

Book Review: Riddle of the Exodus

Riddle of the Exodus

Author: James D. Long

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Riddle of the Exodus explores the “startling parallels between ancient Jewish sources and the Egyptian archaeological record” regarding the exodus from Egypt of the Hebrews. James D. Long begins this book by looking at the reality of Egyptology and archaeology as being based upon opinions and not simply objectivity based upon hard facts. This simple reality leads Long into the explanation – and an important starting place for the book – that the chronology that is widely used by Egyptologists and archaeologists is simply not reliable. The tables and lists used by the experts do not contain “dynasties” and are many times in conflict. In addition, the dating system (Three Age System) that is often used is only a relative dating method and is designed for prehistoric sites. Long argues that even though we can currently translate hieroglyphs we cannot know for certain how to pronounce the words. Hieroglyphs – like Arabic and Hebrew – contain only consonants and therefore it is difficult to know how to pronounce the words. What makes matters even more confusing is that many of the names we commonly attach to people and places in Egypt are Greek.

Based upon research by Paul Rothstein Long argues that the trail often goes cold when researching the Exodus because because scholars refuse to learn from Jewish records. The main sources for the Jewish records include: Tanakh, Talmud, Midrash, and Seder HaOlam. Many minimalists will not take the Tanakh into account because it is considered holy scripture. However, as Long points out, there have been numerous finds that have supported the narrative of the Tanakh therefore leading some to believe that the Tanakh can be a trustworthy source for historical and archaeological research. As retold (in a condensed version) in the *Riddle of the Exodus*, the story of the Exodus begins with Joseph who becomes vizier of Egypt only to have the Hebrews enslaved by the Egyptians after his death.

Many people have been led to believe that Rameses II was the pharaoh over Egypt at the time of the Exodus of the Hebrews. However, Rameses II lived to an old age – reigning for 67 years – during a time of prosperity and power. There is no indication that the plagues which caused devastation to Egypt occurred during his reign. Rameses I, Seti, and Rameses II reigned for a total of 80 years. Joseph was vizier for 80 years so Joseph served since the beginning of Rameses I’s reign he would have still been alive to witness the Exodus. This clearly shows that Rameses II was not the pharaoh of the Exodus. Using the Jewish text *Sefer HaYashar* Long goes on to explain that it was in fact Melol (called Maror by the Hebrews) who was in fact the pharaoh during the time of oppression. Upon his death his son Othri should have taken the throne but he was considered mentally incompetent and his younger brother Adikam took the throne. Adikam

reigned for four years and it was during the first year of his reign that the ten plagues occurred prompting the Exodus of the Hebrews. Long bolsters this argument with the list of pharaohs found in the temple at Abydos. There, Seti is listed as having ruled for 94 years which corresponds with the Jewish midrash which explains that Melol ruled for 94 years. This, Long argues, means that the ruler over Egypt during the oppression of the Hebrews was his son Pepi II (known to the Hebrews as Adikam). Long goes on to explain how the ten plagues were carried out for very specific reasons which would have been understood by the Egyptians at the time.

These ten plagues are also supported by a papyrus currently located in the Museum of Leiden (Netherlands). This papyrus tells of ten plagues that befell Egypt – all ten of them correspond to the ten plagues spelled out in the Tanakh. At the end of the Sixth Dynasty historians and Egyptologists agree that the golden age of Egypt ended. This corresponds to the ending of the reign of Pharaoh Pepi II. There was a time of upheaval and the ultimate collapse of the Old Kingdom. Long argues that this collapse occurred at the time of the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt.

Even though the story of the Hebrews departure from Egypt is spelled out in some detail in the Tanakh there is no real consensus about the route that they took once they left Egypt. In the *Riddle of the Exodus*, Long attempts to bring some light to the potential route taken by the Hebrews. The Hebrews were not to take the Philistine Highway (just east of the Nile Delta) because they may turn back toward Egypt for fear of war. There is a story in *Sefer HaYashar* about a group of Ephramites who attempted to use this passage 30 years earlier to get to the Promise Land. However war broke out and many of the Ephramites were killed. Based upon the Tanakh Long argues that the Hebrews traveled for four days (excluding the time they rested) and arrived at the Reed Sea. This, he argues, means that researchers who say that the Hebrews crossed at Aqaba are incorrect because a large contingent of people could have never travelled 300 miles in four days. Based upon the Tanakh, oceanography, and geology Long argues that the Reed Sea is in fact a small straight just south of Lake Timsah where a land bridge was exposed by the blowing water. This land bridge is what allowed the Hebrews to cross the Reed Sea. To help back up the story of the crossing of the sea, Long looks toward a black granite shrine that was discovered at el-Arish. The account etched onto the shrine tells the story of “Pharaoh Thoum and his army pursuing their enemies only to perish at the ‘Place of the Whirlpool’” (131). All of this combined information leads Long to point to *Seder HaOlam* as reliably dating the Exodus to 2448 (1312 BCE).

As Long closes the *Riddle of the Exodus*, he takes the reader back to the beginning – that of the story of Joseph. In Genesis 45:8 Joseph refers to his status as vizier by stating that God has made him a father to Pharaoh. According to Egyptologist A. S. Yahuda the position of vizier was also known as *If* – which means father. Joseph was also known as *Zafanth PaAnnekh* – revealer of secrets – which referred to both his knowledge of cosmological secrets but also to his engineering prowess. Due to Joseph’s achievements Long argues that Joseph must be traceable in the Egyptian records. During the reign of Pharaoh Djoser there was a prime minister named

Imhotep who was known as an architect (known for the Step Pyramid), astronomer, and doctor. There are further connections between Joseph and Imhotep according to Long. Pharaoh Djoser was troubled because of a seven-year famine and called upon Imhotep for advice just as the pharaoh called upon Joseph for advice. Long explains that both Joseph and Imhotep lived to the old age of 110 years. As one last support for this theory, Long points out that there has also never been a tomb found that was meant for Imhotep. There has been an unfinished tomb near the Step Pyramid which may have been Imhotep's tomb but it was left unfinished and his remains were never found. The Tanakh relates the Joseph was entombed temporarily and then his remains were removed from Egypt. If Joseph is Imhotep then it is no wonder, according to this theory, that Imhotep's remains were never found.

Riddle of the Exodus is a good read for anyone interested in the ongoing theories about the Exodus. James D. Long provides some interesting theories as to the date of the Exodus as well as the route of the Hebrews. In addition, for anyone interested in Egyptology or archaeology in general, the care that Long takes in explaining the truth behind the scholarly theories is well worth the read.

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