

The Sojourn of the Children of Israel Was Four Hundred and Thirty Years

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They will afflict them (the Israelites) four hundred years (Gen. 15:13).

The sojourn of the children of Israel was four hundred and thirty years (Ex. 12:40).

The scriptures mentioned above are dealing with two different periods of time. Exodus 12:40 covers the period commencing with the covenant God made with Abraham while he was still living in Ur (cf. Ac. 7:2-4), up to Moses receiving God's law and commandments at Mt. Sinai, which is a total of 430 years. In contrast, Genesis 15:13 covers the time from Isaac's birth until Moses received God's law and commandments, which is a total of 400 years (Gen. 15:2-6; cf. Gal. 3:17).

Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring (while Abram was still in Ur; cf. Ac. 7:2-4). It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many; but, referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' which is Christ. This is what I mean: the law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void (Gal. 3:16-17; cf. Jn. 8:56-58; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added; RSV).

Consequently, the four-hundred-year period referred to in Genesis 15:13 would be from the time of Isaac's birth until Moses gave the law at Mt. Sinai. Therefore, "sojourning of the children of Israel", mentioned in Exodus 12:40, cannot be limited to the time they lived in Egypt. Instead, it was inclusive of the period that their

forefather Abraham journeyed after he left Ur (cf. Gen. 12:1-2). To reinforce that the Israelites were not under Egyptian slavery for four hundred years, an approximate timeline follows:

1) Joseph died at 110 yrs. (Gen. 50:22). Israelites were not slaves during this time;

2) As Joseph entered Egypt at approximately seventeen years old (Gen. 37:2-36), he would have lived in Egypt a total of 93 years.

3) As Benjamin was the youngest of the twelve sons of Jacob, he may have lived longer than Joseph and, as a consequence, that generation may have been in Egypt for over 100 years, but it is unlikely it lasted for more than 120 years.

4) Following the death of Joseph and his brothers (Ex. 1:6) a new Pharaoh came into power in Egypt (Ex. 1:8).

5) This new Pharaoh attempted to exterminate all the male Israelite babies following the death of Joseph's generation (Ex. 1:16).

6) Moses was spared from this murderous campaign when he was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2:9). At the age of forty, Moses fled from Egypt and lived in Midian (Ex. 2:15). Forty years later, he returned to Egypt and led the nation of Israel out of slavery.


7) As Moses died at the age of 120 years (Dt. 34:7), and as the Israelites were in the wilderness for 40 years, they would have left Egypt when Moses was 80 years old. Therefore, by adding the 120 years of Joseph's generation and the 80 years prior to the Exodus, Abraham's descendants would have lived in Egypt for approximately 200 years.

One Bible commentator calculated the entire period that the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt

as 215 years. The following is an excerpt from his comments on Exodus 12:40.

The sojourning (of the children of Israel) is quite a different subject from the dwelling in Egypt. This sojourning commenced with Genesis 12:1 (cf. Ac. 7:2-4) (The Companion Bible, p 90; see: Ap. 50. III; Ed. notes in parentheses; emphasis added).

There are two reckonings of the sojourning: one starting from the 'promise' to Abraham, Ex. 12:40, Gal. 3:14, 17 – 430 years; the other starting from the recognition of his 'seed'



...AND THEY CAME TO HARAN AND DWELT THERE. SO THE DAYS OF TERAH WERE TWO HUNDRED AND FIVE YEARS, AND TERAH DIED IN HARAN

Genesis 11:31b-32

(Isaac), Gen. 21:12. See: Acts 7:6 and Gen. 15:13 – 400 years. This dwelling in Egypt was only 215 years (see: Ap. 50); and is to be distinguished from the 'sojourning' (i.e. prior to entering Egypt), which was another 215 years (i.e. a total of 430 years) (The Companion Bible, p 90).

Even though the national slavery of Israel did not occur during the first +100 years they lived in Egypt, Jacob mentioned that he experienced various afflictions. As Jacob only lived in Egypt for seventeen years before his death (Gen. 47:28), these difficult times must have occurred prior to entering Egypt. This confirms God's prophecy that Abraham's descendants would have a difficult time while they sojourned among foreign nations and not just while they were in Egypt (Gen. 15:13).

And Jacob said to Pharaoh, 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage (sojourning) are one hundred and thirty years; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage' (Gen. 47:9; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added; NKJV).

In order to calculate the thirty years from the time Abram was originally given the covenant to the birth of Isaac, it is important to review some of the events during that period. First, it is important to establish that God gave His covenant to Abram while he was still living in Ur.

Now the Lord had said to Abram (previously, while Abram was still living in Ur; cf. Ac. 7:2-4): 'Get out of your country, from your kindred and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you' (Gen. 12:1; Ed. note in parenthesis; emphasis added). Following this command various preparations were made and Abram, along with some family members, traveled from Ur to Haran. After arriving at Haran, they dwelt there until Terah died,

...and they came to Haran and dwelt there. 32So the days of Terah were two hundred and five years, and Terah died in Haran (Gen. 11:31b-32).

Working back from the time of Isaac's birth, when Abraham was 100 years old (Gen. 21:5), to Abram's age of 75 years when he left Haran (Gen. 12:4), it would have taken Abram a total of 5 years from the first time he received God's command/covenant, while living in Ur, to the time he departed from Haran (after Terah's death). Therefore, it was thirty years in all. Of note, although Abram was originally given the covenant at Ur, God repeated it again a number of times (cf. Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17; 15:5, 18; 17:1-8).

In conclusion, rather than being contradictory the two scriptures in the heading of this study provide different starting points for calculating time. One starts with God's promise (or covenant) with Abraham, while the other commences with the birth of Isaac. Consequently, the Israelites were not slaves in Egypt for four hundred or four hundred and thirty years. On the contrary, they would have experienced differing degrees of slavery following the death of Joseph's generation. The greatest intensity was just prior to leaving Egypt under Moses. As Joseph's generation lasted about 100–120 years, the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt would have lasted approximately 80–100 years.

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