his influential commentary on Leviticus.^[2] The book won the Shkop Prize for the best work in biblical literature.

The Messiah Before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls

Knohl is best known for his theory that Jewish culture contained a myth about a messiah who rose from the dead in the days before Jesus of Nazareth.^[3] One of the historical antecedents of this messianic figure is Menahem the Essene who is mentioned several times in rabbinic literature. Those theories are expounded in *The Messiah Before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (University of California Press, 2000).^[4] He also finds evidence of this belief in the Dead Sea Scrolls, although his interpretation of the partially preserved Self-Glorification hymn (http://booksandjournals.brillonline.com/content/books/b9789004334496_004) upon which his theory relies is not universally accepted. In 2007, after researching the Gabriel Revelation inscription, Knohl claimed that it supported his contention of a murdered Messiah resurrected after three days, he based himself primarily on the words לשלושת ימין האיה (after three days he will live) in the inscription. This reading was controversial and Knohl later recanted in favor of the more accepted לשלושת ימין האות (after three days there will be a sign).^[5] His ideas about the messiah-myth were reviewed extensively in the popular press, including the New York Times,^[6] and Time magazine.^[7]

Where are We From?

In *Where are We From?* Knohl presents his theory of Israelite beginnings. According to the subtitle the purpose of the book is to crack the genetic code of the Hebrew Bible, or more specifically to address questions regarding the genesis of the Jewish people, the root of its belief system, and how its laws and traditions originated.

Knohl bases himself on archaeological evidence and a critical reading of the biblical text. He claims that the Israelites became a nation in the 12th century BCE through the intertwining of three ethnically related groups, and that the Bible represents an integration of the beliefs of these groups.

The first group is the Hyksos, who were originally Canaanite slaves who then assimilated into the Egyptian population and ruled the country for 100 years beginning in 1638 BCE. This group was banished from Egypt in the 15th century BCE after the fall of their dynasty. It is from this group that the stories about Joseph's greatness originated, as well as the idea of Israelite banishment from Egypt. One also finds abnormal descriptions of climate, such as the Nile turning into blood, in Egyptian sources such as the Ipuwer Papyrus. Other sources for our knowledge of the Hyksos, according to Knohl, include Jewish historian Josephus' book *Against Apion*.

The myth of Abraham and his journey to Canaan originated, according to Knohl, with a group that immigrated from Mitanni following the fall of this kingdom at the hands of Shalmaneser I.

A third group were slaves that escaped from Egypt and they were responsible for perpetuating the myth of Israelite slavery in Egypt, the construction of the cities Pithom and Ramses, and the experience of running away from Egypt. According to Knohl, this third group the Apiru (related to the word Hebrew) escaped from Egypt in the year 1208 BCE during the reign of Pharaoh Merneptah, the son of Ramses II who built the city of Ramses. According to Knohl it was this group of escaped slaves that brought with them the idea of monotheism, which was conceived by Pharaoh Akhenaten. On their way to Canaan the Apiru passed through Midian and accepted Yahweh as the name of their God, as well as the tradition of not representing God through images or statues.

According to Knohl's calculation the time that elapsed from the beginning of the Hyksos dynasty until the escape of the Apiru was exactly 430 years, which coincides with time of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt according to Exodus 12:41.

How the Bible was Born

In his 2018 book *How the Bible was Born* Knohl advanced a new theory about the Exodus, proposing an identification between Moses and Irsu.^[8] According to Papyrus Harris I and the Elephantine Stele, Irsu was a Shasu who took power in Egypt with the support of "Asiatics" (people from the Levant) after the death of Queen Twosret; after coming to power, Irsu and his supporters disrupted Egyptian rituals, "treating the gods like the people" and halting offerings to the Egyptian deities. They were eventually defeated and expelled by the new Pharaoh Setnakhte and, while fleeing, they abandoned large quantities of gold and silver they had stolen from the temples. It was originally thought that Irsu was Chancellor Bay, a prominent Asiatic officer who rose to power during the reign of Pharaoh Seti II and later attempted to usurped the throne; however, an IFAO Ostrakon no. 1864 found at Deir el-Medina in 2000 states that Bay was executed during the reign of Pharaoh Siptah, well before Irsu's action, thus ruling out such identification.^[9]

According to Knohl, the Elephantine Stele and Papyrus Harris I may be the Egyptian propagandistic version of the Exodus story and Irsu may be Moses: in support of his theory, he notes that the Book of Exodus states that, while leaving, the Israelites had plundered the Egyptians,^[10] that the Israelites left Egypt in arms^[11] and that the Pharaoh was afraid of a possible alliance between the Israelites and Egypt's enemies.^[12] Knohl also notes that a similar version of the story can be found in Manetho's Aegyptiaca, which speaks of a leader named Osarseph who had overthrown the legitimate Pharaoh of Egypt leading a group of lepers and in alliance with the Hyksos, before being eventually expelled from Egypt and changing his name into Moses.^{[13][14]}

Books

- *The Conception of God and Cult in the Priestly Torah and in the Holiness School*, (Doctoral Dissertation, 1988).
- *The Sanctuary of Silence: The Priestly Torah and the Holiness School*, (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1992. Hebrew. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995. English).
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Articles

- 'The Acceptance of Sacrifices from Gentiles', *Tarbiz*, 48 (1979), pp. 341–345 (Heb.)
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- 'The Priestly Torah Versus the Holiness School: Sabbath and the Festivals', *HUCA*, 58 (1987), pp. 65–118.
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