

Genesis 29:14-35 to 30:1-29

These verses describe Jacob's sojourn with Laban in Padan-aram. They are among the many controversial and misunderstood events to be found in the Old Testament. There are two components of this biblical saga that need to be better understood. I pray that what follows will contribute to that understanding.

What is wrong with commonly held interpretation of these verses, can be summarized as follows. Contrary to what verses 20 and 21 seem to say, that the first marriage took place only a month and a few days after Jacob met Rachel. Furthermore, the second marriage took place only a few days after the first marriage. Many see this sequence of events much differently and are convinced to be that 7 years of labor was the price Jacob had to pay before he could marry Rachel. The fact is, that there was no delay at all. Jacob had both wives within the second month of his sojourn in Padan-aram. How can I make such a bold and seemingly erroneous statement and so strongly calling it fact? Many also refuse to believe that he was 77 years old when he married Leah and Rachel.

First, the easy one. The following is the proof that he was in fact that old:

1. Turn to Genesis 47:19 there Jacob clearly admits to Pharaoh that he was 130 years old upon his arrival in Egypt.
2. Turn to Genesis 41:46. There we are told that Joseph was 30 years old when he became number 2 man in Egypt.
3. Genesis 47:28 tells us that Jacob dwelled in Egypt 17 years and died at age 147. This also confirms this age of 130 when he arrived there with his whole tribe.
4. Let us go back to Genesis 30:25, 26. Here we learn that Joseph was born during the last year of Jacob's 14 years of servitude.
5. In Genesis 43 we can conclude that it was in the second year of the famine, and after he had learned of Joseph being alive, that he made that journey with his whole family to Egypt.

6. Now, when we add the 7 years of plenty to the two years before he saw Jacob, Joseph would have been $30+7+2$ or 39 years old
7. If we subtract 39 years from Jacob's age of 130, we get 91, that being Jacob's age when he had fulfilled his 14 years of servitude for his wives. Take 14 from 91 and we learn without a shred of doubt that Jacob was 77 when he began that 14 years.

So, now let us examine what Scripture seems to say, that is that Jacob had to wait 7 years before he could have Rachel, and that at the end of 7 years Laban tricked him into marrying Leah instead of Rachel. This would mean that he didn't begin his family through Leah until the first 7 years of the 14 years had past. Let's look at verse 20 carefully. It says "*and Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.*" It seems logical to conclude that after 7 years, when he thought that he was marrying Rachel, is when he got tricked. Now let's apply a little God-given common sense and logic, as well as literal interpretation of the verses that follow. Chapters 29 and 30 tell us that he had 12 children by the end of his 14 years of service. They are all listed chronologically in the order they were born, and to whom they were born. This wording does not in any way allow us to conclude that there were any multiple births, or concurrent pregnancies. The best we might conclude if we torture Scripture hard enough, is that because there were 4 women involved there may have been some overlapping, that is Jacob might have impregnated a second woman before the birth by the first women. Scripture gives us no basis on which to claim such a conclusion.

That connivance yields nothing because it's physically impossible to have 12 children in 7 years given the way they are so methodically listed in chapters 29 and 30. However, the full 14 years is adequate time for him to have sired 12 children. There is no way that you can legitimacy distort common sense, or the Scripture, to get 12 children in 7 years. Actually 12 children would have to be born in 6 years, given that at least three fourths of the first year would pass before the first birth. The idea that Jacob might have used all four women simultaneously is a desperate "grabbing of straws." This is because neither

Scripture nor social mores of the times allow for this premise. The women who bore him children other than his wives were not so used until each wife specifically requested him to do so. This, and the resulting sequence of births are clearly expressed in Scripture.

Now, hopefully having put this issue “to bed” what remains is to somehow harmonize these logically and biblically established facts with the seemingly conflicting and unharmonizable narrative of Genesis 29: 18-28. So let us revisit the text. It was after Jacob had worked for Laban for a month that he agreed to pay for Rachel by working for 7 years. Verse 20 and 21 say that he fulfilled the 7 years before the first marriage took place. There are 5 Hebrew words that are translated as “fulfilled”. The one used here is “male”. Among its several tones of meaning include, “to fill, be full of, in a wide application (literal or figurative) accomplish confirm and consecrate”. This, gives us authority to interpret “fulfilled” as to have been consecrated or “confirmed” rather than to have been physically completed. When God’s inerrant Word so clearly expresses the sequence of births and those who provided them, coupled with the prevailing mores and the spiritual condition of the father, there is no problem with this solution. I strongly believe after hours of musing and prayer, that the word “fulfilled” is accurately interpreted as “consecrated” or “confirmed”. This does no violence to Scripture and it is in perfect harmony with the other elements of the story.