

**Colin J. Humphreys, *The Miracles of Exodus*, San Francisco: Harper Collins (USA), London: Continuum, University of East London (UK) 2003, Hardback (Paperback 2004), 362 pages, Illustrations, Pictures and maps, US\$24.95, ISBN 0060514043 (Hb).**

Reviewed by Murray Gillin

Professor Humphreys CBE is a renowned Cambridge University physicist who has received considerable recognition for his ideas and research, which span many fields from computer chips to microprinting, eternal lightbulbs and computer chips in the brain. His passion for many years has been examining the Bible in the light of science. He is the Goldsmiths' Professor of Materials Science and head of the Roll Royce University Technology Centre at Cambridge University, and chair of Christians in Science for the United Kingdom. He was honoured by the Queen in 2003 with the CBE. Humphreys has published over 500 scientific papers.

Professor Colin Humphreys uses his scientific approach to unlock many of the mysteries associated with the ten plagues that afflicted the Hebrew people, the exodus journey, and a suggested new site for Mount Sinai. Importantly he starts his journey by considering the story of the Exodus to be that of an eye witness and states "his approach to the description of Moses and the Exodus in the Bible is going to be as a scientist who tests and weighs the evidence". "In my research I found that these writings in Exodus are remarkably accurate and coherent" but also found that "Much of the traditional interpretation is wrong, particularly regarding the geography of the exodus."

His aim, in writing this book is to answer five key questions about the exodus.

1. Is the story coherent and consistent?
2. Is the story factually accurate?
3. Can we understand the miracles?
4. Has the Exodus text been misinterpreted?
5. Can we construct the Exodus route and find the true Mount Sinai?

Interestingly, Humphreys starts this often intriguing journey by first considering the final miracle—that of crossing the River Jordan into the Promised Land. In evaluating the available evidence for this event, Humphreys quotes Professor Amos Nur that the ancient town called:-

*'Adam' (Joshua 3:15, 16) is now modern 'Damiya,' the site of the 1927 mudslides which cut off the flow of the Jordan. Such cut-offs, lasting one to two days have also been recorded in 1906, 1834, 1546, 1534, 1267, and 1160. "The stoppage of the Jordan is so typical of earthquakes in this region that little doubt can be left as to the reality of such events in Joshua's time".*

Humphreys is aware that some readers may object to such a scientific explanation as many regard the Israelite event as a miracle straight from the hand of God. He then argues that the Israelites would have viewed this event as 'a total demonstration of the hand of God in their time of need.' After 40 years of waiting in the wilderness and now standing before the flooded Jordan River the river is held back at just the right time and they cross into the promised land. Humphreys exclaims "what a great climax to the Exodus journey"!

A major portion of the book addresses each of the ten plagues and shows scientifically his agreement with the famous Egyptologist Flinders Petrie who observed in 1911 "The order of the plagues are the natural order of such troubles on a lesser scale in the Egyptian season". In other words, it has long been realized that the plagues follow a natural, connected sequence. In each of the ten plagues Humphreys provides a scientific and plausible explanation of each event.

An important feature of his writings surrounds his calculation of the likely number of Israelites participating in the famous exodus. Much has been made of the number 603,550 men, twenty years and older—implying a total group of at least two million. Humphreys' first points out the uncertainty of the word 'eleph' to mean a thousand or a troop and which is unclear from the context. From his reading of the phrase "The two hundred and seventy-three first-born Israelites who exceed the number of the Levites" (Numbers 3:46) he was struck by the precision of the number as it was clearly not a rounded number. Secondly it was a small number; and thirdly the number did not look like a symbolic number so causing him to consider that it was a literal number meaning 273. Performing a mathematical analysis on the relationships between the tribes, males, first-born, &c. he was able to conclude that the total number of men, women and children at the exodus was probably about 20,000. This work has already been published (1998).

Central to Humphreys' scientific approach and establishing the writings in Exodus are remarkably accurate and coherent has been its application to tracing the Exodus journey and leading to the identification of a suggested Mount Sinai. Using the textual clues as to the places at which the Israelites either camped or passed through namely Marah, Elim, Red Sea, Desert of Sin, Dophkah, Alush, Rephadim, Desert of Sinai, and Mount Sinai, he has been able to construct the Exodus journey in a new and scientific way which has remained faithful to the theological integrity of the text and if correct will rewrite our understanding of a major event in world history.

Presented in a "you are there style", this book identifies and describes events and how the biblical account is remarkably accurate and historical when scientifically investigated and answers each of the five questions asked above. Profusely

illustrated with maps, photographs, and explanatory tables, this book by a significant scientist unlocks the mysteries of the ultimate Bible story in a fascinating and convincing way.

#### Bibliography:

Humphreys, Colin J. 1998 The number of the people in the Exodus from Egypt: Decoding mathematically the very large numbers in Numbers 1 and XXVI, *Vetus Testamentum* XLVIII, 2, 196-213.

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**Gerald O'Farrell, *The Tutankhamun deception: The true story of the mummy's curse*, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 2001, 233 pages, US\$18, ISBN 0283072938.**

Reviewed by Ian McDowell

The thesis of this book is that Lord Carnarvon and Howard Carter gained access to the tomb of Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings (KV62) across the Nile from Luxor in Egypt, some years before the accepted entry year of 1922. They did this using postulated passages connecting KV62 to adjoining tombs, notably that of Ramses V & VI (KV9), which were shown to them by the infamous tomb robber family El-Rassul. Carter supposedly constructed the passage by which the tomb is entered today, as part of a detailed recent misdirection.

Your reviewer, an engineer, is skeptical, for various reasons. One is that the tombs in the Valley of the Kings certainly do not display uniformity of levels, which connecting passages capable of installing the KV62 shrines would require. Another is that actual such passages between KV9 and KV62 have not been found. And another is, where are the large quantities of allegedly looted items?

The supposed early entry was for the purpose of despoiling the tomb of most of its treasures secretly. These included papyri which identified Tutankhamun closely with the monotheistic Aten cult of his close relative, Akhenaten, and cast doubt on the historicity of Moses and, by inference, of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Here the book becomes somewhat fanciful. The early deaths of Carnarvon and others, attributed by the media to "the curse of the pharaohs", it is claimed, were caused by persons unknown, with vested interest in denying accepted Christian beliefs.

At the same time, it must be said that the archaeological methods of even Carter's day were suspect. A variety of questions relating to Tutankhamun remain to be answered. An empty tomb of Akhenaten is shown at Amarna. The tomb KV55 in the Valley of the Kings near that of

Tutankhamun was probably prepared for Smenkhkare, a close relative of Akhenaten and Tutankhamun, all Dynasty XVIII pharaohs. But for reasons yet undiscovered, royal funeral honours were withheld from Smenkhkare, and his tomb furniture used for Tutankhamun, including one inscribed canopic coffin. The most notable such item is Smenkhkare's gold funerary mask, which seems to have been used for the second of Tutankhamun's famous masks, being markedly different in appearance from the younger and thinner faces on Tutankhamun's first and third masks, and leaving Smenkhkare's mummy bereft.

It has long been thought that Tutankhamun was murdered at the instigation of polytheistic Amun interests. To this notion the O'Farrell thesis adds latter-day anti-monotheism proponents dedicated to the suppression of the alleged missing papyri. Tutankhamun's mummy has been treated with scant respect since the discovery. Interestingly, Egypt's archaeology chief, Zawi Hawass, recently arranged for CAT scans of the remains, some of which have appeared in the media. We await the detailed findings with interest. Perhaps Dr. Hawass could establish or otherwise the existence of the putative tunnels between the tombs also.

The O'Farrell thesis is acknowledged as derived from that of Thomas Hoving's 1978 book, "Tutankhamun, the Untold Story". Perhaps O'Farrell would have entertained us more if he wrote the story as conspiracy theory fiction like "The da Vinci Code", itself derived from an earlier speculative pseudo-scholarly work.