

HERALD OF HOPE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q20) How long was Israel in Egypt?

Some people say that Israel was **430 years** in the land of Egypt and others say it was **215 years**. **Why the difference?**

When the children of Israel came out of Egypt it was, exactly to the day, 430 years from **the call of Abraham out of Haran**. This period was called *“the sojourning”* of the children of Israel. Abram, Isaac, Jacob and the patriarchs never possessed the land. Read Hebrews 11:8-15.

The Patriarchs could not possess the land of Canaan because the Amorites, who possessed the land, had not exhausted the longsuffering of God and become so wicked as to demand judgment. Abraham respected the Amorites and paid 400 shekels for a burying place at Hebron in the plain of Mamre the Amorite (Gen.23:3-20). He said to the sons of Heth:

*“I am a **stranger and a sojourner** with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight”*(Gen.23:4).

We read that Mamre the Amorite was *“confederate with Abram”* (Gen.14:13) and joined forces with Abram to rescue Lot and the people of Sodom (Gen.14:24) from the four eastern kings. Also, the king of Jerusalem at that time was **Melchisedek**, a priest of the **“most high God”**.

Possession of the promised land was delayed 400 years because God said, *“The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full”*(Gen15:16). It remained for Joshua to slay the Amorite kings when he defended the men of Gibeon (Josh.10:23). Abram was told he would go to his fathers in peace and not possess the land (Gen15:15).

Abraham’s seed were **afflicted 400 years**. He was in conflict with Abimelech (the Philistine) and feared him (Gen.20:1-18). Isaac also feared Abimelech (Gen.26:7), and Abimelech hated Isaac knowing that God was with him (Gen.26:26-33). There was also strife between Isaac and the herdmen of Gerar who filled in the wells that Abraham had dug (Gen.26:11-23). Then in the days of Joseph the children of Israel went to Egypt and became slaves to the Egyptians (Exod.1:8).

1) From the 75th year of Abram, **when he left Haran for Canaan and began to sojourn in the land as a stranger** (Gen12:4), until the birth of Isaac was 25 years. Abraham was 100 years old at that time. Then Isaac was 60 years when Jacob was born and Jacob was 130 years (Gen.47:9) when he went to Egypt. (25 + 60 + 130 = 215 years)

2) Since the total number of years from Abram’s departure from Haran till the Exodus was exactly 430 years (Exod.12:40), the time spent in Egypt could only be 215 years. (430 - 215 = 215 years) and two other Scriptures support this conclusion.

Of the 430 years, Abraham’s seed were to be **afflicted 400 years** (Gen.15:13) and their stay in Egypt was to be for **4 generations** (Gen.15:16). The four generations in Egypt were **Levi, Kohath, Amram and Moses**.

Levi lived 137 years, Kohath lived 133 years, Amram lived 137 years, and Moses was 80 years when he led Israel out of Egypt. **These ages allow for 215 years in Egypt but could not possibly allow 430 years** in Egypt.

History records that at the time Joseph was taken to Egypt the land was ruled by “shepherd kings”, and this is supported by Genesis 39:1-2 where it states that **Potiphar, the captain of the guard, was an “Egyptian”**.

If the Egyptians ruled at the time, that would have been an irrelevant comment. The shepherd kings, however, had employed **an Egyptian** as the captain of the guard.

In addition, when Joseph’s brethren came to Egypt with their flocks they were instructed to tell Pharaoh that they were shepherds, because *“every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians”* (Gen.47:28-34). The Egyptians hated the “shepherd kings” (possibly Hittites), therefore Israel would have favour with Pharaoh if they told him they were shepherds.

Joseph was secure with the shepherd kings, but when there arose an Egyptian Pharaoh who overthrew the “shepherd kings” Joseph fell from favour.

How long was Joseph in favour with the shepherd kings? We are not told, but we know he reigned

through 7 years of plenty and 7 years of famine. It is possible that the overthrow of the "shepherd kings" was after Joseph had ruled for 30 years, or about 16 years after the 7 years of famine had concluded.

Joseph was 30 years when he was exalted, and it was in the second year of the famine that Jacob came to Egypt, the ninth year after he was exalted. (ie 7 years of plenty + 2 years of famine - Gen.45:6). Joseph would have been 60 when the change of government occurred and he fell from favour.

The Israelites were made slaves because the Egyptians were afraid they would multiply and become a fifth column in their midst, assisting the "shepherd kings" should they return (Exod.1:8-12).