

The Bible Vindicated! - 23

We noted last time that calculations made from the Scripture record of Jacob's family history indicate that his daughter Dinah was about 11 years old when the young man in the city of Shechem defiled her and asked for her hand in marriage - Genesis 34:2-4.

Rachel would also have been about 11 years old when Jacob met her. She would have been 18 years old when she became Jacob's wife, 45 years old at the birth of Joseph, and 54 years old at Benjamin's birth.

On the one hand 11 years old seems too young to have ever been considered of marriageable age, and on the other hand, bearing children at the ages of 44 and 54 too old. But we need to be cautious about applying present day conditions or locally accepted age limitations to people who lived in ancient times.

As seen earlier, the legal minimum age of marriage for boys was 14 and 12 for girls in Europe for more than 18 centuries until 1917. 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.

"Pregnancy over 50" in Wikipedia shows numerous examples. The following cases are reported on the Motherhow.com website, which was designed to give parenting and pregnancy guidelines. Here are a couple of historical items provided -

- Aracelia Garcia of Sunnyside, Washington, U.S.A., when 54 years, 10 months old, in 2000, having conceived by natural conception, gave birth (by Cesarean section) to triplets.
- The American Ruth Kistler, of Portland Oregon, in 1956 being at the age of 57 years, 4 months, gave birth to a daughter. This made Kistler one of the oldest women known in recent times to have conceived naturally.

Returning to the narrative of Jacob's return journey, by the time they reached Shechem, Dinah's brother Simeon would be $99 - 67 = 32$, and Levi 30. There is no difficulty in seeing how these hot-headed men, enraged by the defiling of their sister, were quite old enough so that "each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males" - 34:25-29.

These ages are based, as previously mentioned, on Jacob serving Laban for 40 years, instead of the commonly accepted twenty years. But that shorter time would mean that the ages of these sons would be only about 12 and 10 respectively, which does not fit the narrative.

The brothers would doubtless be joined by some of the numerous servants which Jacob had acquired before leaving Laban, as we saw earlier - "the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks, female and male servants, and camels and donkeys" - 30:43. So there would be plenty of help in the brothers' plundering of the city, 35:27-29.

Jacob was shocked and terrified by what his sons had done, but God sent him further south to Bethel, and by God filling the local inhabitants with even more terror, ensured Jacob's safe escape, 35:5. Arriving at Bethel, Jacob built an altar and worshiped God, of Whom Jacob said, who "answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone" - v. 3.

After the rigors of a hurried departure, and now en route, "Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allonbachuth" - 35:8.