

## 430 Years in Egypt?

As of 2019, all current English versions of the Bible indicate that the nation of Israel was in Egypt for 430 years – the period between Jacob’s entrance into Egypt and the Exodus.

Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was **430 years**. (Ex 12:40)

But the apostle Paul indicates that the time between the Abrahamic Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant was 430 years – the period between Abraham’s covenant with God in Canaan (Gen 12:1-4) to Moses’ covenant on Mt Sinai three months after the Exodus (Ex 19:1-6)!

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced **430 years later**, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. (Gal 3:16-17)

There are other instances of this that allude to this as well albeit less obviously:

But He gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he had no child, He promised that He would give it to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him. But God spoke to this effect, that his descendants would be aliens in a foreign land, and that they would be enslaved and mistreated for **four hundred years**. ‘And whatever nation to which they will be in bondage I Myself will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they will come out and serve Me in this place.’ (Acts 7:5-7)

The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. For a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. When He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about **four hundred and fifty years**. (Acts 13:17-19)

Observant commentators, using the lifespans of Moses’ family history, have shown that the maximum length of time that the nation of Israel could possibly stay in Egypt was 350 years.

Gen 46:11, 26 – Kohath enters Egypt (Moses’ grandfather lived 133 years [Ex 6:18])	133
Ex 6:20 – Amram, Kohath’s son and Moses’ father lived 137 years	137
Ex 7:7 – Moses left Egypt at age 80	80
The maximum amount of time that the nation of Israel could possibly stay in Egypt	350 years

This maximum time assumes that each person’s lifespan ends when the next one begins; thus, the time that the nation stayed in Egypt is well below 350 years and significantly less than Moses’ report of 430 years (Ex 12:40).

From the perspective of textual criticism, the Old Testament of current English translations of the Bible are based on Hebrew Masoretic manuscripts dated from the 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> century A.D. (i.e. Leningrad Codex, etc.).

When examining earlier text of Exodus 12:40, a significant difference is noted; 430 years was the period of time between Abraham’s entrance into Canaan and the nation of Israel’s departure from Egypt:

And the sojourning of the children of Israel, while **they sojourned in the land of Egypt and the land of Chanaan, was four hundred and thirty years**. (Ex 12:40, Septuagint, 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.)

## 430 Years in Egypt? (page 2)

Recognized as a pre-Masoretic text, the Samaritan Pentateuch shows a similar difference:

Now the sojourning of the children of Israel and fathers of them, **who dwelt in Canaan and in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years.** (Ex 12:40, Samaritan Pentateuch, 12<sup>th</sup> century A.D.)

The Jewish historian Josephus based his work apparently on an earlier version of the Pentateuch than the Masoretic version as well:

They left Egypt in the month Xanthicus, on the fifteenth day of the lunar month; **four hundred and thirty years after our forefather Abraham came into Canaan, but two hundred and fifteen years only after Jacob removed into Egypt.** It was the eightieth year of the age of Moses, and of that of Aaron three more. They also carried out the bones of Joseph with them, as he had charged his sons to do. (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*: Chapter XV:2, 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D.)

It appears that there was transmission / copyist error when the Masoretic text was written. All of the above sources are consistent with the apostle Paul's account in Galatians 3:16-17 who undoubtedly used a pre-Masoretic source for the Pentateuch.

Is it possible to objectively and independently verify that the nation of Israel was in Egypt for only 215 years? One approach is to compare the date that Joseph was in Egypt calculated on the basis of the Bible's chronology to the date calculated on the archaeological evidence, if any, of Joseph.

Based on the Bible's chronology, the calculation of Joseph's date can be seen here:

Joseph enters Egypt at age 17 as a slave (Gen 37:17) and becomes a vizier at age 30 (Gen 41:46)	13 years
Joseph welcomes his father Jacob into Egypt in the second year of the famine (Gen 45:6)	9 years
The nation of Israel is in Egypt for 215 years	215 years
Joseph entered Egypt = 1447 B.C. + 13 + 9 + 215	1683 B.C.

By using the Bible as a single source, Joseph enters Egypt in 1683 B.C. and becomes vizier in 1670 B.C.

Examining the archaeological evidence within the context of Egyptian chronology is more challenging and contested. Incomplete Egyptian king lists and historical accounts of certain regnal years, which count years from the ascension of a new king, do not fix an absolute time in chronology. The dating of the orthodox / conventional Egyptian chronology is largely based on a limited number of Sothic cycles and the carbon dating of archaeological artifacts, which results in approximations in dating time. Also contributing to the vigorous debates of chronology are the problems of synchronizing the conventional Egyptian chronology with other contemporaneous civilizations (i.e. Assyrian, Hittite, etc.).

In addition to the archaeological findings of Avaris, two are synchronously associated: a) the Waterway of Joseph (Bahr Yussef) and b) king Amenemhat III's pyramid at Hawara located at the end of the Waterway of Joseph, which dates both sites to the 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty.

Because of advances in software, new approaches are looking at fixing Egyptian chronology by astronomically derived dates. Two studies exemplify this approach, and because the results challenge the orthodox / conventional Egyptian chronology, they contribute to the debate on the correct absolute time of Egyptian dynasties.

1. Babylonian astronomer priests noted a rare sequence of a partial lunar eclipse at sunrise followed by, fourteen days later, a partial solar eclipse near sunset. Using retro-calculating astronomical software, researchers were able to date that event associated with the fall of Babylon to 1362 B.C.

With the fall of Babylon fixed, comparing Babylonian king lists with Egyptian king lists resulted in fixing the end of the Egyptian 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty to 1626 B.C.

2. Independently, another study looked for a sequence of 39 new moons during the reigns of two unnamed pharaohs, and clues pointed to one king as Amenemhat III. Researchers, using the orthodox / conventional Egyptian chronology for Amenemhat III, looked for this sequence of 39 new moons in the 18-19<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C. but could not find any range of dates that could match.

However, when looking in the 17<sup>th</sup> century B.C., they were able to find dates that matched with a 97% confidence. The results determined that Pharaoh Amenemhat III reigned during 1678-1631 B.C., which is consistent with the other astronomical study that fixed the end of the Egyptian 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty to 1626 B.C.

While scholars still argue and debate the chronology of Egyptian dynasties, the biblically derived date of Joseph coincides with the astronomically derived date of Amenemhat III.

Joseph becomes vizier of Egypt in 1670 B.C.

Pharaoh Amenemhat III reigned during 1678-1631 B.C.

In determining the date of Joseph, by two independent means, the data confirms that the nation of Israel was in Egypt for only 215 years and even less under slavery.

References:

1. Rohl D, *Exodus: Myth or History?*, St. Louis Park: Thinking Man Publishers, (2015).