

Genesis: Lecture 29: Joseph's Dates and Egypt

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Abstract

This lecture by Dr. Robert Vannoy explores the biblical chronology and historical context of Joseph's arrival in Egypt. It addresses the narrative significance of Jacob's family being reunited in Egypt, highlighting Joseph's forgiveness and Judah's transformation into a self-sacrificial protector of Benjamin. Lastly, the lecture compares two potential dates for Joseph's arrival—an early date (1896 B.C.) aligning with a native Egyptian dynasty and a late date (1740 B.C.) aligning with the foreign Hyksos rulers—and discusses the historical implications and arguments for each view.

Outline

I. Course Administration and Syllabus Review

A. Course Structure and Assignments

1. Continuation of Old Testament History as a two-part course
2. Weekly reading assignments with Friday due dates
3. Potential weekly quizzes on assigned readings

B. Required Textbooks and Reserve Books

1. Schultz (including corresponding Old Testament passages from Joshua and Judges)
2. Finegan
3. Edwin R. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (1977)
 - a. Popularized summary of his findings in *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*
 - b. Currently out of print but multiple copies on reserve in the library

C. Core Chronological Issues Examined by Thiele

1. Synchronization of reigns between Northern and Southern kings
2. Chronological methodologies
 - a. Accession year vs. non-accession year calculations
 - b. Co-regencies and overlapping reigns

- c. Calendar systems (religious vs. civil)

D. Practical Course Assignments

1. Palestine Map Study (due Friday)
 - a. Mapping major geographic locations (cities, rivers, mountains) in Joshua and Judges
 - b. Mapping tribal boundaries (Judah, Ephraim, Manasseh, etc.)
2. Midterm Exam (April 8)
 - a. Map-matching questions using lettered/numbered projections on-screen
 - b. Focus on tribal areas

E. Extra Credit Opportunities (Max 4/10ths of a grade point added to final average)

1. Reading options:
 - a. J. Barton Payne, Theology of the Older Testament (4/10ths grade point)
 - b. Walter Kaiser's books (2/10ths grade point each, up to two books)
2. Requirements: Written statement verifying careful and complete reading
3. Deadline: April 29

II. The Life of Joseph in the Context of Redemptive History

A. Joseph's Temporary Prominence

1. Joseph rises to prominence in Egypt
2. Judah remains the official line of the promised seed

B. Unification and Preservation of Israel in Egypt

1. House of Jacob is united, restored, and brought to Goshen to grow into a nation
2. Joseph's redemptive perspective on his brothers' betrayal (Genesis 45:4)
 - a. Forgives his brothers and attributes his slavery to God's plan to save lives
 - b. Views his arrival as a divine act to preserve a remnant and deliver his family
3. Reconciliation after Jacob's Death (Genesis 50:15)
 - a. Brothers fear post-mortem revenge from Joseph
 - b. Joseph weeps, reassures them, and reinforces that God intended their harm for good

C. Overcoming the Leah/Rachel Tension and the Transformation of Judah

1. Historical jealousy over Joseph (son of Rachel)
2. Brothers develop a protective attitude toward Benjamin (the other son of Rachel)
3. Judah's emergence as a representative and guarantor
 - a. Jacob's reluctance to send Benjamin to Egypt
 - b. Judah offers himself as personal surety for Benjamin's safety (Genesis 43:3, 8-9)
4. The Climax of Judah's Transformation (Genesis 44:18-33)

- a. Joseph tests brothers by framing Benjamin with the planted silver cup
- b. Judah's dramatic plea to Joseph, describing Jacob's grief and his own pledge
- c. Judah offers to remain as a slave in place of Benjamin

D. Robert Alter's Literary Analysis (The Art of Biblical Narrative)

- 1. Moral and psychological "undoing" of the brothers' original crime
- 2. Reconciliation to Jacob's favoritism out of filial duty and filial love
- 3. Juxtaposition: 22 years prior, Judah sold Joseph and watched Jacob grieve; now, he offers himself as a slave to prevent Jacob's grief
- 4. Reconciliation and reversal of the family's fractured state

III. Chronology and Historical Dating of Joseph's Entry into Egypt

A. The Chronological Challenge: The Unnamed Pharaoh

- 1. Genesis (39:1) and early Exodus refer to the ruler only as "Pharaoh"
- 2. Lack of a specific royal name makes direct synchronization with Egyptian records difficult

B. Two Variables in Patriarchal Dating

- 1. The Date of the Exodus: Early date (1446 B.C.) vs. Late date (1290 B.C.)
- 2. Exodus 12:40 textual variants: Masoretic Text (430 years in Egypt) vs. Septuagint (215 years)

C. Calculation of Joseph's Arrival Based on Masoretic Text (430 years)

- 1. Early Date Calculation (Exodus in 1446 B.C.):
 - a. Abraham's birth: 2166 B.C.
 - b. Abraham enters Canaan (age 75): 2091 B.C.
 - c. Jacob's birth (160 years after Abraham): 2006 B.C.
 - d. Jacob enters Egypt (age 130): 1876 B.C. (Genesis 47:9)
 - e. Joseph's arrival in Egypt (approx. 20 years prior): 1896 B.C.
- 2. Late Date Calculation (Exodus in 1290 B.C.):
 - a. Abraham's birth: 2010 B.C.
 - b. Abraham enters Canaan (age 75): 1935 B.C.
 - c. Subtracting 270 years (160 to Jacob's birth + 130 to Egypt entry - 20 years for Joseph's prior arrival): 1740 B.C.

D. Historical Implications of the Two Dates

- 1. Early Date (1896 B.C.): Places Joseph in the 12th Dynasty (native Egyptian, 1991–1786 B.C.)
- 2. Late Date (1740 B.C.): Places Joseph in the Hyksos Period (foreign Asiatic rulers, approx. 1750–1570 B.C.)

IV. Evaluating the Hyksos Hypothesis (Late Date of Joseph's Arrival)

A. Background on the Hyksos

1. Asiatic invaders who took control of Egypt (approx. 1750–1570 B.C.)
2. Capital and center of power located in the Nile Delta (Lower Egypt)
3. Etymology of "Hyksos":
 - a. Manetho (250 B.C.): "shepherd kings"
 - b. Modern scholarship: "foreign rulers" or "rulers of foreign lands"
4. Josephus' view: Joseph was prime minister under a Hyksos dynasty; Josephus equates the Hyksos expulsion with the Exodus to argue for Jewish antiquity

B. Key Arguments Supporting Joseph's Arrival Under the Hyksos

1. Mention of horses in Genesis 47:17 (believed to have been introduced to Egypt by the Hyksos)
2. "New king who knew not Joseph" (Exodus 1:8)
 - a. Best explained as a native Egyptian ruler taking power after expelling the Hyksos
 - b. Explains why Egyptian records are silent about Joseph (Egyptians systematically destroyed traces of the Hyksos period)
3. Capital in the Nile Delta near Goshen, matching the biblical description of the Pharaoh's close proximity to Joseph's family
4. Semitic social mobility: A Semitic foreigner like Joseph would more easily rise to prime minister under foreign rulers
5. "Potiphar the Egyptian" designation (Genesis 39:1)
 - a. Qualifier "an Egyptian" is notable in Egypt
 - b. Suggests a period where the ruling class was not native Egyptian

C. Status of Arguments

1. None of the arguments are fully conclusive or definitive
2. Arguments for the alternative (pre-Hyksos/native dynasty) to be explored in the next lecture