

Determining the “400 years” mentioned in Genesis 15:13

Begin with Genesis 15:13—

Gen. 15:12 -13

12 And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him. 13 And He said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;

The key is “thy seed,” which, in this case is Isaac and his descendants. The 400 years begins with the birth of Isaac and covers the whole panorama of that stated in the verse—a stranger in a land, PLUS the affliction in Egypt. (Not simultaneous, but concurrent.)

For “a stranger” in a land, look at the following:

Genesis 23:2-4 (KJV)

And Sarah died in Kirjatharba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.³ ¶ And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, 4 I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.

Genesis 37:1 (KJV)

And Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.

Genesis 47:9 (KJV)

And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

Exodus 6:4 (KJV)

And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers.

Now compare Exodus 12:40-41 with Galatians 3:17-18—

Exodus 12:40-41 (KJV)

Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years. 41 And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt.

Galatians 3:16a, 17-18 (NASB)

16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed....17 What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. 18 For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise.

Note that the Law was given at Sinai 430 years after the promise given to Abraham. This takes us back to Genesis 12:1-3, which records that which God promised Abraham before he even left Ur.

Abraham would have been 70 years old at the time of the promise. (Note Genesis 11:26 that Terah begat his sons at age 70—obviously he did not begat them all in the 70th year of his life. It is referencing the first son's birth when Terah was 70. Terah's first son was Haran, not Abram. Notice in the following verses that Terah, Haran's son Lot, Abram and Sarai left Ur and settled in Haran. Terah died in Haran at the age of 205—Gen 11:32. Then reference Genesis 12:4 that Abram was 75 when he left Haran. Isaac was born in Garar when Abram was 100—Gen. 20:1; 21:5)

Let's also look at the genealogy from Abraham to Moses. Seven generations: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses. According to Genesis 46:11, Kohath (Moses' grandfather) had already been born when the Israelites went down into Egypt. Also, Amram, Moses' father, married his aunt, Kohath's sister (Exodus 6:20). In other words, the sister of a man who was alive and with those going down into Egypt under Jacob was Moses' *mother* (though undoubtedly she wouldn't have already been born at this time.)

Also, Joseph was 30 years old when he stood before Pharaoh at the beginning of his ascension to power in Egypt—

Gen. 41:46 ¶ And Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt.

And the Israelites came down into Egypt about 10 years later. Joseph lived some 70 years beyond that, during which there was no persecution of the Israelites—

Genesis 50:26

So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Ex 1:7-11 And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. 8 ¶ Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph. 9 And he said unto his people, Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we: 10 Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. 11 Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses.

Sometime between Joseph's death at 110 and Moses' birth 60 years later is the point Exodus 1:8ff begins. The Exodus from Egypt occurred in Moses' 80th year. Thus, the Israelites were afflicted in Egypt (as stated in Genesis 15:13) for a time between 140 and 80 years, no more and no less.

The promise was given to Abraham in Ur (Genesis 12:1-3) 30 years before Isaac was born (note that Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born, 70 when he received the promise). The sojourn of Abraham's seed lasted 400 years. The Israelites were in Egypt the last 210 years of that time, and they were persecuted in Egypt no more than the last 140 years of the 210, possibly many years less but no less than 80 years.

Exodus 12:40-41 counts time from the promise given to Abraham in Ur to the Exodus from Egypt under Moses seven generations later, to the very day—430 years of 360 days per year.

The total number of Israelite *men* coming out of Egypt was 600,000 (Exodus 12:37). The total of number of people including women and children is not given. We can only guess.