

# Lesson18

Genesis 28, 29, 30, 31

## Chapter 28

**Isaac sends Jacob to Paddan Aram to Rebekah's people to find a wife - but not before giving him the full covenant blessing God gave to Abraham. Review Gen. 24:3-8. What do you think is Isaac's main concern as he gives this blessing?**

Recall that Isaac himself stayed in Canaan while Abraham's servant sought a wife for him. Perhaps afraid that Jacob will not otherwise return, Isaac is reminding Jacob that whatever the circumstances between him and Esau, and however true it is that they still live in Canaan as foreigners, God has promised them the land, that He gave it to Abraham and it is the descendants of Jacob, as recipient of the blessing, who will take possession of it.

**What is Esau's response to this turn of events (vss. 6-9)?**

Esau marries yet another wife, this time an Ishmaelite, apparently in a last-ditch effort to do the right thing and please his parents. Unfortunately this is too little, too late, and his action draws a further line of distinction between his family and the future chosen people of God.

- a. Re-read Gen. 27:20 and 28:3. By what names does Jacob know God at this point in his life?**
- b. From whom have Jacob's blessings come so far?**
- c. Has God revealed Himself to Jacob personally?**

Jacob knows God as "the Lord your God," the Lord Isaac's God. God has revealed Himself to Abraham and to Isaac, and Jacob knows Him (and has been blessed by Him) only through his father - God has not revealed Himself personally yet to Jacob.

**Now read the account of Jacob's dream. By what name does God identify Himself in vs. 13? What does this name reveal to Jacob about who God is?**

God revealed Himself to Jacob as "the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac." This says to Jacob far more than that He is great and powerful: it says that He is a personal God, a God who has sought out men to bless them and who has promised to make of Abraham (through his son Isaac, and now through Jacob) a great nation and a source of blessing to the world. It is not just Isaac who has blessed Jacob; that blessing came through Isaac from God Himself.

**The ladder described here is probably a ziggurat, the sort of tower built by the people at Babel. A ziggurat was a tall, stepped temple-tower believed to connect heaven and earth - hence the angels ascending and descending the steps. God himself was at the top of the ladder and spoke to Jacob in his dream, a sign that God would now be Jacob's God. What New Testament statement by Jesus recalls this event? (Read John 1:50-51).**

In John 1, the angels ascending and descending on Jesus, the Son of Man, designate Jesus as God's chosen one from whom blessing and redemption would come to the world. They recall the story of Jacob's dream, in which he is confirmed as God's chosen one - the first Israelite and mere shadow of the true Israelite who was to come.

**Jacob is running away from his brother and from the Promised Land. But God meets him where he is, and gives Jacob what he needs to take the next step. How does God extend His promise to cover Jacob's immediate future?**

God reiterated to Jacob elements of the promise he'd made to Abraham: descendants, land, and worldwide blessing. To that he added a promise to be with Jacob and watch over him wherever he should go; to bring him back to Canaan; and that He would never leave him until He had done what He promised. Jacob needs to be reassured that by leaving the land of promise, he is not leaving God's presence. God will be with him wherever he goes, until He accomplishes what He has promised. God was clearly with Jacob in a way that he was not with other people at that time. Yet His intention was to be with all His children and He became so gloriously when He sent His son Jesus, called "Emmanuel (which means, 'God with us')." (Matt. 1:23)

### **What does Jacob vow in return if God keeps His promise?**

If God will be with him and watch over him and bring him safely home, Jacob vows that the LORD will be his God; the stone he set up at Bethel will be God's house; and he will give God a tenth (by which he would acknowledge the LORD as his God and King). Jacob seems to be trying to maintain some level of control over things, but he is moving on to the point where God will be his and not just God of his fathers.

## **Chapter 29**

### **In vs. 1-14: How is God's guiding hand evident from the time Jacob arrives in Paddan Aram?**

In a scene reminiscent of that in which Abraham's servant finds Rebekah for Isaac, the first people Jacob meets on arriving in "the land of the eastern peoples" are from Haran. Not only do they know Laban, from whose house Jacob is to choose a wife, they are able to point out to him Rachel, who at that moment is arriving with her sheep. Rachel seems as tailor-made for Jacob as Eve was for Adam, and he falls in love with her immediately. When you consider the many people Jacob might have met before those from Laban's household, and even that the less lovely (at least to Jacob!) Leah might have been approaching at that time, it is hard not to see God's hand bringing them together.

### **After Jacob works seven years for Laban to earn Rachel as his bride, he is rewarded with the older yet still unmarried Leah instead. In what way is Laban's trick a kind of "poetic justice?"**

Jacob gets a dose of his own medicine from the wily Laban: the one who stole the benefits of the first-born by pretending to be the first-born now gets the first-born, who pretended to be the younger! Just as Rachel substituted her younger son for the older to achieve her goal, her brother Laban substitutes his older daughter for the younger. The deceiver has himself now been deceived.

### **God, "the father of compassion and the God of all comfort, (2 Cor. 1:3)" comforts the unloved Leah by giving her children. What do the names Leah gives her first three sons reveal about her heartcry? How has her attitude changed by the time the fourth is born, as evidenced in the name she gives him?**

Despite God's comfort and the gift of children, Leah longs to be loved by Jacob. "See, a son" she names Reuben, adding "surely my husband will love me now." Simeon, the second son, is evidence to Leah that God has heard she is unloved (Simeon means "one who hears"). When the third boy is born, "now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons," Leah hopes, naming him Levi or "attached." Jacob still prefers Rachel, though she remains childless. The names are a poignant cry for her husband's love. Leah finally turns her heart from longing after her husband and fixes it on God. Her fourth son is named Judah, "praise" - for "this time I will praise the Lord."

### **The abrupt change in attitude signaled by Judah's name, which means "praise," followed directly by "then she stopped having children" (vs. 35), serves to focus our attention on this fourth child of Leah. Read Matt. 1:1-16, which lists the descendants of Abraham through Judah. What future child of Judah's line would give the whole world cause to praise?**

It is fitting that the son born when Leah learns to accept God's love, the son Leah does not use to try to buy Jacob but who instead causes her to lift her voice in praise to God, should become the father of the tribe from which would come the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

**In spite of being unloved and unwanted, Leah bore six of Jacob's sons along with one daughter. Read the account of the births of Jacob's children in Gen. 30:1-24, paying careful attention to the way they are named. What do the names reveal about the relationships among the women in Jacob's household?**

The first half of Genesis 30 reads like a competition between Rachel and Leah (and their handmaids!) for favor and status. The atmosphere is tense, competitive, full of selfish striving, all revealed in the names they give their sons. Even Leah seems to lose the equanimity she gained with the birth of Judah, and joins in the race. But however selfish their efforts were, the end result was right in line with God's plan: as Boaz was to say later in Ruth 4:11, "together (Rachel and Leah) built up the house of Israel."

**Is Jacob, who has tried at every turn to obtain God's blessing on his own efforts, able to obtain for his beloved Rachel the sons she so desires (See Gen. 30:2,22)? Why or why not?**

It is not in Jacob's power to give life, even to his beloved Rachel. Only God, the author of all life, sustains it and creates new life. God opens and closes the women's wombs, causing them conceive or not according to His plan.

**Enriched by two wives and 12 children, Jacob decided to head for home. Why and how does Laban try to persuade him to stay?**

Laban learns through divination that God has blessed him because of Jacob, and he wants that blessing to continue. (Note: divination, which reflects a world view in which supernatural powers other than God are in control, was later forbidden to Israel. See Lev.19:26,31.) Laban evidently has cheated Jacob out of his due many times, starting with his substitution of Leah for Rachel. He hopes to lure Jacob to stay longer by allowing him to name his wages.

**What terms does Jacob propose in exchange for his continued service? Even though Laban secretly removed all the livestock that should have gone to Jacob, how did Jacob get the better end of the deal?**

Jacob proposed that he tend Laban's flocks in return for all the speckled, spotted sheep and goats and dark colored lambs, while Laban would keep the solid-colored animals. Even though Laban secretly removed the livestock that should have gone to Jacob, Jacob was able over the period of six years (see Gen. 31:41) to breed out strong, mottled livestock for himself. In this way, Jacob became "exceedingly prosperous (vs. 43), turning Laban's prosperity to his own profit.

## Chapter 31

**Six years have passed since Jacob first felt it was time to leave (see Gen. 31:41), and he has become "exceedingly prosperous." What do Laban and his sons think of Jacob's good fortune? Are they correct in their assumption?**

Where Laban formerly attributed his own blessing to Jacob, his attitude "was not what it had been (Gen. 31:2)." He sees that Jacob's gain is from his flocks, and his sons are jealous of his success and attribute it to stealing rather than to Jacob's ingenuity. They look at what is gone and not at the gain to them all. But as Jacob's wives recognize (vss. 14-16), their father had kept what was theirs by right as a bride-price (the price of Jacob's 14 years of labor) - and thus the flocks Jacob has been taking from are actually theirs.

**In Genesis 30 it appeared as though Jacob's effort and superstition were the cause of his success. Were they? What does Jacob reveal to his wives to have been God's role?**

Jacob knows his success belongs to God. As he told his wives, God has been with him (vs. 5); God has kept Laban from harming him (vs.7); God saw to it that whatever parameters Laban set on Jacob's wages, they were met (vss. 8,9); and God took Laban's livestock and gave it to Jacob. However cunning or skillful

Jacob has been, he gives credit for the results to God. This stands in contrast to Jacob's earlier scheming, by which he runs ahead of God and attempts to accomplish things on his own.

**Does Jacob see God as his God yet, according to verse 5? What does he call Him? In contrast, how does God identify himself?**

Jacob doesn't seem to see God as his God yet, although he sees Him as a personal God who has revealed Himself to his ancestors: when explaining to his wives the reason for his prosperity, he credits "the God of my father." Yet when God revealed Himself to Jacob in a dream, telling him it was time to return home, God reminds him that He is "the God of Bethel (vs. 13) - not just the God of Isaac, but the God who revealed himself personally to Jacob at Bethel.

**What did God remind him about in his dream (vss. 11-13)? Do you see any evidence that Jacob recognizes that God has kept His promise at Bethel?**

In his dream, God reminded Jacob of his vow. At Bethel Jacob vowed that "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, 21 so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God, 22 and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that thou givest me I will give the tenth to thee." (Gen. 28:20-22). God has fulfilled His part of the promise, and Jacob's explanation to his wives shows he knows it; now it is time for Jacob to return and make the LORD his God. In returning home and to God he is less like Abraham being called to a new country than he is like the Prodigal Son of Jesus' parable, who left and then returns to his father's house.

**How does Jacob's propensity to deceive continue to cause him trouble? How does God intervene on Jacob's behalf?**

Rather than leave openly, Jacob deceived Laban, leaving secretly with family and flocks and denying Laban the chance to say goodbye and give them a proper send-off. Rachel played her own part in the deception when she stole Laban's household gods. (It is not clear whether she wanted them for protection or blessing, or to worship, but clearly Laban gave place to more than one God in his household and Rachel was in some way influenced by this.) The furious Laban chased them all the way to Gilead before overtaking them. God appeared to Laban in a dream to warn him off. He apparently changed Laban's heart as well, for his attitude seems softened by the time he confronts Jacob,

**What are the terms of the covenant Laban binds Jacob with before they depart for Canaan?**

Jacob must agree not to mistreat Laban's daughters or to take other wives, and a boundary is set between their territories which both agree not to pass to harm the other. The name Mizpah means "watchtower." The Aramean Jegar-sahadutha and the Hebrew Galeed both mean "witness heap." The heap of stones will serve as a reminder and God will watch them both to make sure they hold to their vows.

**On whose name does Jacob swear (vs. 53)? What is the significance of the name?**

Jacob swore by a name he used earlier for God when defending himself to Laban (Gen. 31:42): "the Fear of Isaac." The word used for "fear" (or "the terrible") here also can mean "kinsman." In the context of this title it evokes both the close relationship between God and the patriarchs and also the power and might of the God who stood beside Jacob.