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## A Chronology for the Cities of the Plain

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### Abstract:

Biblically, the timeframe for the existence of the Cities of the Plain ranges from the early patriarchal period of Genesis 10 to the time of Abram and Lot in Genesis 13-19. Taken at face value, the biblical chronology would thus require the Cities of the Plain to exist during the Middle Bronze Age. Southern Dead Sea sites such as Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira belonged to the Early Bronze Age, and were destroyed hundreds of years before the time of Abram. This is problematic for the identification of these two southern sites as Sodom and Gomorrah.



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# A Chronology for the Cities of the Plain

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Fixing an approximate date for the destruction of the Cities of the Plain (Gen 10-19) should not be difficult.<sup>1</sup> However, the acceptance by numerous scholars of so many unfounded opinions about the proper configuration of the biblical chronology has muddied the water significantly.<sup>2</sup> Actually, arriving at a reasonably good chronology is rather straightforward if you walk carefully through the indicators embedded in the biblical text. In order to place the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in its proper timeframe, we must first establish an authentic biblical chronology by following key indicators.

## KEY CHRONOLOGICAL INDICATORS IN THE BIBLICAL TEXT

The following chronological data points are drawn from biblical passages to configure biblical dates on a relative basis and to subsequently adapt them to an absolute dating context.

The primary piece of chronological evidence from the Old Testament is the statement of 1 Kings 6:1 regarding the date of the Israelite Exodus from Egypt. I have dealt with this in detail elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> but a brief summary is in order here. First, the key biblical indicators are:

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<sup>1</sup> For scholarly approaches to the subject of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Cities of the Plain, and related subjects see such general works as the latest editions of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, and *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. For detailed scholarly treatments of the subject see works such as: W.F. Albright, "The Archaeological Results of an Expedition to Moab and the Dead Sea," *BASOR* 14 (1924) 2-12; E. Power, "The Site of the Pentapolis," *Bib* 11 (1930) 23-62, 149-182; F.G. Clapp, "The Site of Sodom and Gomorrah," *AJA* 40 (1936) 323-344; J.P. Harland, "Sodom and Gomorrah," *BA* 5 (1942) 17-32; J.P. Harland, "Sodom and Gomorrah," *BA* 6 (1943) 41-54; B.G. Wood, "Have Sodom and Gomorrah Been Found?" *BS* 3 (1974) 65-89; B.G. Wood, "Sodom and Gomorrah Update," *BS* 6 (1977) 24-30; H. Shanks, "Have Sodom and Gomorrah Been Found?" *BAR* 6.5 (1980) 26-36; W.C. van Hattem, "Once Again: Sodom and Gomorrah," *BA* 44 (1981) 87-92; B.G. Wood, "Sodom and Gomorrah Update," *BS* 12 (1983) 22-33; D.M. Howard, Jr., "Sodom and Gomorrah Revisited," *JETS* 27 (1984) 385-400; G.M. Harris and A.P. Beardow, "The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah: A Geotechnical Perspective," *QJEG* 28 (1995) 349-362; D. Neev and K.O. Emery, *The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and Jericho: Geological, Climatological, and Archaeological Background* (New York: Oxford University, 1995); and B.G. Wood, "The Discovery of the Sin Cities of Sodom and Gomorrah," *BS* 12.3 (1999) 67-80. See also W.E. Rast, "Bab edh-Dhra and the Origin of the Sodom Saga," in *Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Memory of D.G. Rose*, ed. by L.G. Perdue, L.E. Toombs, G.L. Johnson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987); W.E. Rast, "Bab edh-Dhra" in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. by D.N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1993); and M.C. Astour, "Zoar" in *ABD*. The aforementioned scholars have made serious attempts to solve the puzzle of the location of the Cities of the Plain, although I think their analysis of the biblical text is often lacking in precision. There have also been attempts to identify a southern Dead Sea Sodom and Gomorrah that border on the ridiculous, such as the pseudo-archaeology of R. Wyatt, R. Cornuke and a handful of others.

<sup>2</sup> See my discussion in S. Collins, *Let My People Go: Using Historical Synchronisms to Identify the Pharaoh of the Exodus* (Albuquerque: Trinity Southwest University Press, 2002) 7-10.

<sup>3</sup> Collins, *Let My People Go* 8-10. See also J. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, rev. ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998) 224-245; E.H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 57-91; R. Cate, *An Introduction to the Old Testament and its Study* (Nashville: Broadman, 1987) 228-230; and J.M. Miller and J.H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 85-90.

1 Kings 6:1 (Masoretic Text [MT]): “In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of Yahweh.”

1 Kings 6:1 (Septuagint [LXX]): “In the four hundred and fortieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign over Israel....”

Taken at face value, this statement places the Exodus in the mid to late fifteenth century, either 1446 or 1406 BCE (I think a later date—say, the thirteenth century BCE—is untenable on both biblical and archaeological grounds<sup>4</sup>). I much prefer the date of 1406 BCE.<sup>5</sup>

From this point, additional biblical data allow us to work backward to the time of Abraham. These passages involving the length of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt are critical to the correct chronological placement of Abraham and the destruction of the Cities of the Plain:

Exodus 12:40 (MT): “Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years.”

Exodus 12:40 (LXX and Samaritan Pentateuch [SP]): “Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt and Canaan was 430 years.”

Genesis 15:13: “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.”

I have examined much research about the length of the Israelite sojourn in Egypt,<sup>6</sup> and I am convinced that there is only one fragment of evidence—and that highly questionable—in support of a long (430-year) sojourn in Egypt, i.e., Exodus 12:40 in the Masoretic Text: “Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years.” Yet many conservative scholars, particularly evangelicals, cling to the 430 years of Exodus 12:40 (MT) as if the evidence overwhelmingly favored it. But in fact, practically all other lines of evidence point to a short (215-year) sojourn in Egypt, clearly revealing that the reading of the Masoretic Text in Exodus 12:40 is the result of a scribal omission made sometime before or during the Middle Ages (ca. 1000 CE).

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<sup>4</sup> See my detailed discussion in Collins, *Let My People Go*.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 82-84.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that scholars seem to use either a short or long Israelite sojourn in Egypt depending upon the needs of their particular theories, with but little critical analysis as to which length of sojourn is best supported by the evidence. For example, K.A. Kitchen postulates a much-abbreviated time span (on the order of 280 years or so) for the (literal) 480 years of Exodus 12:40 in order to accommodate his preference for a mid-thirteenth century BCE date for the Exodus, but he readily adopts a long, 400-plus-year Egyptian sojourn to avoid placing Joseph in the middle of the Eighteenth Dynasty, where he obviously does not belong. See K.A. Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1978) 74-76.

B.G. Wood, who holds to an early Exodus date (mid-fifteenth century BCE), assumes a long sojourn in Egypt because he needs to push the date of Abraham’s entrance into Canaan as far back as possible to preserve some hope of identifying Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira as Sodom and Gomorrah. See Wood, “Sin Cities” 66-80. It is interesting to observe that this article includes a photograph of Dr. Wood standing next to an information sign placed at Bab edh-Dhra by the Jordanian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities stating that the main (fortified) occupation of the town was destroyed about 2400 BCE toward the end of EB III, more than 300 years before the earliest possible date that Abraham and Lot could have entered Canaan.

In my opinion, the best treatment of the subject in support of the long Egyptian sojourn is P.J. Ray, Jr., “The Duration of the Israelite Sojourn in Egypt,” *BS* 17.2 (2004) 33-44. This is the revised version of an article that originally appeared in *AUSS* 24 (1986) 231-248.

Other witnesses to the text of Exodus 12:40—namely, the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint (LXX)—attest to the following reading: “Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt and in Canaan was 430 years.” Both the Alexandrian-Jewish chronographer, Demetrius (before 200 BCE), and the Jewish/Roman historian, Josephus (first century CE), clearly support this reading of Exodus 12:40.<sup>7</sup> Josephus writes that “[the Israelites] left Egypt....four hundred and thirty years after our forefather Abraham came into Canaan, but two hundred and fifteen years only after Jacob removed into Egypt.”<sup>8</sup> Translator Whiston’s footnote on this passage from Josephus is instructive:

Why our Masorete copy so groundlessly abridges this account in Exodus 12:40, as to ascribe 430 years to the sole peregrination of the Israelites in Egypt when it is clear even by that Masorete chronology elsewhere, as well as from the express text itself, in the Samaritan [Pentateuch], Septuagint and Josephus, that they sojourned in Egypt but half that time—and that by consequence, the other half of their peregrination was in the land of Canaan, before they came into Egypt—is hard to say.<sup>9</sup>

Even the apostle Paul in Galatians 3:17 supports a short Egyptian sojourn by affirming that from “the promises....spoken to Abraham” to the giving of the Mosaic Law, the total elapsed time was 430 years—again, 215 years in Canaan (Abraham to Jacob) and 215 years in Egypt (Jacob to Moses). From a historical point of view, Paul provides evidence for the state of the text of Exodus 12:40 in the middle first century CE, which included both locatives, Egypt and Canaan, as components of the Israelite sojourn. Further, to imply that Paul was only familiar with the LXX reading as a backdrop for Galatians 3:17 is highly speculative, since his extensive training as a “Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Philippians 3:4-6) surely would have given him an intimate knowledge of the then-extant Hebrew text of Exodus. Thus, from an evangelical point of view, only two distinct possibilities exist to account for Paul’s clear support of a 430-year period from Abraham to Moses and, thus, a short sojourn in Egypt: (a) at the time Paul wrote Galatians, both the Hebrew and LXX texts of Exodus 12:40 read “in Egypt and Canaan....430 years,” suggesting that the Hebrew textual tradition, which served as the basis of the much later Masoretic Text, at some point suffered the omission of “Canaan” after the time of Paul; (b) if the variant readings of Exodus 12:40 existed in the first century CE, then the Holy Spirit must have inspired Paul to select the correct one, i.e., “in Egypt and Canaan....430 years.”

The only conceivable objection to a 215-year sojourn in Egypt is the statement in Genesis 15:13 that “your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.” At first glance this may seem to suggest that the Israelites would be enslaved and mistreated for a period approximating 400 years, possibly supporting a long sojourn in Egypt. However, the argument quickly breaks down when the text is analyzed more closely. There is actually a two-fold division in the sentence: (a) “your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own,” and (b) “they will be enslaved and mistreated,” all in a period of 400 years. Obviously, Genesis 15:13 fits the formula of Exodus 12:40 (LXX and SP) very nicely: “Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt and Canaan was 430 years.” They were “strangers in a country not their own” (Canaan) for

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<sup>7</sup> Finegan, *Chronology* 204-205.

<sup>8</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* (2.15.2) in *The Works of Josephus: New Updated Edition*, tr. by W. Whiston (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987) 74-75.

<sup>9</sup> See translator Whiston’s footnote on Josephus, *Antiquities* (2.15.2) 75.

approximately 200 years, and they were “enslaved and mistreated” in Egypt for an additional 200 years. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were only nomadic sojourners in Canaan. The land did not belong to them, but was only promised. The land became theirs only when God brought the descendants of Abraham into it forty years after the Exodus (Genesis 12:7; Exodus 6:8).

When you add to these points the fact that the Masoretic genealogies from Abraham to Jacob and from Jacob to Moses fit best into two 215-year periods,<sup>10</sup> the final nail is in the coffin of a long sojourn in Egypt. J. Finegan’s gentle rejection of a long sojourn in Egypt is more than kind,<sup>11</sup> for the application of even the most basic logic to the available data discredits the premise that the Israelites were in Egypt for 430 years.

## OBJECTIONS TO A SHORT SOJOURN

To be fair, we should also consider several issues raised by J.P. Ray in his defense of the longer sojourn scenario (see the publication information at the end of footnote 52). While he understands the points in favor of a short sojourn, he dismisses them in favor of the 430-year sojourn for several reasons. I will answer each in turn. First, he suggests that possibly since the time of the LXX (third century BCE) “there has been a tradition that the 430 years in Exodus 12:40...represent only 215 actual years of Israelite sojourn in Egypt, with the other 215 years representing the sojourn in Canaan.” But such a take is slanted toward his view—as if the short sojourn idea was some kind of “alternate” tradition to the longer one. Realistically, the long sojourn tradition seems to be purely a late idea spawned by the scribal error leading to the reading of Exodus 12:40 in the MT. Who held to a long sojourn before that? Not many, as far as I can tell.

Second, he suggests that Josephus “provides a divided testimony.” In spite of the fact that Josephus is so adamant about the short sojourn in his *Antiquities* (2.15.2), with his *Contra Apion* (1.14) giving full support to this, Ray cites another passage in *Antiquities* (2.9.1) that, in his opinion, seems to support the MT: “And four hundred years did they spend under these afflictions...” Clearly this reflects the 400 years of Genesis 15:13, and might seem to suggest a 400-year sojourn, but not necessarily—Josephus may merely be skimming over the issue with the precision of the Genesis passage oversimplified or ignored (see the next paragraph). But just as Genesis 15:13 must be understood in the light of other biblical texts, such as Exodus 12:40 (LXX) and Galatians 3:17, so the *Antiquities* 2.9.1 passage should be understood in the light of the *Antiquities* 2.15.2 passage, which, for Josephus, is definitive on the issue. In the same paragraph, Ray points out that even Rabbinic tradition supports a short Egyptian sojourn, citing *Seder ‘Olām* (second century) and Rashi (eleventh century), and also suggests that the Midrash is vague on the issue. So, there is no substantive evidence here to favor the long sojourn.

Third, Ray attempts to sell the idea that the “NT also appears to be divided on the subject.” My response is, Appears divided to whom? He cites Acts 7:6-7 and 13:17-20. But the Acts 7 passage deals with Genesis 15:13, not Exodus 12:40. Genesis 15:13 says, “Then Yahweh said to him, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.’” The meaning is not unclear here. The descendants of Abraham would have two things happen during a period of 400 years: (a) they

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<sup>10</sup> Finegan, *Chronology* 203-206.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

would be strangers in a country not their own (Canaan!), and (b) they would be enslaved and mistreated (in Egypt!). Where is the long Egyptian sojourn? The Acts 13 passage says, “The God of the people of Israel chose our fathers and he made the people prosper during their stay in Egypt. With mighty power he led them out of that country and he endured their conduct forty years in the desert. He overthrew seven nations in Canaan and gave their land to his people as their inheritance. All this took about 450 years. After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet.”

Let’s examine this closely... over a period of 450 years God did several things: (a) he chose our fathers (the Hebrew Patriarchs); (b) he made them prosper in Egypt; (c) he led them out of Egypt; (d) he put up with them in the wilderness; and (e) he overthrew the nations in Canaan and gave that land to the Israelites. But there is absolutely nothing here demanding a long sojourn in Egypt, especially if the “fathers” included Abraham. The Apostle Paul’s statement in Galatians 3:17 is *the* definitive NT passage on the issue. And Ray agrees that Paul follows the LXX rendering of Exodus 12:40! The NT is not divided on the issue at all—it clearly specifies a short (215-year) Israelite sojourn in Egypt.

Fourth, Ray attempts to show a division on the issue among the Ante-Nicene Fathers, namely Tertullian (short sojourn) and Hippolytus (long sojourn). But the argument for a long sojourn does not wash here, and it gets us nowhere.

Fifth, Ray states that “the majority of ancient texts lend support to the long chronology (for the sojourn in Egypt alone). While this fact does not, of course, provide conclusive support for that chronology, it does indicate a direction of probability as to the original.” There is some “sleight of hand” here that I must point out. The use of the term “conclusive support” is terribly misleading. There is no line of reasoning that justifies the term “conclusive” as a description of the evidence for a long sojourn chronology, even if tempered by a carefully placed negative disclaimer. And to jump from that to “it does indicate a direction of probability as to the original” is simply unwarranted.

The balance of Ray’s argumentation is, frankly, neither here nor there. He simply has to try to explain away what more clearly fits a short sojourn scenario. In order to be willing to skate on such thin ice, long-sojourn supporters like Ray must have something else that they desire to preserve at the expense of better logic and evidence. Indeed, the following two ideas are what they generally want to hang onto, but these two ideas must be dismissed if one adopts a short Egyptian sojourn for the Israelites.

#### THE CORRECT CHRONOLOGICAL PLACEMENT FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH

With reference to the destruction of the Cities of the Plain, two ideas must be abandoned on the basis of a 215-year Israelite sojourn in Egypt: (a) the placement of Abraham in either the Early Bronze Age or Intermediate Bronze Age; and (b) the identification of Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira as Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham Did Not Live in the Intermediate Bronze Age (2350-1950 BCE; formerly Early Bronze IV and Middle Bronze I).<sup>12</sup>

If the Exodus occurred about 1446 BCE (based on the Masoretic Text of 1 Kings 6:1) or 1406 BCE (based on the LXX rendering of 1 Kings 6:1), then the earliest possible date for the entrance of Abraham into Canaan 430 years earlier would be the first half of the nineteenth century BCE, which, by any stretch of the imagination, was well into Middle Bronze Age IIA. Thus, the idea so popular among evangelical scholars, that Abraham lived in the Intermediate Bronze Age or earlier, should be abandoned. Abraham was a resident of Canaan at the earliest during the prosperous Middle Bronze Age IIA-B (now Middle Bronze I and II in many chronologies; 2000-1600 BCE)—and perhaps as late in the MB as the Hyksos Period.

Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira Are Not Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>13</sup>

There have been numerous recent attempts to equate the Jordanian sites of Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira with Sodom and Gomorrah. The biblical stories involving the “cities of the plain,” including these two infamous locations, occurred in the days of Abraham and Lot. Since Sodom and Gomorrah were contemporaneous with these two patriarchs, they must have been occupied and thriving during Middle Bronze Age IIA, the correct chronological placement of Abraham in Canaan. But since both Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira were destroyed toward the end of Early Bronze Age IV, no later than 2200 BCE,<sup>14</sup> they cannot remotely be associated with the careers of Abraham and Lot.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, the biblical text tells us that Sodom was a walled town, for “Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city [Sodom]” (Genesis 19:1). Excavations at Bab edh-Dhra—the site most often identified as Sodom—reveal that its final walled phase was destroyed about 2400-2350 BCE, toward the end of Early Bronze III.<sup>16</sup> The subsequent phase was an open settlement destroyed about 2200 BCE. After that, the site was abandoned. Thus, because both Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira were destroyed 300-500 years before Abraham entered Canaan, there is no hope of associating him with those Early Bronze Age towns (not to mention the fact that, as I have discussed elsewhere, Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira are located east and south [respectively] of the Dead Sea’s Lisan peninsula, which puts them entirely in the wrong place!). Even if you assign to Abraham the earliest possible date for entering Canaan, say, about 2100 BCE, he would still

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<sup>12</sup> The problem is not that most scholars try to place Abraham earlier than the Middle Bronze Age; they generally do not. It is simply that the long Israelite sojourn in Egypt assumed by some scholars forces the patriarch into the latter half of the Intermediate Bronze Age which is a considerably different cultural picture than the more stable and prosperous MB I/II (MB IIA/B in older chronologies). Projecting an accurate historical/cultural context for Abraham depends on a more precise chronological placement. If the Egyptian sojourn of the Israelites is actually on the order of 215 years as the bulk of the evidence suggests, then there is no point in discussing Abraham in the light of Mesopotamian, Syrian, and Canaanite socio-cultural contexts earlier than MB I/II.

<sup>13</sup> Attempts to identify Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira as Sodom and Gomorrah abound in the recent literature. See Wood’s “Sin Cities” for a good range of bibliographical references.

<sup>14</sup> R.T. Schaub, “Bab edh-Dhra,” *NEAEHL vol. 1* 130-136. See also M.D. Coogan, “Numeira 1981,” *BASOR* 255 (1984) 75-81.

<sup>15</sup> Using the long, 430-year Israelite sojourn in Egypt, the earliest possible date for the birth of Abraham is about 2166 BCE, placing him in Canaan about a century later. See Finegan, *Chronology* 202.

<sup>16</sup> Schaub, “Bab edh-Dhra” 130-136.

arrive in the land three hundred years after the walled town of Bab edh-Dhra was destroyed. Obviously, Sodom and Gomorrah have yet to be identified.<sup>17</sup>

Even B.G. Wood, who has written several articles on Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira as Sodom and Gomorrah, recognizes the large time gap separating the destruction of those two southeastern Dead Sea sites from the career of Abraham. Wood attempts to accommodate these chronological difficulties in the following manner:

The chronological date for the destruction of Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira, however, is considerably earlier than [2070 BCE]. Rast gives the date for the end of the Early Bronze III period and the destruction of the cities as 2350 BCE....Schaub places the date slightly later at 2300 BCE....This leaves a discrepancy of 230-280 years. Does this mean that we cannot correlate the archaeological findings at Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira with the events described in the Bible?

In reality, the archaeological date for the end of the EB III period cannot be determined with any degree of certainty. Dating for the Bronze Age in Palestine is dependent upon synchronisms with the known history of Egypt. To date, we have no such synchronisms for the EB III period. There are a few correlations for the previous EB II period, suggesting that it was approximately contemporary with the Archaic Period (First and Second Dynasties) in Egypt, ca. 3100-2700 BCE....The dates for the Archaic Period only are known to within 200 years....It is entirely within the realm of possibility, therefore, that the destruction of Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira could have occurred at the Biblical date of ca. 2070 BCE.<sup>18</sup>

While I appreciate Wood's willingness to question the chronological uncertainties of the Early Bronze Age, I must point out that the whole picture of a possible relationship between the destruction dates for Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira and biblical Sodom and Gomorrah is far worse than he admits. First, the potential dates he cites for the destruction of the final walled phase at Bab edh-Dhra) toward the end of EB III are among the lowest dates accepted by scholars specializing in that period.<sup>19</sup> Second, Wood's suggestion that the end of EB III (thus the destruction of Bab edh-Dhra) could possibly be adjusted downward from 2350 BCE to 2070 BCE is simply wishful thinking.<sup>20</sup> Third, Wood is forced to posit a long (430-year) Israelite sojourn in Egypt in order to push the dates of Abraham back as far as possible. However, that is woefully artificial, as I have already demonstrated. Based on an actual 430-year time span from the giving of the promise to Abraham (Genesis 12ff) until the coming of the Law under Moses (mid to late fifteenth century BCE), the earliest possible date for Abraham's entrance into Canaan is ca. 1876 BCE. But since the Exodus probably occurred about 1406 BCE rather than

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<sup>17</sup> I am convinced that a careful analysis of the biblical data for Sodom and Gomorrah will open up the possibility that their locations can be ascertained. However, it is entirely possible that at the time of their destruction they were completely "blown off their foundations," so to speak. In that case, we might expect to find only a few scattered sherds of pottery from the Middle Bronze IIA and perhaps the foundations of some of their ancient walls.

<sup>18</sup> Wood, "Sin Cities" 78.

<sup>19</sup> See A. Ben-Tor, "The Early Bronze Age," *The Archaeology of Ancient Israel*, A. Ben-Tor, ed. (New Haven and London: Yale University, 1992) 81-125; G.W. Ahlstrom, *The History of Ancient Palestine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 112-157; Schaub, "Bab edh-Dhra"; and Coogan, "Numeira" 75-81.

<sup>20</sup> We must remember that even if it were possible to adjust the date for the end of EB III down two or three hundred years—for which there is no supporting evidence—the geographical data from Scripture does not support a southeastern Dead Sea location for Sodom and Gomorrah.

1446 BCE,<sup>21</sup> Abraham's entrance into Canaan would have taken place ca. 1836 BCE, placing the approximate time of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction just before the birth of Isaac, ca. 1811 BCE. The minimum discrepancy, therefore, between the destruction of the EB III occupations at Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira (ca. 2350 BCE) and the biblical date for the destruction of the Cities of the Plain (slightly before ca. 1811 BCE) is on the order of 500+ years. And I see absolutely no means of merging those two widely disparate dates.

In summary, computing a biblical chronology based on a 430-year Israelite sojourn in Egypt is erroneous. Virtually every line of reasoning and evidence points to the factuality of a short, 215-year sojourn. The reality of the 215-year sojourn, in turn, categorically eliminates the possibility of (a) placing Abraham in or before the Intermediate Bronze Age, and (b) Bab edh-Dhra and Numeira as Sodom and Gomorrah. There is no doubt that, if taken literally (which many do not), the 175-year span (Genesis 25:7) of Abraham's life (ca. 1911-1736 BCE; see Table 1) would cover much of MB I and a portion of MB II (1950-1750 BCE and 1750-1600 BCE, respectively). In terms of searching for the actual sites of the Cities of the Plain, a correctly-configured biblical chronology narrows the time window of their destruction to Middle Bronze I or II, requiring that candidate sites have occupational levels at least through that period of time.

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<sup>21</sup> Collins, *Let My People Go* 82-84.

### Three Possible Configurations for the Biblical Chronology from Abraham to the Exodus (BC)

MASORETIC:	LXX <sup>a</sup> :	IB <small>(old EB IV/MB I)</small>	LXX <sup>b</sup> :
2166 Birth of Abram <small>(Gen 11.26; 21.5)</small>	1951 Birth of Abram <small>(Gen 11.26; 21.5)</small>	MB IIA/B <small>(new MB I/II)</small>	1911 Birth of Abram <small>(Gen 11.26; 21.5)</small>
2091 Abram Enters Canaan <small>(Gen 12.5)</small>	1876 Abram Enters Canaan <small>(Gen 12.5)</small>		1836 Abram Enters Canaan <small>(Gen 12.5)</small>
2066 Birth of Isaac <small>(Gen 21.5; 25.26)</small>	1851 Birth of Isaac <small>(Gen 21.5; 25.26)</small>	IB <small>(old EB IV/MB I)</small>	1811 Birth of Isaac <small>(Gen 21.5; 25.26)</small>
2006 Birth of Jacob <small>(Gen 25.26; 47.9)</small>	1791 Birth of Jacob <small>(Gen 25.26; 47.9)</small>	MB IIA/B <small>(new MB I/II)</small>	1751 Birth of Jacob <small>(Gen 25.26; 47.9)</small>
1876 Jacob in Egypt <small>(Gen 47.9)</small>	1661 Jacob in Egypt <small>(Gen 47.9)</small>		1621 Jacob in Egypt <small>(Gen 47.9)</small>
1876-1446 Sojourn in Egypt <small>(Ex 12.40)</small>	1661-1446 Sojourn in Egypt <small>(Ex 12.40)</small>		1621-1406 Sojourn in Egypt <small>(Ex 12.40)</small>
1446 The Exodus <small>(Ex 5-14)</small>	1446 The Exodus <small>(Ex 5-14)</small>		1406 The Exodus <small>(Ex 5-14)</small>

**TABLE 1**

The column on the left represents a biblical chronology configured with an Exodus date of 1446 BCE and a 430-year Israelite sojourn in Egypt, as assumed by the Masoretic Text (MT), placing Abraham mostly in the Intermediate Bronze Age (2350-1950 BCE). But, as I have pointed out in this paper, the MT sojourn figure is almost certainly in error. The middle column shows a computation with the same Exodus date (1 Kings 6:1 MT) and the correct 215-year Egyptian sojourn as given in the Septuagint (LXX). The right column uses an Exodus date of 1406 BCE as specified in the LXX (1 Kings 6:1) with a 215-year Egyptian sojourn. Both the middle and the right columns place Abraham squarely in Middle Bronze II A/B (new MB I/II; 2000-1600 BCE).