

# Joseph's Brothers – a Brief History

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## Introduction

The title of this manuscript implies Joseph's ascendancy, his importance, his place of leadership, and his moral superiority among all of the sons of Jacob. Otherwise, the subject of this study might be "A History of Reuben's Brothers" or "A History of Dan's Brothers." Nevertheless, the brothers of Joseph have their own important niche in the providential plan of God and their history is certainly worthy of our study. The limits of this study are confined to the book of Genesis. Therefore, this brief history will relate almost entirely to the men themselves who were Joseph's brothers, rather than extending to the history of the tribes of Israel which they fathered.

## Background and Birth of Jacob's Sons

Among the patriarchs, marriages were often contracted with those of close kindred. Abraham's wife, Sarah, was also his half-sister (Gen. 20:12). Isaac and Rebekah were second cousins (24:15). When Jacob fled from the wrath of Esau, Isaac sent him to Paddan-aram that he might take a wife of the daughters of Laban, Jacob's uncle (28:2). Jacob did even beyond what Isaac instructed. He first took Leah (thinking he was marrying Rachel), then Rachel, both his first cousins, the daughters of Laban (29: 21–28). Moreover, both Leah and Rachel gave to Jacob their respective handmaids, Zilpah and Bilhah, by whom Jacob fathered sons (30:3–4, 9). The sons and daughter (Dinah) born to Leah and the sons born to Rachel were not only half-brothers and/or sisters. They were also distant cousins to those in the other mother-groups.

All but one of Jacob's 13 children were born in Paddan-aram while Jacob was serving his uncle/father-in-law, Laban. Benjamin was born as the large family and company of Jacob neared Bethlehem (at that time called "Ephrath"), enroute to Hebron, the home of his father, Isaac (Gen. 35:16–19; 27).<sup>1</sup> Jacob's sojourn in the service of Laban in Paddan-aram lasted 20 years (31:38). The first seven years of service were spent as payment for Rachel (he supposed) to become his wife (29:18). Although Laban deceived Jacob by giving him his elder daughter, Leah, in place of Rachel, he later gave him Rachel also (vv. 21–28). With these two wives and their handmaids, Jacob actually had four wives (Bilhah and Zilpah are called "wives" of Jacob, 37:2).

Jacob's family was constantly troubled by this multiplicity of wives. The favoritism of Jacob toward Rachel created severe jealousy and resentment between Rachel and Leah. Jacob's partiality for Rachel extended to her sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Jacob's favoritism for Joseph, especially, created a second generation of hateful resentment toward him in his 10 half-brothers. Jacob's family demonstrates some of the evil fruit of ignoring God's original plan of monogamous marriage (Gen. 2:24). Parents should likewise learn from Jacob the evil consequences of favoring one child over another.

During the 13 years of Jacob's residence in Paddan-aram after his marriages, as noted earlier, he fathered 12 of his 13 named children and the 13th was conceived in that land.<sup>2</sup> Although the record does not state the intervals of the births in Jacob's family, he averaged fathering one child each year for 13 consecutive years.

The order in which the children of Jacob were born and their respective mothers may be seen at a glance in the following chart:

- |                      |                       |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Reuben – Leah     | 8. Asher – Zilpah     |
| 2. Simeon – Leah     | 9. Issachar – Leah    |
| 3. Levi – Leah       | 10. Zebulun – Leah    |
| 4. Judah – Leah      | 11. Dinah – Leah      |
| 5. Dan – Bilhah      | 12. Joseph – Rachel   |
| 6. Naphtali – Bilhah | 13. Benjamin – Rachel |
| 7. Gad – Zilpah      |                       |

Since Dinah is not among the brothers of Joseph, only incidental attention will be given to her to the extent that her life involves the history of her brethren. Likewise, since this is a history of Joseph's brethren, Joseph himself will be discussed henceforth only as his life involves the history of his brethren.

### **Earliest Incidents of Joseph's Brothers**

The earliest incident on record in the life of the sons of Jacob has to do with Reuben, the firstborn. While still a child, Reuben gathered some mandrakes during the wheat harvest (another name for mandrakes is "love apples" (ASV margin). Adam Clarke made the following comment on this fruit: "Both among the Greeks and Orientals this plant was held in high repute, as being of a prolific virtue, and helping conception."<sup>3</sup> At the time of this incident, Jacob had fathered children by Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah, but Rachel, his beloved, was barren. This likely

explains why Rachel begged her sister, Leah, for Reuben's mandrakes and why she was willing to pay Leah's price in order to get them. It appears that Leah was none the worse without them and Rachel was none the better with them, as far as conceiving a child was concerned (Gen. 30:14–17).

Dinah is the principal in the next episode involving Jacob's sons. As the caravan was enroute to the home of Isaac from Paddan-aram, it encamped near Shechem where Jacob built an altar (Gen. 33:18–20). Shechem, the son of Hamor, the local prince, raped Dinah. Dinah's brothers were in the field when news of the crime reached them, and they registered the natural two-fold response of grief and wrath (Gen. 34:17). When Hamor proposed that Dinah be given to his son as a wife and that the other sons and daughters of Hamor and Jacob be permitted to marry one another, Jacob's sons revealed a major moral flaw. Dinah's brothers stated their agreement with Hamor's proposal – on the condition that all the males of his city first be circumcised. These brothers had apparently conspired on their plan for avenging the crime against their younger sister, for Moses says that they demanded this condition "with guile" (v. 13).

Hamor and Shechem agreed to this demand, not only expecting to gain the young women that might be born in Jacob's household, but all of Jacob's property as well (Gen. 34:18–24). On the third day after their surgery when the men were immobilized by soreness and pain, Simeon and Levi fell upon Shechem and killed all of the men. They also plundered all of their property and took their wives and children as captives (vv. 25–29). Jacob's response to this cruel deed by his sons was to rebuke them, pointing out the likelihood that Hamor's allies would now seek to avenge their deed and destroy them all (v. 30). This is the first in a series of events involving Jacob's sons, repeatedly demonstrating their lack of moral principles. There is an irony of sorts in this saga: Hamor had hoped to gain the women and property of Jacob by submitting to circumcision, but by the deed of Simeon and Levi, Jacob gained all of the women and property of Hamor.

The next act on the part of one of Jacob's sons is one of the most extreme sort of moral turpitude. Reuben, the eldest son, committed fornication with Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid and his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22). Although the text does not tell us the act was a rape (as in the case of Dinah), the wrath of Reuben over the rape of Dinah is rendered somewhat hypocritical by his own moral turpitude. One might also ponder why Reuben's brethren did not rise up in wrath against his act, as they had done against the son of Hamor. Reuben's sin would

come back to haunt him. His normal birthright as the firstborn son would be stripped from him by Jacob because of this deed (Gen. 49:4). These incidents graphically portend a pattern of amorality in most of Jacob's sons.

### **Events Relating to Joseph**

The next several events involving the sons of Jacob all relate to Joseph. Joseph's 10 older brothers harbored a deep animosity and a smoldering resentment toward him. At the age of 17 he is described as a tattle-tale on the mischief of his brothers and as the special delight of his elderly father (Gen. 37:2-3). They could not speak peaceably unto this younger sibling, who was, in their eyes, a spoiled brat (v. 4). As if this were not enough, their young brother told of dreams wherein he was ruling over them and his parents. For this his father rebuked him and his brethren "hated him yet the more" and envied him (vv. 5-11).

The pent-up hatred, resentment, and envy in the hearts of these 10 men was soon to find its opportunity for graphic expression. While Joseph's brothers were taking care of their father's sheep in a distant pasture, Jacob sent Joseph to inquire of the welfare of his sons and his sheep (vv. 12-14). One might wonder why Jacob should not have known better than to expose his beloved son to such risk (surely, he could see the enmity between his sons). This seems to be simply a further illustration of Jacob's serious deficiency of paternal wisdom.

While Joseph was still at a distance, his brethren recognized him and conspired to kill him and blame his death on some wild animal. At this point, Reuben prevailed upon his brethren not to kill Joseph, but instead to throw him into a pit. Moses tells us that he planned to come back later and rescue him that he might bring him again to his father. Whether Reuben's motivation was that of sparing his father great sorrow, love for his younger brother, or a temporary lapse in his otherwise lack of moral convictions, his action on this occasion demonstrates some redeeming quality of character rarely seen in any of Jacob's 10 oldest sons. As soon as Joseph arrived at their camp, his brothers laid hold on him, stripped him of the despised symbol of their father's special affection (his colorful coat) and threw him into a dry pit (Gen. 37:18-24).

These men calmly ate their meal after imprisoning their brother, revealing their calloused hearts. Solomon well described them: "Wrath is cruel, and anger is overwhelming; But who is able to stand before jealousy?" (Pro. 27:4). Matthew Henry accurately stated the matter: "When he (Joseph) was pining in the pit, they sat down to eat bread...."<sup>4</sup>

While Reuben was apparently away from the camp, a caravan of Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt to trade their goods, approached.<sup>5</sup> Judah proposed to his brethren that there was no profit in killing Joseph (apparently, the brothers had merely humored Reuben for the moment by throwing Joseph into the pit, intending to kill the young man before their oldest brother returned to camp), but there was tangible profit in selling him. If they could dispose of the pest and make a profit in the process, so much the better. There is a hint of filial loyalty in Judah's suggestion: "and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother, our flesh" (Gen. 37:27).

When Reuben went to the pit to draw Joseph out, he was not there. Realizing his responsibility as the firstborn son to take care of his younger brother and to account to his father for his disappearance, he tore his clothes in his agony of spirit. The record does not indicate either that Reuben inquired about what happened or that the other brothers explained the matter. They all then conspired to dip Joseph's coat in the blood of a goat and present it to their father as if they had found it along the way. They allowed Jacob to draw his own conclusion, namely, that Joseph had been devoured by some wild animal – which inference the wicked sons anticipated. His inference concerning the fate of his beloved son prompted uncontrollable grief in the patriarch, a grief in which even his sons hypocritically sought to comfort him (Gen. 37:31–35). One cannot help noticing the selfishness of these sons who would cause such sorrow to their father by withholding the truth, albeit, had Jacob known the truth of their evil behavior, his sorrow would surely have been multiplied. They proved themselves willing to go to any length to cover their evil disposition of Joseph and to preserve themselves from Jacob's justifiable wrath, should he learn of their treatment of Joseph.

The next series of events centers in Judah and it is indeed a sordid series. Judah's eldest son, Er, married Tamar, and he was so wicked that God killed him. Judah then gave his next son, Onan, to Tamar, but he refused to raise up offspring to his brother, so God also killed him. Judah then promised Tamar his young son, Shelah, when he was of marriageable age, charging her to remain in her father's house until that time. When Shelah had grown to manhood and Jacob had not fulfilled his promise to Tamar she became impatient. Learning that Judah would be passing her way, she disguised herself as and was mistaken by Judah for a harlot. Judah bargained for her carnal favors, giving his signet, his cord, and his staff in pledge of a promised goat from his flock later. Tamar conceived from this union with her father-in-law (Gen. 38:1–23).

When Tamar's pregnancy became known to Judah, he was hypocritically indignant that she had "played the harlot." He demanded that she be burnt for her whoredom. When she was sent for, she produced the pledges she had obtained from Judah as proof that he had committed fornication with her. Judah confessed that the pledges were indeed his and that he was Tamar's partner in sin. While he admitted his guilt in failing to keep his promise to give his son Shelah to Tamar, he was so grossly immoral that he apparently felt no shame regarding his behavior (Gen. 38:24-26). Once more a brother of Joseph exemplifies an odd mixture of immorality and morality, but with a somewhat heavy leaning toward immorality.

### **Events Relating to Egypt**

All of the remaining history of Joseph's brothers relates to the nation of Egypt, in which Joseph had risen to a place of immense power. Some 20 years after young Joseph was sold to Potiphar, a great famine came upon all the world, which affected Jacob's family (Gen. 41:46-54).<sup>6</sup> News soon spread throughout the world that there was grain in Egypt, and Jacob heard it. He sent his 10 oldest sons to buy grain for their families. He kept Benjamin at home, fearing some misfortune might befall this only remaining son (as he supposed) of Rachel (42:1-4). One can only imagine the emotion that flooded the heart of Joseph as he recognized his brothers and remembered his boyhood dreams of their bowing before him. How he must have listened intently as they began talking about their family back in Canaan! While Joseph knew them, they did not know him. How well Joseph must have also remembered their cruelty of 20 years past (vv. 5-9). Had they changed any?

Joseph set out on a course of action by which he hoped to be able to ascertain whether their jealous and murderous hearts had been softened with the passing of time. He accused them of being spies and cast them into prison. At first, he told them he would keep all but one of them in prison. The one released would return to Canaan and bring back their younger brother. This would prove the truthfulness of their story of an aged father and of a younger brother who were awaiting their return with food, Joseph told them. The brothers were kept in prison for three days (Gen. 42:9-17).

Those days in prison must have been days of the most severe terror and apprehension. These men who had come in all innocence to buy grain were charged with espionage, given a tongue-lashing and thrown into prison by a ruler who had them at his complete mercy. They received at least a sample of the treatment and experienced some of the terror they had inflicted on Joseph, although there is no hint that vengeance was Joseph's motive.

On the third day, Joseph called his brethren before him with an altered policy.<sup>7</sup> He would keep only one of them in prison, allowing the other nine to return to their home with the life-saving grain they had come to purchase. To ransom their brother held in prison they must return to Egypt with their younger brother. On the occasion of Joseph's orders, they discussed their guilt in the treatment they gave their brother years before. Here we learn something of the pleadings of Joseph in his terrible distress, as his coat was ripped from him, he was promised death as he was thrown into the pit and was eventually sold as a slave. All of Joseph's brethren, except Reuben, who intended to rescue Joseph from the pit, ignored the young man's pleas.

Reuben reminded his brethren that he had warned them not to "sin against the child; and ye would not hear" (Gen. 42:18-22). Reuben expressed the still-common erroneous philosophy of retribution. He assumed that they were now being punished for what they did to Joseph. So far as the record indicates, this was not the case, but these events certainly produced some badly needed soul-searching in these men.

Unknown to them, Joseph understood their conversation concerning him. The flood of memories of those painful times, plus the admission of guilt he heard his brethren make, was enough to overcome him; Joseph turned away from his brethren lest they see him crying. Simeon was chosen by Joseph to be kept in bonds till they should return from Canaan with Benjamin. Joseph commanded his servants to place in their sacks not only the grain they bought, but the money they bought it with, also. When the nine men stopped for the first night's lodging one of them discovered all of his money in his grain sack, and all were made to tremble, wondering, "What is this that God hath done unto us?" (Gen. 42:24-28).

Upon arriving in Canaan, they reported to Jacob all of the things that had befallen them. They still had a surprise coming, however. They discovered that the money of every one of them was in their respective sacks. They were made to fear all the more, knowing that they must go back to Egypt and answer to the powerful, mysterious ruler who had treated them so roughly. When they returned to get Simeon, they must have imagined that they would be accused this time of being thieves (Gen. 42:29-35).

Jacob did not welcome the message that they must take Benjamin back with them, both to prove that they were not spies and to gain the release of their brother, Simeon. In fact, Jacob considered both Joseph and Simeon as dead: "Joseph is not, and Simeon is not" (Gen. 42:36). He could imagine Benjamin's suffering the same fate if they took him to Egypt. He refused to

entertain the idea of letting Benjamin go, lest he perish also, bringing Jacob to his death in even more sorrow than he had already had to bear over Joseph's supposed loss. Reuben offered the lives of his two sons to Jacob as surety that he would bring Benjamin home again, but Jacob was not moved by this dramatic promise (vv. 37-38).

Hunger is a compelling force, however. When the famine did not abate and the grain they had brought from Egypt was exhausted, Jacob told his sons to return for another supply. Judah reminded him that the ruler who was holding Simeon hostage had sternly warned them that they would not see his (Joseph's) face again unless they brought their younger brother with them. The brothers refused to return to Egypt without Benjamin in their company, believing it would be a wasted trip. Jacob then complained that they had even mentioned Benjamin in the first place. They replied that they were simply answering the ruler's questions and had no way of knowing that he would demand to see the brother of whom they spoke (Gen. 43:1-7).

Judah added his promise of surety to that previously offered by Reuben. Jacob saw that he really had no choice if they were to escape starvation, so he allowed Benjamin to go, sending with the 10 men the best produce of the land and double money to repay what had been found in their sacks besides paying for more grain (Gen 43:8-15).

Joseph observed the arrival of the caravan from Canaan and gave orders to a servant to prepare a meal for them. The men were brought to Joseph's house in fear and uncertainty. They told of finding the money in their sacks and offered its return, but the servant must have amazed them when he told them he had the money for their grain and that God must have put the money in their sacks. Simeon was brought out to them and they were treated hospitably, with even their animals being cared for (Gen. 43:16-25).

When Joseph came home, his brothers bowed before him, as they had done at their first meeting. He inquired of the welfare of their father and spoke a blessing upon Benjamin before he was so overcome with emotion that he had to flee from their presence to weep. Upon regaining his composure, Joseph ordered the meal to be set before them. The men were amazed when their places were set in exact order of their birth (Gen. 43:26-34).

When the men were sent back homeward this time, Joseph prepared an additional surprise for them. He not only had all their money put in their sacks again, but he had his silver cup put in Benjamin's. Joseph then sent his servant to overtake the men with the accusation that they had rewarded his hospitality by stealing his silver cup. The men were so sure that none of

them had done this that they rashly said that they would give up to death him in whose possession it was found, and the rest of them would become Joseph's bondmen. The servant was not so severe, saying only that the thief should become a bondman and the rest could go free. Upon searching the sacks, the cup was found in Benjamin's. In their extreme anxiety, consternation, and frustration, they rent their clothes, loaded their animals, and returned to face what they knew would be an angry ruler (Gen 44:1-13).

Joseph was awaiting their return. They bowed before him now a third time, hoping to assuage his wrath by offering no excuse (although they knew not how this ill fortune had befallen them), but offering all of themselves as Joseph's bondmen, including Benjamin. Joseph refused, saying he would detain only Benjamin, and the rest should return home. Judah then pleaded with Joseph by telling him the unbearable grief the detainment of Benjamin would bring upon Jacob. Judah begged to stay in place of Benjamin for his father's sake (Gen. 44:18-34).

Joseph could take no more; he could hide his identity no longer. He had all but his brethren removed from the room for the special, tender moment when he told them who he was. The weeping was so loud that it was heard even in Pharaoh's palace. The 10 brethren were both shocked and frightened at what Joseph said (Benjamin was surely as shocked as they but had no cause to fear Joseph). They stood aloof, surely expecting him to begin exacting awful retribution for their crime against him 20 years earlier. Reading their thoughts, he spoke some of the noblest words ever to fall from human lips: "And now be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen 45:5). In one beautiful statement Joseph expressed his total freedom from malice toward his malefactors and his complete trust in God's perfect Providence.

Joseph immediately told his brethren that there were yet five years of famine and that they were to return to Canaan and tell Jacob the startling news they discovered. Furthermore, he told them to bring all of their father's family and possessions to Egypt where they would be provided for amply. Pharaoh was well-pleased when he heard these things, and he ordered lavish provisions be sent to Jacob and promising his family the "good of the land" and the "fat of the land." The initial incredulity of Jacob is understandable when his 11 sons brought him the news of Joseph: "And his heart fainted, for he believed them not." This news was "too good to be true." The sight of the provisions and the wagons to move them to Egypt convinced him, however, and he set his heart on seeing Joseph before he died (Gen 45:6-28).

The brothers of Joseph and all of Jacob's offspring took up residence in Egypt. When Joseph told Pharaoh that his family had come to Egypt, the king invited them to come before him. Five of Joseph's brothers were selected to represent them all and those six (counting Joseph), with Jacob appeared before the Egyptian monarch. He ceded to Jacob's family the land of Goshen and employed Joseph's brethren to tend the royal herds (Gen. 46:28–47:12).

The last major event in the inspired record concerning Joseph's brethren has to do with the blessings pronounced upon them by Jacob, shortly before his death. Reuben forfeited his honored position as firstborn because of his adultery with Bilhah. Simeon and Levi were considered together and were rebuked as men of violence and anger, likely for their treachery against Hamor and Shechem, principally. Jacob spoke words of enthusiastic approval to Judah, predicting that his descendants would rule Israel. Not only was the ruling family in literal Israel from Judah, but more important, the great spiritual King, the Lord Jesus, was of the stock of Judah. Nothing significant is said concerning the personal lives of the remaining brethren of Joseph in the blessings and predictions of the aged Jacob (Gen. 49:1–27).

The history of the brethren of Joseph ends with the events surrounding Jacob's death. All the sons of Jacob, along with many of Pharaoh's servants, carried the body of Jacob back to the ancestral burial place in the cave of Machpelah, purchased for that purpose by Abraham (Gen. 50:4–14). Upon their return to Egypt from Jacob's burial, an old – or perhaps a lingering – fear returned to the hearts of Joseph's brethren. Would their brother now avenge himself of the evil they had done him, with the restraining influence of their father now gone? In their anxiety they first sent a message which begged forgiveness of Joseph, as if this had been the dying wish of their father. They then all approached Joseph and once more bowed before him, offering their service to him. Joseph quickly allayed their fears. He wept at their repentance and expressed his full trust that it was the Providence of God that had brought him to Egypt, although the motivation for their action that caused him to be in Egypt was evil. Then he reassured and comforted them with kind words (Gen. 50:14–21).

### **Conclusion**

The history of the brethren of Joseph is frequently marred by their grievous moral principles. They do not ever appear to be men of deep devotion or faith. Their driving motivation seems most constantly to be selfishness and sensual indulgence. It is refreshing to see the inspired record of their lives close with their apparently genuine repentance for a most evil deed. As with most men, there were occasional hints of finer qualities, in spite of the

prevalence of base behavior. In the lives of Joseph's brothers can be seen the reason the Psalmist wrote concerning God that even "...the wrath of man shall praise thee" (Psa. 76:10).

### Endnotes

1. Genesis 35:26, after listing the 12 sons of Jacob (including Benjamin), says, "these are the sons of Jacob, that were born to him in Paddan-aram." This seems to contradict the record of Benjamin's birth at Ephrath (Canaan) which the inspired historian had given only eight verses before. Obviously, Moses could not have been unaware of Benjamin's birthplace when he wrote verse 26. The problem is solved by understanding this as a summary statement which is generally true of those listed. "It is a common practice of the sacred historian to say of a company or body of men that which, though true of the majority, may not be applicable to every individual" (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1968], p. 41). For another example of this style of summary statement see John 17:7, 12.
2. Since the "daughters" of Jacob are mentioned in Genesis 46:15, some have concluded that he had more than the one daughter (Dinah), named in this passage as well as in others. This is apparently the view of Keil and Delitzsch (*Commentary on the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1973], v. 1, p. 370). However, it seems more natural to conclude that *daughters* is used in the common sense of "one or more daughters," as Paul uses "children" in Ephesians 6:1. Thus Crawford seems to understand *daughters* (C.C. Crawford, *Genesis, the Book of the Beginnings* [Joplin, MO: College Press, 1971], pp. 565-66). This conclusion seems even more likely since one daughter only is named immediately before the expression, *sons and daughters*.
3. Adam Clarke, *A Commentary and Critical Notes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, n.d.), v. 1, p. 186.
4. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, n.d.), v. 1, p. 97.
5. The travelers are called "Ishmaelites" three times in the context (Gen. 37:25, 27-28), "Midianites" once (v. 28) and "Medanites" once (v. 36, ASV margin). It is said that Joseph was sold to the Ishmaelites (v. 28), but that the Medanites (ASV margin) sold him to Potiphar (v. 36). All three of these groups were descendants of Abraham, thus the distant cousins of Jacob's sons. "Ishmaelites" were the offspring of Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar (Gen. 16:15), and by this time could have numbered into the thousands. Midian and Medan were two of the sons of Abraham and Keturah (Gen. 25:2) and were the fathers of the Midianites and the Medanites, respectively. Many suggestions have been offered as to why the caravan was so variously described. Likely, Ishmaelites composed the major portion of it, while Midianites and Medanites were smaller sub-groups. The three groups had so closely intermingled in ordinary life that they were generally all considered as one people, much as we designate "Arabs" presently. For a good discussion of this curiosity and a long list of suggested solutions, see Thomas Whitelaw, *Pulpit Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1961), v. 1, p. 438.
6. Joseph was 17 when he was taken to Egypt (Gen. 37: 2). At the age of 30 he was elevated to his place of prominence by Pharaoh, marking the passage of 13 years in Egypt before the 7 years of plentiful harvests began, as Joseph had predicted (Gen. 41:46-47). The 7 years of famine began at the end of the 7 years of plenty, thus beginning in the 37th year of Joseph's life, or 20 years after his entrance into Egypt. Whether or not Jacob's brothers made their first journey to Egypt in the first year of the famine, we do not know, although Genesis 45:6 seems to imply as much.

7. Genesis 42:17-18 well illustrates the way the Hebrew people conceive of and express the lapse of time. Verse 17 says that the brothers were in prison "three days," while verse 18 says that Joseph called them forth on "the third day." Obviously, *three days* and *the third day* refer to the same time period. The same is true with reference to the time lapse involving Jesus' entombment. Those skeptics who attack the inspired record because of a "contradiction" they suppose they have discovered should take note. *After three days* of Mark 8:31 and *the third day* of Luke 6:46 simply refer to the same time period. Another illustration of this Hebraic concept of time is found in 1 Kings 22:1-2.

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