Jacob’s Descendants Who Go to Egypt: MT Versus LXX

The names and numbers of Jacob’s descendants differ between the Masoretic Text (MT) and the Septuagint (LXX). Which tradition is more original, and what prompted the change?

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*A Desert Caravan*, Eugène Girardet, 1894. sothebys.com

How Many Descendants – 70 or 75?

Genesis 46:8-27 lists Jacob’s descendants who came to Egypt; in the Masoretic Text (MT) they total 70, whereas in the Septuagint (LXX), they total 75. In other words, the MT is missing five names found in the LXX. This variation is found elsewhere as well:

Exodus 1:5

According to the MT, Jacob’s descendants number 70:

שמות א:ה וַיְהִי כׇּל נֶפֶשׁ יֹצְאֵי יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב שִׁבְעִים נָפֶשׁ וְיוֹסֵף הָיָה בְמִצְרָיִם.

Exod 1:5 The total number of people born to Jacob was seventy. (Joseph was already in Egypt.) (NRSV)

In two scrolls from Qumran and in the LXX, however, they number 75.[1] The tradition of 75 is also found in the New Testament (Acts 7:14), and in Philo (*De Migratione Abrahami,* 199–201). Both of these sources reflect the LXX.

Deuteronomy 10:22

The MT, and most of the witnesses, testify to 70:

דברים י:כב בְּשִׁבְעִים נֶפֶשׁ יָרְדוּ אֲבֹתֶיךָ מִצְרָיְמָה וְעַתָּה שָׂמְךָ יְ־הֹוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ כְּכוֹכְבֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם לָרֹב.

Deut 10:22 Our ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now YHWH your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven. (NRSV adjusted)

However, one of the three important manuscripts of the LXX, codex Alexandrinus, reflects 75 in Deut 10:22.[2]

To complicate matters further, these five names are found in both the Hebrew and Greek text of Numbers 26. Which is the earlier tradition—70 or 75? And how did the one change to the other?

Manasseh and Ephraim’s Five Extra Descendants

In the MT of Genesis 46, Joseph’s only two descendants listed are his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Yet in the LXX, five additional descendants are mentioned: Manasseh has a son (Machir) and a grandson (Gilead), and Ephraim has two sons (Sutalaam and Taam) and a grandson (Edem):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Masoretic Text | LXX |
| Gen 46:20 To Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. (NRSV) | Gen 46:20 To Joseph in the land of Egypt were born *sons*, Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of Heliopolis (=On), bore to him. And to Manasseh were born sons, whom the Syrian concubine bore him, *Machir*. And Machir became the father of *Gilead*. And the sons of Manasseh’s brother Ephraim, the brother of Manasseh: *Sutalaam*and *Taam*. And the sons of Sutalaam: *Edem*.(*New English Translation of the Septuagint [NETS]* with adjustments) |

But which version is more original? And is either “the” original version?

Comparison with Numbers 26

The five names found in LXX of Genesis 46:20 are not exclusive to the LXX there, but are also found in both the MT and the LXX of the census of the Israelites in the plains of Moab in Num 26, as the shown in the following comparison:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Gen 46:20 (LXX) | Num 26:29, 35-36 |
| And to Manasseh were born sons, whom the Syrian / Aramean concubine bore him, Machir. | The descendants of Manasseh: of Machir, *the clan of the Machirites*; |
| And Machir became the father of Gilead. | And Machir was the father of Gilead; of Gilead, *the clan of the Gileadites*… |
| And the sons of Manasseh’s brother Ephraim, the brother of Manasseh: Sutalaam (=שותלח) | These are the descendants of Ephraim *according to their clans*: of Shuthelah, *the clan of the Shuthelahites*; [of Becher, *the clan of the Becherites*;][3] |
| and Taam[4] (=תחם). | of Tahan, *the clan of the Tahanites*. |
| And the sons of Sutalaam: Edem (=עדם). (*NETS*) | And these are the descendants of Shuthelah: of Eran, *the clan of the Eranites*. (NRSV) |

The lists in Gen 46 LXX and Num 26 (MT and LXX) are connected, since both contain similar names in virtually the same order (although the Numbers text continues into later generations).[5] The overall similarity suggests that the five additional names in the LXX of Genesis 46:20 are original to that text, since the other names in the lists are common to both as well. It is more likely to assume that the same literary connection that exists between the entire lists is also the connection between the references to these five names in Num 26 and the LXX in Gen 46. In other words, these five names have dropped out, or have been omitted intentionally, from MT Genesis 46.

The Problem with Ephraim and Manasseh’s Descendants on the List

It is most likely that this process was not accidental, but intentional, since in the context of Genesis 46, the five names pose a serious chronological problem. According to the internal chronology of the book of Genesis, at the time when Jacob and his sons descended to Egypt, Manasseh and Ephraim were too young to have children, and certainly grandchildren.

Genesis suggests that Joseph marries Asenat immediately after his appointment by Pharaoh (Gen 41:45). At this same time, the years of plenty begin (Gen 41:32). Joseph’s sons were born before the famine (Gen 41:50) and Jacob’s family arrived in Egypt after two years of famine (Gen 45:6), so Joseph’s sons are younger than nine years old at this time; they could not have had offspring at this age.

Secondary Use of an Earlier List

How then do Manasseh and Ephraim’s sons and grandsons make it into the LXX list in Genesis 46? It is not likely that someone would have added them to a list in which they were originally absent, thus creating an unnecessary chronological problem.

It is more likely that the author of Genesis 46 was using an earlier list and that the author/redactor of that chapter simply included the list as it was, and did not concern himself with the problem that some details of the list caused. This too points to the text of Genesis 46 in the LXX as original. But is the source of this early version of Genesis 46 LXX Numbers 26, or some other, lost list?

The Census in Numbers Is Dependent on the Name List in Genesis

Serah Daughter of Asher

The enigmatic comment ושם בת אשר שרח “The name of Asher’s daughter was Serah” in Num 26:46 suggests that Numbers is dependent on Genesis rather than vice versa. That Serah is included in the list of Jacob’s descendants (Gen 46:16) makes sense, since this list purports to count *every* descendent of Jacob who came with him to Egypt. In Numbers, however, Serah is out of place, since this is a list of the clans of Asher for the purpose of the census, and Serah, as a woman, was not the mother of her own clan. Her name was mechanically copied from the Genesis to Numbers.

This problem of Serah’s presence in Numbers was already noted by the rabbis. Rashi, for example, suggests that Serah was listed in Numbers because she was actually still alive at the time:

ושם בת אשר שרח – לפי שהיתה קיימת בחיים מנאה כאן:

The name of Asher’s daughter is Serah – since she was still alive, [the verse] counts her here.[6]

This midrash, however, does not explain the appearance of such a detail in a census account which does not relate to personal figures. A more likely explanation is that Numbers 26 is heavily based on Gen 46, and the author of Numbers 26 copied this detail from Genesis 46.

Manasseh’s Aramean Concubine

Other evidence as well supports this direction of borrowing.[7] For example, one detail that appears in the LXX version of Genesis 46:20, which does not appear in any version of Numbers 26, is the reference noted above to Machir’s mother having been Manasseh’s Aramean concubine. The fact that this detail does *not* appear in Num 26 in any version, suggests two things:

* Numbers 26 is derivative of Genesis 46, and that it left out the comment on the concubine, as well as other details such as the name of Joseph’s wife (v. 20), Asenat.[8]
* That the comment about the concubine in the LXX is original and was cut (accidentally or intentionally from the MT.[9]

LXX Genesis 46 as the Most Original Extant List

The LXX version of the name list in Genesis 46 is the most original extant list. This text served as a source for the expanded census account in Numbers 26. And thus, in the oldest form of Genesis, Jacob had 75, and not just 70, descendants. But what then is the origin of the number 70? In other words, why did MT of Genesis 46 omit the sons and grandsons of Manasseh and Ephraim, and cut the number down by 5?

Deuteronomy 10:22, which notes that Jacob had 70 descendants, may have played a role in the development of MT of Genesis 46. Although the number 70 there may have originally intended as a round, even typological number, perhaps an editor took it literally, and intentionally omitted five names from the list of Genesis 46. But even if this is a factor in the development of MT Genesis 46, why were these five particular names omitted?

As noted above, according to the chronology in Genesis, Manasseh and Ephraim were too young to bear offspring at the time of their grandfather’s descent to Egypt. Observing this problem, a copyist deleted the problematic passage, containing the birth of these later generations, and changed the sum total to 70 in Gen 46 and Exod 1.

Changing Benjamin’s Grandsons to Sons

Further careful comparison between the LXX and MT of Genesis 46 supports the notion that LXX is more original, and has been “corrected” by an editor responsible for MT. In both versions of Benjamin’s descendants in Gen 46:21, Benjamin has 10 descendants. According to the MT all of them are his direct sons, whereas in the LXX three are sons, six are grandsons, and the tenth is a great grandson. Which version is likely more original? While no apparent reason exists to make the MT’s one generation’s worth of descendants into a multi-generation list, good reason exists to do just the opposite.

Joseph Was 39: How Old Was Benjamin?

Joseph was 30 before the years of plenty began (Gen 41:26) and from then until Jacob’s family came to Egypt 9 years passed, seven of the satiety and two of the famine (Gen 45:6). Thus, Joseph, the elder brother of Benjamin, was only 39 at the time of the Jacob’s descent to Egypt.

According to Genesis, Benjamin was born at least 6 years after Joseph. After the account of Joseph’s birth (Gen 30:23), Jacob continued to work for Laban for 6 years (Gen 31:41). Benjamin is born when Jacob’s family had already returned to Canaan (Gen 35:16-18). Thus, the oldest Benjamin could have been when he came to Egypt with his father is 33. At such an age, it is highly unlikely that he would have grandchildren, let alone a great grandson. It seems reasonable that a later scribe, realizing this problem, changed the structure of Benjamin’s list from multi-generational to one generation.[10]

The Method of the Redactor of the MT

The issues just noted suggest that the LXX’s version reflects the original form of the list for both Joseph’s descendants and Benjamin’s, and that the MT was reworked by a scribe or scribes concerned with the chronological problems presented by this list in its current context in Genesis. This scribe or these scribes deleted Manasseh and Ephraim’s sons and grandsons, changed all of Benjamin’s descendants into sons, and adjusted the total number of Jacob’s descendants coming to Egypt from 75 to 70.

The Origin of the List

We are thus left with the distinct impression that the list was *not* composed for its current context as a list of the descendants of Jacob that moved to Egypt. An author of this Gen 46 has inserted an earlier, pre-existent list. The LXX of Gen 46 is an early form of the list, which has been secondarily adjusted to its context in MT.

Fiddling with the Number of Leah’s Descendants

Further evidence that points to our author’s use of a preexistent list comes from the passage listing the descendants of Leah (vv. 8-15), which offers a sum total of this of 33 (v. 15), but only 32 names are enumerated! This suggests that an earlier list has been adjusted, although the Rabbis and medieval commentators resolve this problem through extra-textual means, by suggesting either that Dinah had a twin sister or that Yocheved was born on the way into Egypt.[11]

The Loss of Er and Onan

I suggest that in the original list, now lost, Er and Onan were included in the group of Leah’s descendants, and Dinah was excluded, resulting in the sum total of 33. At a later point, once the list became part of the story of Jacob’s descent to Egypt, and the tradition that Er and Onan died in Canaan became part of the book of Genesis, they needed to be excluded from the counting. This was accomplished through the redactional caveat, “but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan” (v. 12).

בראשית מו:יב וּבְנֵ֣י יְהוּדָ֗ה עֵ֧ר וְאוֹנָ֛ן וְשֵׁלָ֖ה וָפֶ֣רֶץ וָזָ֑רַחוַיָּ֨מָת עֵ֤ר וְאוֹנָן֙ בְּאֶ֣רֶץ כְּנַ֔עַן וַיִּהְי֥וּ בְנֵי־פֶ֖רֶץ חֶצְרֹ֥ן וְחָמֽוּל:

Gen 46:12 The children of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah—but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan; and the children of Perez were Hezron and Hamul.

Removing Er and Onan left the list two people short of seventy.

The Addition of Dinah

Although this loss was never fully made up, it seems that one scribe tried to partially ameliorate the problem by adding Dinah.

מו:טו אֵ֣לֶּה׀ בְּנֵ֣י לֵאָ֗ה אֲשֶׁ֨ר יָֽלְדָ֤ה לְיַעֲקֹב֙ בְּפַדַּ֣ן אֲרָ֔ם וְאֵ֖ת דִּינָ֣ה בִתּ֑וֹ כָּל נֶ֧פֶשׁ בָּנָ֛יו וּבְנוֹתָ֖יו שְׁלֹשִׁ֥ים וְשָׁלֹֽשׁ:

46:15 These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; in all his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three.

The words ואת דינה בתו interrupt the sequence between the concluding sentence and the sum total and are very awkward syntactically, suggesting that this phrase ואת דינה בתו is a late addition.[12] In addition, it is very odd that only one daughter is enumerated here, given that Jacob likely had several daughters (see Gen 37:35).

An Originally Independent List of Jacob’s Descendants

Thus, the earliest authors of Gen 46 did not compose the list, but used an earlier list of Jacob’s 75 descendants. I would postulate that this list’s original context was as the continuation of the fragment אלה תולדות יעקב in Gen 37:2; in its current context only Joseph is mentioned here! When this list was moved and became interwoven into its current context was it changed in a variety of ways.

In the first stage, Er and Onan, who had died in Canaan, were excluded from the tally, and Dinah, who was not mentioned in the original list—was added. (The same editor added the phrase בניו ובנותיו in v. 15, so the addition of Dinah would be less conspicuous.) These changes were made at an early stage, and are found in all of the textual witnesses, including the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint, and the Samaritan Pentateuch.

In a second stage, the redactors of the MT made several changes to resolve chronological problems presented by the insertion of this list into its current context. They deleted the passage of Manasseh and Ephraim’s descendants, and all the descendants of Benjamin, who ranged over three generations, were transformed into his sons. The number of Jacob’s descendants accompanying him to Egypt was then adjusted to 70.

The LXX, where the sum total of Jacob’s descendants who came with him to Egypt is 75, preserves an earlier stage than MT. In this version, Manasseh and Ephraim have sons and grandsons, and Benjamin has sons, grandsons, and even great-grandson, despite the fact that the very claim is—chronologically or biologically—impossible.

The Place of Genealogies in Understanding the Torah’s Development

Does it really matter if according to the earliest traditions Jacob has 70 or 75 children, or if various individuals were Benjamin’s children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren? Certainly not. The point of these remarks is to reconstruct textual history of the Bible, not the history of ancient Israel.

Such textual reconstructions are often most easily accomplished using “boring” genealogies, where it is easiest to see transformations between various texts, and to see and understand how and why genealogies change over time, as they respond to new textual contexts. This particular genealogy shows that the LXX in some cases preserves traditions that are earlier than the MT. It also shows that the well-known tradition that Jacob came down to Egypt with 70 descendants is a secondary tradition, having “downsized” the older tradition that 75 descended to Egypt.

[View Footnotes](https://www.thetorah.com/article/jacobs-descendants-who-go-to-egypt-mt-versus-lxx)

1. On this, see Marc Brettler, [“The Opening of Exodus in the Dead Sea Scrolls,”](http://thetorah.com/jacobs-descendants-seventy-five-dead-sea-scrolls/) *TheTorah* (2015).
2. This is likely a late harmonization with the other appearances in the LXX, namely Gen 46:8-27 and Exod 1:5, which have 75.
3. Just as Becher does not appear in the LXX in Gen 46, neither does he or the Becherites appear in the LXX in Num 26. Becher and the Becherites do appear in the Samaritan Pentateuch text of Numbers. As some commentators note the reference to Becher in v. 35 was mistakenly transferred from Benjamin’s passage (vv. 38-41), since Becher is Benjamin’s son according to Gen 46:21).
4. The Samaritan Pentateuch reads תחם instead of תחן and עדן instead of ערן. The first is like the LXX’s Vorlage (there is no expression of guttural letters like ח in Greek transcription) and the latter is a hybrid, somewhere between the LXX’s עדם and the MT’s ערן. These differences occurred during the early transmission of these names (*nun* and *mem* sound similar while *resh* and *dalet* look similar).
5. The majority of the divergences appear to stem from small mistakes in the process of textual transmission. For another example of these minor discrepancies in names lists, this time focusing on the family of Simeon, see [“What do Genealogies Teach us about Torah?”](http://thetorah.com/pinchas-genealogies/)*TheTorah* (2014).
6. See also, *Midrash Aggada* (Buber ed.), *ad loc.* For an analysis of the midrashic theme of Serah’s longevitiy, see the chapter on Joseph’s inaccessible bones in James L. Kugel, *In Potiphar’s House: The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (2nd ed.; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 125-155, esp. 133-134.
7. See my [“The Census of the Israelites on the Plains of Moab (Numbers 26): Sources and Redaction,”](https://www.academia.edu/10205399/The_Census_of_the_Israelites_on_the_Plains_of_Moab_Numbers_26_Sources_and_Redaction) *Vetus Testamentum*63 (2013): 238-246.
8. The conclusion that Num 26 relies on Gen 46 is reinforced by some other considerations, which this is not the place to deal with in details.
9. This can be demonstrated when comparing the Genesis genealogy with that of 1 Chron 7, which also contains a reference to this woman (v. 14):

דברי הימים א ז:יד בְּנֵי מְנַשֶּׁה אַשְׂרִיאֵל אֲשֶׁר יָלָדָה פִּילַגְשׁוֹ הָאֲרַמִּיָּה יָלְדָה אֶת מָכִיר אֲבִי גִלְעָד:

1 Chron 7:14 The sons of Manasseh: Asriel, whom his Aramean concubine bore; she bore Machir the father of Gilead.

Without even trying to fix this (evidently) corrupt verse, it is clear that it reflects the same tradition as the additional passage in the LXX of Gen 46. The similar wording testifies to a literary dependence between the verses, that is best explained by assuming the concubine existed both in the Hebrew *Vorlage* (=original) of the additional passage in the LXX of Gen 46 as well as in the Hebrew text of Genesis utilized by the Chronicler.

This supposition is strengthened by the fact that a similar formulation occurs in relation to Joseph’s wife (Gen 46:20), in this case in the MT as well as in the LXX:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The Birth of Joseph’s Sons | The Birth of Manasseh’s Son |
| ויולדו בנים ליוסף בארץ מצרים    אשר ילדה לו אסנת בת פוטיפרע כהן און את מנשה ואת אפרים | ויולדו בנים למנשה    אשר ילדה לו פילגשו הארמיה את מכיר |

This similarity strongly implies that the source for both texts is the same, in this case, the original version of Genesis 46.

1. It should be noted that in Numbers 26, although only 7 descendants of Benjamin are recorded (instead of 10), and the names differ somewhat, still, according to both the LXX and the MT, Na’aman and Ard are the sons of Bela, not the sons of Benjamin. Perhaps the editor of the SP (Samaritan Pentateuch), having noted this problem, erased the words “the sons of Bela were” from this passage, returning to Ard and Naaman to their “canonical” status of Benjamin’s sons.
2. See e.g. b. Bava Batra 123a-b:

בעא מיניה אבא חליפא קרויא מר’ חייא בר אבא: בכללן אתה מוצא שבעים, בפרטן אתה מוצא שבעים חסר אחד! אמר ליה: תאומה היתה עם דינה, דכתיב: ואת דינה בתו. אלא מעתה, תאומה היתה עם בנימן, דכתיב: ואת בנימין אחיו בן אמו. אמר: מרגלית טובה היתה בידי ואתה מבקש לאבדה ממני, הכי אמר ר’ חמא בר חנינא: זו יוכבד, שהורתה בדרך ולידתה בין החומות, שנאמר: אשר ילדה אותה ללוי במצרים, לידתה במצרים ואין הורתה במצרים.

See also Rashi, Rashbam and Ramban ad loc.

1. This conclusion leads to another one: The words בניו ובנותיו (his sons and daughters) in this verse are also a late addition. A comparison of this statement to the similar statements in vv. 22, 25 reinforces this second conclusion. These words were added together with the phrase ואת דינה בתו in order to emphasize that Dinah should indeed be included in the list.