

Dr. Robert Vannoy, Genesis, Patriarchal Chronology Continued, Abraham, Lecture 21

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Robert Vannoy continues the discussion on patriarchal chronology, focusing on the variables of the 430-year sojourn in Egypt and arguments surrounding Galatians 3:17 and Genesis 15:16. Dr. Vannoy examines Abraham's geographical movements from Ur of the Chaldeans down to Egypt and back to Canaan. He then analyzes the historical and archaeological credibility of Genesis 14, discussing the wealth of Abraham, the coalition of Mesopotamian kings, and the size of his troop of servants. Finally, the lecture addresses the alleged anachronism of the Philistines in Genesis, presenting archaeological and rhetorical arguments to defend the text's historical reliability.

Outline

I. Chronology of the Patriarchal Period

A. Two Key Variables in Determining Chronology

1. 1 Kings 6:1 Interpretation
 - a. Literal interpretation (480 years) leads to the early date of the Exodus (1446 B.C.).
 - b. Schematic interpretation leads to a late date of the Exodus (approx. 1290 B.C.).
2. Exodus 12:40 Interpretation (Length of the Sojourn)
 - a. Masoretic Text (MT): Israel was in Egypt for 430 years.
 - b. Septuagint (LXX) variant: Israel was in Canaan and Egypt for 430 years.
 - i. Divides the span in half: 215 years in Canaan and 215 years in Egypt.
 - ii. Calculated from patriarchal ages: Abraham was in Canaan 25 years before Isaac's birth; Isaac was 60 years old at Jacob's birth; Jacob was 130 years old upon entering Egypt ($25 + 60 + 130 = 215$ years).

B. Evaluation of Evidence for the Sojourn Duration

1. Support for the 215-Year View (Galatians 3:17)
 - a. Paul states the Law came 430 years after the promise to Abraham.
 - b. Rebuttal 1: The promise was reconfirmed to Jacob just before he descended to Egypt (Genesis 46:3, 35:9).

c. Rebuttal 2 (K.A. Kitchen's View): Paul did not calculate the exact interval but cited a well-known block of 430 years within the overall span to emphasize the gap between the covenant and the Law.

2. Support for the 430-Year View (Genesis 15:16 and Exodus 6:16-20)

- a. Genesis 15:16 mentions Israel returning in the 'fourth generation.'
- b. Exodus 6:16-20 contains a four-generation genealogy: Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses.
- c. Rebuttal on immediate descent (Kitchen's View): The genealogy list in Exodus 6 is abbreviated; Amram and Jochebed denote the family group/clan rather than immediate parents.
- d. Census Support: Numbers 3:27-28 records 8,600 male Amramites at the time of the Exodus, which requires multiple generations to pass.

C. Vannoy's Chronological Conclusions

- 1. Favors the early date of the Exodus (1446 B.C.) and the Masoretic Text reading (430-year sojourn).
- 2. Range of entry into Canaan based on chronological variables:
 - a. Early Exodus (1446 B.C.) + 645 years (MT) = 2091 B.C. for Abraham's entry into Canaan.
 - b. Early Exodus (1446 B.C.) + 430 years (LXX) = 1876 B.C.
 - c. Late Exodus (approx. 1290 B.C.) + 645 years (MT) = 1935 B.C.
 - d. Late Exodus (approx. 1290 B.C.) + 430 years (LXX) = 1720 B.C.
 - e. Overall Chronological Range: 2091 B.C. to 1720 B.C. depending on the textual variables.

II. Abraham as a Historical Figure

A. Outline of Geographical Movements

- 1. Born in Ur of the Chaldeans (traditionally identified as southern Ur, excavated by Wooley, dating to Ur III dynasty 2070-1960 B.C.; northern Ur northeast of Haran is also debated).
- 2. Traveled up the Euphrates to Haran (Genesis 11:31).
- 3. Migrated down past Damascus to Shechem (Genesis 12:6), then to Bethel and Ai (Genesis 12:8).
- 4. Traveled south to the Negev (Genesis 12:9) and descended to Egypt due to famine (Genesis 12:10).
- 5. Returned to the Negev and journeyed back to Bethel and Ai (Genesis 13:1).
- 6. Settled in Hebron by the oaks of Mamre (Genesis 13:18).

B. Historical and Archaeological Analysis of Genesis 14

- 1. Abraham's Wealth and Status
 - a. Abraham was not a poor nomad, but a wealthy businessman owning cattle, silver, and gold (Genesis 13:2, 13:6).
 - b. He possessed numerous servants acquired in Haran (Genesis 12:5).

c. He armed a military force of 318 trained servants born in his own house to rescue Lot (Genesis 14:14).

d. Troop Size Context: Small force size is congruent with the Amarna letters (ca. 1400 B.C.), which depict small military contingents for local city-states rather than massive empires.

2. Identification of Contemporaries and Kings in Genesis 14

a. Coalition of Kings: Amraphel of Shinar, Arioch of Ellasar, Kedorlaomer of Elam, Tidal of Goiim.

b. Amraphel vs. Hammurabi Identification: Now rejected because Hammurabi is firmly dated to ca. 1700 B.C. (via Mari letters) which is too late for Abraham. E. Speiser notes that Amraphel and Hammurabi cannot be linked linguistically (initial aleph/ayin and final L/Y differences).

c. Kedorlaomer of Elam: Fits known Elamite linguistics ('Kedor/Chedor' means servant, 'Laomer' is an Elamite goddess).

d. Political Pattern: Kitchen notes that the alliance of small city-state kings fits Mesopotamian politics between 2000 and 1750 B.C. but not before or after.

e. Ebla Tablets: Freedman proposed moving the patriarchs back to 2300 B.C. based on a lecture claiming Ebla tablets list the five cities of the plain in Genesis 14 order, but this reading remains highly disputed and unverified.

f. Circumstantial Custom Evidence: Nuzi documents (ca. 1500-1400 B.C.) and Hammurabi's laws reflect similar social customs (slave adoption, marriage, inheritance) to those in the patriarchal narratives.

C. Abraham and the Philistines

1. The Alleged Anachronism in Genesis 21:32-34

a. Critical commentators (e.g., John Bright) argue the Philistines did not arrive until 1200 B.C. with the Sea Peoples, making Abraham's interactions with them anachronistic.

2. Conservative Defense (Joseph Free)

a. The critical argument is based on silence; early Aegean contacts could have established smaller Philistine settlements around 2000 B.C., prior to the major 1200 B.C. influx.

b. Exodus 13:17 refers to the 'land of the Philistines' during the Exodus, which on the early date (1400 B.C.) also precedes the 1200 B.C. sea-peoples arrival.

c. Archaeological evidence is fragmentary; it is ill-advised to assume a biblical error based on temporary silence in the archaeological record.