

BO 5779

How Long did B'nai Yisrael Reside in Egypt?

Chapter 12:40 & 41 contains the fascinating chronological conundrum by stating that “the B'nai Yisrael resided (“Moshav”) in Egypt for 430 years (after which they departed)”.

View of Rashi

The primary explanation, which is given by Rashi, conclusively proves that it is impossible that the B'nai Yisrael actually spent this length of time in Egypt. He says that the Bris Bein HaBesarim (“BBH”) took place when Avraham was 70 years old. Yitzchak was born 30 years later and Yetzias Mitzrayim was 400 years after that. The 430-year period referred to by Rashi is therefore from the time the original decree was made by Hashem at the BBH.

Problem with this Calculation

It states at the beginning of Lech Lecho (Berashis Chapter 12:4) that Avram was 75 (i.e. not 70 as according to Rashi) when he left Charan and the BBH took place.

The Seder Olam Chapter 1 answers this (following the *Ayn mook'dam oom'oo'char ba' Torah principle*) that Avraham went back to Charan after BBH (which did indeed take place when he was 70 as Rashi says), he only finally leaving Charan when he was 75.

The Chronology of Seder Olam (is therefore as follows)

- Year 2018: Bris Bein HaBesarim (Avraham 70 years old)
- Year 2023: Avraham's final departure from Charan (5 years from BBH; Avraham 75 years old)
- Year 2048: Birth of Yitzchak (Avraham 100 years old; 30 years from BBH)
- Year 2108: Birth of Yaakov (Yitzhak 60 years old)
- Year 2238: Yaakov comes to Egypt - 210 years in Egypt starts (Yaakov 130 years old)
- Year 2255: Yaakov dies at 147 years old
- Year 2332: Levi dies – oppression starts (116 years of “light” & “heavy” oppression combined)
- Year 2362: Miriam born – heavy oppression begins (86 years of “heavy” oppression)
- Year 2368: Moshe born (Miriam 6 years old)
- Year 2448: Yetzias Mitzrayim after 210 years in Egypt (430 years from BBH; 400 years from birth of Yitzhak).

This view of Seder Olam is set out in various sources (including Rashi Megillah 9a, Tsofos Brochos 7b and Shabbos 10b).

This is also the view of the Rambam who in the letter he wrote to the Yemenites (Iggeres Teimon) explains the Gemara in Sanhedrin 92b that Shevet Ephraim miscalculated the 400 years of oppression as starting from the Bris Bein HaBesarim (and not from the birth of Yitzchak) – they therefore tried to leave 30 years too early.

210, 400 or 430 Years Residing in Egypt?

Given according to this explanation of the Seder Olam that the B'nai Yisrael only spent 210 years in Egypt, an explanation is required for the numbers 400 & 430.

One response is in relation to the interpretation of the word reside (“Moshav”) in Chapter 12:40. This may be found in the emendations of the 72 elders mentioned in Megillah 9a (they translated the Torah into Greek for Ptolemy). They all translated this possuk as meaning “the residing of B'nai Yisrael in Egypt *and other lands*”.

HaKesav VeHakaboloh brings various proofs that the word “Moshav” means to not only sit and reside, but also to expect and wait for. So the translation according to him of Chapter 12:40 & 41 would be “And the expectancy for which the B'nai Yisrael had been waiting and yearning, had been for 430 years.

Rav Hirsch says that “Moshav” never means a time duration in Tenach - here it means “a manner of living”. B'nai Yisrael lived as transient aliens for 430 years.

This idea is also to be found in Me'am Lo'ez, page 111. After the Bris Bein HaBesarim, the Avos suffered and experienced the same “lifestyle” that the B'nai Yisrael would have in Egypt. This lasted 430 years.

Support for this may be found in the Neginos in Lech Lecho Chapter 15:13. There is an *esnachto* (creating a “pause in the possuk”) before the 400 years. Therefore, the Possuk should be translated as “your children will be strangers in a foreign land, where they will be enslaved and be oppressed, / *esnachto* / for four hundred years”. That is, “your children will be strangers in a foreign land.....for 400 years” (not that “the enslavement” or “the oppression” will be for 400 years).

In a similar vein, in Shemos Chapter 12:40, there is an *esnachto pause* and a *zokef koton pause*, and in verse 41 a *zokef koton pause* to produce comparable interpretations.

Working Day and Nights

Me'am Lo'ez quoting Pirkei de Rebbe Eliezer Chapter 48 gives a completely different explanation of the 430. 210 years were spent in Egypt (Yoheved was 130 when Moshe was born, and he was 80 at the Exodus). Ephraim and Menashe had been born 5 years before Yaakov came to Egypt and they had the same status as Yaakov's own sons (Berashis Chapter 48:5). Therefore B'nai Yisrael had been in Egypt for 215 years. Because of the merit of the Avos, Hashem counted days and nights separately, thus doubling the number = 430 years (Malbim states that the Egyptians made B'nai Yisrael work day and night, thus there is a real practical reason for the doubling). According to this, Lech Lecho can be left in chronological order and the word “Moshav” in Chapter 12: 40 & 41 can be taken literally in the sense of “residing”.

דבר תורה לפרשת השבוע לעילוי נשמת אבי מורי ר' אברהם ב"ר נחמן ע"ה ביום היארצייט לפטירתו ו' שבט