

Joseph: A Saga Of Excellence (Part One)

An Overlooked Man

John W. Ritenbaugh

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Have you ever, in all your life, encountered a person of such sterling character and sweet disposition that you wondered whether it was really true? I mean, so good that your suspicions were aroused so as to motivate you to begin purposely looking for flaws. (We do that kind of thing, you know.) A person not only of good character and disposition, but also one who was very good looking. If it was a male, you would say, "This person is really handsome." If it was a female, you would say, "She's a knock out—really beautiful." And not only that, but of such keen intelligence, such a keen mind, so as to give the impression that they have thought of just about everything. That they are right on top of every situation, so wise in their counsel, and so right and logical it is that you wonder, "Why didn't I think of that?"

I hope I have you thinking, because the Bible contains the story of just such a man. I am not talking about the Father and the Son. I am talking about a person who, when I reflected on my own preaching, I realized that I have rather largely ignored this person. When I tried to recall sermons either on this person, or sections of sermons, or even quotes of something that they had said, I had to shake my head and admit that very little, in my history in the church (at least, in my memory), has ever been said about this person. And I think it is a shame, because the Bible devotes a great deal of space to this person.

When I asked myself why I largely ignored this person, I found that it is because, in most of my searchings for things to preach, I most frequently look for illustrations of how we humankind did things wrong—rather than to look for somebody who did things right. Now to this end, we usually look to Christ. But this person that I am thinking about is not Jesus Christ.

The Bible covers the history of mankind for over four thousand years. If we consider prophecy, then we might add several thousand years on top of that. It, of course, focuses on Israelite history. And surely, in that time, there must have been around several hundred million Israelites who have lived.

The Bible is very selective about the people that it tells us of. It uses about thirteen chapters for Abraham and just two for Isaac. Do you know why I think so little is written about Isaac? Nothing of significance happened to him because he usually did things right. It devotes about nine or ten to Jacob, and it is difficult to tell about Moses. But it

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does contain five books that he wrote, and he appears quite frequently in those books. There is a whole book named after Joshua; but, if you look closely, there is not a great deal that it says about Joshua himself. There are things said about circumstances that he was involved in. There are thirty-five to forty chapters about David. In addition to that, numerous psalms that he wrote. And I think so much of David's life is written because he was at the vortex (like Moses) of a very significant time in the history of Israel.

The man that I am thinking about has as much written about him as Abraham. We are familiar with the exploits of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and Moses, and David, and the apostles (especially Peter and Paul). So we can recall and recount elements of the life of Abraham, the father of the faithful; the overcoming and persistence of Jacob; Moses, the great legislator; David, the warrior king and the sweet psalmist of Israel; Peter and Paul, and their zeal for God. But we know these men's flaws as well—because the Bible is faithful to give us insight into their weaknesses, as well as their strengths.

But how many of us are really, truly, familiar with Joseph? We know that he was Jacob's favorite; that his brothers hated him; that he was sold into Egypt; that he fled from Potiphar's wife; that he was thrown into prison; that he interpreted the baker's and the butler's and the Pharaoh's dreams; that he came out of prison; was made prime minister (second in command in Egypt); and that he administered his own plan of salvation—an agricultural plan.

That is an overview of the story; but it is just a skeleton. This man was used of God to fulfill a major step in God's plan. He was used to insure the fulfilling of a prophecy that God made to Abraham—a physical illustration of a major spiritual truth. There is, within this story, expressions of his character (his faith, his wisdom, his love) within the events of his life that are provided in contrast to others, who are also involved in the same events. And from him we can learn a very great deal about human nature and about human relationships.

Herbert Lockyer, in *All The Women of the Bible*, calls Joseph "the godliest and greatest" of Jacob's children; and that he stands out as the most perfect example of Jesus Christ in all of the Bible. Other authors also lavish him with praise. The only negative criticism he receives usually is of a perceived attitude toward his brothers when he was still a boy; and that he appears to have nothing to do with the passing on of spiritual truths to either Israelites or Gentiles. God simply did not use him in that way. But that he exemplified the qualities of a truly godly life, and what it is supposed to produce, is without argument. Every commentator will say something about that. The only one that seems to be like him is the Son of God Himself. Here we are dealing, though, with a human personality of the very highest order.

This sermon is not going to be very involved with Joseph's life. Rather, it is intended to give a background that leads us into a closer examination of his life.

Genesis 30:21-24 And afterward she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah. Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. And she conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach." So she called his name Joseph, and said, "The LORD shall add to me another son."

Genesis 30 contains the story of the births of the children—and the competition for Jacob's affections—of the sisters, Leah and Rachel. Because there were so many wives and concubines, conclusions about Joseph's birth order is varied. Here is what I will give you here. Without a doubt, he was Rachel's first son. But he was the seventh born son of the two wives. He was the eighth child to the two wives, because there was one daughter in there (Dinah). And overall, considering the concubines (Bilhah and Zilpah), he appears to have been the eleventh born of Jacob.

I do not consider his birth order of any great importance, except that the story shows a great deal of negative events that went on in the family before he was born. He was not born into anything that we would call a perfect family atmosphere. And considering Jacob himself—and all the competition, and bickering, and jealousy—it is a miracle to God's credit that Joseph turned out as well as he did.

Like everybody's story, his story begins before his birth, with his ancestry and some of the things that they did. He descended from a long line of strong biblical personalities. Before him was Noah, Shem, Eber, Abraham, Isaac, and of course Jacob. There were women in there as well: Rebekah, and of course Rachel. Abraham was still alive for fifteen years after Jacob was born; and Joseph undoubtedly had several years of contact with the aged Isaac, before Isaac died at the age of 180.

Joseph was born in Syria, when Isaac was 150. Within a few years after his birth, Jacob returned to Canaan. Joseph was then sold into slavery when he was 17. So, it is entirely possible that he had about a decade of contact with his godly grandfather, Isaac. Rachel—who was of a different branch of the same family as Jacob and, of course, Rebekah—was the niece of Rebekah. Remember that Rebekah was Jacob's mother. Rachel was the niece of Rebekah; and, therefore, she was Jacob's cousin. Her name means "ewe." And the word gives us an indication of natural beauty, of a pleasing personality, of a person who is of a generally docile nature, maybe even placid. Now in Genesis 29:17 it says, "Leah's eyes were delicate; but Rachel was beautiful of form and

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appearance."

When Jacob first saw her upon their meeting at the well, he fell madly in love at first sight. We are told in verse 18 that "Jacob loved Rachel." Now, so deep was his love that it says in verse 20 that "Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her." That episode of waiting seven years before marrying and still remaining chaste ought to be a lesson for every one of us. In verse 30, it says:

Genesis 29:30 Then Jacob also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And served with Laban still another seven years.

This attitude that he had toward her was in no way a passing fancy, because it lasted as long as Jacob lived. In verse 31, it is interesting to note. . .

Genesis 29:31 When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.

I think that we can safely say that, while Rachel had the key to Jacob's heart, Leah had the keys to the house. That was because God was involved. The Bible attributes many of the things that occurred in the lives of these two ladies to the fact that God was directly involved in directing events according to His purpose.

Now Leah was not hated in the sense of intense hostility or a loathing; but, rather, she was loved less. In other words, she did not get a fair shake from Jacob. She was not given the same kind of thoughtful consideration, care, and concern that Jacob thought of Rachel. And whereas Jacob would never forget (I am sure) an anniversary date with Rachel, maybe a birth date—he would never forget to do something kind and considerate for her—but he was probably frequently forgetting about Leah, sort of like, "Oh, are you still around here?" kind of thing.

You all have feelings. You know how it is when somebody that you admire and respect forgets, overlooks, snaps at you, is a little bit cross, the eyes glaze over or something, some kind of an expression goes across the face. And you know that the person that you would like to have the attention of does not feel maybe the same way toward you as you feel toward them. It was that kind of lack of consideration that Leah was getting.

I mentioned that it seems as though she had the keys of the house. God responded to

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her, because from Leah came Judah—through whom the sceptre, the Messiah, arose. Through Leah came Levi, to whom the priesthood was given. Two of the highest and most significant offices in the land, in all the history of Israel, went to Leah's children. When it came time to be buried, she was buried in the tomb with Jacob—not Rachel. And where a person was buried seems to have a great deal of significance in the biblical record. God almost never fails to tell you where a king was buried. Think about that in relation to Leah.

The kind of favoritism that Jacob showed, I think, was quite natural; it is something that we should expect from multiple marriages. But it played a very large role in creating the endless state of hard feelings and competition that existed in Jacob's family.

First let us notice the wistful yearning that appears in the names given to the children.

Genesis 29:32 So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, "The LORD has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me."

What was in that gal's heart? Let us look at the next one.

Genesis 29:33 Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon.

Genesis 29:34 She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi.

They were joined to each other in sexual intercourse. There is no doubt at all about that. But their lives were not together; and she full-well knew that. She thought that each time that she had a child, and that child turned out to be a son, that it would cause Jacob to turn his affections toward her. But it did not, because through it all Jacob continued to show favoritism toward the one that he loved.

Genesis 29:35 And she conceived again and bore a son, and she said, "Now I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

Even there it indicates—the meaning of Judah's name, which is "praise"—that she was ever-hopeful. In this case, she was hoping that God was showing her the blessing and that Jacob would somehow see this and realize that maybe, indeed, she was the one that God wanted Jacob to be with.

Genesis 30:1 Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister.

Do you see what is happening here? While the one is in anguish that she does not have the love of the other, the other is in anguish and envy because she is not bearing children to the one that she loves. Were these gals having lessons to learn? Was God teaching them things? Was God leaving (to you and me) a record that multiple marriages, polygamy, is not the way to go? Is He showing us that this kind of situation is not going to bear good fruit? I will tell you, it would take someone either completely oblivious to what was going on, or somebody who did not care and was cold and hardhearted, to live through such a situation without recognizing the kind of fruit it was producing.

Whom was it going to affect? We can already see the biblical record tells us that it was affecting the wives. If it was affecting the wives, it was affecting Jacob as well. What about the children? Were their minds being affected by what was going on?

Genesis 30:1 Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!"

Here is an outburst that I think indicates the depth of her bitter anguish over her being barren. But, brethren, I think it also ought to serve as a reminder to us to watch what we say, even in moments of anguish; because what she said was exactly what happened. God, indeed, gave her children—two of them. And what happened while she was having the second one? She died.

There is a statement here in the book of Ecclesiastes 5. Solomon writes:

Ecclesiastes 5:2 Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth. . .

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In other words, God has the power to respond, even in the way that we might suggest in our anguish.

Ecclesiastes 5:2 . . . therefore let your words be few.

It is very similar to what happened to Moses in the wilderness—when he struck the rock twice after God told him, "Speak to the rock, Moses." And Moses, of course, was not permitted to go into the Promised Land on the basis of his rashness in a moment of anguish.

Maybe it is just a coincidence that that occurred to Rachel, but she did have two children and then died in childbirth with the second one.

Genesis 30:6 Then Rachel said, "God has judged my case; and He has also heard my voice, and given me a son." Therefore called she his name Dan.

She did not really have a son. She concocted the idea that, if she just gave her handmaiden to Jacob and that handmaiden should conceive, that it would be having a baby by proxy. And, indeed, that is exactly what occurred. And when it did occur, she apparently chose the name for the baby that she had by proxy; and she named him Dan, which means "judge." From that she deduced that God had heard her complaint and had judged the situation and given her a son. So she felt a measure of blessing. You can begin to see how deeply this polygamy was playing on her mind.

Genesis 30:8 Then Rachel said, "With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali.

Again, Bilhah conceived by Jacob. When the child was born, Rachel named him Naphtali, which means "wrestlings"—reflecting what was in Rachel's mind in regards to her sister. She was wrestling with her. Now, I do not believe that they were actually rolling around in the dirt—like Jacob did with God, a little bit later. I do not think she meant that at all. But she is talking about the wrestlings that were going on in her mind—the emotions, the mental state—because of the envy that existed between her and Leah, because Leah was bearing children and she was not. She felt that if she would just have a child, then she would be fulfilled as a woman and as a wife.

Do you think that these things are not going to impact upon the children that are born?

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Do you think that her feelings were not passed on to little Dan and on to little Naphtali, while they were yet very young? The stress, the anger, the bitterness, the envy, and certainly the tension that was there between these two sisters.

Genesis 30:13 Then Leah said, "I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed." So she called his name Asher.

Now Leah began bearing once again; but this time she did it through Zilpah. Tit-for-tat. Well, since she was not bearing (and Rachel had done what she did), Leah got the idea, "Why don't I do that with my handmaid?" And so she gave her handmaid to Jacob; and, sure enough, she conceived. So Zilpah had a son; and Leah was very happy about that. That is what the word Asher means, "happy."

Genesis 30:14 Now Reuben went in the days of the wheat harvest and found mandrakes in field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."

They looked upon mandrakes as being an aphrodisiac. Rachel felt that, if she just ate these, she would surely get all fertile, and that she would begin producing eggs, and that surely then she would have her own child.

Genesis 30:15 But she said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" And Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes."

And so she bought the mandrakes by giving Jacob to Leah—prostituting him. Now, Jacob did not seem to mind at all.

Genesis 30:16 When Jacob came out of the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him, and said, "You must come in to me, for surely I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night.

Sometimes I begin to get the impression that every time Jacob came in from the fields, there was a policeman there pointing the way: You go here. You go there. And he went in the direction that he was pointed to go in.

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Genesis 30:17 And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.

She named him Issachar. Then we find that she conceived again and bore a sixth son; and she named him Zebulun. So God kept blessing Leah, until (in verse 23) Rachel finally conceives and Joseph is born. Now let us go back to chapter 29 again.

Genesis 29:31 When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.

Genesis 30:22 Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb.

Now, I would not say that God is involved in every birth, of all on earth. But it is good to remember that God, indeed, was carrying out His plan to fulfill His purpose. In the lives of these people, He was taking major steps to form the nations with which He would make the covenant. These nations would then be His representatives on earth. Let us go back to the New Testament, to Romans.

Romans 9:10-11 And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls.)

This is a key element in the plan—in the purpose—of God.

Romans 9:12-14 It was said to her [Rebecca], "The older shall serve the younger." As it is written, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." [That is quoted from Malachi.] What shall we say then? [Paul writes.] Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not!

Was God wrong in the way that He did things? Was God wrong in that he blessed Leah so abundantly with the children that He did? Was He wrong in withholding children from Rachel? Was He wrong in giving sons to Jacob through these two handmaids? Paul says:

Romans 9:15-16 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." [And then Paul concludes] So then it is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God who shows mercy.

What is Paul expounding here? He is expounding an aspect of the grace of God. We have to make a New Testament connection to this.

Romans 9:17-18 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this same purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

I think that we can see very clearly from Genesis 29 and 30, that the people with whom we are dealing (that is, Jacob and his family) are in a major way very ordinary people. They are just like you and me, in that God elected them according to His purpose, and they played a major role in His purpose. At the same time, God was playing a major role in their lives. Their selection by God was an act of sheer grace—completely, totally, undeserved. Was what they were doing examples of sin? Absolutely! God's calling of Jacob was not conditioned upon either the moral merits of Jacob, or of Rachel, or of Leah, or of Zilpah, or of Bilhah. And we could just keep going right on back—or of Isaac himself, or of the moral failures of Esau (Jacob's brother).

These people—even as we today—had to meet the circumstances of life with their knowledge of God. And their knowledge of God, at the time, was not very complete. There were great gaps in their understanding. It is best in every way that we strive to increase the knowledge that we have. I think that we can safely say that it is quite possible that not even one of them was what we would call today, "converted." Jacob's conversion may have taken place when he wrestled with God and overcame. And that did not take place until quite a few years after what we see here in Genesis 29 and 30.

I think that what the Bible records of these two women shows that, although Rachel was better physically endowed, Leah was the one with the better character. Do not be misled by Leah's description as being "weak eyed", or (in some translations) "tender eyed." It does not mean that she was almost blind. I am convinced that it does not mean that she was in any way ugly. I am convinced by what it says in later passages of the Bible, which indicate that she was indeed "tender eyed"—that is, that she had a soft,

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gentleness of a firm character. She did not have the steely-eyed competitiveness of insecure people, who are going to get others before others get them. I think that when we meet her we are going to find a lady that we will have to consider as pretty nice.

Genesis 34:1-4 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her. His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman, and spoke kindly to the young woman. So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, "Get me this young woman as a wife."

This young lady made a foolish and a tragic mistake. God very clearly tells you and me not to learn the way of the heathen. From this tragedy, a further tragedy also occurred that gives us some insight into the personalities, into the attitudes, into the character of Joseph's brothers.

What this young man, Shechem, did was dishonorable in every way; and yet, as much as lay within him, he loved her and he wanted to marry her. That is far better than David's son, Amnon. When you consider that this man was from a completely Gentile background, what he wanted to do would at least fit into biblical prescriptions regarding a situation in which a rape occurs. So, he wanted to marry her. Amnon, when he defiled his sister, just very coldly tossed her aside—did not want to have anything to do with her.

Well, the situation had to be brought to Jacob's attention and, of course, Hamor's attention. So, there were further negotiations to see what could be done.

Genesis 34:25-27 Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city, and killed all the males. And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem's house, and went out. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled.

I take it "the sons of Jacob" refers to the wider group of sons—not just to Simeon and Levi; but to Reuben, and Naphtali, and Asher and the others as well. After Simeon and Levi did what they did, the others came in and spoiled the city—took away the goods.

Genesis 34:28-31 They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the field, and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive, and they plundered even all that was in the houses. Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I." But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?"

Of course, he should not have, but Jacob was at least trying to find a political way out of this thing. I am sure that he understood that he was vastly outnumbered by the inhabitants of this land, and he wanted to get out of there with his skin saved. The only thing that I can think of was that God intervened and allowed Jacob (and all of his family) to escape with his hide. Otherwise, something very terrible might have occurred to the very group that God was beginning to form, that would be the fathers of their nations.

So, even while the negotiations were going on, Joseph's brothers took things into their own hands. It shows the kind of disrespect they had for their father. They did not wait for his counsel. They did not wait to see if their elders would come up with a more equitable solution to the situation. They went and ravaged the city, even though the inhabitants of the city were trying to do what they could to mollify the situation with Jacob and his family.

We have a little bit of an insight, in the prophecies regarding Jacob's sons.

Genesis 49:5-7 Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. Let not my soul enter their council; let not my honor be united to their assembly; for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.

Because of what they did, they did not have a land of their own (a state of their own, a province of their own) within Israel. They were denied that blessing. And I want you to remember this too: Jacob may have forgiven them; but he never forgot it. Remember that, because it has something to do with Jacob's character. Jacob never forgot what Reuben did either. All three of these men were cursed by what they did. And what Jacob did—in remembering—gives us some insight into his character, which we will get

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into just a little bit later.

Now, I bring the Dinah incident up because these people and what they did created the milieu into which Joseph was born: A mother, who gives every indication of being a beautiful but vain whiner, accustomed to getting her own way through beguiling charm; a father who was not only deceitful, but also a man of very energetic spirit and strong convictions—who seemed to be able to hold a conviction for or against somebody for a lifetime. Someone who did not easily relinquish his position, as his wrestling with God also revealed.

And then he had brothers, who could not help but be affected by an almost constant stream of competitive attitudes flowing back and forth between four different mothers. Not much is said about Bilhah and Zilpah, but they were human beings. They had feelings. I wonder how they felt, knowing that they were second class citizens and merely used in order to produce something for somebody else—prostituted. Sure, we might say, it was part of the age—part of the culture. But still, that cannot help but affect their spirit, their attitude toward life, and what they produced.

The Bible gives no indication whether Rachel ever returned Jacob's affection. Was it all one way? Well, I will give you my personal opinion. It is hard for me to believe that she did not reciprocate. In other words, I believe that she did reciprocate, because I doubt whether Jacob (or any man) would have been able to sustain such a deep love that the Bible seems to show for him if he had not been reciprocated to.

Lest you envision the flaming passion between these two as occurring only while they were young—or, at least, when Jacob was young—I think you had better think again. Consider this: As best as we can determine, Isaac was born when Abraham was either 100, or in his 100th year. He married Rebecca, and then Jacob and Esau were born when Isaac was 60. Esau married when Isaac was 100. (Esau was 40.) This next scripture took place at the time that Isaac was tricked, fooled, deceived into pronouncing the blessing upon Jacob.

Genesis 27:1-2 Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, "My son." And he said answered him, "Here I am." Then he said, "Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death."

Believe it or not, he still had about another 40 years to live. But he is described as being old. Old enough that his eyes were so dim that he could not recognize Jacob and Esau

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by sight. Now, he lived to be 180. I give you these figures so that you will understand that these people were pretty old, by today's standards, when these things were occurring. Now, what about Jacob's age? You can do a little bit of calculating.

Genesis 41:46 Joseph was thirty years old when he stood before Pharaoh king of Egypt...

So now, he is 30 years old—at the time of that.

Genesis 41:53-54 Then the seven years of plenty which were in the land of Egypt were ended, and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said.

And so now Joseph is 37 years old. Jacob is not yet in Egypt.

Genesis 45:6 "For these two years the famine has been in the land, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting."

Joseph is speaking to his brothers. Two more years went by. Joseph is now 39.

Genesis 47:9 And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The days of the years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty years; few [he says] and evil have the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage."

You can understand why he said that. Isaac was going to go on to live to be 180. Abraham lived to the age of 175. And here was Jacob at the age of 130, and he felt like an old, old man.

Genesis 47:27-28 So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there, and grew and multiplied exceedingly. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the whole length of Jacob's life was a hundred forty -seven years.

How old was Joseph by this time, then? By this time, Joseph was either 39 or 40. Since

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Jacob was 130 when he went into Egypt; and Joseph was 39 or 40 at the time that Jacob came into Egypt—we subtract the 39 or 40 from the 130; and Joseph was born when Jacob was either 90 or 91. A passionate teenager! [Chuckle.]

Since Joseph appears to have been the eleventh in line and Benjamin the twelfth, the other ten (with 3 women bearing them) could easily have been born over the previous 10 or 15 years. Considering the first seven years that Jacob worked for Laban to secure Rachel, Jacob was well over 60 when he fell madly in love. I am giving you very conservative figures here. He was well over 60 when he fell madly in love. Most commentators feel that he was well over 70; and quite a few say that he was 80, when those things occurred. And he was just "middle aged." He was going through a middle-aged crisis at the age of 80. It is so interesting that he outlived both of his wives.

I think that, given Jacob's age (his maturity and so forth), his expressed love for Rachel was real. It is a shame for Leah that the marriage occurred the way it did, but even there, there was a measure of justice meted out against Jacob. Even as Jacob deceived Isaac in order to receive the birthright and therefore supplanted Esau, Laban deceived Jacob, and Rachel was supplanted by Leah—thus setting up a very painful penalty for what Jacob then had to endure for the rest of his life.

Genesis 35:16-19 Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored in childbirth, and she had hard labor. Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, Do not fear; you will have this son also." And so it was, as her soul [her life] was departing (for she died), that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem.

Here is a defining moment in the life of Joseph. He is not mentioned there, but I think it was a defining moment. I am sure that Jacob, in reaction to the fact that he no longer had Rachel on which to lavish his love, transferred his affection to Joseph (Rachel's son), much to the envy of the rest of the family. And so we find in Genesis 37:

Genesis 37:3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors.

The story begins with Jacob making a very serious mistake in childrearing. If there was ever a biblical character with a one-track mind, this man was it. That is a quality that is

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good in some areas of life, but it produces evil fruit in other areas.

I did not go much into Jacob's character, up to this point. But from what the Bible reveals of seamier aspects of his life, he was a long way down the scales of admirable personalities from Abraham and Isaac. The Bible shows him to be a crafty schemer, selfish, overreaching. He had a keen eye for a sharp deal that was heavily weighted in his favor. Self-advantage in how far he was willing to go to attain it seems to be the main characteristic God pictures in this man. This man had a very hard time getting himself untrapped from focusing his attention in a singular fashion on anything that he did.

One author called him the biblical version of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He had neither the faith of Abraham nor the purity of Joseph. Yet he was undoubtedly a man of prayer. Inconsistencies are everywhere—weakness here, strength there. But do you know what I think happened? By the time Jacob was returning to Canaan from his twenty-year exile in Syria, he was beginning to get things right. When Rachel died on the way back, Joseph became the beneficiary of the wisdom that Jacob had gleaned from a tumultuous lifetime of experiences. Then, he began to spend what we would call today "quality time" to pass these things on to Joseph—attention, time, and wisdom that were never shared with the other sons.

That, plus the contact that Joseph had with Isaac—a contact that must have occurred, even though the Bible does not state it, because Isaac was still living when they returned back to Canaan. It was a small country. He must have had, at least, somewhere near a decade in which he had contact with Isaac. And what Jacob was passing on, and Isaac passing on, began to form in Joseph the foundation of a life that was going to play a very important role in God's plan.

Now, I will end this sermon with a quote from Mr. Armstrong, in *Mystery of the Ages*, page 231, [where] he says:

After Adam's rebellion, with Satan still on earth's throne, only God could have known how gradually, cautiously, a step at a time, must be the procedure. Such righteous men as Abel, Enoch and Noah undoubtedly were used to play some part in the ultimate. . . . GOOD FAMILY through the patriarch Abraham. Isaac, Jacob and Joseph formed part of that foundation.

They are the fathers of Israel—the nation with whom God made His covenant and through whom He designed to carry out His plan. So we are looking here at an

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individual that we need to know more about and understand. A man who seems to have been blessed with a great deal of integrity and spiritual purity. And so, next week we will pick up the theme, and we will see a great deal from Joseph's life itself.