

Virtual Christian Magazine

Hope And Encouragement For The Real World

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Moses was called out of Egypt both physically and spiritually. His experience, though unique in many ways, is not altogether different from ours. Just as he learned to trust God during his lifetime, so should we. Moses is more like us than many think.

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Loving Your Enemies

By Michelle Grovak

I began my personal journey in learning to love my enemies 13 years ago. Many other people's stories have taught me along the way.



AS A YOUNG WOMAN PLACED HER HAND on the casket, she asked the mourners to forgive the man who had murdered her husband, Greg Oswald. The murderer, Robert Wissman, sadly took his own life at the scene of the crime. Far from seeking revenge, Mrs. Oswald set an example for everyone in that crowded church in Goshen, Indiana, when she spoke of forgiveness.

To have outward concern for those who would do us wrong doesn't come naturally. It's natural to want to get back at those who hurt you. It only seems natural to hate the person who murdered your husband. But we are called to do something far greater than what comes naturally. We are commanded not only to forgive those who mistreat us, but we are instructed to love them as well.

Learning difficult lessons

Conversion is a process, and as we learn to "put on Christ" as the apostle Paul instructed, we will begin to learn the lesson of learning to love our enemies. This lesson seems so daunting we may not feel we can deal with it. I felt much the same way while attending speech class in college. I kept putting off Speech 101 from one semester to another until I was finally forced to take it in order to complete my required courses.

The call to love our enemies is not a suggestion; it's a command found in both the Old and New Testaments.

For the first 17 years of my Christian experience I concentrated very little on loving my enemies and focused more on other areas of Christian living. However, during the last 13 years, I have learned valuable lessons in this area.

Commanded to love

In Matthew 5:44 Jesus exhorts us to love our enemies. Why? Because we are to become like

our Father, who causes the rain to fall on the righteous and the unrighteous. The apostle Paul in his letter to the brethren in Rome said to "bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:14). We are not to repay evil for evil. On the contrary, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head" (Romans 12:20; Proverbs 25:21-22).

How can we love someone, especially when we are fighting feelings of anger and resentment towards those who have injured us? A sincere love of our enemies is impossible without our Father's help. We must seek His inspiration and guidance in order to keep our focus on learning the lesson of loving our enemies.

My mother's example

My mother, Becky Harper, applied the scripture of feeding your enemies as a means to achieve the spirit of true forgiveness towards those who hurt her deeply. My mom was the best cook for miles around. Every dish was created from "scratch" with love. One day she baked a batch of chewy brownies for someone who had repeatedly hurt her. I asked her why she would do that when she still had hard feelings. She replied, "I want to forgive him for what he's done, and it helps me to forgive people when I do something nice for them."



I've learned from her example of physical service--be it making chicken soup, mowing a lawn or planting flowers as a surprise for a difficult neighbor. Doing these simple yet profound things helps me to get my attitude in line with God's will for those who aren't my favorite people.

God loves His enemies

And Jesus' perfect example is always before us. He gave His life for humanity while we were yet enemies of God: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Romans 5:10). He was degraded, tortured, scorned, judged and killed because He loved the people of the world, the very people who murdered Him (John 3:16). At this Passover season, when we are to take inventory of ourselves, how about focusing on how well we have followed Christ's example of loving our enemies during this past year?

The Bible is clear, we are to do several things for our enemies. The tasks are simple, but far from easy. We are instructed to pray for and bless those we don't like. We are to do good to them rather than repay evil for evil. We are to turn the other cheek and not seek revenge. We are to give them food and drink.

My personal journey of forgiveness

I began my personal journey in learning to love my enemies 13 years ago. After my mother's death I carried a terrible bitterness towards a couple who had wronged me. I asked God to help me love them and find a way to break the walls of anger and hatred that had built up in my heart.



My mother died of cancer during the Feast of Tabernacles in 1988. We had lived next door to her during the final years of her life. Just before she passed away we sold our home. We were supposed to move out of the house the day of my mother's funeral, but due to the stress we were under I made arrangements with the buyers to move the remainder of our belongings from the house a few days after the funeral. The grief of losing my mother was compounded when we discovered the buyers had ransacked our belongings. They had kept what they

wanted and put the rest in the shed.

My son and daughter inherited my mom's house, which meant I would see those who had hurt me so deeply prospering with our things. I asked God to help me love them, but it was not easy. One day while visiting my son, I went to their mailbox to retrieve the mail. I had forgotten our neighbor's mailbox was next to theirs. Even that irritated me.

Blessed relief

On that particular day I happened to glance over and noticed a heart drawn in pencil on their mailbox. Inside the heart, was written in childish scrawl, 'Mom and Dad, I love you, Mikey.' Somehow the fact that these people had a little son, who loved them, melted the icy hatred I held in my heart. For the first time I saw their humanity. I had asked God for a way to love them, and the answer came in a very unusual way. It was a relief not to have to carry that anger and the hatred it engendered any longer.

We are instructed to pray for, and bless those we don't like.

Learning from a stranger

Later, while at the Feast of Tabernacles, I learned more about forgiveness from a woman who was a complete stranger. During our brief encounter, she began exhorting me to love my enemies. She was intent on explaining to me how crucial it is for the Christian to do so. She spoke from experience. Her husband had left her for another woman 10 years earlier. Not only that, he lived across the street from his former wife. To add insult to injury, he refused to pay child support. She was understandably hurt and outraged.

It was a relief not to have to carry that anger and the hatred it engendered any longer.

In time, she learned to love this man who had become her enemy. She prays that her former husband and his new family will be blessed. As a result, she is seeing God's blessing in her own life in both physical and spiritual ways. Her face beams with joy, as she praises God for teaching her this hard, but beautiful, lesson.

That is not to say we shouldn't seek legal recourse for assistance in receiving justice. However, we need to remember it is not up to us to personally seek vengeance for those who have mistreated us. That is God's job. And He is a God both of mercy and justice.

God does bless and reward us when we love our enemies. It's not natural, but it is a required course of study for Christians. Advanced Loving Your Enemies is a hard course, but the rewards are well worth the effort.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

By Gary Petty

Millions of people celebrate Easter in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus never observed Easter, but there are a series of special days He celebrated while on earth. These days included the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. What relevance do these days have for Christians today?



FOR MOST OF US bread is an unheralded side dish of our everyday diet. In much of the Western world meals are centered around meat, pasta or casseroles; and unless we are eating a sandwich, bread is an afterthought. That wasn't true of the Middle Eastern cultures of biblical times.

In ancient Israel eating meals was a communal affair. Family and friends gathered to eat a meal while reclining on a floor mat. Each person would tear a piece of bread from a small loaf or thin round chunk, and use it as a spoon to scoop food from the various dishes offered at meal time. This is why the Bible speaks of people eating a meal as "breaking bread." During Roman times couches and a low table replaced the mats, but the meal was eaten in basically the same manner.

The leavening process

Bread was made from different grains including wheat, barley, millet or even beans and lentils. Loaves were prepared by mixing flour with water and kneading it in troughs or bowls made of leather, wood or cloth. Depending upon where a family lived or how wealthy they were, bread was baked on hot sand or flat stones over a fire; on a griddle; or in an oven made of bronze, iron or more commonly clay.

The leavening process is fascinating. A leavening agent, which causes gas bubbles to form, is introduced into a batch of dough. This leavening agent permeates every part of the dough until the entire batch is leavened. A small amount of leavening can change a large amount of dough. Since bread was made daily, the easiest way to leaven it was to save a lump of leavened dough from the previous day. This lump would be added to the dough and left to stand until the leavening process had permeated the entire batch.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread

Every spring ancient Israel observed a religious festival called the Feast of Unleavened Bread. We find in the Old Testament that the Israelites were commanded by God not to eat leavened bread during this seven-day period (Exodus 13:3-10; Leviticus 23:4-8).

Do these ancient observances have any meaning for Christians today? Many say that Christians are to live by the teachings of the New Testament and pay little attention to the Hebrew Scriptures. They forget that the only Scriptures available to the apostles of the first century were what we call the Old Testament: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).



Paul was reminding Timothy to remember what he had been taught as a child from the Old Testament. In this context it is not difficult to understand why the early New Testament Church observed the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Why do so few Christians actually observe the Passover and the accompanying Feast of Unleavened Bread?

In his letter to the Corinthians the apostle Paul wrote the following to a predominately non-Jewish congregation: "Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Corinthians 5:6-7). He uses leavening as a symbol of human pride and vanity.

Paul understood the leavening process and applied it to the human condition. In verse 2 he told the Corinthians that they were "puffed up." Remember, leavening fills dough with air bubbles. We even refer to someone who is preoccupied with self-importance as being "filled with hot air."

Now notice verse 8: "Therefore let us *keep the feast*, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." What feast is Paul speaking of?

Symbolic uses of leavening

Jesus uses leavening as a symbol of false teachings. Notice what He said to His disciples: "Then Jesus said to them, 'Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees...How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?--but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees'" (Matthew 16:6, 11). In the New Testament leavening is used as a symbol of human pride and false religious teachings that are a result of human pride.

This leavening agent permeates every part of the dough until the entire batch is leavened.

On another occasion a group of Jewish religious leaders approached Jesus and asked Him to perform a sign to prove that He was sent from God. They referred to the time God provided ancient Israel with food called *manna*. In the Old Testament bread was a synonym for food, they simply referred to it here as "bread" (John 6:25-35).

"Eat My body, drink My blood"

With this in mind, Jesus' comments should have more meaning: "Then Jesus said to them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.' Then they said to Him, 'Lord, give us this bread always.' And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.'" (John 6:32-35).

Jesus made the remarkable statement that He is the "bread of life." He said if you eat of this bread you shall live forever (verse 50-51, 58). The apostle Paul also linked the Passover observance with the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus Christ was offered as the New Testament Passover sacrifice, and He called Himself the bread of life.

What religious days should Christians observe?

Where did the Western world get their present religious calendar? The New Testament Church didn't observe Easter. Even the name Easter comes from an ancient pagan goddess. The Easter bunny and colored eggs have origins in fertility rites of antiquity and have nothing to do with the death and resurrection of Jesus the Son of God.

Why is it that so many in the Christian community ignore, or many times have no knowledge of, the Holy Days outlined in the Old Testament, observed by Jesus and the apostles and kept by the New Testament Christian Church?



Jesus made the following perplexing statement: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:53-56).

What did Jesus mean by these statements? Did He really intend that a person eat His body and drink His blood in order to receive eternal life? This statement offended many people, yet Jesus did not attempt to explain Himself until the evening He was arrested and taken to trial.

Jesus explains Himself

On the night before His death, Jesus assembled with the 12 disciples to *They forget that the*

observe the Passover meal, commonly referred to as "the Last Supper." During this meal He explained what He meant concerning His earlier statements about eating His body and drinking His blood: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins'" (Matthew 26:26-28).

only Scriptures available to the apostles of the first century were what we call the Old Testament.

The New Testament claims that Jesus is the Passover Lamb of God. Why do so few Christians actually observe the Passover and the accompanying Feast of Unleavened Bread? Why have so many abandoned the annual religious observances of the Scriptures and replaced them with holidays whose origins are in dark non-biblical antiquity? To answer these important questions, request your free copy of *God's Holy Day Plan--The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*.

The Exodus Controversy

By Mario Seiglie

Did the Exodus really happen? Did God deliver the ancient Israelites from Egyptian slavery as the Bible describes? Contrary views have generated much publicity, but the facts of the Bible's side of the argument are seldom considered.



IT SEEMS THAT EVERY YEAR, especially around the spring Passover season, when Jews and many Christians commemorate Israel's deliverance from Egypt, newspapers and magazines publish articles questioning the validity of the biblical account of the Exodus.

Last year, for example, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a front-page story reporting that a liberal rabbi in the Los Angeles area caused quite a stir when he shocked his congregation by stating he had his doubts that the Exodus ever took place.

"The truth is," explained Rabbi David Wolpe, "that virtually every modern archaeologist who has investigated the story of the Exodus, with very few exceptions, agrees that the way the Bible describes the Exodus is not the way it happened, if it happened at all" (April 13, 2001).

Perhaps you have read such articles and wondered whether you can believe the Bible. After almost 200 years of archaeological research in Egypt and Israel, why do so many challenge the Bible's Exodus account? The stakes are high, as the critics well know. If the narrative of the Exodus is not factual, then the trustworthiness of biblical revelation is seriously undermined. Therefore it is essential that our evaluation of the evidence be accurate and fair.

Christ affirms the Exodus

First, let's make sure we have a clear picture of the biblical

perspective. We find that Jesus Christ affirmed the biblical account of the Exodus as true, and He based some of His teachings on it. Reminding His countrymen that God had miraculously provided food for them during 40 years in the wilderness, He said: "Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:49-51).



Jesus staked His reputation, authority and credibility on the Exodus account's reliability--on His confidence that the Israelites actually did eat manna in the desert as the Scriptures describe. If this account were not true, then Jesus' teachings would be seriously questioned too.

We should not be surprised, then, that some critics have focused so much attention on this fundamental event in the Bible. They try to discredit the story of the Exodus to undermine its historical validity.

Biblical historian Eugene Merrill describes the importance the Exodus has for the rest of the Bible: "The exodus is the most significant historical and theological event of the Old Testament because it marks God's mightiest act in behalf of his people...To it the Book of Genesis provides an introduction and justification, and from it flows all subsequent Old Testament revelation...In the final analysis, the exodus served to typify that exodus achieved by Jesus Christ for people of faith so that it is a meaningful event for the church as well as for Israel" (*Kingdom of Priests*, 1996, pp. 57-58).

Limits of archaeology

Many critics who doubt the historicity of the Exodus share a problem: overreliance on what archaeology can prove. Archaeology is, in fact, a limited and imperfect area of study in which the interpretation of findings, as archaeologists readily admit, is more of an art than a hard science.

Archaeologist Edwin Yamauchi points out the limits of this science when he explains: (1) Little of what was made or written in antiquity survives to this day; (2) few of the ancient sites have been surveyed and a number have not even been found; (3) probably fewer than 2 percent of the known sites have been meaningfully excavated; (4) few of these have been more than scratched; and (5) only a fraction of the fraction that have been excavated have been published and data made available to the scholarly world (*The Stones and the Scriptures*, 1981, chapter 4).

Considering not only the limits, but the positive side of archaeology, it is remarkable how many biblical accounts have been illuminated and confirmed by the relatively small number of sites excavated to date. Even though, regrettably, some professionals go out of their way to present a distorted picture of what archaeology does reveal, it does provide some of the strongest evidence for the reliability of the Bible as credible and accurate history.

Evidence destroyed

A major challenge in reconstructing an accurate view of history is that, through the ages, most negative or embarrassing evidence was never written down or was intentionally destroyed by later rulers. In fact, the Bible stands in marked contrast to most ancient literature in that it objectively records the facts about biblical personalities, whether good or bad.

In many nations, when new kings ascended the throne, they covered up or destroyed monuments and records of previous monarchs.

When new kings ascended the throne, they naturally wanted to be seen in the best light. So in many nations they covered up or destroyed monuments and records of previous monarchs. This pattern of expunging earlier historical evidence can be repeatedly seen in Egyptian monuments and historical records. For example, after the Hyksos rulers were expelled from Egypt, the Egyptians erased the records of that humiliating period so thoroughly that some of the names and the order of the Hyksos kings remain uncertain.

Some time later Pharaoh Thutmose III destroyed virtually all records relating to Queen Hatshepsut, the previous ruler, whom he despised. Visitors to her famous temple can still see where Thutmose's workmen carefully chiseled away her image from the walls of the structure. A few decades afterwards the ruling priests eliminated virtually all possible traces of the teachings of Pharaoh Akhenaten, who had introduced what they considered to be heretical Egyptian religious reforms.

So it should come as no surprise that the ancient Egyptians would not have wanted to record or even remember what was perhaps their greatest humiliation--the national devastation that occurred when their Israelite slaves won their freedom and Egypt's might proved powerless to stop them.

It seems too much to hope for, then, that a proud and powerful nation such as Egypt, whose rulers were considered gods, would record that their mighty army was ignominiously crushed by a band of virtually unarmed slaves who had a more powerful deity on their side. This would have embarrassed them before the entire world. It is natural to believe they simply tried to cover up all traces of this humiliating national episode, especially since they are known to have done this type of thing on other occasions.

Bias against the Bible

Another problem that is seldom noted is that of scholarly bias. A brief reading of archaeological journals will expose this problem. Differing opinions can stimulate public accusations that are hateful, envious, vain, arrogant and spiteful.

Radio commentator Dennis Prager made an insightful comment about Rabbi Wolpe's skepticism of the Exodus account noted above: "According to the [*Los Angeles Times*] article, most archaeologists...do not believe the biblical Exodus occurred. That most archaeologists conclude from the alleged lack of archaeological evidence that Jews were never slaves in Egypt and the exodus to Canaan never took place tells us *something about these individuals*, but *nothing* about the Bible or the Exodus.

"What does it tell us? That most of these archaeologists have the same bias against traditional religious beliefs that most academic colleagues have. Ten years ago, Dr. Robert Jastrow, ...founder of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies and now director of the Mount

Wilson Observatory--wrote about this in his book, *God and the Astronomers*. Jastrow described a disturbing reaction among his colleagues to the big-bang theory--irritation and anger. Why, he asked, would scientists, who are supposed to pursue truth and not have an emotional investment in any evidence, be angered by the big-bang theory?

"The answer, he concluded, is very disturbing: many scientists do not want to acknowledge anything that may even suggest the existence of God. The big-bang theory, by positing a beginning of the universe, suggests a creator and therefore annoys many astronomers. This anti-religious bias is hardly confined to astronomers. It pervades academia, home to nearly all archaeologists" (*The Jewish Journal*, April 20, 2001, emphasis added).

Uphill battle for believers

When it comes to the Bible, archaeologists and biblical scholars categorize themselves into two groups: minimalists and maximalists. The minimalists (also called *deconstructionists* of the Bible) generally hold the view that the Bible is full of myths and is therefore unreliable. So they vigorously try to refute any evidence that supports the biblical account.

Professor and archaeologist Anson Rainey says of the minimalists: "Their view that nothing in biblical tradition is earlier than the Persian period [538-332 B.C.], especially their denial of the existence of a United Monarchy [under Saul, David and Solomon], is a figment of their vain imagination...Biblical scholarship and instruction should completely ignore the 'deconstructionist school.' They have nothing to teach us" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, November-December 1994, p. 47).

The maximalists, on the other hand, believe the biblical accounts have solid historical and archaeological backing. Long a minority among archaeologists, their numbers are growing, since it seems that every year discoveries are found that support, rather than refute, the biblical narrative.

The archaeological date for the Exodus falls into place if the event is dated back to 1450 B.C. Archaeologist Bryant Wood is an example of a biblical maximalist who is slowly turning the tide in favor of the biblical evidence. He argues that the archaeological data for the Exodus falls into place if the event is dated back to 1450 B.C., the approximate date the Bible indicates for the Exodus. He mentions that the documented evidence of foreign slaves at that time in Egypt could well include the Israelites. He also adds that archaeological indications of the destruction of Canaanite cities some 40 years afterward support the account of Joshua's conquests.

But Dr. Wood goes against the current. Although he sits in the forefront of archaeological digs and is excavating what he believes is the biblical city of Ai, he observes he can't get his research published in serious archaeological journals because of an ingrained anti-Bible bias.

The tide of scholarly opinion on the Bible has shifted several times in the past centuries. During the later part of the 19th century there was much skepticism of the Bible, but in the 20th century, thanks to astonishing archaeological discoveries supporting the Scriptures, the tide has turned somewhat in its favor.

U.S. News & World Report religion writer Jeffery Sheler observes: "...The spirit of post-

Enlightenment skepticism unquestionably continues to dominate the biblical academy. But it is skepticism seemingly less rigid and dogmatic than it has been at times in the past...There are many scholars of a decidedly 'secular' nature who nonetheless appreciate the possibility of realities, some which are represented in the Bible, that are beyond the scope of nature and of a natural explanation" (*Is the Bible True?*, 1999, p. 14).

The biblical evidence for the Exodus

How do these factors affect the debate over the Exodus?

Although not apparent at first glance, the biblical account of the Exodus contains many tiny details that place it within a distinct historical and chronological context. Those who ignore this evidence refuse to give the biblical record a fair hearing.

For instance, in the events leading up to the Exodus, the book of Genesis records that Joseph's brothers sold him for 20 shekels to slave traders who took him from Canaan to Egypt (Genesis 37:28). Egyptologist Kenneth Kitchen notes some of the flaws in the logic of those who reject the biblical Exodus or assign it to unnamed writers many centuries later. He notes that the price of 20 shekels is "the price of a slave in the Near East in about the 18th century B.C. ...If all these figures were invented during the Exile (sixth century B.C.) or in the Persian period by some fiction writer, why isn't the price for Joseph 90 to 100 shekels, the cost of a slave at the time when that story was supposedly written? ...It's more reasonable to assume that the biblical data reflect reality in these cases" (*Biblical Archaeology Review*, March-April, 1995, p. 52).

The date of the Exodus can be accurately calculated since the Bible mentions in 1 Kings 6:1 that the fourth year of Solomon's reign was "the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt..."

Surprisingly, there is scholarly agreement about the dates of Solomon's reign, placing his fourth year in the 960s B.C. Subtracting 480 years takes us back to a date for the Exodus in the 1440s B.C.

Another biblical reference to date the Exodus is found in Judges, where Jephthah tells the Ammonites that Israel had been in the land for 300 years (Judges 11:26). Again, there is acceptance among the experts that Jephthah's victory over the Ammonites took place around 1100 B.C. This would place the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan near 1400 B.C., 40 years after the Exodus. Thus both biblical dates for the Exodus agree.

In spite of this biblical evidence, most minimalist scholars believe the Exodus took place around 1260 B.C., a date that contradicts the biblically derived dates by almost two centuries. Minimalists generally give three main reasons for this later date of the Exodus: (1) the mention of the Israelites' building of the city of Raamses (Exodus 1:11); (2) the archaeological evidence that no sedentary population lived in the Transjordan and Negev regions between 1900 and 1300 B.C.; and (3) the widespread devastation of cities and towns of central Canaan during the 1260s B.C.

Let's consider whether these reasons are solid grounds for a date that contradicts the Bible.

The city of Raamses

Many archaeologists assume the city of Raamses was named after Rameses II, a famous pharaoh who was a great builder. Yet the term Rameses simply means "born of the god Ra" (or Re) and had been used in monuments centuries before the time of Pharaoh Rameses II. The Bible itself mentions the same name when it speaks of Joseph's sojourn in Egypt, hundreds of years before the reign of Rameses II. "And Joseph situated his father and his brothers, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded" (Genesis 47:11).

So the argument that Moses lived in the 1200s because the Israelites helped build a city with the name Rameses is not convincing, since this had been a popular name for many centuries before this time. It could also be that the name Rameses was a later update to the biblical text to reflect the changed name of the city, as we see in other biblical passages.

Evidence for settlements

The second argument against the traditional date for the Exodus is based mainly on the work of archaeologist Nelson Glueck in the 1930s that seemed to show there were no permanent settlements in the Transjordan and the Negev regions between 1900 and 1300 B.C. This region should have shown a sizable presence of Edomites, Amorites and Moabites at that time, since the biblical account mentions their strong opposition to the Israelites.

However, more recent excavations have shown many settlements in the area that Glueck did not find. "The important point which has been reinforced again and again in recent decades," notes archaeologist John Bimson, "is that Glueck's initial conclusions were definitely wrong, and it is disappointing to find scholars citing them as if they were still valid evidence. All too often the 13th century date for the Exodus has been perpetuated by the baseless repetition of outmoded views" (*Biblical Archaeological Review*, September-October 1987, p. 44).

Widespread destruction

The third argument used to date the Exodus to the 1200s B.C. is the archaeological evidence for the destruction of several Canaanite cities during this period. Scholars believe this took place when Joshua invaded and conquered Canaan.

Yet, if the traditional 1400s date for the Exodus is maintained, the archaeological evidence seems to fit much better, for destruction levels in Canaanite cities such as Hazor and Jericho also date to the 1400s.

If Joshua conquered Canaan after 1400, this would have given the Israelites time to eventually take over much of the land during the 300 years of the judges. The Bible is clear that there were many cities the Israelites didn't conquer during Joshua's time or even during the time of the judges (Joshua 13:1; Judges 3:1-6). The archaeological record does support such a gradual process.

Dealing with the present findings, archaeologist Randall Price concludes: "...The signs of widespread destruction at certain sites should not be considered as archaeological evidence against the biblical chronology and for a late date for the Conquest [by Joshua]. These

destructions better fit the period of the Judges, during which ongoing warfare was commonplace" (*The Stones Cry Out*, 1997, p. 147).

Dr. Merrill adds: "...Signs of major devastation in the period from 1400 to 1375 would be an acute embarrassment to the traditional view because the biblical witness is univocal that Israel was commanded to annihilate the Canaanite populations, but to spare the cities and towns in which they lived. And the record explicitly testifies that this mandate was faithfully carried out. The only exceptions were Jericho, Ai, and Hazor" (*Kingdom of Priests*, p. 73).

We find, then, that the archaeological evidence better fits the traditional date of the Exodus backed by the Bible.

Recent discoveries

Another argument that the Exodus never occurred is that there are no signs that the Israelites wandered in the Sinai desert for 40 years. We need to consider several points in this regard.

We must remember that during the Exodus the Israelites were forced to live nomadic lives. No longer did they reside in villages with sturdy houses and artifacts that could have survived as evidence. Instead, in the wilderness environment every item had to be used to its fullest capacity and then, if possible, recycled. Also, the portable tent encampments during those 40 years would have left few or no traces that could be found 3,400 years later, especially in the midst of the shifting desert sands.

Interestingly, recent satellite infrared technology has revealed ancient caravan routes in the Sinai. George Stephen, a satellite-image analyst, discovered evidence in the satellite photographs of ancient tracks made by "a massive number of people" going "from the Nile Delta straight south along the east bank of the Gulf of Suez and around the tip of the Sinai Peninsula." He also saw huge campsites along the route, one that fits the description given in the book of Exodus (Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out*, p. 137).



Could this evidence be a coincidence? If nothing else at least it shows that a large number of people could be sustained in the same region and on the same path as that taken by the Israelites during the Exodus.

The sturdy anvil

We have covered only some of the evidence for the biblically derived date of the Exodus. Much more exists. Moreover, it seems that every year more discoveries are made that confirm the existence of biblical persons and places. But the skeptics know what is at stake, and in this world of growing unbelief they will not be deterred from striking at the foundations of Christianity and Judaism.

Although almost 200 years old, a statement by 19th-century writer H.L. Hastings regarding skeptics' attacks on the Bible holds true: "For eighteen hundred years, skeptics have been refuting and overthrowing

"For eighteen hundred years, skeptics have been

this book, and yet it stands today as a solid rock. Its circulation increases, and it is more loved, cherished, and read today than ever before. The skeptics, with all their assaults, make about as much impression on this book as a man with a hammer would on the Pyramids of Egypt.

refuting and overthrowing this book, and yet it stands today as a solid rock." -- H.L. Hastings

"When a French monarch proposed persecuting Christians, an elderly advisor told him, 'Sir, the Church of God is an anvil that has worn out many hammers.' So the hammers of the skeptics have been pecking away at *this book* for ages, but the hammers are worn out, and the anvil still endures. If this book had not been the book of God, men would have destroyed it long ago. Emperors and popes, kings and priests, princes and rulers have all tried their hand at it; they have all died and yet this book lives on.

"No other book has been so chopped, sifted, scrutinized, and vilified. What book on philosophy, religion, psychology or literature of classical or modern times has been subject to such massive attacks as the Bible? And with such venom and skepticism? And with such thoroughness and erudition? And upon every chapter, line and tenet? Yet the Bible is still loved and studied by millions."

As with the rest of the Bible, the Exodus account remains a powerful witness to a God who does care about His people and intervenes in human affairs to carry out His plan.

Do you believe the Bible? Is it the Word of God? Can we find even more evidence that it is true? Be sure to request your free copy of [*Is the Bible True?*](#)

Less Than Perfect

By Robert Berendt

Spiritual growth is serious business. Our Christian calling requires striving for perfection.



RECENTLY I HAD A CONVERSATION with my son who is a pathologist. I expressed my concern about the stress he was under at work. My advice to him was to relax a little and not be so hard on himself. His response was, "Dad, I can't afford to make a mistake. Lives depend on my decisions and thousands of dollars may be squandered if I am wrong." I got the same response from my daughter-in-law who is also a pathologist. As professionals they understand that by signing their name to an examination they put their reputations on the line. It didn't take me long to see the profound truth behind their words, and I was happy to know that there are people like this in such responsible positions.



All of us are concerned about errors and mistakes (or we should be). There are many jobs that demand a high degree of technical expertise: for example, airplane pilots, air traffic controllers, surgeons, truck drivers and others who hold human lives in their hands. They must constantly seek to be at their best so they can perform according to the standards of their respective occupation. If the captain of the *Titanic* had been more of a perfectionist, hundreds of lives might have been saved. None of us want to have someone who is in a responsible position to say, "Oops, I goofed." That "oops" could prove to be fatal under certain circumstances.

Mistakes are going to happen

It's been said, "If a person is not making any mistakes, he is not breathing." While there is some truth in this statement, we all know the importance of striving for perfection in our daily lives. It is all too easy to slip into sloppy habits at work or to accept a "less than perfect"

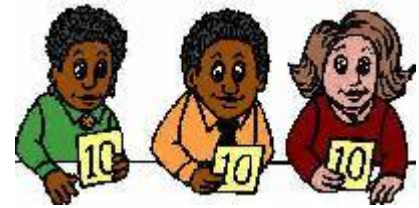
effort in other areas of our lives. We see it in the way people dress, the crude and careless words that come from their mouths and an attitude of bending the rules. Finding capable and conscientious employees is the single most pressing need facing employers today. Changes in the work ethic, combined with the decline of moral standards, have impacted our society far more than many understand.

Growing up spiritually

In Matthew 5:48 Jesus made an astonishing statement: "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect." Many have not understood the importance of this statement.

The Greek word for "perfect" is *teleois*, which conveys the idea of goodness. It can also refer to being of full age or mature. What Jesus was pointing out was the need for Christians to be mature in their spiritual life. Becoming a mature Christian means we understand that our actions reflect our spiritual state.

But spiritual growth does not come without effort. Constant minute-by-minute monitoring of our words and deeds is essential if we are to become of full age. Jesus went on to say in Matthew 12:36: "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment." Make no mistake; spiritual growth is serious business. We will not be able to say "oops" when we stand before God. We can all think of things that we wish we had never said. So it is imperative we learn to monitor what we say by constantly being aware of what we are thinking.



Sin and weakness not necessarily the same

A prime example of people lacking spiritual maturity can be found in the apostle Paul's letter to the Corinthians. They had confused being tolerant of human frailties with being tolerant of sinful behavior. As a result, their standards of conduct had fallen dramatically. They had begun to think of sin as mere mistakes. Paul corrected them by pointing out that some sins produce collateral damage within the congregation.

Paul corrected them by pointing out that some sins produce collateral damage within the congregation. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles--that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you...Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed

Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1Corinthians 5:1-2, 6-7).

Godly repentance

In 2 Corinthians 7:1 Paul taught the difference between being sorry for sin and true

repentance. "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." There was little room for the lack of effort towards perfection in Paul's mind.

He went on to say, "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter" (verses 10-11).

Becoming a mature Christian means we understand that our actions reflect our spiritual state.

Days of Unleavened Bread

The apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian church that each person should examine himself or herself to see whether they were in the faith (2 Corinthians 13:5). While we should examine ourselves on a continual basis, God set aside seven days known as the Days of Unleavened Bread to reexamine our spiritual lives. During this period of time Christians are instructed to focus on the importance of putting sin out of their lives.

To do so requires an understanding of what sin is. The Bible defines sin as the transgression of God's law: "Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him" (1 John 3:4-6). (For further information, be sure to request your free copy of the booklet [Holidays or Holy Days: Does It Matter Which Days We Keep?](#))

Sensitivity to sin

All of us sin and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). But as we grow in grace and knowledge we will become more sensitive to sin in our daily lives. This is the purpose of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Just as we learn from errors in our daily lives, we must learn to discern sin in our spiritual lives. There was a time when people took great pride in their work. In the same way, Christians must learn to honor God by putting their calling first.

The next time you get on an airplane ask yourself how "perfect" do you want the pilot to be? Is it good enough that he has read the flight manual, but has not yet successfully completed his flight training? Of course not! And overcoming sin is something we should not take lightly either--it is a matter of life and death. What should our response to sin be? The answer is obvious. Let's get serious about this life-and-death issue.

Virtual Christian Magazine Editorial

Moses' Journey Out of Egypt

By Tom Damour

Moses was called out of Egypt both physically and spiritually. His experience, though unique in many ways, is not altogether different from ours. Just as he learned to trust God during his lifetime, so should we. Moses is more like us than many think.



LIFE BEGAN FOR MOSES as it had for millions of his countrymen, in abject poverty and hopelessness. Little is known of his formative years, except what can be found in Scripture. We are told his parents were determined to save him from Pharaoh's edict despite the inherent risks involved in such a decision. They saw something special in him, and thought God did too. They believed he was destined for greatness and were committed to doing their part towards that end (Hebrews 11:23; Exodus 2:2; Acts 7:20).

Moses' parents have a plan

After hiding him for three months his mother, Jochebed, devised a plan, which she hoped would save her son. The biblical account seems to reveal that she felt the only way to save her son from Pharaoh's edict was to place him within the household of Pharaoh itself.

It was no secret the royal family took part in religious rituals in specially prepared inlets along the Nile River. It was into one of these inlets that Moses' ark was deliberately placed so someone in the royal household would find it (Exodus 2:3; Acts 7:21).

The Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary states: "The occasion is thought to have been a religious solemnity which the royal family opened by bathing in the sacred stream. Peculiar sacredness was attached to those portions of the Nile, which flowed near the temples. The water was there fenced off as a protection from the crocodiles; and doubtless the princess had an enclosure reserved for her own use, the road to which seems to have been well known to Jochebed."

Moses drawn out

Pharaoh was considered to be the god of the Nile. His daughter held the title "daughter of god." As such, she could claim the Nile had delivered the boy child to her. Thus, the name Moses, which in Egyptian means "one drawn out" (Exodus 2:10), was declared to be the "son of the Nile." Such a declaration could position him to become the next Pharaoh, or perhaps take his place among the Egyptian pantheon (one of the gods of Egypt).



Ancient promise of deliverance

Moses grew up aware of the unique circumstances surrounding his birth. He knew his birth mother, Jochebed, had been selected to nurse him until he was old enough to be returned to Pharaoh's daughter (Exodus 2:6-9). Until then, he was taught what was known of the God of their fathers.

He was told that one day they would be delivered from Egyptian bondage: "Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, 'God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here'" (Genesis 50:25; Hebrews 11:22). This prophecy served as a beacon of hope during those dark years of slavery.

Spiritual slavery

Like Moses, we have been born into a world enslaved by the god of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4). Satan has done his best to use religion as a means to confuse people about the identity of the true God. Today millions remember hearing something about the God of the Bible, yet what is known has become confused in the religious turmoil of the 21st century. Just like Moses, we must learn all we can about God to serve Him according to His will.

Moses misunderstands God's timing

Moses was deeply troubled by the suffering of his people. By the time he was 40 years of age he had come to the conclusion that he was the one Joseph had prophesied would deliver the Israelites. In fact, he thought his brethren had come to the same conclusion as well: "And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian. *For he supposed that his brethren would have understood that God would deliver them by his hand* but they did not" (Acts 7:24-25, emphasis added throughout).

No pharaoh for Israel

When Moses refused to be called the "son of Pharaoh's daughter" he was burning his bridges behind him. This decision was well thought out and deliberate: "By faith Moses, when he became of age [40 years old], *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, *choosing* rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:24-25).



Have you ever wondered what would have happened had the Israelites accepted Moses as their deliverer? What kind of leader would Moses have become? The only model of leadership he had to draw from was that of Egypt. Simply put, had the people initially accepted Moses, he most likely would have become the pharaoh of Israel. This was not God's will for him, nor for Israel. Without realizing it Moses had made the first step in coming out of Egypt.

We must choose

God has called us to prepare to assist Christ when He returns to establish the Kingdom of God. We must, through a deliberate act of will, refuse to continue to live like the world around us. By doing so we are declaring that we, like Moses, are not willing to accept the "passing pleasures of sin." By making such a choice we are also burning many of our bridges too. Just as the author of Hebrews wrote: "For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland...But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them" (Hebrews 11:14-16).

New leadership

Although Moses was correct in concluding he was the one God had selected to deliver the Israelites from bondage, his timing was wrong. Before he could lead the people out of Egypt, he had to learn to trust God implicitly. By doing so he would no longer look to his own devices while seeking to serve God.

This was a hard lesson for a man like Moses to learn. He was highly educated and accustomed to using the authority his position in the royal family afforded him. Before God could use him, Moses had to be humbled.

He didn't realize it yet, but God was calling him to become a new type of leader. A leader who would devote himself to teaching others how to serve the true God. However, like most people, Moses' understanding of God was based solely on what he had heard from others. What was lacking was a personal relationship with God. This relationship would develop as he came to understand the God of his fathers.

Gone were the grandiose notions that the God of his fathers had some special plan for him.

Moses rejected by his people

Rejecting his adopted people was an act of faith by Moses. He thought the Israelites would accept him as their new leader. When this didn't happen, he became a man without a country: "And the next day he appeared to two of them [Israelites] as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?' But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?'" (Acts 7:26-28).

It is interesting to note that one man's statement reflected the entire

Simply put, had the

nation's attitude towards Moses: "This Moses whom *they rejected, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?'"* (Acts 7:35). This fact did not go unnoticed by Moses. He was crushed and greatly disappointed by this unexpected turn of events. He had given everything up to be identified with his birth people. After being rejected by them he was forced to leave everything and everyone he ever knew. Misunderstanding how God was working in his life, Moses became disillusioned with God.

people initially accepted Moses, he most likely would have become the pharaoh of Israel.

Disillusioned with God

After fleeing Egypt 40 years earlier, God appeared to Moses in the burning bush. When God told him that he had been selected to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, Moses did not want to obey (Exodus 3:10-11). Why did he resist God's calling so vehemently? The answer may surprise you.

Spending 40 years in the desert had changed him. Gone were the grandiose notions that the God of his fathers had some special plan for him. In fact, he had become somewhat resentful of those who had rebuffed him even after forsaking the "riches of Egypt" on their behalf. Why should he return to those ungrateful people? After all, didn't they reject him once, and wouldn't they do it again? (Exodus 4:1; 6:12). He would have been content to live out the remainder of his days in the wilderness (Exodus 2:21), but God had other plans. (To learn more about faith simply request our free booklet, [Transforming Your Life The Process of Conversion.](#))



In the third and fourth chapters of Exodus Moses has somewhat of an argument with God. He did everything he could *not* to do what God was directing him to do: "But he [Moses] said, 'O my Lord, please send by the hand of *whomever else You may send.*' So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses..." (Exodus 4:13-14).

Just as Moses had become disillusioned, so have some of God's people today. When life does not turn out the way we think it should, or God doesn't respond to our prayers the way we wish He would, it is easy to become disillusioned. Yet God, being a loving leader, is patient and kind towards us.

Get to know God

God has commanded His people to observe a series of festivals known generally as the Holy Days. Moses' relationship with God was renewed as he observed these special days of worship.

Moses came to know God as he learned to observe these special days. These unique festivals have been designed to do the same thing for us. Be sure to read all the articles in this month's issue of the *Virtual Christian Magazine* so you can learn more about the God Moses came to know, and request your free copy of [You Can Have Living Faith.](#)