**So what’s the deal? How long were the Israelites enslaved?**

**Answers in Genesis, Ref to Dr. Nolan Jones** http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2010/07/05/israelites-in-egypt

The answer is given by **Henry Ainsworth**, a British theologian from the early 1600s:

Henry Ainsworth, Annotations on the Pentateuch or the Five Books of Moses; the Psalms of David and the Song of Solomon (Glasgow, Scotland: Blackie and Son, 1843), p. 83.

Gen 15:13, Ver. 13. Knowing Know,] That is, know assuredly: see Gen. ii. 17. Not Theirs, Meaning Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Canaan itself; wherein they were but strangers, Gen 15:8, Gen. xvii. 8. Psal. cv. 11, 12. and therein afflicted. Gen 21:9, Gen. xxi. 9. Gen 21:7, 14, 15, xxvi. 7, 14, 15, &c. but chiefly in Egypt.

**Four Hundred Years, Which began when Ishmael, son of Hagar the Egyptian, mocked and persecuted Isaac**, Gen 21:9, Gen. xxi. 9. Gal 3:29, Gal. iv. 29.

Which fell out **thirty years after the promise**, Gen 12:3, Gen. xii. 3.

Which **promise was four hundred and thirty years before the law**, Gal 3:17, Gal. iii. 17.

and **four hundred and thirty years after that promise, came Israel out of bondage**, Ex 12:41, Exod. xii. 41. 2 (emphasis added)

When you think about it, this is an incredibly straightforward explanation that is provided by Scripture, but is ingeniously simplified by **Henry Ainsworth**:

Israel’s (the nation) “**affliction**” (Genesis 15:13; Acts 7:6) **started when Isaac was five years old and Ishmael mocked him** (Genesis 21:9; Galatians 4:29).

**Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years, Ex 12:40?**

However, another difficulty might seem to arise from Exodus 12:40 where it says, “The time that the people of Israel lived in Egypt was 430 years.” Is this a contradiction, error, or difficulty? Once again, this type of question actually reveals a very important, yet subtle way of thinking. It reveals how one approaches Scripture. If I am to come to Scripture and read a passage and ask, “Is that wrong?” I am revealing that I do not truly believe Scripture is without error. The proper approach, since it is God’s infallible Word, is to ask, “Since this cannot be in error, how is my understanding in error?”

Once we realize this, we can then look at the passage and realize that this statement made by Moses actually adds clarity. When we think of the children or people of Israel we typically think of Jacob, his 12 sons, and their descendants. Remember though, the promise was not made to Jacob, but to Abraham. What Moses is subtly pointing out is that the nation of Israel did not start with Jacob, but with Abraham (Genesis 12:2 reveals that the nation of Israel began with him). Therefore, this passage is including Isaac and Abraham in the nation of Israel. Also, 430 years prior to the exodus is when Abraham first lived in Egypt. There is no contradiction or difficulty. Simply put, the nation was named after Jacob/Israel, but it started with Abraham.

Dr. Floyd Nolen Jones also concludes in his The Chronology of the Old Testament that not only was Abraham a member of the nation of Israel, but that the 400 years of sojourning and affliction started with Isaac’s weaning at five years old when Ishmael mocked him.3

This point about Isaac’s weaning and Ishmael’s mocking 30 years after the promise is also concluded by James Ussher in his The Annals of the World:

Based on these verses (Ga 4:29, Ge 15:13, Ac 7:6), we conclude that this persecution started at this time when Isaac was five years old and Abraham made this feast. This was thirty years after Abraham left Haran. 4

For a more detailed look at when and in what order these events took place, and to learn a few other interesting facts, see the timeline below. One interesting fact, for example, is that Isaac was still alive (he was 168) when Joseph was sold into slavery.

**Table 1**: Timeline showing dates from God’s promise to Abraham to the exodus from Egypt.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Patriarch: Age** | **Event** | **Passage** | **Years from Promise** | **Years to Exodus** |
| Abraham: 75 | God makes the promise to Abraham and he leaves Haran. | [Gen 12:1–4](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2012.1%E2%80%934) | 0 | 430 |
| Abraham: 75-85 | God tells Abraham his descendants “will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there and they will be afflicted for 400 years.” | [Gen 15:13](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2015.13);[Acts 7:6](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Acts%207.6) | 0–10 | 420–430 |
| Abraham: 85 | Abraham has lived in Canaan for 10 years and takes Hagar as his wife and she conceives Ishmael. | [Gen 16:3–4](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2016.3%E2%80%934) | 10 | 420 |
| Abraham: 86 | Ishmael is born. | [Gen 16:15–16](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2016.15%E2%80%9316) | 11 | 419 |
| Abraham: 100Ishmael: 14 | Isaac is born. | [Gen 21:5](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2021.5) | 25 | 405 |
| Abraham: 105Isaac: 5Ishmael: 19 | Isaac is weaned and Ishmael mocks/persecutes Isaac. | [Gen 21:8–9](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2021.8%E2%80%939);[Gal 4:29](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Galatians%204.29) | 30 | 400 |
| Abraham: 140Isaac: 40 | Isaac marries Rebekah. | [Gen 24:1–67](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2024.1%E2%80%9367);[25:20](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2025.20) | 65 | 365 |
| Abraham: 160Isaac: 60 | Esau and Jacob are born. | [Gen 25:26](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2025.26) | 85 | 345 |
| Abraham: 175Isaac: 75Jacob: 15 | Abraham dies. | [Gen 25:7](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2025.7) | 100 | 330 |
| Isaac: 151Jacob: 91 | Joseph is born. |   | 176 | 254 |
| Isaac: 168Jacob: 108Joseph: 17 | Joseph is sold by his brothers and taken to Egypt. | [Gen 37](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2037) | 193 | 237 |
| Isaac: 180Jacob: 120Joseph: 29 | Isaac dies. | [Gen 35: 28–29](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2035.%2028%E2%80%9329) | 205 | 225 |
| Jacob: 121Joseph: 30 | Joseph is made secondin command by Pharaoh. | [Gen 41:46](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2041.46) | 206 | 224 |
| Jacob: 130Joseph: 39 | Joseph reveals himself to his brothers two years into the famine with five years left.Jacob meets Pharaoh. | [Gen 45:4–6](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2045.4%E2%80%936)[Gen 47:9](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2047.9) | 215 | 215 |
| Jacob: 147Joseph: 56 | Jacob dies. | [Gen 47:28–49:33](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2047.28%E2%80%9349.33) | 232 | 198 |
| Joseph: 110 | Joseph dies. | [Gen 50:26](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Genesis%2050.26) | 286 | 144 |
|   | Only 64 years pass from the time Joseph dies to when Moses is born. | [Ex 6:16–20](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Exodus%206.16%E2%80%9320) |   |   |
| Moses: 3 months | Moses is placed in a basket and adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter. | [Ex 2](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Exodus%202) | 350 | 80 |
| Moses: 80 | Moses and Aaron speak to Pharaoh beginning the exodus from Egypt. | [Ex 7:7](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Exodus%207.7);[Ex12:40–41](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Exodus%2012.40%E2%80%9341);[Gal 3:16–17](http://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Galatians%203.16%E2%80%9317) | 430 | 0 |