

EGYPT & THE BIBLE

An Introductory Bibliography

Biblical scholarship's fascination with Mesopotamia tends to obscure the ongoing relationship between ancient Israel¹ and Egypt, the major power closest to ancient Israel, a relationship that was both economic² and political.³ Egyptian culture, religion, and geo-political history often help us understand biblical stories more clearly.

For example, commentaries on the story of Joseph (Gn 37-50) may address philological questions (e.g., the probable Egyptian word lying behind a certain statement), theological themes (e.g., God's purposes for Joseph's life), or critical issues, such as tribal motivations behind the preservation of the story of Judah and Tamar (Gn 38), and how these stories were either manufactured or editorially manipulated in order to explain the tribal and national situation. Understanding the centrality of dream interpretation to ancient Egypt life cautions us against viewing Joseph as a boastful dreamer (Gn 37) and help explain Pharaoh's servants' and Pharaoh's own willingness to listen to an imprisoned foreign slave (Gn 40-41); knowing about the life of high Egyptian officials/society helps explain Joseph's rise to power in Potiphar's household; the nature of Egyptian governance and justice raise questions about Joseph's extended imprisonment (Gn 39-40); the Egyptian "ideal" of the "silent" man (in Egyptian instruction literature) is suggestive for some aspects of the story of Joseph, and the list goes on.

Reading translations of Egyptian wisdom (instructional) literature, legends, love poetry, and studying Egyptian art—even learning a bit about hieroglyphs—can make the situations underlying the stories in the text more vivid than [many] scholarly discussions.⁴

You will notice a number of books "for children". This is because books written for adults tend to be poorly or under-illustrated; books for children, on the other hand, are filled with drawings and photos. Done by experts, under the oversight of or co-authored by Egyptologists, these tend to be valuable resources for what cannot be easily visualized from prose descriptions.

Visiting a museum with an Egyptian collection provides a sense of scale and mass that neither pictures nor description can convey. The three great Egyptian collections in North America are at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Philadelphia, PA), the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, NY), and The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago (Chicago, IL). The British Museum (London) and the Louvre (Paris) have two of the world's great Egyptian collections outside Egypt. You will find it helpful to read something on Egyptian art (e.g., Frankfort 1996) and life (e.g., Casson 2001) before visiting a collection.

I recommend beginning with Currid (1997) and then moving on to Casson (2001). For deep insight into Egyptian religion, Frankfort (1948 and 1978) is unsurpassed.

Finally, as with any field of ancient studies, new materials often reflect access to information not available to earlier writers. This does not always mean that "newer is better"; it does, however, suggest that it is wise to check later writings to be sure that interpretations and explanations have not been discarded or corrected based on new(er) evidence.

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Epiphany MMXII

¹This relationship was entirely (or primarily) with the southern kingdom of Judah, after the division of the kingdom (930 BCE).

²1 Kgs 10.28-29.

³See 1 Kgs 3.1; 4.21; 9.16; 11.17-22, 40; 12.2; 14.25-26; 2 Kgs 17.4; 18.20-24; 23.29-35; 24.7; 25.25-26.

⁴This statement merely notes that commentaries cannot address everything.

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Breasted, James Henry

2001-02 *Ancient Records of Egypt*. Five vols. Reprint ed. U. of Illinois.

Budge, E. Wallis

Many works written on ancient Egyptian language (e.g., grammars, dictionary, translations and commentaries on many texts) and culture (e.g., religion). Although his works on Egyptian culture and religion show rather questionable biases, his linguistic materials, although dated, are valuable. Many are available from www.doverpublications.com.

Casson, Lionel

2001 *Everyday Life in Ancient Egypt*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U. Press.
Great description of what its title claims.

Collier, Mark, & Bill Manley

1998 *How to Read Egyptian Hieroglyphs*. Berkeley: U. of California Press.
Brief guide to pronouncing Egyptian hieroglyphs; not a grammar.

Currid, John

1997 *Ancient Egypt & the OT*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
Very helpful essays on various aspects of Egyptian life, thought, and literature, and their relationship to biblical interpretation, often with reference to specific biblical texts.

Davies, W. V.

1987 *Egyptian Hieroglyphs*. Reading the Past. Berkeley/London: U. of California/British Museum.
A casual, but carefully written overview of Egyptian hieroglyphs (not a grammar of the Egyptian language).

Frankfort, Henri

1996 *The Art and Architecture of the Ancient Orient*. Fifth edition. The Yale University Press Pelican History of Art. New Haven: Yale U. Press.

Perhaps the best book on this subject; part of a great series.

1978 *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature*. Oriental Institute Essays. Reprint edition, with introduction by Samuel Noah Kramer. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.

Another "gift" from Frankfort to our ability to understand ancient Oriental (Egypt and Mesopotamian) thought about the nature and function of kingship; one of the v. few studies to compare these cultures' thought.

1948 *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Interpretation*. New York: Harper.

Perhaps the best book on this subject. Lucid, sympathetic, and textually based.

Frankfort, Henri, et. al.

1977 *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man. An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East*. Oriental Institute Essays. Reprint edition. Chicago: U. of Chicago.

A brilliant work on its subtitle, perhaps the best book on this subject; part of a great series.

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1961 *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.

A fascinating and somewhat idiosyncratic look at ANE religion as dramatic ritual that re-enacted and "caused" that which it represented.

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Hart, George

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A “children’s” book, but with marvelous maps and illustrations better than in many books written for adults; written by an expert in Egyptology, it offers a basic orientation in few pages.
- 1989 *Exploring the Past : Ancient Egypt*. New York: Harcourt Children’s Books.
- 1986 *A Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*. London: Routledge.
An entry for every god worshiped in Egypt, including foreign deities “imported” into Egypt, including an explanation of symbols associated with them (when known). Major gods are discussed/described at length (Amun-Re). Vital background for mythologists and cultural anthropologists, as well as for biblical scholars. Some illustrations.

Hildebrandt, Ted, & Frederic Clarke Putnam

- [2012] *The Book of Proverbs: A Classified Biography*. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press.
Includes extensive sections on works dealing with the relationship between Egyptian “instructions” and the biblical book of Proverbs.

Hill, Marsha (ed.)

- 2007 *Gifts for the Gods: Images from Egyptian Temples*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art.
A museum catalogue of funerary offerings found in Egyptian tombs. Well-illustrated, but rather limited in scope.

Hoerth, Alfred J., Gerald L. Mattingly, & Edwin M. Yamauchi

- 1994 *Peoples of the Old Testament World*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
Brief essays on the various ANE cultures (Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, &c.). An “update” of Wiseman 1973.

Kitchen, Kenneth A.

- 1998 “Biblical instructional wisdom: the decisive voice of the ancient Near East”, in *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World: A Tribute to Cyrus H. Gordon*. Edited by Meir Lubetski, Claire Gottlieb, & Sharon Keller. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 346-63.
- 1996 *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100-650 BC)*. Aris & Phillips.
Magnum opus of the world’s leading Egyptologist. A massive work that covers most of the period of Israel’s nationhood.
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