

## The Israelite Sojourn in Egypt: 430 or 215 Years? A Text Critical Analysis

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The manuscripts of Exodus 12:40 contain several variants, recording either a 430 year sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt, or in Egypt and Canaan. The original wording of Exodus 12:40 is important not only to the reader in general, but also to archaeologists and historians, since the chronological placement of Joseph and the Israelites in Egypt guide interpretation of the archaeological and historical evidence.

Waltke writes,

“[A] resolute historian needs to know whether the biblical historian recorded in Exod 12:40 that Israel spent 430 years in just Egypt (MT) or in Egypt and Canaan (LXX, SP). Both theology and history demand that the critic decide upon an original text.” [1]

Some who favor the manuscripts which add “and in the land of Canaan” propose that the words dropped out in other manuscripts during the process of copying. This possibility can be tested scientifically using the tools of textual criticism.[2] If the words fell out during copying, there should be evidence left that a haplography occurred. This proposed scribal skip could have taken place either from involvement of the beginning letters (homoioarcton) or the end letters (homoioteleuton), and could have happened from sight or sound confusion of letters or words.

In the search for evidence of haplography, the scripts of Paleo-Hebrew and early square script should be used. Additional text critical observations of the variants should also be taken into account. Lastly, these investigations should be in consideration of all the manuscripts which have Exodus 12:40.

Such a study was undertaken, with the textual variants and discussion following.

In the manuscripts of Exodus 12:40, there are about seven variants:

1. Now the time that the children of Israel had been living in Egypt was 430 years.

(Evidence: MT (Masoretic text), Syr (Syriac Peshitta) Mss, Tg (Targum) Mss, LXX minuscule 125, OL (Old Latin) Ms, Vg (Latin Vulgate); cf. 2QExod(a) reconstruction)

2. Now the time that the children of Israel had been living in [the land of] Egypt was 430 years.

(Evidence: 4QExod(c), Syr Mss)

3. Now the time that the children of Israel had been living in [the land of] Egypt [and in the land of Canaan] was 430 years.

(Evidence: LXX(B), Syr(Hex)\*)

4. Now the time that the children of Israel had been living in [the land of] Egypt [and in the land of Canaan] [they and their fathers] was 430 years.

(Evidence: LXX(AFM + minuscules), OL Mss).

5. Now the time that the children of Israel had been living [they and their fathers] in Egypt [and in the land of Canaan] was 430 years.

(Evidence: LXX(G + minuscules))

6. Now the time that the children of Israel had been living in [the land of Canaan and in] Egypt was 430 years.

(Evidence: LXX(h))

7. Now the time that the children of Israel [and their fathers] had been living [in the land of Canaan] [and] in [the land of] Egypt was 430 years.

(Evidence: SP (Samaritan Pentateuch))

Discussion:

The shortest reading, “in Egypt,” without mention of Canaan, is represented by all Masoretic Hebrew manuscripts, Targum Onqelos and Targum Palestinian, Syriac Peshitta Mss, LXX minuscule 125 (XIV cent.),[3] an Old Latin Ms, and the Latin Vulgate of Jerome (c. 400 AD). Spacing considerations of Qumran 2QExod(a) suggest that it has the identical wording of MT.[4]

Variant 2 is supported by Qumran 4QExod(c) and Syriac Peshitta Mss, and has the additional word for “the land of” prior to “Egypt.” Looking at the Hebrew, there is no reason for “the land” to have fallen out.

Variant 3 is represented by the Old Greek LXX translation (c. 3rd cent. BC), according to the Gottingen Septuaginta, edited by Wevers.[5] LXX(B) (c. 300 AD) actually reads “435 years” rather than “430 years.” The latter number is apparently supported among LXX Mss by uncials A (c.400-440), F (V cent.), G (IV/V cent.) and M (VII cent.), plus minuscules (X cent. and later). The Syriac Hexapla has “and in the land of Canaan” marked with obeli, indicating some doubt as to its authenticity. There does not seem to be a reason why “the land of” before “Egypt,” fell out. It is possible that “and in the land of Canaan,” fell out from a single letter homoioteleuton by sight confusion in Paleo-Hebrew, from the mem in “Egypt” to the nun in “Canaan.”

Variant 4 is supported by LXX(AFM) and abt. 59 minuscules, and Old Latin Mss[6]. This has the additional words “the land of” and “and in the land of Canaan, they and their fathers.” There is no reason for “the land of” to have fallen out. It is possible for “and in the land of Canaan, they and their fathers” to have fallen out from a single letter homoioteleuton in square script or Paleo-Hebrew, from the mem in “Egypt” to the mem in “fathers.”

Variant 5 is represented by LXX(G) and abt. 29 minuscules, and has the additional words “they and their fathers” in a different location than variant 4, and also has “and in the land of Canaan.” There is no reason for the loss of “they and their fathers” or “the land of.” A single letter homoioteleuton by sight confusion in Paleo-Hebrew is possible for “and in the land of Canaan,” from the mem in “Egypt” to the nun in “Canaan.”

Variant 6 is supported by LXX(h) (minuscule 55, X cent.), which has Canaan before Egypt, and lacks the additional word for “the land” prior to the word “Egypt.” There does not appear to be a reason for these words to have dropped out.

Variant 7 is represented by the Samaritan Pentateuch, and, like variant 6, it has the reverse order of “Egypt” and “Canaan” as compared to other LXX Mss. The SP also has the additional word for “and their fathers,” which is slightly different wording than in variants 4 and 5 (which add pr. “them”), and is in a different location. There is no reason for “and their fathers” to have fallen out. The additional words “the land of Canaan and in the land of” could have been lost from homoioarcton by single letter sight confusion, from the bet in “in the land” to the mem in “Egypt.”

#### Conclusion:

In this investigation of the manuscripts of Exodus 12:40, the variants were examined with the tools of text criticism, which included a search for haplography in the two ancient Hebrew scripts. [7] Two of the variants were found to have possible support for a single-letter haplography. If this information was the only text critical observation concerning all the variants, the evidence would be significant. However, the following additional observations of the variants must be considered.

Of the variants studied, the longer readings were found to have the additional words 1) in different locations (“they and their fathers”), 2) in different word orders (“Egypt and in the land of Canaan”, “Canaan and in the land of Egypt”), and 3) with different wording (“them and their fathers”, “and their fathers”, “in Egypt”, “in the land of Egypt”). These facts are very convincing evidence of a secondary origin of the longer readings, i.e., scribal expansions. In this case, “lectio brevior praeferenda est,” the shorter reading is preferable. For these reasons, text critics have rejected the longer readings found in variants 2-7, and have concluded that the MT reading is likely the original.

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Appendix: The 400 years, 430 years, 450 years, and the 4th Generation

430 years in Egypt, Exodus 12.40: 1877BC–1447BC;

400 years of slavery in Egypt, Genesis 15.13; Acts 7.6: 1847 BC–1447 BC;

450 years, Acts 13.19-20: 1847 BC (begin slavery in Egypt) – 400 yrs (slavery) – 40 yrs (wilderness sojourn) – 7 (Conquest) = 1400 BC (Conquest completed) = 447 years (hos etesin tetrakosiois kai pentekonta “about four hundred and fifty years”);

430 years, Galatians 3.17: 1877 BC (Genesis 46.2-4, covenant confirmed) – 1447 BC (law given);

4th generation Exodus, Genesis 15.16: The length of the generation (Hebrew: dor, Hol 1789 “circuit, lifetime, generation”) in view is the life span of four Israelites who lived during the 430 years in Egypt, e.g., Person 1: 1900–1780 BC, Person 2: 1780–1660 BC, Person 3: 1660–1550 BC, Person 4: 1550–1440 BC. Some overlap for each is possible.

Appendix: Egyptian era of Joseph and Entrance into Egypt: Various Theories

Israelite entrance into Egypt: (4th yr Solomon 967 BC + 480 = 1447 BC + 430 =) 1877 BC

1) Assume conventional secular chronology.

Joseph as a vizier: 1886 BC

Seven-year famine: 1879-1872 BC

Egyptian Pharaoh of Joseph: Senuseret II 1897 BC–1878 BC, 12th Dynasty.

Egyptian Pharaoh of famine: Senuseret III 1878 BC–1839 BC

Archaeology: Middle Bronze II A

2) Egyptian chronology is off by 138-181 years: Amenemhat III Year 1 is 1679 BC.[8]

Joseph is a vizier: 1886 BC + 181 = 2067 BC (conventional date)

Famine: 1879 BC–1872 BC + 181 = 2060 BC–2053 BC (conventional date)

Egyptian Pharaoh: Intef III 2069–2061 BC (-181 = 1888 BC – 1880 BC)

Egyptian Pharaoh: Mentuhotep II 2061 BC–2010 BC (-181 = 1880 BC–1829 BC). [9]

Archaeology: Middle Bronze I

3) Archaeology is off by c. 263 years. Exodus at transition of MB IIA and MB IIB [10], Tell el-Dab’a stratum G/1 (end); el-Lahun abandonment (latest inscription: Neferhotep I = c. 1700 BC); End of MB IIA is c. 1710 BC in conventional chronology. 1710 BC–1447 BC = 263 years.

Joseph a vizier: 1886 BC + 263 = 2149 BC in conventional chronology.

Egyptian era of Joseph and famine: 7th-8th Dynasty.

Archaeology: Early Bronze IV.

References:

1. B. K. Waltke, "How we got the Hebrew Bible," in *The Bible at Qumran*, P. W. Flint and T. H. Kim, Eds, 43.
2. Cf. P. K. McCarter, *Textual Criticism* (1986); J. F. Brug, *Textual Criticism of the Old Testament* (2014); W. A. Mitchell, *Scribal Skips: 1300 Words That Fell Out of the Bible* (2017). I recently completed a two year study of the biblical manuscripts for haplography, resulting in a list of 374 examples. In consideration of the Masoretic Hebrew copy of Exodus, at least 25 words were found to have fallen out from copyist haplography. In comparison to the other books of the Torah, this number is below the average: Genesis lost 103 words, Leviticus 29, Numbers 17 and Deuteronomy 40. The most significant in the entire Masoretic Hebrew text was 1&2 Samuel, at 439 words.
3. Moscow, ehem. Syn. Bibl., Gr. 30.
4. E. Ulrich, *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls* (2010), 59.
5. J. W. Wevers, (Ed.), *Exodus (Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum, Auctoritate Academiae Scientiarum Gottingensis, Vol. II, 1)*, 177.
6. Ibid.
7. For a copy of the seven variants in square script and Paleo-Hebrew in PDF format, direct email to the author at: [PublicDomainBibles at gmail.com](mailto:PublicDomainBibles@gmail.com)
8. D. Lappin, *Illahun Lunar Texts and the Astronomical Dating of the 12th Dynasty*, in van der Veen & Zerbst, *Volk ohne Ahnen?* 2012. Amenemhat III Yr 1 1679 BC results in 100% fit (Probability  $P = 0.2433$ ) of 21 recorded lunar dates, and 92% fit ( $P = 0.0932$ ) for 39 lunar dates, which include both Senuseret III and Amenemhat III. The conventional chronology of Amenemhat III is therefore off by either 181 yrs (if year 1 = 1860 BC) or 138 yrs (if Year 1 = 1817 BC).
9. Cf. also: P. Clarke, *Joseph's Zaphenath Paaneah—a chronological key*, *Journal of Creation* 27(3):58–63.
10. D. Rohl, *Exodus: Myth or History* (2015), 312.

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