

Book Review: *Patterns of Evidence: The Exodus*

Christopher T. Haun¹

Introduction

“It goes without saying that none of the gruesome, disordered events described in Exodus ever took place. Israeli archaeologists are among the most professional in the world. . . . There was no flight from Egypt, no wandering in the desert (let alone for the incredible four-decade length of time mentioned in the Pentateuch), and no dramatic conquest of the Promised Land. It was all, quite simply and very ineptly, made up at a much later date.”

This attack by Christopher Hitchens² on monotheism was a regurgitation of what most experts in the fields of Egyptology, Syro-Palestinian archaeology, and even

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² Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Hachette Book Group, 2007), 102. Cited in the *Patterns of Evidence: the Exodus* book.

biblical archaeology seem to be saying. The stories in Exodus are especially subject to the prevailing climate of skepticism. The tribes of Israel weren't in Egypt at all in the thirteenth century BC. They neither flourished there nor were they enslaved there. They did not make a mass exodus after a series of catastrophes crippled Egyptian civilization. They did not wander as a group of thousands (much less millions) in the Sinai wilderness for forty years before crossing the Jordan into Canaan. They did not conquer the walled cities of the Canaanites. The Israelites probably did not even exist as an identifiable people at all back then. They only evolved through chaotic and gradual forces into a distinct people in the seventh century BC. The Torah was probably written in the seventh century BC as well. And it is not for no objective reason that they're able to say these things. The evidence uncovered so far in Egypt and Canaan from the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BC simply forms a

model that looks entirely different than the model offered by the Bible.

This climate of skepticism challenged filmmaker Timothy Mahoney to question his faith and search for answers. Twelve years after this journey began, he published the book *Patterns of Evidence: The Exodus* to share the highlights of his quest. A “visual story teller” by trade, he and the Thinking Man Films team also created an excellent-quality documentary film to compliment the book.³ This is a review of the book and, to a lesser degree, the film. This review consists of eleven chapter summaries, my positive feedback, answers to three objections to POE, thoughts about the strategic importance of the Exodus story and projects like POE, and a final conclusion.

³ The book and film are available through <http://PatternsOfEvidence.com>. The film made its one-night-only debut in 700 theaters in the USA on January 19th, 2015, and earned a single encore showing soon after.

Chapter Summaries

The foreword to the book is written by physicist Gerald Schroeder. He describes *Patterns of Evidence: the Exodus* (POE hereafter) as “a game-changer” and praises Mahoney’s willingness to reevaluate the data. Mahoney is no mere armchair sleuth. He made several journeys to see the relevant source data with his own eyes and to hear as many viewpoints as possible. This approach led to a project with a wealth of fifty fascinating interviews. Highlights of seventeen of those interviews made it into the film. Some of the interviews are surprisingly candid. Something about Mahoney’s respectfulness, passion, and openness makes people open up to him. Although this film leads to an optimistic view about the historical veracity of the Exodus, it cannot be dismissed simply as Judeo-Christian propaganda. Of the ten agnostics/atheists surveyed after previewing the film, nine gave the film a “very good” to “excellent” rating.

In chapter one, Mahoney's first investigative interviews seemed to be slightly more encouraging than discouraging. He met with Kenneth Kitchen, a well-known Egyptologist who helped set the standards for dating Egypt's past. While favorable towards the Exodus being historical, Kitchen did not have any hard evidence to offer for consideration. This is not a problem for him because the Egyptians never recorded their defeats, only two percent of all Egyptian records written on papyrus survived, and the frequent flooding of the Nile could have washed away much of what may have been in Goshen. The second interview was with Hershel Shanks, founder of the *Biblical Archaeological Review*. Looking at Exodus from the standpoint of genre and authorial intent, Shanks judged Exodus to ultimately be theological, non-historical, and legendary—but not mythical. Dismissing Exodus as pure myth is going too far; Exodus does contain some real history and miracle. But providing the reader with history

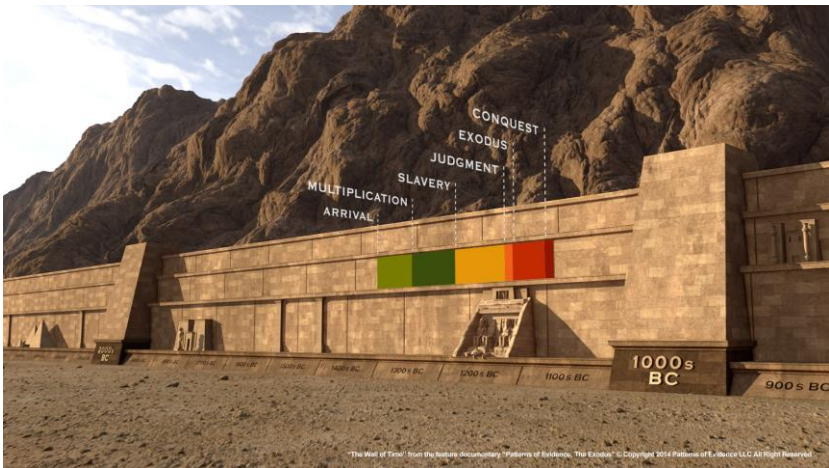
wasn't the author's intention. While he agreed that, "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence," and while he could also admit that there is no archaeological evidence that conflicts with the Exodus account, he doubts archaeology's ability to decide upon the degree of factual correspondence that the book of Exodus has. His third interview was with Jim Phillips who believes the exodus event to be historical but denied the miraculous aspect. Despite thinking Mahoney's mission impossible, he expressed openness to consider whatever Mahoney might find.

Chapter two contains fascinating interviews with three Israeli Archaeologists and three Israeli political leaders. Norma Franklin, Israel Finkelstein, and Ze'ev Herzog all seem sincere in saying that they just don't see any evidence for the Exodus. Herzog states it the most strongly: "the more information we have on biblical matters, the more contradictions we've found. And the

evidence we do have is very rich.” But Herzog’s admission that such judgments are based on data only to the tune of ten percent and upon interpretation for the other ninety percent proved encouraging. Interviews with Natan Sharansky, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Shimon Peres add a different dimension and gravitas to the quest. They discuss how the exodus and the giving of the Law has ethical and socio-political reverberations not just for Israel but for all modern democracies and human rights movements. A viewing of the Dead Sea Scrolls encouraged Mahoney even further by pointing out that a shepherd boy discovered the most significant archaeological find of the twentieth century. What might Mahoney find?

In chapter three Mahoney and his team visit Egypt. An interview with Mansour Boraik suggested that even though there doesn’t seem to be any evidence found so far, it was still true that the ancient Egyptians never chiseled or painted bad news in their temple reliefs, and there are still

many secrets left to be discovered in the sand. Then the “wall of time” is discussed. In the film the wall of time proves to be a very effective visual aid for conceptualizing the complexities of multiple “patterns of evidence” that are otherwise difficult to juggle mentally. The computer generated imagery definitely helped prevent information overload from occurring. This is one of those things that needs to be seen in the film to be properly appreciated.



The theory that the exodus probably should have happened—if it happened at all—during the reign of Ramesses II is probed with the help of Kenneth Kitchen

and James Hoffmeier. Much of the assumption that Ramesses II is the best choice stems from the fact that Exodus 1:11 mentions the city of Rameses. But still there really doesn't seem to be any palpable evidence to point to anything from Exodus in thirteenth century BC Egypt. The problem of the lack of evidence for a large group of Semites living in the city of Ramesses is raised and challenged. New findings by Manfred Bietak's team thicken the plot. Mahoney visits Bietak to explore the question of whether he unearthed evidence of Syrians or Semites living in Avaris. Just as Mahoney's hopes are raised, Bietak disappoints him by judging that these findings shouldn't be connected with "proto-Israelites." Why? The findings date to a time older than the twelfth century BC.

In chapter four the team returns to Egypt to try to figure out who the Pharaoh was at the time of the Exodus. Kent Weeks, the archaeologist who discovered the tomb of

the sons of Ramesses II, explains why Ramesses II was one of the greatest pharaohs and weighs the pros and cons for his being the pharaoh at the time of the Exodus. He points out that there are ambiguities and very significant problems in the conventional dating system. Without offering any positive evidence to consider (he also agrees that the Egyptians did not record inglorious events), he encouraged Mahoney to dare to question the assumptions about the timing of the exodus. In the attempt to develop a scientific approach to reexamining the data, the decision is made to focus more on the identification of a complex, non-random pattern of evidence. Predicated upon the outline of the Exodus events listed in Genesis 15:13-16, the pattern of **Arrival, Multiplication, Slavery, Judgment, Deliverance, and Conquest (A-M-S-J-E-C)** becomes the pattern of evidence that they will search the data for. They are not just looking for evidence; the evidence is not going to be considered evidence unless it matches that pattern and fits

in the right sequence. This approach is revolutionary because it temporarily bypasses the problems that have arisen from the method of deciding upon dates first (using arguably imperfect dating systems) and then looking for evidence only inside the data within parameters of specific date ranges.

Chapter five examines data and arguments for possible evidences for the arrival of the descendants of Jacob in Egypt. The possibility that Bietak discovered evidence of Semites is reconsidered. Egyptologist David Rohl's theories based on unorthodox dating are considered. The problem of seeing no evidence of Semites in the city of Rameses may be solved by the finding of "Asiatics" (non-Egyptians from the Levant) in Avaris, which is beneath the city of Rameses. The use of Rameses in Exodus 1:11 is questioned as a marker for dating because it is also mentioned in Genesis 47:11. What if Rameses is just a place name and not a time marker? What if it is an

anachronism added later to the text? A case is made for placing the Jews in Goshen (in cities such as Avaris) during Egypt's thirteenth Dynasty (and the Middle Kingdom) rather than in the 19th Dynasty (and the Latter Kingdom). Perhaps the evidence is missing because the dating system causes scholars to look in the wrong strata and time periods for it. A tantalizing case is made for unearthed evidence of Joseph and his brothers at Avaris. Charles Ailing is interviewed as a check on Rohl's theory. Hoffmeier provides additional arguments in favor of the story of Joseph. Rohl explains the significance of the canal of Joseph while Bryant Wood explains the significance of the evidence of the transfer of wealth from the districts to the Pharaoh.

Chapter six considers the evidences for the multiplication of the Jews in Goshen and subsequent slavery. Rohl describes the humble beginnings of the city of Avaris. It starts with less than 100 people who seem to

be Semites and within four generations it swells to 30,000 Asiatics (non-Egyptians from Canaan or Syria). Hoffmeier elaborates on the evidences for the Semitic culture of these settlers. John Bimson mentions twenty or more settlements like Avaris in Goshen that have not been fully excavated yet. Hoffmeier discusses evidence of slavery at the tomb of Rekhmire (and the problem of applying it to the Exodus period). Rohl discusses the evidence from the Avaris excavation of dramatic changes in lifespans (that are consonant with slavery) and other nuances seen in data from the graves. The “Brooklyn Papyrus” (From the thirteenth dynasty) is considered as a list of slaves with Hebraic names. Since this evidence shows up ~400 years earlier than expected, it tends to not interpreted as evidence.

In chapter seven the evidence for the judgment of Egypt (the ten plagues and the drowning in the Red Sea) is considered. Rohl reasons, “Look for collapse in Egyptian

civilization and that's where you'll find Moses and the Exodus." But some seem satisfied to say, "Egyptians did not record their defeats," to explain away the lack of evidence of judgments in the time of the 19th Dynasty. The fact remains that Egyptian civilization did not apparently suffer any mortal blows during the New Kingdom era. So evidences of such a destruction in the Middle Kingdom are considered. The pros and cons of the Ipuwer Papyrus (or the *Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage*) as evidence are weighed. (The film includes a helpful reading of parallel passages from the Exodus and from Ipuwer in tandem. The audience in the theater I was in seemed particularly impressed at the unmistakable harmony between the two.) Maarten Raven is consulted as the expert on the *Admonitions*. He is adamant about seeing no connection between Ipuwer's *Admonitions* and the Exodus. To begin with, both accounts are way too fantastic to be true. Second, Ipuwer's account is way too early to align with the

Exodus story. Third, scholar Miriam Lichtheim ruled out the calamity described by Ipuwer as being historical because the account was of a poetic genre and therefore not possibly history. Apparently a text cannot be both poetic and historical at the same time. Fourth, Lichtheim cites an apparent incongruity about the wealthy becoming poor and the poor becoming wealthy that makes the Admonitions seem logically absurd to her. (Mahoney points out the answer to this conundrum may be found in the Exodus account.)

Chapter eight tackles the challenge of the Ramesses Exodus theory. Kent Weeks confirms that there was no collapse in the time of Ramesses II. Finkelstein agrees. There just is not any evidence of national weakness or collapse at this time. Returning to the Bible, the date from 1 Kings 6:1 is factored in. It says clearly says that the Exodus event occurred exactly 480 years before the building of Solomon's temple. This suggests a date of 200 years before

Ramesses date. Hoffmeier suggests the need to choose between the 1 Kings passage (and the date of the fifteenth century BC) and the Exodus 1:11 passage, which to him indicates a thirteenth century BC date. (Mahoney points out the Rameses-anachronism loophole to Hoffmeier's argument.) Other logical problems are considered. A new pharaoh came to power while Moses was in exile for forty years and that's difficult to reconcile with Ramesses II who ruled till age ninety-seven. The Merneptah stele mentions Israel as existing as a nation in the time of Ramesses II. Charles Ailing and Clyde Billington introduce the little-known Berlin Pedestal which seems to indicate that the nation of Israel existed by 1360 BC—which is 100 years earlier than Ramesses II. They also mention little known hieroglyphs dated 1390 BC that talk about a Bedouin people who worship *Yahweh*, the name of God that was revealed to both the Israelites and to Pharaoh by Moses just

prior to the exodus event. (Compare Ex. 3:13-15 with Ex. 6:3.)

Chapter nine digs for evidence of the departure from Egypt—the exodus proper. The findings from mass grave pits and abandonment in both Avaris and Kahun are evaluated. Manetho’s history seems to say that God (singular) smote the Egyptians during the thirteenth dynasty. The only true collapse of civilization in a 1,000 year block of Egyptian history occurred in the thirteenth dynasty and was followed naturally by the Hyksos invasion.

Chapter ten considers the usual reasons for rejection of the conquest of Canaan and gives a special focus on the excavations at Jericho. Kenyon proved that there was no Jericho and other city-states in Canaan to be conquered in 1250 BC. Not only is there no evidence, there are no such cities at the expected time. But Bimson points out that there was a destruction of those cities at an earlier century. Rohl

chimes in with what seems like the method and spirit of the POE search: “If people are telling us there is no Jericho at the time Joshua conquered the Promised Land, and therefore Joshua is a piece of fiction, and therefore the Conquest is a piece of fiction, and then probably Exodus is a piece of fiction as well, if that’s the case, why don’t we ask the simple question, ‘Well, when was Jericho around, when was Jericho destroyed,’ and start from that point of view?” Wood dismantles Kenyon’s claim that Jericho was destroyed around 1550 BC *by the Egyptians*. Wood also discusses pottery analysis from the destruction of Jericho. Wood and Ailing make a case for the Exodus around 1450 BC while Rohl and Bimson suggest the dates are in need of major correction. All agree that the destruction of Jericho fits the pattern found in Exodus. The destruction of the city of Hazor and evidence for its King Jabin is also considered. The biblical story of the conquest and the scope of the destruction is revisited. The Bible says nine cities were

destroyed. Joshua did not burn most of the cities of Canaan. Bimson mentions thirty sites that were destroyed or abandoned at the end of the Middle Bronze Age. The evidence for Shechem as the location of Joseph's bones is evaluated. The pattern of evidence seems to fit but the problem is that it's all too early for most scholars to readily accept.

Chapter 11 tackles the problem of dating and time. Could conventional Egyptian history really be off by 300 years? Hoffmeier is against "chronological revisionism." Finkelstein insists they cannot be off by more than ten years. Alan Gardiner's old comment about Egyptian history being built on the shaky foundation of "rags and tatters" is considered. Weeks tends to agree but cannot see shifting it all by centuries. Rohl and Bimson suggest maybe the "dark periods" between the three kingdoms of Egypt may have been miscalculated. The length of the Third Intermediate Period is particularly questionable.

Chapter 12 digs deeper into the matter of the historical evolution of conventional Egyptian dating and timelines. The dating of Pharaoh Shishak/Shoshenq I to the time of 925 BC is a key. If that date is wrong, many other dates are likewise off. And are Shishak and Shoshenq really the same Pharaoh? If not, perhaps everything needs to be rethought.

The epilogue hints to a sequel. At least four helpful bonus chapters follow.

Positive Feedback

POE does a great job of introducing a large quantity of data that seems to fit the A-M-S-J-E-C pattern well. It is well suited for novices, experts, believers, and nonbelievers.

Those who are new to the subject get a great introduction and a dose of optimism. Those who have thought the stories contain a few kernels of truth might begin to see more than just kernels. The scholars who believe the Bible

is reliable in its historical accounts may now have more impetus, opportunity, and courage to swim against the stream now. (For now their careers may be at risk if they suggest the Bible should be taken seriously as a historical reference tool.) The film's persuasiveness has already proven to win scholars over. An Israeli archaeologist who previewed the film (and who must remain unnamed for now) said it was remarkable in every way, is probably correct on the whole, and harmonizes very well with the findings of another famous Israeli archaeologist from the 1930s who was not mentioned in the film. An Israeli Egyptologist who was asked to preview the film responded with:

I am so impressed with your work, the richness and the scholars that you have reached to. I have to say that I have been approached several times in the past with attempts [by others] to do your [type of] work but it was never the real thing. . . .While I was watching your movie it felt this is it! I had always the feeling that Avaris was a great key to understand our story but it was always very political and with many secrets . . . some of the findings did not reach the scholars especially the one[s] in Israel. Now I understand why. . . You definitely convinced me in

your dating. . . It make sense. . . I think I can contribute you with more evidence from my research. I'm an Egyptologist specializing in the language. There are references in different text that you will be interested to know [about]. I would love to participate . . . to share what I know and why I support you strongly.

The film has much to commend it. The CGI for the wall of time is better seen than described. The CGI reconstructions of Avaris and what might be Joseph's tomb offer something that the book cannot. The readings and recitations of the Exodus by Rabbi Manis Friedman were a pleasant touch. Presumably the DVD sets will have special features that the book will not include. The discussion panel segment with Gretchen Carlson, Eric Metaxas, Anne Graham Lotz, Jonathan Morris, and Dennis Prager had several worthwhile moments. Prager expanded on a thought-provoking argument for believing the Exodus story that POE film only gave ten seconds to. Short cameos by Dr. Walter C. Kaiser Jr, Dr. Norman L. Geisler, and Dr. Joseph C. Holden helped highlight the apologetic value of the project.

POE still offers some fascinating glimpses of fideism and the neo-kantian fact/value dichotomy in action. The film starts with a conversation between Rabbi Wolpe and Michael Medved. Wolpe explained his view of the Exodus saying, “Whether it was true, it is true. And those are two different things.” An interview with Israel Finkelstein (who influenced Wolpe) discusses the juxtaposition of his empirical faith in that which is tangible, factual, and logical with his not-so-rational-but-highly-valued type of faith in religious traditions and symbols. The interview with Maarten Raven captures a closed-minded presuppositionalism that also warrants being seen on film.

Anticipated Objections

Although Mahoney and team try to avoid getting hung up on the dating of data in favor of focusing on patterns of evidence, they are certainly going to refuel the fires of the date debate. Hoffmeier and Kitchen date the Exodus late in

the New Kingdom (around 1250 BC) while Wood and Aling place it early in the New Kingdom. Bimson pins it to the end of the Middle Bronze Age while Rohl places it slightly earlier. Despite the fact that Mahoney is careful to avoid setting any dates himself, it still seems like he's encouraging serious reexamination of the conventional dating systems. For better or for worse, many conservative scholars are going to resist this. Additional measures of caution about the dating problem may be presented in the book that may not be as obvious in the film.

It may be possible that some may object to the reliance on David Rohl. Rohl did seem to get more air time in the film than most of the other scholars. He's also the most likely to get slapped with labels like maverick, sensationalist, unorthodox, or radical. RationalWiki.org lumps Rohl in with the provocative and largely discredited Velikovsky. Wood says Rohl "cannot so easily be brushed

aside” but offers several criticisms of his work.⁴ Some might be uncomfortable with the fact that Rohl is an agnostic. (There is a piquant irony in the fact that an agnostic seems to have more faith in the historical reliability of the Old Testament than many Christians and Jews!) I’m not trying to marginalize Rohl’s perspective here. All theories deserve testing and Einstein was right when he said “we can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” There may be additional need for caution with some of Rohl’s theories. If someone who sees the film somehow concludes that Mahoney is parroting Rohl, I think a reading of the

⁴ Bryant G. Wood. David Rohl’s Revised Egyptian Chronology: A View from Palestine. *Associates for Biblical Research*. May 23rd, 2007. <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2007/05/David-Rohls-Revised-Egyptian-Chronology-A-View-From-Palestine.aspx>. Accessed February 13, 2015. To be fair, some of Wood’s work on Jericho is also criticized constructively as being “equivocal, unpublished evidence” by Holden and Geisler in *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible* (Harvest House: 2013) 235-237.

book would be a good to clear up that misconception. It is clearer in the book that Mahoney doesn't embrace Rohl in all ways at all times. And, given the bonus chapters factor in the book, ultimately it is the conservative Hoffmeier who gets the last word rather than the radical Rohl.

Another possible objection that might arise from some is Rohl's recommendation that the reference to the "city of Rameses" in Exodus 1:11 and the reference to "the land of Rameses" in Genesis 47:11 are anachronistic redactions. This proves to be a key debate when dating the Exodus. The idea that Moses may not have written every single word in the Pentateuch might be a problem for some. While firmly holding to the Mosaic authorship of Genesis and Exodus myself, there may be a good reason to believe there is a modicum of later redaction in the Torah after Moses' death. For example, although it is possible that Moses could have prophetically seen his own death and burial and written about it before dying, I can see why

many would find more likely the idea that another scribe recorded Moses' death and burial story in Deuteronomy 34. This is of course a very far cry from the radical redaction criticism of a previous century that produced the audacious JEPD theory. Also there may be some possibility of apologetic value in accepting the notion that the mentions of Rameses in Genesis and Exodus were not written by Moses. Many today (including some of the people interviewed in the POE project) believe that none of the five books of Moses were in fact written by Moses. They prefer to think that the Torah was written centuries later by other scribes. One common theory is that Ezra, one of the few literate Jews who could read Hebrew after the Babylonian captivity, may have been the main author of the Torah in the seventh century BC. But if Rohl is right in saying that the mentions of Rameses in the Torah are anachronisms, there is the possibility of a chronological marker here that would help disprove the Ezra theory.

There was only a ~200 year span where it was meaningful to speak about the city of Rameses or the land of Rameses. If a scribe after the time of Moses did add Rameses to the text, or change a name from Avaris to Rameses to make it more recognizable to his audience, for example, it would then be likely that the redaction occurred in the thirteenth century BC (assuming standard dating) rather than the seventh century BC. Even if Moses did not write Rameses, it would have been someone who lived much closer to his time than to Ezra's time.

The Strategic Importance of the Exodus Story

The strategic objective of the Christian apologetic endeavor is not just to “take every thought captive to Christ” but also to “destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor. 10:3-5 ESV). The war is largely ideological and so are the “strongholds” that need to be destroyed. The stronghold of skepticism about

the events of Exodus that has been fortified throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. POE is one of the few attempts to lay siege to it. The knowledge of God is at stake here. The God we serve has made himself known in human history not just with meaningful words but with meaningful actions. The veracity of Exodus matters because it arguably the best showcase of interventions by the God of Jacob into our world. A skeptical view of Exodus fits with atheism, agnosticism, deism, polytheism, or finite godism. What was the public uproar over Ridley Scott's 2014 epic film *Exodus: Gods and Kings*? It was over the casting of actors seeming racially biased. Meanwhile the few objections voiced to casting God as a vengeful, imperfect child and a finite alien-god went largely unheard. But why should this surprise anyone? As long as the historians are saying that YHWH did not actually do anything in Egypt for the Israelites at all, how can there be any scandal over taking his name in vain? There is no force in an objection to the

reinterpretation of a totally fictitious character with a different fictitious character. A vindication of the historical reliability of the Exodus account is also then a vindication of theism—the belief in a personal God who purposes and acts in ways that cannot be thwarted. Moses said this to a new generation of Israelites:

[H]as any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him. (Deut. 4.)

The connection between the acts of God and the knowledge of God (for both Jews and Egyptians) was a running theme throughout the book of Exodus:

- Ex. 6: “**you shall know** that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”
- Ex.7: “Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. The Egyptians **shall know** that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring out the people of Israel from among them. . . By this **you shall know** that I am the LORD. . .”

- Ex. 8: “Be it as you say, so that **you may know** that there is no one like the LORD our God.”
- Ex. 9: “so that **you may know** that there is none like me in all the earth. . . . so that **you may know** that the earth is the LORD's.”
- Ex. 10: “that I may show these signs of mine among them, and that you may tell in the hearing of your son and of your grandson how I have dealt harshly with the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them, that **you may know** that I am the LORD.”
- Ex. 14: “and the Egyptians **shall know** that I am the LORD.”
- Ex. 33: “how shall it **be known** that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”

Joshua extended the need for this knowledge to everyone:

For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty, that you may fear the LORD your God forever. (Joshua 4:23-24)

While none of the Christian creeds explicitly require belief in the exodus story. But when the factual nature of the exodus story is removed, very little in the factual core of the Christian faith makes any sense. The

idea that the God of Jacob is able and willing to act in our world to keep his promises to mankind suffers a mortal blow. If we cannot trust the biblical record of God intervening powerfully in human history to redeem his people from slavery in Egypt, what rationale is there for bothering to pretend that the same God will redeem us from anything? If the old covenants are legendary, how can the new covenant be any less so? If Exodus is one big myth, then the Passover celebration, the Last Supper, and the Lord's Supper become celebrations of myths. If the Old Testament is legendary, the New Testament, unable to rise above its source, either becomes legends sitting atop older legends or delusion based upon legends. If the first and foundational books of the Hebrew Scriptures are considered to be a mix of legend overlaying history, why expect scholarly attitudes about the four gospel to be significantly different? For when the beginning of a long story begins with, "Once upon a time," the tone for the all

the chapters in the story is set. In 1 Cor. 10 some of the exodus events are said to serve as “examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things. . . and were written down as warnings for us.” Is the reality of the basis for holiness predicated upon a non-real event? Hebrews 3:7-19 uses the parts of the exodus story to urge us to not have “a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” Hebrews 11:22-31 cites eight of the exodus events to explain what faith is. Faith itself would need to be redefined as believing that which we know does not correspond to reality. As confidence in the historicity of Exodus is allowed to continue to wither, we also let wither the idea that religious faith, factual correspondence, and reason can coexist.

Conclusion

In Numbers 13, most were too afraid to try to conquer the fortified cities of Canaan. Caleb alone said, “We should go

up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.” Mahoney and his team remind me of Caleb. There aren’t many people who are laying siege to these particular strongholds of skepticism. Perhaps the same fortified cities that Caleb was referring to are what Paul was imagining when he set the expectations that “the weapons of our warfare. . . have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:3-5). Thinking Man Films has given us a powerful tool that makes people rethink the historical reliability of the Bible and end up with an optimism. Perhaps this could help inspire a new generation to take up the cause of trying to know God better and trying to make him better known in this world.

Mahoney and team are just getting started. They have a vision for spending the rest of their lives investigating the patterns of evidence for several of the historical records in the Bible that are shrouded in skepticism. The next project is slated to tackle the doubts

and controversies surrounding the route of the Exodus, the location of the Red Sea crossing, the location of Mount Sinai/Horeb, and the area of wilderness wanderings.