

# A Modern Maggid

Contributed by [Rabbi Jeffrey Falick](#)

**Source:** Written by Rabbi Jeffrey Falick, Miami Beach, FL

This is a supplement prepared by Rabbi Jeffrey Falick, a secular humanistic rabbi, addressing the modern archeological discoveries about the exodus and origins of the Israelites. It blends the ancient story with the newly uncovered information to help keep the seder relevant even for those who do not regard the Torah as a history book.

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*Leader:* The great scientist Carl Sagan wrote: Just when we've finally understood something [that] scientists are talking about, they tell us it isn't any longer true. And even if it is, there's a slew of new things - things we never heard of, things difficult to believe, things with disquieting implications - that they claim to have discovered recently. Scientists can be perceived as toying with us....

Sagan was writing about physics, but he just as well might have been referring to historical archeology. Less than 100 years ago, scholars still believed that the basics of our Exodus tale were true in most details. But then they started digging. And soon it became clear that the story we had told ourselves for millennia was not true in its details.

*Together:* That's when they made an astonishing discovery: There had been no mass Exodus from Egypt. The Israelites were natives of the Land of Israel. They were Canaanites themselves!

*Leader:* Our ancestors were Canaanites living in their own land. But they were not free and Egypt was not innocent. For while they might not have been slaves **IN** Egypt, we discovered that they were slaves**TO** Egypt.

What history revealed was a story every bit as wondrous as the myth of Moses and the Exodus. It is a narrative of Egyptian conquest of the Land of Israel and how the Pharaoh Ahmose and his descendants established a crippling system of corvée labor among the peasants of the land.

*Together:* It is the story of kings of Canaan who bowed to the Pharaohs. They forced their own people to abandon family fields and to work their royal lands.

*Reader:* From their midst arose bands of rebels who led a peasant revolt and soon Israel was freed from the yoke of the Egyptians. Archeology shows that tribes and towns began to form, bringing together the disparate rebels. In a long, complicated and gradual process they became known as the Israelites. They did not conquer the land from abroad, but they fought fiercely to unite their brothers and sisters so that they might thrive in their homeland.

*Together:* Here's another question on a night of questions. Why did people who were native to the Land of Israel tell a story in which they were outsiders?

*Reader:* Exoduses from Egypt to Israel and back were common occurrences. The Nile provided a more constant source of water than Israel's rains. This ongoing dependence was a kind of servitude, too. In short, Egypt dominated everything in the entire region for generations.

Perhaps the real story was too complicated and perhaps, like us, the Israelites needed a clear and simple narrative in order to appreciate the significance of freedom and to celebrate their special attachment to a land that was always claimed and conquered by others.

*Together:* The details are buried in history, but history gives wings to legends and legends yield heroes like Moses.

*Reader:* Over hundreds and hundreds of years, the story of this successful rebellion and the freedom it brought transformed into the tale of one great man, dedicated to justice and liberation for his people. Like the rebels of history, he challenged a Pharaoh and brought freedom to his people. And he came to represent the hundreds or perhaps thousands who fought to be free....

*Together:* It is his story - now our story - that we tell tonight.

*Rabbi Jeffrey L. Falick, Revised for Pesach, 2011/5771*

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