

CHAPTER 6

A CHRONOLOGICAL MYSTERY SOLVED!

The importance of understanding the life of the Patriarch Jacob

One of the most important and intriguing truths found in your Bible is that all we find in the scriptures is *the real truth*, but often God doesn't make *the truth so easy to find!* Sometimes we must put on a "detective's hat" and play the role of "Sherlock Homes" to solve a mystery in certain aspects of understanding, especially on our studies into ancient history and chronological facts. Of course, the real answer is the power of the Holy Spirit that reveals these solutions!

A most thought-provoking footnote is given in the NIV Bible under Gen. 11:27 B 25:11 and is well worth including in this Chapter:

"With God's calling of Abram out of the post-Babel peoples, the story of God's ways with humankind shifts focus from universal history to the history of God's relationship with a particular person and people. Here begins the history of his saving work in which human sin is not only judged (the flood) or restrained (Babel) but forgiven (through atonement) and overcome (through the purifying of human hearts). Throughout the rest of the Scripture the unfolding of this history remains the golden thread and central theme. Its final outcome is made sure through Jesus Christ, 'the son of Abraham' (Lk 3:33; see also Mt 1:1-17; Gal 3:16)—which is the core message of the NT."

To begin this Chapter, we need to revisit briefly the life of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the father of Jacob who grew into the great nation of Israel.

Isaac

2108 A.M., Isaac

The scriptures state that Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born, and the twins Esau and Jacob were born when Isaac was 60 years old. This brings us down to one of the big "mysteries" in the lives of the patriarchs: When was Jacob married to the two daughters of Laban, Leah and Rachel, and when was Joseph born? Up until now important birth and marriage data has been supplied in your Bible, but the scriptures do not state the marriage date of Jacob directly. But God has not left us in the dark about such important dates. The clues are there. It is up to our own careful study to determine the answers. And Joseph's life is important to understand because it helps us identify the chronology of the first three dynasties of the Egyptian culture.

2168 A.M., Esau & Jacob

So, let us "play detective" again. To find the dating of Jacob's marriage, we must start all the way down to the absolute 2298 A.M. date of Jacob's journey down to Egypt to live in the land of Goshen found in Gen. 47:7-9, and then carefully work backward to his year of marriage:

2198 A.M., Jacob before Pharaoh

"7. And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8. And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old are thou? 9. 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.”

Continuing this line of reasoning, we read in Gen. 45:6 that after Joseph revealed himself to his brothers and requests that they go home and bring Jacob down to him, the following:

“For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in which there shall neither be earing nor harvest.”

There had been the seven years of plenty after Joseph had been appointed Second-in-Command under Pharaoh when he was 30 years of age (Gen. 41:46) and now two years of famine, so Joseph’s age was now 39 (30 + 7 + 2). Subtracting the 39 years of Joseph from the 130 of Jacob, we come to the conclusion that Jacob had been 91 when Joseph was born to Rachel. Now the question becomes, how many years previous to Joseph’s birth had Jacob married the two daughters of Laban? That’s simple. Jacob had to work seven years for Rachel, then after Laban’s trickery of substituting Leah for Rachel on the wedding night, Laban bargained with Jacob that if he first completed the marriage week with Leah, then he could have Rachel to wife too, if he agreed to work another seven years for him. Rachel’s womb was closed for the first six years after their marriage -- most of the time Jacob had his additional seven years of servitude for Laban. In the seventh year Rachel became pregnant with Joseph. Finally, we read in Gen. 30:25-26:

2259 A.M., Joseph

“And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country. 26. Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee [these fourteen years], and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee.”

With the birth of Joseph seven years after the marriage, Jacob had fulfilled his obligation to Laban and was ready to return home. But, as we know, Laban bargained with Jacob again for yet another six years for which Jacob would receive some of the livestock from Laban. This twenty years of service to Laban is confirmed in Gen. 31:38, 41:

“38. This *twenty years* have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. 41. Thus have I been *twenty years* in thy house; I served thee *fourteen years* for thy two daughters, and *six years* for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times.”

We have these facts now (better than just an educated guess!):

2168 A.M., Esau/Jacob

Esau and Jacob are born to Isaac and Rebekah. I covered this on page 1 of this chapter.

The patriarch Jacob had an interesting life. He had his faults too, but he grew in love and respect for the Eternal God. First, we can read in Genesis 25 of Esau selling his birthright to his brother Jacob. Bullinger, in his *Companion Bible*, estimates that the two brothers were about 24 when this action took place. The Bible does not reveal the answer, and besides, it is not really important at what age this sale took place.

Then, by trickery Jacob got the blessings from his father Isaac as explained in Genesis 27.

Esau was mad! This led to Jacob fleeing from his home to Padan-aram to look for a wife from the clan of Laban. See Gen. 27:41-45:

“41. And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob. 42. And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah: and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. 43. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; and arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran, 44. And tarry with him a few days, until thy brother’s fury turn away; 45. Until thy brother’s anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day?”

Rebekah was quite concerned about Jacob’s choice of wife, because her son Esau had made her quite weary with his choices of wives from the daughters of Heth. She told Isaac her worries. He responded by telling Jacob to leave home in Gen. 28:5-7:

“5. And Isaac sent away Jacob: and he went to Padan-aram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah who was Jacob’s and Esau’s mother. 6. When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, and sent him away to Padan-aram, to take him a wife from thence; and that as he blessed him he gave him charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; 7. And Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Padan-aram.”

In the land to the east Jacob found Rachel and fell in love with her! This is the Bible’s example of “love at first sight!” Gen. 29:9-12:

“9. And while he yet spake with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep: for she kept them. 10. And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother’s brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother’s brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well’s mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother’s brother. 11. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. 12. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s brother [actually *her father’s nephew*], and that he was Rebekah’s son: and she ran and told her father.”

Jacob was quick to strike up a deal with Laban for his daughter Rachel. He was willing to begin a seven year servitude for her to be his wife. Read Gen. 29:16-20:

“16. And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and name of the younger was Rachel. 17. Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. 18. And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. 19. And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. 20. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.”

We will see that these A.M. dates for Jacob’s life are very accurate in this Chapter. The amazing fact is that Jacob is well along in years when he begins his service!

2245 A.M., Laban

Jacob is 77 when he begins working for Laban seven years for Rachel’s hand in marriage.

2252 A.M., Marriage

Jacob is 84 when he marries Leah, then completes her marriage week, after which he is given Rachel for a wife too. But he must work another seven years for her to complete the deal. Laban had fooled Jacob by substituting Leah for Rachel, and he demands another seven years from Jacob for Rachel. Laban knew what kind of man Jacob was and how it would profit Laban so much to have him as his chief shepherd!

2259 A.M., Joseph

Jacob is now 91. After working for Laban another seven years, Jacob completes the contract for Rachel. During these years of marriage Rachel has been barren while Leah and the two handmaidens have produced eleven children, ten sons and one daughter. Rachel finally bears a son, Joseph, and Jacob wishes to return home. Gen. 30:25-26:

“25. And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto my own place, and to my country. 26. Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee [fourteen years], and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee.”

Jacob is ready to leave for home but is persuaded to work six more years for Laban. But this time for some of his cattle. Gen: 30:27-32:

“27. And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake. 28. And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it. 29. And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me. 30. For it was little which thou hast before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude; and the Lord hath blessed thee since my coming: and now when shall I provide for mine own house also? 31. And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock. 32. I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire.”

2265 A.M., Home!

After working for Laban another six years, Joseph is now six years old, Jacob is now 97, and he finally leaves Laban to return home.

The commentaries, especially Bullinger's *Companion Bible*, Appendix 50, generally agree with these ages of service for Jacob.

Of course, all this information is very helpful in correlating Biblical chronology with Egyptian chronology. This will be covered in another chapter.

When periods are undefined

None of Jacob's son's date of births are given in the Bible, especially Levi and his line down to Moses and Judah with his line down to David, so how can we determine when the Exodus occurred? The answer: God has given us a fixed number of years from the Covenant of

Circumcision to the Exodus, thus bridging the gap when dates as found in Gen. 5 and 11 are not given. Exodus 12:40-41 explains this “bridge” as being 430 years. We’ll discuss this in another chapter too.

Bullinger (*Companion Bible*, Appendix 50) speculates the following:

- One year after Jacob’s marriage: Reuben born
- Two years after: Simeon Born
- Three years after: Levi and Dan born
- Four years after: Judah and Naphtali born
- Five years after: Gad born
- Six years after: Asher and Issachar born
- Seven years after: Zebulun and Dinah born (twins?) and Joseph born

You be the judge! Except for the date of Joseph’s birth, the other children’s birth dates are not particularly significant. We read in Gen. 29:31-35: “And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated [loved less in comparison to Rachel], he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren. 32. And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben [Heb. “*See a son*”]: for she said, Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me. 33. And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon [Heb. “*Hearing*”]. 34. And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi [Heb. “*Joined*”]. 35. And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah [Heb. “*Praise*”]; and left bearing.”

Now enters the two handmaidens of Leah and Rachel: Gen. 30:1-13: “And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. 2. And Jacob’s anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God’s stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb: 3. And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. 4. And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her. 5. And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son. 6. And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan [Heb. “*Judging*”]. 7. And Bilhah Rachel’s maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son. 8. And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali [Heb. “*My wrestling*”]. 9. When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife. 10. And Zilpah Leah’s maid bare Jacob a son. 11. And Leah said, A troop cometh: and she called his name Gad [Heb. “*A troop or company*”]. 12. And Zilpah Leah’s maid bare Jacob a second son. 13. And Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed: and she called his name Asher [Heb. “*Happy*”].

After hiring Jacob’s love with her son Reuben’s mandrakes, Leah conceived again. See Gen. 30:17-24: “And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son. 18. And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband: and she called his name Issachar [Heb. “*A hire*”]. 19. And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son. 20. And Leah said, God hath endued me with a good dowry; now will my husband

dwell with me, because I have born him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun [Heb. “*Dwelling*”]. 21. And afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name Dinah [Heb. “*Judgment*”].”

After being barren for six years of their marriage, Rachel finally became pregnant, and in her seventh year of marriage she had her own first son. Read Gen. 30:22-24: “And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. 23. And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: 24. And she called his name Joseph [Heb. “*Adding*”]; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son.”

Thus, after seven years of marriage Jacob now had eleven sons and one daughter! Quite a big family. And Benjamin was yet to be added to Rachel (who died in childbirth), giving Jacob twelve sons, one daughter and a very large family! His daughter, Dinah, was raped by Shechem, the son of Hamor, of the Hivite tribe, rescued by her two brothers Simeon and Levi who slew all the males in Hamor’s city, and returned her to Jacob. She may have died childless according to the listing in Genesis 46 of the Israelites who moved down to Goshen. But it is unclear. In any case she is not considered as part of the twelve tribes of Israel.

More details are given in Genesis 46:15: “These be the sons of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob in Padan-aram, with his daughter Dinah: All the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty and three”; verse 18 “These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter, and these she bare unto Jacob, even sixteen souls”; verse 22: “These are the sons of Rachel, which were born to Jacob: all the souls were fourteen”; and verse 25: “These are the sons of Bilhah, which Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and she bare these unto Jacob: all the souls were seven.”

In Gen. 46:26-27 we have two summary verses that show the rapid growth in Israel’s family, invited by Pharaoh to live in the land of Goshen. “All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob’s sons’ wives. All the souls were threescore and six; 27. And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten.”

The story of this remarkable patriarch Jacob would be incomplete without recounting a most interesting event he had on his return to his homeland and reunion with his estranged brother Esau. At the ford Jabbok he sent his family ahead of him but remained behind for the night. Jacob encountered God, and wrestled with him! Read the story in Genesis 32:24-30:

“24. And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. 25. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob’s thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. 26. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. 27. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. 28. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. 29. And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me. I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou does ask after my name: And he blessed him there. 30. And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”

Apparently, he limped on his thigh the rest of his life!

Jacob dreaded meeting his brother Esau because he did not know how Esau would react. But the encounter turned out to be very joyous! In Genesis 33:4 we read: “And Esau ran to meet him,

and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.”

The NIV Bible has a very accurate *Integrated Chronology of the Patriarchs* on page 26 to which I’ve added the A.M. dates given in the previous and this Chapter. It appears on the following page since I do not wish to divide this chart on two pages.

Integrated Chronology of the Patriarchs

A.M.

Abraham

2083

Age 75 To Canaan*

Birth of

2108

100

Isaac*

2148

140

Age 40 Isaac married*
Birth of Esau and

2168

160

60

Jacob*

2183

175 Abraham’s death*

75

Age 15

2208

100

40 Esau’s marriage*

2245

137

77 Jacob to
Padam-Aram Birth of

2259

151

91

Joseph

2265

157

97 Jacob’s return
to Canaan **Age 6**

2276

168

108

17 Joseph to Egypt*

2288

180 Isaac’s death*

120

29

2289

121

30 Joseph enters
Pharaoh’s service

2296

37 Begin 7 yrs Drought

2298

130 Jacob to Egypt*

39

2303

44 End 7 yrs drought

2315

147 Jacob's death* **56**

2369

110 Joseph's death*

Note: The ages marked with (*) are expressly given.

The mysteries of Jacob's age of marriage and of Joseph's birth date have been solved! Small Biblical clues can lead to big results!