

*Outline Studies*  
*in*  
*Biblical Chronology*  
**A Continuous Chronology**  
**from**  
**Creation to the Cross**

**Chapter 2**  
**The Lives of Jacob and Joseph**  
*Overturning Misconceptions through Chronological Constraints*



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# **Outline Studies in Biblical Chronology**

## **Chapter 2 The Lives of Jacob and Joseph**

### **Overturing Misconceptions through Chronological Constraints**

#### **Contents:**

<b>Preliminary Fundamentals</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Exposing and Correcting Misconceptions per the Lives of Jacob and Joseph</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>A Textual Misconception:</b>	
<b>The Chronological Placement of Genesis 34</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Jacob and His Family: A Biblically Consistent Overview</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>The Lives of Jacob and Joseph after Arrival of the Family at Hebron</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Clarifying Misconceptions Concerning Joseph in Relation to Genesis 37</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Appendix #1: The Toledoths of Genesis</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Appendix #2: Addressing a Published Chronological Confusion</b>	<b>17</b>

## Ch. 2. The Lives of Jacob and Joseph

### Preliminary Fundamental

A construction of the chronology of the lives of Jacob and Joseph is central to discerning the patriarchal succession in the formation of Israel as a nation. It is also central to a clearer understanding of the developmental period following the enunciation of the Abraham Covenant, and the outworking of God's providence leading to fulfillment of the promise up to the time of the exodus and God's formation of "a great nation". Another significant value of a chronology of this period is that it exposes some unrealized and unappreciated facets of Jacob's commitment to the covenant promises, and of his fulfilling his sovereignly-ordained place among the patriarchal progenitors of the nation of Israel.

An analysis of the chronology of these patriarchs properly begins with the chronological anchors connecting the birth of Jacob to the lives of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham.

**Fact #1.** Abram was 75 years old when the covenant promise was first given and he left Haran for Canaan.

"So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him.  
Now Abram was 75 years old when he left Haran."  
*Gen. 12:4*

**Fact #2.** Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born of Sarah.

"So Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time of which God had spoken to him. ... Now Abraham was 100 years old when his son Isaac was born to him."  
*Gen. 21:2-5*

**Fact #3.** Abraham lived for 175 years.

"And these are all the years of Abraham's life that he lived, 175 years." *Gen. 25:7*

**Fact #4.** Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah as his wife.

"and Isaac was 40 years old when he took Rebekah, ... to be his wife. *Gen. 25:20*

**Fact #5.** Isaac was 60 years old when his twin sons Esau and Jacob were born.

And afterward his brother came forth with his hand holding on to Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob; and Isaac was 60 years old when she gave birth to them." *Gen. 25:26*

**Conclusion:** Jacob was born when his grandfather Abraham was 160 years old,  
and Jacob was 15 years old when his grandfather Abraham died.

These facts are summarized for reference in the following table.

Event	Generational Information	Generational Information
Abraham born		
Covenant Promise Received	Abraham 75 years old	Abraham enters Canaan
Isaac born	Abraham 100 years old	
Jacob born	Isaac 60 years old	Abraham 160 years old
Abraham dies @ age 175	Isaac 75 years old	Jacob 15 years old

The extended and more detailed chronology of the lives of Jacob and Joseph can only be ascertained by engaging a careful and consistent analysis of the various time-specific markers revealed in the Genesis narratives. Now in regard to the chronology of the lives of both Jacob and Joseph, definitive chronological considerations have often been overlooked, leading to interpretive conclusions that have fueled multiple misconceptions that are contrary to fact. In what follows a revised understanding of the lives of these pivotal characters in God's redemptive program is sought, even one in which rigid chronological correspondence across all interrelated texts is faithfully upheld.

## Exposing and Correcting Misconceptions per the Lives of Jacob and Joseph

As noted, the unfolding of events in the lives of Jacob and Joseph cannot be accurately understood apart from a respectful consideration of those distinct chronological markers interspersed in the narrative accounts of their lives. If such markers are not duly respected, and are not allowed to assert a controlling influence over translative choices of individual words or phrases, presumptive interpretations can find root. The outcome is a tendency for misconceptions to emerge in the perceived story line, and for such presumptive-based understandings to become ingrained in the literature of these two heroes of the faith.

misconception: an opinion, idea or conviction that is contrary to fact;  
an ingrained understanding that is based on presumption.

With respect to the role of Jacob and Joseph, two truly pivotal characters in the formative history of Israel, a number of expositor-writers have presumed to overlook certain chronological data that imposes stringent constraints on the ordering of events and experiences in their lives. It is shown in this chapter that widely-accepted and contrary to fact teaching has been infused in the history surrounding the lives of these individuals, a result traceable to presumptive license with respect to chronology. These two heroes of the faith receive quite extensive space in Scripture, and they hold quite strategic positions in the foundational history of Israel. For this reason, it is essential that exposition of the narrative accounts of their lives be based on accurate deductions from the received, true history.

In the following sections several key chronological facts are highlighted which compel insights that stand in decided opposition, even strong contradiction at certain points, to several of the widely held presumptions regarding the lives of both Jacob and Joseph. The goal of this text, it is hoped, is to argue convincingly for true conceptions where popular misconceptions exist, and to set forth definitive and substantive bases for an accurate and consistent understanding of the history of both of their lives.

### Key Chronological Marker #1

**Fact #1a.** Joseph was 30 years old when he was promoted to prime minister in Egypt.

"Now Joseph was 30 years old when he stood before Pharaoh, king of Egypt."  
*Gen. 41:46*

**Fact #1b.** Joseph was 39 years of age when Jacob moved his family to Egypt.

Note: 7 years of plenty plus 2 years of famine passed after Joseph assumed rulership, and before Joseph invited his father to Egypt.  
(7 yrs. + 2 yrs. + 30 yrs. = 39 yrs.)

"Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, ... and you shall live in Goshen, ... for there are still 5 years of famine'." *Gen. 45:9-11*

**Fact #1c.** Jacob was 130 years old when he arrived in Egypt with his entire family.

"And Pharaoh said to Jacob, 'How many years have you lived?'  
So Jacob said to Pharaoh, 'The years of my sojourning are 130';" *Gen. 47:8-9*

**Conclusion #1a.** Jacob was 91 years of age at the time of Joseph's birth.  
**130 – 39 = 91**

**Fact #1d.** Jacob died at age 147 in Egypt, having lived there for 17 years after leaving Hebron.

"And Jacob live in the land of Egypt 17 years; so the length of Jacob's life was 147 years." *Gen. 47:28*

**Conclusion #1b.** Joseph was 56 years of age when his father Jacob died.  
**Jacob: 147 - 130 = 17**  
**Joseph: 39 + 17 = 56**

## Key Chronological Marker #2

**Fact #2a.** Jacob served Laban 14 years for the privilege of marrying Laban's daughter Rachel. Jacob served 7 years before his marriage to Rachel plus another 7 years after their marriage.

**7 yrs. + 7 yrs = 14 yrs. of service to Laban**

### Misconception Comment:

Some expositor-writers have presumed that Jacob not only served Laban an additional 7 years, but that the privilege of marrying Rachel was also postponed for 7 more years. This is a presumption contradicted by rigid chronological considerations. The additional "week" in view is a 7-day period during which, according to custom, wedding feasting and family celebration occurred.

"Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, 'I will serve you 7 years for your younger daughter Rachel.' ... So Jacob served Laban 7 years for Rachel ... " *Gen. 29:18-20*

"Now it came about in the evening that [Laban] took his daughter Leah, and brought her to [Jacob];" *Gen. 29:23*

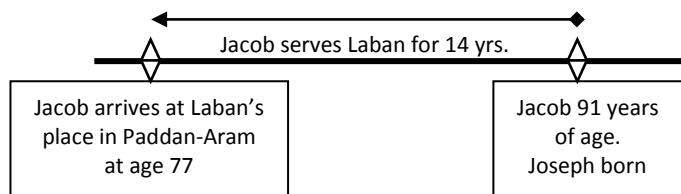
"Complete the week of this one [Leah], and we will give you the other [Rachel] also for the service which you shall serve with for another 7 years. ... and [Jacob] served with Laban for another 7 years." *Gen. 29:27-30*

**Fact #2b.** Jacob requested leave of Laban immediately following Rachel's giving birth to Joseph. Jacob had at this time completed the promised 14 years of service for the privilege of marrying Rachel.

"Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, 'Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country. ... for you yourself know my service which I have rendered to you.'" *Gen. 30:25-26*

**Conclusion #2.** Jacob first arrived in Paddan-Aram when he was 77 years of age.

$$91 - 14 = 77$$



### Misconception Comment:

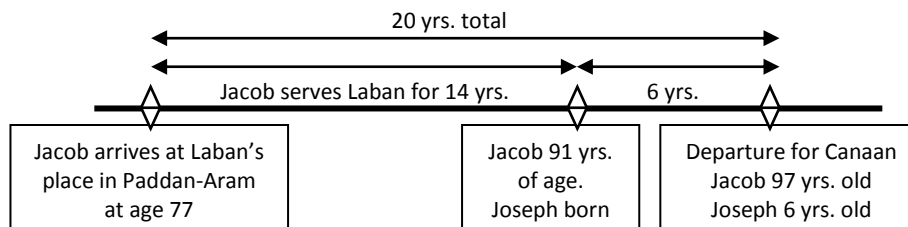
It is commonly presumed that Jacob was a young man, most probably less than 30 years old, when he deceived his father Isaac in the matter of the blessing, and then had to flee from his parents because of the wrath of his brother Esau.

## Key Chronological Marker #3

**Fact #3.** Jacob served Laban for 6 additional years following the birth of Joseph, an arrangement worked out with Laban for wages consisting of a portion of Laban's flock. Thus, Jacob served in Paddan-Aram for a total of 20 years.

"These 20 years I have been in your house; I served you 14 years for your two daughters and 6 years for your flock, and you changed my wages 10 times." *Gen. 31:41*

**Conclusion #3a.** Jacob was 97 years of age when he departed from Paddan-Aram.



**Conclusion #3b.** Joseph was 6 years old when the family departed Haran for Canaan.

## The Birth Order of Jacob's Children: Part I

*Gen. 29:31-35.* Leah gives birth to 4 sons → likely over a 4-yr. span following her marriage year.

*Gen. 30:1-2.* Rachel remains barren for some years following her marriage to Jacob.

*vs. 30:3-4.* Rachel proposes a surrogate motherhood plan through her handmaid Bilhah.

We do not know how many years since her marriage that Rachel resorts to her 'handmaid-birth plan' to raise up children ... perhaps around 3 to 3+ years.

*vs. 30:5-8.* Bilhah bears 2 children (on behalf of Rachel) ... likely over the next 2 years.

Comment: The revealed birth-order brings Rachel to a time roughly 5 years after marriage.

*Gen. 30:9.* Leah, perceiving that she has arrived at a life-stage where she is no longer able to conceive, a conclusion likely ascertained over a 2 to 2+ year period of barrenness, she resorts to adopting Rachel's surrogate motherhood plan – in this case, to raise up children through her handmaid Zilpah.

Comment: This action by Leah likely moves the chronology of her life forward to the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> year since Reuben's birth.

*Gen. 30:10-13.* Zilpah bears 2 sons (on behalf of Leah) ... likely over a further 2-yr. period.

*Gen. 30:17-21.* God graciously intervened on behalf of Leah and allowed her to once again conceive and bear children → she gives birth to 2 more sons, followed in chronological succession by the birth of a daughter named Dinah. These births occurred, quite likely, over a period of approximately 3 years following the birth of Zilpah's last son.

Comment: The children born through Leah (both her own 7 plus Zilpah's 2) likely occurred over 11 years minimum, but definitely less than 12 years maximum.

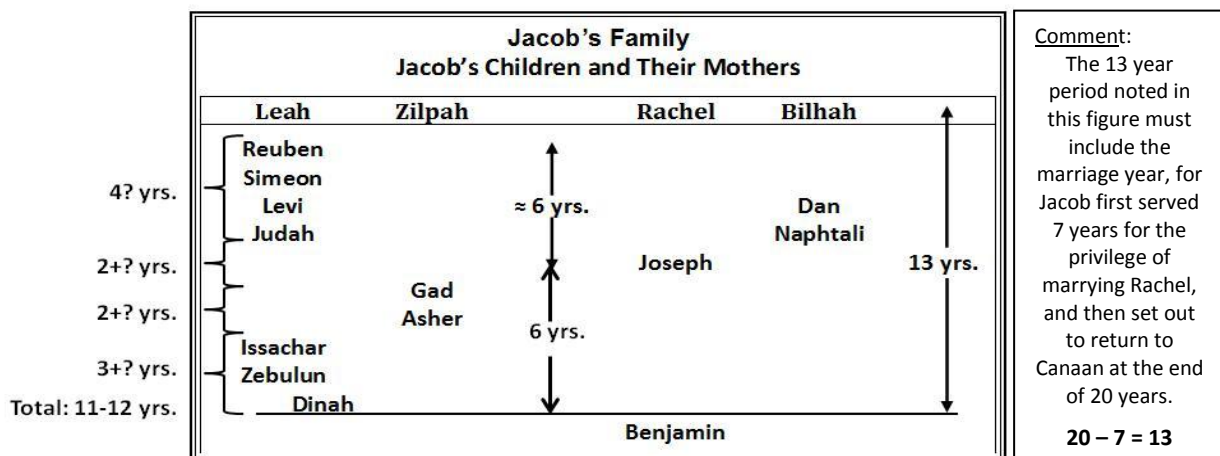
**Pivotal Ques.** How does Joseph fit into this schedule of children born into Jacob's family?

**Ans.** Joseph's birth, in light of explicit and immoveable chronological constraints, occurred precisely 7 years following Jacob's and Rachel's marriage.

**Secondary Ques.** How should we understand the continuation of the *Gen. 30* narrative when the text moves from the close of one paragraph in *vs. 21* to the opening of a new paragraph in *vs. 22*?

Do common translations of the original text, a text which was both inspired and infallible, allow the decisively necessary fact that Joseph's birth occurred 7 years following Jacob's marriage to Leah and Rachel?

**Ans.** The textual analysis leading to a clarified understanding of the placing of Joseph in the birth order, per a proper linguistic reading of *Gen. 30:22* supporting full consistency with chronological requirements, appears in the next text box containing Part II of our consideration of the birth order of Jacob's children (see next page).



Note: Benjamin (listed at the bottom of the foregoing figure) was born while the family was returning to Canaan; actually as they neared Ephrath (alt., Bethlehem) on their way to Hebron where Isaac was residing (see Gen. 35:16-20).

Further Note: Later texts suggest that Jacob had other daughters in addition to Dinah (see Gen. 37:35 and Gen. 46:7, 15), daughters perhaps born to Bilhah after Rachel died.

## **The Birth Order of Jacob's Children: Part II**

### **Gen. 30:22 and The Position of Joseph in the Line of Jacob's Offspring**

#### **A Brief Textual Analysis of vs. 22**

In many modern translations, *Gen. 30:22* opens with the conjunction "Then ..." → a term implying a temporal succession with direct connection to the preceding paragraph. That is, the word "then" opening vs. 22 suggests that the text which follows in vs. 22 pertains to an event subsequent to that which immediately precedes the conjunction. Thus, the implied sense communicated by translations choosing to employ the conjunction "then" is as follows: Rachel's giving birth to Joseph noted in vs. 22 follows consecutively Leah's giving birth to Dinah in vs. 21, albeit with perhaps some unknown and likely brief delay. As such, these translations imply that Dinah and Joseph are to be seen as quite similar in age.

Note: Some of the common translations employing the conjunction "Then" in the opening statement of vs. 22 include the NASB, NKJV, ESV, NIV, Oxford, Amplified, and surely multiple other versions. Some employ the alternate translative rendering, "As soon as ...". Such wording implies an even stricter sense of a successive temporal flow of events existing between vs. 21 and vs. 22 than even "Then ..." – the most widely used term

#### **The Preferred and Necessary Translation of vs. 22**

In quite definitive contrast with many modern translations, the Geneva and King James versions translate vs. 22 using the conjunction "And ..." as opposed to "Then ...". Linguistically speaking, the conjunction "and" can mean "additionally", such as providing other "additional in sequence" commentary meant to advance, intensify, broaden, etc. the information content in the immediately preceding paragraphs. However, the conjunction "and" can also mean that "further", even "non-consecutive, information has been inserted". Either of these meanings implies the appearance of "additional "relevant information". In particular, use of "And ..." alerts the reader that information pursuant to the subject at hand is being added, yet it does not necessarily pertain directly to the foregoing chronological flow.

Now the subject matter at hand, both before and after the transition from vs. 21 to vs. 22, pertains particularly to the family born to Jacob while he was residing in Paddan-Aram.

Also, the particular "additional", or "further", information appearing in the paragraph consisting of vs. 22-24 is the birth of Rachel's first-born child, Joseph.

**Point #1.** The conjunction opening vs. 22-24 to foregoing text does not necessarily require a continuation of the birth-order succession in Jacob's family that is detailed in the preceding paragraphs.

**Point #2.** Since chronological markers decisively place the birth of Joseph at 7 years following Rachel's marriage, the narrative in vs. 22-24 ought to be seen as providing additional and non-consecutive information and *not* detailing a continuation of a chronologically consecutive birth-order.

#### **Key Chronological Marker #4**

**Fact #4.** Dinah is the 7<sup>th</sup> child born to Leah by Jacob, and quite apparently the youngest of all the children born into Jacob's family while in Paddan-Aram.

"Then Leah said, 'God has endowed me with a good gift; now my husband will dwell (honor) me, because I have borne him 6 sons.' ... And afterward she bore a daughter and named her Dinah."

*Gen. 30:20-21*

**Conclusion #4a.** Dinah was most likely 5, perhaps even 6, years younger than Joseph.

**Conclusion #4b.** Dinah was at most 12 years of age when Joseph was 17 years of age.



### Summary Points to Note:

**Point #1.** The Biblical narrative describing the temporal and sequential development of Jacob's family line, particularly Joseph's place in that line, requires a careful integration of *both chronological and textual* considerations relative to family details recorded in *Gen. 29* and *Gen. 30*.

- ❖ A common misconception concerning the succession of birth-order is decisively contradicted by a chronological constraint.

**Point #2.** All of the 12 children (11 sons plus daughter Dinah) born to Jacob in Paddan-Aram were born from 4 mothers over a span of 12 years.

**Point #3.** Joseph was at most 6 years younger than Reuben, Jacob's eldest son born to Leah.

**Point #4.** Rachel gave birth to Joseph 7 years following her marriage to Jacob. Thus, Joseph most certainly *was not* the youngest among the other 10 boys born to Jacob during his 20-year stay in Paddan-Aram.

**Point #5. Important Facts Linking the Earlier Life of Jacob to His Latter Years.**

- Jacob arrived in Paddan\_Aram at 77 years of age.
- Jacob served Laban for 7 years for the privilege of marrying his daughter Rachel.
- After marrying Rachel, Jacob agreed to serve Laban an additional 7 years for the privilege of having received Rachel as wife.
- Rachel gave birth to Joseph 7 years after her marriage to Jacob.
- Jacob served Laban 14 years before Joseph was born.
- Jacob served Laban for a total of 20 years before beginning his return journey to Canaan from Paddan-Aram at 97 years of age.

#### **Comment: The "toledoth" Structure of Genesis**

The word "toledoth" is a Hebrew term that appears 11 times in Genesis, this unique 'Book of Beginnings'.

The term means "origins", or more comprehensively, "accounts or records of origins or beginnings".

It appears in the recurring phrase, "These are the generations of author's name".

The word "toledoth" appears in faithful English translations of Genesis as "generations", at least so in the Geneva, King James, New King James, and New American Standard versions.

A substantial body of evidence exists suggesting that each appearance of the word in Genesis marks the close of a separated or distinct writing. Alternatively, the appearance of this phrase represents a subscript to the foregoing account attributed to a particular author, an author who wrote as an eye-witness of life-experiences occurring within that period of true history defined within his life time.

There are, admittedly, naysayers with respect to this described meaning of the term as it appears in the Genesis account, and of its textual significance. Nevertheless, many writers, present writer included, consider the meaning described above to rest on a firm and substantive interpretive foundation.

For the purposes to this chapter, it should be noted that the account of the lives of Jacob and Joseph is covered in two narrative accounts. The life of Jacob plus the early life of Joseph, say before he was 8 years of age, is described in the "toledoth of Jacob". The "toledoth of Jacob" extends from *Gen. 25:19b—37:2a*. In accordance with the "toledoth formula", this section contains, 'in-the-large', Jacob's personal account of his life – the qualification noted appears because two brief "toledoth" accounts of Esau are included in the body of Jacob's record. Esau's "toledoths" were likely received from Esau himself at the time when he and his twin brother Jacob buried their father Isaac. Jacob would then have included them in his own account, an action wholly consistent with his role as the patriarchal head and covenant successor of Isaac's family.

By contrast, the narrative account of Joseph's life, which also includes important life-experience data pertaining to the latter part of Jacob's life, forms the closing and most lengthy section of Genesis, a section almost surely penned by Moses from received written and oral accounts preserved by Joseph's family.

Note: An expanded list of the 11 toledoth statements in Genesis is given in the Appendix #1 (p. 15).

### Summary Perspective of the Life of Jacob

Jacob is a somewhat enigmatic character, and somewhat maligned in various writings concerning his life. This is a consequence that arises in part, so it seems to this author, from misconceptions that have their root in a less than diligent appreciation for interpretive constraints gleaned from attention to chronological considerations and from insightful statements regarding his character.

One of the more remarkable conclusions derived from a careful chronological analysis of the life of Jacob is that he was a mature 77 years of age before participating with his mother in a scheme to garner the patriarchal blessing from his father Isaac. This fact stands in stark contrast to impressions one obtains from most commentaries and notes in Study Bibles about Jacob.

It is quite widely presumed that Jacob was a young man, quite probably less than 30 years of age, when he fled from his family home in Beersheba, fleeing in the face of life-threats made by his enraged brother Esau.

The fact that Jacob had remained unmarried in the household of his parents shines a distinctive light on the degree to which he valued the covenant promises, exposing the depth of his commitment to and regard for the patriarchal role as spiritual leader of the family clan.

This role involved:

- assuming responsibility as leader of the family clan in worship of Yahweh;
- serving as custodian of the *"toledeth"* records of God's working since the beginning of creation (i.e., the formative portions of the book of Genesis); and
- sustaining a family-cherishing of the privilege of being part of that family through whom Yahweh would fulfill His awesome covenant promises and redemptive working.

A quite descriptive statement in Scripture regarding Jacob's character is penned in *Gen. 25:27*:

*"Jacob was a complete man, living in tents."*

It should be noted that this phrase not only defines Jacob in a most praiseworthy light, but it does so while accenting a deep contrast between his life and the irresponsible and undisciplined (even debauched) life of his twin brother Esau. Drawing from various reputable Bible dictionaries, the life-characteristic *"complete"* communicates the sense of being:

- pious, upright, and wholesome;
- morally and ethically pure;
- having integrity, blameless.

Now, to this author's knowledge, no text in Scripture shines a detractive or denigrating light which undermines or qualifies the essence of this statement defining the character of Jacob

Of course, no one denies that Jacob exhibited a flawed nature at points of decision and action, but his God-revering and covenant-esteeming heart was manifested in multiple contexts, and so at bold and decisive points, particularly in his building the altar and leading his family clan in worship of Yahweh, the Elohim of his fathers. It is especially in and through such instances that one is able to discern a deeper insight into why God was pleased to be called

*"the God of Jacob"* (e.g., *Ps. 81:1, 4; Ps. 135:4*);

and also why Yahweh states without qualification: *"Yet I have loved Jacob"*, (*Mal. 1:2*).

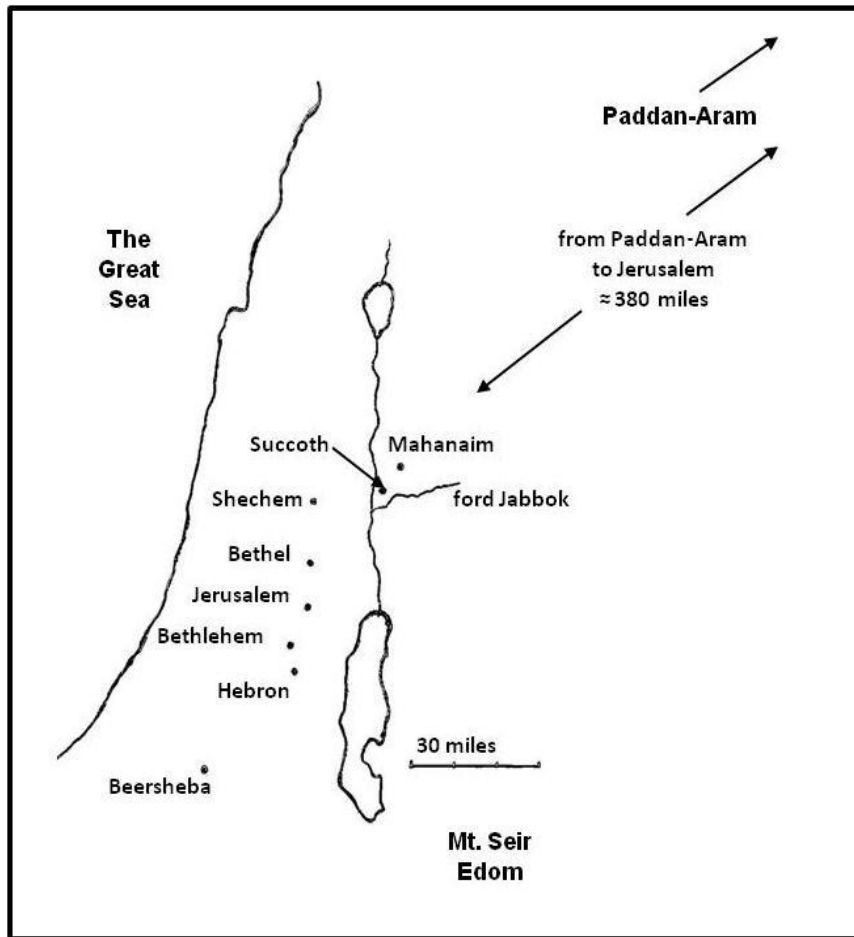
Jacob indeed stands as a patriarchal equal with his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac, and one for which a specific and peculiar parallel identity becomes a common place expression in Scripture. For example, when Yahweh encountered Moses at the burning bush, Yahweh attributed to Himself the following identity (e.g., see *Ex. 2:6*):

*"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."*

This manner of God's self-identification becomes commonplace thereafter in Scripture – a most distinctive and affirming validation of the faith and covenantal devotion which was a defining characteristic of Jacob's walk with God as a *"complete"* man for the greater part of his 147 years.

## Jacob's Return Journey from Haran in Paddan-Aram to Hebron in Canaan

### Tracing Key Events and Stops on the 400 Mile Journey of Jacob with His Family Clan



**1.** Jacob departs Haran at Yahweh's command – with a promise of protection.  
*Gen. 31:1-3, 11-13*

Jacob is 97 yrs. of age.  
Rueben is ≈ 12 yrs of age.  
Joseph is 6 yrs of age.  
Dinah is 1-2 yrs of age

**2.** Jacob and his departing entourage are intercepted by Laban after 10 days of travel.  
*Gen. 31:17-25 (esp. vs. 23)*

Note. Jacob's goal: his father Isaac's place in Hebron. (vs. 18)

**3.** Jacob encounters a host of angels at Mahanaim.  
*Gen. 32:1-2*

Mahanaim = "two hosts"  
Jacob receives assurance that his journey will proceed under the guardianship of two hosts: an angelic host plus his servant host.

**4.** Jacob makes preparations for an encounter with Esau. *Gen. 32:3-32*

He presumably makes preparations at Mahanaim, north of the ford Jabbok.  
He engages in prayer. (vs. 9-12)  
He prepares a gift for Esau. (vs. 13-15)  
He wrestles the angel of Yahweh. (vs. 24-32)

**5.** Jacob encounters Esau on the south side of the ford Jabbok.  
*Gen. 33:1-16*

Esau returns to Mt. Seir (Edom).

**6.** Jacob and his entourage rest at Succoth, just to the east of the Jordan.  
*Gen. 33:17*

**8.** Jacob purposes to lead his family clan to Bethel, requiring a time of repentance before engaging the journey.  
*Gen. 35:1-15*

Jacob rebuilds the altar and engages in worship with the whole family. (vs. 6-7)  
God renews elements of the Patriarchal covenant with Jacob. (vs. 9-15)

**7.** Jacob crosses the Jordan, arriving in Canaan and setting up the family camp at Shechem. *Gen. 33:18-20*

He purchases property and builds an altar called El-Elohe-Israel, meaning, "The Strong One who is the Elohim of Israel".

**9.** Benjamin is born at Ephrath (Bethlehem) and Rachel dies. *Gen. 35:16-20*

**10.** Home at last!  
Jacob and his clan arrive at Hebron. *Gen. 35:27-29*

Note: The span of time for Jacob's journey from Haran to Hebron is unknown. Yet it is from Hebron that Jacob later sends Joseph to visit his brothers tending the flock in Shechem ... an occasion 11 years after Jacob left Haran, assuming Joseph is so sent by Jacob at age 17.

Isaac dies at 180 yrs. of age ... 23 years after Jacob left Haran ... and when Joseph is 29 yrs. of age (already being in Egypt for 12 years).

## A Textual Misconception: The Chronological Placement of *Genesis 34*

The placement of *Gen. 34* in relation to the chronological flow of events in Jacob's journey from Haran to Canaan presents, as shown in this section, a troubling cause for concern arises when seeking to connect details set forth at the close of *Gen. 33* with those appearing in the opening of *Gen. 35*. Although chapter 34 is textually set in a position intermediate to *Gen. 33* and *Gen. 35*, it is a presumption to insist that the sequence of events described in chapters 33–35 actually flowed out along a continuous and consecutively arranged chronology. It is shown here that this presumption is, in fact, a misconception that must stand contrary to truth. Nevertheless, the idea that chapters 33–35 actually present such a consecutive flow of events is an ingrained and widely adopted understanding of Jacob's life flow.

Consider first the timing of Jacob's arrival at Shechem. It seems reasonable that Jacob and his entourage would have endeavored to progress quite consistently until their arrival at the ford Jabbok and their encounter with Esau. Thereafter, as the text declares, they moved but a short distance to Succoth where they rested for an extended period (Jacob both built a house and booths for the livestock). Perhaps this was a winter rest stop, one where a supply of water and good shelter in the woods and brush along the Jordan River were readily and abundantly available.

If this proposed scenario indeed has close resemblance to fact, then their crossing the Jordan and arriving at Shechem, say in early springtime, might have occurred approximately one year following their departure from Haran. In such a case we can discern that the ages of selected members of Jacob's family would be as follows.

<p><u>Ages when camping at Shechem</u> (assuming an arrival 1 yr. after leaving Haran)</p> <p>Jacob: <math>97 + 1 = 98</math> yrs. old Reuben: <math>12 + 1 = 13</math> yrs. old Joseph: <math>6 + 1 = 7</math> yrs. old Dinah: <math>(1 \text{ or } 2) + 1 = 2 \text{ or } 3</math> yrs. old</p>
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The estimated ages of both Reuben and Dinah immediately stimulate questions regarding the possibility that *Gen. 34* follows chronologically the events noted in *Gen. 33:18-20*. The crucial point is that the shameful and tragic circumstances described in *Gen. 34* could hardly have occurred at the time of Jacob's camping at Shechem on his homeward journey to Hebron because of the age of Dinah and of her eldest brothers. Consequently, the details described in *Gen. 34* almost certainly must have occurred, roughly say, 20 or so years later, and *Gen. 34* ought to be seen as a parenthetical insertion within the broader account of the return journey. From this perspective, its placement following the description in *Gen. 33:18-20* occurs as likely a parenthetical insertion or an historical addendum relative to the earlier first stop at Shechem, even an event that chronologically occurred at some unspecified time later.

As Jacob penned his "toledoth" account, which is concluded in *Gen. 37:2a* by use of the phrase, "*These are the generations of Jacob*", he evidently purposed to insert a record of this grievous incident of his life sometime after arriving back in Canaan. Since this event occurred at Shechem, it would be quite natural that he would append the account of *Gen. 34* in immediate proximity to the details of his initial stop at Shechem, and his associated purchase of property there and the raising of an altar in worship of El-Elohe-Israel. It is worth noting that Jacob's toledoth, ending with *Gen. 37:1*, contains essentially only scant further detail of his journey back home to Hebron aside from his stop at Bethel. He only briefly references his arrival at Hebron (*Gen. 35:27*) and the death of his father Isaac (*Gen. 35:28-29*).

The proposed conclusion detailed above receives added support by two further textual evidences. First, the detail appearing in the sacred text immediately following Jacob's toledoth suggests that Joseph was sold into slavery at age 17, or perhaps a year or two later (see "Comment" at bottom of page 11).

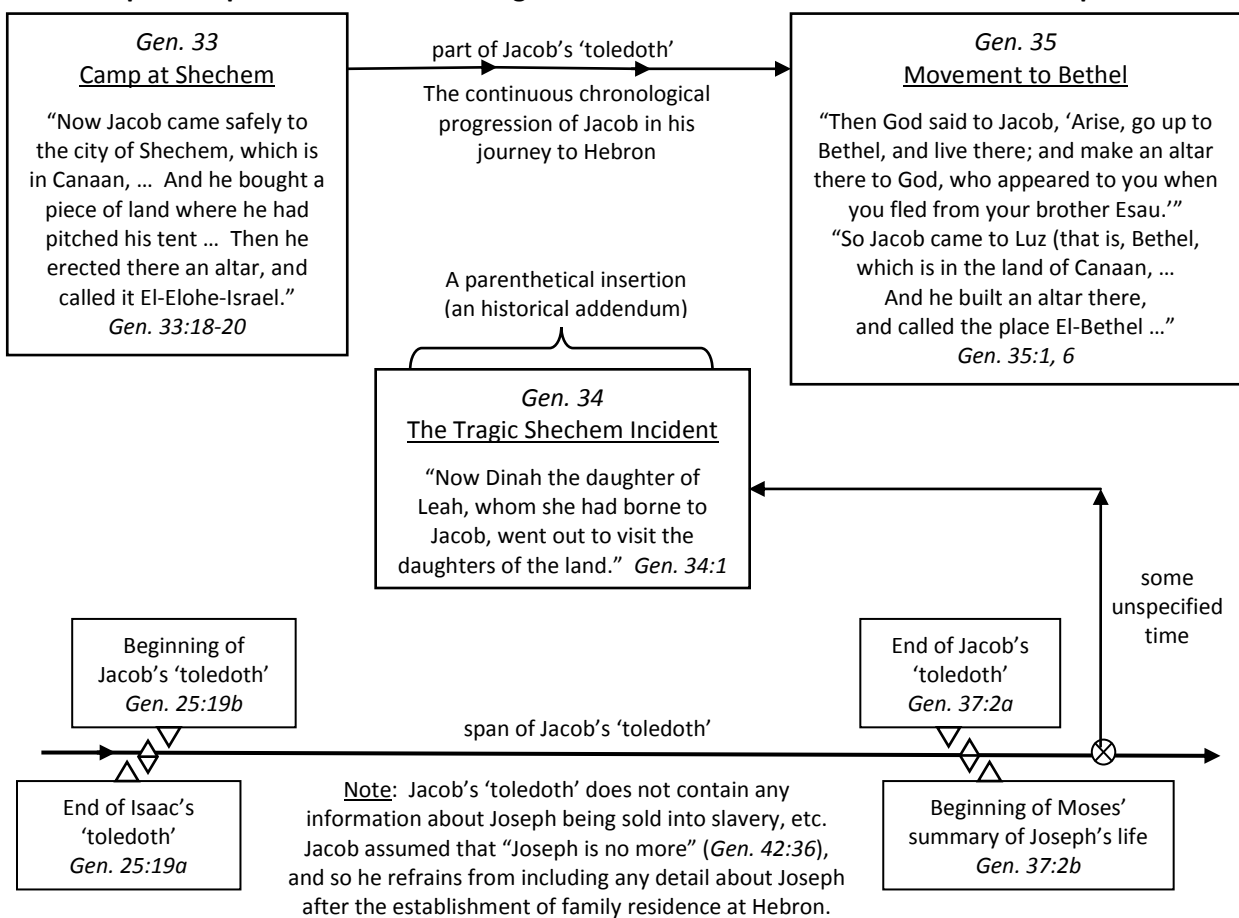
Now even at this later time, the age of Dinah is still problematic in relation to the opening statement of *Gen. 34*. To make this explicit, consider the following computation of relative ages in Jacob's family.

Ages when Joseph is 17 yrs. of age  
 (Joseph's age noted in *Gen. 37:2*)  
 Jacob:  $91 + 17 = 108$  yrs. old  
 Reuben:  $6 + 17 = 23$  yrs. old  
 Dinah:  $17 - (5 \text{ or } 6) = 11 \text{ or } 12$  yrs. old  
 (Dinah estimated to be 5-6 years younger than Joseph)

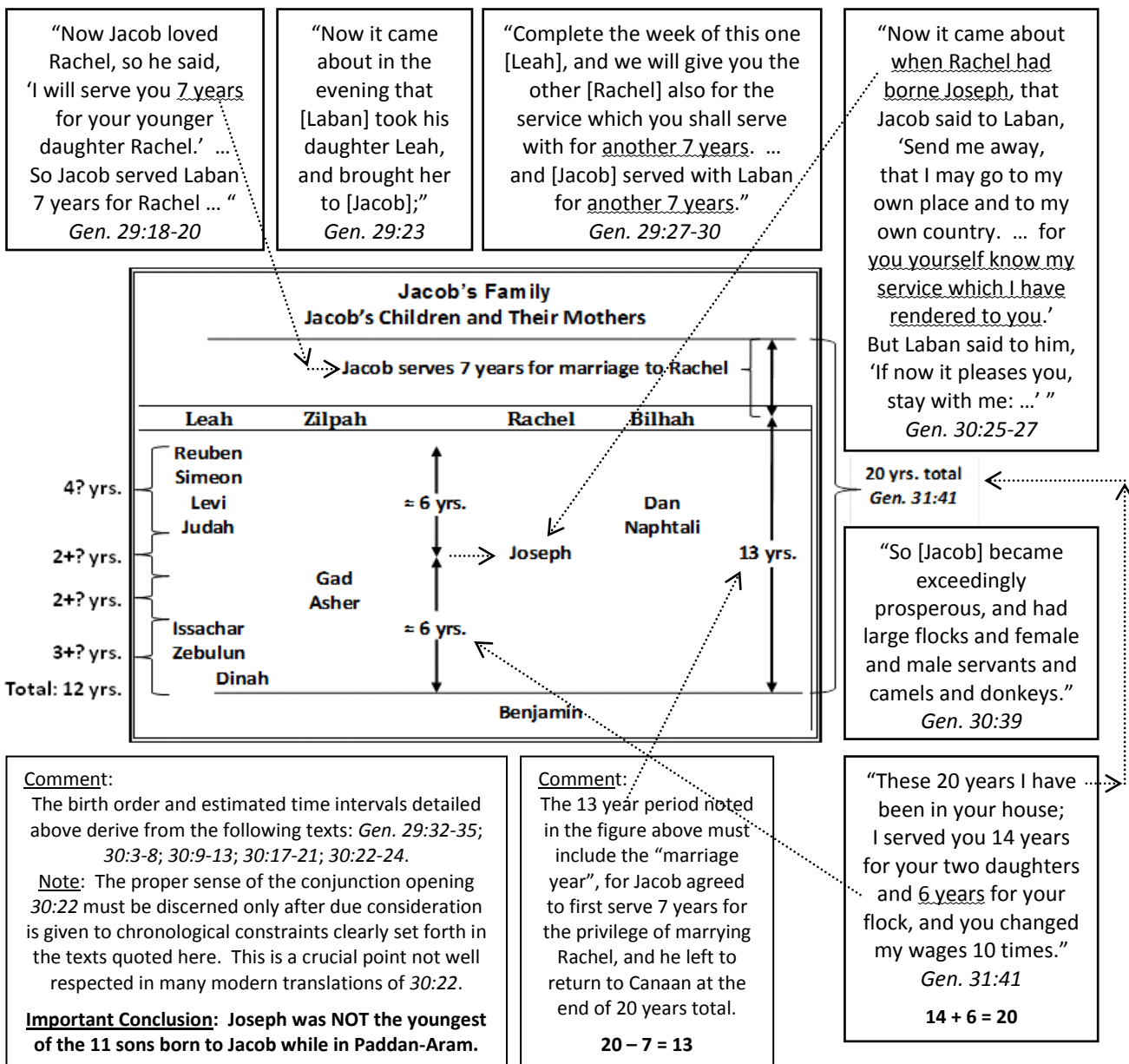
**Important Conclusion:** The tragic *Gen. 34* incident at Shechem must have occurred some years **AFTER** Joseph was sold as a slave to the Midianite traders.

In addition, this conclusion is reinforced by the very unlikely fact that Jacob's sons would be found pasturing the flock in proximity to Shechem after the events of *Gen. 34* ... after the scandalous action and murderous plot perpetrated in that community. What with the resulting profound denigration of Jacob's name through such heinous action by his sons, Jacob would almost surely have kept this flock some distance to the south. Thus, Joseph would not have been sent on that 50 mile journey to check on the welfare of his brothers and the flock around Shechem after the events of *Gen. 34*.

#### The Proper Perspective of the Chronological Placement of *Genesis 34* in Jacob's Life Experience



## Jacob and His Family: A Biblically Consistent Overview



### Important Chronological Implications:

<p><b>Ages when arrival at Shechem:</b> (assume arrival 1 yr. after leaving Haran)</p> <p>Jacob: 97 + 1 = 98 yrs. old Reuben: 12 + 1 = 13 yrs. old Joseph: 6 + 1 = 7 yrs. old Dinah: (1–2) + 1 = 2 or 3 yrs. old</p>	<p><b>Comment:</b> Abraham departed Haran in 2083 An. Hom. while Jacob left Haran in 2265 An. Hom.</p> <p>Thus, Jacob arrived at Shechem and built the altar to El-Elohe-Israel 182 years after Abraham built his altar there.</p>	<p><b>Joseph's Years at Hebron:</b> (assume arrival at Hebron 2 yrs. after leaving Haran)</p> <p>Joseph arrives at Hebron at age 6 + 2 = 8 yrs. Joseph is sold as slave at age 17 yrs. Joseph lives in Hebron for 9 years before being sold as slave. <b>Conclusion:</b> Joseph has opportunity for personal interaction with grandfather Isaac throughout his 9 yr. stay at Hebron.</p>
<p><b>Ages when Joseph is 17 yrs. of age:</b></p> <p>Jacob: 91 + 17 = 108 yrs. old Reuben: 6 + 17 = 23 yrs. old Dinah: 17 – (5–6) = 11 or 12 yrs. old</p> <p><b>Important Conclusion:</b> The <i>Gen. 34</i> incident at Shechem must have occurred AFTER Joseph was sold as a slave to the Midianite traders.</p>		<p><b>Further Facts:</b> Jacob departs Haran at age 97 in 2265 An. Hom. Jacob and family arrive in Hebron in 2265 + 2 = 2267 An. Hom. Joseph arrives in Hebron at age 8 in 2267 An. Hom. Joseph is sold as slave at age 17 in 2276 An. Hom. Isaac dies at age 180 in 2288 An. Hom.</p> <p><b>Conclusion:</b> Joseph is age 29 (in Egypt) and Jacob age 120 when Isaac dies, 21 years after Jacob arrives back in Hebron.</p>

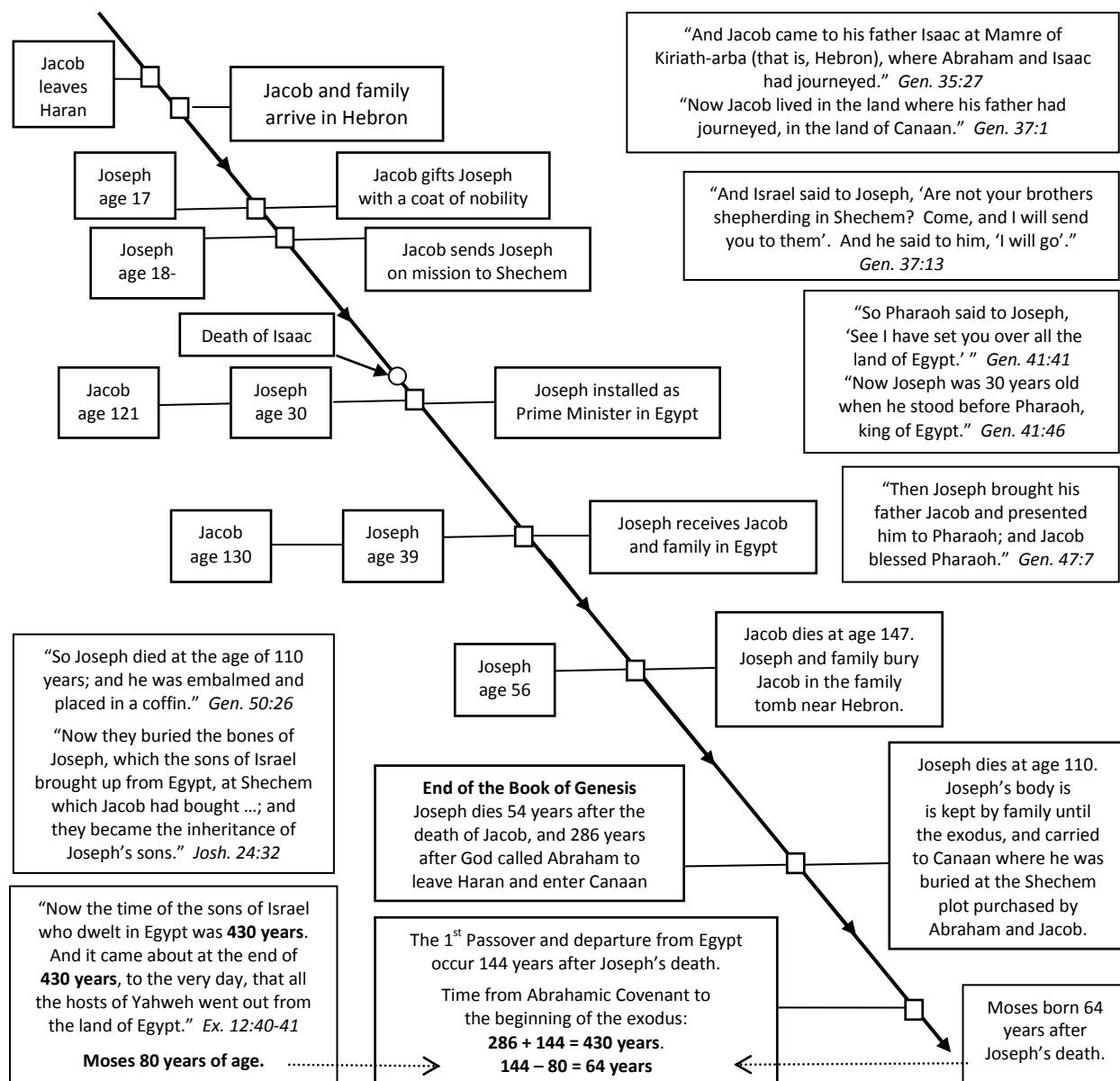
## The Lives of Jacob and Joseph after Arrival of the Family at Hebron

The establishment of the family clan's residence in Hebron comprises the closing note in Jacob's "toledoth" account of his life prior this time. He closes his personal account with two statements pertaining specifically to the climax of his journey from Haran to Hebron: *Gen. 35:27* and *Gen. 37:1*.

The reader will observe that the death and burial of Isaac (*Gen. 35:28-29*), plus the two toledoths of Esau, are inserted between these two closing statements in Jacob's toledoth. As such Jacob exercised his patriarchal duty to represent the whole of his father Isaac's descendants, and carried forward the account from the close of Isaac's toledeth (see *Gen. 25:19*) until his own arrival back in Hebron. The toledoth of Jacob is truly quite comprehensive of the whole of his family life. It ranges from the marriage of his parents onward to his own birth, through the years of his home life, then traces the development of his personal family, and finally describes key aspects of his return from 20 years in Haran.

The continuation of the historical record of the family is picked up in *Gen. 37:2b*, but under different authorship, with Joseph being 17 years of age and pasturing the flock with his brothers in the vicinity of Hebron. The subsequent history of the lives of these two saints is presented in a schematic form below, with principal focus on the chronological flow revealed in *Gen. 37:2b-50:26*.

### The Chronological Flow of the Lives of Jacob and Joseph after their Return from Haran.



## Clarifying Misconceptions Concerning Joseph in Relation to *Gen. 37*

### Comment re *Gen. 37:3* and the phrase: “[Joseph] was the son of [Jacob’s] old age”

The referenced phrase is a basis for frequent assertions that Joseph was a son born considerably later in Jacob’s life compared with the other 10 sons born in Paddan-Aram. However, such presumption is clearly contrary to fact. As shown decisively through chronological considerations detailed earlier in this chapter, all 11 of Jacob’s sons born in Paddan-Aram were born while Jacob’s age spanned the range 85–96.

Further, Joseph was born when Jacob was 91, near the mid-range of this span.

Thus, all of Jacob’s sons were, in a true sense, “a son of his old age”, and Joseph was certainly not such a son in some sense that was unique or special in comparison with his other brothers.

As such, the phrase, taken in a plain and straightforward manner as it appears in our modern translations, provides no particularly distinct information in regard to Joseph – for this modifying phrase clearly has Joseph as its subject. It seems logical therefore that an alternate and more meaningful sense must be present in the original version of this text – a sense likely not well captured in our common translations.

A few select commentaries address the underlying sense of this phrase, and offer quite informative insights into the character of Joseph. The following statements are excerpted from two sources.

- ♦ “Literally rendered, it is ‘son of old age to [Jacob]’—Hebrew phrase for ‘a wise son’—one who possessed wisdom above his years— ... one born old, one wise above his years, an old head on young shoulders.” [James-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary]
- ♦ “The ancient translations, Chaldee, Persian, Arabic, and Samaritan, render the [phrase] thus, a wise or prudent son; ... one wise above his years, one that had a grey head, as we say, upon green shoulders.” [Matthew Poole Commentary]

A succinct paraphrase of these descriptive statements might be: “Joseph was a son of older age” – a son who manifested a more advanced maturity, dependability, and analytical judgment over his brothers.

### Comment: Joseph’s Age when Sold as a Slave to Midianite Traders

The narrative in *Gen. 37* opens with Joseph at 17 years of age. Now it is widely presumed, and so quite authoritatively stated in many writings, that Joseph’s age on the occasion of his being sold into slavery was indeed 17, an event described several paragraphs later than this earlier statement of his age.

However, it is purely a speculative assumption that he was sold at age 17, one not at all definitively required by the text. Joseph’s being 17 years of age in *Gen. 37:2*, as he is introduced at the beginning of this narrative account, may simply have reference to that time when he gave his critical report concerning his brothers, and when his father Jacob gifted him with a varicolored tunic – a coat which in color and style was distinctive of an individual belonging to nobility.

An examination of the text shows that vs. 5 opens a new paragraph, one addressing the subject of Joseph’s dreams. Now this new paragraph need not be seen as describing an action having immediate and successive temporal relation to the subject matter in vs. 3. Of course, the NASB does open vs. 5 with the conjunction “Then”, a term implying temporal succession. However, the Geneva and King James versions alternatively use “And”, while the NKJV uses “Now”. Such renderings of the conjunction opening the new paragraph allow the sense that a subsequent event is being described in vs. 5, even one which may follow the previous event (vs. 3) with an unspecified interval of delay.

Note: Recall the earlier encounter of this same translative sense communicated by the choice of conjunction in relation to *Gen. 30:22* and Joseph’s place in the birth order of Jacob’s sons. (see p. 5)

Certainly, as Joseph purposed to share his dreams with his family, and since these shared dreams sharply intensified the already rising resentment of Joseph’s manifest position of favor from his father Jacob, it seems entirely reasonable that some interval of time following his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday could have occurred between vs. 4 and vs. 5, and that both Joseph and his brothers continued to reside in Hebron.

Realistically then, Joseph may have been somewhere between 18 to 20 years of age by the time Jacob sent him to check on the welfare of his brothers in the vicinity of Shechem 50 miles to the north.



**Point:** The infallibility of Scripture ensures consistency of detail in all respects, and thus the phrase “[Joseph] was the son of {Jacob’s} old age” must comport fully with all revealed chronological data. And further, the correct interpretive understanding must satisfy full correspondence across all related texts.

**Conclusion:** Joseph’s age when he was sold as a slave and escorted to Egypt, although unspecified in Scripture and subject to conjecture, was likely in the range 18–20, but almost assuredly greater than 17.

Summary Chronology: The Lives of Jacob & Joseph (with information relative to Abraham & Isaac included)		
Year An. Hom.	Patriarchal Event	Chronological Comment
2008	Abraham born	(in Ur of the Chaldeans)
2083	Abraham called to leave Haran	Abraham 75 yrs. of age Covenant Promise given ( <i>Gen. 12:1-3</i> )
2108	Isaac born	Abraham 100 yrs. old
2168	Jacob born	Isaac 60 yrs. old
2183	Abraham died	Jacob 15 yrs. of age
2245	Jacob flees to Paddan-Aram	Jacob 77 yrs. of age Isaac 137 yrs. of age
2252	Jacob marries Leah & Rachel	Jacob 84 yrs. of age
2259	Joseph born	Jacob 91 yrs. of age (eldest son Reuben ≈ 6 yrs. old)
2265	Jacob leaves Haran to return to Canaan (after 20 years with Laban in Haran)	Jacob 97 yrs. of age Joseph 6 yrs. of age (daughter Dinah ≈ 1 yr. old)
?? 2267 ??	Jacob arrives at Hebron (estimated 2 yr. travel time)	Jacob 99 yrs. of age Joseph 8 yrs. of age
2276	Joseph 17 yrs. old	(Reuben ≈ 23 yrs. old) (Dinah ≈ 12 yrs old)
2288	Isaac died	Isaac 180 yrs. old Jacob 120 yrs. of age Joseph 29 yrs. of age Joseph likely in prison in Egypt
2289	Joseph begins to rule in Egypt	Joseph 30 yrs. of age
2298	Jacob moves with family to Egypt	Jacob 130 yrs. of age Joseph 39 yrs. of age
2315	Jacob died	Jacob 147 yrs. old Joseph 56 yrs. of age
2369	Joseph died	Joseph 110 yrs. old

## Appendix #1: The “*toledoths*” of Genesis

“toledoth” (*Heb.* to-led-aw’; alt., “toledot”) → family descent; account or record of begetting

**Gen. 2:4:** The toledoth of creation

Gen. 1:1 ————— Gen. 2:4

“These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh Elohim made the earth and the heavens.”

*Gen. 2:4 (Geneva, KJV)*

**Gen. 5:1:** The toledoth of Adam

Gen. 2:5 ————— Gen. 5:1

“This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him; male and female created He them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.” *Gen. 5:1-2 (Geneva, KJV)*

**Gen. 6:9:** The toledoth of Noah

Gen. 5:2 ————— Gen. 6:8

“These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and upright man in his time: and Noah walked with God.” *Gen. 6:9 (Geneva)*

**Gen. 10:1:** The toledoth of the sons of Noah

Gen. 6:9 ————— Gen. 10:1

“These are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham and Japheth: unto whom sons were born after the flood.” *Gen. 10:1 (Geneva)*

**Gen. 11:10:** The toledoth of Shem

Gen. 10:2 ————— Gen. 11:10a

“These are the generations of Shem: Shem was 100 years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood.” *Gen. 11:10 (Geneva, KJV)*

**Gen. 11:27:** The toledoth of Terah

Gen. 11:10b ————— Gen. 11:27a

“Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran: and Haran begat Lot.” *Gen. 11:27 (Geneva, KJV)*

**Gen. 25:12:** The toledoth of Ishmael

————— Gen. 25:12a

Included  
in the  
span of  
Isaac’s  
toledoth

“Now these are the generations of Ishmael Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s handmaid, bare unto Abraham.” *Gen. 25:12 (Geneva, KJV)*

**Gen. 25:19:** The toledoth of Isaac

Gen. 11:27b ————— Gen. 25:19a

“And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son: Abraham begat Isaac.” *Gen. 25:19 (KJV)*

**Gen. 36:1, 9:** The toledoth of Esau

(Gen. 36:1a ???) ————— Gen. 36:9

Included  
in the  
span of  
Jacob’s  
toledoth

“Now these are the generations of Esau, who is Edom.”  
“And these are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in mount Seir.” *Gen. 36:1, 9 (KJV)*

**Gen. 37:2:** The toledoth of Jacob

Gen. 25:19b ————— Gen. 37:2a

“These are the generations of Jacob.” *Gen. 37:2a (KJV)*

“Now these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt; every man and his household came with Jacob. Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin; Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were 70 souls: For Joseph was in Egypt already. And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation.”

*Ex. 1:1-6 (KJV)*

## Some Reasoned Considerations *re* the “toledoth formula”

Possible options/means leading to the composition of the Book of Genesis.

- Text received by Moses via direct revelation – whether visions or verbal communication
- Text obtained via oral histories handed down generation-by-generation, and which were received through some means by Moses, and then organized into a unitary composition by Moses under guidance of the Holy Spirit
- Written accounts by eye-witnesses, preserved by patriarchal heads across generations, and eventually received by Moses who organized them (separate toledoths) into a single compendium, a ‘Book of Beginnings’.

Essentially no narrative or historical account of Scripture, considering the whole panorama of the Biblical texts, was penned by direct revelatory input apart from individual eye-witness accounts. Stated in another way, the preponderance of Scripture was written by eye-witnesses, and their records came about by inspiration of the Holy Spirit directing each writer. And certainly the receipt of a book covering such an expansive scale of human and earth history apart from eye-witnesses providing input (personal accounts) would seriously weaken the concept of the inspiration, infallibility, an inerrancy of Scripture.

The patriarchs were the writers and preservers, the authors and librarians, of sacred writings, men raised up by God and chosen by God, for the purpose of providing for all successive generations (even generation by generation) the reliably true record of who God is, and of God’s creative and redemptive working for His eternal end in the world.

With respect to the means whereby the texts of Scripture came to their present form, we can note the following points.

- ◆ Non-narrative texts, such as the 10 commandments, as well as major portions of Leviticus, were received by Moses via direct revelatory communication from Yahweh.
- ◆ Some prophetic texts were received by the respective prophet via divinely-communicated visions (viz., Ezekiel, Daniel, the Apostle John in The Revelation).
- ◆ As examples with close parallels to the formation of Genesis, we have the historical books (I & II Kings, I & II Chronicles). These books were composed by an author (? Jeremiah, Ezra, ...?) from preserved records/accounts likely penned by priests/scribes in quite continuous succession generation by generation.

As such, the formative structure of Genesis via the “toledoth formula” is not unique to Scripture. Or, perhaps better stated, there are other books of the Bible that came to have their present form in and through means not distinctly different than in the case of Genesis.

## Appendix #2: Addressing a Published Chronological Confusion

Some chronologists have reported that the ages of Esau and Jacob had to have been younger than 63 years of old when Jacob departed Beersheba for Paddan-Aram to escape the threat of Esau against his life. This proposition is based on the text of *Gen. 28:5-9*, and particularly the following phrase:

“and Esau went to Ishmael, and took for wife, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth.” (*Gen. 28:9*)

The chronological confusion lifted from this text can be understood, and clarified, by reference to the following data.

- ◆ Abraham was 86 years of age when Ishmael was born. (*Gen. 16:16*)
- ◆ Abraham was 100 years of age when Isaac was born. (*Gen. 21:5*)  
Conclusion: Isaac was 14 years younger than Ishmael ( $100 - 86 = 14$ ).
- ◆ Ishmael died at age 137. (*Gen. 25:7*)  
Conclusion: Isaac was 123 years of age when Ishmael died.
- ◆ Esau and Jacob were born when Isaac was 60 years of age. (*Gen. 25:26*)  
Conclusion: Esau and Jacob were 63 years of age when Ishmael died ( $123 - 60 = 63$ ).

The immovable chronological data listed above has led some authors to claim that, since “Esau went to Ishmael, and took for wife”, per *Gen. 28:9*, Esau had to have been younger than 63 years of age when he married Mahalath. Further, since this action by Esau occurred at the time Isaac and Rebekah were sending Jacob to Paddan-Aram, Jacob must have also been younger than 63 years of age at this time of his departure from Beersheba, not at 77 years of age as other fixed statements as detailed in this chapter clearly require.

*Question.* How should this ‘seeming’ contradiction be reconciled?

*Answer.* The reconciliation is straightforward when the statement “and Esau went to Ishmael” is not presumed to say that Esau literally met Ishmael in person, but rather that Esau went to the family clan (people) of Ishmael. Further to this line of reasoning, the subsequent phrase in *Gen. 28:9* stating “Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael” is likely inserted to denote that Mahalath was, in truth, the direct offspring of Ishmael, even the cousin of Esau, and implying that this marriage occurred after Ishmael had already passed away.