

A. Confirmation about the Heir (1-6)

3. The Revelation of God

-Peace:

"Fear not"

-Protection:

"I am your shield"

-Prize:

"Reward shall be...great."

4. The Reasoning of Abram

-Tested by Inaction

"I continue childless"

-Tested by Inequity

"Given me" points towards the fact that others had been given offspring.

Also points to his chief servant as the "heir"

-Tested by Inability

"No Offspring" - He thought it was impossible to have a child

Gen 11:30 - "Sarai was barren"

Gen 17:17; 18:12 - Abraham and Sarah laughed at the thought of their having a son of their own

B. Covenant about the Inheritance (7-21)

1. The Declaration for Abram

-The Power of God

"Brought you out from Ur"
Gen 12:1

-The Promise of God

"Give you this land"

2. The Desire of Abram

"How am I to know...?"

Not all inquiries of God are the same:

Luke 1:18 "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years."

Luke 1:34 "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "***Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.***"

²But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for ***I continue childless***, and the ***heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?***"

<- Likely his chief servant

³And Abram said, "Behold, you have ***given me no offspring***, and a member of my household will be my heir."

⁴And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; ***your very own son shall be your heir.***"

⁵And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and ***number the stars***, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "***So shall your offspring be.***"

<- Compare to Gen 13:16 "dust of the earth"

⁶And ***he believed the LORD***, and he ***counted it to him as righteousness.***

⁷And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans ***to give you this land*** to possess."

⁸But he said, "O Lord GOD, ***how am I to know that I shall possess it?***"

⁹He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."

¹⁰And he brought him all these, ***cut them in half***, and ***laid each half over against the other.*** But he did not cut the birds in half.

¹¹And when ***birds of prey*** came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

Your Reward Shall Be...Great

The promise regarding Abram's heir was previously given in Gen 12:2 and 13:16

1. The Reply of God

-Correction

"Your very own son shall be your heir"

-Comfort

"Number the stars...So shall your offspring be"

Gen 22:17; 26:4

2. The Response of Abram

-The Sagacity (wisdom)

"He believed the Lord"

Believed = אָמַן aman

The Hebrew word for 'believed' comes from the same root where we derive "Amen" (So Be It)

John 3:16 "Believes in Him"

-The Salvation

"Counted it to him as righteousness"

Righteousness = Being in a right relationship with God (i.e. Salvation)

Rom 4; Gal 3:1-9

To Give You this Land

The promise regarding the land was previously given in Gen 12:7 and 13:14-15

3. The Duty for Abram

-The Purpose

Obedience to God is part of our spiritual learning

-The Particulars

The actions of Abram were consistent with the ancient near-eastern procedures to ratify an agreement (Jer 34:18,19)

Neither Abram nor God immediately walked through the animals.

-The Problems

"Birds of prey"

"Great darkness"

4. The Disclosures to Abram

-Residing out of the Land

"Sojourners in a land that is not theirs"

Israel's suffering in Egypt (Gen 47 to Exo 12)

-Reposing in the Land

Dying in Peace

Living a Long Life

-Returning to the Land

"Come back here..."

Jos 3:14-17

5. The Demonstration Before Abram

-The Character of God

"Smoking fire pot"

"Flaming Torch"

Two parts of the same item - A portable clay oven.

Fire is often associated with the presence of God

Exo 3:2; 24:17

Deu 4:11; 5:4-5

-The Confirming of the Covenant

"Passed between the pieces"

Only God passed between the pieces of animal, because it was HIS covenant / HIS promise

He swore by Himself (Heb 6:13)

The covenant had no conditions

-The Contents of the Covenant

"To your offspring..."

Under Solomon, Israel realized more of this covenant than Israel did at any other time.

¹²As the sun was going down, a *deep sleep fell* on Abram. And behold, dreadful and *great darkness fell* upon him.

¹³Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be *sojourners in a land that is not theirs* and will be servants there, and *they will be afflicted for four hundred years*."

¹⁴But *I will bring judgment on the nation* that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

<- 10 Plagues -Exo 7:14-12:32
Great Possessions -Exo 12:33-36

¹⁵As for you, you shall *go to your fathers in peace*; you shall be *buried in a good old age*.

<- 175 years
Gen 25:7

¹⁶And they *shall come back here* in the fourth generation, for the *iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete*."

¹⁷When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a *smoking fire pot* and a *flaming torch passed between these pieces*.

¹⁸On that day the LORD *made a covenant* with Abram, saying, "*To your offspring I give this land*, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,

¹⁹the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,

²⁰the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,

²¹the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

400 Years

-Refers to Israel's entire stay in Egypt, from Jacob's arrival to the Exodus

-Possible this is a round figure, because **Exo 12:40** puts it at 430 years. (See also **Acts 7:6**)

-See notes section in electronic handout for more information

Iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete

-Amorites are representative of the people of Canaan

-Because God was long-suffering with the nations in Canaan, he delayed their judgment so they might have more time to repent (**2Pe 3:8-9**)

-Those who condemn Israel (and God) for the way the Canaanites were treated seem to forget that God gave them centuries to repent of their wickedness.

Passed Between the Pieces

-Those entering into a covenant would walk through the halved carcasses—meaning "may this happen to me if I break this agreement" (see Jer 34:17-20)

-In this case, only God in the form of a smoking fire pot and flaming torch passes through.

Your Reward Shall Be Great

Genesis 12:2 (ESV)

² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

Genesis 13:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

The Reasoning of Abram

Genesis 11:30 (ESV)

³⁰ Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

Genesis 17:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, “Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?”

Genesis 18:12 (ESV)

¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?”

Comfort – Offspring as Stars

Genesis 22:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,

Genesis 26:4 (ESV)

⁴ I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed,

Believe

John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that **whoever believes in him** should not perish but have eternal life.

539. אָמַן *aman* (52d); a prim. root; *to confirm, support*:—believe(26), believed(11), believes(2), bringing(1), carried(1), chronic(1), confirmed(5), doorposts(1), endure(1), enduring(3), established(3), faithful(21), firm(2), fulfilled(1), guardians(3), has assurance(1), have faith(1), have ... assurance(1), last(1), lasting(1), nurse(3), put your trust(2), puts ... trust(2), reared(1), reliable(1), stand still(1), sure(4), trust(4), trusted(1), trustworthy*(1), unreliable*(1), verified(1).¹

586 I. אָמַן (*’ā·mān*): v.; ≡ Str 539; TWOT 116—**1.** (qal pass.) La 4:5, note: other sources as 574; **2.** LN 31.82–31.101 (nif) **be faithful**, **be trustworthy**, **loyal**, i.e., pertaining to reliability, so a state or condition of being dependable and loyal to a person or standard, and so not fail (Nu 12:7); **trust**, **rely** (Jdg 11:20); **3.** LN 70 (nif) **be true**, **verified**, i.e., be in a state that conforms to a real situation, and so is certain and reliable (1Ki 8:26), see also domain LN 72; **4.** IFLN 34.42–34.49 (nif) **be established**, i.e., confirm a relationship with another (1Ch 17:24); **5.** LN 79.7–79.8 (nif) **firm**, i.e., pertaining to a surface that is not soft, or loose dirt (Isa 22:23); **6.** LN 59.44–59.47 (nif) **have enough**, i.e., pertaining to having enough of a supply (Isa 33:16); **7.** LN 67.78–67.117 (nif) **lasting**, **enduring**, i.e., pertaining to a duration of time, without reference to other points of time (2Sa 7:16); **8.** LN 31.102–31.107 (hif) **believe**, **put faith**, **trust**, **have confidence**, i.e., have faith as a believer in what God has revealed (Ge 15:6; Ex 4:5; Jnh 3:5); **9.** LN 31.35–31.49 (hif) **believe to be true**, **be confident of** (Ge 45:26; Dt 28:66)²

John G. Butler → “He believed in the Lord.” The word “believe” is “The biggest word in the chapter, one of the greatest in the Old Testament!” (Leupold). It means to confirm, to trust. It means to say “Amen” to what God said; for “The original Hebrew for ‘believed’ comes from a root whence we derive our ‘Amen,’ and we might paraphrase it by saying that ‘Abraham said Amen to the Lord’” (Griffith Thomas). Thomas adds that “‘Amen’ in Scripture never means a petition (‘May it be so’), but is always a strong assertion of faith (‘It shall be so,’ or ‘It is so’).” Leupold says that the form of the word “believe” in our text “would indicate that the permanence of this attitude is to be stressed: not only [did] Abram believed just this once, but Abram proved constant in his faith.”³

¹ Thomas, R. L. (1998). *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries : updated edition*. Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc.

² Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

³ Butler, J. G. (1993). *Abraham: the father of the Jews* (Vol. Number Nine, p. 106). Clinton, IA: LBC Publications.

Righteousness

Romans 4 (ESV)

¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? **“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”** ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;

⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

⁹ Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that **faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.** ¹⁰ How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, ¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was **“counted to him as righteousness.”** ²³ But the words **“it was counted to him”** were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Galatians 3:1–9 (ESV)

¹ O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. ² Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? ³ Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? ⁴ Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? ⁵ Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— ⁶ just as Abraham “**believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness**”?

⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

To Give You This Land

Genesis 12:2 (ESV)

² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

Genesis 13:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.

The Power of God

Genesis 12:1 (ESV)

¹ Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.

Desire of Abram

Not all inquiries of God are the same:

Luke 1:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ And Zechariah said to the angel, “How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years.”

Luke 1:34 (ESV)

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

Duty for Abram

John G. Butler → “Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” This seems like a strange thing for Abraham to do. But it really was not. The orders reflected the method used in those days to ratify an agreement. The method was so well known by Abraham that God did not have to tell him what to do with the animals, for Abraham knew immediately what God’s orders meant. “And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not” (v. 10). To ratify an agreement, animals were slain then cut in two. The two parts of each animal were laid in two rows opposite each other several feet apart. Then the parties making the agreement would walk between the parts of the animals. This would accomplish the same purpose today as our signing a contract. It confirmed each other’s intent to abide by the agreement; and it also implied that if they did not keep their word regarding the agreement, they or their livestock should suffer the experience of the animals.⁴

Faithlife Study Bible → **15:10 cut them in pieces down the middle** The animals are cut in half, and each half is separated from its partner. The most common word for “making” a covenant in the OT is “cut” (*karat*) a covenant. The ancient Near East has many examples of this type of covenant practice.

Ordinarily, those entering into a covenant would walk through the halved carcasses—meaning “may this happen to me if I break this agreement” (see Jer 34:17–20). The fate of the sacrificial animals is applied onto the participants. In this case, only God in the form of fiery pot and flaming torch passes through.⁵

Be Obedient → What is described in 15:9–17 was known in that day as “cutting a covenant.” This solemn ritual involved the death of animals and the binding of people to a promise. The persons making the covenant would sacrifice several animals and divide the bodies, placing the halves opposite each other on the ground. Then the parties would walk between the pieces of the sacrifices in declaration that, if they failed to keep their word, they deserved the same fate as the animals. (See Jer. 34:18–19.)

But Abraham’s experience was different. He killed the animals, laid them on the ground, and spent the rest of the day fighting off the birds of prey that were attracted to the flesh and blood. When the sun went down, Abraham fell into a deep sleep; and then God appeared to him and spoke to him. *But God alone passed between the parts of the sacrifices!* (Gen. 15:17) It was God who made promises to Abraham, not Abraham who made promises to God. There were no conditions attached; the covenant of grace came from the generous heart of God.⁶

⁴ Butler, J. G. (1993). *Abraham: the father of the Jews* (Vol. Number Nine, pp. 113–114). Clinton, IA: LBC Publications.

⁵ Barry, J. D., Grigoni, M. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Mangum, D., & Whitehead, M. M. (2012). *Faithlife Study Bible* (Ge 15:10). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁶ Wiersbe, W. W. (1991). *Be Obedient* (pp. 48–49). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Jeremiah 34:18–19 (ESV)

¹⁸ And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts— ¹⁹ the officials of Judah, the officials of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, the priests, and all the people of the land who passed between the parts of the calf.

400 Years

Exodus 12:40 (ESV)

⁴⁰ The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years.

Acts 7:6 (ESV)

⁶ And God spoke to this effect—that his offspring would be sojourners in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and afflict them four hundred years.

How Long Was the Israelites' Egyptian Bondage? (Apologetics Press)

by **Kyle Butt, M.A.**
Alden Bass
Bert Thompson, Ph.D.

[1] In Galatians 3:17, the apostle Paul stated that the Law of Moses (which was given shortly after the Israelites' exit from Egypt) came **430 years after God had made His covenant with Abraham**. However, Moses stated in Exodus 12:40-41 that the children of Israel **dwelt in Egypt 430 years**. How can both passages be correct when it seems clear from a straightforward reading of biblical chronology that a minimum of 215 years passed between the time God made His covenant with Abraham and the time the Israelites (through Jacob) entered Egypt—thus making it appear that the Israelites had to have been in Egypt **645 years** (215 + 430)?

[2] Additionally, information in 1 Chronicles 6:1, 1 Chronicles 23:6-13, and Exodus 6:16-20 allows for a maximum time period of 352 years. How, then, can it be stated that the Israelites were in Egypt **430 years**?

[3] Furthermore, in Genesis 15:13 Moses explained that the Israelites would be “sojourners in a land that is not theirs” for “**400 years**,” and Stephen used the same figure in his speech in Acts 7:6 when he said that the Israelites would be brought “into bondage” and treated evil “for **400 years**.” What is the truth of the matter? How, exactly, do all these passages fit together? How many years **were** the children of Israel in Egypt?

The Exodus of the Hebrews from the hands of their cruel Egyptian taskmasters is one of the most triumphant stories in Old Testament history. This event was the beginning of Israel's rise to power, and proved to the then-known world that the living God had chosen the descendants of Abraham as the people through whom He would bring the Messiah. The Exodus and its aftermath were so monumental, in fact, that it virtually overshadowed the history of the previous centuries.

But the exact length of the Israelites' “sojourn” has been in the past, and remains today, a matter of some controversy. Certain biblical passages (e.g., Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6) seem to indicate a length of 400 years for the time period under consideration. Elsewhere

(e.g., Exodus 12:40-41) the length of time appears to be 430 years. Still other information (e.g., 1 Chronicles 6:1, 1 Chronicles 23:6-13, and Exodus 6:16-20) places an upper limit of approximately 350 years on the time frame involved. In an article written more than thirty years ago (“The Duration of the Egyptian Bondage”), chronologist Harold W. Hoehner observed: “When one looks at the various passages of Scripture concerning the length of Israel’s bondage in Egypt, one immediately discovers that there are apparent disagreements in the biblical record” (1969, 126:306). In his discussion on Exodus 12:40-41, renowned commentator Adam Clarke noted: “The statement in this verse is allowed on all hands to be extremely difficult, and therefore the passage stands in especial need of illustration” (n.d., p. 358). Albert Barnes took the same position in regard to Acts 7:6 when he wrote in his commentary on that book: “Great perplexity has been experienced in explaining this passage, or reconciling it with other statements” (1949a, p. 121). Those “other statements” to which Barnes referred are the passages mentioned in the above questions. Can the “apparent disagreements” between these passages be resolved?

Yes, they can. However, some background information on each of these passages is required in order to understand the problems posed by the three questions above—and the solutions that we plan to propose.

First, we need to address the suggestion that there was a minimum of 215 years between God’s promise to Abraham and the entrance of the Israelites (through Jacob) into Egypt. Such a suggestion is correct. Various writers (e.g.: Barnes, 1949b, p. 343; Duncan, n.d., p. 4; Hoehner, 1969, 126:308-309; Mauro, n.d., pp. 26-27) have explained how the 215-year figure can be obtained quite readily from Scripture. By way of summary, the information appears as follows:

Later in this discussion, we will return to the problem of the alleged 430 years of Egyptian bondage supposedly having to be added to that 215-year period. But for the present, we would like to examine the problem of the limitation placed on the Egyptian sojourn by information found in such passages as 1 Chronicles 6:1, 1 Chronicles 23:6-13, and Exodus 6:16-20. Again, by way of summary, the information gleaned from these texts is as follows:

1. The text in Genesis 46:11 indicates that Kohath, the son of Levi and grandfather of Moses, apparently was born prior to Jacob moving to Egypt with his sons (Genesis 46:11). **If he had just been born** at the time, and **if** he sired his son Amram the **last day** of his life, then Amram could have been born no later than 134 years after the entrance into Egypt (rounding a 9-month pregnancy upward to a full year) because Kohath lived only 133 years (Exodus 6:18).
2. Amram (the father of Moses) lived 137 years (Exodus 6:20). **If** he had sired Moses the **last day** of his life, then Moses would have been born no more than 272 years after Jacob and his sons entered Egypt ($133 + 1 + 137 + 1 = 272$).
3. Moses was 80 years old when Israel came out of Egypt (Exodus 7:7).
4. Add that 80 to the 272, and the total is a maximum of 352 years. As Barnes noted: “From the account which Moses has given of the lives of certain persons, it would seem clear that...the **whole** time thus mentioned, including the time in which the father lived **after** his son, was only three hundred and fifty years” (1949a, p. 121, emp. in orig.). Thus the suggestion that these passages “allow for a maximum time period of 352 years” also is correct.

5. Additional information that delimits the number of years of the sojourn can be derived from a source completely independent of Kohath—Moses' mother, Jochebed. The Bible mentions her twice, the first instance being Exodus 6:20: "And Amram took him Jochebed his father's sister to wife; and she bare him Aaron and Moses: and the years of the life of Amram were a hundred and thirty and seven years." Jochebed is named a second time in Numbers 26:59: "And the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt: and she bare unto Amram Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister."

Clearly, Jochebed (who was born in Egypt) was the daughter of Levi, the sister of Kohath. With this information before us, let's "crunch the numbers." Eleven of Jacob's sons were born within a seven-year period. Remember that as a bachelor, Jacob worked seven years for Laban in order to "pay" for Rachel, but was tricked by Laban into marrying Leah. Then, he worked for seven more years in order to marry Rachel. At the end of this second seven years, he asked to depart from Laban with all of the children who had been born to him and his wives (Genesis 30:25). With Levi being the third son of Jacob/Leah (allowing approximately one year for the births of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi), he could have been only about four years older than Joseph, who was born near the end of the seven-year period. As Joseph was 39 when Jacob came into Egypt (he was 30 when he appeared before Pharaoh [Genesis 41:46], plus seven years of plenty, plus one more year before the famine was realized), Levi could not have been more than 44 or 45 when he came into Egypt. Levi lived in Egypt for 93 years (age at his death was 137 [Exodus 6:16], minus 44 [his age when he went into Egypt], which equals 93). **If Levi had conceived Jochebed on the very last day of his life, then Jochebed would have had to given birth to Moses when she was 257 years old** in order to get a period of 430 years for the sojourn in Egypt (93 years that Levi lived in Egypt, plus Moses' 80 years (Exodus 7:7) when he arrived to deliver the children of Israel— $93+80+257=430$). Recalling the fact that Sarah was only 90 when the miraculous birth of Isaac occurred, it makes little sense to suggest that Jochebed gave birth to Moses when she was almost three times as old as Sarah! Furthermore, we know that life spans were far shorter than 257 by this time, and that the 430-year sojourn does not (and cannot) fit with the genealogies—either through Kohath or through Jochebed.

Where, then, do the figures of 430 years and 400 years fit into all of this? Were the Israelites in Egypt 645 years? Or 430 years? Or 400 years? Or 215 years?

As we attempt to provide the answers to such questions, let us point out that **no one** has stepped forward to suggest that the Israelites were in Egypt for **645 years**. Such a view is indefensible in light of the biblical evidence, including (but not necessarily limited to) the scripturally imposed time limit mentioned above of 352 years. There are, however, two major viewpoints regarding the specific length of Israel's sojourn. The first suggests that the Israelites **actually lived in Egypt** for 430 years. This view has been adopted by Archer (1994, pp. 205-212), Keil and Delitzsch (1974, 2:29), Kitchen (1966, pp. 53-56), and Unger (1954, pp. 106,150), among others. Yet, as David Rohl observed in his book, *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest*:

In most commentaries or popular books on the Old Testament you will read that the Israelite Sojourn in the land of Egypt lasted four hundred and thirty years. However, this figure is by no means certain. In fact, there is clear evidence that the period of the Sojourn was no more than two hundred fifteen years (1995, p. 329).

Dr. Rohl is correct on both counts. The idea which suggests that the Israelites spent 430

years in Egypt is presented in “most commentaries or popular books on the Old Testament.” Nevertheless, there is “clear evidence” that the Israelites were in Egypt for only 215 years, not 430. [We will deal with the matter of the “400 years” of Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6 at a later point in this article, since it turns out to be a separate issue altogether.] This, then, is the second major view regarding the length of the sojourn, and has been adopted by such scholars as Barnes (n.d., p. 121), Clarke (n.d., 1:358), Henry (n.d., 1:322), Mauro (n.d., pp. 31-32), Rohl (1995, pp. 329-332), and Thiele (1963, pp. 166-167), among others. But why—in light of what appear to be clear statements of Scripture that assign a period of 430 years to the sojourn—do such writers suggest that the sojourn actually was half of that? An explanation is in order.

There is only one passage in the Old Testament that suggests a sojourn of 430 years—Exodus 12:40-41:

Now the time that the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt was **four hundred and thirty years**. And it came to pass at the end of four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of Jehovah went out from the land of Egypt.

Those who suggest that the sojourn lasted only 215 years believe—because numerous facts seem to demand it—that the time period of “the sojourning of the children of Israel” **begins with the call of Abraham** and God’s promise to him (Genesis 12:1-3), **and ends with the Exodus**. In other words, the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) sojourned in Canaan for 215 years, and their descendants lived in Egyptian bondage for an additional 215 years. The total, then, is the 430-year figure of Exodus 12:40-41 (and Galatians 3:17). In his commentary on Acts, Albert Barnes put it this way: “The question then is, how can these accounts be reconciled? The only satisfactory way is by supposing that **the four hundred and thirty years includes the whole time from the calling of Abraham to the departure from Egypt**” (1949a, p. 121, emp. added). In addressing the text of Acts 7:6 in his commentary on that inspired book, H. Leo Boles remarked: “Paul says that the law came four hundred thirty years after the promise (Gal. 3:17); so that **the four hundred years of Ex. 12:40 probably included the patriarchs’ residence in Canaan** (Genesis 15:13,14; Exodus 3:12)” [1941, p. 104, emp. added]. In his commentary on Galatians, Barnes wrote: “The exact time here referred to was probably when Abraham was called, and when the promise was first made to him. Assuming that as the time referred to, it is not difficult to make out the period of four hundred and thirty years” (1949b, p. 343).

But why is it “not difficult”? And what do we mean by our statement that some scholars believe the sojourn lasted only 215 years because “numerous facts” seem to demand it? What are those “numerous facts”? How can the 215-year figure be defended?

First, it must be admitted forthrightly, in light of the information given above, that there is a **maximum** of 352 years available for the sojourn in Egypt, whatever that sojourn might encompass. There simply is no way around that fact.

Second, Paul, in his epistle to the Galatians, reviewed the time element associated with the covenant between God and Abraham (given in Genesis 15) when he wrote:

Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He saith not, “And to seeds,” as of many; but as of one, “And to thy seed,” which is Christ. Now this I say: A covenant confirmed beforehand by God, the law—which came **four hundred and thirty years after**—doth not disannul, so as to make the promise of none effect (3:16-17).

In discussing Paul’s observation, Philip Mauro wrote: “Here we see that the 430 years began with God’s promise to Abram, made at the time he entered into Canaan at the age of 75 (Gen. 12:1-4) and ended with the giving of the law, which was the same year as the Exodus” (n.d., p. 27). As we have shown above, it can be documented quite easily from Scripture that the time from Abraham’s call to Jacob’s entrance into Egypt was 215 years. Rohl therefore concluded:

Various passages in the book of Genesis have led scholars to determine that the period from Abraham’s descent to Jacob’s arrival in the Land of Goshen was two hundred and fifteen years and so the Sojourn in Egypt (from Jacob’s arrival to the Exodus) lasted around the same length of time—in other words, circa two hundred and fifteen years (1995, p. 331, parenthetical item in orig.).

If the time period between Abraham’s call and the giving of the law (which occurred roughly three months after the Exodus) was 430 years (and Paul specifically remarked that it was), and if 215 of those years had passed **before** the Israelites went into Egypt (the time period from Abraham’s call to Jacob’s entrance into the land of the Nile), then that would leave only 215 years remaining for the Israelites’ sojourn in Egypt—which is exactly the time frame we believe the evidence supports.

Third, in Genesis 15:16 it was prophesied that the Israelites would return to Palestine during the lifetime of the “fourth generation”—which they did, according to Exodus 6:16-20, Numbers 3:17-19, Numbers 26:57-59, 1 Chronicles 6:1-3, and 1 Chronicles 23:6,12-13 (Jacob-Levi-Kohath-Amram-Moses). As Hoehner (who does not even agree with the 215-year view) admitted: “To fit four generations into a 215-year period is much more reasonable than a 430- year span” (1969, 126:309; see also Duncan, n.d.).

Fourth, secular research likewise has concluded that the Israelites remained in the land of the pharaohs for 215 years. David Rohl, a respected Egyptologist, is convinced that this is the proper interpretation of the facts. In his book, *Pharaohs and Kings*, he undertook the challenge of reassessing the century-old Egyptian chronology so that it could accommodate more accurately several new archaeological discoveries. According to his research, Israel went down into Egypt c. 1662 B.C., and was delivered by God through Moses c. 1447 B.C.—a span of 215 years (1995, pp. 329-332).

Fifth, there are other important historical and/or textual considerations that need to be investigated in this matter. For example, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus wrote that the Israelites “left Egypt in the month of Xanthicus, on the fifteenth day of the lunar month; four hundred and thirty years after our forefather Abraham came into Canaan, but **two hundred and fifteen years only after Jacob removed into Egypt**” (II. 15.2). Rohl observed in this regard:

Now, according to the statements of Josephus himself, he had access to very old documents formerly housed in the Temple of Jerusalem from which to draw his account of early Israelite history. Josephus lived in the first century A.D. and so his writings are dated hundreds of years before the Masoretic text of the Tanakh (Hebrew Old Testament) was completed in the fourth century A.D. If his source documents were genuine, then the information he gives for the duration of the Sojourn derives from a much earlier period than that employed by the Masoretes when they made their version of the history of Israel and a further several centuries before the earliest extant copy of the Masoretic text (1995, p. 331).

In the Masoretic text of the Old Testament (to which Rohl referred, and on which the biblical quotations given above have been based), Exodus 12:40 reads as follows: “The time that the children of Israel dwelt in Egypt was **four hundred and thirty years.**” Two other highly reliable biblical texts, however, strongly suggest that this translation is incorrect due to a critical omission. In both the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament), Exodus 12:40 reads as follows: “Now the sojourning of the children of Israel **and of their fathers**, which they sojourned **in the land of Canaan AND in the land of Egypt** was 430 years” (see Clarke, n.d., pp. 358-359, emp. in orig.). William Whiston, who translated the works of Flavius Josephus into English, included a footnote at the bottom of the page accompanying Josephus’ comment (quoted above in regard to the Israelites’ 215-year stay in Egypt). Whiston wrote:

Why our Masorete copy so groundlessly abridges this account in Exod. xii,40 as to ascribe 430 years to the sole peregrination [travel by foot—AB/BT/KB] 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, 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 (1974, 2:171).

Rohl suggested, however, that it really is not hard to say. In fact, he said:

It is fairly easy to see what happened in the interval between Josephus’ day and that of the Masoretes. During the process of copying down the original scrolls over the intervening centuries, a section of text something on the lines of “and in the land of Canaan” had fallen out (or had been edited out). This is confirmed by the Greek rendition of the Old Testament (the Septuagint or LXX) which retains the original, full version of the passage (1995, p. 331).

In his commentary on the Pentateuch, Adam Clarke discussed this at length:

...the Samaritan Pentateuch, by preserving the two passages, **they and their fathers** and **in the land of Canaan**, which are lost out of the present copies of the Hebrew text, has rescued this passage from all obscurity and contradiction. It may be necessary to observe that the Alexandrian copy of the Septuagint has the same reading as that in the Samaritan. The Samaritan Pentateuch is allowed by many learned men to exhibit the most correct copy of the five books of Moses; and the Alexandrian copy of the Septuagint must also be allowed to be one of the most authentic as well as most ancient copies of this version which we possess (n.d., pp. 358-359, emp. in orig.).

Rohl wrote in agreement:

The Septuagint was first written down in the time of Ptolemy I during the third century B.C. and the earliest surviving manuscript is again much older than the earliest surviving Masoretic copy. The Samaritan version of the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) is also considerably more ancient than the Masoretic scriptures and it too retains the longer rendition of the passage on the length of the Sojourn. Thus, three out of four sources for the book of Exodus state that the four-hundred-and-thirty-year interval represents the whole period from Abraham’s descent into Canaan all the way down to the Exodus of Moses and the Israelites from Egypt (1995, p. 331).

If Josephus, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Septuagint are correct (and there is good evidence to indicate that they are) in stating that “the sojourning of the children of Israel

and of their fathers, which they sojourned **in the land of Canaan AND in the land of Egypt** was 430 years,” then the alleged contradiction between Exodus 12:40-41 and Galatians 3:17 evaporates into thin air, and the 215-year figure for the Israelites’ sojourn in Egypt can be accepted quite easily as both credible and scriptural.

But where do the “400 years” of Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6 fit into this scheme? As God spoke to Abraham in Genesis 15 while the patriarch was dwelling among the terebinth trees at Hebron, the Lord said: “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them **four hundred years.**” Here, God was permitting His faithful servant—through words spoken approximately two centuries **prior** to Israel’s entrance into Egypt—to peek into the future of his descendants. Add to that the words of Stephen (in Acts 7:6) when he said, looking back on Israel’s history: “And God spake on this wise, that his seed should sojourn in a strange land, and that they should bring them into bondage, and treat them ill, **four hundred years.**” What is the meaning of these particular passages?

Some writers (e.g., Barnes, 1949a, p. 121; Boles, 1941, p. 104) have suggested that the 400-year figure represents merely a “rounding off” of the 430-year figure given in Genesis 15:13. But we think there is a much better explanation, and suggest that there is a **fundamental distinction** between the 430-year figure and the 400-year figure.

Notice that in Stephen’s speech he specifically stated that Abraham’s “**seed** should sojourn in a strange land.” In his book, *The Wonders of Bible Chronology*, Philip Mauro wrote:

But, in addition to this period of 430 years, there is another of 400 years, which also ended at the Exodus.... The period of 430 years includes the sojourn of Abram and Sarah. That of 400, however, begins with the experience of Abraham’s “seed.” This refers, of course, to Isaac in the first place; for in Isaac the promised “seed” was to be “called”; but the era is not that of the **birth** of Isaac, but that when he was acknowledged the “seed” and the “heir” by the casting out of Hagar and Ishmael. That took place at the time of the “great feast” which Abraham made the day Isaac was weaned (Gen. 21:8-10). This is an important event in the annals of God’s people, because of its deep spiritual significance, as appears by the reference to it in Galatians 4:29,30.

From the foregoing Scriptures we are able to arrive at the date when Isaac was weaned and Ishmael was cast out (whereby Isaac became the acknowledged “seed” and “heir”). For there is a difference of thirty years between the two periods. But we have already found that there were twenty-five years from the call of Abraham (and God’s “covenant” with him) to the birth of Isaac. Hence, deducting 25 from 30 gives us 5 years as the age of Isaac when Ishmael was cast out. There is no need to give at greater length the proofs concerning the 400-year period (n.d., pp. 27, 28, emp. in orig.).

As Hoehner wrote: “In conclusion, the 430 years went from Abraham’s call to the Exodus. The first 215 years was their sojourn in Palestine and the last 215 years in Egypt. The 400 years was from the weaning of Isaac to the time of the Exodus” (1969, 126:309). Our point exactly!

Some may ask, though, how the 215-year figure for the Israelites’ time in Egypt can be squared with statements such as those in Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6, which seem to indicate that the Hebrews would be “sojourners **in a strange land that is not theirs**” where their enemies would “**bring them into bondage**” and “**treat them ill**”? In his commentary on Galatians, David Lipscomb addressed this point.

The law was given by Moses four hundred and thirty years after this promise was made to Abraham (Ex. 12:40). Many interpret this to mean that they sojourned in Egypt four hundred and thirty years. **But they dwelt in tents and had no permanent habitation** during their sojourn in Canaan and Egypt and in the wilderness from the call in Ur until the entrance into Canaan after the Egyptian bondage (n.d., p. 231, emp. added).

Or, as Mauro stated: “This period of ‘sojourning’ of the people of God is reckoned from Abraham’s entrance into Canaan, for then they (Abram and Sarah, the beginnings of the family) became strangers and pilgrims (Heb. 11:8-13)” [n.d., p. 27, parenthetical item in orig.]. In Exodus 6:4, **Canaan** is referred to as “the land in which they dwelt **as sojourners.**” While it certainly is true that they were slaves in Egypt for a considerable period of time (215 years), their oppression actually began much earlier, and lasted much longer, than just those 215 years. In fact, it would be accurate to say that the oppression began as early as Ishmael, who was half Egyptian and who mocked Isaac, the son of promise (Genesis 21:9). In Galatians 4:29, Paul discussed Ishmael’s ill treatment of Isaac when he penned these words: “He that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit.” That “persecution” obviously continued, as is evident from the fact that Egyptians felt it was a great abomination to eat with Hebrews (Genesis 43:32)—even until the time that Joseph came to power in their country. Later, of course, the persecution culminated in the attempted destruction by Pharaoh of the Hebrew male babies during Moses’ infancy (Exodus 1:15-22). Thus, the “sojourning” and “ill treatment” did not occur **only** during Egyptian captivity, but actually had commenced much earlier.

Critics of the 215-year view, however, have suggested that the second 215-year period (i.e., the time spent in Egypt) would not allow for the population explosion that obviously occurred while the Hebrews were captives. Less than 100 went down into Egypt, and yet by the time they left, they numbered more than 2 million (based on the figures in Numbers 1:46; cf. Archer, 1982, pp. 378-379). However, C.G. Ozanne, in his volume, *The First 7,000 Years*, has shed some light on this criticism.

Of course, the standard objection to this interpretation is the census totals of male Levites in Numbers 3. In this chapter the total number of Kohath’s male descendants “from a month old and upward” is given as 8600 (v. 28), these being divided between his four sons, Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. Assuming that the total number is to be divided evenly between the four sons, Amram must have had some 2150 male descendants within a few months of the Exodus. At first sight this figure may seem well-nigh impossible. When, however, it is broken down, it begins to assume more reasonable proportions. Thus, supposing that Amram was born fifty-five years after the descent into Egypt and that forty years constitute a generation, it is only necessary to allocate seven males to a family to arrive at a figure considerably in excess of the desired 2150. On this reckoning Moses would have had 7 brothers (for he himself may be ignored for the purposes of this calculation), 49 nephews, 343 great-nephews and 2401 great-great-nephews within the allotted span. A total of 2800 is thus obtained, of which the vast majority would still have been alive to see the exodus from Egypt. Bearing in mind the greatly extended period of childbearing (Jochebed was about 70 at the birth of Moses), the practice of polygamy (which enabled Jacob to have eleven sons in seven years), and above all the astonishing fertility of the Israelite women on which the Bible lays special emphasis (cf. Gen. 46.3; Exod. 1.7,12,19; Deut. 26.5), the rate of increase here suggested should not necessarily be thought incredible (1970, pp. 22-23).

Thus, when **all** of the biblical information is considered, it is apparent that there is no contradiction between Exodus 12:40-41 and Galatians 3:17. Nor is there any problem in regard to Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6. As the late Bobby Duncan said when he ended his study of these matters, “Isn’t it amazing how the Bible clarifies the Bible?” (n.d., p. 4). Amazing indeed!

REFERENCES

- Archer, Gleason (1982), *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan).
- Archer, Gleason L. (1994), *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago, IL: Moody).
- Barnes, Albert (1949a reprint), *Barnes’ Notes—Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker).
- Barnes, Albert (1949b reprint), *Barnes’ Notes—II Corinthians and Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker).
- Boles, H. Leo (1941), *Commentary on Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate).
- Clarke, Adam (no date), *Clarke’s Commentary on the Old Testament—Volume I: Genesis to Deuteronomy* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury).
- Duncan, Bobby (no date), “The God of the Fourth Generation” (Adamsville, AL: Adamsville Church of Christ).
- Henry, Matthew (no date), *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible—Volume I: Genesis to Deuteronomy* (McLean, VA: MacDonald).
- Hoehner, Harold W. (1969), “The Duration of the Egyptian Bondage,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 126:306-316, October.
- Keil, C.F. and F. Delitzsch (1974 reprint), *Commentary on the Old Testament—The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).
- Kitchen, Kenneth A. (1966), *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (London: Tyndale).
- Lipscomb, David (no date), *Commentary on Second Corinthians and Galatians* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate).
- Mauro, Philip (no date), *The Wonders of Bible Chronology* (Swengel, PA: Reiner).
- Ozanne, C.G. (1970), *The First 7,000 Years* (New York: Exposition Press).
- Rohl, David M. (1995), *Pharaohs and Kings: A Biblical Quest* (New York: Crown).
- Thiele, Edwin (1963), “Chronology, Old Testament,” *Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan).
- Unger, Merrill (1954), *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan).
- Whiston, William, trans. (1974 reprint), *The Complete Works of Flavius Josephus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker).⁷

⁷ Butt, Kyle M.A.; Bass, Alden; Thompson, Bert Ph.D., *How Long Was the Israelites’ Egyptian Bondage?*, Apologetics Press, 2002, <http://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=6&article=796>

Reposing in the Land

Genesis 25:7 (ESV)

⁷ These are the days of the years of Abraham’s life, 175 years.

Great Possessions

Exodus 12:33–36 (ESV)

³³ The Egyptians were urgent with the people to send them out of the land in haste. For they said, “We shall all be dead.” ³⁴ So the people took their dough before it was leavened, their kneading bowls being bound up in their cloaks on their shoulders. ³⁵ The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. ³⁶ And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians.

Returning to the Land

Joshua 3:14–17 (ESV)

¹⁴ So when the people set out from their tents to pass over the Jordan with the priests bearing the ark of the covenant before the people, ¹⁵ and as soon as those bearing the ark had come as far as the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the brink of the water (now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest), ¹⁶ the waters coming down from above stood and rose up in a heap very far away, at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, and those flowing down toward the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, were completely cut off. And the people passed over opposite Jericho. ¹⁷ Now the priests bearing the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firmly on dry ground in the midst of the Jordan, and all Israel was passing over on dry ground until all the nation finished passing over the Jordan.

Iniquity of the Amorites...

2 Peter 3:8–9 (ESV)

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

The Character of God (Fire)

Exodus 3:2 (ESV)

² And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.

Exodus 24:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel.

Deuteronomy 4:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom.

Deuteronomy 5:4–5 (ESV)

⁴ The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, ⁵ while I stood between the Lord and you at that time, to declare to you the word of the Lord. For you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain. He said:

Confirming of the Covenant

Hebrews 6:13 (ESV)

¹³ For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself,