

The Date of the Exodus

The following material summarises some of the arguments for an early date (1446 BC) and a later date (circa 1260 BC) 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' of about 1446 BC for the exodus:

1. First Kings 6:1 says: *<<In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the Lord>>*. The currently accepted date for the fourth year of Solomon's reign is 967/966 BC, 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 BC, which would yield a date of around 1400 for entrance into the land of Canaan, which, when the forty wilderness years are added, is consistent with a 1446 BC exodus.
3. Archaeological data from Jericho, Ai, and Hazor have been claimed to show evidence of destruction in the late fifteenth century BC, which is consistent with a 1446 BC exodus and 1406 BC conquest of Canaan. However, 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 BC 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 BC.
5. Exodus 1:11, which mentions the building of 'Raamses,' should not be dated to circa 1270 BC as a 'late date' view would hold, because the remarkable multiplication of Israel recorded in Exodus 1:12-22 and the birth of Moses in Exodus 2:2 both occur after Exodus 1:11. However, if Moses was eighty years old (Exodus 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 BC, 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 BC.

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 favour of a 'later date' (circa 1260 BC) are the following arguments:

1. Exodus 1:11b says the Israelites <<*built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh*>>. However the city of Rameses, also spelled Raamses - the Egyptian Pi-Rameses, was built by Raamses II, who reigned 1279-1213 BC. This city is not mentioned in any earlier archaeological records from Egypt. Therefore the Israelites were still in Egypt around 1270 BC when Raamses was built. In addition, the other geographical terms in Exodus, e.g. Pithom, Migdol, Yam Sup, i.e. 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 idealised generations of 40 years each. However, in reality the period covered 12 generations of only 25 years each, or 300 years. Subtracting 300 years from 966 BC gives an exodus about 1266 BC.
3. Egypt had imperial control over Canaan from about 1400-1250 BC. However, 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 BC.
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 BC, 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 BC.
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 BC.
6. Archaeological discoveries in Canaan show the complete destruction of some cities, such as Hazor, in the later thirteenth century BC, which would fit with a date of circa 1260 BC 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 BC. 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 favour the later date for Israel's occupation.

Conclusion

Both the early date and the late date are supported by established evangelical scholars today. In the comments made on this web site both the early date of 1446 BC, and the later date of circa 1260 BC are included.