

The Church of God
(La Iglesia de Dios)

Four Hundred Years of Genesis 15:13-15 – By Don Roth

FOUR HUNDRED YEARS OF GENESIS 15:13-15 CLARIFIED

Most certainly the Bible is a book of truth. This truth is only obtained by diligent study. II Tim. 2:15. *“Be diligent to present yourselves approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”*

It is vital, when studying biblical events, especially prophetic events that one should consider all of the scriptures pertaining to what happened over the span of time involved. By following this method of study God will reward one with understanding. This is true that when looking at a prophetic event, such as Genesis 15:13-16. *“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. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.’”*

Abraham’s descendants will be *“strangers in the land that is not theirs.”* Do other scriptures define where these descendants will be “strangers?” Who are the descendants being spoken of, and what land is being referred to? By carefully studying God’s word the scriptures will reveal the answers.

It should be clear that there are many places where God tells Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that He is giving them the land. A point to remember is: When were they to receive this land? Something needed to take place before they received the land. This was explained in Gen. 15:7-8. *“Then He said to them, ‘I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.’ And He said, ‘Lord God, how shall I know that I will inherit it?’”* God answers Abram’s question in Gen. 15:16. *“But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not*

complete.” The land does not become their possession until the fourth generation and the Amorites degenerate morally. The following scriptures show that Abraham and his immediate offspring were strangers in the land that was not theirs at that time.

Acts 7:2-5, “And he said, ‘Brethren and fathers, listen: The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran,’ And said to him, ‘Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to the land that I will show you.’ Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran. And from there, when his father was dead, He moved him to this land in which you now dwell. And God gave him no inheritance in it, not even enough to set his foot on. But even when Abraham had no child, He promised to give it to him for a possession and to his descendants after him.”

Gen. 37:1 says, “Now Jacob dwelt in the land where his father (Isaac) was a stranger in the land of Canaan.” And in Gen. 36:6-7, “Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the persons of his household, his cattle and all his animals, and all his goods which he had gained in the land of Canaan, and went to a country away from the presence of his brother Jacob. For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together, and the land where they were strangers (both Esau and Jacob) could not support them because of their livestock.”

The question is: when did the Promised Land become the possession of Abraham’s descendants? It was when Moses and Joshua started conquering the Promised Land, and not before that time. Deut. 1:20-21, 39, *“And I said to you, ‘You have come to the mountains of the Amorites, which the Lord our God is giving us. ‘Look, the Lord your God has set the land before you; go up and possess it, as the Lord God of your fathers has spoken to you; do not fear or be discouraged.”* Vs. 39, *“Moreover your little ones and your children, who you say will be victims, who today have no knowledge of good and evil, they shall go in there; to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.”* God was in the process of giving them the land; it was not theirs yet.

Deut. 2:24, 31, “Rise, take your journey, and cross the river Arnon. Look, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land. Begin to possess it, and engage him in battle.” Vs. 31: “And the Lord said to me, ‘See, I have begun to give Sihon over to you, Begin to possess it that you may inherit his land.”

The ownership of the land by the Israelites began at this point, not before.

Notice two key words in the Genesis 15 prophecy; “serve,” Number 5647, and “afflict,” Number 6031. The word serve basically means to serve by assisting, but also may include the idea of slavery. The Bible translators used the word slavery in the Exodus story, and many visualize what they saw in the Hollywood movie THE TEN COMMANDMENTS, which is not what the Bible describes as the Israelite’s slavery.

The Israelites occupied their own area of land described in Ex. 8:21-22. *“Or else, if you will not let my people go, behold I will send swarms of flies on you and your servants, on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians shall be full of swarms of flies, and also the ground on which they stand. And in that day I will set apart the land of Goshen in which my people dwell, that no swarms of flies shall be there, in order that you may know that I am the Lord in the midst of the land.”*

The Israelites also owned livestock as shown in Ex. 9:3-4. *“Behold, the hand of the Lord will be on your cattle in the field, on the horses, on the donkeys, on the camels, on the oxen, and on the sheep – a very severe pestilence. And the Lord will make a difference between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt. So nothing shall die of all that belongs to the children of Israel.”*

The Bible states that the Israelites had just one job and that was to produce a certain quantity of bricks for the Egyptians. Ex.5:7-8: *“You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick as before. Let them go and gather straw for themselves. And you shall lay on them the quota of bricks which they made before. You shall not reduce it. For they are idle; therefore they cry out, saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to our God.’”* This does not picture how slavery is understood in our present day, but amounts to a type of forced servitude.

The first recognized descendant of Abraham was Isaac. Gen. 26:15-22. *“Now the Philistines had stopped up all the wells which his father’s servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, and they had filled them with earth. And Abimelech said to Isaac, ‘Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we.’ Then Isaac departed from there and pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham. He called them by the*

names which his father had called them. Also, Isaac's servants dug in the valley, and found a well of running water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, 'The water is ours.' So he called the name of the well Esek, because they quarreled with him. Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also. So he called its name Sitnah. And then he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it." If the water had belonged to the herders of Gerar then the land that produced the water also belonged to them, not Isaac.

First the Philistines stopped up the wells Abraham had dug. Next they sent Isaac away. Then the first two wells Isaac dug in the new area were taken from him and he was again forced to move. Clearly the land was not Isaac's – he was a stranger and sojourner in the land, meaning that this was the first generation *"in the land that was not theirs"*. Isaac was under a type of servitude to those who actually possessed the land.

The dictionary definition of a generation is: "The act or process of generating; procreation; reproduction; the fact of being generated; descent or genealogy." This definition of generations applies to individual families.

Isaac was the first generation of Abraham beginning at his birth. That generation lasted until the birth of his sons Jacob and Esau.

The second generation was Jacob until the birth of his twelve sons. The third generation was the twelve sons up until their offspring were born. The fourth was the offspring of the twelve sons of Jacob. This fourth generation would have been Moses, Aaron and Miriam. Ex. 6:20. *"Now Amram took for himself Jochebed, his father's sister, as wife; and she bore him Aaron and Moses. And the years of life of Amram were one hundred and thirty-seven."*

This scripture shows that Jochebed is Levi's daughter, and here is the beginning of the fourth generation which is confirmed in Num. 26:59. *"The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and to Amram she bore Aaron and Moses and their sisters Miriam."* It means that she and her offspring would be the fourth generation. They were the ones who came out of Egypt. God makes special note about tracking the generations through Levi's daughter and her family. The

Bible standard is to track families through the male, but here God uses a daughter because He wants it understood who constitutes the fourth generation.

The second word is “afflict,” number 6031 in Strong’s. The Complete Word Study Dictionary Old Testament gives the following definition of this word: “a verb indicating to be afflicted, to be oppressed, to be humbled. It refers to being oppressed, in a state of oppression. It means to bow down, to humble oneself, to be humble (Ex. 10:3; Isa. 58:10).”

The article “430 Years of Exodus 12:40 – The 400 Years of Genesis 15:13,” shows that the humbling of Isaac began in Gen. 21:9 and continued into his adult life. The Philistines had no respect for Isaac. They filled in the wells of his father after Abraham died. Isaac needed these wells for his people and animals and then they forced him to move.

In addition, the first wells that Isaac dug in the new area were taken from him by the herdsmen of Gerar as noted in Genesis 26:17-22, showing that he was under their subjection, a humbling experience.

As previously noted the other scriptures defining where the offspring of Abraham are called strangers are found in Gen. 36:6-7 and Gen 37:1.

There are many scriptures telling that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are being given the land by God, but at what point did they receive it? Several scriptures point out that they did not receive possession of the land while they alive. The offspring of the fourth generation would receive the promise of the land.

God makes the point in Ex. 6:20 of using Levi’s daughter and her offspring as the fourth generation. Levi was Leah’s third son. His birth year is not stated, but does fit into a time about the fifth year to the seventh year after Jacob’s marriage to Leah. Joseph was born at the end of the fourteen years of Jacob’s service to Laban, for Leah and Rachel: Reference Genesis 30, verse 25.

The years from Joseph’s death to the exodus can now be determined.

When Joseph died in Egypt at 110 years old, Levi was 117 to 119 years old. It appears that after the death of Joseph Israel came under servitude, due to the fact that Levi lived longer than Joseph.

Remember this prophecy says that his offspring would be afflicted four hundred years. It can be seen as the starting point of the affliction in Genesis 21:9. *“And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had born to Abraham, scoffing.”*

Now the number of years of slavery in Egypt can be determined by beginning to count the years forward from Genesis 12:4 to determine the passage of time to the death of Joseph. This would have been the earliest point of time to start to figure the slavery of Israel.

Genesis 12:4 Abraham was 75 years old when he left Haran.

Genesis 21:1-7 Abraham was 100 years old at Isaac’s birth.

Genesis 25:26 Isaac was 60 years old at the birth of Jacob and Esau.

Genesis 47:9 Jacob was 130 years old when he went to Egypt.

Genesis 41:46-47 Joseph was 30 years old when he gave the Pharaoh the meaning of his dream at the start of the seven years of plenty.

Genesis 47:9 Records that Jacob was 130 years old when he came to Egypt in the second year of the famine, making Joseph 30 years old plus 7 years of plenty, plus 2 years of famine, or 39 years when his father came to Egypt. Joseph’s birth year would be 130 minus 39, making the age of Jacob at Joseph’s birth 91. Joseph is the only offspring of Jacob that has his birth and death connected to a biblical timeline.

The following is a summary of time from Abraham’s leaving Haran to go to the Promised Land and Jacob’s arrival in Egypt.

Abraham was 75 years old when he left Haran, and 100 years at Isaac’s birth 25

Isaac was 60 years old at the birth of Jacob and Esau 60

Jacob age when he went to Egypt 130

This shows the elapsed time from the beginning of the 430 years to Jacob’s arrival in Egypt.

Total 215

Joseph died at 110 years – see Genesis 50:22. 110 minus 39 equals the 71 years that the Israelites lived in Egypt peacefully, (not in slavery) during Joseph’s lifetime. It took 215 years for Israel to arrive in Egypt. 215 years plus 71 years to the death of Joseph is 286 years. Beginning with the original 430 years, minus the 286 years equals 144 years of slavery in Egypt. These 144 years of slavery assume that it started at Joseph’s death.

Levi died at 137, which is either 18 or 20 years after Joseph’s death. Not knowing the age of Jochebed when she married Amram, or the year of her birth, means that the years until Moses birth cannot be definitely counted. He was 120 years old when he

died as stated in Deuteronomy 34:7. Subtracting 40 years of wandering shows Moses' age at the exodus as 80 years. The 144 years minus 80 years leaves 50 years for Jochebed to marry and have her first two children and the birth of Moses. Certainly this forbids the idea that the Israelites spent 400 years of slavery in Egypt, and clearly shows there were not enough years left in the lifetimes of Jochebed and Amram to give a total of 400 years of slavery in Egypt.

It now can be understood that Jacob's sons who lived past the death of Joseph were among the fourth generation under slavery in Egypt. The definitive factor is not the count of the four generations, but the 400 years and the 430 years.

Examining Ex. 12:40-41 it says: *"Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was 430 years. And it came to pass at the end of the 430 years – on that very same day – it came to pass that all the armies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt."*

The key to correctly understand these verses is that "it came to pass on the selfsame day." What was it that came to pass? They were leaving Egypt for the Promised Land; the land that God was giving to them. The meaning of this is that someone else had been doing the same thing; on that very day, 430 years earlier. This information is recorded in Gen. 12:4. *"So Abraham departed as the Lord had spoken to him, and Lot went with him. And Abraham was 75 years old when he departed from Haran."*

All the scriptures presented here support the statement that the Bible makes of the 430 years and the 400 years correctly documented in the article "The 430 Years of Exodus 12:40 – The 400 Years of Genesis 15:13."

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