

H. "FORTY YEARS" AFTER WHAT?

Having presented the tabular outline of David's chronology, a persisting problem with regard to his time frame may now be addressed. The anomaly is found in II Samuel 15:6-7:

And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel (the context). And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron.

Many of the modern translations have followed the Syriac version and read "after four days" even though every extant Hebrew manuscript reads "forty". Admittedly, two of the Hebrew manuscripts have the novel, yet obviously erroneous, rendering "forty days" rather than "forty years". However, as it is impossible that Absalom could have won the hearts of all Israel in so short a time, all scholarship has conceded that this is a corrupted reading of the text.

Nearly all commentaries conclude that the "forty" is also corrupt, but they discount that God has promised many times to preserve His Word. Accordingly, we shall exercise faith in those promises and proclaim with absolute calm assurance that "forty" is the correct reading. Moreover, a so-called "scribal" error is not an acceptable solution as the Hebrew word for "four" (aleph-beth-resh-ain = urba) is significantly different from the Hebrew "forty" (aleph-resh-beth-ain-jod-mem = myubra). For the sake of clarity, the following exegesis is given in a somewhat different format from the norm.

QUESTION: Since 40 is the correct number, to what does it refer?

CONSIDERATIONS:

1. the 40th year of David's reign?
2. Absalom's age?
3. David's age?
4. the years Absalom politicked at the gate?
5. Other?

PERTINENT FACTS:

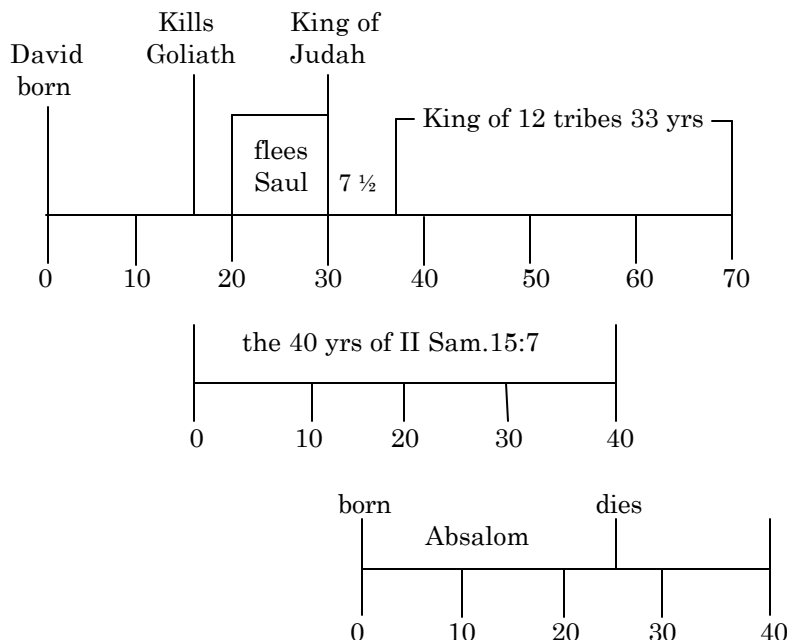
- a. David reigned 40 years (II Sam.5:4-5)
- b. David began to reign over Judah at age 30 (II Sam.5:4)
- c. David reigned 40 years, whereupon he died at age 70 (30+40; II Sam.5:4)
- d. Absalom was the third son born to David at Hebron during the first 7½ years of his rule (II Sam.3:3; cp. I Chr.3:1-4; David was about 33 years old at the time)
- e. Thus, Absalom's "potential" age at David's death would be 70-33 = about 37 years (maximum age would be 70-31 = 39 if David's oldest 3 sons are born during the first year at Hebron).

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

The 40 years are:

1. Not forty years into David's reign for this incident did not occur at the end of David's life. II Sam.21:1 makes clear that a minimum of 4 years remained unto David for the famine and the census, not to mention the Temple preparations (cp. vv.9-10 and 24:8).
2. Not Absalom's age. We have already shown that Absalom's "potential" age at David's death would have been $70-33 = 37$ years old (or 39 max.). As we have also shown that the rebellion and death of Absalom took place at least 4 years prior to David's decease, Absalom's life span cannot exceed $37-4 = 33$ years (or $39-4 = 35$).
3. Not David's age. Were David 40, Absalom would be only about 7 years old – hardly the age of a murderer and the leader of a rebellion.
4. Not the number of years Absalom was at the gate winning the hearts of Israel for he did not live that long

SOLUTION: Under "Considerations", the answer is number five – other! The explanation is ascertained by deriving the context which is given in the sixth verse: "so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." That is, Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel from David and joined them to himself. When had David won over and bonded unto himself the hearts of the men of Israel? Forty years earlier when he slew the Philistine giant, Goliath, followed quickly by a succession of victories in the months that ensued (I Sam.18:5, 16, 30). The II Samuel 15:6-7 passage thereby allows us to closely estimate David's age at the time of Absalom's rebellion.



Thus the "forty" years is not an error, it is a major key in the chronology of David's life (tabular display, page 103 ff.). The Biblicist must exercise faith rather than doubt when he doesn't understand.

I. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Special attention is called to the derivation and Scriptural verification of the forty year wilderness journeys at the top of Chart Four just under the year "1500 BC" as well as the two computations which derive the length of time from the "Entry" under Joshua to the dividing of the land among the twelve tribes. They are worthy of perusal and reflection.

Again, Charts 4a and 4b confirm the "short sojourn" contention by applying Scriptures that deal with the lineages of Judah and Moses to the controversy. Here it may once more be seen that the God-breathed but oft ignored genealogies, apparently unused by most investigators, contain significant corroborating information which is capable of keeping the chronologist from going astray.

Despite all that has been presented and laboriously documented, most scholars have considered the era of the Judges as being the least precise of the chronological sections into which the Scriptures are usually divided, especially with regard to the explicit detailed dates for the individual events recorded. Doubtless, many will continue to so believe; however it is felt that the foregoing has Scripturally met and logically answered the vast majority of the principal points of historical contention and confusion. Yet it is not meant to be inferred that the author is convinced that some refinements will not be forthcoming as study and time continue.

Indeed, after all that has been said and done, this researcher considers the single area of least certainty and potential weakness that of the positioning of the eighteen year segment of vexation and oppression of Israel at the hands of the Philistines and the children of Ammon (Jdg.10:7). The reason for this relative ambiguity and hesitancy is largely due to a general lack of definitive Scriptural evidence upon which to base with assuredness a firm decision.

As Anstey pointed out in 1913, Judges 10:8 is a most difficult verse to exegete.¹ Thus it is at this juncture that this undertaking has of necessity departed from the point of maximum certainty and is left teetering between two uncertain alternatives.

The present interpretation has this eighteen year period concomitant with the judgeship of Jair. Many past chronologers have reached the same determination. This treatment has in its favor that it is consistent with the known case involving Samson's judgeship with relation to the forty year Philistine dominion as well as that involving those Judges prior to the interval in question.

The only real problem entailed with this resolution is that the natural progression in reading Judges 10 is that the servitude seems to follow the abbreviated story of Jair. Of course, this happens often both in Scripture and in everyday life as one cannot tell two happenings at the same time. However in this instance Jair is from Gilead (10:3), the very province mentioned as particularly being under Ammonite oppression (10:8, 17-18).

If these eighteen years should immediately follow Jair's twenty-two rather than overlap them so as to be inserted between Jephthah's fixed BC 1152 date and Jair, the net result would be that all the judgeships prior to Jair would slide to the left toward the secured BC 1444 date at which the land was divided among the twelve tribes. That is, each Judge would be pushed eighteen years farther back in time resulting in Cushan-rishathaim's initial oppression date becoming BC 1418 rather than 1400. Thus the Judges-Joshua chasm would be reduced by that same amount so that instead of its being a forty-four year gap as diagrammed, it would become only twenty-six years:

$$1444 - 1418 = 26 \text{ yrs. (Judges-Joshua chasm)}$$

¹ Anstey, *The Romance of Bible Chronology*, *op. cit.*, pp. 144- 145.

Insofar as the heretofore discussed problems related to allowing for a time span of sufficient duration for the remainder of Joshua's life after the division of the land unto his death, the rule of the Elders who outlived him, the story of Micah's priest and the tribe of Dan (Jdg.17-18), the story of the Levite and his concubine (Jdg.19-21), the subsequent forsaking of the Lord by the generation that followed the Elders, and the bondage to Cushan – a feasible solution could be managed. For example, if Joshua died around BC 1430, he would have been 49 at the Exodus (young) and 96 at the division of the land (old and stricken). This would leave at least 12 years for the Elders, etc. (1430 – 1418 = 12).

The main objection to this is that selecting BC 1430 is mere conjecture, an accommodation and nothing more. It may be correct, or at least nearly so, but for now it lacks any known method for confirmation.

Moreover, appeal to Josephus is no longer practicable as his twenty year statement from the division of the land (1444) to Joshua's decease (1444 – 20 = 1424 BC) would leave but six years for the elders and all that follows (1424 – 1418 = 6). This stretches credulity beyond that which this author can bear.

Thus, in the final analysis the present interpretation of the eighteen year period of oppression as concomitant with the judgeship of Jair has only in its favor that it is consistent with the known situation whereby Samson's twenty year judgeship transpired during the forty year Philistine dominion as well as the similar overlap condition found existing in those Judgeships which occurred prior to Jair and the twenty year statement of Josephus. True, this latter is an ancient historic link, but a most tenuous one upon which to cling as resorting to Josephus is hardly "thus saith the Lord".

It has been stated that there is a lack of definitive Scriptural evidence upon which to make a firm decision with respect to this matter. It is not intended that this be taken as a final assessment. This author is convinced that there exists such a clue within the bounds of the Holy Writ that will militate against one of these two solutions in favor of the other. He confesses that neither his arduous searching nor the Lord has as yet revealed that fact to him as of this writing; thus the investigation continues.

Finally, it should be noted that the beginning and ending of the Period of the Judges is marked by the judgeships of the two greatest such men, Moses and Samuel (Jer. 15:1, cp. Psa. 99:6). Nevertheless, this form of government which persisted about 300 years failed to keep the people as a whole in the ways of God. The heart of the majority was not after His paths.

Among the system's main shortcomings was that it lacked the ability to bring about sufficient personal accountability. Among the lessons learned is that, even with such outstanding men of God at the helm, man simply cannot govern man under a form of government where the leader lacks absolute authority. The final result of such an administration will always end in failure for it cannot bring the hearts of the people into submission to either the leader or to the God who appointed him. The inevitable result will always be that every man will do that which seems right in his own eyes (Jdg.17:6; 21:25).

Thus this 300 year trial, like the Patriarchal period before it, terminated having demonstrated conclusively the need for more authority to be invested in the uppermost representative's position. Yet even with that, the question still remains – can any form of human government really achieve such lofty goals as bringing mankind to love and obey his human regnant and God – to change his allegiance from self to God?

The period ends with the elders of Israel coming to Samuel and, being dissatisfied with the judgeship structure as a whole, demanding that he appoint a king to rule over them as was the manner of all the other nations about them (I Sam.8:4-5,19-20). Until this, God had been their unseen King, but

they were breaking His covenant, rejecting His laws and leadership, as well as that of His human representatives. To these sins, they now add the demand of a mere human to replace Him as king. Thus the next grim lesson begins.

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Exhort

You *can* know for yourself the identity of the 100% pure; inerrant, preserved *copy* of the Word of God by the aid of the Holy Spirit; the *Author, Superintendent and Teacher* of the Word of God. This is the promise of God and the witness of the saints.

"Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew [it] unto you." ([John 16:13-14](#))

"But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." ([1 John 2:27](#))

[Francis Turretin](#)¹ 1623-1687 (brackets and emphasis mine):

*"By **original** texts, we do not mean the **autographs** [originals] written by the hand of Moses, of the prophets and the apostles, which certainly do not now exist. We mean their **apographs** ² [perfect copy; genuine original; 'authentical'] which are so called because they set forth to us the word of God in the **very words** of those who wrote under the **immediate inspiration** of the Holy Spirit."³*

God bless,

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"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." ([Revelation 3:11](#))

¹Gerstner, called Turretin, "**the most precise theologian in the Calvinistic tradition.**" *Turretin on Justification*' an audio series by John Gerstner (1914-1996) a Professor of Church History at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary and Knox Theological Seminary.

² Apograh means "**a perfect copy, an exact transcript**". This is the same witness of the authors of the Westminster Confession when they described their *copy* of the Word of God as 'authentical', which [Webster's 1828](#) dictionary defines as "**having a genuine original**".

³ Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992 reprint), 1:106, See also Robert Barnett, "Francis Turretin on the Holy Scriptures," a paper presented at the annual meeting of the Dean Burgon Society held at Calvary Baptist Church, Ontario, Canada, in 1995.

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"Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." ([Revelation 3:11](#))