

The Bible Vindicated! - 22

During the last phase of Jacob's difficulties with Laban, God sent a message to him, explaining how He was foiling Laban's efforts to defraud him. The effect of that Divine care was that -

•“In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys” - Genesis 30:43.

And so by the time Jacob left Padan-Aram, he not only had a remarkably large family, but was also a wealthy man - all in consequence of Jacob's vow to God. This was no promise of material wealth for all who do the same - that wealth was necessary in the circumstances of the times, but the principle still holds true for every person who keeps this vow - as God said to Jacob,

•“I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU until I have done what I have spoken to you” - 28:15. And God kept His word until the end, when Jacob could say while blessing Joseph's sons,

•“God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads” - 48:15-16.

The final phase of Jacob's stay with Laban came to an end. Jacob had become wealthy, and Laban became poorer. His former efforts to keep his nephew working for him came to an end -

•“Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, ‘Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth.’ 2 And Jacob saw the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before. 3 Then the Lord said to Jacob, ‘Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you’.” - 31:1-3.

And so while Laban was elsewhere, Jacob set out, and headed south with his family and possessions into Canaan (in Jacob's 97th year). Underlining the divided state of Jacob's family, they were traveling in “two companies” - 32:10. Later Jacob made his way to a place outside the Canaanite city of Shechem (99). His daughter Dinah “went out to see the daughters of the land” in the city- 34:1. Dinah's estimated age at this time of 11 years may seem too young to be found so attractive to the boy, son of a Hivite prince, that he defiled her and wanted to marry her v. 2-4.

We need to be cautious about applying present day conditions or locally accepted age limitations to people who lived in ancient times. Abraham lived to 175 (25:7), Isaac to 180 (35:28) and Jacob 147 (49:33), unheard of ages now. Dinah's aunt, Rachel, would have been about the same age when Jacob fell in love with her and wanted her to be his wife - by the time she gave birth to Joseph she would have been 91 - $57 + 11 = 45$ years old, and at the birth of Benjamin about 9 years later, 54, while the birth of Isaac to 90 year old Sarah was clearly miraculous - Hebrews 11:11.

The articles “Marriage” in The New International Dictionary of Archaeology and “Marriageable Age” in Wikipedia report the following. In Europe, for more than 18 centuries - from the time of Augustus (before the time of Jesus), down through its adoption in Church Canon Law until 1917, THE LEGAL MINIMUM AGE FOR BOYS WAS 14 AND 12 FOR GIRLS. Closer to the time of Jacob, Egyptian records show that the usual age range for the marriage of boys was 14-20 and girls 12-14.