

## **THE LENGTH OF ISRAEL'S SOJOURN IN EGYPT**

JACK R. RIGGS  
Associate Professor of Bible  
Cedarville College

The chronological framework of Biblical events from the time of Abraham to David rests upon two pivotal texts of Scripture. The first is I Kings 6:1, which dates the Exodus from Egypt 480 years before the fourth year of Solomon.

The second pivotal date for the Biblical chronology of this period is Exodus 12:40 which dates the arrival of Jacob's family in Egypt years before the Exodus.

The purpose of this paper will be to discuss the problem of the length of Israel's sojourn in Egypt. This problem is important, as already suggested, because it has to do with dating events in the centuries prior to the Exodus.

There are at least three possible solutions to the problem of the length of Israel's Egyptian sojourn. The first view is that the time span of the sojourn was only 215 years. A second solution is the view of 400 years for the sojourn. The third, and final, solution to be discussed is the idea that 430 years elapsed between the entrance of Jacob and his family into Egypt and their Exodus under Moses' leadership.

### *The View That The Egyptian Sojourn Was 215 Years*

The most commonly held view of the length of Israel's sojourn in Egypt is the 215 year idea. To state the view simply, the chronological notations of Genesis 15:13,

This article was presented as a paper at the Midwestern Section meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society on April 17, 1970, at Grace Theological Seminary.

And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that 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,

and Exodus 12:40,

Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years,

include sojourns in both Canaan and Egypt. From this it is argued that approximately 215 years were spent in Canaan and 215 years in Egypt.

Among the proponents of this view are Anstey,<sup>1</sup> Meyer,<sup>2</sup> Eadie,<sup>3</sup> Alford<sup>4</sup> and McDonald.<sup>5</sup>

Anstey is possibly its leading adherent. He reckons the 430 years of Exodus 12:40 from Abraham's call to the Exodus, and considers the 400 years of Genesis 15:13 as embracing the same period, but beginning with the weaning of Isaac.<sup>6</sup> According to Anstey the Genesis passage has to do with the sojourning of Abraham's *seed*. As he has explained:

Abraham's seed here means Abraham's posterity, viz., Isaac from the time that he was weaned and became Abraham's heir (Gal. 3:29-4:5) and Isaac's descendants.<sup>7</sup>

Holding to the idea that an oriental child was weaned at age five, the conclusion is that the 400 years of Genesis 15 began when Isaac was five years old.<sup>8</sup>

Adding these five years plus the twenty-five years that elapsed between Abraham's call and Isaac's birth to the 400 years of Exodus 12:40 makes the harmonious chronological scheme.<sup>9</sup>

Another argument is his interpretation of the phrase "*a land that is not theirs*" in Genesis 15:13. Since Canaan was actually never possessed by Abraham's seed before the conquest under Joshua, then the 400 years must include both that land and Egypt.<sup>10</sup> The interpretation also of McDonald is significant here as he sees the phrase as being more appropriately applied to Canaan. He has written:

While no particular country is specified, the appellation "a land that is not theirs" was, as regards Abraham and his immediate posterity, more applicable to Canaan than it was to Egypt during the sojourn there. Up to

the time when it was taken possession of by Joshua, Canaan, though the "land of promise", was in every sense a strange (*allotria* Heb. xi. 9, comp. ac. ii. c), land, Abraham or his posterity having no possession in it beyond a place of sepulture, and no fixed dwelling place, whereas in Egypt they had the land of Goshen by royal grant.<sup>11</sup>

In connection with this Anstey does not see the servitude and affliction mentioned in the verse as applying to the Canaan sojourn. He skirts the necessity of applying these to the entire four hundred years by the use of an introversion. In other words he breaks down the passage so that it is constructed in the following manner:

Know of a surety that

A. thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs,

B. and shall serve them;

B. and they shall afflict them;

A. four hundred years. 12

In this construction the two A clauses correspond to each other and relate to the same event, that is, the whole period of the sojourning. The two B clauses likewise correspond and are parenthetical and relate to the servitude in Egypt and that alone.

A third argument used to establish the extent of the sojourn is the variant readings to the Massoretic text of Exodus 12:40. The Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch both include Canaan in the 430 year sojourn. The Septuagint version is as follows:

The sojourning of the children of Israel which they sojourned in Egypt and in the land of Canaan, was four hundred and thirty years.

The Samaritan Pentateuch reads:

And the sojourn of the children of Israel and of their fathers in the land of Canaan and in the land of Egypt.

The clause "and in the land of Canaan" of the Septuagint, and the clause "and of their fathers in the land of Canaan" of the Samaritan Pentateuch are not supported by any other manuscript evidence.

Anstey finds support in these variants while not contradicting the Massoretic text. He believes that the Septuagint and Samaritan insertions

. . . agree perfectly with the Hebrew which is further elucidated, but in no way modified by them. They correctly interpret the meaning of the Hebrew text. . . . But the meaning of the Hebrew is sufficiently clear without the explanatory addition when the text is properly translated.<sup>13</sup>

To summarize at this point, the major premise for the 215 year view is the interpretation of Genesis 15:13 and Exodus 12:40 as referring harmoniously to both the Canaan and Egyptian sojourns. The support for this is the view that the *seed* of Abraham, beginning with Isaac, was to dwell in a *land not their own*, which included Canaan. At the same time the variant readings of Exodus 12:40 interpret that passage as bringing the two sojourns into one.

The final support for reckoning the 430 years from Abraham to Sinai is the implication of Galatians 3:17. This verse, speaking of the covenant of the law which came many years after the Abrahamic promise, reads as follows:

Now this I say: A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law, which came four hundred and thirty years after doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect.

The implication of this verse is important to the view under consideration. Fergusson sees this verse as indicating the space of 430 years to be reckoned

. . . from the first solemn sanction and confirmation of the covenant by God to Abraham. . . and the close of it was at the giving of the law upon Mount Sinai. . . .<sup>14</sup>

This supposed interpretation by Paul of the 430 years is also considered by Meyer to be an evidence that Paul used the Septuagint at this point,<sup>15</sup> which in turn gives support to that version's interpretation of Exodus 12:40.

It is from the standpoint of the major premise of 430 years for the Canaan and Egyptian sojourns that the time span of the latter sojourn is calculated. The time from Abraham's call to Jacob's entrance into Egypt can be determined by particular references in Genesis. According to Genesis 21:5 Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old or twenty-five years after Abraham entered Canaan (Gen. 12:4). Jacob was born when Isaac was 60 years old (Gen. 25:26) and entered Egypt at age 130 (Gen. 47:9). The total of the figures of 25, 60 and 130 would be

215, the time span of the Canaan sojourn. Subtracting this figure from 430 would leave a similar amount of time for Israel's stay in Egypt.

In order to demonstrate the validity of 215 years in Egypt, several arguments are put forth, the principal one being the genealogy of Jochebed. According to Exodus 6:16-20 and Numbers 26:59, Jochebed was the daughter of Levi, who went into Egypt, and the mother of Moses who led the children of Israel out. If the sojourn in Egypt was 430 years, she would have to be over 250 years old when Moses was born. This conclusion is reached by deducting the number of years Levi lived in Egypt, approximately 94, and the age of Moses at the Exodus, 80, from the 430 years. Ellicott summarizes the problem as follows:

Amram, grandson of Levi, marries his father's sister Jochebed (Exod. 6:20; comp. Exod. 2:1; Numb. 26:59). Now as it appears probable by a comparison of dates that Levi was born when Jacob was about 87, Levi would have been 43 when he came into Egypt; there he lives 94 years (Exod. 6:16). Assuming then even that Jochebed was born in the last year of Levi's life, she must at least have been 256 years old when Moses was born, if the sojourn in Egypt be 430 years. . . .<sup>16</sup>

Consequently, the 215 year view of the Egyptian sojourn is considered more reasonable as it does not demand such an inconceivable age for Jochebed. McDonald, making his deductions from the 215 year hypothesis, suggests an approximate age of 45 for Jochebed at Moses' birth.<sup>17</sup>

Anstey's Joseph to Moses connection is his further demonstration of a short Egyptian sojourn. He subtracts the time span from the call of Abraham to the death of Joseph, 286 years, and the age of Moses at the Exodus, 80, from his 430 year figure of both sojourns and arrives at a 64 year interval between Joseph and Moses.<sup>18</sup> This time period would allow for the events that took place between the two men (Exodus 1:1-22).

The proponents of this view see no difficulty in harmonizing the population increase of Israel in such a short period of 215 years. Anstey first of all, sees confirmation of the 600,000 male population in the later notices in Numbers 2:32 and 26:51.<sup>19</sup> He then argues that such an increase is not beyond comprehension:

Mr. Malthus has shown that with an abundant supply of food, a given population may continue to double its numbers in about 15 years, and in favored cases, in

even less time. At this rate of increase the 70 souls who went down into Egypt would have multiplied in 225 years to 2,293,760, which is perhaps about the number of the entire population including Levites, women and children; the 600,000 mentioned in Exodus 12 :37, Numb. 2:32 and 26:51, would be the adult males.<sup>20</sup>

Others, such as Moller, have attributed the phenomenal growth simply to Divine blessing.<sup>21</sup>

To summarize, the view of a 215 year sojourn in Egypt is first of all based upon the idea that the period from the call of Abraham to the Exodus was 430 years. This idea is derived from the interpretation and harmonization of Genesis 15:13 and Exodus 12:40. Genesis 15:13 is interpreted in reckoning the sojourn of Abraham's seed in a land not their own from the weaning of Isaac. This interpretation is further supported by adopting the Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch readings of Exodus 12:40, which include both Canaan and Egypt in the 430 year span.

Within this framework of time, the time of the sojourning in Canaan, determined by references in Genesis, is deducted from the 430 year period leaving 215 years for Israel's stay in Egypt. This is then demonstrated by the genealogy of Jochebed and the short span of years between Joseph and Moses. At the same time, the increase in the Hebrew population in Egypt does not invalidate such a short period of time.

There are, however, several objections to this interpretation. To begin, while the Genesis 15:13 passage does clearly indicate that the 400 year sojourning is to be the experience of Abraham's seed, yet the verse does not specify the reckoning of this period to begin with Isaac.

A second objection is to the interpretation of the phrase "a land not their own" in the same passage. While it is true that the Israelites did not take possession of the land of Canaan until Joshua's day, yet the land was still theirs. The very context of the passage is concerned with deeding the land to Abraham and his posterity. The land not their own was in direct contrast to the land of Canaan. Beet has very aptly remarked:

It is also difficult to suppose that in Gen. XV. 13 the 'land not theirs,' in which Israel was to dwell 400 years and which seems to be contrasted with the land promised to Abraham, includes both Egypt and Canaan, countries so different in their relation to Israel.<sup>22</sup>

Thirdly the passage refers to servitude and affliction during the period of the 400 years. The children of Abraham did not serve others in Palestine, nor were they afflicted by their neighbors in Canaan.<sup>23</sup> Anstey's introversion of Genesis 12:13 is really a circumnavigation of the real sense of the verse.<sup>24</sup>

Keil and Delitzsch have suggested the importance of the passage as follows:

By this revelation Abram had the future history of his seed pointed out to him in general outlines, and was informed at the same time why neither he nor his descendants could obtain immediate possession of the promised land, viz., because the Canaanites were not yet ripe for the sentence of extermination.<sup>25</sup>

The fourth objection is to the interpretation of Exodus 12:40 as based upon the variant readings. In refutation of this supporting evidence it may be said the more reliable text is the Massoretic text.<sup>26</sup> The implication of the Hebrew text is that the residence in Egypt occupied the whole 430 year period. It would certainly be more natural in reckoning the time of the departure from Egypt to give the length of the sojourn there than the period elapsed since Abraham entered Canaan.<sup>27</sup> While the context of the Galatians passage would seem to support the idea of 430 years elapsing between Abraham's call and the law, a possible solution is that Paul may be looking at periods or ages. This will be discussed later.

The objection, the fifth, here is that support could be rendered to the 215 year view if it could be determined that Paul used the Septuagint. In discussing this point, Ridderbos concludes that it is impossible to determine Paul's chronological source:

The LXX transmits Ex. 12:40 in such a way that the time in which Israel was in Egypt and in Canaan came to 430 years. There is, however, no equivalent for the words *kai en gei chanaan* in the Hebrew text. It is therefore impossible for us to determine whether and in what sense Paul takes his figure from one or another of these data.<sup>28</sup>

Such being the case, the final interpretation of Galatians 3:17 can not be based on the Septuagint. This relieves one from the necessity of supporting a 215 year Egyptian sojourn at this point, or from facing the definite problem of Paul's use of an inaccurate source.

A sixth objection is the insistence on a strict genealogical record of Exodus 6:16-20. This is admittedly a difficult problem. Keil and Delitzsch argue that the genealogical records are very often incomplete due to missing links. Their argument is as follows:

The genealogies do not always contain a complete enumeration of all the separate links, but very frequently intermediate links of little importance are omitted.<sup>29</sup>

Keil and Delitzsch then demonstrate this by a comparison of Exodus 6:16-20 with the other genealogies in which more than four generations between Levi and Moses must have occurred.<sup>30</sup> Numbers 26:29ff, 27:1, and Joshua 17:3 show six generations from Joseph to Zelophehad. Ruth 4:18 and I Chronicles 2:5, 6 show six generations from Judah to Nahshon who was a tribal prince in the time of Moses. I Chronicles 2:18 lists seven generations from Judah to Bezabel. The most significant is possibly I Chronicles 7:20 which lists nine or ten generations from Joseph to Joshua. Keil and Delitzsch significantly have commented:

This last genealogy shows most clearly the impossibility of the view founded upon the Alexandrian version that the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt lasted only 215 years; for ten generations, reckoned at 40 years each, harmonize well with 430 years, but certainly not with 215.<sup>31</sup>

Archer sees the same problem, although from a slightly different reckoning. His conclusion is that

. . . ten generations can hardly be reconciled with a mere 215 years (especially considering the longer life span of pre-Exodus Israelites), but it fits in very plausibly with an interval of 430 years.<sup>32</sup>

The genealogy of Jochebed, then, does not support a short sojourn of 215 years in Egypt due to the problem of missing links in the genealogy itself.

Added to this is Thiele's statement:

That some considerable period was involved is clear from the fact that Joseph before his death saw the children of the third generation of both his sons (Gen. 50:23), and that at the time of Exodus Amram and his brothers were already regarded as founders of clans (Num. 3:27).<sup>33</sup>



The increase from 70 to approximately one million Hebrews does in reality militate against the 215 year view. This is the final objection to the idea. It is certainly admitted that such an increase is Divinely possible in 215 years. In fact, even in the 430 year view the Divine blessing of Exodus 1:20 should be cited. Yet, the tremendous increase of the nation seems more plausible during a 430 year period. The problem of increase is more paramount with only 215 years of sojourning. Archer views the problem as follows:

If there were indeed only four generations, then the rate of multiplication would necessarily have been astronomical. Even if seven generations should be crammed into the 215 years, there would have had to be an average of four surviving sons per father.<sup>34</sup>

In conclusion, from a study of the lines of evidence, an Egyptian bondage of 215 years was highly improbable and unlikely.

*The View That The Egyptian  
Sojourn Was 400 Years*

Rea<sup>35</sup> and Hoehner<sup>36</sup> favor the position of a 400 year Egyptian bondage.

Rea proceeds to establish this idea by first of all accepting the Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch readings of Exodus 12:40. The 430 years of that verse would thus apply to both Canaan and Egypt.<sup>37</sup> However, Rea reckons the beginning of this period not from Abraham's call, but from Jacob's return from Haran to Canaan with his family. Jacob's name was confirmed as Israel at that time. The grounds for this is an emphasis upon the phrase "the children of Israel" which is found in the Exodus 12 verse. To quote Rea:

The verse therefore states the length of time which elapsed from the return of Jacob from Haran to Canaan with his children, unto the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. The "exodus" of Jacob along with his family from Padan-aram is compared with the exodus of Moses accompanied by the nation of Israel from Egypt. Even when we adopt the longer reading in Exodus 12:40, the 430 years cannot cover the entire patriarchal age and the sojourn in Egypt, that is, from Abraham's arrival in Canaan until the Exodus. The verse distinctly says "the time that the children of Israel dwelt," and that cannot be made to include Abraham and Isaac.<sup>38</sup>

Galatians 3:17 is viewed as giving support to this in stating that the 430 year period began with the confirmation, not the institution, of the Abrahamic covenant. The last confirmation was made with Jacob in Canaan years before the entrance into Egypt (Gen. 35:9 -15).<sup>39</sup>

The next step is to subtract the intervening time between Jacob's return to Canaan and his entrance into Egypt from the 430 years. This leaves approximately 400 years for the Egyptian sojourn and produces a harmony of Exodus 12:40 with Genesis 15:13 and Acts 13:19, 20. Commenting on Acts 13:19, 20 Rea makes his conclusion as follows:

According to the Apostle Paul, then, the time that the Israelites spent in Egypt was only four hundred years instead of 430 years. The slightly shorter period accords with the four hundred years of Gen. 15:13 and almost exactly with the 430 years of Ex. 12:40 (Samaritan Pentateuch and Septuagint Versions), thirty-four of which were spent in Canaan before Jacob and his sons descended into Egypt to sojourn there.<sup>40</sup>

Rea believes that the Acts 13:19, 20 chronological note gives strong support for his view. In dealing with the textual problem connected with this passage, he has chosen the text of the Alexandrian family, the Latin Vulgate and the Armenian Version and made the following translation of the latter half of verse twenty:

He gave them their land for an inheritance--about four hundred and fifty years. And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet.<sup>41</sup>

This would mean 400 years for the Egyptian bondage. 40 years for the wilderness journey. and 7 years for the conquest of the land under Joshua's leadership, making a total of 447 years or "about 450 years" as the text states.

This is of course the alternative to the King James Version. based on the Byzantine texts, which places the four hundred and fifty years after the phrase "he gave unto them judges." This positioning of the figure would tend to indicate that it was meant to apply to the period of the judges instead of the Egyptian sojourn.<sup>42</sup>

The first objection to this view is the use of the Septuagint and Samaritan renderings of Exodus 12:40. As already noted the Massoretic text is the more reliable text and its rendering of the passage does not include Canaan with Egypt in the 430 years. To include a Canaan sojourn in the reference does seem to be contrary to the point of the

reference which was to give the years spent in Egypt at the time of their termination.

To make the sojourning run from the return of Jacob to Canaan to the Exodus on the basis of the use of the appellation "the children of Israel" does seem rather forced.

A third objection is the restriction of the beginning of the 430 year period of Galatians 3 to the confirmation of the covenant in Genesis 35 when Jacob returned to Canaan. The last confirmation of the covenant to Jacob could very well be seen in Genesis 46 when he entered Egypt. As he journeyed to Egypt the Lord encouraged him and promised to make a great nation of him while in that land. The promise of a great posterity had its roots in the covenant and consequently its reiteration was another confirmation of its provisions. The 430 years would subsequently run from Jacob's entrance into Egypt until the Exodus under Moses' leadership.

In conclusion, this view does not seem to explain adequately the Biblical data.

*The View That The Egyptian  
Sojourn Was 430 Years*

This second most prevalent view simply states the length of Israel's sojourn in Egypt was 430 years. This period began with Jacob's entrance into Egypt and terminated with the Exodus.

Some of the proponents of this view are Keil and Delitzsch, Archer,<sup>44</sup> Leupold, Toussaint,<sup>46</sup> Lenski,<sup>47</sup> Jamieson, Fausset and Kitchen.<sup>49</sup>

Basically, this view takes Genesis 15:13-16; Exodus 12:40 and Acts 7:6 in their normal sense. The Genesis 15 passage refers to the sojourn in a land not theirs when God has just deeded Palestine to Abraham and his seed (cf. 15:7, 18). Along with this it is also noted that Abraham's children did not serve others in Palestine, nor were they afflicted by their neighbors in Canaan.<sup>50</sup>

The 400 years of the passage is to be considered as a rounded number used in prophetic style<sup>51</sup> with the fourth generation reference of verse 16 denoting the same period of time. Archer has significantly commented:

It is evident that in Abraham's case a generation was computed at one hundred years, and this was

appropriate enough in view of the fact that Abraham was precisely one hundred when he became the father of Isaac. At least four centuries, then, and not a mere 215 years, would mark the Israelite sojourn in the foreign land.<sup>52</sup>

An objection has been raised to the view under discussion because of the idea of a rounded number being used. The thought is that such an interpretation could allow too much liberty in the interpretation of other numbers in the Bible and consequently do damage to the doctrine of inspiration.<sup>53</sup> However, if it can be shown that the Bible does use rounded numbers then the doctrine of inspiration is in no way affected.<sup>54</sup> Paul, for example, in Acts 13 suggested such a use when he used the phrase "about the space of" in summarizing the years of the Egyptian bondage, the wilderness wanderings and the conquest of Canaan. The author of II Samuel rounds off the years of David's reign at 40 and then explains that the reign was actually composed of 7 years and 6 months at Hebron and 33 years at Jerusalem (II Sam. 5:4, 5). The enumeration of Job's possessions must have involved the use of rounded numbers for it would have been trivial for the author to have given an odd ten or fifty or hundred in /figures running into thousands.<sup>55</sup>

The Bible then, does contain rounded numbers. The real issue is determining, mainly by context, the use of such figures in anyone text.

The normal literal sense of Exodus 12:40, with the Massoretic text being preferred, is a 430 year Egyptian sojourn for Israel.

The Acts 7:6 passage is evidently a quote of Genesis 15:13. It reads as follows:

And God spake on this wise, that his seed should sojourn in a strange land, and that they should bring them into bondage and treat them ill, four hundred years.

Chadwick sees Peter quoting

. . . plainly and confidently the prediction that the seed of Abraham should be four hundred years in bondage and that one nation should entreat them evil four hundred years. . . .<sup>56</sup>

A second argument for this view is the support of Acts 13:19, 20. Following the A. S. V., which is based on B, Aleph, A, and C, the four best texts according to Westcott and Hort,<sup>57</sup> the four hundred and

fifty years, which preceded the period of the judges, would include the rounded number of 400 for the Egyptian sojourn. Lenski has arranged the chronology of the passage as follows:

The round number "about 450 years" covers the time for the sojourn in Egypt to the possession of Canaan. According to Acts 7:6 (Gen. 15:13) 400 years were spent in Egypt, forty additional years in the journey through the desert to Canaan, and about ten further years for conquering the land which is certainly close to 450 years.<sup>58</sup>

A third argument is the genealogical tables in I Chronicles 7:20-27, indicating nine or ten generations between Joseph and Joshua. As already suggested ten generations can hardly be reconciled with a mere 215 years.

From this a fourth argument is derived. The increase of the Hebrew population from 70 to approximately one million is more plausible with nine or ten generations in 430 years than with three or four generations in 215 years. Such an increase in 215 years is very difficult to comprehend, although it is divinely possible, of course.

Archer has demonstrated the plausibility of the increase in 430 years in the following quotation:

If the sojourn lasted 430 years, then the desired multiplication would result from an average of three sons and three daughters to every married couple during the first six generations, and an average of two sons and two daughters in the last four generations. At this rate, by the tenth generation there would be (according to Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, II, 30) 478,224 sons above twenty by the four hundredth year of the sojourn, while 125,326 males of military age would still be left over from the ninth generation. These together, then, would total 603,550 men at arms.<sup>59</sup>

The problem in connection with this genealogical consideration is the genealogical line in Exodus 6:16-20. This is admittedly a difficult problem. The solution may very well be that there were two men by the name of Amram in this line.<sup>60</sup> Amram, the son of Kohath, was probably an earlier ancestor of Amram, the father of Moses.

In fact, a simple comparison of this genealogy with Numbers 3:27, 28 will show the impossibility of assuming that the father of Moses in verse 20 was the son of Kohath mentioned in verse 18. According

to Numbers 3:27, 28 the Kohathites were divided (in Moses' time) into the four branches, Amramites, Isharites, Hebronites, and Uzzielites, who consisted together of 8,600 men and boys. If divided equally a fourth, or 2,150 men, would belong to the Amramites. According to Exodus 18:3, 4, Moses himself had only two sons. Consequently, if Amram the son of Kohath, and tribal father of the Amramites, was the same person as Amram the father of Moses, Moses must have had 2,147 brothers and brothers' sons. But this would be absolutely impossible and it must be granted that an indefinitely long list of generations has been omitted between the former and latter descendant of the same name.<sup>61</sup>

Kitchen argues that Exodus 6:16-20 gives the tribe (Levi), clan (Kohath) and family-group (Amram by Jochebed) to which Moses and Aaron belong and not their actual parents.<sup>62</sup>

In connection with this 430 year view, there is the problem of Paul's statement in Galatians 3:17 which seems to indicate the time from Abraham to Sinai was 430 years.

Some possible solutions have been suggested. Lenski's suggestion is that the time is an understatement on the part of Paul. His purpose was to convince his opponents the number could have been larger by understating it.<sup>63</sup> This is, however, a very weak argument and does not fit the exactness that characterizes the Apostle in his writings (cf. 1 :16-2 :21).

A second solution has been given by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown. The assertion of this view is that the 430 years are to be reckoned from Jacob to the giving of the law.<sup>64</sup> The objection to this view is that the context of Galatians 3 concerns Abraham and not Jacob.

A more satisfactory solution is the one offered by Toussaint which is as follows:

Paul here is considering periods of time. The promises were given during the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This period of time preceded the giving of the Mosaic law at Sinai by 430 years, the length of the sojourn in Egypt.<sup>65</sup>

As previously discussed, the last recorded confirmation is given in Genesis 46 when Jacob went down into Egypt. From this last recorded confirmation to the Exodus 430 years elapsed.

In conclusion, the 430 year view is based upon a normal interpretation of Exodus 12:40 which indicates a 430 year Egyptian sojourn

for Israel. Genesis 15:13-16 and Acts 7:6 are interpreted as containing rounded numbers. This is true also of Acts 13:19, 20 which summarizes the "about" 450 years before the judges.

Further confirmation of this view is the genealogical table of I Chronicles 7:20-27 which indicates at least nine or ten generations between Joseph and Joshua, making the increase from 70 to approximately one million more plausible. The problem of Amram in Exodus 6:16-20 can be answered by the argument of there being two men in that line by that name.

The interpretation of Galatians 3:17 is answered by the suggestion Paul is referring to periods or ages, i. e., 430 years elapsed between the period of the confirmation of the Abrahamic covenant and the beginning of the period of the law.

### CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to consider three solutions to the problem of the length of Israel's sojourn in Egypt. The views of 215 years and 400 years are rejected as inadequate basically because of their interpretation of Exodus 12:40, i. e., their acceptance of the Septuagint and Samaritan Pentateuch readings of the verse in contra-distinction to the Massoretic text.

The view of 430 years is set forth as the true solution to the problem, being based upon the better text, the Massoretic, and properly interpreting the pertinent scripture references in their normal sense.

### DOCUMENTATION

1. Martin Anstey, *The Romance of Bible Chronology* (London: Marshall Brothers, 1913), p. 114.
2. H. A. W. Meyer, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1873), p. 167.
3. John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1869), p. 260.
4. Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1958), III. IV., 31.
5. Donald McDonald, "Chronology", *The Imperial Bible Dictionary*. Ed. Patrick Fairbairn (London: Blackie and Son, 1887), p. 31.
6. Anstey, p. 117.
7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
10. *Ibid.*
11. McDonald, p. 31.
12. Anstey, p. 127.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
14. James Fergusson, *An Exposition of the Epistles of Paul*, (Evansville, Indiana: Sovereign Grace Publishers, n.d.), p. 58.
15. Meyer, p. 167; see also Alford, p. 31.
16. Charles J. Ellicott, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1863), p. 61.  
See also Alford, p. 31.
17. McDonald, p. 31.
18. Anstey, p. 124.
19. Anstey, p. 123.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Wilhelm Moller, "The Book of Exodus", *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), II, 1965-66.
22. Joseph Agar Beet, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1903), p. 89.
23. Stanley D. Toussaint, "Galatians". (Unpublished Class Notes, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1965), p. 72.
24. *Ibid.*
25. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), I, 216.
26. Merrill F. Unger, *Introductory Guide to the Old Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1951), pp. 144 and 156ff; F. F. Bruce, *The Books and the Parchments* (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1950), pp. 150-51; Everett F. Harrison, "The Importance of the Septuagint for Biblical Studies (Part I), *Bibliotheca Sacra*, CXII (October-December, 1955), p. 351.
27. Beet, p. 89.
28. Herman Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), p. 136.
29. Keil and Delitzsch, II, 30.
30. *Ibid.*
31. *Ibid.*



32. Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), p. 212.
33. Edwin R. Thiele, "Chronology, Old Testament," *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Publishing Company, 1963), p. 167. Thiele argues that it is impossible to give a categorical answer as to all that is involved in the 430 year sojourn, but then goes on to imply that on the bases of Galatians 3:16, 17 the sojourn must have included both Canaan and Egypt.
34. Archer, p. 212.
35. John Rea, "The Historical Setting of the Exodus and the Conquest" (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1958), pp. 80ff.
36. Harold W. Hoehner, "The Duration of the Egyptian Bondage," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, CXXVI (October-December, 1969), pp. 313 -16.
37. Rea, p. 80. Hoehner does not place much stock in either the Septuagint or Samaritan Pentateuch for chronological notices, but does comment that the inclusion of "in the land of Canaan" in both texts "may point back to some early tradition in the text. It is somewhat difficult to explain its inclusion except that there was some sort of early tradition for this reading," pp. 315-16.
38. Rea, p. 80.
39. Hoehner, pp. 313-14.
40. Rea, p. 81. He actually holds that the Egyptian sojourn was 396 years due to the 34 years mentioned above. The number 400 is an approximate number. Hoehner would see the 400 years as exact due to the doctrine of inspiration, p. 313.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. Keil and Delitzsch, I, p. 216.
44. Archer, p. 211.
45. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1942), p. 486.
46. Toussaint, P.. 72.
47. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1944), p. 520.
48. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, *Commentary on the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1934), p. 330.
49. K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1966), pp. 52-53.

50. *Ibid.*, See also Rea, p. 136.
51. Keil and Delitzsch, I, 216.
52. Archer, p. 211; See also Leupold, p. 486.
53. Hoehner, p. 313.
54. See the following for listing and discussions of rounded numbers in the Bible: John J. Davis, *Biblical Numerology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), pp. 51-54; William T. Smith, "Number," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), IV, 2158-69.
55. J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore The Book* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1952), III, 29-30.
56. B. A. Chadwick, "The Book of Exodus," *The Expositor's Bible*. Ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1903), pp. 197. 98.
57. Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1948, p. 567.
58. Lenski, p. 520.
59. Archer, p. 212.
60. Toussaint, p. 72.
61. Keil and Delitzsch, I, 470.
62. Kitchen, p. 54.
63. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press: 1937), p. 162.
64. Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, p. 330.
65. Toussaint, p. 71.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

Grace Theological Seminary  
200 Seminary Dr.  
Winona Lake, IN 46590  
[www.grace.edu](http://www.grace.edu)

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: [thildebrandt@gordon.edu](mailto:thildebrandt@gordon.edu)