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Galpaz-Feller, Pnina

יציאת מצרים

[*The Exodus from Egypt: Reality or Illusion (Exodus 1–15)*]

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Galpaz-Feller, both an Egyptologist and a biblicist by training, addresses the Egyptian background of Exod 1–15. Although a number of scholars have illuminated the Egyptian coloration of the exodus story before, Galpaz-Feller's work stands out because she offers a greater integration of Egyptology and biblical studies in a series of short essays that constitute a running commentary on Exod 15.

Galpaz-Feller offers an analysis that is admirably well balanced. She identifies details of the biblical texts that reflect the impressions of Egyptian culture on biblical texts, while identifying discordances between biblical texts and the realia of ancient Egypt. The 110-year life span of Joseph reflects the ideal life span of ancient Egyptian culture, the seventy-day mourning period mirrors the practices of ancient Egypt, and the use of **אבני לידה**, not mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, is referenced in both Egyptian texts and pictorial representations. At the same time, the cameo of an Egyptian princess descending to the Nile to bathe conflicts with the reality that ancient Egyptians did not do so in the Nile because of the danger of crocodiles.

Galpaz-Feller's analysis of the plague narratives shows her intellectual integrity. She examines and then dismisses the theory that each plague was directed against a particular Egyptian deity, showing that a number of plagues, such as lice, wild animals, and boils, cannot be linked to any Egyptian god. Rather, in Galpaz-Feller's analysis, the plagues are generated from the undoing of creation according to the biblical account of it. However, the special emphasis devoted to the plague of locusts reflects the special valence of locusts in Egyptian culture, and the biblical author's use of heavy and rigid verbs to characterize the pharaoh's heart portrays his guiltiness in the context of Egyptian death religion's emphasis on the lightness of an innocent heart. Galpaz-Feller's discussion of

the origins of Israelite monotheism also exemplifies her reluctance to engage in Egypto-parallelomania. She argues that Israelite monotheism was influenced by many theological/cultic concepts of the religions of the ancient world, one of which happened to be Egyptian. The true name of the Egyptian god Ra is a secret, and Galpaz-Feller offers the suggestion that the secrecy of the true name of a deity might be reflected in the name YHWH. She asks whether the revealing of the name YHWH is a true revelation of the deity's name or whether the name YHWH lacks specificity and therefore should be linked to the concept of the secrecy of the true name of a deity. Galpaz-Feller also demonstrates that Akhenaten's religious revolution, worshiping the sun-disk via the king, died with Akhenaten and that certain fundamental aspects of his religion are contradicted by the contours of Israelite religion in the Bible. Creation, for example, was not an issue for Akhenaten's "monotheism" but was certainly a major facet of biblical religion.

Galpaz-Feller argues that, beyond the Egyptian coloration of the exodus narrative, there are elements that have historical value. Beyond the details that reflect ancient Egyptian culture as it was generally practiced throughout Egyptian history, there are elements that reflect Egyptian culture and history only in the time of Ramesses II and the Nineteenth Dynasty. The particular cities that the Hebrew Bible records as having been built by the Israelites were attributed in Egyptian texts to Ramesses II. A city in the Nile Delta, Pi-Rameses, not Memphis or Thebes, was the capital during the reign of Ramesses, and the brevity of the journeys that Moses and Aaron undertook to visit the pharaoh implies that the capital was near the Israelites in the Nile Delta. Increased documentation for the use of foreign workers comes from his reign. The route taken by the Israelites out of Egypt mirrors that taken by fleeing slaves in the Nineteenth Dynasty so as to avoid manned outposts. There is documentation for the stationing of royal horses and chariotry in the Nile Delta during the Nineteenth Dynasty. Here, although she does not specifically state it, Galpaz-Feller appears to be arguing against the so-called minimalist historians by contending that there is historical validity to the exodus narrative.

Galpaz-Feller argues that, although there were probably Egyptian scribes at the Israelite or Judean royal court, it is highly unlikely that details of Egyptian culture and history restricted to the reign of Ramesses and the Nineteenth Dynasty would have been known to court scribes, who generally wrote daily records of court life. These details, according to Galpaz-Feller, are more than an Egyptian atmosphere—they are memories preserved from an acquaintance with life in Egypt during the reign of Ramesses II and the Nineteenth Dynasty. Galpaz-Feller argues that these memories were preserved from the sojourn of some ancestors of the ancient Israelites who were foreign workers living in Egypt during the reign of Ramesses II and the Nineteenth Dynasty—this embodies the historical kernel that is at the core of the exodus narrative.

One can quarrel with specific details of Galpaz-Feller's analysis. Her argument that the location of the pharaoh's palace in the Nile Delta is a detail linking the narrative to the reign of Ramesses is undermined by the location of the capitals of Egypt during the First Temple period, Tanis and Sais, in the Nile Delta: according to Galpaz-Feller's leaning that the narratives were composed in the First Temple period, an Israelite in that period composing a story set in Egypt would naturally place the capital in the area. But, most critically, there is a methodological ambiguity inherent in Galpaz-Feller's contention. Whether or not the specific details she isolates as particular to the Nineteenth Dynasty are truly so, historical verisimilitude does not mean that an event actually occurred. Elements that create an Egyptian atmosphere (concomitant with many that are alien to Egypt) might mean that a story is plausible, not probable. Galpaz-Feller assumes that a tale that can be taken historically must be taken as historically true. An author could invent an occurrence, and, as long as the story contained details appropriate to the historical period in which it was set, this imaginary event, according to Galpaz-Feller, would have to be taken as an event that actually occurred. To assert that an event could possibly have occurred is quite different from asserting that it is likely to have occurred.