

Jacob's Age and Jacob's Ladder

Dr. Wilson L. Thompson

Jacob's departure from Beersheba to seek a wife in Haran is full of important social facts. Esau was threatening to kill Jacob. Isaac heeded Rebekah and sent Jacob to Haran take a wife from the daughters of Laban. Jacob left having been blessed by Isaac a second time. And, Jacob was overwhelmed at Bethel by a glorious vision of the ladder (John 1:51) stretching to Heaven (Genesis 28:12) In the vision, God affirmed His covenant blessings for Jacob. These dramatic social facts tend to obscure the fact that the bachelor, Jacob, was about 77 years old when he left home.

This fact can be established by a process of subtraction. First, we know Jacob was 130 years old when he conferred with Pharaoh in Egypt (Genesis 47:9). Nine years earlier, Joseph had been 30 years old when appointed by Pharaoh to rule in Egypt (Genesis 41:46). Later, after seven years of bumper crops, two years of the famine and Joseph's warning (Genesis 41:29-30; 45:11), Jacob moved Israel Industries into Egypt. Joseph was then 39 years old. So, taking Joseph's age from the 130 years of Jacob, we know Jacob was some 91 years old when Joseph was born. Shortly after Joseph was born, Jacob began the last six years of his twenty-year tenure in Laban's house (Genesis 30:25; 31:41). Thus, fourteen years earlier, Jacob was about 77 years old when he had his vision of the ladder. He married Leah and Rachel about seven years after coming to Haran bringing only his staff (Genesis 29:15ff; 32:10).

In contrast, his twin, Esau, was 40 years old when he married two Hittite women who "were a grief of mind unto Isaac and Rebekah" (Genesis 26:35). Let us recall that Isaac was 40 years old when Abraham arranged for Rebekah to become wife to his son, Isaac. (Genesis 24:2ff). Yet, some 37 years after Esau married, Isaac had still made no move to arrange a marriage for Jacob, his hard-working master shepherd. Instead, in his blindness, Isaac sought to give the blessing to Esau and get a meal of Esau's savory venison in the bargain. When Isaac discovered that, despite all, he had in fact blessed Jacob, it is recorded that he "trembled very exceedingly" (Genesis 27:33). Thereafter, "the fear of Isaac" is listed in Genesis as one of the names of God (Genesis 31:42,53).

The first night on the road to Haran, Jacob, laid stones "for his pillows" (Genesis 28:11). God transformed his lonely Luz into Bethel (house of God) with a vision of the ladder (Genesis 28:19). God assured Jacob, in his vision, "I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest" (Genesis 28:15) And Jacob vowed, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, . . . So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God . . . and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee" (Genesis 28:20-22).