

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

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D. Mordechai Schlachter

How long were Bnei Yisroel in Eretz Mitzrayim?

וּמוֹשֵׁב בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָשְׁבוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם שְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה:

“And the settlement of Bnei Yisroel that they settled in Mitzrayim was thirty year, and four hundred year.” (Shmos 12:40).

The Pesach Haggadah does not give the years Bnei Yisroel actually were in Mitzrayim. It does quote the pasuk that Avraham’s children will be strangers in a strange land for four hundred years. (Magid – Baruch Shomer). This was told during the Bris Bein Habsarim (Covenant of the Parts). (Bereishis 15:13). The Gemara says that Bnei Yisroel only sojourned in Mitzrayim for two hundred and ten years in hardship. (Brochos 7b). The Midrash reconciles the two pesukeim and says that the four hundred years was from the birth of Yitzchok and the pasuk in Shmos is referring to the thirty years earlier when Hashem made the bris with Avraham. (Tanchuma Bo 9).

The problem with the four hundred and thirty (or merely four hundred) years in actual Mitzrayim is that Kehas was born before Yaakov’s family arrived in Mitzrayim. (Bereishis 46:11). Kehas lived to be one hundred and thirty-three years. (Shmos 6:17). His son Amram lived to be one hundred and thirty-seven. (Ibid 6:20). Moshe, his son, was eighty when he stood before Pharaoh. (Ibid 7:7). Adding them up, even if Amram was born shortly before Kehas passed and Moshe was born shortly before Amram passed, that would only be three hundred fifty years.

When Hashem told Avraham that his children would sojourn in a land not theirs, the first child was Yitzchok. Thus, the Midrash opines the four hundred years is from Yitzchok. However, that does not fit with our pasuk. It does not say Yisroel or sons of Avraham or the like. It says, specifically, Bnei Yisroel. Bnei Yisroel either means Yisroel/Yaakov’s actual children. (Bereishis 42:5; Shmos 1:1). Or it means the nation as a whole. (Shmos 1:7). It is a hard stretch to mean that Yitzchok was part of “Bnei Yisroel” when Yisroel was the name given to Yaakov. (Bereishis 35:10). And even if Yitzchok was part of the “Bnei Yisroel,” was Avraham, too—for the extra thirty years? And was Avraham also part of it before even arriving in the land? The promise was made to him while he was still in Charan. (Ibid 15:7).

The Gemara says that when the Jewish representatives translated the Torah into Greek, they all translated our pasuk as “that Bnei Yisroel settled in Mitzrayim and Canaan.” (Megillah 9b). While that helps with the location of Bnei Yisroel it still does not answer two questions. First, the Torah is always particular and the Torah does not say “and Canaan.” Second, Bnei Yisroel does not include Avraham or Yitzchok. The translation was not changed to “and the sons of Avraham sojourned.” It remained “Sons of Yisroel.” One could argue that “Bnei Yisroel” does mean Avraham and his progeny. And it would not refer to Yishmael and Eisav because they did not inherit the Land of

Yisroel. Still, the Torah should have provided a clearer term. Furthermore, Yitzchok was not even allowed to go to Mitzrayim so he can't be said to have sojourned there. Finally, if Bnei Yisroel were 210 years in Mitzrayim and 230 years in Canaan (and Charan). It could make sense to "estimate" saying, a majority was spent in Mitzrayim so the Torah is just using general terminology; however, that is not the case. Finally, the Torah doubles down and repeats that Bnei Yisroel were in Mitzrayim for exactly four hundred and thirty years. (Shmos 12:41).

History changed as Avraham arrived in Canaan. After touring the land, a famine developed. (Bereishis 12:10). He traveled to Mitzrayim and was showered with riches. (Ibid 12:16). Then a plague struck Pharaoh and his household. (Ibid 12:17). After this, was the war where Four Kings invaded from the east. (Ibid 14:1). Avraham joins the war and took his own trained men and pursued them until [what would be named] Dan. (Ibid 14:14). Then he divided himself and chased them out until Damascus, Assyria. (Ibid 14:15). Who did he divide? When Avraham left Mitzrayim, "Pharaoh commanded men [of war] and they escorted him, his wife, and all that was his." (Ibid 12:20). Simply, this means back to Canaan. This actually also means joined Avraham in the war. Avraham divided his army among his own household and the joining Egyptians. The Torah also says, "and there were Canaanites in the land." (Ibid 12:6). The Torah already said Avraham went to the Land of Canaan. (Ibid 12:5). Of course, Canaanites were in the land.

The Torah, ever with nuanced wording teaching historical context, is saying that although this was the Land of Canaan, it was not ruled by Canaan and his children. They were merely present in the land. It was a vassal of Mitzrayim. Historically, Pharaoh Thutmose III conducted a great war where he ran invaders from Mesopotamia (Bavel area) out of Canaan. He chased them out all the way back northeast toward the Euphrates with a great battle at Megiddo in northern Israel. Between Megiddo and the Euphrates is Dan and Damascus. Avraham was aided by Pharaoh. This explains Egypt's aversion to Hebrews (who come from the other side of the Euphrates). It also explains the trust Pharaoh put in Yosef—the great grandson of the great Abraham. It also explains why Pharaoh made Avraham rich and why Avraham did not take a thing from the Canaanites. Further, while Yitzchok, Yaakov, and his children were living in Canaan, it was really Mitzrayim because it was a vassal to Mitzrayim. While it was "the Land of Canaan" that his children will inherit, it did not even belong to Canaan. Yaakov dwelled in the land that his fathers sojourned, the Land of Canaan (Ibid 37:1). Physically in the Land of Canaan that would become Eretz Yisroel, but politically in Mitzrayim. Yaakov to Moshe was four generations, exactly as predicted at the bris. (Ibid 15:13).

Therefore, include Yisroel in Bnei Yisroel as he is the father of the nation. Then the count begins with Yaakov. Yaakov was one hundred and thirty when he went down to Mitzrayim (passed at 147 and spent 17 years there). Add to that Kehas' 133, Amram's 137, and Moshe's 80, that is 480. There is four hundred and thirty years plus overlap. Further, Yaakov might have been thirty when he bought the bechoros off of Eisav, commencing living in a land that is not his (but should be).

Have a Chag Kosher v'Sameach.