

Chronology

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A reliable chronology is a prerequisite for the study of Jewish History. Without it, proper historical relations to the civilizations of other peoples cannot be established and clarified. Let us, therefore, as a preliminary task reconstruct the chronology of the early times as derived from the Bible and other sources. The data derived from such as chronology will accord completely with the most recent findings of archaeological science.

The Bible provide for continuous chronological dates up to the death of Joseph [1]. On the basic of traditional era of creation (aera mundi) [2] they lead to the following dates of the common era.

The flood – 2104. The Chinese tradition is very close, placing the Flood in the year 2200 [3]. According to Indian tradition, a new age, the Silver Age started in 2204 [4]

Birth of Abraham – 1812. This date is corroborated by recent excavation in the area of the Dead Sea, suggesting very strongly that the time of Abraham cannot be placed earlier than the 19th Century BCE [5]

Birth of Isaac – 1712

Lifetime of Jacob- 1652 – 1505

Death of Joseph – 1451

The Sojourn in Egypt lasted from 1522 (130 years of Jacob, Gen 47:9) to 1312, altogether 210 years. The biblical account that it lasted 400 or 430 years [6] includes the preceding time leading to the Egyptian bondage either from the birth of Isaac (400) or from the time of Covenant with Abraham (430) [7]. The sojourn in Egypt cannot have lasted for 400 years. Such an assumption is ruled out when we consider the lifetime of all the generations who lived there.

There is a possibility that he 430 years are dated from the time of the Hyksos who ruled over Egypt and apparently, also over Palestine. When they are driven out of Egypt, Palestine remained under Egyptian rule. Thus, from about 1730 onwards, Abraham and his descendants were really under Egyptian rule. This may well be the meaning of the words of the Bible [8] “Now the sojourning of the children of Israel that they stayed in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years”. It is noteworthy that in the following sentence referring to the actual Exodus not Egypt is mentioned, but the ‘land of Egypt,’ indicating that after having stayed under Egyptian domination for 430 years (partly in Palestine) the Jews finally went out of the land of Egypt.

The Hyksos are known to have established their own era, named Tanis, their capital city [9]. The Ramesside house, tracing its ancestry back to one of Hyksos kings, erected

the “400 year stela” of Tanis to commemorate his time. It may well be that the 400 and 430 years of the Bible are in direct connection with this era [10]

The date of the Exodus thus is 1312. The general Jewish tradition is followed here [11]. Some Jewish Authorities place it 30 years later at 1282 [11]

Among modern scholars there is an “early Exodus theory” assigning the Exodus to the middle of the 15th Century. (see sub II). The results of recent excavations however, tend to discredit this. The year 1290 or a few years earlier is gradually being accepted as the date of the exodus [12]

The next date is provided by the 480 years which according to I Kings 6:1, elapsed between the Exodus and the beginning of the building of the temple in the fourth year of King Solomon. The traditional chronology of the Seder Olam follows the literal meaning of this statement. As a result, only 902 years remain for the entire time from the building of the temple to its second destruction (1312 – 480 plus 70). After a further subtraction of 70 years for the Babylonian exile, only 832 years are left for the Seder Olam they are divided into 410 and 420 years respectively. The very short time thus available for the period of the second temple led to the reduction of the time of the Persian kings to only 34 years. It was assumed that the Kings Koresh, Darjavush and Artachshacta were identical and that Ezra came to Palestine one year after the building of the second temple.

These consequences were rejected by R. Serachja of Lunel [13] as incompatible with the words of the Bible [14]

To solve these difficulties, the suggestion has been made that the 480 years of the book of Kings be considered a mere symbolical number such as those that frequently occur in Egyptian chronologies. Then the time necessary for the later period could easily be subtracted from it [15]. Such an assumption, however would be unparalleled in the whole Bible and seems unjustified for a book written in the prophetic spirit [16]. It is moreover unnecessary; for the Bible itself points the way to an adequate solution. The Genealogy of King David shows only four generations from the conquest of the land to his own time (Salmo-Boas-Owed-Jesse) [17] . If we assume a period of 480 years from the Exodus to the fourth year of King Solomon, these four generations together must have lived 366 years, as we have to allow 40 years for the wandering in the desert, 70 years for King David, and 4 years for Solomon. This would be possible only if we assume that Salmo, the first of the line, was one year old at the time of the conquest and the each of the following generations was born when their respective fathers were 91 years old [18]. This seems very improbable. The six preceding generations of the same genealogy, from Judah to Nahshon, covers only 290 years which means that on the average, one generation was separated from the next by about 40 years. The genealogy of King David thus demonstrates that the 480 years must have a meaning similar to the 400 or 430 year for the sojourn in Egypt. There, too, the life time of the generations living in Egypt was proof of the shorter duration of the whole period. The sums of 400 or 430 years were to include the preceding time preparing for the historical climax in Egypt. In the very same way, the time of the Exodus, as referred in the book of Kings, may have been counted

from those preceding events which stated the entire historical development that led finally to the Exodus. There is, indeed, one event of outstanding significance which fulfils these requirements: the death of Joseph. A turning point in the early history of the Jews, it marked the end of the Patriarchal Age and the beginning of a new epoch, that of the oppression which finally led to the exodus. It is, therefore the beginning of the Book of Exodus. Counting 480 years from this event which took place in 1451, we arrive at the year 971, which according to dates derived from completely independent Assyrian inscription was, indeed the fourth year of king Solomon. The meaning of the 480 year would then be that that much time had elapsed from the beginning of the era of the exodus starting with the second book the of the Torah and the death of Joseph until the building of the first temple.

Thus the main problems of the later chronology are solved. There now remain 1041 years from the time of the first temple, the Babylonian exile, and the second temple, instead of the 902 years of the Seder Olam. The difference of 139 years is made up by the time that elapsed between 1451 and 1312.

The chronology is in full accord with the traditional era of creation (aera mundi) which is based on the tradition of the Sanhedrin. Its reliability is clearly illustrated by the fact that its dates for the second millennium B.C.E have been widely confirmed by the most recent archaeological discoveries [19]. The beginning of the Selucid era, a basic date for the chronology of the first millennium B.C.E, has been handed down as the year 3448 in complete agreement with the general chronology putting it at 312 B.C.E [20]. The difficulties arose solely from the inaccurate appointment of the correct space of time. The 1382 years from the Exodus to the second destruction were divided into 480 years until the building of the first temple, 410 years for the first temple, 70 years for the Babylonian exile and 420 years for the second temple. Instead, the division must be 341, 385, 70, 586 years, respectively. The total however was 1382 years remains unchanged.

[1] Gen 5; 11:10; 21:5; 25:26 ; 28:9; 41:46, 47:9

[2] See Nechlath Zwi 1935 p 314; 1936 p. 79

[3] Parsons, p.45; Barsilai p 176; Marcus, Chrono. P 5

[4] Parsons, p. 31; see for further details Chapter IV, 1, III

[5] Albright, Arch of Pal. p.137

[6] Gen 15:13; Ex 12:40

[7] See Rashi, Ex 12:40

[8] Ex. 12:40

[9] See also Num 13:22

[10] Albright, from the Stone Age, pp. 169, 195; Archaeol of Pal., p 144 BASOR N. 58 p. 16; Boehl, p. 25.

[11] Zemach David, year 2448

[12] Albright BASOR N. 58 p. 16; 68 p. 24; From the stone Age, p. 195 Finegan, p 106; Kittel, p 368

[13] Baal Hamoaur, Rosh Hashana 2.

[14] See Marcus, Chronol., p 13; Barsilai, I p. 317, II p. 22; Jahrb, Jued. Literar, Gesellsch. 1906

[15] Marcus l.c.

[16] See Nachlath Zwi 1935, pp 276, 313; 1936 p 79

[17] Ruth, 4:18, I Chron. 2.

[18] See ibn Ezra, Ruth 4:17; but see also Nahmanides, Genesis 46:15.

[19] See Fundamental Questions notes 36 ff, 98, ff; Wooley, Abraham, p 287

[20] See Rambam, XI Hikh Kiddush Hachodesh, X, Hikh Shmittah; Zemach David, year 3448 arguing against de Rossi in Meor Enajim, who without sufficient reason rejected the era of creation; see Marcus. Chronolo p 13

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