

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Old Testament History, Lecture 20

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Chronology of the Patriarchal Period

B. Under the Patriarchal Period, The Authenticity of the Patriarchal Accounts

We were discussing yesterday B. “Under the Patriarchal Period, the Authenticity of the Patriarchal Accounts” and the main point of interest there was the light that archaeological research has thrown on the patriarchal period, and as a result there’s a much greater tendency to accept those narratives as historical then there was say 50 years ago. I think we can say that to pick up right at the end of the hour, I quoted from John Bright’s book, *History of Israel*, about nomenclature, that the nomenclature that you find in the patriarchal narratives fits precisely that period of Israel’s history, not later periods, and I think we can say that the kind of material that you find in the patriarchal narratives is of the type that could not have been invented by later writers and then represented as being earlier when it was actually late. Things like nomenclature would be very hard if you were living a thousand years later to know what the nomenclature was in the time of the patriarchal period. Now that doesn’t mean that archaeology has proved that the patriarchal stories occurred just as the Bible tells us, that goes beyond, I think, what the results of archaeological research can do but certainly as far as general historicity archaeology’s done a lot.

C. The Chronology of the Patriarchs

1. The Biblical Data

Let’s go on to C., which is “The Chronology of the Patriarchs.” You notice that there are three sub-points there: “The Biblical Data,” “The Difficulties,” and then a “Summary.” You’ve read this section in Schultz already on the patriarchal period and the chronology of the patriarchs, page 30 of Schultz says, “The chronology for the patriarchs still remains a moot point, within this general period, the date advocated for Abraham varies from the 21st to the 15th century.” Now Schultz himself I mentioned this earlier, in a previous edition of his book, argued for the early part of the 19th century, but he’s

backed off that in the last edition, the 3rd edition, and now puts it at 2091 B.C. which is what he favors. But you notice what he says, the dates vary from the 21st to the 15th century, that's a 600 year span. Now, most people fit back around 1900, 2000, 2100 B.C., but there is a wide variation. The question is why? Well, let's look at "The Biblical Data, that's 1.

If you're going to get at the chronology of the patriarchs, you have to start from a later time. In other words, you have to start in the kingdom period. The points where we get Old Testament chronology, generally, are by linking certain things in the kingdom period with the Assyrian or Egyptian chronology. You can do that in the kingdom period and then you've got the synchronized chronology of the reigns of the kings and you work from fixed points back to the earlier time.

1 Kings 6:1

So, as far as the date of the patriarchs is concerned, the first thing you have to look at is 1 Kings 6:1. You read about this the date of the Exodus because 1 Kings 6:1 says that in the fourth year of Solomon's reign, the Temple was "begun to be built" and that was 480 years after the Exodus. So, what you can get from that is the fourth year of Solomon's reign is 480 years after the Exodus. So you can pin-point what the date of the fourth year of Solomon's reign is, and you add 480 years and you're back to the date of the Exodus. To just jump ahead, the 4th year of Solomon's reign is 966 B.C., not much controversy about that. So, you add 480 to that and you get 1446 for the date of the Exodus. But that's where you start. 480 years between the Exodus and the building of Solomon's Temple.

Exodus 12:40

Then you move to Exodus 12:40, where you read, "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt was 430 years." So, you move 430 years further back, and that's the time that Israel was in Egypt, from Exodus 12:40. Then you go to Gen. 47:9, where you read, "Jacob said unto Pharaoh, the days of the years of my

pilgrimage are 130 years. Few, and evil have been the days and the years of my life. I did not attain to the days of the lives of my fathers, and the days of their pilgrimages.” So, Jacob says, at the point that he went down to Egypt, that he was 130 years old. So, you know, 480 years, from Solomon, back to the Exodus. 430 years in Egypt, and Jacob was already 130 years old when he came into Egypt. Now you’re back to $966+480+430+130=\text{ca. } 2006 \text{ B.C.}$

Patriarchal Birthdays and Life Spans

Gen. 25:26, the next reference, where you read, “After that came his brother out and his hands held on Esau’s heel, his name was called Jacob. Isaac was three score years old when she bore them.” So, at the birth of Jacob, he’s 130 years old when he went to Egypt, but at his birth, Isaac was 60 years old. So, you can move another 60 years back, Isaac’s age before Esau and Jacob were born. Then Gen. 21:5, “Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born unto him.” So, Abraham’s age before the birth of Isaac was 100 years. Now, you can note in this connection, because this will become important later, you compare that with Gen. 12:4. In Gen. 12:4, we read, “Abraham departed as the LORD had spoken unto him. Lot went with him. Abraham was 75 years old when he departed out of Haran.” So, when Abraham left Haran to come down to the land of Canaan, he was seventy-five. It wasn’t until twenty-five years later, when he was one hundred, that Isaac was born. But, the patriarchal period in Canaan really began 25 years prior to the birth of Isaac, when Abraham was seventy-five years old. Now, if you add the 480 to 430, 130, 60, 100, it comes out to 1200 years. That 1200 years, then, is the time between Abraham’s birth and the fourth year of Solomon’s reign (ca. 966 B.C.).

Now notice, and I am going to come back to this later, the patriarchs were in Canaan, before Jacob’s going to Egypt, 215 years. You get that by adding the 130 of the age of the Jacob when he went down to Egypt, the 60 years of Isaac before the birth of Jacob and the 25 years of Abraham in Canaan. So, the Patriarchs were in Canaan 215 years before Jacob went to Egypt--25 for Abraham, 60 for Isaac, 130 for Jacob.

Arriving at a Date

All right, putting that together, the fourth year of Solomon's reign is 966 B.C. You add the 1200 to that: it gives you 2166 B.C. for the year of Abraham's birth. You subtract the 75, his age when he left Haran; that means 2091 is the beginning of the Patriarchal period in Canaan. So, we would say that the Patriarchal period at least in Canaan is 2091 to 1876. That is the 2091 minus the 215 where they were in Canaan before Jacob went to Egypt. That'd be 2091 to 1876. 1876 would be the date they went down into Egypt. Israel was in Egypt 1876 to 1446, that's the 430 years of Exodus 12:40. Now, that seems rather cut and dry and clear. Yet Schultz said that, "the dating of the Patriarchs is still a moot point." What's the problem; what's moot about that?

2. The Difficulties

So, let's go on to number 2. "The difficulties." Genesis 12:4, he was 75 years old when he left Haran so 2166 B.C. would be the date of his birth. He was 75 when he left Haran so 2091 B.C. would be the beginning of the Patriarchal period in Canaan.

Let me preface what I am going to say – I don't think it has anything to do with reliability of the Scripture, inerrancy or anything of the kind, but we don't know the methodology that was used to keep these chronological records. Maybe people just generally kept round number figures and, if that's the case, that could be what is inserted here in accordance with the system that was used. There is no way to establish that, I don't think. The same way when we get to the book of Judges, you get 40 years of rest, and then 40 years of oppression. Or sometimes 80 years or sometimes 20, sometimes it's half the 40, sometimes it's double the 40. And then you begin to wonder, is there some kind of schematic there that was used in that time or should we take that as precise chronological data? It seems that the 40, 20, 80 thing occurs so many times - of course there are stranger coincidences than that which happen - but it seems that it occurs so many times that there may be some kind of schematic.

That leads right into the next comment: what are the difficulties? Why isn't this firm? Patriarchs 2091, Abraham went into Canaan. Well, there are really two problems

and they have to do with these first two citations: 1 Kings 6:1 and Exodus 12:40. I am not going to discuss the 1 Kings 6:1 in any detail now because we will do that when we get to the date of the Exodus, but it's difficult to specify with certainty the date of the Exodus in relation to both biblical data and extra-biblical data. It's a real tough problem. The details of that are so complex that I don't want to enter it into this discussion.

I just want to say at this point - something probably you already know - that there are two different viewpoints on the date of the Exodus: the so-called early date (1446 B.C.) and the late date view (1260 B.C.). The early date is 1446 which follows this 480 years from 966 B.C. The late age is about 1260 B.C. Now, how does the late date view deal with 1 King 6:1? It takes it as a schematic figure and then there are various approaches of what kind of a schematic it is. The most general one is twelve generations of 40 years each, actual generations are less so you get a compression. But if there is something like that working here then you can't simply put the 480 on top of the 966 B.C. and come up with 1446 B.C. But without getting into all the details of that at this point, that is one of the variables, because however you come down on the date of the Exodus is going to determine, the extent that you move the date of Patriarchs because you are working backwards into the Patriarchal period. So, you have an early date for the Exodus, that's going to mean an earlier date for the Patriarchs. If you have a later date for the Exodus, that's going to mean a later date for the Patriarchs. So that's a variable. The date of the Exodus is one of the questions involved that makes the date of the Patriarchs more difficult.

The whole question of the date of the Exodus could easily have been solved if God chose to do so by simply naming the Pharaoh of the oppression. His name is never given, it's just "Pharaoh," the name isn't given; or any additional chronological information. So it doesn't seem at certain points to be important, but at other points there does seem to be quite a bit of interest. If you look through the book of Numbers there is a lot of chronological data in the book of Numbers. Then you look at 1 and 2 Kings, you have that synchronized chronology in the North and the South and there seems to be a fair amount of interest in chronology there too. Again, the question of the methodology and

how it was done is quite different than ours. You get into questions of how you count the beginning of the year. A number of variances: how do you count co-regencies? Is that part of the length of a reign or isn't it part of a reign? You're going to do a reading assignment on this in the second semester. There does seem to be a real interest in chronology there but the systems were quite different than our systems. So that's part of the problem.

Text Difficulties with Exod. 12:40 [LXX versus MT]

The second one is Exodus 12:40, which I read for you. Exodus 12:40 says, "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel who grew up in Egypt was 430 years," but the question is there's a textual problem at that point. The Septuagint says, "that the sojourning of the children of Israel while they sojourned in the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan was 430 years." Now you see what that does, it lumps together the patriarchs in Canaan plus the time in Egypt as being 430 years. Now we know that they were in Canaan 215 years, that is why I called your attention to that earlier. If they were in Canaan 215 years and the total is 430 then they were in Egypt 215 years instead of 430. It's cut in half, exactly in half. So that's the other variable. Which do you follow? Do you follow the Masoretic Text and its rendering of 430 years in Egypt? Or do you follow the Septuagint which really gives you 215 years in Egypt because the 430 is both in Canaan and in Egypt?

Was it 430 Years Sojourn in Egypt?

Now I do want to discuss that question. Was the sojourn in Egypt 430 years or 215 years? Let's first look at arguments for the 430 years; in other words, arguments that would follow the Masoretic Text rendering. I'll take arguments along that line, first of all it is the Masoretic Text, that is the Hebrew text and generally one prefers the Masoretic Text to the Septuagint, not a hundred percent of the time however. Sometimes the Septuagint seems to have the better reading. But as a general rule the Masoretic Text is to be preferred because it is the Hebrew text.

In addition, remember God made promises to Abraham in Genesis 15 and you read in verse 13 he said, “Know for certain that your seed shall be a sojourner in a land that is not theirs, they shall serve them, they shall afflict them 400 years.” The Lord says to Abraham, “Your seed is going to be in a land that’s not their own and be afflicted for 400 years.” Now that seems to be a round number, get back in this method of chronology, but it’s much closer to the 430 than it is to 215. It could very well be taken as a round number for 430 years.

In verse 16 of that same chapter another term is used. Genesis 15:16, “In the fourth generation they shall come here again.” Now, the Hebrew term there is *d’or*, translates to “generation.” That’s a different term than “these are the generations of.” That phrase that occurs through Genesis where it’s *toledoth*. It’s a different term. It’s *d’or*. Four generations, that seems to correspond to verse 13 where it says 400 years. In other words, each generation is a 100 years or four generations. On your bibliography, I think there is an entry by K.A. Kitchen down towards the bottom of page 12, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*. I might recommend this book as full of a lot of useful information. *Ancient Orient and Old Testament*. Page 54 note 99, he says, Abraham, is told that his descendants will reenter Canaan in the fourth generation, Hebrew *d’or*. The simplest explanation is that the four *d’or* corresponds with the 400 years, not a generation in the modern sense. In the modern sense, what’s a generation?--25 years. This is suggested, not by a mere wish for harmonization, but by perfectly clear evidence from Ugaritic and early Assyrian sources that *d’or* can mean a span or cycle of time of 80 years or more. In other words, the same term in other cognate Semitic languages demonstrates the meaning of 80 years or more. So the four generations were 400 years. That’s exactly what it was with Abraham. Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old. Acts 7:6-7 which is a really a quotation of Genesis 15. Acts 7 says, “God spoke in this way: that his seed should sojourn in a strange land, that they should bring them again into bondage and ill-treat them 400 years. In a nation to whom they shall be in bondage while I judge,” and so forth...

One last consideration for the 400 years is population increase. Jacob’s family

initially went down in to Egypt. It's the time of the Exodus that the population had expanded to a rather large number. Now we're going to discuss those numbers of the Book of Numbers and in some detail too, I don't want to try to play one end of the thing off against the other. The figure that is given is 600,000 fighting men over 20 years of age, that extrapolates to two or three million total population. It's much easier to fit the multiplication of the population of the Israelites, into a 430 year period than it is the 215 year period.

The other entry there, at the bottom of page 12 is Leon Wood, *Survey of Israel's History*, page 85, he says that you have 82 individuals from whom resulted in approximately two million. It may be that to these 82 with the added numerous servants, whose descendants would also accompany and count as Israelites at the time, (how many servants Jacob had is not known), but even if as many as two thousand total persons are conjectured the increase to reach two million is still a thousand times. Never in history otherwise has anything like this rate of growth transpired even if we think in terms of 430 years as the time involved. In the footnote he says, speaking comparably, "if the Israelites had continued to multiply a thousand times each succeeding 430 years they would have numbered two billion by the time of David, two trillion by the captivity, and over two quadrillion by the time of Christ." Of course, we get a mathematical progression in that kind of thing, but he does say mathematically, this increase in 430 years is possible—under the Lord's blessing the birth rate being kept high, the death rate low. However, the same can hardly be said for 215 years and that's his point. So the population growth is an argument for the longer period in Egypt rather than the shorter period in Egypt.

Now, the way that can mathematically be worked out, you can find in Franz Delitzsch on your bibliography pages 28-29 in volume 2 of his commentary if we follow 1 Chronicles 7:20 where ten or eleven generations are mentioned between Ephraim and Joshua. Reckon 40 years is a generation, the tenth generation the 41 grandsons of Jacob would be born in about the year 400 of the sojourn in Egypt, and therefore would be over 20 years of age at the time of Exodus. Let's assume on an average there were three sons,

three daughters to every married couple. In the first six of these generations, 2 sons, 2 daughters in the last 4, and we will find that in the 10th generation there would be 478,224 sons, about the 400th year of the sojourn. They would therefore be about 20 years of age at the time of the exodus 125,326 men of the ninth generation would still be living so there would be the 478 plus 125,000 or 603,550 men. Now, I don't expect you to pick all of that up, but if you're interested in that kind of calculation I'll just refer you to that source where Delitzsch has tried to work out how it's possible for that number of increase to have occurred in 430 years.

Now let me just say at this point, and I don't like to say this without discussing the whole issue but we'll do that later. I think that there are some problems of understanding terminology in the census figures of Numbers chapter 1 that could perhaps modify your conclusion about the total of the population. There are a number of reasons for that in the biblical text, so I think there were a substantial number of Israelites, whether there were two or three million, I'm not certain of that. I don't want to get into the details of that at this point, but in any case, there certainly is more time for increase in size during the time of 430 years rather than 215 years.

Student asks question: About the timing exactly we're talking about generations, about ages of people and while I was reading here in the book of Genesis I had a little confusion because when the three visitors came to Abraham and Sarah and Sarah was laughing because of her age-that she was going to have a child but yet it was right before that when Abimelech still apparently found her very attractive. And yet Abraham lived to be 175 and then here in this year's summary that you gave us we've got Jacob who is 130 years old when he goes to Egypt.

Vannoy's Response: A woman can certainly still be attractive beyond the period of menopause. I mean it seems to me that's the issue, but that period would certainly be later in life than was reasonable. So you would expect it to be today because the life term generally was greater then. I don't really see much else to say than that. Even though she was beyond the time of childbearing, she could still have been a very attractive woman. We'll come back to that. We'll discuss those passages. I don't know that I'll throw much

more light than that on it.

Evidence for 215 years in Slavery in Egypt

Alright, let's look at evidence for 215 years, I'm not going to get very far though.....Galatians 3:17 is a problem text. You read there, it's a familiar text: "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." "I say this, that the covenant that was confirmed before God in Christ the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after and not annulled that it should make the promise of no effect." The law is 430 years after the covenant. Just before that you're talking about Abraham. Was the law 430 years after Abraham? If it was, that's 215 years in Canaan and 215 years in Egypt. And of course, those who argue for the 215 year period appeal to this text and say that Paul was following the Septuagint text and the Septuagint should be preferred. But the implication of 430 years in Galatians 3:17 is that the whole of the patriarchal period and the time in Egypt was 430 years. In this New Scofield Bible there is a note at Exodus 12:41 which reads: "this period of time probably began with the descent of Abraham into Egypt. Genesis 12:10; 1 Kings 6:1." So, the 430 years in the note in the New Scofield is beginning early in Abraham's time in Canaan. Shortly after he came into Canaan he went down into Egypt.

Now the response to that, by those who take the 430 years, I think there is a two-fold way to respond. One way is to say that the covenant with Abraham is the covenant that's in view, but that covenant was renewed with Isaac and it was renewed with Jacob. And it was renewed with Jacob shortly before he went down into Egypt. If you look at Genesis 46 you read there, in verse 3 "and he said, 'I am God, the God of your father, fear not to go down into Egypt, for I will make you there a great nation.'" So right at the point when Jacob is about to depart to go into Egypt and that promise has been given to Abraham, it is reaffirmed with Jacob right before his departure. Prior in Jacob's life, in Genesis 35:9-15 we read that "God appeared to Jacob when he came out of Padan Aram blessed him, God said unto them, 'your name is Jacob, your name shall not anymore be

called Jacob, but Israel.” And God said, ““be fruitful, multiply, a nation and a company of nations shall be from you, kings shall come out of your loins and the land which I gave Abraham, Isaac and to you, I will give it to your seed after you...” and so forth. Again, repetition of the promises initially given to Abraham repeated to Isaac, and repeated to Jacob. So that’s one possible way of getting at it-that the 430 years is still to be dated from the time of Jacob’s descent into Egypt and the promise is the promise to Abraham reaffirmed to Jacob.

There is another way to get at it but my time’s up so we’ll pick up here in the next hour.

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