

Who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus?

How long was the Israelite bondage in Egypt? When was the Exodus from Egypt? Who was the Pharaoh of the Exodus who refused to free the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt?

The peoples of the Middle East witnessed a great exodus of Israelites from the land of the Nile following the initial Passover in Egypt, which was a long awaited deliverance for thousands of people who began an arduous journey to a Promised Land.

However, we could say that the story of the Exodus really begins with Jacob's son Joseph who was at the age of 17 sold into servitude by his brothers and taken to the land of Egypt. There he served for a short time in the household of Potiphar—considered to be the chief of the executioners—until false accusations caused Joseph to be thrown into prison where he would remain for 13 years.

Then, through a series of unusual events, he was brought before Pharaoh to interpret the king's troubling dream, and Pharaoh was so impressed by Joseph's understanding that he set him over certain affairs of Egypt, which brought Joseph to prominence in Egypt at the age of 30 in the year c. 1695 BCE.

Now according to the interpretation of Pharaoh's dream there would be several years when the crops would be bountiful before a time of severe and widespread famine that would overtake the land. So Joseph proposed to Pharaoh that a mandate should be given to the people to store sufficient food during the

seven plentiful years, and thereby they would ensure that there would be enough food available to keep the people alive for the succeeding seven-year period of famine that would come upon Egypt.

In time the famine did come upon the land and within two years many people in the region were increasingly coming to Egypt to buy grain, and this led to circumstances that allowed Joseph to bring his father and family into Egypt, which was an event that would influence the people of Israel and the Egyptians for more than 200 years.

Now Joseph had been ruling in Egypt for nine years before his father Jacob saw him again, and Jacob lived for 17 years in the land of Egypt. That means Joseph had been in Egypt for 39 years by the time his father died at the age of 147 in c. 1669 BCE, which was about the time Joseph's children were given the blessing of the birth-right promise by Jacob. Then after Jacob's death, Joseph lived an additional 54 years in which time his great grandchildren were "brought up upon Joseph's knees," which brings us to the year c. 1615 BCE when Joseph died at the age of 110, which confirms something important about the period of Israelite bondage in Egypt.

That is that from the time Jacob came to Egypt at the close of the second year of famine to the time Joseph died, the people were not in bondage in Egypt. In fact, we could reasonably say that for more than a century the Israelites lived in relative prosperity in Egypt until a period of severe

bondage began at a time when a Pharaoh came to power who “knew not Joseph” (Acts 7:18).

Historically, this period of increasing oppression is considered to have started during the rule of Ahmose I as early as c. 1570 BCE. Ahmose I was a Theban prince who drove the Hyksos rulers out of Egypt, and he eventually reorganized Egypt under his sole rule by c. 1550 BCE. This was a little more than 100 years before the Israelite exodus from Egypt, which allows us to reasonably conclude that the period of Israelite enslavement fell somewhere within this time period.

Bringing us then to the story of Moses.

From the biblical account we learn that Moses was born during the period of Israelite enslavement, and by God’s intervention he was raised in the royal house of Pharaoh. Then we learn from the story that when Moses was 40 years old he became a fugitive and was forced to flee and live among the people of Midian. There he remained for 40 years until after the death of Thutmose III, at which time Moses returned to Egypt to confront a notorious Pharaoh. “And it came to pass in process of time, that the king of Egypt died: and the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Ex. 2:23-24). [Author’s emphasis throughout.]

Notably, by the time Moses returned to Egypt he was 80 years old when he came before Pharaoh to seek the release of the people of Israel, and what followed was a series of devastating plagues that came upon the land

of Egypt. [Forcing Pharaoh to free the Israelites from bondage](#), and marking the beginning of a forty-year period of Israelite sojourning that came to a close after the departure of Moses when the Israelites initially settled in the plains of Jericho (Jos. 5:9-10). (This was shortly before the reign of Thutmose IV in Egypt, which was at a time of relative peace for the warring kingdoms of the Egyptians, the Mitanni, and the Hittites.)

Bringing us then to figure the date of the Exodus, which is calculated from the date of the building of the temple at Jerusalem by King Solomon.

For we read that: “it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Zif [April/May], which is the second month that he began to build the house of the Lord” (I Kings 6:1).

Interestingly, this verse gives us a time period of nearly [480 years that is reckoned from the time of the Exodus](#) from Egypt to the fourth year of Solomon’s reign, and in the second month of Solomon’s fourth year of reign we find that he laid the foundation of the temple at Jerusalem. Leading us to conclude that to figure the date of the Exodus from Egypt we must reckon Solomon’s fourth year of reign and the building of the temple to a known date in history, such as the date associated with the reign of a king who helped to build the “house of the Lord” (I Kgs. 5:1).

He was King Hiram of Tyre, a political friend to King David and King Solomon.

Now from the works of the historian Flavius Josephus we note that there is a relationship between King Hiram’s reign and the building

of the temple at Jerusalem, and also there is a relationship between the kings of Tyre and the founding of Carthage by the Tyrians.

So Josephus wrote that: “the whole time from the reign of Hirom [Hiram], till the building of Carthage, amounts to the sum of one hundred fifty-five years and eight months. Since then the temple was built at Jerusalem in the twelfth year of the reign of Hirom, there were from the building of the temple, until the building of Carthage, one hundred forty-three years and eight months.

Wherefore, what occasion is there for alleging any more testimonies out of the Phoenician histories [on the behalf of our nation], since what I have said is so thoroughly confirmed already?” (*Against Apion*, Josephus, 1. 18.)

Now if the reign of King Hiram began 155 years and eight months before the founding of Carthage, then that would make Hiram’s first year of reign to be c. 980/979 BCE.

Therefore, his 12th year of reign would have been c. 968/967 BCE, which coincides with the year the temple at Jerusalem began to be built by King Solomon. (Solomon’s first year reign began in c. 971 BCE at Jerusalem.)

But let’s look at this a little more closely.

Josephus also wrote in his history that: “Now in the seventh year of his [Pygmalion’s] reign, his sister fled away from him, and built the city Carthage in Libya” (*Against Apion*, Josephus, 1.18.125). Adding that: “The temple was built by King Solomon at Jerusalem, one hundred forty-three years and eight months before the Tyrians built Carthage; and in their annals the building of our temple is related” (*Against Apion*, Josephus, 1.17). (The first century Roman historian Gnaeus Pompeius Trogus notes in

his work that Carthage was founded 72 years before the founding of Rome in the commonly accepted year of c. 753 BCE.) (See, I Kgs. 6:37-38.)

Thus, Josephus confirms for us that in the seventh year of King Pygmalion of Tyre (Pumayyaton), also called Pummay, the king killed his sister’s husband. Her name was Dido (also called “Elissa”) and she married her uncle Acerbas who was a priest and brother to King Pygmalion. Consequently, when Acerbas was killed, Dido fled in that same seventh year, which was c. 825 BCE to the coast of modern-day Tunisia in Northern Africa where she founded the ancient city of Carthage.

Summarily, then, the seventh year of King Pummay of Tyre coincides with the founding of Carthage in Pummay’s regnal year of c. 825/824 BCE, which was about 143 years after the temple began to be built by King Solomon. Giving us then the date of Solomon’s fourth year of reign—c. 968/967 BCE—and the ability to [establish the date of the Exodus](#), which is accomplished by adding the elapsed period of 480 years to the date associated with Solomon’s fourth regnal year at Jerusalem. (The beginning of Solomon’s fourth year of reign coincided with the completion of the 479th year that followed the Exodus, and so the 480th year after the Exodus was in the spring of c. 967 BCE. Simply, the foundation of the temple was laid 479 years and 1 month after the Israelites left Egypt—in the 480th year.)

Thus, the year of the Exodus was in the spring of c. 1447 BCE.

So, if the bondage was initiated during the reign of Ahmose I, which is reasonable, then the enslavement began about 40 years before

the birth of Moses, noting that Moses was born in c. 1527 BCE, which was 80 years before the Exodus, and so we can reasonably say that the period of enslavement and the increasing burdens for the people of Israel lasted for about 120 years in Egypt. This likely means that the time of increasingly greater oppression was during the reign of Thutmose III, who died shortly before Moses was called by God to return to Egypt.

Who then was the Pharaoh of the Exodus?

He was the Pharaoh whose reign followed that of Thutmose III, and he was also co-regent with Thutmose III for nearly two and one-half years before he became the sole ruler of Egypt.

He was Amenhotep II.

Amenhotep II was a ruler known for his barbarism and his athleticism, and some scholars think that it was Amenhotep II who attempted to wipe out the memory of Queen Hatshepsut from Egyptian monuments more so than Thutmose III. But more importantly it was Pharaoh Amenhotep II who provoked God to plague the people of Egypt, which broke the might of Egypt's government and opened the way for the Israelites to begin their sojourn out of Egypt. 