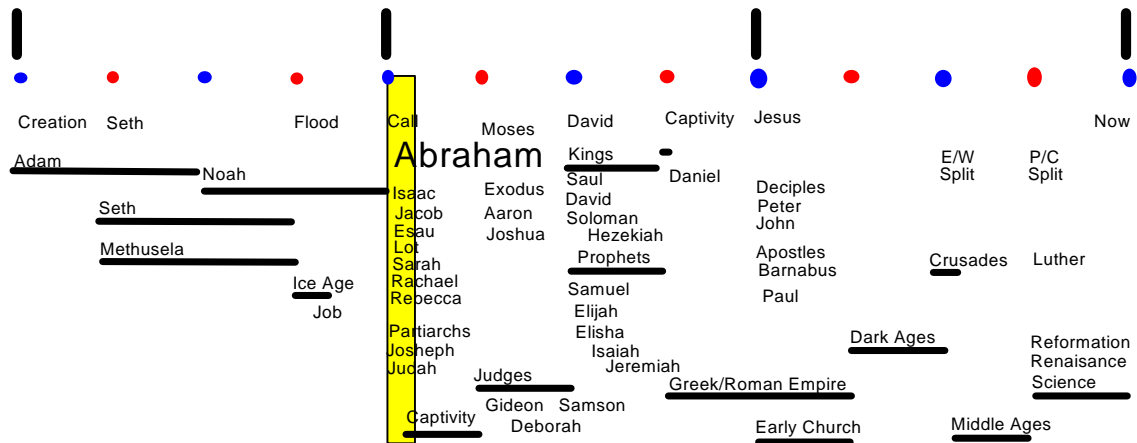


Jacob

JACOB/ ISRAEL

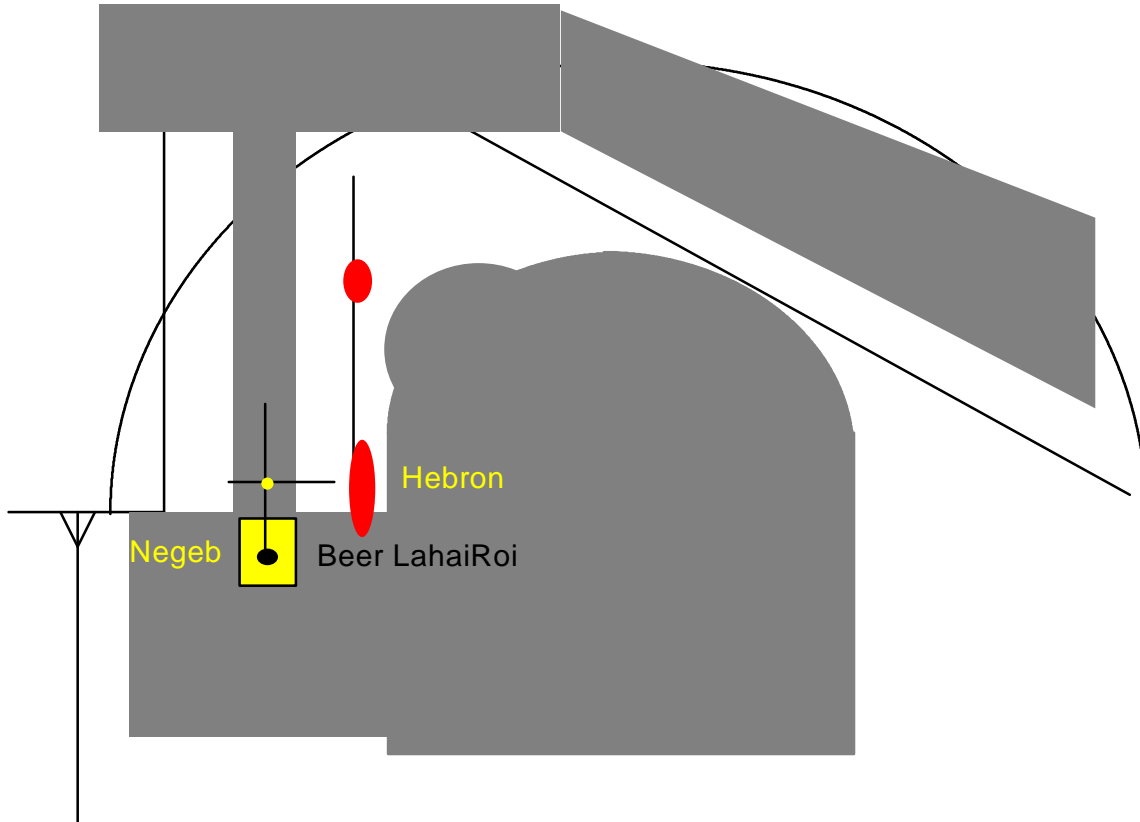
The 13 Dots of History, The Movement of God In History, The Lord of History



Jacob

Jacob bargained for Esau's birthright.

Location -- Beer LahaiRoi

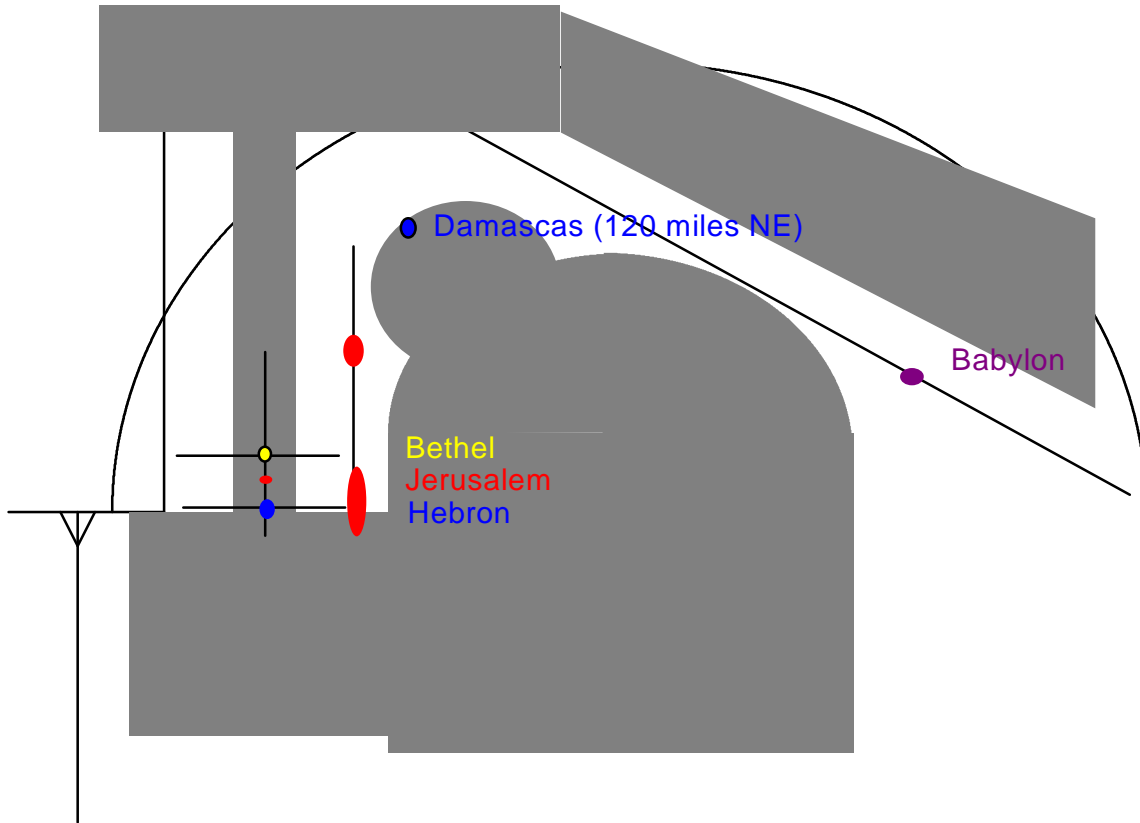


Living up to his name, Jacob bargained for Esau's birthright. See Birthright. Parental partiality fostered continuing hostility between Esau, the hunter beloved of his father, and Jacob, the quiet, settled, integrated person favored by his mother. The tensions between brothers seemed to threaten the fulfillment of the divine promise. Esau's thoughtlessness lost him his birthright and allowed Jacob to have material superiority. Nevertheless, Isaac intended to bestow the blessing of the firstborn upon Esau. The oracle Rebekah received (25:23) probably encouraged her to counter Isaac's will and to gain the blessing for her favorite son by fraud. The blessing apparently conveyed the status of head of family apart from the status of heir. To his crass lies and deception, Jacob even approached blasphemy, using God's name to bolster his cause, "Because the Lord your God granted me success" (27:20 NRSV). The father's blindness deepened the pathos. The blind father pronounced the blessing he could never recall. Jacob became the bearer of God's promises and the inheritor of Canaan. Esau, too, received a blessing, but a lesser one. He must serve Jacob and live in the less fertile land of Edom, but his day would come (27:40). The split between brothers became permanent. Rebekah had to arrange for Jacob to flee to her home in Paddan-aram to escape Esau's wrath (27:46-28:1).

Jacob

Stairway to Heaven Vision

Location -- Bethel

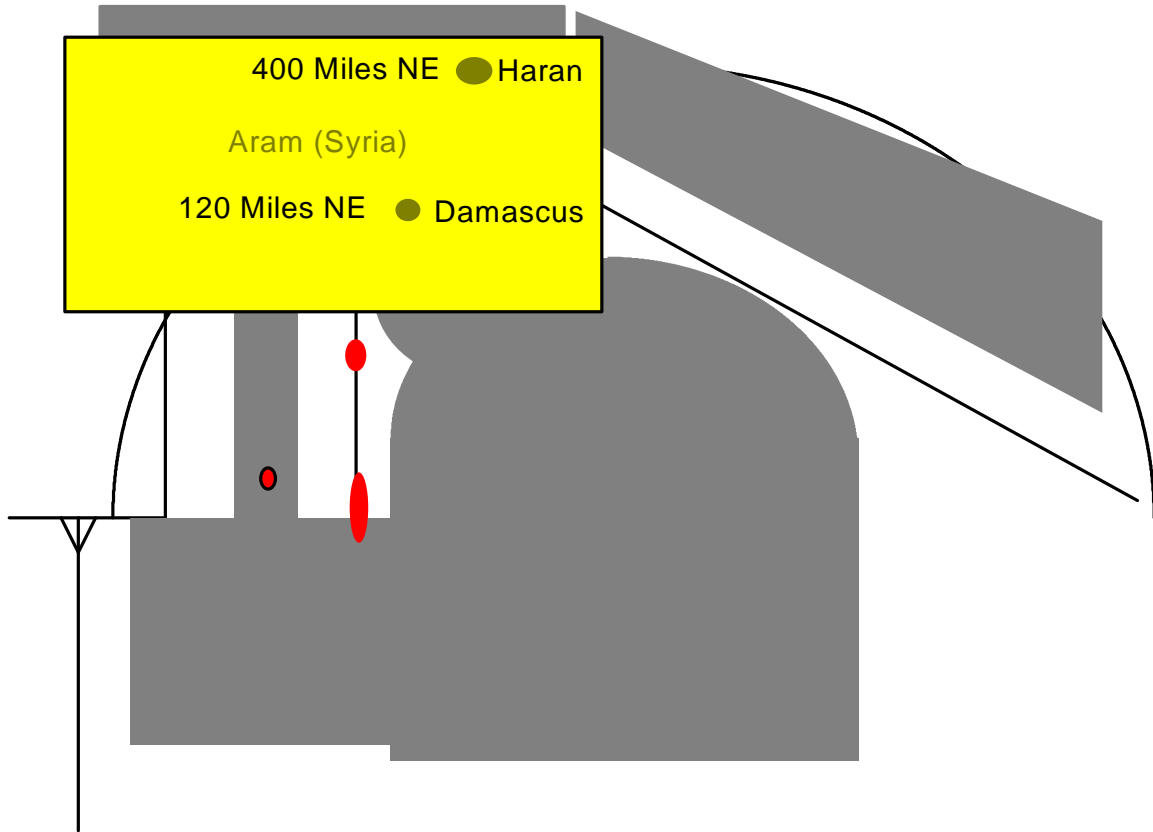


At age 40, Jacob fled his home to begin his life as an individual. Suddenly, a lonely night in Bethel, interrupted by a vision from God, brought reality home. Life had to include wrestling with God and assuming responsibility as the heir of God's promises to Abraham (28:10-22). Jacob made an oath, binding himself to God. Here is the center of Jacob's story; all else must be read in light of the Bethel experience.

Jacob

Laban tricks Jacob

Location -- Aram, Haran



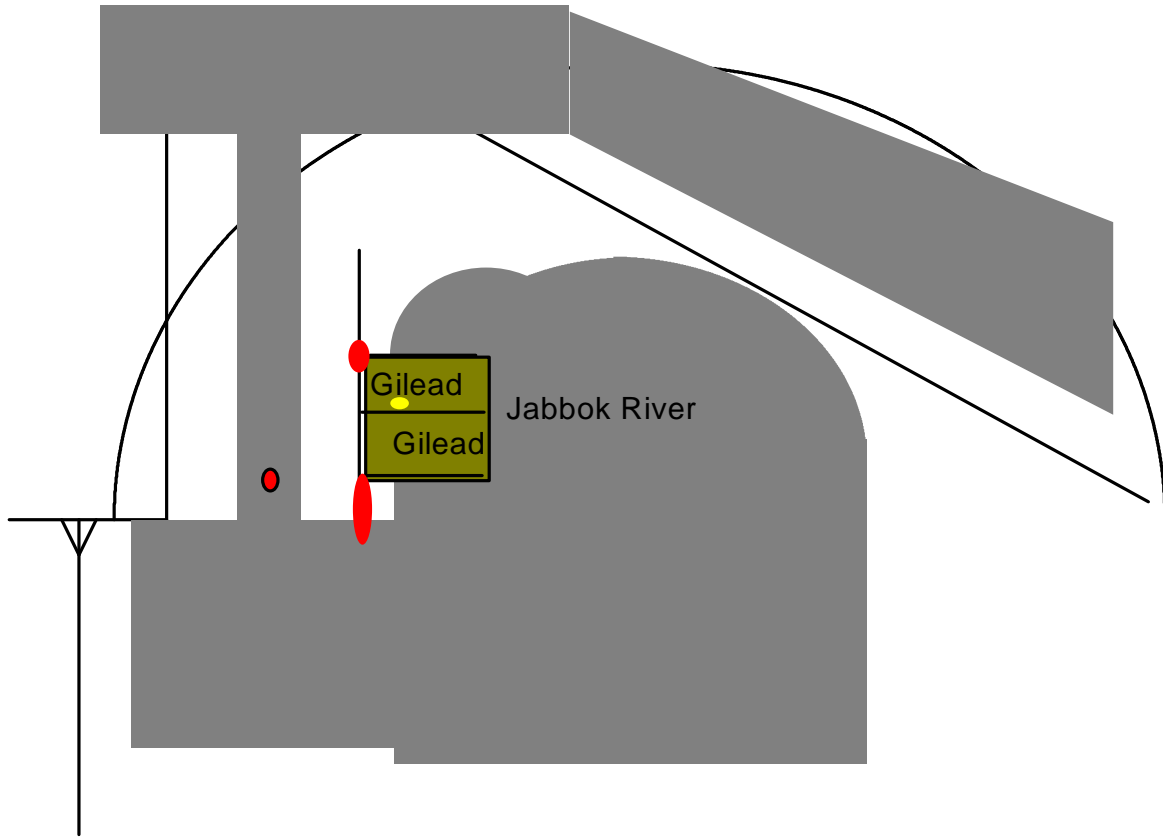
In Aram with his mother's family, the deceiver Jacob met deception. Laban tricked him into marrying poor Leah, the elder daughter, before he got his beloved Rachel, the younger. Fourteen years he labored for his wives (29:1-30). Six more years of labor let Jacob return the deception and gain wealth at the expense of his father-in-law, who continued his deception, changing Jacob's wages ten times (31:7,41) Amid the family infighting, both men prospered financially, and Jacob's family grew. Eventually he had twelve children from four women (29:31-30:24).

Intense bargaining ensued when Jacob told Laban he wanted to follow God's call and return to the land of his birth. Supported by his wives, who claimed their father had cheated them of their dowry (31:15), Jacob departed while Laban and his sons were away in the hills shearing sheep. Starting two days later, Laban and his sons could not overtake Jacob until they reached Gilead, 400 miles from Haran.

Jacob

Covenant with Laban

Location -- Galeed, Mizpah, (Gilead and Moab), north of the Jabbok River

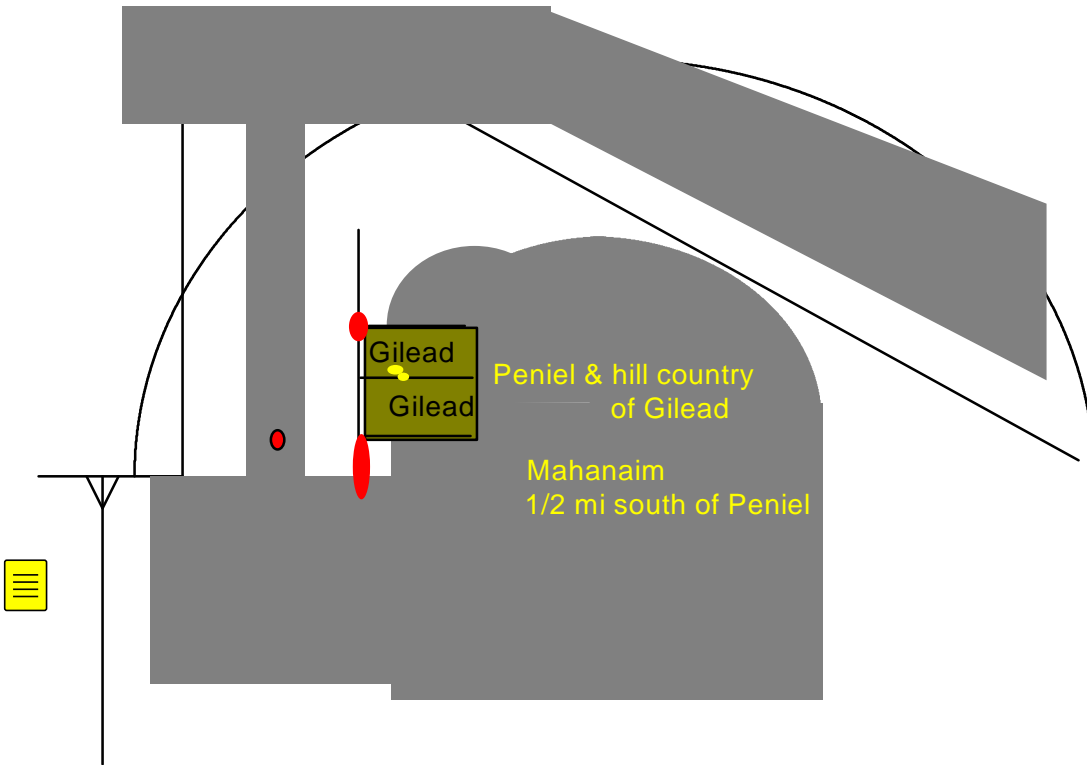


Laban complained that he had not had an opportunity to bid farewell to his daughters with the accustomed feast. More importantly, he wanted to recover his stolen gods (31:30,32). These gods were small metal or terra-cotta figures of deities. See Teraphim. Without the images, his family lost the magical protection which he thought the gods provided from demons and disasters. Since no fault could be found in Jacob's conduct in Haran, all Laban could do was to suggest a covenant of friendship. Laban proposed the terms as (1) never ill-treating his daughters, (2) never marrying any other women, and (3) establishing the site of the covenant as a boundary neither would cross with evil intent. Jacob was now head of his own household. He was ready to climb to a higher plane of spiritual experience.

Jacob

Jacob meets Esau, wrestles with God

Location -- Mahanaim, crossing Jabbok river, Peniel, hill country of Gilead



As Jacob approached the Promised Land, a band of angels met him at Mahanaim (32:1-2).

They probably symbolized God's protection and encouragement as he headed southward to meet Esau for the first time in twenty years. Esau's seemingly hostile advance prompted a call for clear evidence of God's guarding. Shrewdly, Jacob sent an enormous gift to his brother and divided his retinue into two groups. Each group was large enough to defend itself or to escape if the other was attacked. To his scheme Jacob added prayer. He realized that it was ultimately God with whom he must deal.

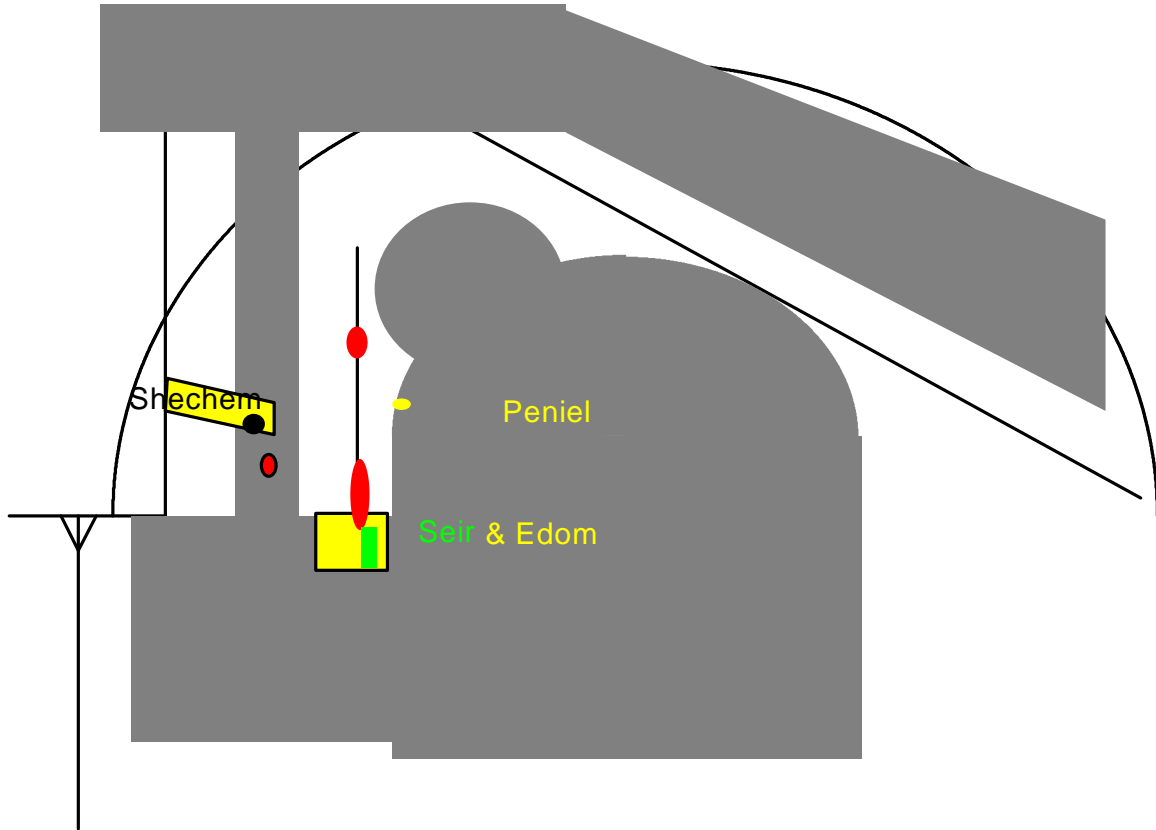
When all had crossed the Jabbok River, Jacob met One who wrestled with him until daybreak (ch. 32).

The two struggled without one gaining advantage, until the Opponent dislocated Jacob's hip. Jacob refused to release his Antagonist. Clinging to Him, he demanded a blessing. This would not be given until Jacob said his name. By telling it, Jacob acknowledged his defeat and admitted his character. The Opponent emphasized His superiority by renaming the patriarch. He became Israel, the one on whose behalf God strives. He named the place Peniel (face of God), because he had seen God face to face and his life had been spared (32:30).

Jacob

Jacob moves to Shechem, builds an altar to God

Location -- Shechem



Jacob's fear of meeting Esau proved groundless.

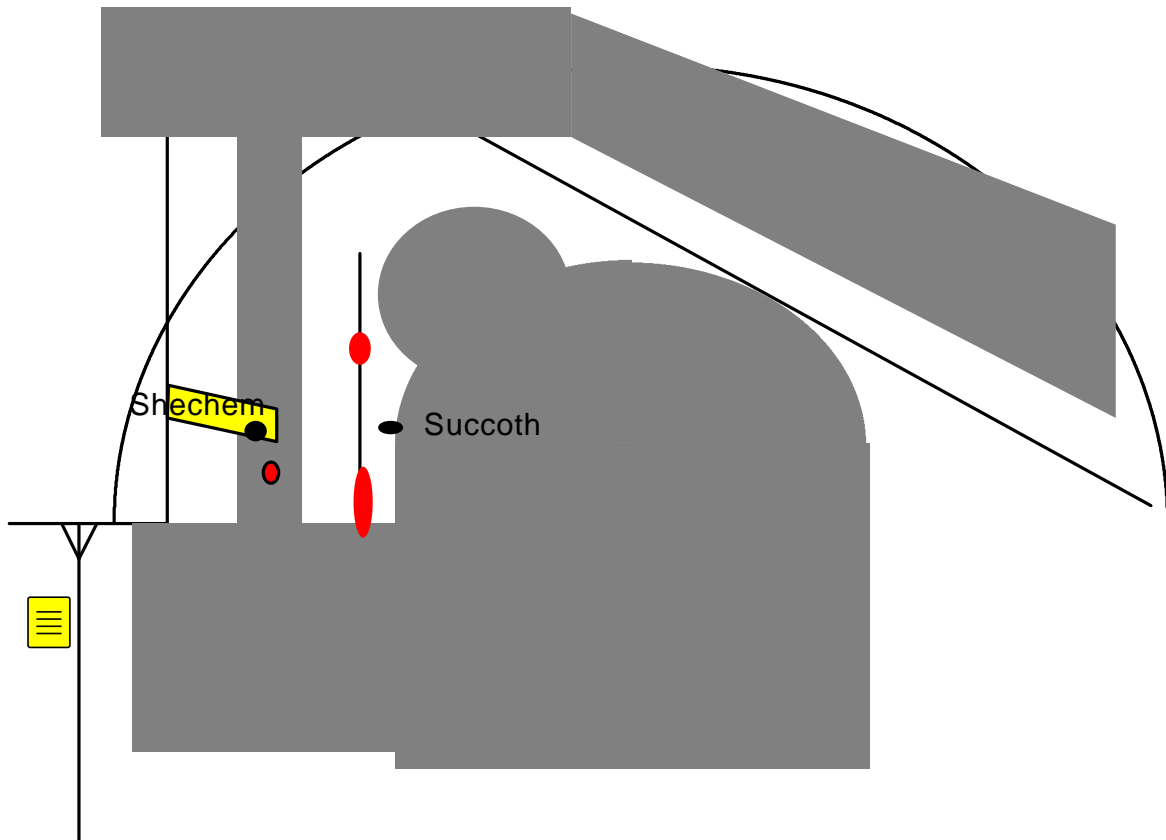
Seemingly, Esau was content to forget the wrongs of the past and to share his life. As two contrary natures are unlikely to live long in harmony, Jacob chose the better course turning westward to the Promised Land.

Esau headed to Seir to become the father of the Edomites.

The twins did not meet again until their father's death (35:27-29).

Jacob

Dinah raped, Jacob's son's trick the Shechemites



From Succoth, Jacob traveled to Shechem,
where he built an altar to God.

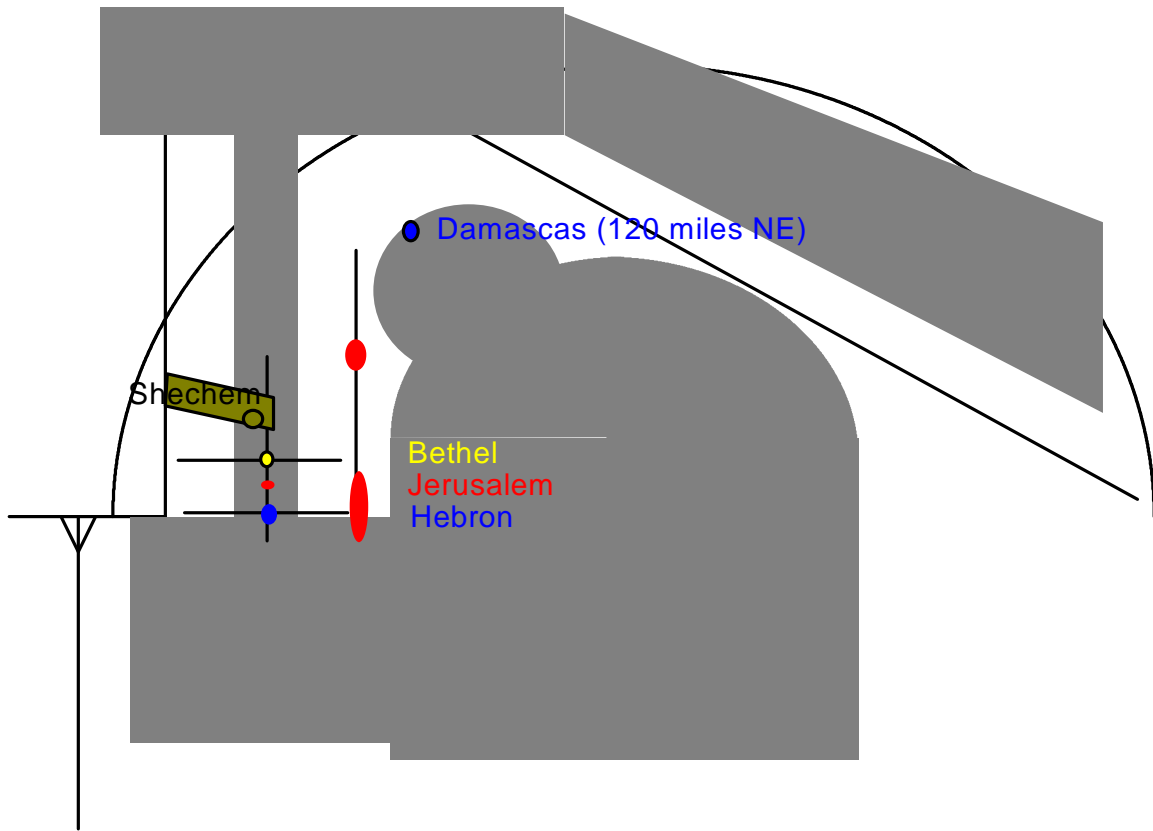
The son of the city ruler raped Jacob's daughter, Dinah.

Jacob's sons demanded that the Shechemites be circumcised before any intermarriages were permitted. The leading citizens followed the king in the request. They hoped to absorb the Hebrews' wealth and property into their own. While the men of Shechem were recovering from surgery and unable to defend themselves, Simeon and Levi killed them to avenge their sister. Jacob condemned their actions, but had to leave Shechem.

Jacob

Jacob returns to Bethel

Location -- Bethel



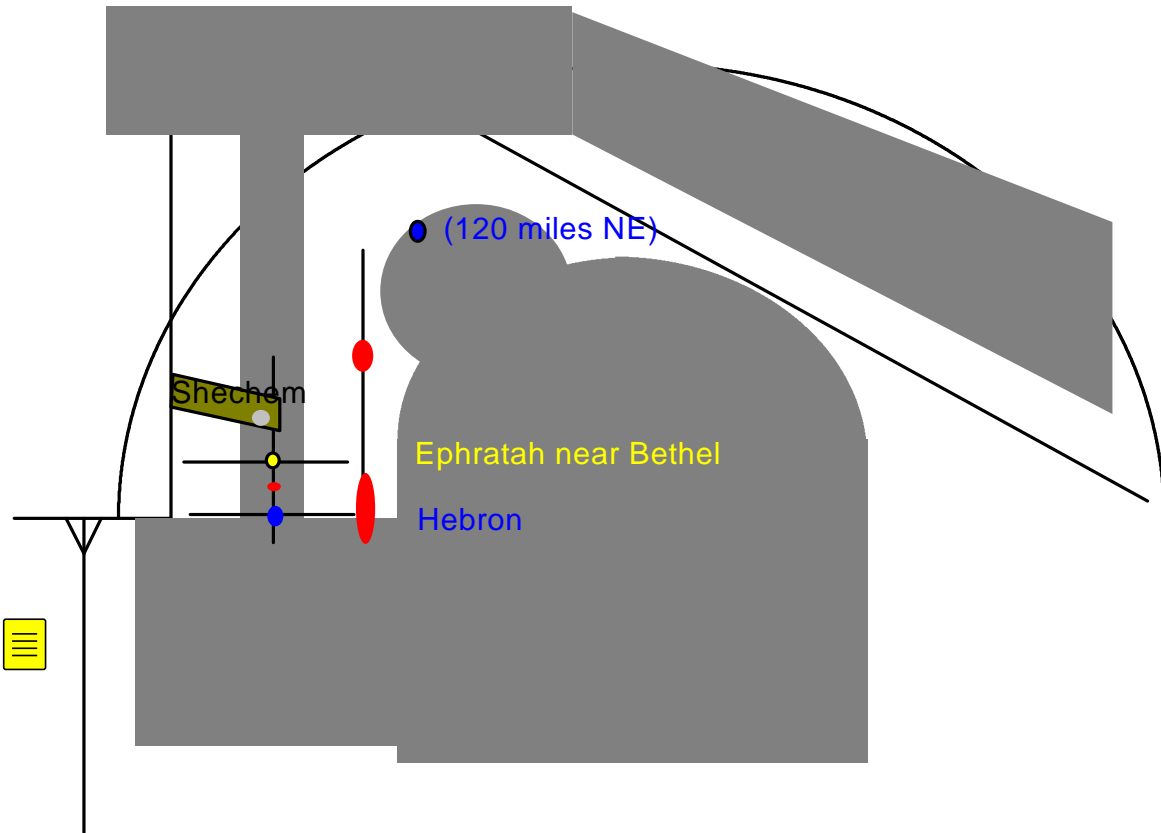
From Shechem, he returned to Bethel.

Once again he received the patriarchal promises.

Jacob

Losses and grief characterized this period.

Locations -- Ephrath near Bethel, Hebron

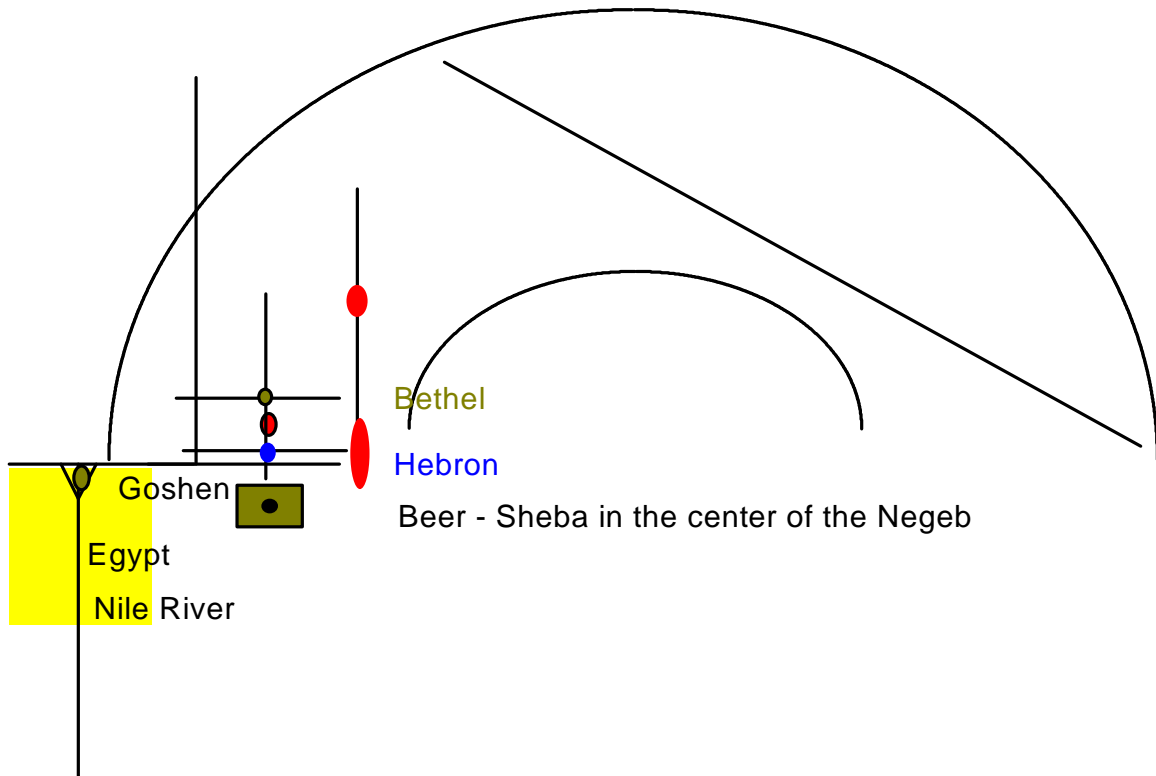


The death of his mother's nurse (35:8; 24:59) was followed by the death of his beloved wife Rachel while giving birth to Benjamin at Ephrath (35:19; 48:7). About the same time Reuben forfeited the honor of being the eldest son by sexual misconduct (35:22). Finally, the death of Jacob's father, who had been robbed of companionship with both sons, brought Jacob and Esau together again at the family burial site in Hebron. Although Chapters 37-50 revolve around Joseph, Jacob is still the central figure. The self-willed older sons come and go at his bidding.

Jacob

Descent to Egypt

Location -- Bethel, Hebron, Beer-sheba, Goshen Egypt



When severe famine gripped Canaan, Jacob and his sons set out for Egypt.

At Beer-sheba Jacob received further assurance of God's favor (46:1-4). Jacob dwelt in the land of Goshen until his death.

Jacob bestowed the blessing not only upon his favorite son Joseph, but also upon Joseph's two oldest sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

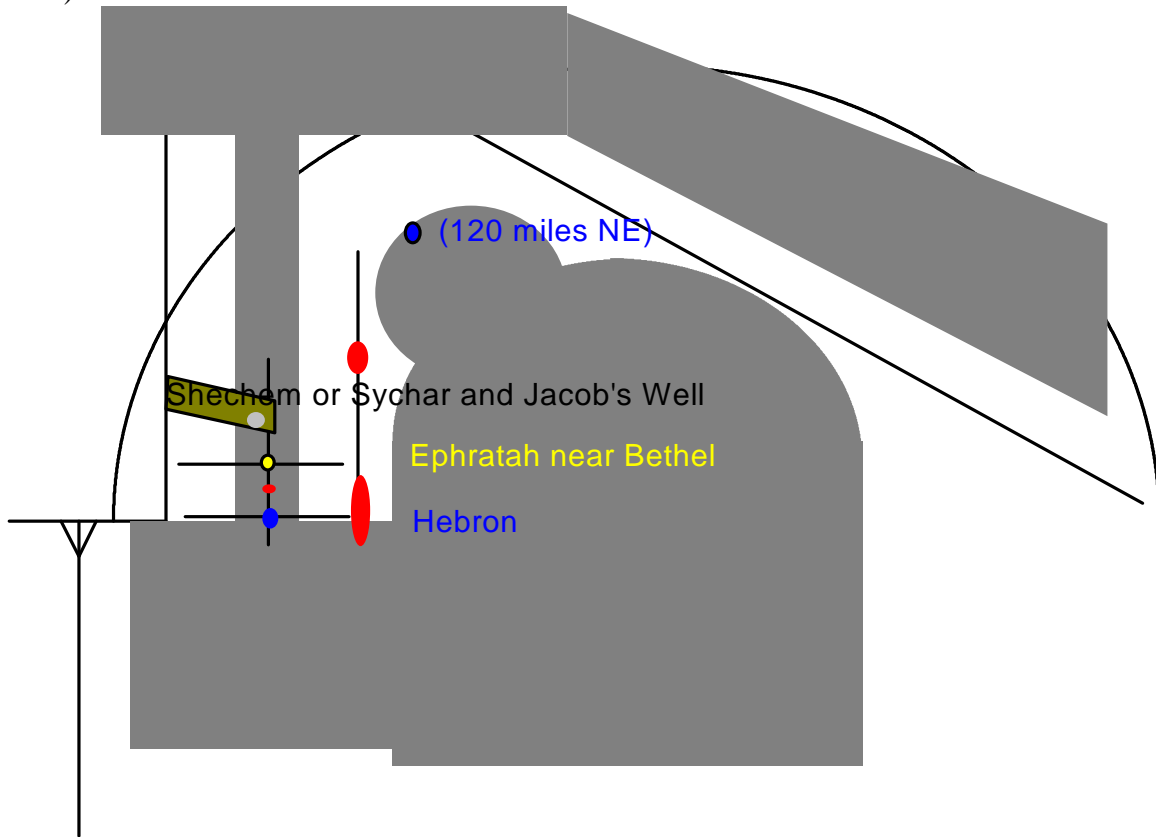
He was finally laid to rest at Hebron in the cave Abraham had purchased (50:12-14).



Jacob

Four New Testament passages recall events in his life.

The woman at the well in Sychar declared to Jesus that Jacob provided the well (John 4:12).



Stephen mentioned the famine and Jacob's journey to Egypt in the course of his defense before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:8-16).

Paul presented Jacob as an example of the sovereign choice of God and of the predestination of the elect (Rom. 9:10-13).

The writer of Hebrews held up Jacob as one of the examples of active faith (Heb. 11:9,20-22).

Jacob

Jacob's Character

Persistent faith in God

Throughout the narrative a persistent faith in the God of the fathers shines through.

His life, like that of all Israelites, was a checkered history of rebellion and flight.

Jacob's life was a story of conflict.

He always seemed to be running from someone or something--

from Esau,

from Laban, or

from famine in Canaan.

Jacob is no ideal.

Jacob's better nature struggled with his sinful self. What raised Jacob above himself was his reverent, indestructible longing for the salvation of his God.

Jacob's Religion

As the religion of Israel and thus the roots of Christianity claim to derive from the patriarchs, it is necessary to attempt to understand Jacob's spiritual life. See God of the Fathers.

Jacob's religion was consistent with the beliefs and practices of his fathers.

He received instruction from Isaac concerning the history of Abraham, covenant, and the great promises. Jacob encountered God at Bethel at the moment of greatest need in his life. He was fleeing from home to distant unknown relatives. A secondhand religion would not do. Jacob's dream was his firsthand encounter with God. The threefold promise of land, descendants, and a blessing to all nations were personalized for him. Jacob saw in the vision the majesty and glory of God. At Bethel Jacob worshiped God and vowed to take Yahweh as his God.

At Peniel, Jacob wrestled face-to-face with God.

He saw how weak he was before God. It taught him the value of continued prayer from one who is helpless. Jacob emerged from Peniel willing to let his life fall into God's control. He was wounded but victorious. God gave him a crippled body but a strengthened faith.

It was a new Jacob--Israel--

who hobbled off to meet Esau. He had learned obedience through suffering.

Jacob

Theological Significance - Jacob chosen for his Potential

God did not chose Jacob because of what he was but because of what he could become. His life is a long history of discipline, chastisement, and purification by affliction. Not one of his misdeeds went unpunished. He sowed deception and reaped the same, first from Laban and then from his own sons.

Jacob's story is a story of conflict.

The note of conflict is even heard before his birth (Gen. 25:22-23). However, in the midst of the all-too-human quarrels over family and fortune, God was at work protecting and prospering His blessed.

With the other patriarchs God acted directly, but with Jacob God seemed to be withdrawn at times. Yet, God was no less at work. He worked through unsavory situations and unworthy persons. Even in Jacob's web of conflict and tragedy, God's hand guided, though half-hidden.

Gary D. Baldwin