

O. T. TEXTUAL CRITICISM

VARIANT READING RESOLUTION

TEXT: 1 Kings 6:1

PROBLEM: A disagreement arises in 1 Kings 6:1 over the length of time between the Israelites' exodus from Egypt under Moses and the beginning of the building of the First Temple under Solomon. Either the construction began in the 480th year after the exodus, or it began in the 440th year after the exodus.

EXTERNAL EVIDENCE:

VARIANT 1: The construction of the Temple under Solomon began in the 480th year after the exodus from Egypt. According to the reading of the MT, the exodus transpired שְׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה (“in the 80th year and 400th year”) after the children of Israel came out of the land of Egypt.

PRO

1. This reading is supported by the following evidence: Hebrew manuscripts: the Masoretic Hebrew text (MT) and the Leningrad codex; Versions: the Vulgate.

2. Most modern versions also follow the reading of “480th year” between the exodus and the construction of the First Temple, including the King James Version, the New King James Version, the New International Version, the New American Standard Bible, and the Russian Synodal Version.

CON

1. Cf. Variant 1, PRO 2. Modern versions are not too vital in the solving of variants related to the ancient Biblical text, whether related to the Hebrew Scriptures or the Greek Scriptures.

VARIANT 2: The construction of the Temple under Solomon began in the 440th year after the exodus from Egypt. According to the reading of the LXX, the exodus transpired ἐν τῷ τεσσαρακοστῷ καὶ τετρακοσίοστῳ ἔτει (“in the 40th and 400th year”) after the children of Israel came out of the land of Egypt.

PRO

1. This reading is supported by the following evidence: Hebrew manuscripts: none; Versions: the LXX (the Greek Septuagint, a 3rd-century-BC Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible).

2. Cf. Variant 2, CON 1. It must be emphasized that the reading of the LXX is quite ancient, possibly extending back beyond the 3rd century BC. The manuscripts of the MT date back only to the 9th or 10th century AD, so the possibility exists that the LXX preserves the most ancient reading.

CON

1. The lack of attestation of the 440th-year variant in any Hebrew manuscripts—either in the MT, the Dead Sea Scrolls, or elsewhere—renders this variant difficult to accept as being original. A reading found in only one single translation, without any corroborating witnesses or original-language manuscripts, has an extremely small chance of possessing the correct reading found in the *autographa*.

2. Cf. Variant 2, PRO 2. In reality, the text of the MT dates back much further than the 9th or 10th century AD, since the MT itself derives from the *Sopherim* (specifically the *Tannaim* of the 1st century BC to the 3rd century AD), who faithfully and accurately passed down the Hebrew text. Moreover, though the antiquity of the LXX renders its text important for determining the originality of any variant in the HB, the MT possesses greater authority than any ancient translation, including the LXX. “[The MT] has repeatedly been demonstrated to be the best witness to the [OT] text. Any deviation from it therefore requires justification” (Ernst Würthwein, *Text of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed., trans. Erroll Rhodes [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 116). Plus, the LXX has been shown to be inferior to the MT in chronological matters (Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994], 90–94).

TENTATIVE CONCLUSION BASED ON EXTERNAL EVIDENCE:

The antiquity of the LXX renders its text important in determining the originality of any variation in the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, there must remain the possibility that the LXX correctly preserves the original number as “440th year” for the time between the exodus and the beginning of the building of the Temple. However, the MT preserved by the Hebrew scribes carries with it greater authority than any ancient version, including the LXX. Therefore, based on the need to place more trust in the MT when the only competing witnesses for a given textual variant are the MT and LXX, along with the LXX reading’s inability to provide any corroboration, Variant 1 is preferred as the better reading based on external evidence.

INTERNAL EVIDENCE:

VARIANT 1: The construction of the Temple under Solomon began in the 480th year after the exodus from Egypt. According to the reading of the MT, the exodus transpired *שְׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה* (“in the 80th year and 400th year”) after the children of Israel came out of the land of Egypt.

PRO

1. There appears to be no reason to suspect any accidental error on the part of a Hebrew scribe as the reason behind the appearance of “480th year” in 1 Kings 6:1 of the MT.

2. Assuming the accuracy of the broadly-accepted date of 967 BC as the year in which the construction of the Temple began, and assuming that the exodus occurred in April, one can infer the date of April, 967 – April, 966 BC as representing the 480th year since the exodus event. With this in mind, the date of the exodus is *ca.* April 25, 1446 BC. For confirmation of this date as correct, see Douglas Petrovich, “Amenhotep II and the Historicity of the Exodus Pharaoh,” *TMSJ* 17:1 (Spr 2006), 84. The evidence for the dating of the exodus to 1446 BC must be examined.

a. Being that the Judean monarchy used the Tishri calendar, which began and ended on \approx Sept 10th of each year, and being that the Judean monarchs counted their first regnal years from the day in which their reigns began, the 4th year of Solomon’s reign would have been *ca.* Sept 10, 968 – Sept 10, 967 BC. This means that the Temple-building began in *ca.* May, 967 BC, in the month of *Ziv* (the 2nd month on the Hebrew calendar). This dating matches with the parameters of April, 967 – April, 966 as the 480th year after the Exodus, making the beginning of the May-construction just 1 month into the 480th year.

b. Egyptian history shows that in 1446 BC, Amenhotep II would have been the reigning pharaoh. Based on the astronomical/chronological information obtained from the Ebers Papyrus, the

reign of Amenhotep II would have been from *ca.* 1455–1418 BC. He would be an excellent candidate for the pharaoh of the exodus, due at least to the following reasons:

1) Amenhotep II was the only 18th-Dynasty pharaoh who had a father who reigned for over 40 years. The reign of Thutmose III lasted for almost 54 years (*ca.* 1506–1452 BC). While the book of Exodus does not speak of Moses' age when he left Egypt, Acts 7:23 notes that “when he was approaching the age of 40, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel.” Then later it states that “after 40 years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai” (Acts 7:30). Exodus 2:23 adds that “. . . it came about in *the course of* those many days that the king of Egypt died.” The implication is that the pharaoh who sought to kill Moses died after Moses had completed 40 years in Midian. God further tells Moses, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who were seeking your life are dead” (Exod 4:19). Not only was pharaoh dead, but *all of the men* who sought after Moses were dead. If 1446 BC is the year of the exodus, then the death of Thutmose III in 1452 BC would provide perfect timing for the recent passing of the only 18th-Dynasty pharaoh who reigned for over 40 years.

2) Amenhotep II launched his second Asiatic campaign in his 9th regnal year. If his reign began in *ca.* 1455 BC, which matches well with the Ebers Papyrus, his 9th year translates to Nov 22, 1447 – Nov 22, 1446. Therefore, an exodus-date of April 25, 1446 BC would correspond perfectly with his 9th regnal year. As it happens, the campaign of his 9th year was launched in November, an extremely unusual time for the beginning of a military campaign in the ancient world. Pritchard, one translator of the Memphis Stele, which records the two military campaigns of Amenhotep II, notes that “the present date would fall in the early part of November, an unusual season for an Egyptian campaign in Asia.” (James B. Pritchard, *ANET* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950], 246). The French Egyptologist Vandersleyen concurs: “The second Asiatic campaign began on the 25th day of the 3rd month (*akhet*) of the 9th year, during an unusual season for military campaigns. It was probably induced by the necessity of urgent intervention.” (Claude Vandersleyen, *L’Egypte et la Vallée du Nil*, vol. 2 [Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1995], 328). The Bible confirms spring as the normal time for launching campaigns: “Then it happened in the spring, at the time when kings go out to battle, that Joab led out the army and ravaged the land of the sons of Ammon, and came and besieged Rabbah” (1 Chr 20:1). In the 9th-year campaign, a reference is made to a group of 3,600 captives who were called *Apiru*, ethnically distinct people who can be identified with no people other than the Hebrews (Douglas Petrovich, “Evaluating the Candidacy of Amenhotep II as the Exodus-Pharaoh,” <http://utoronto.academia.edu/DouglasPetrovich/Papers>, 23).

3) For more reasons why Amenhotep II is the best candidate for the exodus-pharaoh, see Petrovich's article, “Amenhotep II and the Historicity of the Exodus Pharaoh,” or the updated version, titled “Evaluating the Candidacy of Amenhotep II as the Exodus-Pharaoh.”

3. In Acts 13:20, the number “440th” is more difficult to reconcile with the historical and chronological details than the number “480th” is. See the Acts 13:20 variant for more details.

4. Cf. Variant 1, CON 1. The placing of the exodus in 1267 BC, or at any other time in the 13th century BC, presents far more problems than it solves. There are many clues about the life of the exodus-pharaoh that surface in the Bible, especially in Exodus. For example, the exodus-pharaoh *followed* an exceedingly lengthy reign, not *boasted* one, as does Ramses II. As noted, Moses fled from pharaoh, who sought to execute him for killing an Egyptian (Exod 2:15), departing from Egypt when he “was fulfilling 40 years of age” (Acts 7:23). Only “after 40 years had passed” did the angel speak to him at the burning bush (Acts 7:30), which immediately follows the statement that “in *the course of* those many days, the king of Egypt died” (Exod 2:23). Thus the pharaoh who preceded the exodus-pharaoh must have ruled beyond 40 years, a criterion not met by the modest reign of Seti I (*ca.* 1305–1290 BC), Ramses II's predecessor.

CON

1. Many interpreters of the Bible view the number “480th” in 1 Kings 6:1 to be a figurative number, which renders the date 1446 BC far too early for the exodus. According to the majority who hold to this view, 480 is the sum of 12 eras consisting of 40-year generations: 20 years for one generation to live to child-bearing age, then 20 years for their children to do likewise. When totaled, these 12 eras of 22–25 actual years supply the 288–300 years needed to support the late-exodus theory. Thus the exodus is dated to *ca.* 1267 BC, which falls within the exceedingly long reign of Ramses II.

VARIANT 2: The construction of the Temple under Solomon began in the 440th year after the exodus from Egypt. According to the reading of the LXX, the exodus transpired ἐν τῷ τεσσαρακοστῷ καὶ τετρακοσιοστῷ ἔτει (“in the 40th and 400th year”) after the children of Israel came out of the land of Egypt.

PRO

1. There appears to be no reason to suspect any accidental error on the part of a Hebrew scribe as the reason behind the appearance of “440th year” in the LXX.

2. Cf. Variant 1, PRO 2. According to Variant 2, the Israelite exodus thus would be dated to April, 1406 – April, 1405. The occurrence of the exodus in 1406 BC means that Amenhotep III (*ca.* 1408–1369 BC) would have been the reigning pharaoh during the time of the exodus.

CON

1. Cf. Variant 2, PRO 2. Amenhotep III is not an acceptable candidate for the exodus-pharaoh, because his father, Thutmose IV (*ca.* 1418–1408 BC), reigned less than 12 years, though the exact length of his reign is uncertain. This would make Thutmose IV an impossible candidate for the predecessor of the exodus-pharaoh, who must have reigned over 40 years [Cf. Variant 1, PRO 2., b, 1)].

2. Cf. Variant 2, PRO 2. If the exodus occurred in 1406 BC, then the Israelites did not enter Canaan until *ca.* 1366 BC. The Amarna Letters, however, date to the reigns of Amenhotep III and his son Amenhotep IV (a.k.a. Akhenaten, *ca.* 1369–1352 BC), who ruled after him. These tablets record attacks by the *Apiru*, or Hebrews (or Eberites, since Hebrews derived from Eber), who had to have sufficient time for the conquest under Joshua, before the “mop-up” operations that are characterized in the Amarna Letters.

EVALUATION OF INTERNAL EVIDENCE:

The evidence in Variant 1, PRO 2 makes a strong case in favor of that variant. Variant 2, CON 1 is especially harmful to Variant 2, though certainly CON 2 does nothing to help it either. In light of the information gleaned from ancient history, the internal evidence conclusively favors Variant 1.

FINAL CONCLUSION:

Both external and internal evidence point to Variant 1, the reading of “480th year,” as the original reading found in 1 Kings 6:1. The reading in the LXX cannot supplant the reading of the MT, as there is no evidence that favors such a correction. Moreover, the historical evidence related to the internal evidence clearly makes a reading of “440th year” quite impossible. Choose Variant 1 in an easy decision.