

# Genesis 15:12-16—God Reveals More Of His Plan To Abram: The Israelites Will First Be Slaves In Egypt

## Memory Verse

Genesis 15:6 NLT—*Justification by faith*

And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith.

## Introduction and revision—How does God teach us to learn to trust Him?

What have you noticed that God is doing with Abram? *God gives Abram promises, and then gives Abram the time and opportunities to learn to put his trust in those promises.* For example, the promises that Abram would have many descendants, and would inherit the land. Our study through Genesis chapter fifteen showed that Abram needed a lot of encouragement and support to believe these two promises, and so God did everything necessary to encourage and strengthen Abram in his faith.

Let's apply this life principle to ourselves. Below is a promise that applies to all believers, including Abram: *All believers will suffer persecutions when they choose to live a godly life, but God will deliver them out of them all.*

2 Timothy 3:10-12 NLT

But you, Timothy, certainly know what I teach, and how I live, and what my purpose in life is. You know my faith, my patience, my love, and my endurance. <sup>11</sup> **You know how much persecution and suffering I have endured. You know all about how I was persecuted in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra—but the Lord rescued me from all of it.** <sup>12</sup> **Yes, and everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.**

So here's what happens. God asks us to obey Him, even when it is hard. This includes obedience to God's moral commands (right and wrong, the 10 commandments), and also to follow and obey the specific instructions He gives to each of us individually as He guides us in our daily lives. God wants us to learn to trust the overall promise that whatever God asks us to do, whatever His will is for us, it is always best for us. Why? Because when we obey God:

- we will grow in our perseverance, character, hope and we will experience God's love in our hearts (see Romans 5:3-5).
- we will receive eternal reward (see 1 Corinthians 3:5-17)
- it will always work for our ultimate good (see Romans 8:28)

James 1:2-4 NLT

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. <sup>3</sup> For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. <sup>4</sup> So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

## Why do we suffer persecutions and trials?

When we do choose to follow and obey Jesus, it is seldom easy. There is usually always someone who will reject us, criticise us, mock us, or worse—many are even be killed for our faith. Often this persecution comes from our families and friends, and even from people who call themselves Christians. *Why do we experience persecution? As Jesus said, if they hate Him, then they will hate us.*

John 15:18-21 NLT

“If the world hates you, remember that it hated Me [Jesus] first. <sup>19</sup> The world would love you as one of its own if you belonged to it, but you are no longer part of the world. I chose you to come out of the world, so it hates you. <sup>20</sup> Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted Me, naturally they will persecute you. And if they had listened to Me, they would listen to you. <sup>21</sup> They will do all this to you because of Me, for they have rejected the One [the Father] who sent Me.

Do we, like Paul did, like Abram did, choose to push through, choosing to love and obey God even though it is often so difficult, trusting the promise that God really will come through for us, that in the end it will all work out for our good? If we do, then we will experience God’s promise, that He will indeed deliver, protect, and reward us. But if we don’t believe the promise, if we run away, disobey, or compromise, then the persecution stops—but *we never got to experience the miracle, the deliverance, God had planned to send our way*—we never experience His power working in our lives—we lose our reward. *We will never prove God’s promise to be true.*

*Why is it so hard to trust God? Understanding the two different things that we put our faith in, two different forms of trust.*

**There are two different forms of faith or trust - faith in the natural and faith in the spiritual.** Faith in the natural is based on long experience of what we can see and feel. We trust or have faith that the mechanic will fix our brakes properly or that the food in the supermarket will be fresh or that the doctor will give us the correct diagnosis. Now, even though we know that there is a small chance that they won’t, the majority of the time they will. So by continued experience we learn that the best thing for us is to learn to trust others and their promises unless we have a valid reason not to, e.g. someone or something has proven to be untrustworthy.

Now God always, always, always delivers on His promises. He never fails. So why is it so hard to trust Him? It’s because we can’t see Him and we haven’t **experienced or developed character** in trusting God. It is something we are not familiar with when we are new Christians or immature in our walk with the Lord. Romans 5:3-5 says that it is only as we **persevere** through the tribulation or trial that we will **experience** deliverance, which gives us hope or trust in God’s love and deliverance.

Romans 5:3-5 NLT

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance [perseverance]. <sup>4</sup> And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. <sup>5</sup> And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love.

Therefore, when we come to the next trial or difficult decision to follow and obey God, we are more likely to trust Him again because we remember, we have logged some **experience**, of when God delivered us or kept His promise last time. *Remember that our experience or character guides our future actions.*

“For example, you might say, “let’s try this new restaurant”. You take a risk and test the waters. If the experience is good and your expectations are fulfilled or exceeded then you would say; “that restaurant had good food last time so we will go there again.” Or if we put our faith or trust in a friend and they constantly let us down, then our experience tells us that we should no longer put our trust in them and we will turn to someone else. But if our

experience tells us that we can trust them, then we have more and more confidence in them and will turn to them more and more. It's just common sense, but it takes time for that trust or confidence in that person or thing to grow, and it involves taking a risk." (James Montgomery Boice)

A good example is learning to abseil—it's only once you have learned by experience to trust the harness and rope that you lose your fear and begin to enjoy the experience.

So we come back to our initial question: How does God teach us to learn to trust Him? The answer: God gives us promises in order that we might learn to live by trusting him.

"We all live by depending on someone else's promise? You enter into business, get married, take a job, buy a piece of property, and do thousands of other things because of someone's promise. Because we trust their promises, we act on them. We put them into practice. We act as if their promise is real and true because most of the time it is." (James Montgomery Boice)

Why is it so important to hold onto the promises of God? Why not just keep trusting in the things that we can see and feel and know and are familiar with? 2 Peter 1:3-5a tells us why. When we trust God and act on His promises, we partake of the divine nature which is how we escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. In other words, by following and obeying Him we become more like Him, and by default we become less like the world. Our mind is transformed and renewed. We love more and more the things that God loves and hate more and more the things that God hates.

2 Peter 1:3-5a NLT

**By His divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life [this is the promise].** We have received all of this by coming to know Him, the One who called us to Himself by means of His marvellous glory and excellence. <sup>4</sup> And because of His glory and excellence, **He has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share His divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.**

<sup>5</sup> **In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises.**

In summary,

1. It is hard, risky, and scary, to put our trust in something we have no or little experience with, or can't see or understand fully. The spiritual realm is unseen and we have no experience of God's promises being true before we become a christian. It is a new concept, and it also goes against our human nature or flesh, which by nature resists and hates God. *We all, like Abram, start our new life in God with weak faith.*
2. Our perseverance, character, hope, and love grow by *experiencing* that God's promises are true, but we will only experience this when we make the initial decision to trust or put our faith in that fact that what God commands us or calls us to do is the best thing for us.
3. The more we experience God's provision and faithfulness, the more we will trust Him and the more we will be like Him and the stronger our faith becomes—the more we experience God's promises to be true, the easier it becomes is to trust God's promises, and so it goes on—this is the secret to growing in our faith.

A modern analogy: *Reading the word of God is like reading a good review about something before we buy it, which gives us the confidence for the initial purchase. Then, if we find that the product or service was good, our level of trust goes up, and we are far more likely to buy from there again. So faith and trust in God grows both by reading the word of God (especially initially), and then also when we experience that God's promises are true.*

This is the continuing story of Abram's life, and it can be ours too. Will we continue to read the word of God, and so grow in our faith, and so learn to trust in God's promises and grow in perseverance, character, hope, and love?

### **Outline (Genesis 15:2-20)**

1. God reveals to Abram the future of his descendants—before inheriting the land, they would be slaves in Egypt. (vs 12-16)
2. Explaining the timeline of the birth of the nation of Israel—explaining the apparent contradiction (v 13)

### **Genesis 15:1-20 NKJV**

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward."

<sup>2</sup> But Abram said, "Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" <sup>3</sup> Then Abram said, "Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!"

<sup>4</sup> And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup> Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

<sup>6</sup> And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

<sup>7</sup> Then He said to him, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it."

<sup>8</sup> And he said, "Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?"

<sup>9</sup> So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." <sup>10</sup> Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. <sup>11</sup> And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup> Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. <sup>13</sup> Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. <sup>16</sup> But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

### **1. God reveals to Abram the future of his descendants—before inheriting the land, they would be slaves in Egypt.**

### **Genesis 15:12-16 NKJV**

Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. <sup>13</sup> Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. <sup>14</sup> And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. <sup>15</sup> Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. <sup>16</sup> But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

v 12 **Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him:** Abram is about to hear some news that he really didn't want to hear.

v 13 **Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years:** Often, God's purposes and promises are not fulfilled in the way we expect. God told David that he would be the king of Israel, then he spent almost 13 years running from king Saul. Moses was told that he would be the promised deliverer that God would use to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, then he spent 40 years watching sheep in the wilderness. God told Paul that he would be an apostle to the gentiles, but then he spent around 10 years in obscurity in Tarsus before Barnabas came and got him. God revealed to Joseph that his father, mother, and brothers would all bow down to him, then he spent 13 years as a slave and prisoner in a foreign land. *There is a pattern here. God must prepare us before He can use us—God needs to humble us before He can raise us up—we must learn to depend on God alone before God can use us for anything of significance.* This is also true for the nation of Israel—they would go through a period of suffering and persecution before being delivered by God—this was God teaching them to depend on Him and trust in Him.

v 14 **And also the nation whom they serve I will judge:** This was fulfilled when God judged the nation of Egypt with the 10 plagues at the hand of Moses.

v 14 **Afterward they shall come out with great possessions:** After God killed the firstborn of Egypt, the Egyptians were so scared that, when, at God's instruction, the nation of Israel asked of their Egyptian neighbours gold, silver, and clothing, the Egyptians gave them basically everything they had. You could say that this vast amount of wealth was payment for the years of slavery.

Exodus 12:35-36 NLT

And the people of Israel did as Moses had instructed; they asked the Egyptians for clothing and articles of silver and gold. 36 The LORD caused the Egyptians to look favourably on the Israelites, and they gave the Israelites whatever they asked for. *So they stripped the Egyptians of their wealth!*

v 15 **Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age:** God tells Abram that the future slavery would be after his time—Abram would die in the promised land, in peace. Abram did live to a good old age, 175 years old (See Genesis 25:7).

v 16 **But in the fourth generation they shall return here:** There would be four generations of Israelites in Egypt. For the first part of that time, things were good because Joseph was the prime minister or second in charge of Egypt. He saved Egypt from being destroyed by the seven years of famine. But after Joseph died, another Egyptian king arose who did not know Joseph, and he made the nation of Israel slaves, because he was scared of them, due to the fact they were increasing in number so quickly (see Exodus 1:8-14).

Exodus 6:14–25 gives us the details of the four generations.

1. Levi, the son of Jacob, who entered Egypt at the time of Joseph
2. Kohath, a son of Levi
3. Amran, a son of Kohath
4. Moses and Aaron, who were the two sons of Amram

Levi > Kohath > Amram > Moses and Aaron

## Why did God allow His people to be slaves in Egypt?

God planted His people in Egypt in order to prepare them for the Land of Promise. The first reason is that their suffering served a very important purpose. We talked about this in the introduction—*God must prepare us before He can use us—we must learn to depend on and trust God in the hard times, otherwise when God lifts us up our pride will destroy us.* Paul describes this principle in his first letter to Timothy.

1 Timothy 3:6 NLT

A church leader must not be a new believer, because he might become proud, and the devil would cause him to fall.

The second reason God allowed His people to be slaves in Egypt was to prevent intermarriage with the very sinful Amorites (the Canaanites)—the nation of Israel would have been absorbed or assimilated into that wicked culture. Consider that, in the land of Canaan, there were no cultural boundaries to stop the people of Israel from intermarrying with the people of the land of Canaan, and we see at times they did, with terrible consequences. For example, Judah in Genesis 38.

However, in Egypt, there was a cultural separation—the Hebrews were shepherds, and shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians, so that they wouldn't even associate with them or eat with them. Thus there would be no or very little intermarriage with the Egyptians, which was God's plan for them. He wanted them to marry within the nation, to remain pure, because marrying the people of the land without exception resulted in compromise, with the people of Israel becoming like the people they intermarried with. This is why the bible gives us such a stern warning about being "unequally yoked", whether it be in marriage, in business or even with the friends that we choose.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 NLT

Don't team up [be unequally yoked] with those who are unbelievers. How can righteousness be a partner with wickedness? How can light live with darkness? <sup>15</sup> What harmony can there be between Christ and the devil? How can a believer be a partner with an unbeliever? <sup>16</sup> And what union can there be between God's temple and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God said:

"I will live in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they will be My people. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. <sup>18</sup> And I will be your Father, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty."

7:1 Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete holiness because we fear God.

1 Corinthians 15:33 AMP

Do not be so deceived and misled! Evil companionships (communion, associations) corrupt and deprave good manners and morals and character.

v 16 **For the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete:** It took 470 years until the iniquity of the Amorites was full, until the sin of the Canaanites had risen to the place where God had no other option but to judge them. The sins of the Canaanites were horrific. They were a people who sacrificed their children, tortured each other, and practiced all kinds of gross sexual immorality—they were truly a perverted people. Yet in His incredible kindness and mercy, God gave them 470 years to repent and turn from their sin, and even gave them a witness - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob for the first 215 years (until Jacob went down to Egypt). But they wouldn't. So, like a rabid dog, they had to be exterminated not only in order that others wouldn't be infected by their debauchery, but also that they might be put out of their own misery.

I emphasise this point because the tendency for people who don't know this is to think God is cruel when they read His commands in the Book of Joshua to wipe out the Canaanites. However, nothing could be further from the truth. God is exceedingly kind, unspeakably patient. For four hundred and seventy years, He waited for the Canaanites to turn from their sin, to turn to Him. And how many people did? Only one family, Rahab's family, that we know of. God was patient enough to wait hundreds of years for Rahab and her family to be ready to believe, and now He's ready to see His people take over their land.

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Think about death bed confessions and conversions. Think about how gracious God is with us. God is so patient with us.

2 Peter 3:9 AMP

The Lord does not delay and is not tardy or slow about what He promises, according to some people's conception of slowness, but He is long-suffering (extraordinarily patient) toward you, not desiring that any should perish, but that all should turn to repentance.

## **2. Explaining the timeline of the birth of the nation of Israel—explaining the apparent contradiction**

**Genesis 15:13 NKJV**

**Then [God] said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years.**

*When did the exodus occur (understanding the time frame)?*

1 Kings 6:1 tells us that the Exodus took place 480 years previous to Solomon starting to build the temple. Since this was about 960 BC, the Exodus would have been about 1440 BC.

1 Kings 6:1 NKJV

And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.

*How long did the nation of Israel stay in Egypt?*

There are two views on how long the people were in Egypt. The problem is twofold. Firstly, there is an apparent contradiction as to how long the time was. Was it:

1. 400 years or,
2. 430 years.

Secondly, when did the clock start ticking (when did this time period start). The two options are:

1. When God gave the promise to Abraham, or
2. When Jacob went down to Egypt to live.

Let's start by looking at the first problem, the apparent contradiction. The answer is not all that complicated when we allow the Scripture to speak for itself (let Scripture interpret Scripture). What we will see is that the two different times refer to two different things. The 400 years refers to how long the oppression or persecution lasted. However, the 430 years refers to how long they were sojourning or wandering, before they inherited the promised land.

## 400 years of oppression and affliction

We already know that in Genesis 15:13 God reveals to Abraham that the nation of Israel would be afflicted for 400 years. This is repeated in the book of Acts.

Acts 7:6-7 NKJV

<sup>6</sup> But God spoke in this way: that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land, and that they would bring them into bondage and **oppress them four hundred years**. <sup>7</sup> ‘And the nation to whom they will be in bondage I will judge,’ said God, ‘and after that they shall come out and serve Me in this place.’

What we need to notice here is that the 400 years is associated with affliction and oppression. The question now is, when did that affliction and oppression start? Putting together Genesis 21:8-10 and Galatians 4:28-30 we see that the affliction, oppression, or persecution started when Isaac was weaned at about 5 years old. This was when Ishmael scoffed at Isaac—Galatians calls this scoffing “persecution”. The persecution ceased only when God freed the nation of Israel from their slavery in Egypt.

Genesis 21:8-10 NKJV

<sup>8</sup> So the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned.

<sup>9</sup> And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, **scoffing**. <sup>10</sup> Therefore she said to Abraham, “Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *namely* with Isaac.”

Galatians 4:28-30 NKJV

Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. <sup>29</sup> But, as he who was born according to the flesh [Ishmael] then **persecuted** him who was born according to the Spirit [or promise, Isaac], even so it is now. <sup>30</sup> Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.”

## 430 years of sojourning or wandering

Exodus 12:40-42 NKJV

Now the **sojourn** of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was **four hundred and thirty years**. <sup>41</sup> And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt. <sup>42</sup> It is a night of solemn observance to the Lord for bringing them out of the land of Egypt. This is that night of the Lord, a solemn observance for all the children of Israel throughout their generations.

Galatians 3:16-17 NKJV

**Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made.** He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. <sup>17</sup> And this I say, that **the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later**, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.

So what we see here is that there was a time period of 430 years from when God first gave the promise to Abram, to when the law was given.

To summarise: Paul says in Galatians 3:16-17 that the law was given 430 years after the promise was given. When was the promise, “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” given? When Abraham was 75 years old in Genesis 12:2-3. It is repeated and expanded upon in Genesis 18:18, 22:18, 26:4 and 28:14. The law was given in the first year that the children of Israel were living in the wilderness, in the year following the Exodus. So to make it clear, the time from the giving of the promise to Abraham when he was 75 years old, to when the law was given in the year following the Exodus, was 430 years. Despite this, some bible commentaries still say that the Israelites spent 400 years in Egypt.

### How long did the Israelites spend in Egypt?

“Galatians 3:17, however, suggests that the 430-year period was from the time of the covenant with Abraham until the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. This, in turn, suggests that Genesis 15:13 can be interpreted: “Thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and [all the people among whom they dwell, both Canaanites and Egyptians] shall afflict them four hundred years.” Similarly, Exodus 12:40 can be understood as follows: “Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was [altogether, that is, from the time of the covenant until they left Egypt] four hundred and thirty years.”

If this is the intended meaning, then the actual sojourn in Egypt itself would only be approximately 215 years, taking the entry of Abram into Canaan as the effective date of God’s covenant promise. This interpretation is also supported by the Septuagint translation of Exodus 12:40, which substitutes the words “in the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan” for the words “in Egypt.” In this case, the “four generations” could refer to the 215 years, rather than the four hundred years.” (Henry Morris)

Here’s the timeline that shows how the 430 years is divided up into two lots of 215 years—215 years in the land of Canaan, and 215 years in the land of Egypt:

1. God gives a promise to Abraham when he is 75 years old.
2. Isaac is born 25 year later when Abraham is 100 years old.
3. Jacob and Esau and born when Isaac is 60 years old.
4. Jacob is 130 years old when he goes to Egypt.

So we have 25 plus 60 plus 130 years = 215 years. This leaves 215 years for the 70 families (likely at least 200 people including wives and children) for the population to grow to around two to three million (about 600,000 men of fighting age).

It’s at this point that some may say, “there’s no way that a population of 215 can become 3,000,000 in 215 years, it doesn’t seem reasonable.” But a simple calculation shows that it is very reasonable, especially given the description we have in Exodus 1:7,12 But the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them. ... <sup>12</sup> But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were in dread of the children of Israel.

If we assume that one generation is 27 years, and each generation has an average of 7 children, then after 8 generations there would be over 3,000,000 people. To put this into perspective, the average Amish family has 6-8 children, with some of their populations having an average of over 10 children per family.

## Why couldn't the Israelites have been in Egypt for 400 years?

The main problem with spending all that time actually in Egypt is that there simply aren't enough generations.

Levi is already born and has a family and kids when he gets to the Egypt, as we learnt about in the closing chapters of Genesis. The bible tells us in Gen 6:14-21 that Levi died when he was 137 years old. His son was Kohath died when he was 133 years old, and his son Amram (Moses father) died when was 137 years old. Also, Moses was 80 years old when he led the Israelites out of Egypt. Now the bible doesn't tell us how old the fathers were when they had their children, but to stretch out the time as much as possible, let's make the unlikely assumption that in each generation, the son was born in the last year of the father's life.

So here's the math- Moses 80 years, plus Amram 137 years, plus Kohath 133 years, plus Levi, with a maximum of about 90 years in Egypt = 440 years. So it is theoretically possible, but would have required miraculous intervention on God's behalf, repeatedly making very old men and their very old wives fertile in their very old age. The text also seems to indicate that they had their children fairly young, as we read of them seeing their grandchildren and great grand children in some cases.

Also remember that all the text says in Genesis 15:16 is that after 4 generations they would leave Egypt, i.e. they would only be there for four generations, not that those 4 generations would cover 400 years.

## 400 years or 430 years?

Now we have looked at the first issue of when the sojourn started, let's look at the apparent contradiction: the 430 years vs the 400 years. Which is it. The answer is "yes" or "both". Let's have a look at the timeline to understand and find the solution to this problem.

So here's the timeline.

1. God gives a promise to Abraham when he is 75 years old.
2. Isaac is born 25 year later when Abraham is 100 years old. (Ishmael would have been 14 years old)
3. Isaac is weaned at about age 5. This may sound strange to you, but in other cultures child led weaning is the norm, which means that the mother keeps breast feeding until the child doesn't want it any more.

Here are some quotes that give some background to the age of weaning. There are many more like it.

"In biblical times, it was the custom to make a joyous feast on the occasion of weaning the child to give thanks to the Almighty that the child had survived the most perilous stage of infancy..This is learned from the feast prepared by Abraham on the occasion of his son's weaning. (Genesis 21:8) In talmudic times, it was the custom to celebrate the child's weaning any time from eighteen months to five years. (According to the school of Hillel, the child is weaned at eighteen months; according to Rabbi Eliezer, the child may nurse up to twenty-four months; according to Rabbi Joshua, a child should be allowed to nurse up to the age of five! (Kettubot 60)

Accordingly, we note that Samuel was weaned at the age of three, after which he was admitted into the services of the Temple.(I Samuel 1:24)" (<https://www.christianforums.com/threads/biblical-weaning-age.4386873/>)

“Some babies have a stronger need to nurse longer, and it still continues to be beneficial for the child. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF recommend that all children, in both developed and undeveloped countries, be breastfed a minimum of two years, or beyond, and acknowledge that the average age of weaning worldwide is about four years old.” ([attachmentparenting.org](http://attachmentparenting.org))

So now we can reasonably assume that there is a 30 year time gap between the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 12 to Isaac being weaned (25 years plus 5 years), which marks the start of the 400 years of persecution and oppression. 400 years + 30 years =430 years.

In summary, we can conclude that the persecution started 30 years after the promise was given. Again, this is supported by Exodus 12:40-42 which says that the sojourn or pilgrimage (not oppression) was 430 years, and also Gal 3:16-17 that tells us that there was 430 years between the giving of the promise and the giving of the law, which happened in the year following the Exodus.

So to summarise, the sojourn, or wandering in a strange land was 430 years, half or 215 years in the land of Canaan and the other half (215 years) in the land of Egypt. The first half covers the lives of Abraham from Age 75, All of Isaac's life, and Jacob's life until he was 130 yrs old, with the second half covering Joseph's life from age 39 on, and the population explosion in Egypt until Moses leads them out of Egypt.

Remember, an apparent contradiction is only apparent until we actually dig into the Scriptures and find the logical and reasonable explanation. The Bible can be trusted. God's promises are true. Though we can't see God, we must believe that He exists, and that He rewards those who seek Him, just like Abram did.

Hebrews 11:6 CSB

Now without faith it is impossible to please God, since the one who draws near to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.