

Israel's Time in Egypt  
by David Barker

A source of confusion in Bible chronology is the number of years attributed to Israel's time in Egypt. Exodus 12:40 (KJV) states: "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years." This verse seems to be quite clear in saying that the descendants of Jacob/Israel were in Egypt that long. However, other versions suggest the 430 years was from Abraham's entry into Canaan to the Exodus. A key phrase not in the Hebrew Bible and subsequent translations based on it appears in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) translated: "and in Canaan."<sup>1</sup> Thus, according to the earlier LXX version, the 430-year period included both time in Canaan and Egypt and was not exclusively Jacob's descendants. The apparent error was popularized and further confused in Cecil B. DeMille's famous movie, *The Ten Commandments*. As the Exodus began, the movie's "Joshua" mentioned they had been "in bondage 400 years."

Here are some applicable references:

- 430 years "The sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years" (Exodus 12:40) (KJV).
- 430 years "The sojourning of the children of Israel . . . in the land of Egypt *and in the land of Canaan*" (Exodus 12:40) (LXX). (emphasis added).
- 430 years "To Abraham and his seed . . . the covenant, that was confirmed . . . four hundred and thirty years after" (Galatians 3:16-17).
- 430 years "They left Egypt . . . four hundred and thirty years after our forefather Abraham came into Canaan, but two hundred and fifteen years only after Jacob removed into Egypt."<sup>2</sup> A footnote to this account of Josephus states: "Why our Masorete copy<sup>3</sup> so groundlessly abridges this account . . . to ascribe 430 years to the . . . Israelites in Egypt, when it is clear even by that Masorete chronology elsewhere, as well as from the express text itself, in the Samaritan, Septuagint, and Josephus, that they sojourned in Egypt but half that time."<sup>4</sup>
- 400 years "And he said unto Abram . . . thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years." (Gen. 15:13)
- 400 years "And God spake . . . that his seed [Abraham's] should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years" (Acts 7:6).
- 210 years "The sojourning of the children of Israel who dwelt in the land of Egypt in hard labor, was two hundred and ten years" (Jasher 81:3).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 1. New York: Abingdon Press, 1952, p. 926.

<sup>2</sup> *Josephus*. "Antiquities of the Jews," Book II, Chapter XV:2. 1960, p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Masorete. "Much of the work of preserving the Hebrew scriptures through the centuries after Christ was accomplished by the Masorettes, traditional Jewish scholars who worked in Palestine and Babylon between the sixth and tenth centuries A.D." Read. *How We Got the Bible*. 1985, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Josephus*. "Antiquities of the Jews," Book II, Chapter XV:2. 1960, p. 62.

David Rohl wrote: "In most commentaries or popular books on the Old Testament you will read that the Israelite Sojourn in the land of Egypt lasted four hundred and thirty years. However, this figure is by no means certain. In fact, there is clear evidence that the true period of the Sojourn was no more than two hundred and fifteen years."<sup>5</sup>

Abr	430y	400y	210y	Isaac	Israel	Levi	Joseph	Kohath	Amram	Aaron	Moses	Joshua	Caleb	
				in Eg.										
70	0													The Lord appeared to Abraham in his 70th y, he built an altar. Jasher 13:17-20
101	31	1					1							Isaac born when Abraham was 100. Gen 17:21; Jasher 23:80; Josephus 36
141	71	41					41							Isaac 40, marries Rebecca. Jsr 24:40, 45
161	91	61					61							Jacob & Esau born when Isaac was 60 y old. Jsr 26:15-16, Dem 2:2
175	105	75					75							Abraham died in 15th y of Jacob (lived 175 yrs Josephus 39) Jsr 26:29
	177	147					87							Levi b in 10th y 6th m of Jacob in Haran. Dem 2:3 (137 in 93rd yr of Israel in Egypt. Jsr 63:1)
	181	151					91							Joseph & Dinah b in 14th y 8th m of Jacob in Haran. Dem 2:5
	197	167					107							Joseph 17 sold into Egypt. Gen 35; Jsr 41:9, 44:1
	198	168					108							Joseph cast into prison for 12y after serving Potiphar for ~1 1/2y. TLT 45, 52, 58, 63
	210	180					120							Joseph 30 Prime Minister. Gen 41:46. 7 good years begin
	214	184					124							Ephraim & Manasseh born in 34th yr of Joseph. Jsr 50:15
	221	191					131							Jacob enters Egypt at 130. Jsr 55:26
	236	206	16e				146							Kohath b, Levi 60 (36 TLT197), Jacob d. Dem 2:19
	237	207	17e				147							Jacob d 147, 17th yr in Eg. Gen 47:28 Levi 60y, Joseph, 56 Dem 2:19
	251	221	31e				75							Joseph's pharaoh d when Joseph was 71y old. TLT169
	273	243	53e				97							Amram b when Kohath was ~40. Dem 2:19
	291	261	71e				115							Joseph died at 110. Gen 50:22 71st yr of Isr in Eg. Jsr 59:25
	313	283	93e				137							Levi died at 137 in 93rd yr Isr in Eg. Jsr 63:1; TLT198; Dem 2:19
	350	320	130e											Moses b when Amram 78. Dem 2:19
	392	362	172e											Caleb b (~40 when spied land) Josh 14:6-10
	425	395	205e											Moses m Zipporah. Jsr 77:28-51
	427	397	207e											Moses to Eg, returns to Midian for 2y TLT 295
	429	399	209e											
exo	exo	exo	exo	exo	exo	exo	exo	exo	exo	exo	exo	exo	exo	Exodus
														40 Spies sent out in 2nd y of exodus. Num 10:11-12

Figure 1 Israel's time in Egypt. Key: Abr = Abraham; b = born; d = died; Dem = Demetrius the Chronographer;<sup>6</sup> Eg = Egypt; exo = Exodus; Jsr = Jasher; m = married; TLT, Ginzberg's *The Legends of the Jews*, Vol. 2.<sup>7</sup>

By comparing the ages of key characters in the scriptures and related sources, I compiled a list showing 210 years for Israel in Egypt (see figure 1). The 430-year count extends from Abraham's covenant (at the time of his entry into Canaan) to the Exodus. The 400-year period is from Isaac's birth to the Exodus, and the 210 years from the time Jacob/Israel Entered Egypt to the Exodus. Since Jacob's son Joseph lived 71 years after Jacob entered Egypt, and since the bondage didn't start until after he died (Exodus 1:6-11), it appears that the bondage was less than 139 years. And, it is obvious that I am not the only one who has mixed up details of the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or used the term "Israelites" or "children of Israel" to include not only Jacob's descendants, but also some of his ancestors.

<sup>5</sup> Rohl. *Pharaohs and Kings*. 1995, p. 329.

<sup>6</sup> In *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, Vol. 2, 1983, pp. 843-854.

<sup>7</sup> Patterned after similar charts by Dennis Clawson.