In response to a question from years ago about the problems posed to critical scholars by the Hebrew Bible I have so far provided two posts, one involving the surviving manuscripts (do we know what the authors originally said?) and the other with apparent discrepancies (where accounts appear to be at odds with one another). I will now provide a couple of posts dealing with the equally big problem that the Hebrew Bible narrates events that probably did not take place, at least as described.

Today I will provide a chunk from my forthcoming book on the Bible about the exodus event under Moses, in which Moses led the children of Israel out from their slavery in Egypt and a great miracle transpired at the parting of the Sea of Reeds (traditionally called the Red Sea), where the children of Israel were allowed to cross on dry land before the waters rushed back destroying Pharaoh’s entire army (as narrated in Exodus 14). It’s an absolutely amazing, terrific story. But it does not appear to be historical. Here are some reasons why:

Exodus from a Historical Perspective

It has proved difficult for biblical scholars to establish when these events are to have taken place. The most common dating of the exodus event places it around 1250 BCE, for three reasons.

First, the text indicates that the Israelites had been in Egypt for 430 years; that would coincide roughly with the narrative of Genesis, when Joseph would have gone to Egypt at the beginning of the 17th century BCE, according to the chronology that appears to be operative there (in Genesis). But even more important is a hint provided in Exod. 1:11, that the Hebrew slaves were forced to build the cities of Pi-Ramses and Pithon; both cities actually were rebuilt or reoccupied in the mid-13th century BCE.

The rest of this post is for members only. Sorry. Well, not really. You too could join. And why not? Doesn’t cost much, and you get five posts a week on substantive issues. Give yourself a treat. Go for it.