

THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE

Scripture verses are NKJV unless otherwise noted; words in brackets [] were added by Bible translators; words in parenthesis () and any underlining is my emphasis.

In order to understand the trouble Jacob encountered in his lifetime his life must be followed as he aged. Without a time marker this could not be accomplished. Consider the dates of the birth and death of one of his sons, Joseph.

The bible does not directly record the year of Joseph's birth, but it does reveal it through the use of several pertinent scriptures. These scriptures must be assembled in time order and are as follows:

Genesis 41:46-47—Joseph was 30 years old when he gave the Pharaoh the meaning of his dream at the beginning of the seven years of plenty.

Genesis 47:9 relates that Jacob was 130 years old when he went to Egypt in the second year of the famine, making Joseph 30, plus seven years of plenty, plus 2 years of famine equals 39 years. This is Joseph's age when his father came to Egypt.

Joseph's birth year would be 130 (Jacob's age) minus 39, making the age of Jacob at Joseph's birth 91. Joseph is the only offspring of Jacob who has both his birth and death spelled out in biblical time.

This makes it clear that Jacob was 91 when Joseph was born. **Genesis 30:25** ***"And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph that Jacob said to Laban, 'Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country.'"*** At this time Jacob's family was complete with the exception of Benjamin, showing that his father's blessing was being fulfilled.

In **Genesis 28:3** Jacob received the blessing. ***"May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, That you may be an assembly of peoples;"***

Why was Isaac's blessing given to Jacob, the younger son? **Genesis 26:34-35** ³⁴***"When Esau was forty years old, he took as wives Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite. ³⁵And they were a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebecca."***

This grief of mind for Isaac and Rebecca was intense. They realized from their own experience that the promise to Abraham could not be fulfilled if one married into the families that they were to expel from the land in future years. Mixing with the Canaanites would have resulted in their falling into the same lifestyle that would cause God to reject them from the land in future years. **Genesis 15:16** ***"But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites [is] not yet complete."*** For that reason, it was important for Abraham to choose a wife for Isaac from his kindred, and should have been a motivating force for Isaac to do the same. However, it was Rebekah who was moved to see that Jacob would not fall into the same marriage trap that Esau fell into.

Genesis 27:46 *“And Rebekah said to Isaac, ‘I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth like these [who are] the daughters of the land, what good is my life to me.’”*

Why then did Isaac intend to give the blessing of the firstborn to Esau? The statement in **Genesis 27:1-2** gives the impression that some time had elapsed from Esau’s marriage to the intended blessing of Esau. ¹*“Now it came to pass, when Isaac was old and his eyes were so dim that he could not see, that he called Esau his older son and said to him, ‘My son.’ And he answered him, ‘Here I am.’”* ²*Then he said, ‘Behold now, I am old. I do not know the day of my death.’”*

This occurred when Isaac was 137 years old and Jacob was 77 which will be shown once the passage of time is explained by scriptural evidence from the bible. Rebekah was the one who realized that the blessing of the firstborn could not be given to Esau because he had married into the Canaanite nation. It negated the very purpose of her marriage to Isaac. At this time there was no doubt that the blessing had to go to Jacob who was as yet unmarried.

In **Genesis 24:3** Abraham gives instructions to his servant. *“and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell;”*

In addition, Rebekah correctly understood that once the blessing was given it could not be taken back which **Genesis 27:33-35** explains. ³³ *“Then Isaac trembled exceedingly, and said, ‘Who? Where [is] the one who hunted game and brought [it] to me? I ate all [of it] before you came, and I have blessed him—[and] indeed he shall be blessed.’”* ³⁴ *When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, ‘Bless me—me also, O my father!’”* ³⁵ *But he said, ‘Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing.’”*

It is necessary to remember that the bible only contains the core information, leaving out the details of interactions of those involved. One of the details is that Isaac and Rebekah knew that Esau had sold his birthright to Jacob. In **Genesis 27:36** Esau reiterates his loss of the birthright, which was no surprise to Isaac. Another fact is the deep disappointment of Esau’s marriage at age 40 to the two Canaanite women. The combination of these two facts automatically eliminated him from the birthright and the blessing. Finally, the intended blessing took place 37 years after Esau’s marriages.

For Isaac the rejection of the birthright by Esau had faded over the 37 years, and he was willing to look past these errors and give the birthright blessing to Esau, his favorite son. On the other hand, Rebekah felt a constant irritation which left her no peace as **Genesis 27: 46** has previously shown. At this point it is necessary to establish the age of Jacob when this blessing was given. As already pointed out Jacob was 91 at Joseph’s birth. At what juncture did his birth occur? **Genesis 30:22-26** ²² *Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb.* ²³ *And she conceived and bore a son, and said, “God has taken away my reproach.”* ²⁴ *So she called his name Joseph, and said, “The LORD shall add to me another son.”* ²⁵ *And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away, that I may go to my own*

place and to my country. ²⁶Give [me] my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done for you."

Joseph was born at the concluding point of Jacob's service of 14 years; Seven years for Leah and seven years for Rachel. Jacob was 91 years old at the birth of Joseph. Subtracting the 14 years of servitude from 91, the age of Jacob was 77 when he left his home in the Promised Land. This happened immediately after receiving the blessing of the firstborn. Jacob and Esau were twins, born when Isaac was sixty years old. Then 77 years later Isaac was 137.

Remember! This was 37 years after Esau had married the two Hittite women, and Isaac was then 137 years old. The sting of Esau's marriages had faded for Isaac, so he was now willing to give Esau the blessing of the first born.

For Rebekah, this was not the case. She continued to be greatly disturbed and pleaded with Isaac to send Jacob back to her homeland to find a suitable wife. **Genesis 27:46** *"And Rebekah said to Isaac, 'I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these [who are] the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?'"*

Because of our modern way of thinking it is easy for us to forget that it was the responsibility of the father to arrange the marriage for his son. It is not told why Isaac failed to carry out that responsibility, but he did not. From the time that Esau married into the Canaanite society and had sold his birthright the topic of a wife for Jacob, and his marriage was one of prime importance. The marriage of Jacob to a woman outside of Canaan would ensure the birthright for him. As the years passed and Isaac failed to act things came to a head when Rebekah heard Isaac's final decision to give the firstborn blessing to Esau.

It may seem that this decision came about without much discussion. There are two points to note here. They are both found in **Genesis 25:28** *"And Isaac loved Esau because he ate [of his] game, but Rebekah loved Jacob."* This is important because it shows what would affect their decisions in the future about the two brothers.

Esau showed his lack of belief in the prophetic destiny of the family that God gave to his grandfather Abraham and his father, Isaac. He did this first by selling his birthright to his brother Jacob, and then marrying into the Canaanite family which was a strictly forbidden act. As each incident occurred they prevented Isaac from giving the birthright blessing to Esau. There would have been a continued discussion between Rebekah and Isaac because of the importance of taking a wife from outside the land of Canaan, which would allow the birthright to fall on the one who would carry out the covenant that God had made with Abraham and Isaac.

Finally, after 37 years Isaac decided to overlook Esau's failures and give him the blessing. Conversely, Rebekah, holding to the prophecies that God gave her before the birth of the twins, and the failure of her husband to place the birthright on the son who would keep the covenant, made the decision to ensure that Jacob received the birthright blessing. This caused the subterfuge that followed. She also understood that once the blessing was given it could not be rescinded, making it imperative that Jacob receives the blessing. **Genesis 27:37** *"Then Isaac*

answered and said to Esau, 'Indeed I have made him your master, and all his brethren I have given to him as servants; with grain and wine I have sustained him. What shall I do now for you my son?'

This resulted in Esau receiving the following blessing in: **Genesis 27:38-40** ³⁸ *"And Esau said to his father, 'Have you only one blessing, my father? Bless me—me also, O my father!' And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. ³⁹ Then Isaac his father answered and said to him: 'Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, And of the dew of heaven from above. ⁴⁰ By your sword you shall live, And you shall serve your brother; And it shall come to pass, when you become restless, That you shall break his yoke from your neck.'"*

This blessing did not apply directly to the lives of the two brothers, but to their offspring as the prophecy to Rebekah from God in **Genesis 25:23** explains. *"And the LORD said to her: 'Two nations [are] in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; [One] people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.'"* It is the offspring of the older that will serve the younger.

At the encouragement of Rebekah Isaac sent Jacob off and gave him an additional blessing. **Genesis 28:1-4** ¹ *"Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: 'You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. ² Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. ³ May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, That you may be an assembly of peoples; And give you the blessing of Abraham, To you and your descendants with you, That you may inherit the land In which you are a stranger, Which God gave to Abraham.'"*

It is interesting that there is no recrimination of either Rebekah or Jacob for the deceit they perpetrated on Isaac. Did Isaac recognize that he needed to give the blessing to Jacob; but needed an excuse to not give it to Esau? Is this why he allowed Rebekah to overhear his instructions to Esau? He knew that Rebekah would go to any length to see that the blessing went to Jacob. Did Isaac realize that his wife had saved him from making a fatal error? It appears he did as he was happy to give a second blessing to Jacob confirming the first.

What was it that Rebekah did to deceive Isaac? First she cooked the savory meal, then dressed Jacob in Esau's clothes, encouraging him to play the part of his brother. This enabled Jacob to receive the birthright blessing. Can it be said that this was directed by God? Absolutely not! God does not use lies and deceit to accomplish His ends. On the other hand He does not force men to do the right thing; each must make right choices on their own. God uses our mistakes to teach us important lessons. Jacob spent most of his life learning the consequences of deceit after experiencing the same from his father-in-law, who was also his uncle. **Genesis 47:9** shows this. *"And Jacob said to Pharaoh, 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage [are] one hundred and years; few and evil have been 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.'"*

Looking back it is seen that Jacob lived in fear of his brother Esau for twenty years, from his deception of Isaac at the age of 77, to his return to Canaan at the age of 98. In addition to this threat on his life he served his father-in-law for twenty years of deception. **Genesis 31:38-41**

³⁸“These twenty years I [have been] with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. ³⁹That which was torn [by beasts] I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, [whether] stolen by day or stolen by night. ⁴⁰There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. ⁴¹Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times.”

Changing his wages ten times was actually ten major deceptions. The first was his marriage to Leah instead of Rachel. The following nine changes occurred in the six years of raising Laban’s animals. When Laban saw the results of the first year that Jacob got most of the offspring he changed his pick of the animals and chose the opposite of the marked ones. At the end of the second year Laban saw Jacob still receiving the majority of the animals, so now Laban suspected Jacob was affecting the outcome through breeding. He then made two changes in the following year. Thinking he could thwart what Jacob was doing to achieve the desired outcome Laban now changed his pick before the breeding season, and once the breeding was completed he changed it again. This occurred during the last four years of the agreement.

The marriage change and the first change in the second year of caring for Laban’s flocks, plus the two changes in each of the last four years equals the ten changes, or deceptions. Despite Laban’s best efforts to cheat Jacob the flocks of Jacob continued to multiply. The result was that Jacob became a very wealthy man. This was not only due to his ingenuity in breeding animals but because God blessed him. **Genesis 31:7-9, 42 ⁷“Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. ⁸If he said thus: ‘The speckled shall be your wages,’ then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: ‘The streaked shall be your wages,’ then all the flocks bore streaked. ⁹So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given [them] to me. ⁴²Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked [you] last night.”**

Jacob deceived his father, Isaac just once, but God had Jacob go through ten deceptions to prove the point that deception is a sin. Sin is what brings pain into our lives. Because Jacob had taken multiple wives, in part through deception, his family life was in constant turmoil. It was filled with bickering and fighting as the wives competed with one another for Jacob’s attention.

Coupling this with his father-in-law’s deception with his wages made a miserable life for Jacob.

I Corinthians 10:11-13 ¹¹“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God [is] faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear [it].

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