

Birth Years for Jacob's Sons if He Received His Wives Shortly After Coming to Laban
Genesis 29:31 to 30:26
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Leah's sons	Leah	Zilpah	Billah	Rachel	Year BC	Yr. for wives
					1759	At Labans
1	Reuben				1758	1
2	Simeon				1757	2
3	Levi				1756	3
4	Judah				1755	4
	<i>Barren</i>		Dan		1754	5
	<i>Barren</i>		Naphtali		1753	6
	<i>Barren</i>	Gad			1752	7
	<i>Barren</i>	Asher			1751	8
5	Issachar				1750	9
6	Zebulun				1749	10
	Dinah				1748	11
					1747	12
					1746	13
				Joseph	1745	14
					1744	15
					1743	16
					1742	17
					1741	18
					1740	19
				Benjamin	1739	20

Genesis 29:20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

Genesis 30:25 And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.

26 Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee. (i.e., the 14 years have ended; see 31:41 below)

Genesis 31:41 Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times.

Now Jacob contracted to work seven years for uncle Laban the Syrian in order to marry his daughter Rachel. But Laban deceived his nephew: instead of Rachel, Jacob awoke the morning after the wedding to find Leah, the firstborn daughter, in his bed. Shaken, Jacob then agreed to work another seven years to obtain his beloved Rachel.

Problem (1): Did Jacob acquire his wives before or after his first seven-year dowry period. Although this is debated, the answer is straightforward. As shall be shown, the math imposed by Scripture demands that Jacob took his wives, Leah and Rachel, almost as soon as he came to Uncle Laban's in Haran of northern Syria.

Now Leah had six sons and a daughter *before* Joseph was born to Rachel (30:20–24). Furthermore, after having birthed four sons, there was a period when she “left (off) bearing” (29:35; 30:9). During the barren interval she gave her handmaid Zilpah to Jacob that she might have more children through her. As Zilpah bore two sons *before* Leah began to bear again, the childless interval had to have been close to a minimum of two years. Thus, it should be evident that for Leah to have had seven single births and an approximately two-year unfruitful interval in only seven years is hardly possible. Therefore, we must conclude that Jacob received both his wives at the *beginning* of the entire 14-year dowry period – the other 7 years *are* necessary. Indeed, how else could it be said of a love-smitten suitor that the time to get Rachel “seemed unto Jacob but a few days” (Gen. 29:20)?

Furthermore, Jacob did not say “Give me my wife, for my *years* are fulfilled”: he said “for my *days* are fulfilled” (Gen. 29:21). The seven years (vs. 18) of service for Rachel were the dowry, *not* the customary waiting period. The “few days” of Gen. 29:20 could have been the month of verse 14, and the contract been made at the beginning of these 30 days. Verse 15 implies that Jacob was industrious and had already been “serving” Laban.

But there is more. Had Jacob not obtained Leah almost as soon as he came to Laban’s (and Rachel only seven days later, Gen. 29:27-28), Judah would have been born too late for all the details of his life in Genesis 38 to have occurred (see chart on last page). There are but 33 years for Judah to return with his father to Canaan, marry a Canaanitess, beget Er, Onan, and Shelah, commit sex sin with Tamar his daughter-in-law (who subsequently bore him twin sons, Perez and Zerah) and Perez’s having begotten two sons by the end of the 33 years, at which time Jacob took his family down to Egypt.

Birth Years for Jacob’s Sons **if He Worked 7 Years Before Receiving His Wives**

Leah’s sons	Leah	Zilpah	Bilhah	Rachel	Year BC	Yr. for wives
					1759	At Laban’s
					1758	1
					1757	2
					1756	3
					1755	4
					1754	5
					1753	6
1	Reuben				1752	7
2	Simeon				1751	8
3	Levi		Dan		1750	9
4	Judah		Naphtali		1749	10
	<i>Barren</i>	Gad			1748	11
5	Issachar	Asher			1747	12
6	Zebulun				1746	13
	Dinah			Joseph	1745	14
					1744	15
Neither this scheme nor any other realistically satisfies the birth order with Dinah’s data in only a 7 year span (Gen. 29 & 30). Jacob’s sons being placed at Joseph’s table from first-born to the youngest must also be considered (43:33).					1743	16
					1742	17
					1741	18
					1740	19
				Benjamin	1739	20

Indeed, the math also imposes a *tension* involving Benjamin’s age (he must be old enough to have 10 sons when the family comes to Egypt in 1706 BC – Gen. 46:21) with Dinah’s age at the time she is raped (Gen. 34). Both their ages are restricting factors as to when Jacob obtained his wives.

Jacob went to Laban in 1759 BC. Joseph was born at the end of the 14-year dowry period which he served to pay for his two wives (in 1745, Gen. 30:24–26; cp. 29:18–28), and Scripture implies that Dinah was born before Joseph (Gen. 30:19–26). Later, while living in Hebron with Isaac, Joseph’s brothers sold the 17-year-old into slavery (in 1728 BC, Gen. 37:2, 28 & 36; cp. 35:27). This and Joseph’s birth date also place restrictions on Dinah’s age at the time of her defiling (a problem so conflicting that even Ussher avoided dating the incident in his 1650 AD *Annals of the World*. In 1701 AD Bishop Lloyd incorrectly dated it by 7 years: most assume this is an Ussher date.)

Upon his return from Laban, Jacob built a home and shelters for his cattle at Succoth. At this time, his sons were referred to as “tender children” (Gen. 33:2–13). Later, Jacob sojourned at Shalem, a city of Shechem the Hivite, where he purchased “a parcel of a field” (Gen. 33:18–19). There, Dinah (Jacob’s daughter by Leah) “went out to see the daughters of the land” (Gen. 34) at which time Shechem, the Hivite prince, raped her. At the time of Dinah’s defilement, Jacob’s sons were then called “men” (Gen. 34:7, 21, 22, 25). Therefore, a considerable time passed between the year in which Jacob returned from Padan-aram unto that of the rape.

As Dinah was Leah's youngest child and since the rape took place before Joseph's 17th year, Jacob could not have waited 7 years until 1752 BC ($1759 - 7 = 1752$) before he received his wives. Otherwise, Dinah could not feasibly be born during the first 7-years as that would not allow enough time for all her siblings to be born.

Problem (2): Moreover, Dinah's birth could not have occurred before 1748 BC (see first table). And as Jacob came to Laban in 1759 and departed 20 years later (1739 BC), Dinah would have only been 9 years old at the time of the Genesis 34 rape ($1748 - 1739 = 9$). Obviously 9 is far too young to fit the context of the story (and she's only six if Jacob worked 7 years *before* receiving his wives), for although girls this young have become defiled by deviates, marriage to such a child is never their intent. But Prince Shechem did so wish. Indeed, Dinah is in point of fact older, for in 34:3, 4 & 12 he calls her a *damsel!* Besides, a nine year old would hardly go unescorted among the ungodly in that day. Dinah clearly must be older. More time is needed – and we have already found it. It was in our previous discovery in which Jacob's sons were referred to as “tender children” the year he returned from Padan-aram (Gen. 33:2–13) whereas at the time of Dinah's defilement they were called “men” (Gen. 34:7, 21, 22, 25). However, as we shall soon find, adding years at this point results in several thorny problems.

True, when one casually reads without regard to the pertinent Scriptures containing mathematical constraints on the storyline, Genesis 34 just seems to naturally flow from chapter 33 into chapter 35 with the result that Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin some 8 to 10 years after Jacob first came to Succoth. This interpretation solves Dinah's age problem as it places the rape episode near 1730 BC with her around 16 or 19. If correct, it would mean that Genesis 35:27 is the account of Jacob's coming to permanently live and care for his aging father immediately after the rape and Rachel's passing soon thereafter. In such case Jacob would have so lived for 14 years, as Isaac died in 1716 at the age of 180 (Gen. 35:28). Of course, the result of this understanding would mean that, like nearly all Bible dictionaries and commentaries would have it, we must suppose that during those 14 years while Jacob was living at Shalem he came to visit Isaac many times in Hebron (although Scripture mentions none). Otherwise, everything apparently fits – so let's move on to chapter 36.

The issue: But this scenario is totally flawed, for it not only fails to resolve other mathematical constraints on the narrative, it completely misses the entire point of everything from Genesis 28 through chapter 35! When Jacob departed Beer-sheba to go to Haran in Padan-aram, the LORD met and spoke to him in a dream from the top of a ladder that extended into heaven (28:12-22). Among other things, there at Luz (which Jacob named Bethel) God promised to protect and bring him back to his father's home. Thus, the overriding theme across this entire eight chapter span is – did God keep that promise? Did He bring Jacob back to Isaac? The prevailing explanation above simply does not adequately address this. As a result, it utterly misses the mark for it fails to see the significance of Genesis 35:27. The following will show that the Dinah incident is placed *contextually*, not chronologically.

From the 1759 BC promise at Bethel, we quickly go 20 years to 1739 where we find the Lord speaking to Jacob in a dream and telling him to return to his kindred, to his father, and for him not to forget the vow he had also made (Gen. 31:3, 13, 18 & 32:9). While en-route and near the Jabbok River ford, Jacob learned that Esau was coming toward him with 400 men. Although his faith in God's promises faltered to the extent that he schemed to placate his offended twin, Jacob humbled himself before Esau who eagerly forgave and tenderly welcomed his brother back.

Now nearly all biblical authorities see Jacob's refusal of Esau's generous offer to accompany him safely for the rest of the journey as being more of his old scheming nature in order to distance himself from his brother and the 400 with him. Such misses the mark. Jacob, his family, servants, flocks and herds had just fled over 300 miles in only 10 days to escape Laban (30 miles a day!), who overtook them in the Mt. Gilead range. Jacob has now gone but a few miles farther with Issachar being only 11 years old, Zebulun 10, Dinah 9, and Joseph 6. Indeed, Jacob says the children are “tender” and the animals are with young (33:13-14). All are exhausted from the flight and the animals in danger of losing their little ones. He is being sincere with Esau. The proof is that he immediately goes about 5 miles west to Succoth and, with the help of his many menservants, quickly builds a house for his family and booths for the herds and flocks to recover (30:23, 32:5, 33:17). Moreover, Jacob also builds these because he cannot show up at Hebron with so many animals as such would almost certainly overwhelm Isaac's pastures.

Here we must remind ourselves of the prevailing subject within Genesis 28 through 35. God has promised to bring Jacob back to his kindred (this would include his father, cp. 28:21) and now tells the patriarch to return. Further, we have seen that the Dinah incident is actually out of sequence, for when we add 8 or 10 years to Dinah's age it would result in Benjamin later coming down to Egypt with 10 sons, yet being only 23 years old. Whereas such is not totally impossible, it strains credibility. Indeed, this whole account, including Levi's and Simon's revenge on the Hivites for so defiling their sister, draws us away from the question and focus – namely, did God keep his promise and return Jacob to his father (The *reason* for the rape episode being here is forthcoming.).

Therefore, the actual progression of events must be understood as that after a brief respite for himself and his family, Jacob left some of his servants with the animals at Succoth while he and his family crossed the Jordan River and purchased a plot of land some 30 miles away at Shalem (Shechem, between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim) from the

children of Hamor the Hivite (33:19; note the key chronological word “when” in vs. 18). At this point, Jacob’s journey home continues south from Shechem, leaping over the Dinah-Simeon-Levi happening to 35:9. Note that no time has passed here for Dinah to reach the age of maidenhood. It is still 1739 BC, for we read that God appeared “again” to Jacob “when he came out of Padan-aram” – not nearly a decade later!

From Shechem Jacob’s family travels about 22 miles to Bethel. At Genesis 35:9 God reminded the patriarch that 20 years earlier He had promised at that very place to protect him, give him the land, and bring him back to it (28:12-22). At 35:10 the Lord reminded Jacob of the wrestling match near Mahanaim on the Jabbok River where his name was changed to Israel (32:24-30) and that such was still in effect. Only one promise remained unfulfilled – and so with only about 35 miles to go, south to Hebron he goes.

As they near Bethlehem, Jacob’s beloved Rachel dies while giving birth to Benjamin and a seeming out-of-place incident is added regarding Reuben’s adultery with Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid and concubine to Jacob (35:22). Finally, the 97 year old patriarch is rejoined with his 157 year old father – the promise given by the Lord at Genesis 28:15 has come full circle and the 20 year saga is now complete. This is the climax and whole point of the entire narrative – God kept his promises: the question has been answered. Furthermore, God brought it to pass in the very same year in which He told Jacob to return (1739 BC). Otherwise, the entire force of 35:7 is lost – rather than the sagas triumphal pinnacle, it is just another visit to Isaac that took place some 10 or so years after his return.

Any remaining doubt as to the correctness of this understanding is immediately answered by Genesis 48:7, “when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way...and I buried her there in ...Bethlehem.” This second time it is Jacob, an eyewitness, who states that Rachel died “when” he came from Padan, not some 8 or 10 years afterward as nearly all have it! Again, this resolves the problem of Benjamin’s coming to Egypt with 10 sons at only 23 (instead, he was 33, much more believable), and it confirms our contention that the chapter 34 dreadful experience of Dinah is completely out of place in the sequence of events.

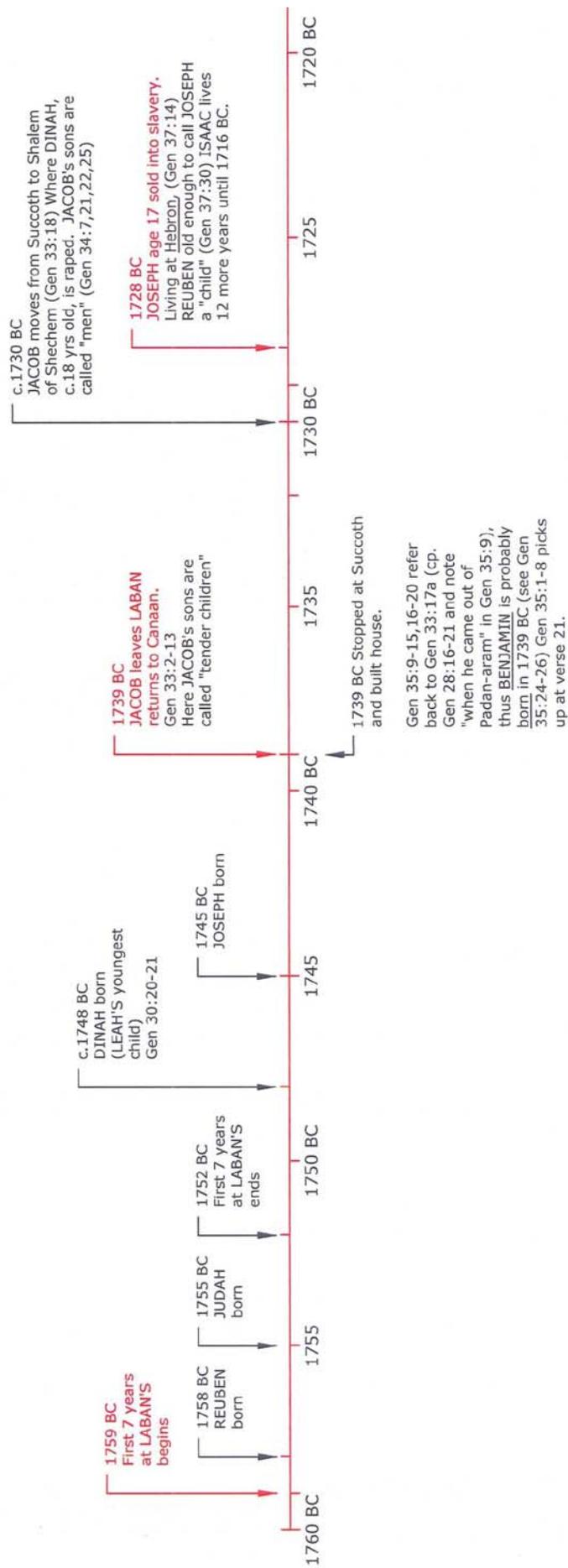
Moreover, the correct understanding is that when coming back to Isaac and after some time is spent rejoicing, renewing and celebrating, Jacob returned to Shechem and Succoth. The land purchased from the children of Hamor was probably to obtain more pasture land for his vast herds and flocks (30:43). The large number of Jacob’s servants allowed him to maintain a ranch on both sides of the Jordan. Moreover, it was after living there for around 10 years that the Dinah-Simeon-Levi event occurred, forcing Jacob and his family to leave. Of course it follows that while living there and before the rape, Jacob would often return to visit Isaac during the 23 years before his death. Indeed, it may well have become necessary to eventually move to Hebron to care for Isaac in his final days.

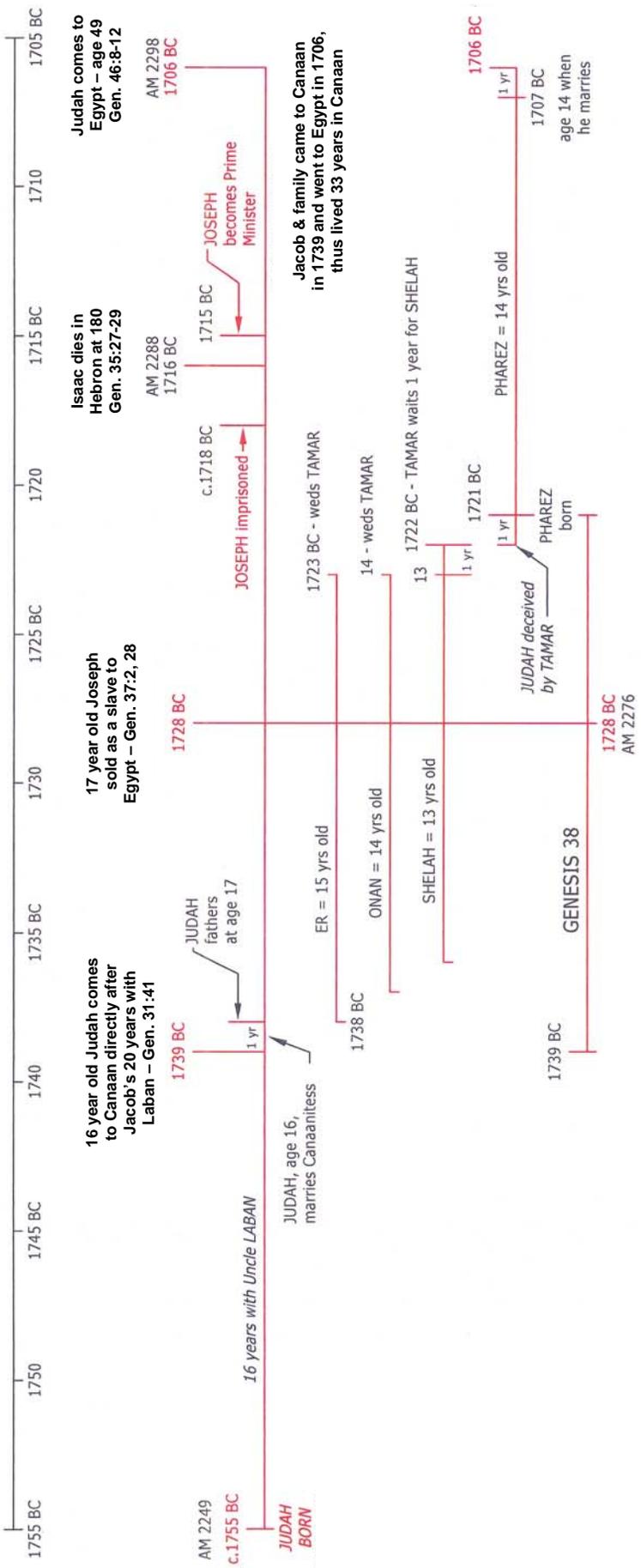
Furthermore, that Jacob – having been changed and molded by God’s dealings with him over these 20 years, kept his word to Esau. Namely, that soon after his initial arrival at Hebron, he went to visit his twin – that their reconciliation was exactly as recorded, both genuine and heartfelt (33:4 & 15). The joint participation in burying their 180 year old father so implies (35:29). Imputing deception to Jacob here is totally unwarranted.

So what about Dinah-Simeon-Levi – why is this story where it is and what is its purpose? First, the out-of-place story is where it is for a specific reason and there is no other convenient place to insert it. Genesis 36 is about Esau and his lineage, so it doesn’t fit there. Chapter 37 deals with Joseph’s being sold as a slave to Potiphar the Egyptian: again no fit. Then, much as in the case before us, Genesis 38 interrupts the story of Joseph with a seeming out-of-place story of Jacob’s son Judah (showing God has purpose for and does put non-sequential accounts within His Holy Word: this account of Judah is necessary for that which follows dealing with Joseph and is actually wisely placed where it is). Indeed, here is a biblical precedent for the out-of-sequence story at chapter 34 ff. but placing Dinah here doesn’t fit either. Moreover, Genesis 39 through 48 continues the story of Joseph along with his father Jacob and family coming down to him in Egypt to escape the famine. Here Jacob blesses Pharaoh (47:7) and later adopts Manasseh and Ephraim as full sons, conferring the blessing on Ephraim the younger (Gen. 48, 1689 BC). Obviously, there’s no place to just plop the Dinah-Simeon-Levi happening in this section of Genesis either.

But why place the Dinah event where it is in Genesis? Because Hamor and Shechem are introduced in the preceding verses concerning Jacob’s purchasing land from them – thereby making the connection. Still, other than being a warning for young girls and also to men about the seriousness of making covenant as well as taking vengeance rather than justice, what is the purpose for the Dinah-Simeon-Levi episode being in Scripture anyway?

The answer is straightforward. Without it and the seeming out-of-place incident regarding Reuben’s adultery with Bilhah, the story of Jacob’s blessing his sons in Genesis 49 would be unclear – and why set aside Simeon and Levi? Now normally the blessing (i.e., the lineage to Messiah) and birthright (the double inheritance, Deu. 21:15-17 and, until the Law was given, be the family priest) would be given to the firstborn or the next down in order of birth. Yet because of their previous acts Reuben, Simeon, and Levi (Jacob’s first 3 sons, Gen. 29:32-35) are disqualified and the blessing passes on to Judah, Jacob’s fourth born (largely due to his heart change as seen in 43:9, where he is 49 years old) whereas the birthright went to Joseph (Gen. 48:21-22; 1 Chr. 5:1-2). Thus we see that Genesis 34 is especially necessary for without it Jacob’s actions in Genesis 49 would be incomprehensible. .





Possible Scenario for Judah
Note: the Ages for Er, Onan, Shelah, and Pharez would have to be even younger if Jacob had to work for Laban 7 years before he received for wives both Leah and Rachel. (See Genesis 38)