

The Great Dating Debate

Article Contents:

Introduction

Manetho vs. Ussher (What Exactly is Going On?)

How *We* Incorporated the Dating Debate Into our Curriculum

Fitting the *History* Into the *Bible* and NOT Vice Versa

Bibliography for New Chronology vs. Traditional Chronology Dating

Add-ons:

Add-on #1: Four Hundred and Thirty Years?

Introduction

Who didn't like studying Ancient Egypt in school? Between the mystery, the excitement, and, of course, the mummies, what wasn't to like? But few students (of any age) are fully aware of the debate that rages behind the scenes amongst historians and archaeologists about *when* everything in ancient Egyptian history happened. And if you don't know, that's completely understandable. Why even go there? Many things do not need accurate dates to be made interesting and informative. Often a simple "a really, really long time ago" suffices. In fact, dates usually make things less interesting and more monotonous! But the haunting question for many of us is why? Why would people be creating such a ruckus about these ancient *Egyptian* dates in particular? Aren't they just like all of the other ancient dates we have? Well, not exactly. You see, when you're talking about Ancient Egypt, you're talking about one of the closest things we have to "the beginning," and naturally, if the beginning of a story is flawed, there's a good chance it will impact the rest of it.

Now, for starters, let's get something straight. This is not a treatise explaining the "truth" behind the debate. It's not going to have all of the answers laid out plain and simple. We openly acknowledge that we are woefully underqualified to give a *definitive* answer to the problem, let alone to properly explain or support all of the examples and claims put forward in the rest of this article. But what we *have* done is put in months of exhaustive research in order to try to understand the basic arguments. We've boiled down and organized the information as much as we could for you, so that you – and your students – can be as well informed as possible about the incredible complexity of the ancient Egyptian dating issue... without having to read hundreds of dry pages of archaeology and history books and treatises to get there!

Our goal here is to lay out both sides of the debate, and to show you why we have chosen to explain things the way we have in our curriculum. We wanted to provide this document in particular to deliver this information more thoroughly, since we were forced to leave much of the explanation out of our text lessons for the sake of not completely overwhelming the children. (You'll find that the chronology lesson is still one of the most complex in the whole study!) If the topics spark any interest on your part, a bibliography is included at the end of this document that shows many of the sources used to gather information about the "new chronology" side of the debate in particular, and while many of them make for rather dry reading, they are worth the time if you are interested.

One other item of note is our choice of terminology. We have chosen to use **traditional** to describe the long-standing, traditional dates, and **new chronology** or occasionally **Biblical chronology** to describe the newer dates. However, there are many non-Christians who believe in the integrity of the Bible as a historical document and thus support the new chronology. On the flip side, the traditional

view is still endorsed by many Christian historians as well. So, the title *Biblical* chronology does not imply something exclusively Christian, but rather the *historical* timeline of the Bible. The history laid out in the Bible is simply so vital to the new chronology hypothesis that the term tends to flow naturally.

Manetho vs. Ussher (What Exactly is Going On?)

For years ancient Egyptian dates have been based off a number of different things — statues, temple carvings, papyri, etc. — but arguably one of the most important sources has been the dynasty list of Manetho. Manetho was an Egyptian priest during the time of the Greek pharaohs, the Ptolemies. The priest was commissioned to create a history of Egypt, since much of the history was not written down or had been destroyed in the past. Manetho gathered oral accounts and the scraps of information he could find and drew up his history. No original copies of this have survived, but some ancient historians like Josephus, Julius Africanus, and Eusebius copied parts of it before it was lost. One part of Manetho's work in particular that has survived in the copies is a listing of the pharaohs of Egypt, in consecutive order, in which the priest broke them down into a series of dynasties. There are thirty or thirty-one of these, depending on if you are counting the short, second rule of the Persian kings before Alexander the Great conquered the country.

From the beginning of Egyptology, this list has been instrumental in deciding who ruled Egypt when. This seems to have been a key factor in many historians placing the creation of the world around five or six thousand B.C. This approximate date is supported by ancient historians like Josephus, who also seems to have calculated that the creation took place somewhere around c. 4500 B.C. Even in Home School in the Woods' timeline materials we settled on circa 5000 B.C. to attempt to leave room to fit everything into place with their approximate traditional dates. (When dealing with dates this old, everything is an approximation.)

However, right off the bat a possible issue arises. The new chronologists have suggested that, while Manetho's list places the pharaohs *consecutively*, much of the evidence seems to show that some of the pharaohs ruled *at the same time* over different areas of Egypt. This claim of concurrent rather than consecutive pharaohs would naturally lead to the conclusion that the traditional timeline of Ancient Egypt is overextended. It is a valid argument, and one that deserves attention.

Ok, now to lay a little more proper background for the new chronology. James Ussher was a prelate in the Anglican Church who lived in the 16th-17th centuries. Claiming the reliability of the Bible as a historical text, he created a Biblical timeline of the world, in which he placed creation specifically in the year 4004 B.C. This was the widely accepted Christian date for the beginning of the world until the 19th century, and it has been a springboard from which many new chronologists have begun to argue that the ancient Egyptian timeline is overextended. For example, Ussher places the Biblical Flood at c. 2348 B.C. This immediately caused problems with the traditional dates, like those created by Manetho's dynasty lists, laid out by professional archaeologists and historians in the last two hundred years. Or as another example, the first Egyptian pharaoh, Menes, ruled around c. 3100 B.C. This would mean he, and quite a few other pharaohs, were alive *before* the flood. To use another example from a completely different geographic region, Stonehenge was traditionally built sometime around circa 2700 B.C. Once again, according to Ussher's dates, this would be before the flood.

And here is where things start to get a bit sticky. Something had to give, whether it was the purely Biblical dates of Ussher or the archaeological, historical dates compiled over the last two centuries. Both the historical and the archaeological communities have crucially decided that the traditional dates they had created through their research were correct, or at least on the right track, and therefore Ussher's Biblical timeline was incorrect. This, of course, did not sit well with many Christians, so they set out to find where the issues lay, and naturally it wasn't long before the question came up, "What if the traditional dates are the ones that are wrong, and the Biblical dates are right?" There was

tremendous pushback against this hypothesis, but probably not just out of stubbornness or hatred towards the Bible. It may have come from the overwhelming thought of the consequences if the currently accepted dates were wrong.

You see, as we touched on at the beginning of the document, recorded Egyptian history is pretty much as near to creation as we can get after the Bible. Therefore, the dates we had for the ancient Egyptians have often been used to date the other, “younger” nations that lived around them. For example, if a date could not be found for a certain Hittite king, but it was known that the king lived during the time of Rameses II, they would naturally place him around the 13th century B.C., the time when Rameses II traditionally ruled. But what if Rameses II actually ruled around the eighth century – one of the suggested new chronology dates? That would mean *both* Rameses II and the Hittite king were misdated. So, I think we can all agree that the ancient Egyptian dates are very important, and changing them must be taken very seriously.

In fact, Peter James’s book *Centuries of Darkness* suggests that many of the “dark ages” that often appear in the ancient world are attributable to the alleged errors in the traditional ancient Egyptian timeline. For instance, to pick on the Hittites a little more, there is a point in their history where they suddenly drop off from a massive empire to a weak, scattered nation. However, instead of the Hittite history ending there, it enters a dark age, continuing on as an apparently unconquered people for nearly five hundred years before being officially absorbed into other nations. Many scholars who embrace the new chronology have suggested that the dark age of the Hittites was simply an artificial extension created by historians to help it *fit in* with the traditional Egyptian timeline! It is just one of numerous examples the new chronologists point to. The evidence is quite compelling.

However, before we get too enchanted with the idea that a new chronology is *the* answer, it should be pointed out again that Christians do not universally accept this new view. There are prominent Bible-believing scholars, such as the Associates for Biblical Research, who still argue for the traditional dates and believe that they support the Bible well. They appear to look at the new chronology as a forced solution that answers some of the ongoing problems with lining up ancient history with the Bible, but at the expense of derailing all of the correlations that already exist. All this just to say, this truly is a debate, and not a cut-and-dried situation. And it is largely due to prominent Biblical archaeologists and scholars like these that we have found it hard to make a 100% full decision on which version seems to be the truth. It is certainly not an open and closed discussion.

How We Incorporated the Dating Debate Into our Curriculum

There is no doubt in our minds that the new chronology argument has great merit and could hold significant, albeit still often vague and underdeveloped, truth. It attempts to line up the dependable history of the Bible (not just in terms of faith, but also as a solid historical document) with the evidence we see in the secular, archaeological world today. However, we at Home School in the Woods have not been able to fully leave the traditional dates behind. As previously mentioned, there are groups like the Associates for Biblical Research who are God-fearing men and women who still hold that the traditional dates are true. The fact that good men and women are on both sides of the argument should give us all hesitation before we assume that either is the definitive answer.

However, regardless of which side of the argument you subscribe to, or if you, like us, simply want to join in and watch the discovery process unfold without picking sides too hastily, we did end up using the traditional dates in our curriculum primarily for one specific reason. A key part of our mission as a company is to help bring a hands-on element to history, and one of the primary ways we do this is through timelines, helping to draw everything together into one “big picture.” But when we looked into dates in order to provide at least the option of a new chronology timeline, we discovered that, while many of the events and people of the Bible have received a new chronology dating “makeover,” those of Ancient Egypt, and many other ancient cultures, still have a long way to go until

they get any solid new dates. It isn't a surprise, as the Bible does not heavily reference other cultures very often, especially specific leaders or events.

Several people have tried to come up with an alternative, new chronology timeline for Ancient Egypt, but thus far there has been next to no harmony between these suggestions. Some, like Immanuel Velikovsky, originally suggested shortening the Egyptian timeline by as much as five or six hundred years! Others, such as David Rohl or Peter James, propose much more modest alterations of a few hundred years, although even these two don't line up with each other.

Some sources that fully endorse the new chronology have been forced to create vague new dates, and drop others out completely, rather than replace them. And rightfully so, as there are no real replacements yet! In fact, in Project Passport: Ancient Egypt, due to the tremendous confusion and our ultimate desire of creating a positive, enjoyable experience for the students, we tried to leave out as many unnecessary dates as possible as well. But when it came to any timelines in our materials, well, let's just say good *timelines* uncompromisingly require dates. And this is an area where the new chronology often has difficulty delivering concrete answers.

For example, the Biblical figure Joseph is traditionally dated at c.1914 B.C. New chronologists, on the other hand, offer dates anywhere from the 18th to the 16th centuries B.C. When a historical figure is dated as "somewhere between the 18th and 16th centuries B.C." or, even worse, has no date at all, as is often the case, it becomes very hard to create an accurate order of events on a timeline. So we have decided to remain, for the moment, with the traditional dates in order to help the students understand the flow of events easier.

But do not fear! That does not mean we have ignored the important argument of the new chronologists, either. In the Project Passport: Ancient Egypt study in particular, we take great pains to lay out the debate, highlighting the merits of the new chronology, and showing how the shifted dates would line up with the Bible. The students even create a timeline that contrasts the traditional ancient Egyptian dates with the suggested new chronology dates (we decided for this specific project to go with John Ashton and David Down's revised dates in *Unwrapping the Pharaohs*, to bring some specificity to the vagueness of the new chronology timeline). We have gone to great pains to include this information, and to draw the students' attention to it in order to prepare them for the barrage of secular arguments that attempt to tear down the validity of the Bible.

At the end of the day, the new chronology that is emerging is a vital subject to study, as it combats the popular secular idea that the Bible, in this case specifically in regards to history, doesn't line up with the facts enough to be more than a bunch of myths. Instead, it puts forward the idea that the truths of the Bible are *supported* by archaeology and the history of the secular world, and that is something we think is worthy of attention!

And of course, as was pointed out more than once, there are still Christian scholars who believe that the traditional dates already *do* support the Bible. So the debate rages on. In all of our extensive research we have come to the conclusion, that as far as the manmade part of the argument goes, things are anything but clear at this point, and we should do our best to present *both* sides of the argument, with the understanding that all of this is in the pursuit of lining up the history with the Bible and not vice versa. The one theme that seems consistent within the Christian world, and which has been encouraging, is that both sides can agree that the Bible is indeed the undisputable truth, and we must stop making it take a back seat to "the facts."

— Jaron Pak, Chief Researcher/Writer, Home School in the Woods

Fitting the *History* Into the *Bible* and NOT Vice Versa

Now that we've gone over the general debate, let's take a look at some of the effects that the new chronology has on Egypt and the Bible. The following is taken directly from "Stop #23" of Project

Passport: Ancient Egypt. It highlights when in Egyptian history characters like Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and others may have lived if the new chronology is correct:

What if we assume that the Bible's history is accurate, and instead question whether the traditional dates of the Egyptian pharaohs are wrong? That is what the new chronologists are asking. For example, there are several historical figures and events from the Bible that have been fairly well proven. Most historians agree that Solomon ruled Israel some time around 1000 B.C. In addition to this, the Bible tells us in 1 Kings 6:1, "And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel..." That means the Exodus took place four hundred and seventy-six years before Solomon became king, which would be a little bit after 1500 B.C. Some argue that if you follow the traditional Egyptian timeline, and find the pharaohs who were supposed to be ruling at these times, there is little sign of either Solomon ruling a magnificent kingdom alongside them, or of a large group of Israelites leaving Egypt. But rather than question if Solomon ever lived or if the Exodus ever happened the way it is described in the Bible, the more important question that needs to be asked is, "do we really know *which pharaohs* were alive at these times?"

So, let's look at a few of the most famous people and events from the Bible and see what the traditional story says about who was ruling Egypt at that time. Then we'll take a look at what the "new chronology" has to offer. Remember, though, the timeline of the new chronology is often very vague, since the new chronologists have not yet agreed on what the new dates should be. We will mostly follow Ussher's suggested dates, although if others have very different dates we will try to include them as well. Here come the "what-ifs!"

Abraham

Genesis 12:10 "Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to dwell there, for the famine was severe in the land."

Abraham (still Abram at this point) is traditionally thought to have lived around 2100 B.C. and to have visited Egypt sometime around the First Intermediate Period or perhaps the early days of the Middle Kingdom (Dynasties 7-12). According to Ussher he was probably born closer to 2000 B.C. But while Abraham's date doesn't change much, if you also use the shortened *Egyptian* timeline of the new chronologists, you will find it actually places Abraham all the way back around the 4th Dynasty! In fact, do you remember back in Stop #9 when we read how Abraham "communicated to [the Egyptians] arithmetic and delivered to them the science of astronomy?" Some historians think it was Abraham's teachings that helped the 4th-Dynasty Egyptians build pyramids so perfectly, especially compared to those of the 3rd Dynasty!

Joseph

Genesis 39:1a "Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt..."

Genesis 41:41 "And Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.'"

After being sold by his brothers into slavery, Joseph was brought down to Egypt, where he rose from slavery to be a vizier, second in the land only to the pharaoh. The traditional date for Joseph's time in Egypt is c.1914 B.C., during the powerful 12th Dynasty. The new chronology places Joseph two to four hundred years later. However, the shorter Egyptian timeline *also* shifts the 12th Dynasty by roughly the same amount of time. So in this case Joseph actually ends up arriving in Egypt during the same dynasty!

The Exodus

Exodus 5:1a "Afterward Moses and Aaron went in and told Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord God of Israel: "Let My people go..."'"

After being slaves under the Egyptian pharaohs, the Israelites, led by Moses, were freed by the Lord, who sent ten plagues to devastate Egypt and then drowned the pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. The traditional and new chronology dates both have the Exodus happening in the 1400s B.C. However, the traditional date places the event somewhere between the reigns of Queen Hatshepsut of the 18th Dynasty and Rameses II of the 19th Dynasty. Some historians have even suggested that Hatshepsut was the very princess that drew Moses up out of the Nile River, and that her step-son's son, Amenhotep II, was the pharaoh of the Exodus.

The new chronology, however, claims the Exodus actually took place much earlier, at the very end of the Middle Kingdom, perhaps during the stormy last days of the 13th Dynasty. A papyrus that was most likely written around this time

by an Egyptian sage named Ipuwer has been found and translated. It describes a chaotic and destructive time in Egypt's history that sounds an awful lot like the plagues of the Exodus. Some also think the ten plagues and Red Sea crossing left Egypt so weak that it allowed the Hyksos to take over "without our hazarding a battle with them," as we heard in Stop #17. Others think the Israelites themselves were the Hyksos, and the Egyptians were simply trying to make it sound like *they* were the victims. They didn't, after all, want to record for all of history the story of how they were beaten by their own slaves!

The Queen of Sheba

1 Kings 10:1-2a *"Now when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord... She came to Jerusalem with a very great retinue, with camels that bore spices, very much gold, and precious stones..."*

Traditionally, the Queen of Sheba was thought to have come from a distant land, perhaps in the Middle East. But new chronologists have suggested that *maybe* this mysterious queen was none other than Queen Hatshepsut herself! Now, *if* this were true, it would also mean that she is *not* the princess who found Moses, as the Queen of Sheba visited Israel hundreds of years after the Exodus events. However, with the shortened Egyptian timeline suggesting that the Exodus happened centuries before Hatshepsut was born, she may well have lived at the same time as Solomon.

Shishak

1 Kings 14:25-26 *"It happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem. And he took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and the treasures of the king's house; he took away everything. He also took away all the gold shields which Solomon had made."*

The Pharaoh Shishak attacked Jerusalem and took all of its treasures, especially from the Temple of Solomon. Shishak is traditionally considered to be Shoshenq I, founder of the 22nd Dynasty, whose traditional date is in the mid-9th century B.C. It was assumed this simply because their names were similar, but in all of the recordings of Shoshenq I's conquests, Jerusalem never seems to be mentioned. But remember, Egyptian names are very hard to translate! Upon closer examination, new chronologists have concluded that Shishak may have been Thutmose III, or even Rameses II himself, who had the nickname Sisy. In Hebrew the Egyptian "s" is often turned into "sh" and that would make it "ShyShy," which happens to sound an awful lot like... Shishak! Once again we see that translating ancient Egyptian is tricky! Either of these pharaohs could have ruled during Rehoboam's reign on the shortened Egyptian timeline.

Ok. Is your brain hurting? And yet, we've just scratched the surface! The debate over when everything happened in ancient Egypt is extremely complicated, and in many ways it is just getting started. It is fun to speculate about which pharaoh relates to which character from the Bible, but the important thing to keep in mind is that just because the facts might not line up perfectly in our heads does not mean we should discredit the Word of God. Manmade timelines, both traditional and modern, should never be assumed to be more correct than the inspired words of God. It is risky business believing facts that come from what men have found buried in the dirt, instead of those that come straight from the Bible.

Bibliography for New Chronology vs. Traditional Chronology Dating:

- Ussher, James, *The Annals of the World*, Master Books 2007
- Manetho (Waddell, W.G. translation), *Manetho*, Harvard University Press 1940
- John Ashton & David Down, *Unwrapping The Pharaohs*, Master Books 2006
- Rohl, David M., *From Eden to Exile, the Epic History of the People of the Bible*, Arrow Books 2003
- Rohl, David M., *A Test of Time, the Bible – from Myth to History*, BCA 1995
- Velikovsky, Immanuel, *Ages in Chaos*, Sphere Books Ltd 1978
- James, Peter, *Centuries of Darkness*, Jonathan Cape London 1991
- Steinmann, Andrew E., *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*, Concordia Publishing House 2011
- Associates for Biblical Research: <http://www.biblearchaeology.org>

Note: Apart from Steinmann's book and the Associates for Biblical Research, most of these resources are heavily pro-creating a new chronology. We've made sure to include these, as they are harder to find. However, there are plenty of sources that back up the traditional dates, as they are the generally accepted dates in the historical and archaeological communities.

NOTE: With a topic this complex, from time to time, questions will naturally arise, and we want to do our best to answer them! Therefore, this will remain a "living article," and we reserve the right to edit and adjust information as the chronology debate continues to develop. In addition, if we wish to directly answer specific questions, they will be incorporated into this document as "Add-ons" at the end.

Add-ons

Add-on #1: Four Hundred and Thirty Years?

One of the common questions that is often discussed in relation to the traditional vs. new chronology debate is in reference to Exodus 12:40, which reads in the NKJV:

“Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years.”

This is compared to Genesis 15:13, which again reads in the NKJV:

“Then He said to Abram: ‘Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.’”

There are further references to a four-hundred-year affliction, sojourn, etc. in places in the New Testament as well. This is easily explained in the traditional chronology, as it is suggested that Jacob and his family entered Egypt around 1876 B.C. (Andrew E. Steinmann in *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology*) and then the Exodus took place a little over four hundred years later. Easy-peasy.

With the New Chronology, however, the question that naturally arises is, how does this “four hundred and thirty years” bit jive with the new timeline, which moves the time of Jacob and his family’s arrival in Egypt up over two hundred years. (Approximately 1660 according to John Ashton and David Down in *Unwrapping the Pharaohs* – and please remember that this is just one of several new chronology estimates). The Exodus is generally agreed by traditional *and* new chronology proponents alike to be somewhere around 1450 B.C. Therefore, the Israelites would only have been in Egypt for a little over two hundred years, barely half of the four hundred mentioned in the promise.

However, the solution proposed by new chronologists is that the promise made to Abraham applied to the entire stretch of time from the making of the promise (roughly two hundred years before Jacob entered Egypt) *through* the two hundred years they spent in bondage. As with most traditional versus new chronology topics, both sides of the argument have significant evidence and deserve attention. It is therefore important, unless you have already made a firm decision on your own, to teach the students that this information is open to interpretation and is not yet “set in stone.” There are strong Christian men and women on both sides of the debate trying to discover the answer.

As mentioned in previous statements, our timeline figures currently follow the traditional dates primarily because both Biblical and secular scholars alike who believe in the traditional chronology already agree upon these. The new chronology, on the other hand, usually has several different, often conflicting new dates for each person or event... that is, assuming they even have a new date yet. Many less important figures have not been assigned new dates yet. We believe the debate between the traditional and new chronologies is an honest pursuit of the truth but that neither side has yet established that it is *certainly* the solution to the problem. However, it is certain that it is an exciting time to be researching these ancient events. Every day brings new evidence and revelation to the table!

— Jaron Pak, Chief Researcher/Writer, Home School in the Woods