

The Bible Vindicated! - 24

The reference to the death of Jacob's mother's nurse in Genesis 35:8 calls attention to the godly loving kindness which is portrayed in Jacob's provision of familial care in the old age of this valuable and honoured servant. Long after she had nursed the babies, Deborah had evidently been on hand in the raising of the children in Isaac and Rebekah's family. They provided a home for Deborah up into her old age until Jacob took over the duty of her care.

As Jacob moved further south away from the city of Shechem towards Ephrath (Bethlehem), and when Joseph was nine years old, Rachel went into labour and bore another son, Benjamin (in Jacob's 100th year) - and then died. Jacob continued to display the depth of his love for Rachel, erecting a memorial pillar doubtless at great cost - and, despite the intervening presence of Canaanites, the pillar was still to be seen 400 years later, 35:20; 1 Samuel 10:2.

Jacob then moved to Mamre (near Hebron) where his father Isaac was living, 35:27 As Joseph grew into his teens, Jacob made it clear that his beloved Rachel's oldest son was his favorite. He dressed him in princely attire and employed him to keep an eye on the other sons' behavior while they worked in his animal husbandry business. In turn, the ten elder brothers hated Joseph, watching for an opportunity to get rid of him, 37:2-11.

That opportunity came when they saw Joseph heading their way, while he was still a long way off, and someone suggested throwing him into one of the local empty storage pits after killing him. This was an opportunity for the eldest brother, Reuben, to get back into favor with his father, who had demoted him for serious misbehavior, so he appealed to the brothers not to kill him, but just put him in the pit and leave him to die, 37:18-24.

The brothers agreed, stripped Joseph of his robe and sent him down into the pit, and Reuben evidently went elsewhere, intending to rescue him later and take him back to his father. Meanwhile, a south-bound trading caravan came into view, and Judah, who had by then rejoined the family, still wanted Joseph out of the way, but wanted to save his life. "What good is there killing him?" he asked the brothers. "Why not sell him to the traders, and we can get some payment for our trouble" - 37:25-27.

"Then Midianite traders passed by; so the brothers pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and SOLD HIM TO THE ISHMAELITES for twenty shekels of silver. And THEY TOOK JOSEPH (then 17) TO EGYPT" - 37:28 (in Jacob's 108th year).

The following year, Judah's son Er was 17 (Jacob 109) and Judah took a wife for Er, whose name was Tamar. But Er was so wicked that God killed him - 38:6-7.

The year after that (Jacob 110) Judah applied the levirate rule and gave his second son Onan to Tamar. Onan did marry his brother's widow, but then refused to fulfil his role to perpetuate his brother's line, so God killed Onan also, Tamar was asked to wait until Judah's third son, Shelah, was old enough to marry her according to the same levirate rule.

Judah failed to keep his promise of Shelah to Tamar, so Tamar engineered the fathering by Judah of her twin sons, Perez and Zerah, (Jacob 113) an ungodly action by her father-in-law for which Judah took the blame - 38:11-30.

Seven years after that (Jacob 120) Isaac died, aged 180 years.