

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Session 20, Podcast Audio

Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Alright, get ready, because today we're diving deep into the Bible. The Old Testament, to be exact. You got it.

We're going to try to untangle the timeline of those big names. You mean the patriarchs? Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? That's right. Those guys.

And we're specifically looking at how long they lived in the land of Canaan. That's a tricky question, for sure. Yeah, it is.

Our main source for this deep dive is a lecture transcript from an Old Testament history course. By Dr. Robert Van Noy. He's got some pretty interesting calculations in there.

He does. But fair warning, it gets pretty complex. Biblical chronology is rarely simple.

So we're here to make sense of it all, and hopefully have some of those aha moments along the way. Sounds like a plan. What I find really fascinating is how we can use these biblical stories.

Not just as stories. Right. Not just as stories, but as a way to connect with actual history and timelines.

It's like we've got this puzzle. With pieces scattered across centuries. And we're trying to put it all together.

Exactly. And Dr. Van Noy starts with a really clever anchor point. Okay.

I'm intrigued. Tell me more. He points to the Temple of Solomon, specifically 1 Kings 6:1. Okay, I know that verse.

It says Solomon's temple was built 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt. The Exodus. You got it.

And that verse is key because it links this biblical event to a date we can pinpoint historically. So we're working backward from a known point in time. Precisely.

We know that the fourth year of Solomon's reign is generally accepted as 966 BC. Okay. So add those 480 years from Kings, and we arrive at 1446 BC as the traditional date for the Exodus.

Right. So that becomes our starting point. For tracing back the patriarchal timeline.

Like a trail of breadcrumbs. But instead of leading to a gingerbread house. They're leading us back through biblical history.

I like that analogy. So what's our next breadcrumb? Let's go to Exodus 12:40. I'm looking it up. That verse tells us the Israelites lived in Egypt for 430 years.

All right. 430 years. So how do we connect that to the patriarchs? We need to look at Jacob, Abraham's grandson.

Okay. Genesis 47:9 tells us that he was 130 years old when he entered Egypt with his family. Ah.

So we're moving back another generation. Now where does Isaac, Jacob's father, fit into this? Genesis 25:26 says Isaac was 60 years old when Jacob was born. Okay.

So we're slowly working our way back to Abraham. Right. What does Genesis say about Abraham? Let's see.

Genesis 21:5 tells us that Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born. Exactly. You see how these verses give us a kind of genealogical roadmap? I'm starting to see the bigger picture here.

But all these numbers are making my head spin a little bit. I hear you. So if we add it all up, all those years for Solomon, the Exodus, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, where do we land? We land somewhere around 2166 BC as the year of Abraham's birth.

Whoa. We're going way back. We are.

But remember, what are we trying to figure out? How long the patriarchs were in Canaan? Exactly. And Genesis 12:4 mentions that Abraham was 75 years old when he first entered Canaan. So he was living in Canaan for 25 years before Isaac was even born.

That's right. It's not just about how long they lived. It's about how long they lived in Canaan.

Okay. Back to the calculator. If Abraham was born in 2166 BC and entered Canaan at age 75.

That means he arrived there around 2091 BC. Got it. But when did this whole patriarchal period in Canaan actually end? We need to figure out when Jacob and his family went down to Egypt.

Right. Using the dates we've got so far, Jacob entered Egypt in 1876 BC. So 1876 from 2091, that gives us, wait a minute, 215 years? That's it, right? 215 years for the patriarchal period in Canaan.

Mystery solved. We did it. Well, not so fast.

Remember all those puzzle pieces we talked about? Right. Some of them might be from a different puzzle. Oh no.

What do you mean? Dr. Van Noy reminds us that dating biblical events is really tricky. Because ancient methods for recording time might have been totally different from how we do it today. It makes you wonder if we should always take these biblical numbers literally or if they're more symbolic.

You see that a lot in the Book of Judges. Right. With those cycles of 40 years of peace and then 40 years of oppression.

So are we saying the Bible is inaccurate? Not necessarily. It's more about recognizing that ancient cultures may have viewed time differently than we do. Their system might have involved rounding numbers or using symbolic numbers to give a general sense of time.

Rather than exact chronological precision. Okay. So, if we can't rely entirely on these calculations, what are the biggest challenges to our 215-year timeline? Dr. Van Noy highlights a couple of key issues.

First, that anchor point we talked about? You mean 1 Kings 6:1, about the 480 years between the Exodus and Solomon's Temple? Exactly. The problem is there are different opinions about when the Exodus actually happened. Some scholars think it was earlier.

Some think it was later. And that throws a wrench in our calculations. Because if the Exodus shifts, everything before it shifts, too.

Including the patriarchal timeline. And the second challenge comes from Exodus 12:40 itself. The one about the 430 years in Egypt.

Right. You see the Septuagint. That's the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, right? Exactly.

And it interprets this verse a bit differently. So two different versions of the same story. You could say that according to the Septuagint, those 430 years included the time in Canaan and Egypt.

Wait. If the Septuagint is right, and we already said the patriarchs were in Canaan for 215 years. That leaves only 215 for their time in Egypt.

That's a huge difference from the 430 years in the Hebrew text. It seems like we've hit a fork in the road. 430 years in Egypt or 215? That's the debate we're going to tackle next.

This is getting good. Okay. So are we leaning towards 430 years or 215? Well, let's look at the arguments for both sides.

We'll start with 430 years in Egypt. Dr. Vinoy points out that it lines up with the Masoretic text. Which is like the gold standard for a lot of scholars.

Exactly. And there's another point in its favor. Remember God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:13. He mentioned 400 years of affliction for his descendants.

430 definitely fits better than 215. True. And Genesis 15:16 mentions returning to Canaan in the fourth generation.

If a generation is about 100 years, which some other ancient languages support. Then that lines up with a 400-year time frame too. Exactly.

And then there's population growth. Think about it. The Israelites started as a small family.

And by the time of the Exodus? They were a massive group. Would that kind of growth really happen in just 215 years? That's a good point. Is there evidence for that kind of growth rate? Dr. Vinoy actually lays out a whole mathematical model in his lecture.

He shows how that population boom could have happened over 430 years. And he mentions another scholar, Leon Wood, who says that kind of growth in 215 years. Would be almost unheard of.

Pretty much. So we've got some strong arguments for 430 years. But what about the other side? Yeah.

What about 215? What evidence is there for that? Their main evidence comes from the New Testament, Galatians 3:17. I'm pulling it up. It says that the law was given 430 years after the covenant with Abraham. Okay.

But what if those 430 years include the time in both Canaan and Egypt? Well, we already figured out the patriarchs were in Canaan for about 215 years. Exactly. So if Galatians is right, that only leaves 215 years for Egypt.

So how do we reconcile these two timelines? They seem completely contradictory. That's the tough question. Dr. Vannoy suggests a few ways to interpret Galatians 3:17 without completely ditching the 430-year theory.

Okay. I'm listening. Yeah.

What are some of those interpretations? One idea is that the covenant with Abraham wasn't just a one-time thing. It was renewed with Isaac and then with Jacob. Oh, right.

Right before Jacob went to Egypt. Exactly. Genesis 46:3. So maybe the 430 years in Galatians is counting from the covenant with Jacob.

Not the original one with Abraham. It would definitely change things. Hmm.

That's interesting. And it shows how important it is to look at the context of these passages. Right.

It's not always as simple as it seems. And there's another layer here. God reaffirms his promises to Jacob in Genesis 35.

Basically reiterating that covenant. It all adds complexity to the timeline. For sure.

So it's not just black and white. Not at all. And Dr. Vannoy brings up another point about the census figures in Numbers chapter 1. What about them? He doesn't go into detail here, but he suggests there might be some issues with how we understand those numbers.

Okay. And how they relate to the total Israelite population at the Exodus. So basically another layer to this whole puzzle.

Exactly. It's all connected. But it makes me wonder if there's this much debate about something as simple as counting years.

How can we be sure about anything in biblical history? That's a great question. And it's one that scholars are always wrestling with. The goal isn't always to find absolute certainty.

More like to have a thoughtful discussion. And to analyze the evidence we have. These ancient texts give us a glimpse into a different time and a different culture.

We have to take the historical context into account. Oh, language. Different interpretations.

Right. It's more about the journey than the destination. And about understanding that there might be more than one right answer.

Which honestly makes it even more interesting. I think so, too. And it reminds us to approach these questions with humility.

And an open mind. Absolutely. So where does this leave us with the patriarchs in Canaan? Do we at least have a general time frame? I hope so.

We've been going back and forth for a while. Based on everything we've talked about, there are two possible timelines, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. Laid it on me.

If we go with the Masoretic texts and the traditional understanding of Exodus 12:40, the patriarchal period was likely from 2091 BC to 1876 BC. A total of 215 years. Right.

But if we consider the Septuagint's reading, which includes the time in Canaan as part of those 430 years. Then we have to shift the timeline and recalculate the dates. It's like a giant historical jigsaw puzzle.

And we're still missing some pieces. But it's been a fascinating discussion so far. Definitely.

And before we wrap up, I think there's one more detail from Dr. Vannoy's lecture we should touch on. Oh, what's that? It has to do with the concept of time itself. And how it might have been different in the ancient world.

Okay. This sounds interesting. Tell me more.

So you're saying ancient people might not have been obsessed with exact dates and times? It's possible, Dr. Vannoy says, they might not have been as focused on precise year-by-year chronology like we are. Makes sense. They didn't have Google Calendar.

Right. And this difference in thinking could show up in how they recorded history. Okay.

So give me an example. Remember those 40 years of peace and 40 years of oppression in Judges? Oh, yeah. That seems more symbolic to me, like a pattern.

Than literal history. Right. So were they always trying to be super accurate with dates? Or were they using rounded numbers? Maybe even symbolic numbers to give a broader sense of time.

Instead of being laser-focused on each year. Exactly. It's like they were painting with broader strokes.

Focusing on the big picture. Rather than tiny details. So does that mean the Bible's wrong about history? Not necessarily.

It just means we have to consider how they viewed time back then. We can't just assume they tracked time the same way we do. Right.

Context is key. Okay. So after all this talk about Biblical chronology, can we say for sure how long the patriarchs were in Canaan? Well, a definite answer is still tricky.

But we found two likely timelines. Both with good arguments and evidence. If we go with the traditional understanding of Exodus 12:40, the 430 years.

Right. Then the patriarchs were probably in Canaan from 2091 BC to 1876 BC. 215 years.

But if we factor in the Septuagint's reading. Where those 430 years include the time in Canaan. Then the timeline shifts.

And we've got to recalculate everything. Exactly. And don't forget the whole debate about the Exodus state.

Right. That affects everything too. It's like a giant historical jigsaw puzzle.

And some pieces are still missing. True. But this has been a really interesting exploration.

It really has. And I feel like I've learned a lot. That's great.

But before we go, is there a key takeaway you want listeners to remember? Something to think about. Here's a question for you. We've focused on when the patriarchs were in Canaan.

Right. But what about how they lived there? And why they were there? How would the length of their stay affect their interactions with the people and the culture? And why did the biblical writers focus on some dates and leave others vague? Wow. Those are great questions.

It shows that there's always more to discover. More layers to these ancient texts. Exactly.

Our deep dive might be ending, but your journey is just beginning. That's a great way to put it. Thanks for joining us on this fascinating look at biblical chronology.

You're welcome. And until next time, keep those minds curious and those deep dives going.