

EVANGELICAL BIBLE COLLEGE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



LIVES OF
ISAAC AND JACOB

**MENTORS TO ENCOURAGE US IN
GOD'S GREAT GRACE**

GENESIS 25:12 – 36:42

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Hebrews 11:20-21

20 By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

21 By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff."

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF ISAAC AND JACOB

THE TRIUMPH OF GRACE THROUGH FAITH IN THE MIDST OF VERY HUMAN WEAKNESSES

INTRODUCTION TO THESE GREAT BUT FLAWED MEN

Abraham's life has been seen to be the life that teaches us the principles of a forward focused life; a life of faith-rest. Hebrews 4:1-2, 11:1-3. Now we move on to the next two of the patriarchs. Each man has other lessons in the faith-rest life to teach us, and remember, Moses is writing these up for the Exodus generation, so that they will learn all their ancestors have to teach them before they enter the land promised to these very ancestors.

Moses could see that his people had to learn what their ancestors had learned or they could not enjoy the land promised to them. The joy of the land was only to be enjoyed by those who had learned the obedience of their ancestors and were masters of the truths taught to them through daily Holy Spirit filled application of the Word into the fabric of their daily life.

The lessons are to be learned here from weak and fallible men, who fail as much as they conquer, but who stand in the place of grace and faith, and so receive God's mercy and love. We are called to stand with them in the place of faith and grace, and so we too will enjoy our walk through this life in the presence of God's mercy, peace, grace and love.

Genesis is not the story of giants who we can only yearn to be like, but the story of flawed men and women who struggle each step of their walk upon the earth, but gain victory when they trust the Lord their God. They are great because they keep their focus forward and do not let their failures stop their steady march towards heaven. Hebrews 11:8-21.

This section begins and ends with Isaac as it is his legacy that we examine in this part of Genesis; the legacy of tenacity in the faith walk through life, and the consequences of disobedience. It is not the dynamic faith of a spiritual giant, but the weak faith of an ordinary man, who becomes extra-ordinary through the grace and power of God in his life. He truly has the faith that is like the mustard seed. Matthew 17:20. Abraham leaves us gasping at times with his greatness, but these men will leave us gasping at times as we look at their failures – these are men just like us – and we need what they discovered in the grace of God.

In these next generations after Abraham there will also be a further dividing between those who will go on in faith and those who will fall by the wayside through lack of follow through on the commands the Lord gave them. The heroes and heroines of the book of Genesis are men and women like us, and those who fail are also people like we can be. The difference in the victorious lives is their tenacity in obedience and their readiness to repent and move back into God's path, again and again. It is a story of what the theologians would call "the perseverance of the saints", of what Paul calls, the habit of "walking in the Holy Spirit". Let us wake up spiritually, heed the lessons from these men and walk as God call us all to walk before Him.

Ephesians 5:14-18 *"14. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*

15. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

16. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

17. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

18. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;"

The dominant message remains the grace of God, for these two men before us here, are not a fraction of the spiritually mature believer that Abraham was. Sadly there is a falling down of faith application into life and an acceptance of pagan morality relating to multiple wives, that was not part of the plan of God for mankind. Even though these two men fail again and again, personally, and in their family witness, the Lord's grace will bring them through, and the twelve sons of Jacob will become the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Lord still triumphs through their weaknesses, by their faith resting upon his grace, not their abilities.

OUTLINE OF THIS BOOK

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|-----------|---|
| 25: 12-34 | Two sons, and two attitudes to spiritual things |
| 26: 1-11 | Isaac at Gerar |
| 26: 12–22 | The challenge of prosperity at Gerar |
| 26: 23–35 | The new well at Beersheba |
| 27: 1-46 | Jacob seizes the blessing by deception |

28: 1-9	Jacob meets a real deceiver in Haran
28: 10-22	Jacob's dream and his vow to God
29: 1-30	Jacob's two wives from Laban
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30: 25-43	Jacob outwits Laban
31: 1-55	Jacob escapes, is confronted, and makes a covenant with Laban.
32:1-32	Reconciliation with Esau
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GENESIS 25:12-24

“Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's handmaid, bare unto Abraham: 13 And these are the names of the sons of Ishmael, by their names, according to their generations: the firstborn of Ishmael, Nebajoth; and Kedar, and Adbeel, and Mibsam, 14 And Mishma, and Dumah, and Massa, 15 Hadar, and Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah: 16 These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their towns, and by their castles; twelve princes according to their nations. 17 And these are the years of the life of Ishmael, an hundred and thirty and seven years: and he gave up the ghost and died; and was gathered unto his people. 18 And they dwelt from Havilah unto Shur, that is before Egypt, as thou goest toward Assyria: and he died in the presence of all his brethren. 19 And these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begat Isaac: 20 And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian. 21 And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. 22 And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. 23 And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. 24 And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.”

REFLECTION

Verses 12-16. Once again, I am not going to identify all the modern tribes of Arabia from this list of names, for many have done so before and without much real evidence left today that their identifications are correct. There are some very clear links to Arabian tribes and a good Bible dictionary or encyclopaedia needs to be looked up for each name to see the suggestions. Again it is a reminder that the Arab peoples are closely related to the Jewish people; they are the same family and the enemy fights to send as many as he can to hell from all branches of Abraham's family.

We must see the Arab-Israeli conflict in terms of Satan's hatred for all the sons of Abraham, and we must work to ensure that the Gospel of truth is given to all the sons of Abraham, for the enemy has won by dividing the sons of Abraham. The Bible teaches that many of his sons will enter into glory praising his name and the Messiah who has come from his line. Let us focus on getting Gospel truth to all the children of Abraham. The enemy delights in sending many to Hell, and we must delight in giving them the Gospel of Jesus (The Injeel of Isa, the message of J'Shua Ha Meshiach).

Verses 17-18. Ishmael enjoys a blessing by association with Abraham. Not only does he become the father of twelve Arabian tribes, but he lives long and prosperously to the great age of 137 years and dies in peace and spiritual rest, surrounded by his extended family. He has been carnal but the way Moses describes his death we must conclude he

draws closer to God as he grows older. His people live over an extensive area as pastoralists. Moses describes his death in the same terms as he did that of Abraham, and that make me believe, that he is describing a believer who dies in God's provision of Dying Grace. Genesis 15:15, 25:8. Let us remember that this man, the father of many of the great Arab peoples is a believer in the one true God, and we have the mission to speak to his sons, just as to the sons of Isaac.

Verses 19-20. Notice that Laban is called "the Syrian" as he was of the land called Syria by this time. He has become associated with his neighbours in Padanaram. Now this term means "the Plain of Aram" and refers to the vast plain that surrounds the city of Haran, so it is the name for the land area and became a name for the city over time as an equivalent to Haran.

Verses 21-22. Rebekah is unable to have children and this will form the first of the tests of Isaac's life of faith. Isaac goes straight to the Lord over the matter and the Lord answers his prayer and Rebekah conceives and it is discovered that she has twins within her.

This also was a cause for prayer; both of rejoicing and also concern for the mother. In this day death was common after child birth and the birth of twins was more problematic than a single birth. Because this was special there was great prayer made as to what this birth might mean, and especially by Rebekah herself, who almost felt them fighting within her. She takes her concern to the Lord and asks, "What does this mean?" Psalms 50:15, 65:1-2, 91:15-16, Isaiah 45:9-13.

Verses 23-24. Rebekah is told that there will be conflict from the start and unto the end with her two sons. This is not an easy thing for a mother to hear and it will be hard for her and for Isaac. Isaac will love his son Esau more than he will love Jacob, who is not the most lovely of characters, but Rebekah will remember the words of the Lord and she will ensure that Jacob receives the birth right, even if it is by tricking their father. This is a woman that we will find values God's words ahead of any love she has for her husband or her boys, and she is focused upon what God is doing rather than any issues of man's doings. Romans 9:9-15.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Ishmael's sons become twelve princes of the Arab peoples. They prosper and are blessed by God. They remain in lands blessed by great oil wealth today. Our responsibility is to deliver them the message of the Saviour. Let us fulfil our responsibility to our father in faith Abraham and deliver the truth to his sons and daughters.
2. Take all matters of concern to the Lord in prayer. Rebekah does this, and so does Isaac. They are our example here, although later we will see that they fail, just as we do. Like them, let us pick ourselves up and serve the one to whom we lift our prayers. 1 Peter 5:5-10.
3. From the start these two boys fight. There is no blame attached to the parents for this. There are genetic factors at work in all children and they are the code for that child's strengths and weaknesses. Esau is not doomed with his nature, for he has a good disposition and is loved more than his brother Isaac by all who meet them.

He is going to be "hated" by God because of his choices. He builds evil upon his genetics rather than good. No matter what our birth or our genetic material we are responsible for our actions upon that inherited foundation. Let us play our God chosen part on the path the Lord has selected for us from eternity past. We have no freedom to select our genetics, nor the place we are to serve in this life, we have simply the freedom to accept the Lord's will and serve with enthusiasm in our area of the battlefield of life. Let us play our part and not seek the part of another! John 21:20-22.

GENESIS 25:25-34

"And the first came out red, all over like a hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. 26 And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them. 27 And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. 28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob. 29 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: 30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. 31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. 32 And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? 33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. 34 Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright."

REFLECTION

Verses 25-26. The boy's birth is told here, and it is an unusual birth, with the baby's behaviours being most unusual, and a portent of things to come. The first is red all over and covered in hair, and so his name is "Hairy one", or Esau. It is almost as if the babies have been fighting to see who will come out first and Esau wins, and Jacob is grasping at his heel with his little hand as Esau comes out. Anything other than a head presentation in birthing can lead to complications and so the skill of the midwives here is seen and Jacob is born without danger to mother or child. The grace of God is seen in this, as many would have died in this birthing process.

From the baby's behaviour he gets the name Jacob – or "heel holder". Now we have the shock with the giving of Isaac's age when he has these sons. He is sixty years of age now. They have waited over twenty years for this birth. Rebekah may be around forty years of age. Both will live good and long lives, their deaths being alluded to in Genesis 49:31. Isaac's age at his death is recorded in Genesis 35:28. He lives five years longer than Abraham and dies at 180 years of age.

Verses 27-28. The family dynamic is spoiled by favouritism, for these boys are as unlike as chalk and cheese. Isaac loved the hunting-fishing outdoors type of man Esau was. He was the "tall dark and handsome" "action man" type, and most people, if they met these two boys, would have preferred him, to the stay at home boy that Jacob appeared at first glance to be. All is not as it initially appears in this household and the nature of the boys is not as they initially present; Esau is not as good as he looks and Jacob is not as passive and bookish as he appears to be.

Jacob was more quiet and sat in the tent rather than roamed about in the open fields. This indicates possibly a more pious, philosophical, or religious life preference, for the tent flap was where the older men sat to speak of philosophy, justice, religion and life itself. It may be that Jacob was a more reflective young man. He certainly wasn't a total "stay at home boy" because he knew his farm animals and understood breeding and getting the best out of flocks, as Laban would discover later.

So once again Moses gives us just a glimpse of key characteristics to help us as the story unfolds. Isaac loved his son Esau because he loved the venison he killed and prepared for him. Isaac's discernment is flawed and Moses means us to pick this up. We are not to decide on the value of any person on the basis of what they can do for us, but on what they are as people, and what they will allow God to do with them. It is inner character that will emerge over time with many actions, that is to be the basis for valuation of people, not any short term benefits from the individual's immediate actions.

Verses 29-30. It is intriguing to think about how many single events of no real significance in themselves become major turning points for individuals and even nations. Apparently inconsequential meetings and words can set in motion events that bring down nations and change the destiny for millions. We must always be looking as what God is doing as he weaves people's paths together with our own, for it is the apparently "inconsequential" meetings that often matter most in God's path for our lives.

This particular day in the tent of Isaac just such an inconsequential meeting took place. Jacob is preparing a red lentils dish, still common throughout Syria, Lebanon, and Israel. The beautiful aromatic smell of the cooked lentils wafts out into the open air as Esau returns from a particularly exhausting hunt in the open fields. This was apparently a favourite dish for Jacob and Esau knows this is a good dish when Jacob makes it. He asks for some right then, with real passion. Literally in the Hebrew he says, "Let me swallow some of that red, that red right there". Esau's nick name was "Red" (Edom) because of his passionate love of these lentils.

Moses mentions this right here, just before the interchange that leads to the trading of the birth-right. Does he do so to hint that Jacob knew his brother's weakness and has he done this cooking to entice his brother and get him to say what he does? We are left with the question unanswered at this point, but it may be that Jacob was doing a bit of game playing here, and would enlist his mother's help to advance the plot later. The scene is set for a test for both young men.

Esau will demonstrate that he does not value his birthright, and Jacob will prove that he values receiving it above all things. Esau appears initially to be the dynamic and strong one, but he lacks tenacity, and the ability to handle hardship and privation, and it is these things that mark out the truly tough leader. People who lust after food and cannot control themselves when they are hungry cannot ever play an important part in the plan of God except as a test to others! Let us test ourselves in these matters, for the early Church held two fast days a week to build their toughness – so that hunger would not ever move them into wrong decision making.

The modern SAS commandoes are trained to withstand all desires that will hinder their fulfilment of orders. I remember eating breakfast in an Army Training camp as a Naval officer, and without warning the SAS were jogged into the back of the dining hall. They were stood to attention there along the back wall, and stood absolutely still while we all ate breakfast, the smells of the food filling the room. At a later point the SAS Sargent major called them all to "Right Wheel" and said aloud, "I hope you have enjoyed the smell of breakfast and are feeling full", and he then led them out on a further route march. They were being trained to be tough and resist all hunger or other lusts and focus only on their task – that is our standard also!

Verse 31. Jacob is ready to ask this question of Esau. This indicates that Moses hint regarding the red lentils and Esau's love of them may indicate a well laid plan on Jacob's part. This is not the sort of "deal" you would normally offer, let alone be able to make over a bowl of lentils! The birth-right was the right to be chief of the clan, to be the leader and

ruler of the brethren. It was the spiritual leadership as well as the judicial leadership. Genesis 27:4, 27-29. Later it would involve the double portion of the material goods, although that was not the pattern in this day, where one son may receive virtually all the Father had as we have seen with Isaac. Deuteronomy 21:17.

Verse 32. Esau is “faint” with hunger, “weary in his bones” we would say, but he is not at the point of death! A simple drink of water will refresh while the food comes, so there is no survival issue here. This is about his ability to handle lust and desire, not withstand death! Jacob is not going to deny him food anyway; Esau is of the family and can eat whenever he wishes, but this is a special dish and may be it was to be set aside for their father and mother later. There is something about this dish that requires a deal to be made between the brothers to eat of it at this point, but no such serious deal needs to be made.

Verses 33-34. Esau is over exaggerating here. No matter how tired you are water will refresh and keep you going for a number of hours before you need to eat. This is a man, who although apparently a tough out door type, is not self disciplined nor self controlled. He finds his appetites hard to control, and he has not got any sense of value to the birth-right, for spiritual and leadership issues do not concern him.

He is a man who just wants to hunt and enjoy his time in the open fields. He is the sort of man who today has a bumper sticker on his four wheel drive vehicle – “I’d rather be fishing or hunting”. He lacks the character that is required to serve, and can only do things to produce pleasure for himself. His work is not productive for the farming operation, he leaves that “boring farming stuff” to Jacob, for he prefers the joys of the hunt.

We now see that Jacob is clever and cunning, and he has, I believe, in the light of how Moses has let this story unfold, clearly planned this for some time. He makes his brother formally swear that the birthright is passed over. This is such an unusual act that it is baffling that Esau is so casual in his attitude towards the oath/event. He is proving himself to be a man who doesn't think much over great matters – he would rather be hunting and fishing! Superficial thought leads to fatal errors of morality and behaviour later.

He simply does not value anything other than his right to roam the hills free and arrive home to warm lentils! Jacob deserves the birth-right by his brains and discernment about what really matters, but this act of cunning will come back to bite him later! Moses makes sure we get the point by identifying that the key element of the story is that Esau despised his birth-right. He considers spiritual matters of no consequence, and so judges himself as unfit for leadership in spiritual matters. He is also excluding himself from being part of the line of promise, as he does not value the spiritual realities.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. To value the spiritual means that we are alert to each situation as a potentially important learning experience. We are seeking the Lord's guidance in all things, for we have eyes that look heavenward for opportunities for service of the Lord. Esau was only concerned with what was in front of his mouth or eyes; he served his flesh, and cared not for the things of God. Let us be warned by him for God hates this attitude.
2. Isaac does not come out of the story well, for he, like his son Esau loves the things he can taste and feel, and makes his carnal son his favourite, when the son who will inherit the promise is ignored. We must learn to value the spiritual and not be fooled by the attractive carnal people we meet. It is not superficial charm that the Lord seeks us to value, but genuine spiritual life and production.
3. Let us look beyond the immediate gratification of our needs when we are judging people, to their character and their spiritual life and witness. It is easy to be blinded by the deeds of a person who has met our needs, but may not be doing anything more than positioning themselves to manipulate us the more thoroughly later. Let us discern with godly power, seeking the fruits of the Holy Spirit alone when we judge people, and so we will not be fooled by the attractive, but carnal people who the enemy will use to distract us from God's path for us.

Notes

CHAPTER 26**ISAAC – THE MAN BORN IN THE LAUGHTER OF FAITH****GENESIS 26:1-14**

“And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. 2 And the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: 3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father; 4 And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; 5 Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws. 6 And Isaac dwelt in Gerar: 7 And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon. 8 And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife. 9 And Abimelech called Isaac, and said, Behold, of a surety she is thy wife; and how saidst thou, She is my sister? And Isaac said unto him, Because I said, Lest I die for her. 10 And Abimelech said, What is this thou hast done unto us? One of the people might lightly have lien with thy wife, and thou shouldest have brought guiltiness upon us. 11 And Abimelech charged all his people, saying, He that toucheth this man or his wife shall surely be put to death. 12 Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. 13 And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: 14 For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him.”

REFLECTION

As we read these words we feel our hearts sink and we find ourselves saying, “Not again!” Why does the son follow the father in the same lying sin, in the same place. Has no wisdom been passed on through the generations? Has not Abraham warned his son, by telling the story of what happened to him here in Gerar? Why does Abraham not warn his son of this sinful stupidity? Why head back into troubled places that his father fled years before?

The wells of Gerar are a source of trouble, and these local people steal the wells that the visiting pastoralists dig with impunity and regularity. The king of Abraham’s day here lied and stole and murdered, and this new one (same name – same title) does the same. Envy-jealousy drives these people, and it’s associated sin comes in all other forms of lust.

Mental attitude sins do not abide alone; they always lead to overt sins of murder and adultery. This is not at first sight a place to stay long, any more than Sodom was for Lot, although in this case, we will see, that the Lord guides him there and has things for him to learn here, before moving away. Isaac will not fall into the error of Lot, even though he is tempted to by circumstances.

Verses 1-2. Famine stalks the land again after good harvests for over fifty years the rains fail for several years. Isaac faces the same test that Abraham had, and the same test we all face; the test of not having enough to make ends meet. It is by the sweat of our brow that we get our living, from the exile from Eden until the Lord comes in his second advent.

Many believers today say as they struggle in daily work, “Life isn’t meant to be this hard!” It wasn’t meant to be this hard, but Adam and Eve fell, and since then it has been hard, and all “soft options” involve fraud, crime or immorality! Yet life is this hard today because of the fall, and the curse will be finally lifted from the earth at the Lord’s Second Advent, and until that day we are urged to work for our daily bread, and be prepared to sweat hard for it. Genesis 2:17-19, 2 Thessalonians 3:5-15.

All of us face this test in the devil’s world, for he delights in pressuring the Lord’s people, and our challenge is to keep working, while we remain focused on the Lord our God. The Lord is our portion, our protector, and our provider. Psalms 37:34-40, 42:1-5, 44:3-8, 119:57, 142:5.

Moses makes it clear that this famine was similar in severity to the one that hit in the days of Abraham, and this is at least fifty years later, as it is placed in the narrative after the birth of Jacob, and Isaac is sixty at that time. It is a severe famine and drastic measures are required. It may be that Isaac remembers that around Gerar his father had dug wells and that even in the famine times of the past there was shelter and pasture there. He heads there, and possibly is thinking about moving further south into Egypt, for the Lord speaks to him directly and warns him against heading further south. He is told to dwell in the land he is told of; and that means in this context, the land around Gerar.

Isaac receives the same command Abraham had received in Genesis 12:1. The repetition is designed to make him recall the spiritual lessons of his father and walk in the truths that his father learned; especially the truth, that where the Lord tells you to walk is safe to walk, and you do not need to develop strategies of man to keep yourself safe there. Psalms 32:8, 37:3-7. Will he rest in the Lord, or rest in his lies and plans?

Verses 3-4. The command is to “sojourn” in this land. He is to live as a pastoralist, not a permanent settler. The land will finally be given to his descendants, but he is to stay in tents in testimony to the future promise and the present dangerous reality of the local people. God’s promise is that the oath taken to Abraham will be fulfilled to the seed of Isaac and Jacob, but not to them personally. Genesis 15:7ff, 22:16-18.

It is the reminder to Isaac that he too, like his father, will have to walk in faith, for he will not see the land inherited and lived in permanently, but he is to live in the reality of the truth of the promise, knowing it will be fulfilled. Just so it is with us today. Our present generation may not live to see the Millennial Kingdom, but we are to live in the certain assurance that the world will be transformed by the Lord’s coming, and every time we lift the Communion Cup, we are to say, “Until He Comes”, in expression of our faith in this reality. Like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we are to express our faith in future realities whether we live upon the earth to see them or not, for we will all enjoy them together. Isaiah 43:1-7.

The promise of his seed being the seed of promise and inheriting great blessing, and all the world being blessed in his seed is given to Isaac. This is important, because Abraham has received this promise and is the father of many nations already. Isaac could ask whether the promise is already fulfilled, and the Lord makes it clear to him that it is not. The promise will be fulfilled through Isaac’s seed. At this time Isaac thinks of both his boys, but the spiritual promise will flow through only one, and it will not be the one he hopes for. It will be through Jacob that the blessing will come, and that blessing will be concentrated in one line through all Israel’s history until Messiah comes. Psalms 72:17-19, Acts 3:22-26, Galatians 3:7-14.

Verses 5-6. The reasons for blessing flowing through his line, is that Abraham was persistent in his obedience. He learned to trust the Lord through time, by the habit of daily obedience, and although Jacob will fail, he will persist in walking with God, whereas Esau will not, and unlike Ishmael, he will be an unbeliever and persistently hate God’s path. Moses really stresses this for his own generation. Isaac is called to the same path his father walked, and so he will receive the same blessing his father received; both in this life and the one to come. The Israelites are also called to walk as Isaac and Jacob walked, in faith, depending on the grace of God.

The blessings that these men receive are in their own life times a “first fruits” of blessing, and in heaven eternal blessing, and as time unfolds, blessing that flows to all mankind through them. We also may have the same legacy of blessings, for in time we know the fruit of the Holy Spirit within us, and our lives and those around us are blessed. In heaven we receive eternal rewards, and in time, after our deaths, the work we have done goes on to bless others. We are to praise God for his blessings that flow, every time we read a spiritual book written by one who has already passed on to glory, and remind ourselves to live lives worthy of such a flow of blessing to others.

Verses 7-8. Isaac moves to the vicinity of Gerar and dwells there, as Abraham had before him. Genesis 20:1-2. Sadly he will make exactly the same mistake Abraham does. He over thinks and tries by lying to avoid trouble, rather than simply walking with the Lord and leaving his safety in the Lord’s hands. Our challenge is not to walk avoiding trouble and pressure, but walk with God through the middle of the enemy. We are not to accommodate evil or sin, not plot/scheme our way around them, but walk in righteousness and the strength of the Holy Spirit alone. Now Isaac does not plot as Abraham did from Ur onwards, regarding Sarah. Genesis 20:11-13.

From the way Moses tells the story, it would appear that Isaac has not planned to say this, but when challenged as to the relationship between himself and Rebekah he lies. Many good men and women have been caught this way; not expecting a question, quickly summing up the danger, and finding themselves in a lie. Lies are always easier than the truth at the time, but very quickly they unravel and the consequences can be more fatal than those that the lie tried to avoid in the first place.

The observation of the king of Isaac and Rebekah tells us that Isaac has his tent in a place where it can be overlooked by the city walls, or the highest point, the king’s citadel. Isaac may have made the mistake of living too close to town, or maybe it was that they had to camp there, and be watched by the Gerar authorities to ensure they were not a threat, before being given permission to pasture their flocks in the out lying districts. Whatever the reason for living where their every move could be watched, the king observes Isaac and Rebekah in love play outside their tent and spots a sexual relationship exists between them.

Robust sexual enjoyment between a husband and wife is part of God’s plan for marriage, and sexual pleasure is meant to be enjoyed by both partners right into older age, and no excuses are to be given for enjoying each other in a marriage. Sarah’s comment in her nineties refers to this. Genesis 18:12. Isaac and Rebekah are well into their middle years, but both are young in spirit and robustly enjoy each other sexually. This is normal and healthy, but Isaac has lied about their relationship and so he gives the king the higher moral ground in their next meeting.

Verses 9-10. The same things said to Abraham for the same lie are said to Isaac. Genesis 20:9-10. These foreign and pagan people are sexually promiscuous, and it is a “light” thing, of no real consequence to them at all, to have sex with others, not the legal partners of others. They do have morality, and theirs is better than Hollywood’s today, for they would not take another man’s wife, for they recognized that this was an evil and would bring guilt and judgment upon them. It is likely that this was the legacy of Abraham’s visit. Genesis 20:2-8. They had learned from experience, but Isaac is yet to learn that God will keep him in all places he tells him to go. Isaac needs to trust more, and know that God will not lead him to a place, and then abandon or destroy him there. Let us remember, if the Lord has led us to a place/path then the Lord will keep us safe there if we are serving him on his path for our life.

Verses 11-12. This Abimelech takes direct action to protect Isaac and Rebekah, and by so doing to protect his own people from God's judgment, as had been experienced in Abraham's day. By doing this he also gives a testimony that he will use later, to assert that he is Isaac's friend, when future events will prove that not to be so. Isaac's lie has opened the door for this man to prove he is more than he actually is! Isaac will face further tests because he failed this one. This man will use his actions here to try to undermine Isaac's resolve later and pressure him, but Isaac will trust the Lord from here onwards; he will not lean upon his own understanding again, but will rest upon the Lord. Proverbs 3:5, Micah 3:11.

He immediately receives a bumper harvest in the land he is given by the king. It is not good land; that is why he has been given it, and so the king is baffled, but Isaac blesses the Lord who has in grace given him blessing in the midst of cursing. God's message is seen by Isaac clearly; trust in the Lord and you will receive all you need! 2 Corinthians 8:14, Philippians 1:19, 4:19.

Verses 13-14. Moses must have been amazed as he reads of Isaac's actions and the Lord's gracious response. He has lied when he didn't need to, but then has received blessing as soon as he repents and corrects the lie. God doesn't hold out on him at all as punishment, but provides exactly as he had said he would. Moses faces many similar tests with the children of Israel in the wilderness, and they fail again and again, but the Manna never fails to appear daily and they never run out of water.

God's point through the ages is the same; trust in the Lord, and you will have all you need to serve him, where he wants you to serve! Isaiah 30:18, Proverbs 3:5-6. Isaac is blessed above and beyond the normal bumper crop. He becomes very powerful and prosperous, and what that meant for this maturing believer was not purchase of more luxuries, but 100% reinvestment in agriculture. Isaac purchased more sheep, goats, cattle and servants in the depressed economy and so grew in power, as had Abraham. Psalms 112:1-10, 144:12-15.

Isaac started out with the reduced inherited wealth of his father, much of which was used up in the latter years of his life, but he has rebuilt all and possibly (from Moses language here) even more than Abraham's greatest fortune and now has his influence and power. He has hundreds of men in his household, and the natives of Gerar are now militarily threatened, and very jealous. They have given him their rubbish land and he has prospered more there than they have in the better coastal land. It is as if God gives rain to Isaac's pastures and the clouds pass over their own!

The points for Moses are clear.

1. God will bless us when we trust him alone.
2. God blesses his path for us, and no other.
3. Physical details about what looks prosperous on the surface do not matter, for the Lord will ensure that his people prosper enough to serve in all places he leads them. God does not lead us to a place to destroy us!

He gives us "streams in the desert". Psalms 78:15-20, Proverbs 10:22, Isaiah 35:6.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. God's grace is not hindered by the believer's stupidity. God blesses because of who He is and who we are in Christ Jesus. Our sin holds up the receipt of blessing, but repentance re-opens the floodgates of God's love, mercy and grace. If we deal with our sins, we will not lose what the Lord has for us; his patience is amazing towards us all and his plan remains secure for us. Obedience is all he seeks from us. He wants us to learn dogged daily obedience to the plan, so that his Word is more real than anything around about us and we walk in it's truth and assurance, trusting to the Lord for our provisions.
2. We do not need to plot to be safe or prosper, we only need to advance down God's path for us and we will receive all he has for us. To lie or plot means we get what our plots can produce, but to trust God means we get what God can do for us! Plots and lies open the door for evil men to manipulate us further. A lie will mean we have more testing to come in that area. We do not need to over think for God, we need to walk in his path for us and relax in his provisions on that path.
3. We are sojourners upon the earth. This is not our home, and the toys and signs of wealth that pagans gather around them are not to be the focus for our lives here. We are here to serve and witness, not relax and play. Our relaxation and play is for recharge of batteries to serve the more, it is not the preoccupation of our life. The robust enjoyment of Isaac and Rebekah's sexual life is one example of bona fide play for all married believers. We are to enjoy all aspects of our married lives until their end and bring joy to each other all the days of our lives. Let us challenge ourselves to do a loving and pleasant thing for our marriage partner this day and every day.
4. As believers we are meant to be forward focused always. This means growing away from any of our dysfunctional childhoods, abuse memories, traumatic events, or any other thing that modern psychology wants us to spend years in psycho-therapy for! God's call is to become new creatures in Christ Jesus, not re-work our

old lives. We grow into our new identity in Christ by focusing forwards not backwards. Let us advance in and through application of God's Word into the fabric of each and every day.

GENESIS 26:15-35

“ For all the wells which his father's servants had digged in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them, and filled them with earth. 16 And Abimelech said unto Isaac, Go from us; for thou art much mightier than we. 17 And Isaac departed thence, and pitched his tent in the valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. 18 And Isaac digged again the wells of water, which they had digged in the days of Abraham his father; for the Philistines had stopped them after the death of Abraham: and he called their names after the names by which his father had called them. 19 And Isaac's servants digged in the valley, and found there a well of springing water. 20 And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him. 21 And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah. 22 And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land. 23 And he went up from thence to Beersheba. 24 And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake. 25 And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well. 26 Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, and Ahuzzath one of his friends, and Phichol the chief captain of his army. 27 And Isaac said unto them, Wherefore come ye to me, seeing ye hate me, and have sent me away from you? 28 And they said, We saw certainly that the LORD was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee; 29 That thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good, and have sent thee away in peace: thou art now the blessed of the LORD. 30 And he made them a feast, and they did eat and drink. 31 And they rose up betimes in the morning, and swore one to another: and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace. 32 And it came to pass the same day, that Isaac's servants came, and told him concerning the well which they had digged, and said unto him, We have found water. 33 And he called it Shebah: therefore the name of the city is Beersheba unto this day. 34 And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite: 35 Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.”

REFLECTION

WATER, POLITICS, AND ESAU'S COMPROMISE

Verse 15. The natives of Gerar had filled in the wells of Abraham after he left their area. Remember the Philistines as such are still not settled in this region; they are several hundred years away, as far as modern archaeology can tell, but Moses uses the term to describe the people of the area, as that is the name of the country when he arrives there.

This well filling was not an act of spite, as it may appear, but an act of self protection. Abraham and his men acted as a buffer power between them and the Arab tribes of the desert regions. Abraham had between 300-600 men under arms by the days he was with them and these armed men were able to keep the potentially violent desert wanderers at bay. With Abraham gone the temptation would be for others to enter the land he had occupied and settle there, closer to Gerar. Their foreign policy was to keep the desert dwellers at least 30 kilometres away from them, and so any wells in that area were stopped up permanently, to ensure no-one settled there. It was their “no-man’s land” buffer area for defence.

Isaac has apparently re-opened some of the wells to ensure he has a supply of good water year round and so he prospers further and further each year he keeps his herds and flocks in this border region. The king and nobles of Gerar are jealous and frightened of what this man’s prosperity means for their security. They are pagans and so they cannot understand blessing by association; instead of relaxing and enjoying the Lord’s blessing through Isaac, they doubt and fear him and his growing influence in the border region and the growing number of armed men that are coming to and from his encampment.

Verses 16-17. From the instruction here given by Abimelech, it appears that Isaac had his tent pitched outside the city and the vast numbers of his armed men coming and going was causing unease amongst the city dwellers, and so Abimelech orders him to move his headquarters further a field, out into the area his herdsman operate in. Isaac does this and moves up the valley the city sits in, deep into the hinterland.

Isaac does not plead his case, nor explain himself, but graciously agrees to the request of his pagan host and moves his vast encampment away from the city. He will not let anything affect his witness to this man and his people. He wants to influence them for God, not cause fear and loathing.

As believers we need to be sensitive to the perceptions of others about us. If we have given the wrong message, we need to withdraw away from the misconception. If there is a problem in communication, the believer’s approach is to be that we are to change first, before we ask the pagan to shift their ground. We are to be people who are focused upon

others needs rather than our own. Our job is to leave our vindication with the Lord, and focus solely upon his service, and ours to the others amongst whom we witness to the power and truth of God.

Verses 18-19. Isaac systematically now re-opens all the wells of Abraham and calls them by their names, as Abraham had done. He has taken the order to move into the hinterland seriously and so re-establishes himself as Abraham had done fifty years or more before, as the forward defensive shield around Gerar. Isaac's motives are good, but they will not be taken that way by the nobles of Gerar, whose jealousy gets in the way of their strategic thinking.

The servants of Isaac dig a new well in the upper reaches of the valley and discover the best possible find, a spring of gushing water, rather than simply a water table where water can be drawn. This deep spring will provide the needs of many people and animals. It is a valuable find and they make a proper well there for people and animals.

Verses 20-21. The same thing that occurs to Abraham's servants occurs to Isaac's with the servants of the city flocks of Gerar. Genesis 21:25ff. In Abraham's day the army of Gerar came, supporting their herdsmen and violently took control of the well and killed possibly seven men of Abraham's company.

Just such a thing happens here, with a violent attack upon the well by the men of Gerar. Isaac could stand and fight for this well, or argue for it with the king, but he chooses to withdraw further into the hinterland and dig another well. It is apparently just in sight of the first and the men of Gerar take it by force also. Any doubts about the malice of these men is dispelled by the names of these wells; the first "angry violence", and the second, "hatred". With two insults to his people and blood to avenge, under the laws of the desert war would be expected now. Instead Isaac withdraws further away and digs a third well.

Verses 22-23. He is now out in the area of Abraham's prosperity and at the third well there is peace; the men of Gerar do not over extend themselves and attack him there. They have reached their maximum point of expansion and being able to hold their possessions. Isaac knows he doesn't have to fight them here, for he is now in the right place where there is room for them all, and he will be blessed by the Lord, and they will now leave his people alone. He calls the well "Room". He is not quick to anger, but seeks the Lord's place for his people, away from the sphere of the city that he sees more and more is ruled by lust and power. James 1:19-20, Galatians 5:19-21.

Isaac, under great provocation, demonstrates by his actions that he has the fruit of the Holy Spirit, and that he is not ruled by his Old Sin Nature. There is great reason for violent anger and retribution, compensation, but he moves further away and prays and rests in God's protection and provision. He also moves back to his father's great well at Beersheba and dwells there where the Lord has spoken before. He is not moved by men's actions, but directed by God's promises.

Verses 24-25 Isaac builds an altar for regular animal sacrifice, and digs a second well here at Beersheba after the Lord speaks with him in a dream by night. He is going to stay close by the place where the Lord has spoken, for in his heart he seeks the Lord's blessing and the Lord's fellowship. The altar speaks of the blood shed for sin, and he will use it often to remind himself of grace. He will stand as the priest of his family and offer sacrifices for them all.

His time amongst the people of Gerar has been jaded and disturbed by their double dealing and he seeks the space to wander and have his pastoral life style in spiritual purity. They will follow him here and speak with him, as they did with Abraham, for they fear him, but Isaac is in the right place here. He has sought the fellowship of the Lord and this is the right place to receive the evil double dealing men of Gerar. Notice the promises of the Lord to Isaac here, and how closely they parallel the promises to Abraham, and how they will be repeated to Jacob, and then reinforced to Moses himself. Genesis 15:1-6, 17:1-10, 28:13-15, Exodus 3:1-18.

The central message of the Lord is, "Fear Not, for I am with you". This tells us that the main problem Isaac had was fear at this point, and if we look within our own hearts, we will find that this is the same problem we all have as we walk through the troubles of this world in our own day. God's message remains the same; we are to look up when a look around brings in fear. We are to remember that we serve the King of Kings and the Lord of all lords, and lean upon Him alone to keep us safe in troubled times. Psalms 27:1-3, 46:1-3, Isaiah 12:1-6, 41:10-14, 43:1-13, 44:1-3, 51:7-12.

Read each of these verses above and write them in your promise notebook, for each of these verses were in the spiritual "First Aid Kit" of the early church, and were sung and quoted daily for encouragement under persecution. These verses will be the source of strength again for those going through the Great Tribulation in years to come. Luke 12:32, Hebrews 13:6.

Verses 26-27. The official Gerar delegation arrives one day at Beersheba. They are well away from their power base and they are coming to Isaac, just as they came to Abraham, because they are fearful that their actions previously, in seizing the wells, may have provoked a state of war. They fear that Isaac is gathering the desert tribes against them from his power base in Beersheba and may sweep upon them. Once again, note, they come to the man of God; they do not demand his presence in their city. This is a sign, as it was in Abraham's day, that Isaac is powerful in their eyes; they know God is with him even though they have abused him. When we fear men, we can rest in the Lord on it, for if we walk with the Lord, evil men will fear us far more than we fear them.

The delegation is a strong and official one, and would have been backed with many troops. Those present, as in the visit to Abraham tell us that these men seek information as to Isaac's plans and attitudes towards them, and it reminds us that the politicians of the devil's world seek to push God's people to the limit at all times. Genesis 21:22-32. Isaac does not

greet them with the political pleasantries of the day, but directly confronts them with their aggression towards him and his men in the Valley of Gerar.

He gives them no other option but to confront the truth, and either make peace, make war, or leave him in peace. This tells us that Isaac has enough men under arms to be strong in the presence of his potential enemies, and is a reminder to us that we are not to shrink from telling truth to evil men who seek to manipulate us and lead us, or force us, from God's path. He has withdrawn far enough to be sure of his position and his allies amongst the sons of Uncle Ishmael; he is now in a strong place, and they are far from home, and want to find out what he thinks. He has kept his counsel secret, and they must approach him on his ground – this man is a good strategist.

Verses 28-29. Their answer is full of pious hypocrisy and fake respect. Had they really believed these things they say, they would have treated Isaac and his men with respect and had a meeting to plan mutual advantage well before this date. These words are fake at their heart, although it is true that the king and his staff have seen that God is with Isaac. They have seen him be blessed irrespective of the pressures they put upon him, and they have seen him dig successful wells after well, when they cannot find water in the same place. But their deeds speak louder than their words, and as Jesus says, it is by the fruit of men's lives they are to be known, not their pious praising of, or acknowledging of God. Matthew 7:15-23, James 2:19-20.

These devious and evil men lie through their teeth! They have done evil to Isaac's men, and they have stolen two wells. Isaac has rightly confronted them with truth, and they have avoided the issue altogether, but they have betrayed by their words that they fear his ill will, and they fear him militarily. Without admitting to their wrong doing, they ask for a non-aggression pact between them. Isaac shows real thought about his goals, and revenge and setting past grievances right is not amongst them, for feeling "justified" is never the best plan when it does not add to or meet the Lord's life goals for our life now.

Their action is tantamount to an admission of guilt, and Isaac will show great statesmanship in not forcing them to openly admit fault over the two wells that he now does not need. He weighs up the situation, and is focused upon the goal he now seeks, not yesterday's offence. This is our challenge – to be focused upon God's purposes not our ideas or sense of injustice. Isaac seeks a formal acknowledgement of his right to be in Beersheba and to use the wells that matter to him and he will "trade away" past grievances and properties to obtain the Lord's path and purposes.

Their very treaty offer acknowledges him as an equal power and his right to live in Beersheba. He will give away the other two wells he dug, which he doesn't need any way, for a pact that looks forward rather than backwards. Isaac is future focused, and so must we be. Setting right historic injustice is a waste of time, if the path to future prosperity lays open before us. It is a future focus that the Lord calls us to. We cannot change the past, but we can always make a better future.

There is wisdom here. He does not try to force them to look backwards, he gives them the opportunity to look forwards and make a pact that will be his guarantee of peace between him and them. He had intended peace anyway, but this gives him a chance at no cost to himself to be seen to be a peace maker and their friend. They are the ones who will walk away feeling they have been lucky.

This level of wisdom was lacking during and after World War 1, when the British and French rejected several overtures of peace from Germany, and millions more died. The reason was national pride and the demand for "unconditional surrender". World War II was the result of the pride and stupidity of revenge by the victorious nations at Versailles at the end of World War 1. Such pride based negotiating ignores the real objectives of politics, which are always the prosperity and safety of your own people. By making this pact, Isaac is going to be able to challenge any future attempted seizures of wells with the current treaty, rather than trying to enforce a fifty year old one, which has been shown to carry no weight now.

Verses 30-31. Isaac is in charge of the whole process now, and he shows himself a good host and takes all the initiatives, sending them away in the morning with a promise of peace. Isaac has shown himself to be the peace-maker and friend of those who seek his friendship. He has, by making this treaty been seen by all the surrounding desert tribes to be the equal of these important city dwellers and so has increased his status amongst them also. Many of these tribes are allies of Ishmael and so the people of Gerar are aware that Isaac has many potential allies to draw upon. The strong man armed keeps his house! Luke 11:21. He has walked the path of peace with strength, which is the guarantee of peace in the present world. Matthew 5:9, Romans 12:18, Hebrews 12:14.

Verses 32-33. In the same day as the army of the men of Gerar head back to their town the servants of Isaac come to him and tell him that they have found water. The new well they have dug has been successful and the town of Beersheba is now certain and secure with it's water supply. The name of the well is "shebah" or oath. The place of Abraham's dwelling has been certified as blessed by the Lord through this well. Isaac praises the Lord in the renaming of the place after Abraham's time there, possibly nearly one hundred years before now (it is hard to date things precisely here, it is at least fifty years, but more likely closer to one hundred now). Isaac stays in this area and he prospers here even more so and becomes very great in power and influence, and in case you missed it, Moses has mentioned, verse 14, that the people of Gerar envied him greatly. The enemy of the Lord will envy and hate us. We ought not to be surprised by this, nor distracted by it. Luke 6:22, John 15:18.

Verses 34-35. Great political and spiritual victories are won on this day. Victory over lust for power, or desire for vengeance is well and truly eliminated by Isaac's diplomacy. Victory over want is permanently achieved by the second well being successful. It is of note that both wells are still in operation today and revered by the descendents of Abraham, Jew and Arab.

Esau however continues to produce evidence that he is a carnal man, and guided by his own lusts. He selects two wives from amongst the Hittite aristocracy amongst whom they live. These girls have caught his eyes, and maybe he sees valuable alliances amongst the Hittite rulers by making these matches, but the "daughters of Heth" are not spiritually minded, and the matter of his marriage sets the seal on his destiny as far as Rebekah is concerned especially. Both parents are saddened by this choice, although Isaac will still seek to bless his son and his son's seed, for his love for Esau covers over his concern for the promise that is to be inherited only through Jacob.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. We are called to be peace-makers. This challenge is directed at us as a part of the commands of the Lord to direct us forward rather than backwards, and to make us set aside our pride and focus on the path the Lord would have us take, not personal agendas. We are called to be ambassadors and that means we take nothing personally in this life, and bring all offences against us to the Lord and leave them with Him to set right. We are to have no fear, no hatred, and no revenge, only love and service to the one who has commissioned us to be his representatives upon the earth.
2. The hatred of the people of this world is to be expected. When we are hated, we are in good company, for so they hated our Lord before us. Let us expect no more from unsaved men than the Lord did. Let us recognize when we are lied to that this is just the expected thing that unsaved people do, and that there is nothing personal. Let us cast all our cares upon Him and leave our affairs in the Lord's hands.
3. Isaac was prepared for hard work to find water. Some Arabian wells are hand dug to a depth of 160 feet and some are 300+ feet deep! Spiral staircases are dug along the sides to get down and back safely. When we seek the will of the Lord in barren places, we need to be ready to dig deep into the rock of his Word. If we persist in seeking the Lord's will, we will find it, and we will be blessed there. Praise the Lord for his goodness, and praise him as you toil and sweat over the present task he has set you. Keep digging believer!
4. Regular fellowship with the Lord is essential if you are to serve the Lord in spirit and in truth. The altar built up by Isaac is the place of meeting, covered by the blood of the sacrificial animal. Isaac recognizes the grace and mercy of God depend upon the sacrifice of a perfect one for our sinfulness. He expressed his faith in the sacrifice daily, and so ought we to do also. Let us draw near to the Lord in prayer daily, through the blood of Christ shed for us.
5. Isaac is blessed in the place of fellowship and so are we. Let us draw near the Lord today and enjoy his fellowship in this and all things, as we seek to serve the one who gave his all for us. Amen.

Notes

CHAPTER 27**GENESIS 27:1-27**

“And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. 2 And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: 3 Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; 4 And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die. 5 And Rebekah heard when Isaac spake to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. 6 And Rebekah spake unto Jacob her son, saying, Behold, I heard thy father speak unto Esau thy brother, saying, 7 Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the LORD before my death. 8 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to that which I command thee. 9 Go now to the flock, and fetch me from thence two good kids of the goats; and I will make them savoury meat for thy father, such as he loveth: 10 And thou shalt bring it to thy father, that he may eat, and that he may bless thee before his death. 11 And Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: 12 My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing. 13 And his mother said unto him, Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them. 14 And he went, and fetched, and brought them to his mother: and his mother made savoury meat, such as his father loved. 15 And Rebekah took goodly raiment of her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son: 16 And she put the skins of the kids of the goats upon his hands, and upon the smooth of his neck: 17 And she gave the savoury meat and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob. 18 And he came unto his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I; who art thou, my son? 19 And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy first born; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me. 20 And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the LORD thy God brought it to me. 21 And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. 22 And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. 23 And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him. 24 And he said, Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am. 25 And he said, Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless thee. And he brought it near to him, and he did eat: and he brought him wine and he drank. 26 And his father Isaac said unto him, Come near now, and kiss me, my son. 27 And he came near, and kissed him: and he smelled the smell of his raiment, and blessed him, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed:”

REFLECTION**THE PLAN IS HATCHED AND EXECUTED**

Esau's choice of wives has opened up the reality for Rebekah that her grand-children through Esau will not grow up as believers and will not be the inheritors of the promises made to Abraham and Isaac. She is ready to act and the day comes for her to do so. Time has ticked by and Moses gives us another marker here. By cunning calculations the ancient scribes and commentators identify that Esau is forty when he marries. Isaac is then 100 years old, and Rebekah around 80 years of age. Genesis 25:26.

The events of chapter 27 begin almost forty years later, with many of Esau's children well grown up. It would appear that Jacob will be nearly eighty when he marries for the first time! He has not looked as if he will have children at all! The sons of promise are late starters!

These ages come from calculations based upon the age of Jacob when he enters into Egypt and the details Moses gives around that time in the narrative. The key point to grasp as we enter this chapter is that both Esau and Jacob are men in their seventies, not boys in their teens as some of the Sunday School pictures of the past indicate.

The ages are reached by the following facts recorded by Moses later. Joseph is 30 years of age when he is introduced to Pharaoh. Genesis 41:46. It is at least nine years later when he sees his father. Genesis 45:6. Jacob blesses Pharaoh and is aged 130 years at that time. Genesis 47:9. Jacob has Joseph when he is ninety one years of age, and his birth occurs after fourteen years in Haran. Genesis 29:18, 21, 27, 30:25. So his journey to Haran occurs when he is 77, and Isaac is 137.

So Isaac is around 137 years old when these events occur, with Jacob and Esau in their seventies. Isaac has seen the death of his half brother Ishmael fourteen years before this event, and has arrived at the age when Ishmael died. He is starting to have major difficulty with his eye sight, which was and is a common problem for men working in the sun all day long. He may have cataracts, as he can see shapes and light and dark, but not clearly distinguish faces, even when very close. Thomas Parr, the oldest man in English history had similar eye sight problems for the last twenty years of his life before dying at 152 years nine months.

Isaac will live another 43 years before his death in great old age at 180 years. Genesis 35:28. Like men when they come up to mile stones he thinks he had better move to bless his son Esau before death stops him reversing the effect of Jacob's trickery all those years before over the bowl of lentils. Genesis 25:27-34.

In this Isaac is wrong, and Rebekah knows it. She is correct in her belief that the Lord has blessed Jacob, not Esau, and that it is Jacob who ought to be the one who leads the clan, and through whom the Abrahamic blessing will flow. At this point Jacob is not looking much of a prospect for a son, as he is already in advanced years, and there is no wife on the horizon at all. Isaac is blind in more ways than one; he does not see what the Lord is doing at this point, although as we will see, when he sees he has been tricked, he quickly identifies that the Lord has corrected him through his wife and second son.

Verses 1 - 4. Isaac is deliberately trying to give Esau a blessing as the covenant son, even though he himself has carelessly cast it away by his actions. Esau is still an active hunter in the fields and ravines of the Negev. He is still around the encampment and his father's favourite. From the context here it would appear that Rebekah is not meant to hear this conversation, but Isaac, being partly blind is not aware he is overheard. Notice the instruction of the old man.

The father's blessing ought to be given in accordance with God's will and not as a reward for any food brought and prepared. The meal to celebrate the blessing should be prepared by servants and follow the blessing ceremony. The whole thing here is back to front, and reflects the father's lusts and favouritism rather than the will of the Lord for the lives of the people involved. As with all things in believer's lives, the Lord ensures there is a person standing by to act in the Lord's name and for the Lord's glory. That person is Rebekah.

Verses 5-10. Rebekah has it all worked out. Remember, if the dates are right, she is an old woman of at least 110 years of age, and coming to the age when she too will expect to die. She is no young plotter! She is an old woman who is determined that the Lord's will is going to be done, even if the Lord gets help from her! Now I say this with a smile, for God needs no help from Rebekah. She is in fact doing the Lord's will, for it is the Lord who ensured she overheard this conversation, and Isaac is wrong in his desire and action this day. God will vindicate Rebekah and Isaac will praise her eventually for her actions. Rebekah knows exactly what Isaac loves and she will prepare the goats so that they taste like venison. The purpose is clear; that Jacob is to receive the blessing from his father before the old man dies. From this comment it may be that Isaac is sick and all are expecting him to die soon.

Verses 11-12. The plan calls for deceit and deliberate lying. Such things are forbidden, and clearly such a level of deceit of a blind father could bring down a serious curse that will negate any blessing obtained. Notice that Jacob does not say that he cannot deceive his father, he is only concerned about how to get away with it! Jacob is truly a trickster. Do not think for a moment that he "gets away with this", for he will reap exactly what he sows – we all do! It is grace alone that will deliver him from the consequences of his trickery! In Laban he will meet his match, and then his own sons will outplay him by 100% over Joseph!

As we will see, Jacob as an older man is going to see and feel the impact of great betrayal by his sons regarding Joseph. He is going to have nearly twenty years of pain at the loss of Joseph, who they tell him has died. Let no one ever say Jacob gets away with his deceit here. His readiness to trick his father will be repaid ten times upon his head when he meets Laban, who tricks him for fourteen years, and then by his own sons over Joseph. God will bless this action of Rebekah because she is right in her heart, but Jacob will pay the price for it, because he is not right in his heart at this point at all. God trains us all, and the slower we are at learning truth and the more ruthlessly we treat others, the tougher the lessons will be for us. 2 Corinthians 6:8, 1 Thessalonians 5:22.

Verses 13-14. Rebekah is determined and knows that speed is of importance as there is limited time before Esau will be successful in his hunt and return with his game. She instructs Jacob in what he is to do immediately and tells him what she will then do. She is confident of success, and is ready to take the curse that may come upon herself, and die under a curse, in order that the right son receive the blessing. This is a woman who will hazard everything that is important to an older person to win the spiritual prize, for which she has lived her life. She wants the right son to receive the blessing and go on in his spiritual growth to be the man that God intends him to be.

Verses 15-16. Rebekah is thinking here very clearly. Isaac is blind, but his other senses are finely tuned. He can feel and touch and smell. She gets a garment of Esau's that is in her tent. Esau does not live there now, for he has married and has his own encampment, but his formal clothing is there if he needs it for a formal family occasion after his arrival from being away in the fields or at his other camp sites.

She takes the best clothing, and the clothing that smells most of Esau. She also selects the skins of the goats that have the hairy and rough feel of Esau's skin. She knows where Isaac touches his boys and how he recognizes them; he always touches and holds their arms, and strokes their necks. Isaac is a loving man, and like many who have gone blind late in life, he delights in the touch of his loved ones. While the goats are cooking in their aromatic herbs Rebekah cuts and trims the skins so that they fit over Jacobs hand and arm, and around his neck, fitting underneath the coarse woollen garment he is wearing and up to his hair line. The wet skin of the goat will harden against Jacob's skin and mould to the shape of his neck and arm and she believes they will fool their aged father.

Verses 17-18. The meal prepared, she sends Jacob in to Isaac. He has the bowl of stewed spiced meat and the unleavened (Pita) bread with which Isaac will be able to scoop up the gravy with his meat pieces and really enjoy the meal, right to the last morsel. Jacob enters and calls to his father, "Here I am". This may indicate that Isaac was hard of

hearing also, and speaking loudly, as the partly deaf do, (hence Rebekah over hearing his conversation as he was speaking very loudly without realizing it). It may be that he was finding it hard to even tell voices apart. Jacob tries to sound like Esau but his father's answer to him indicates there is either deafness or doubt, or both.

Verses 19-20. Jacob has his script memorized and delivers it well. His father is enticed into the conversation and asks after the hunt, being surprised that the game was so easily found. Jacob's answer is that the Lord has delivered the prey on a plate to him is humorous, as the Lord, through his mother, has done exactly that! Moses will hear the Lord's Law later, and one of the first commandments is to not take the Lord's name in vain. Exodus 20:7.

Has Jacob done this and fallen into such a sin that he is in danger of judgment? The answer in the narrative is that he is safe in the Lord's hands, and while he will pay for his deception with some bitter learning about being deceived, he is in no danger of loss of his place in the plan. Again the grace of the Lord is in view here, and Moses does not moralize at this point, and warn the readers about breaking the Law. He simply tells the story and leaves us to see the price Jacob pays for the deception, even if it is in the Lord's will that he be the inheritor of the blessing. We can all too often jump into the text and moralize. We need to learn from Moses and simply let the Word of the Lord speak.

Verses 21 – 22. Isaac doubts that this is Esau. Why does he not call in Rebekah at this point, or ask for a servant's help? The answer to this question is the reason why he later accepts being fooled by Jacob so well. Isaac has tried to do this secretly, without anyone in the house other than Esau knowing of it. He does this because he knows that all recognize that Jacob is the son of promise not Esau. Isaac is trying to get around the clear will of the Lord concerning his sons, and he is being outplayed by God not Rebekah and Jacob, and he will accept that later.

Verses 23 – 24. He doesn't understand what is going on, and does not seek to clarify his confusion, but presses on with his plan to bless Esau before anyone can stop him doing so. His haste in a situation where clarity was essential, betrays the fact that he knows this is wrong, but the Lord has matters well in hand.

This is an event that should have occurred before all the family and with elders of the surrounding peoples present to certify the facts and bless the new chief of the greatest clan amongst them. It is being done in secret because Isaac knows it is wrong. Jacob lies again here in answer to a direct question asked by a blind old man! You have got to be a good liar to lie into a blind man's face as he seeks to clarify a baffling thing. Jacob is not a nice chap!!! God will however go to work on this man and he will become a prince of God (Israel), but here, in his seventies, he is still a tough and hard wheeler and dealer, and ready to lie quickly and effectively. There is hope for all of us!

Verses 25-27. Jacob is ready to move forward, the aroma of the food going before him, in case the smell of Jacob would catch the old man's nose. He also brings wine to wash the food down with and also dull the old man's senses further. This is not the way for a patriarchal blessing to be given! All spiritual service ought to be rendered in sobriety and followed by food, never preceded by a large meal. We are meant to be alert when spiritual matters are being dealt with, not sleepy from good food and wine.

Isaac still is concerned that this isn't Esau and so calls him forward for a kiss to really smell the clothing and get a close up smell of the person. Jacob steps forward and his father smells only the scent of the clothing of Esau and he blesses the smell of the open fields. Isaac loved the great outdoors and he loved that aspect of his son's wild life as a hunter.

It is a good thing to enjoy the outdoors and celebrate the creation that God has made, but these things are not reasons to assign spiritual blessing or responsibility. The qualities for spiritual leadership are not determined by physical fitness tests, nor shared enjoyment of the creation, for pagans can share that with us. We are to be as fit as we can be, for then we can serve with vigour, and we are to enjoy the works of God in nature, but the characteristics of the spiritual leader are found in other areas. Whatever we enjoy is fine, but it is walking with God that fits us for leadership.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. When rendering spiritual service we are best to be slightly hungry, and certainly not filled with wine. We are to be in the most alert state we can be, for then through prayer and close fellowship with the Lord we will be focused upon the Lord's service and the filling of the Holy Spirit. It is through spiritual means alone that we can render spiritual service.

Isaac was fooled by Jacob because he was acting like a fool in this secret blessing ceremony. He was focused upon physical things – food and wine – and so was foolish in his actions in the spiritual area. It is always unwise to try to bless those God has not blessed, because they have not placed themselves in the place of blessing-fellowship. All we can do for those we love who do not love the Lord is pray that they might be convicted of their sinful state and be restored to fellowship. The issue is not blessing for them but spirituality.

2. Mixed marriages nearly always lead to disaster, for spiritual life will deteriorate without regular fellowship with the Lord and a pagan partner will lead the believer away from the Lord, never to the Lord. The Lord forbids such marriages and all who enter into them place themselves outside the Lord's blessing.
3. It is never too late to move forward with the Lord. Jacob is in his seventies when he finally moves forward and serves the Lord as he should. If we are alive the Lord has something still for us to do. We are finished in the Lord's service when we are seeing him face to face. Until then let us pray for guidance in our on-going service.

4. God's grace is seen once again here. The Lord ensures that the right blessing goes to the right man, and that even though he is not spiritual at this point, God sees and deals with Jacob as he will be rather than as he is now. God deals with us the same way. We are dealt with on the basis of what the Lord has done for us, and what the Holy Spirit will do with us through time; we are not dealt with according to our Old Sin Nature dominated thoughts and actions. We live and move and have our being only in God's grace. Let us praise his name now, for we are dealt with in grace and love, and like Jacob we can bless the Lord that we have not received what we could have for the Lord has taken the sins of all upon himself! Praise the Lord!!!

GENESIS 27:28-46

“Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: 29 Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee. 30 And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. 31 And he also had made savoury meat, and brought it unto his father, and said unto his father, Let my father arise, and eat of his son's venison, that thy soul may bless me. 32 And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy firstborn Esau. 33 And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed. 34 And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father. 35 And he said, Thy brother came with subtilty, and hath taken away thy blessing. 36 And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? 37 And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son? 38 And Esau said unto his father, Hast thou but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me also, O my father. And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept. 39 And Isaac his father answered and said unto him, Behold, thy dwelling shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; 40 And by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck. 41 And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob. 42 And these words of Esau her elder son were told to Rebekah: and she sent and called Jacob her younger son, and said unto him, Behold, thy brother Esau, as touching thee, doth comfort himself, purposing to kill thee. 43 Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; arise, flee thou to Laban my brother to Haran; 44 And tarry with him a few days, until thy brother's fury turn away; 45 Until thy brother's anger turn away from thee, and he forget that which thou hast done to him: then I will send, and fetch thee from thence: why should I be deprived also of you both in one day? 46 And Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?”

REFLECTION

TWO MEN, TWO BLESSINGS, TWO DESTINIES

After much time enjoying the food and wine, the blessing Isaac gives his son is very short, but it carries with it the blessing of Abraham before him and indicates that it is in Jacob that the line of promise will come to fruition for all mankind. Compare Genesis 22:17-18, and then 49:1ff, for a further and more specific blessing on each of the sons of Jacob, by a more careful and spiritually mature Jacob this time.

Verses 28-29. From the words here we can tell that the father is praising the son for his life style and there is a little envy of it in old Isaac's words. He is now partially blind and deaf, and looks back to the days of his strength and youthful energy. He longs to live now as Esau lives; he loves the great outdoors and all the blessings that nature has at it's productive best. He loves Esau and this is a blessing that comes from love of a father to his favourite son, but God's favourite son is Jacob, because he will come to real faith and be the true follower of Abraham. Remember the point made above, that Isaac knows that this secret blessing ceremony is wrong, and that the Lord's will is different to his will here. Now notice the order of the blessings and their significance.

1. The Lord give thee the dew of heaven.
2. The fatness of the earth.
3. Plenty of corn.
4. Plenty of wine.
5. Let people serve you.

6. Many nations bow down before you.
7. Rule over your relatives in the extended family.
8. Let all the other "sons" and grand-sons of your mother bow to you.
9. Cursed be any who curse you.
- 10 Blessed be all who bless you.

Isaac prays and prophecies here as the priest and prophet of his family before God, so this is a powerful list of things said, for it carries prophetic weight and will set the direction of his and Jacob's people for millennia. This is why the Lord ensures Rebekah is able to take action to ensure the right man receives the blessing from the old blind prophet-priest of the clan.

Notice the order of blessings; first he cites the physical blessings associated with pastoral agriculture. It was essential for there to be good heavy dew upon the earth, and this was a sign of a balanced climate that would bring the rains in their appropriate season also. The first blessing is therefore climate based for prosperity in agriculture.

The second involves richness of the soil so that the crops grown and the animals are heavy and large. Poor soil will produce poor crops and sick animals. The third and fourth blessings are the staples of diet; basic food and wine. Now pause and reflect upon the real nature of Esau for a minute. He was a hunter by preference; he despised the daily grind of pastoral agriculture.

Isaac is blessing his son in such a way to try to change his preferences, to turn him from hunter to a man who can take over the farming operation. It is, when we reflect upon it a blessing that suits Jacob alone, for he is the farmer. Now reflect again, and see that Isaac wants his son Esau to have the characteristics of Jacob, and hopes by his secret blessing to impart them to him. This is not the way God works upon men, for they need first to desire change, and come humbly before Him; Esau will never do either of these things. When Esau finally is blessed, the blessing will reflect his true and his chosen nature; it will be the blessing upon a hunter and a warrior.

The fifth blessing is that he be the leader of others and that he have others serving him, rather than serving mightier people to himself. This goes even further with the sixth blessing, which asks/prophecies that nations serve him, not just individuals. This will happen at times in Israel's history, but fully and completely only in the Millennial Kingdom.

The seventh and eight blessings relate to his rulership over the other children/grand-children of his mother. This is Isaac's attempt to reverse the earlier sale of the birthright to Jacob, but because it is Jacob who receives it, the blessing actually confirms that what happened on that day was a reflection of the truth.

The ninth and tenth blessings relate to blessing by association that will be the lot of all who support and stand by Jacob, and the corresponding judgment of God that will be upon any who attack or abuse him and his descendents in any way. This will be an important part of Israel's history and will be a major prophetic truth that Moses and the people will be challenged to hold to throughout the Exodus. Deuteronomy 32:10, Psalms 17:8, Zechariah 2:8.

Verses 30-31. Jacob has barely left the tent of his father when Esau arrives with his dish of meat, cooked and ready to serve. He has been out hunting and has been successful quickly, and he has cooked the meat in the field using natural herbs. He is clever and able, and ready to serve his father. He has entered the camp site quickly, gone straight for the tent, and is ready to serve his father the meal, and barely misses Jacob coming out. It has been a close run thing. He enters with confidence and announces his presence with bravado; come eat what your son has made for you! His confident assurance and excitement that he at last has the birthright blessing back is short lived.

Verses 32-33. Isaac sees that he has been tricked totally. He trembles with shock, anger and horror that he has been so thoroughly deceived, but he does not lose control at that point and curse Jacob. He sees that he has brought deception upon himself by the sneaky way he had gone about this, and so he will not curse his tricky son, for the blessing has been given under God's over ruling will and he sees that at this point. I have blessed him, he says, and he is blessed. This will not be changed. Isaac wins the battle over his own pride at this point, for it would have been easy to curse and retract the blessing, but this is clearly not God's will, and his prophetic gifting keeps him stable here. Spirituality has re-emerged through the goat stew and the wine, and he realizes that the Lord's will has been done.

Verses 34-35. Esau cries aloud with a wail that pierces the air. He wails and weeps and screams at the loss he has endured here. Remember, this is a seventy year old man at this point, not a toddler, but in his heart he is still immature. He has not made his life a spirit centred life, and so he depends upon his father's blessing to make him something, rather than recognize what he has or will become in God's grace. Blessings do not make us great, for it is how we live that brings greatness, and shows that the blessings have been worked out for good in our life.

Jacob will spiritually grow into this blessing and his children down the ages will profit from it by following the faith of their father. Esau is a man who loves self centred pleasures, and is not capable of thinking in a spiritual manner, because he refuses to go down that path at all. He pleads for a blessing from his father, of any sort at all. He just seeks to receive a

blessing that will make him great without having to do too much himself! Jacob desired the place of rulership within the spiritual world of his grandfather Abraham, but Esau just wants the prosperity gospel message of wealth and power, and he wants it here and now!

Verses 36-37. Esau sees the truth now about the work of Jacob, and ties the two events that relate to the birthright and the blessing together. Isaac has tried to reverse the birthright sale by the secret blessing of Esau, but they have both been ankle tapped by Jacob. Esau sees that Jacob has been the ankle tapper of his success and has tripped up all the plans of his father to raise him up to rulership. He is desperate for a blessing from his father, for he sees the prophetic nature and power of such a thing, and desires something that will give him the “luck” he wants in life.

To Esau, as to many carnal believers, and to many religious unbelievers, matters of faith are issues of lucky charms and “good luck”, or “good fortune”, being given by the divine power. They see the world in terms of the gods being able to grant that they become “lucky”, and they seek lucky charms, lucky actions, and lucky places. They want a gift of luck so that they don’t have to work so hard, and so that things come easier to them. This is a Satanic perversion of grace.

The faith of the patriarchs and of the apostles is not a “good luck” religion, but a dynamic relationship with the Creator-Saviour, in which obedience to his commands places the believer in a place where the power of God leads them into their path for life, and ensures that in grace all things needed for their service to the Lord are provided.

True biblical relationship with God is by faith, through the provisions of God’s grace, but obedience to the Lord’s Word is required, and an acceptance of the task of service in the midst of a world in which you must still sweat your way through each day. The Bible teaches that the curse upon the ground will be finally lifted only at the Lord’s Second Advent, but Satanic religion teaches that it is already gone, and man can relax and enjoy himself now and find lucky charms to assist!

The patriarchal blessing here is a prophetic word of the destiny of the descendents of the men involved; it is no “charm” to ensure it happens. Prophetic words do not make an event happen, they reflect divine fore-knowledge of what will occur as the person applies the doctrines of the Word into their life, or applies the satanic doctrine of self centeredness. The blessing to Jacob accurately describes the rulership that will be Israel’s in the Millennial Kingdom, and describes many of the blessings that obedience will bring to his descendents through the centuries, as they follow the Word of God. Esau’s blessing will also prophetically speak of the destiny of his descendents.

Esau pleads for a blessing to rejoice in himself. Isaac details to him that the rulership over his house has already been given to Jacob, and he recognizes that prophetically it has been given, and cannot be taken back, for the rulership is Jacob’s. He also recognizes that the best pastoral land and the prosperity associated with that has been given to Jacob and his descendents. Canaan blessing has been given to him and his descendents. Esau cannot be promised the land of Canaan. Remember that Esau enjoyed hunting in the Negev desert and the southern lands after the deer and other wild animals; he did not enjoy the daily grind of the life of a pastoralist where care of flocks and herds occupied his time from dawn till dusk. He will be promised a destiny that reflects his life preferences and the words of Isaac will prophesy the future of his people and their inter-relationship with the sons of Jacob.

Verses 38-39. Esau weeps and wails again. He has all the bitterness of a man fooled, and out played by another throughout his life. He seeks a clear path for himself that will make his life worth while. He has good health, and even at his age now wants to know his destiny, and have a prophetic sense of certainty. Yet he seeks all this without a real relationship with God and without a pattern of worship that would open the doors of heaven’s true blessings for him. Isaac starts the blessing for him, and it runs a parallel course to Jacob’s, but notice the differences. He will wake up with the dew upon him. His life will be an outdoorsman, and he will live off the fat of the land, but he will not harvest great crops, he will be a hunter-gatherer and pillage other’s goods.

Verses 40-41. The prophetic word identifies that there is great violence at the heart of Esau’s life and the society he will establish in the southern desert lands. He will live by his sword not by his hard work and intelligence. He will be a hunter and a warrior, and he will live either by taking game, or taking people and goods. He will serve his brother and his descendents, but when he breaks free of him it will be by really terrible violence.

Esau hated Jacob from this day and planned his death straight away, but knew he had to wait for the right moment. He was sure that his father was dying, and so would wait until his death and the mourning period was over and then kill Jacob. He is fooled by the Lord again, for Isaac has at least forty years to live on, even in his blindness and frailty.

The history of the people of Esau, the Idumaeans or Edomites, is one of violent opposition to the Israelites, and the final prophecy regarding their rulership over Israel was terribly fulfilled in Herod the Great, who was a direct descendent of Esau. Truly the descendents of Esau drink fully the cup of his desire; they find rulership of God’s people through murder and the power of the sword alone.

1. The Edomites are defeated first by King Saul. 1 Samuel 14:47.
2. Then controlled by David. 2 Samuel 8:14.
3. Revolted again under Solomon. 1 Kings 11:14.
4. They rebelled again under King Joram and were subdued again by Amaziah. 2 Kings 14:7.

5. They finally shook off the yoke of Israel in the reign of Ahaz. 2 Kings 16:6.

6. They were finally conquered by John Hyrcanus in 129 BC, and forced to accept Judaism and all the males be circumcised.

7. Herod the Great is a Judaized Idumaeen, and rules through to the birth of the Lord, with his descendents ruling until 70 AD.

Verses 42-43. Esau, like all lust controlled people, blurts out the words that are on his heart at the time. He screams for someone to hear that he plans to kill Jacob. This murderous hot headedness was the weakness of his people and enabled them to be controlled by the cool and calculating generals like Saul and David later. It was also the weakness, written large, in the life of Herod the Great, who in psychotic fits of irrational rage, murdered all those close to him whom he loved. In grace, Rebekah gets to know of the plan of Esau, and she has a plan to assist Jacob escape death through her brother Laban in Haran.

God ensures Jacob's safety, just as the Lord will ensure ours as we serve him. Rebekah is told by a servant who over hears Esau's angry outburst(s). Rebekah tells Jacob directly that Esau is going to calm himself from his rage by killing him! Notice Rebekah's way of expressing this murderous desire of Esau. She knows her boy well. He lives in and through his emotion, and seeks actions that will sooth his emotion rather than actions that express good logical planning, or spiritual understanding.

He is a man who will be ruled by emotions always, and such people are tyrants when they rule others, as Herod and his family would prove later. Emotion uncontrolled by reason will always bring shipwreck to the lives of all around the uncontrolled person. There is no stability in emotion. It is stabilized only by reason, and the best source of reason is the plan of God. Esau will never find this. The end result of his life style and the choices through the ages of his people, is a man like Herod the Great, Herod Antipas, and Herod Agrippa! Matthew 2:3-19, Matthew 14:1-12, Acts 12:1-2, 20-25.

Verses 44-46. The plan is for Jacob to flee to Haran and stay there with Rebekah's brother Laban for "a few days". The two families must have stayed in touch, for he would also be of a great age now, at least 110 years old, given Rebekah's age. She must know he lives and that the family are doing well there. There must be another reason for sending him to Haran above and beyond the escape from Esau's anger. Isaac will not believe that his son Esau was capable of murder, and so telling him of Esau's words would not help anyone, for they would not be believed by Isaac, and would cause Esau to hate Jacob all the more. Rebekah uses the marriage of Jacob as the cover story to ensure Jacob escapes. Her desire is right for him to find a wife amongst people who believe in God's Word and his promises, but Jacob will be sent away without the wealth that Abraham's servant had to pay the bride price for Rebekah.

I had speculated in the earlier Genesis volume about possible loss of fortune for Isaac, for Jacob must work for the girls rather than pay the bride price and leave the next day. Moses is telling us the story in such a way that as the story unfolds we see why Jacob was sent to Haran without adequate wealth to pay Laban. Isaac was punishing his son for his deceit, and placing him in a vulnerable position, where he would have to work his way out of trouble and into any fortune he was to have.

In a way Isaac is testing the Lord here, to see if God will indeed prosper the way of Jacob without the wealth of his father making him great. It is a spiteful thing Isaac does, and plays into Laban's tricky hands, but the hand of God is here, for it is in the events of the next fourteen years that Jacob will be transformed from a tricky man into a prince of the Lord God. The prophetic word will be shown to be correct, for the Lord will prosper the way of Jacob, and the inheritance of his father, when it comes to him forty years later, simply makes him wealthier; he is not depending upon it.

Also reflect for a minute upon Jacob's age at this point. He is a fit and very healthy 77 years of age. He hasn't married, nor suggested marriage before to his parents. Why not? Has he been so busy with his own schemes and plans? Moses does not tell us anything about why this great delay, but Jacob's easy taking of multiple wives later may be an indication of what lies behind Rebekah's words about the "daughters of Heth causing her to be weary of life".

Jacob may not have been living a completely moral life through this time; at worst he has been casual with sex, at very least he may have been showing romantic interest in the Hittite women. Rebekah is greatly worried about the Hittite women living around them, and she ties her concern to Jacob. These women would be no concern if Jacob had no interest at all in them. Moses is silent about all this, but Jacob's story is one of redemption and transformation, and there may be a great deal going on here behind the scenes that caused Rebekah concern about the Abrahamic line of promise continuing through Jacob.

Time is running out for Jacob; Rebekah fears for him and the line of promise. He has been casual about living his life, and has not seriously considered the Abrahamic Covenant and it's obligations upon himself to be obedient to the plan of God for him. Although he has lived in a different way to Esau, he has not been 100% in the Lord's will. All this will change as the Lord moves him out of the comfortable tent of his father and mother to sleep on the rocks of the roadside. James 4:13-17.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Do not try to out think God. Isaac tries to plot and plan to ensure his favourite son is changed in his nature and given the blessing that he seeks for him. God does not work that way, for our children are blessed only as they follow us in obedience to the Word and Will of God. Let us ensure that we set the right example and then we can leave the blessing of our children to the Lord who leads them as he leads us.
2. Israel's blessing runs through the millennia and will find it's complete fulfilment in the Millennial Kingdom. We need to remember the principle of blessing by association with Israel, and ensure we stand with God's people always. Satan's main strategy is the destruction of the Jewish people, and all who love God and his Word need to stand firmly against this evil. In the Great Tribulation it is important that the believers then stand with the Jewish refugees of every nation and feed and hide them, for that is their own deliverance, and the true evidence of their own salvation. Matthew 10:40-42, 25:31-46.
3. Esau's destiny is destruction and death. Self centeredness always leads to those destinations! Esau has made his life direction choice, and most of his descendents will follow him on the path to destruction. Matthew 7:13-14. Just yesterday there was the announcement that archaeologists have found Herod the Great's tomb in the fortress palace of Herodium. It is interesting that in these last days we are reminded of Esau through his greatest of descendents. Let us remember the choices men make and their eternal consequences, for this man, buried in such pomp and ceremony, awaits the Lake of Fire in Hell today. Luke 16:19-31, Revelation 20:11-15.
4. Jacob's story is a story of redemption and total transformation. He will make more mistakes and his sexual lust weakness leads to multiple wives and all the conflict that such things bring amongst his sons, but God's grace will be the dominant force in his life by the end. He will become the founder of the nation and the patriarch who sees his people enter Egypt for their formative national experience.

He will move from supplanter of his brother to the prince of God. If there is hope for a 77 year old play boy and con artist there is hope for all men and women. Let us remember that the Lord our God is the Saviour, and all who still breathe can be saved and transformed into the image of Christ. Our task is to deliver the truth about the Grace Gospel of God's transforming power.

Notes

GENESIS CHAPTERS 28-30 - THE LIFE AND TIMES OF "TRICKY" JACOB**INTRODUCTION**

Isaac has grown old and is blind and he thinks, as does the family, that he is going to die. This however will not happen until over forty years later. It was traditional at such a time to openly call in your children and given them a formal, public, farewell blessing. Isaac has clearly been in prayer and seen fully the spiritual nature of the events recorded in chapter 27. He calls his son Jacob in to give him a blessing. This is the oral and formal passing on of spiritual heritage and the responsibilities that go with it. The private blessing ceremony he had planned for Esau has been foiled by God, and so Isaac now formally blesses Jacob and passes on the Abrahamic blessing and promise to him. Refer to the BTB study DYING GRACE.

God has overruled and blesses Jacob even though at this point he is one of the worst characters in the Bible. The way the Lord blesses Jacob should however be a warning to us all, as He will put him through great testing, and will discipline him significantly to bring him to the place where he can be spiritually used.

Moses makes clear the biblical principle, that you will not get by with sin or slackness if you are a child of God, but will be disciplined. Hebrews 12:1-13. In his life experiences and through his multiple marriages he received great discipline. His sin was the sin of pride; he thought he was pretty special, instead of living in the promises of the Word of God, and allowing God to make him special. 1 Peter 5:6-9.

In Genesis 27:46 - 28:5 it is recorded that both Rebekah and Isaac are in a low ebb spiritual with Rebekah worried about her son because he is considering marrying the daughters of the Canaanites. Isaac in his blessing tells him not to take a wife from the pagans.

The formal blessing is given in verses 4 and 5 where the blessing to Abraham is reiterated. Moses is recording the details he had before him in an editor's way; telling the story in such a way as to underline the spiritual principles that will find their ultimate fulfilment in the Law he receives on Sinai. He shows us the grace of God in action with Jacob, for he will be transformed by God's work upon his life, whereas his brother will not ever be changed, because he chooses to live a life unencumbered by morality and truth!

ESAU

Esau acts in verse 6 to try to gain favour and position in the family, and answer the concerns his parents have expressed regarding the Hittite wives he has. He is trying to do things to upstage his brother who has been told in verse 5 to go to relatives of his mother in Syria where he would find a wife. Esau thought that, if his brother is going to marry into his mother's family, that he would marry into the family of his uncle Ishmael, the son of grand father Abraham. By doing this, his blood relationship with Abraham is strengthened and he believes he will have moved up the ladder of success and status within the family. God has a different sort of ladder that will be revealed in this chapter, to the ladder of success that Esau dreams up in his plan for an "Abrahamic marriage".

He is trying to go one better than Jacob. However Isaac and Rebekah have told Jacob to marry a believer by going to Haran. This shows that it is not the physical relationship to Abraham that matters, it is the spiritual heart of the wife that matters, for her and her children to inherit the blessings of Abraham.

In the church today you will find a lot of people who are trying to be seen to be doing what they consider to be the right thing, whereas they are doing the wrong thing. If you want to do something spiritual for the Lord they want to upstage you, but their choice of impressive action will illustrate their carnality, their worldly thinking. They are either unbelievers, or carnal believer, but either way they have no spiritual discernment. Marrying a physical relative/cousin is not the issue for these men, marrying a person with similar spiritual background is.

Moses sees the vital need for believers to marry only within their own spiritual group and this is strongly reinforced in the Mosaic Law by direct order of the Lord. Exodus 34:10-17, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. The "equally yoked" principle still applies and will always apply. It goes further than just marrying a believer, for some believers are mostly carnal and so they will slow any spiritual partner down. Equally yoked means to be "pulling the same weight" – equally committed to the task that the Lord has set before them. Be very scared of getting it wrong here!

JACOB'S LADDER

In verses 11-22 Jacob heads north and has a dream with rocks as a pillow in a rather desolate place. He dreams of what becomes known as "Jacob's Ladder" with the Lord Jesus Christ standing at the top of the ladder and angels ascending and descending. It is, as we will see actually the "Lord's Ladder".

A number of principles flow from this. There is no God forsaken place on earth, it does not matter where you are God is there, even in a desert place with rocks for your pillow. God is interested in you, you are his, he is yours, and He is everywhere. God also is in contact with man, He is not remote but involved directly and indirectly in man's situation. No

believer is ever forsaken or alone. This is a powerful message to us in what feels like an increasingly pagan world. God is with us everywhere he requires we walk. Let us walk with Him in prayerfulness. Psalms 3 – 7.

Jacob has a lot to learn. As an immature believer he is surprised by all this. Jacob does not deserve this special treatment from God, but then neither do we. God reveals Himself to Jacob and the promise to Abraham is reiterated to him. He has gained the blessing of Abraham by entering into a relationship with God. We also receive the blessings of God by entering into the plan of God by faith in Christ.

BETHEL

Jacob recognizes this as a place where he has seen God and using his pillow of stones he makes an altar. He calls the place Bethel, the house of God. He is an immature believer and does not understand yet that the whole world is the house of God. In addition, having just received the Abrahamic promise from Isaac, and then from the Lord, which is a certain promise for it rests upon the basis of God's character, Jacob makes a vow and pledges a tithe to God, if God keeps His promise.

Jacob says, in effect, that if the Lord keeps him alive so that he can return to his family, then the Lord can be his God. What a confused baby believer he is. There is a lot of encouragement here, for the story recorded as it was by Moses is meant to stabilize us in our baby like faith at times, where instead of faith, we try to make deals with God.

There are however many people who are doing this type of thing as a pattern for faith in the church. They think that they can do deals with God; that if they give a certain amount to the church, then God will bless them on a percentage basis depending on what they have give! Moses will underline the biblical truth; that God blesses us in Christ Jesus, on the basis of his grace character, not because of who we are, and what we can do, or have done apparently "for him". We are blessed by God because of who God is, what he has done, and our position, by grace through faith, in Christ Jesus. We are all blessed in grace, as we should, from what we have done, receive only judgment from Him.

Moses will make it clear that the correct response of the genuine believer to the Lord, is to say, that we are His servants and wish to know Him more and more, and serve him more and more. The Jacob's in our congregations are numerous and need to understand grace. Our task before the Lord is to teach truth, so that they may be transformed by the Holy Spirit. Jacob becomes Israel – so there is hope for every modern Jacob!

LEAH, RACHEL, ZILPAH, AND BILHAH

In chapter 29:1-14 Jacob gets close to Haran and sees a well. Jacob sees this beautiful woman and is out to impress her (Rachel). However in Laban he meets his match in trickery and deal making. Laban had two daughters, Leah who was plain in appearance, and her younger beautiful sister Rachel. Jacob wanted to wheel and deal with the Lord, and the Lord disciplined him in exactly that way, so that he could learn spiritual lessons. Jacob does not follow the spiritual example of his father's servant, but works a deal with Laban, rather than walking in prayer all the way and receiving the girls on the basis of God's will and grace.

The Lord will use different types of people to train His people. You are a blood bought sinner and God will go to the ends of the earth to teach you how to do things properly even if it means bringing you close to the sin unto death. Jacob worked for seven years for Rachel but was given Leah and her handmaid by means of trickery after a good feast. Laban falls back on tradition and says that the elder must be married before the younger so Jacob works another 7 years for Rachel. In the midst of all this God looks after Jacob in grace, while teaching him over this fourteen years the lesson, that works is always a second best option.

However Jacob is going to limp through his entire life because he needs a permanent reminder that he walks and has his being only through the grace of God and not by things he can do. This is a warning against pride. As a pastor you have the honour and privilege to share your faith with others, you do not do great things for God, at best he does great things with you in the power of the Spirit. At worst you do great things in your own strength, and they are all wood, hay and stubble in God's sight; fit only for the bonfire! 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

We must learn the lessons that Jacob learns or our life's work will go up in smoke in eternity and there will be no rewards with which to bless the Lord. Many try to run the local church their way and then hold a meeting and ask the Lord to bless their plans. As you go through the Scriptures you will find many people who do the right thing with the right motive but in the wrong way and God says, "stop". Remember pastor, it is not our church; it is the Lord's church.

Do not try and out manoeuvre people in the church, but rather simply teach them the Word, or you will end up with a Laban on the committee. Jacob is going to become Israel after he has learned this principle and we free up the church to move forward in the Lord's will by learning to walk in the Spirit, rather than the deal making of the flesh.

A TURBULENT MARRIED LIFE

Jacob initially loves one woman, Rachel, more than the other, and then later he prefers Leah, and then has a love-hate relationship with both women. He had a very turbulent married life. Leah has a number of children, Rachel has none and therefore Rachel hates and envies Leah. By the time he has four sons he has learnt to love Leah. Rachel becomes envious and angry. It is a mess and violence and deceit in the family is the norm here, and the legacy of these two

women's rivalry and Jacob's favouritism is the break up of Israel into two nations and then the destruction of the majority of the descendants of all but those of Judah, Benjamin and Levi.

In chapter 30 it becomes even more complicated. Rachel says that if she does not have children she will die and so gives her slave girl to Jacob, which is a repeat performance of Abram, Hagar and Sarai. He is angry with Rachel for accusing him of the blame for her childlessness, and asks her, "Am I God?", and points out that he is able to have children with others, as he has demonstrated.

Remember, more than one wife/husband was never God's plan for mankind, and will always create grief for all concerned; yet even in discipline there can be blessing if all involved look only to the Lord. In the midst of this very dysfunctional family we will find hope and salvation eventually.

As a minister if you have to counsel couples who cannot have children, you should strongly turn them away from self centred reasoning to seek the Lord's path through their problem. Even if their infertility is caused by early promiscuity or sexually transmitted disease, as believers now you can assure them that they have not been disciplined by God, and that the Lord can work all things out now for his glory. They must seek his path for their lives, with or without children.

We must recall Jeremiah's, Ezekiel's, and Paul's life experience without children, for they were able to fulfil the Lord's path only because they were unencumbered by children, and that in many areas those without the responsibility of children can do things for the Lord which others cannot do. If the couple are meant to be together, then they need to seek the Lord's will for their lives, and it may not be children.

You need to challenge them to believe God and His Word and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, not on the path to the local fertility clinic. If you want something from God, and he does not give it to you, there is a reason why He is withholding it from you, and you are to be encouraged to claim Romans 8:28 and keep moving spiritually forward. On the path the Lord has for us we will find all things we need.

Rachel's servant girl gives birth to Dan whose name indicates that Rachel feels vindicated. Next is Naphtali meaning struggle, telling us that she sees herself as competing with Leah. Leah now produces Gad meaning "a troop", indicating her mind set also, in effect saying to her sister, "I've got so many it's an army". He is followed by Asher, meaning happy, indicating that she is content now that she has well and truly beaten her sister in the fertility stakes.

Meanwhile Jacob is wandering from bed to bed, enjoying himself, but not dealing with the growing conflict. He is being blessed, but he is also being judged. He is having lots of sex, but he is having no peace. He is getting love and sex from these women, but his house is becoming a battlefield.

As believers if we make a deliberate decision to go into a sin, the Lord may let us advance down that foolish self chosen path, and we will have our fill of it until we finally are sated by it to the point of nausea. Jacob will be allowed to advance down the path, because this is what he wants, and God will bless him in grace, and also discipline him by the simple consequences of his actions.

Moses sees this clearly, and spells it out in these chapters for his own people. An example of this same problem within the Exodus generation is when they got tired of manna and demanded meat. They were given so much that it putrefied and they became sick. God had given them manna and quails early on as a sign, but they were to advance only with the manna daily, but they fell into lusting for meat. Exodus 16:4-14, Numbers 11:4-10, 31-34.

The Lord disciplines them in and through the results of following their lust. Jacob is wrong 100% of the time in this chapter. Moses tells the story to really make it clear that God is neither supporting promiscuity nor polygamy. If you talk to someone who is very promiscuous you will find that they are empty and feel defiled, are not satisfied, and finally they seek lasting, loving intimacy. Do not envy those who are having a lot of sex with different people; for they are simply fat pigs heading for the spit of their own making.

The judgment of God is on Jacob all through this time, just as it is on all who think they can second guess God, and get away with sin. Moses reminds us here in this chapter that God demands our obedient walk in his path, and any other path will be covered with our bitter tears.

Notes

CHAPTER 28**GENESIS 28:1-10**

“And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. 2 Arise, go to Padanaram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother. 3 And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; 4 And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham. 5 And Isaac sent away Jacob: and he went to Padanaram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother. 6 When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob, and sent him away to Padanaram, to take him a wife from thence; and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan; 7 And that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Padanaram; 8 And Esau seeing that the daughters of Canaan pleased not Isaac his father; 9 Then went Esau unto Ishmael, and took unto the wives which he had Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife. 10 And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran.”

REFLECTION

Isaac will formally and publicly bless Jacob. He formally recognizes that this is the son to inherit the blessing of Abraham, and makes that realization clear to all by reciting the blessing aloud for all to hear in Jacob's presence. Esau is probably here at this ceremony, as would all the senior members of the household, for it is formal recognition of his rulership of the household after Isaac's death. Jacob is then sent away to find a wife in Haran, from the family of Laban. He is sent away however without the money to pay the bride price for the wife.

As was noted in the previous chapter, Isaac is recognizing Jacob as his heir before God, but he is determined to punish him also, and make the path a hard one. On the generous side, perhaps Isaac sees that his arrogant son needs to work harder and play less in order to depend more on the Lord his God. It will be a long time before he really learns these lessons. On balance I suspect that Isaac is using what we term “tough love” on his son here, and he is forcing him to face reality and work as hard as he needs to.

Verses 1-2. Isaac acts in accordance with the direction and correction of the Lord his God. He calls Jacob in for the formal blessing and he blesses him. This would have been a surprise to Jacob I suspect, given his deceit of his father just before hand. It formally sets him apart as leader of the clan after Isaac's death and perhaps was designed to try to “flush out” Esau's malice. It could have been that this ceremony was partly done for Isaac to watch his son Esau's reaction to it.

Esau certainly reacts, but not with anger towards Jacob, but with the desire to please his elderly parents by a new and, he believes, a more appropriate marriage. It may be also that Esau's hatred of Jacob has been dissipated now by his own blessing which sums up his life choice anyway. Certainly Jacob still fears him, as we will see below, but Esau does not appear to deeply hate his brother any more from this point onwards, even though his own mother does not trust him.

Verses 3-4. Isaac strongly repeats the Abrahamic blessing over Jacob, with the strong emphasis upon it being the work of God, not the work of Jacob to fulfil the blessing. In the very stating of the blessing he underlines the importance of Jacob walking closely with his God.

The name of God used, “God Almighty” reminds Jacob that he doesn't have to work things out himself, but depend upon the Lord alone, who has the power to direct, provide and over-rule when required. Moses sees the significance of the many names of God, and the Lord's use of different names to emphasize different things, and that the emphasis for the life of Jacob is to trust God alone to direct his path and build his house. Exodus 6:2-8, Psalms 127:1-5.

The Canaan blessing of permanent tenure is passed on to Jacob. He is reminded that he will remain a sojourner in the land, but his descendents will inherit the Abrahamic promise. Genesis 12:1-3, 7, 15:5-7, 17:6-8, 22:17-18, Psalms 72:17-19. The day will come when, as the Psalmist records the main name of the Lord will be “the Lord, the God of Israel”.

Jacob will become Israel and the Lord will be known for the mighty work he does in his transforming of this dysfunctional man and building a nation from his sons. Salvation and spiritual growth will transform this man and his sons, just as God's grace transforms us today. Psalms 105:2-15, Romans 4:7-8, 17-18, Hebrews 11:9-13.

Verses 5-9. Esau thinks in purely human terms, and thinks that blood relationship rather than spirituality is the issue for marriage, so he looks around for a dynastic marriage that will be better than the one Jacob makes in Haran, and one that he can consummate faster than Jacob will have the chance to.

He looks to move with speed to position himself in a stronger place than his brother. He seeks rulership by dynastic marriage. He seeks direct Abrahamic connection rather than the more distant descendents of Nahor, Abraham's brother.

He still seeks his parent's approval, even though he is nearly eighty. This is a man who has not grown up spiritually enough to see that if he only followed the God of his grand father Abraham, then he would be blessed by God and by his relatives.

Jacob is still carnal, and will remain a man with a sexual weakness for a long time, but his journey will lead to a close encounter with God that will continue the process of change within him. He has much suffering to face on the road, due to his sexual pre-occupations; the sexual sin of Reuben, the rape of his only daughter Dinah, then the deceitful, murderous cruelty of Simeon and Levi to the Shechemites. He must then face the death of his beloved Rachel, then the deceit of his sons regarding the "loss" of Joseph, and finally the rigors of a great famine. Let none say that he "got by" with his sexual behaviours! We end this section with Jacob leaving on his journey to Haran to seek his wife and his fortune.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. When we see that we have made an error, we are not to weep and wail over the error, but seek the Lord's next required action, in obedience to his plan to bring blessing through our next step on God's path. Few mistakes or errors of judgment need be fatal, but the believer needs to quickly recognize the path of the Lord for them, and get back in fellowship. If we are alive at the end of a time of foolishness, let us confess our sins, praise the God of Grace, and move back into active, obedient, spiritual life.
2. God's blessing is not withdrawn unless we persist in carnality and refuse to be in the only place where the blessing can flow. Jacob will go through great suffering due to his carnality but he will be blessed, and his children will not be judged for the circumstances of their birth into a polygamous household.

Many today get side tracked because of their illegitimate births, or the poverty and disgrace of their family of origin. In Christ we are a "New Creation", and we have become members of the Royal Family of Heaven. We never need hang our head concerning our birth or previous circumstances, nor do we need to acquire wealth and power, or dynastic marriage, before man to gain respect. Our respect flows from our relationship with the Lord, and that is to be the sole focus for our decision making in this brief sojourn upon the earth.

3. In this world there is a daily battle between worldliness and spirituality, represented here by the viewpoint of Isaac and that of his son Esau. Our challenge daily is to see things God's way, rather than be pre-occupied with the things of this world, and the viewpoint that depends upon what we see with our eyes alone. Let us ensure that the Lord's words to us are more important than what we see with our eyes.

GENESIS 28:11-22

"And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. 12 And he dreamed, and beheld a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and beheld the angels of God ascending and descending on it. 13 And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; 14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. 15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. 16 And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. 17 And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. 18 And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. 20 And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, 21 So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: 22 And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee."

REFLECTION

Verses 11-12. What a change for this man; from the tent of his father and mother, to the stones of the road side on a road he had never travelled. He had been thinking a lot and praying also, as we will see as we advance in the chapter. The Lord answers his prayer in the vision he gives him. He happens to arrive at an apparently random place and, as it is getting dark he pulls over and stops. There are no soft things around to sleep upon, and so he places rocks under his blankets for his pillow. He has come to what appears to be a random place with no name, and he little imagines he is in the exact place he needs to be. He has been obedient and travelled without hesitation or delay, so in God's grace he arrives at the right place for the Lord to meet with him. It is not the appearance of a place that matters but it's real place in the plan.

He has an awesome dream, that is so unusual that he is riveted to it's content. He sees a great staircase (not a small ladder up which only one person can climb) upon which the angels are going up towards heaven and down to the earth

in continuous procession both ways. It speaks of the angel's involvement with the earth as the representatives of God upon the earth, and their reporting function on the matters of man to God as sovereign over the heavens and the earth. Genesis 32:1-2, 35:1, 16-17.

It directly challenges Jacob's unspoken feeling as he went to sleep, that he was in a "God-forsaken place". It speaks of the intimate involvement of the angelic host with man, and the constant nature of their oversight. There are no God-forsaken places upon the earth when we are walking in his plan for our life. Every place is a place to meet God, and every place is a place of worship and potential service.

Verses 13-14. Initially Jacob focuses upon the staircase and the action upon it, but then he lifts his eyes upwards to the top of it, and there he sees the Lord himself standing at the top, but not on the stairs; he was standing above it as the Lord over it. As Jacob focused upon him, the Lord spoke directly to him and announced himself. When a king stood it was to judge, or pronounce a formal statement of policy. The Lord formally announces himself in terms of his saving and leading work upon Abraham and Isaac. Psalms 105:7-15.

He is told that the land he lies upon will be given to him and his descendents. This promise will be repeated throughout the nation's history, and this very promise will be referred to by the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel 37:20-25. The nation will be re-gathered to inherit this land from the four corners of the earth, and the land will remain their own, even in the midst of great pressure and terrible invasion. Ezekiel 38-39.

The blessing upon him is expanded from the Abrahamic base line. Abraham had been promised to become a father of a multitude of peoples, as "the dust of the earth, and sand of the sea". Genesis 13:16. The addition is interesting, for it refers to the wide spread of the peoples who will descend from Jacob.

The Arabic peoples descended from Abraham through Ishmael and the sons of Keturah, and Isaac through Esau, have not spread very widely through the earth, preferring until the most recent times to stay in the Middle East. The Jewish people however have been people who have followed the trade routes since earliest times, and as a result of the first (605 – 535 BC) and second exiles (70AD to the present), have spread to the far corners of the earth. Since the 1860s there have been Jewish people in every corner of the earth, just as is prophesied here. I am writing this from the "ends of the earth" in the South Pacific and I fellowship with many Jews weekly, both messianic and orthodox.

It is only in the last hundred or so years that the Jewish people have reached their maximum point of dispersal. It is from this point that the words of the prophets become exciting to ourselves, for as we see the rebirth of the nation Israel, named after Jacob, and at a time of maximum dispersal from which the Lord alone has promised that he will recover his people. Isaiah 11:11-12, Jeremiah 9:25-26, 25:15-33, Ezekiel 7:1-2, Revelation 7:1.

The return of Israel is a matter of present excitement, and rightly so, for it relates right back to this place. The other promise here is not to be missed however; the promise of blessing for all the peoples of the earth through the Jewish dispersion. If you look at a number of facts you quickly see that the Jewish people have blessed the world in a manner way above their numbers. Look at the number of Nobel Prize winners over the last hundred years, and notice how many Jewish people there are. Look at innovators in medicine and commerce and notice the numbers of Jewish people. Also simply look at the fortunes of nations down the centuries, and notice that those who blessed the Jewish people in their dispersion were blessed while they did so, and they were then disciplined by God when they persecuted the Jewish people. God protects his people. Psalms 72:17-19.

Verses 15-16. The specific promise to Jacob is an answer to his unspoken prayer before he lay down to sleep, and gives us an insight into his fears as he tried to sleep that night. The Lord promises him that he is already with him, and will continue to be with him. He also tells him directly that he will keep him safe on the journey, in all the places he goes. He is assured that he will be brought back into the land he sleeps upon, and that the Lord will not leave him at any time, but will accomplish all he has promised to him.

The Lord's promise to the believer today is no different, for he will accomplish, with his power in us, all he has called us to do, and bring us to the place of victory. All he seeks is our being positioned in the right place and having us open for Holy Spirit filling. Psalms 46:1-7, Matthew 18:20, 28:18-20, Romans 8:28-34, 2 Timothy 4:18, Jude 24-25. Jacob's response to the promises of the Lord is real bafflement. He was not expecting to meet the Lord in this place.

Verses 17-18. When people have an encounter with the Lord they are not generally dancing with joy, but shaking with awe, and their thinking is fine tuned slowly as to what it all means. When you hear people speaking of their "amazing experiences" with angelic visitors look at their report and judge it against the real experiences of the men and women in the Biblical record.

In the Bible when people meet the Lord or an angel, they are awe struck, often fearful, always prayerful, and worship of the Lord is the normal outcome. They are not thinking of the beauty of the vision, but are struck by the "otherness" of it. They feel acutely the otherness of God and their own humble position. They feel their sin, their unworthiness, and their need for setting themselves right before the Lord and being ready to follow his plan. Be suspicious of appearances of angels that are out of step with the biblical record.

In our day, as we near the end of this age in time, and see the nation Israel at the centre of world events, we ought to expect more and more fake and real angelic events. As believers we must be very discerning, or we will be misled and

our lives distracted from the Lord's path by angels of light, who are actually servants of the prince of darkness. Satan and his team are good counterfeiters, but they cannot imitate holiness, so they try for other things, often in the attractive and sensual-sexual area. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

Jacob rightly recognizes the hand of God in the awesomeness he feels, and with the fear, there is the comfort of knowing he is in the Lord's hands in all his doing that are in obedience to the Lord. He sets up the largest rock that he has lain upon and makes it a marker of the place, and prays, pouring olive oil upon it. The Levites will utilize this ritual in the Mosaic Law. Leviticus 8:10-13.

Verses 19-20. The place he has lain down is outside the city/village of Luz, but Jacob renames the hill he has slept upon Beth-EL, or the house of God. He then says something aloud that gives away his very baby like faith, and records it upon the tablets for Moses to read. Keep remembering that these men were literate, and had been for over a thousand years, writing in the international written language of the previous 2000 years, Akkadian. Notice the words of Jacob here, for they are almost a challenge to the Lord to keep his word, and express a fair degree of doubt that God will come through. He even asks the Lord to provide food and clothing! Now the Lord does promise this in the Sermon on the Mount, but we are also expected to work for our food and clothing as the Lord provides the opportunity to work! Matthew 6:28-34, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12.

The words of Jacob here indicate that the Lord is on trial and Jacob won't commit himself until he has seen the promises fulfilled. Jacob is not praised in the scriptures for his attitudes at this time; he is a man way out of living spiritual fellowship with the Lord, yet the Lord still speaks to him. It is a reminder of the amazing grace of God, and the need to take the Lord seriously and learn of Him and His Word with focused energy and application. Hosea 4:1-6, 12:2-6. When the Lord next speaks to him, he will remind Jacob of his promise to the Lord here, and will call himself the God of Beth-EL. Genesis 31:13.

Verses 21-22. Jacob will end his "deal" with the Lord that once he is back safely home he will believe in the Lord, but the Lord will call him to respond to him in Haran itself, and there will be another great test before he sees his father's tent again; he will have to meet Esau in the open road and face his fears then. Jacob does finally express some confidence in the Lord at the end of his words here, for he promises a tithe of all that is given to him as a gift to the Lord. It is of interest to reflect upon where and to whom this gift is going to be given, for Jacob is in effect his own priest before his family. Moses will hear from the Lord that the tithe is a lasting command for Israel for the gift of the land they will receive. Leviticus 27:30-33.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. There is no God-forsaken place upon this earth. Where ever we are, the Lord is with us there, in the midst of whatever distress we find there. No fear is too far from the God to take to him, for every place upon the earth is a place where the angels touch the earth, and which the Lord sees. We are in the sight of the Lord and his angels at all times, and he cares for us at all times.
2. Discernment is something that we need to practice at all times as the angelic conflict advances towards the end of this present age. The enemy is subtle and angels will appear at times to mankind with messages, but they may be fallen angels with false messages from the enemy to deceive the unwary! We are not meant to be ignorant of the devices of the enemy, but too many believers are. Let us ensure that our understanding of systematic theology keeps us safe.
3. When people have a genuine encounter with the Lord or an angel they will be awe struck, not leaping around and boasting about it. When the Lord or an angel appears with a message from the Lord, the people receiving the message will have a real task before them. Do not be misled by the enemy here, for he can be expected to send more and more counterfeits as the days grow short.

God's angels have all appeared as if of male gender, and they are all well clothed. There is no sexuality about them, and they have a serious message that requires work and often suffering. The enemy's fallen angelic host will tend to be sensual, at times appearing to be of beautiful female gender, and often bright light illuminated beings, who inspire worship of themselves, rather than being the humble messengers, and pointers to Christ, that elect angels are. Let us beware of the enemy's malice and deception as the days grow short.

REFLECTIONS UPON THE ANGELIC COUNTERFEITS OF SATAN

1. There are Doctrine of Demons – we must be discerning. (1 Timothy 4:1)
2. There is a false Communion Table. (1 Corinthians 10:20-21)
3. There are always False Prophets and Ministers around. (2 Corinthians 11:12-15)
4. There is a fake Gospel. (2 Corinthians 11:3-4)
5. There is fake Spirituality – that all false religions provide. (Galatians 3:2-3)

6. There is fake "Self-Righteousness". (Matthew 19:16-28)
7. Satan has Power – and may appear to be God like at times. (2 Thessalonians 2:8-10)
8. There are false gods – demons with real power from their master. (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4)
9. There are false Religions - (Matthew 23)

REFLECTIONS UPON SATAN'S STRATEGY

1. Believers are warned against him and his tactics. (Ephesians 4:27, 6:11-13, James 4:7, 1 Peter 5:8)
2. We must be ready and alert. (2 Corinthians 2:11)
3. Satan is a deceiver and a counterfeiter. He uses deception - things not obviously wrong or sinful - but very subtle changes to the truth (Genesis 3:1). Remember, a counterfeit looks like the original, but has a different source.
4. Satan is described as an "angel of light" - often seeming attractive and "good". (2 Corinthians 11:14)
5. His tactics
 - a) Towards unbelievers.
 - i) to blind them regarding the gospel. (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4, 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 1 0)
 - b) Towards believers.
 - i) Satan seeks to hinder our growth and witness. (1 Peter 5:8)
 - ii) Satan will mislead into false doctrine and legalism. (1 Timothy 5:14-15)
 - iii) He persuades believers to ignore the will of God through disobedience (Genesis 2:17, James 4:7-8)
 - iv) Satan often attacks our assurance of salvation so that we doubt God.
 - v) Worry (1 Peter 5, 7-9)
 - vi) Fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14-15)
 - vii) He accuses believers of sin both to God and to the believer (using guilt). (Revelation 12:9-10, Job 1:6-11)
 - viii) He takes our focus off Christ by getting eyes on self (1 Corinthians 1:10-11), on people (1 Corinthians 1:12), on things (Hebrews 13:5-6)
 - ix) When we don't allow the Holy Spirit to control our lives, we open ourselves up to Satanic attack. (1 Corinthians 7:5, 2 Corinthians 2:11, 1 Timothy 5:14-15)
 - x) The Lord will allow Satan to attack a believer as discipline for unconfessed sin. (1 Timothy 1:20 cf 2 Corinthians 12:7)
 - xi) Satan cannot indwell or possess a believer, only beguile them. (Galatians 3:1)
 - c) Towards the world in general.
 - i) The World - Satan tries to deceive and thereby control the nations. (Revelation 20:7-10)

Notes

CHAPTER 29**GENESIS 29:1-14**

“ Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east. 2 And he looked, and behold a well in the field, and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks: and a great stone was upon the well's mouth. 3 And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place. 4 And Jacob said unto them, My brethren, whence be ye? And they said, Of Haran are we. 5 And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? And they said, We know him. 6 And he said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep. 7 And he said, Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together: water ye the sheep, and go and feed them. 8 And they said, We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep. 9 And while he yet spake with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. 10 And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. 11 And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. 12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father. 13 And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things. 14 And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him the space of a month.”

REFLECTION

Jacob has literally travelled from one culture into another as he crosses into Mesopotamia and the vast fertile plain of Padan Aram, with it's city Haran at the epicentre. This was a great city in any day, with over one million people in and around it. It was vast and cultured and wealthy. It would be the centre of the north until the battles around it at the end of the Assyrian Empire in the years 612 – 606 BC, so it has over one thousand years of prosperity ahead of it.

For Jacob it was culture shock, with the difference in dress, language and customs. He was educated in the languages of his day, and would have spoken at least three languages to enable his trade, but he was entering a big city after a life time amongst tents and small city states of up to 10,000 people. He has good intelligence about the whereabouts of Rebekah's people and so is able to begin his search for them in the right pastoral area in the outlying lands of the city of Haran. The first verse of the new section finds him well on the way into Mesopotamia but probably just in direct sight of the city of Haran itself.

Verses 1-4. As Jacob approaches the city and plain he enters the outlying pastoral country. He sees the familiar scene of pastoral agriculture and sits and watches the shepherds of three flocks as they approach one of their wells. He actively sits and watches. As was mentioned in the earlier section on the life of Abraham, it was death to approach a well and drink from it, if that well was not your own, or you were not invited by the people of the land to drink. Jacob is not as careful and a slave to custom as his grand-father's servant over a hundred years before, but he will prove that he does not lack courage as the hours unfold.

He watches the shepherds sit waiting for someone in authority to come and move a great stone from the lip of the well and water their flocks, and then replace the stone. It is a stone designed to require a number of men to shift for security. It may even have been held by an official chain and lock. He waits and watches, and then approaches with a friendly question, asking them of what place they are, and he is told they are men of Haran. He greets them as fellow shepherds, “brethren”. It is clear that Jacob has travelled alone, without wealth, and without retinue, nor is he wearing the clothing of a wealthy merchant, as had Abraham's servant. He has travelled as a wandering but senior pastoralist, visiting relatives, not a wealthy sheik of the desert. Genesis 24. His status will be seen by his actions, not by his clothing.

Verses 5-6. Read the interchange between these men and notice the clipped sentences, without the normal Middle Eastern pleasantries of invitations to drink, or sharing of food, both of which would be common if there was friendly interest between the groups. Jacob receives information, but it is given coldly and formally. From the interchange I deduce that Laban is not a popular man with these men, as his father had been, and that these men will do little to assist any friend or relative of Laban's. They point out that Rachel is coming with Laban's flock, but they add no other information and certainly are not there to assist her, nor are they men in power or authority, able to move the stone from the well mouth. They all sit and wait for someone to come and move the stone from the lip of the well.

Verses 7-8. There is a time to water the sheep, and it is only when “they” come and open the well. We are not told who “they” are, but these men he speaks with are “hired help” or slaves, and have no authority to water the animals. As a pastoralist Jacob knows that it is high time for the sheep to be watered before the cattle come in later in the day. He adds up the sheep and knows the time it will take, and he knows that they will run out of time if they don't open the well soon. No-one moves.

Verses 9-10. Rachel arrives and she is running the flock herself. This is no sixteen year old girl, but a mature woman who really knows what she is doing. She is in a man's world and being a woman may have saved her some of the abuse

that may have come had she been seen as Laban's heir. At this point Jacob sees her and falls immediately in love with her. It is a repeat of his father and Rebekah; love at first sight. He now moves and does something that would be death in normal circumstances, and may create a great feud for years to come, or make him a hero. In this culture, his actions will make him either a folk hero here, or a corpse!

Verses 11-12. He first waters the sheep of Rachel well before introducing himself. He is clearly a great man, and remember, he is in his seventies, so there will be bafflement as to who this man is, and even more so that he takes charge and moves a giant stone (a real sign that Jacob is incredibly strong and a very tough customer), and then waters Rachel's sheep first.

No one steps in to stop or attack him, an indication that they sense he is a great man, and certainly he is a big one! Shepherds in this day were ready to fight Asiatic Lions, so these are not men who would hide from a fight. Jacob is a real man who earns their silent respect very quickly by his actions. He kisses Rachel on the cheek, a sign of being a relative, and of love, and tells her who he is. She is overcome and she runs and tells her father what has happened.

Now probably, this is a run of several kilometres, for flocks were pastured well away from the city, which was surrounded by market gardens of crops. Sheep were pastured well out in the foot hills. This may take through the night and into the next day to get Laban back out to where Jacob will have stayed with the flocks. By his taking over the flock of Laban for this time, he becomes a member of Laban's family and entitled to use the well, so his staying there with the sheep probably saves his life and gives him a status amongst the shepherds.

No mention is made of what happened when the men who were supposed to open the well arrived later on the scene! The appearance, strength and presence of Jacob apparently settled any argument they may have wanted to make. Moses doesn't tell us all here. There are some interesting things that will have happened out on the foot hills that day and into the night. It is common for commentators and teachers to speak of Jacob as a bit of a "Mummy's boy", and a situation like this one reminds us that they are WRONG on all counts. Firstly this man is no boy, he is in his seventies. Secondly, no-one gets away with what he did here unless he is very imposing, strong, and has a quality about him that makes men think they will die if they take him on. This is a man who we will see try to wrestle with the Lord himself. He is a very tough customer!

Verses 13-14. When Laban hears the news he leaves the place he is and heads out to the well in order to bring Jacob into his city house. It may be that Laban is caring for other flocks in another part of the hill country and so Rachel had only a few kilometres to run to get him, and that they were able to head back into town for that night, but given the geography, agriculture around the city, and distances in this place, I suspect these events may have taken a twenty four hour period which Moses compresses.

Jacob recounts to Laban the events of the last few days, and possibly the repetition of the Abrahamic Covenant to him by the vision from the Lord. Laban is pleased that he is there, the son of his sister, and that he has this man to assist him in things with flocks and herds. The marriage proposal is not delivered and nothing happens for a month. This man Laban plays for time, and from his past actions and what we see him do in the next twenty years, plays also for wealth. He needs a man like Jacob in his business and he is happy to settle nothing about marriage, and just sit and talk in the evenings, and have Jacob work for him for nothing from dawn till dusk.

It is over one hundred years since the visit of Isaac, so the great wealth received then has been dissipated and he likely seeks more for the next generation to be prospered. This man has been blessed by good health and length of days, just as has Isaac and Abraham, but his heart is still set upon wealth. He has done one good thing however, and that is to bring his daughters up as believers, although very competitive ones as we will see. These two women will be the last generation of solid and useful believers that will come from this household, as the weaknesses of this man dominate in later generations, and like Lot, they drop out of redemptive history from this point onwards.

PERSONAL AND PASTORAL APPLICATION

1. Each generation must advance in their love and service of the Lord or they will slide backwards. Laban is a man who believes the Lord, but values his wealth and power more than spiritual things. He knows the Lord, but is not sold out to the Lord. His girls have faith but they are the last in the line of Nahor to serve the Lord in spirit and in truth. This family is another reminder that unless we advance in spiritual life we lose what we have. We are called to lose our self in the Lord's service, for then we gain eternally, but if we lose our self in pursuit of wealth, power or influence amongst men, we will lose everything, for none of these things lasts beyond the grave. Matthew 16:25-26, Mark 8:35-36, Luke 9:24-25, 17:33, John 12:25.
2. Jacob watches, plans, speaks and then acts in great strength. All these people live long because they treat their body as the Temple of God and are fit and strong. Let us be as careful in health habits and so let us aim to be as healthy as they were. Jacob gets away with an action that would mean death to others. He has been led by the Lord to the right place, and so he is operating in the Lord's will here, and so he is safe. It is a reminder that if we walk where the Lord orders, we have safety in our actions there. Let us walk in the Lord's will this day, and prayerfully consider each action we take.
3. Jacob has come without wealth to seek a bride. His father Isaac has placed him in a vulnerable position to teach him humility, test his resourcefulness, and ensure his dependence upon the Lord. Jacob operates on the

basis of being in the right place under God's guidance, but also on the basis of his great physical strength. He will learn over time to trust the Lord's strength within him rather than simply his own dominating physical presence. Let us ensure we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, and lean not on our own strength. Proverbs 3:4.

GENESIS 29: 15-35

15 And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be? **16** And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. **17** Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. **18** And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. **19** And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. **20** And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. **21** And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her. **22** And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. **23** And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her. **24** And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid. **25** And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? **26** And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. **27** Fulfill her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. **28** And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also. **29** And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid. **30** And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years. **31** And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren. **32** And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me. **33** And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon. **34** And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi. **35** And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing."

REFLECTION

Verses 15-16. Laban has had Jacob working for him with vigour for over a month now, and Jacob has been happy to do this work, for he feels it builds his moral claim to the hand of Rachel, but he little knows his father in law's mind. This is a man who wants to take full advantage of what Jacob may offer to him by way of pastoral knowledge and experience, but who wants to control him totally. In the days of Rebekah there is no indication that Laban was involved in agriculture, rather it appeared then he was in trading. He has moved to pastoral agriculture, with the flocks, perhaps to try to emulate Abraham, who made so much by this means of work.

He has placed his own daughter in the fields to assist, and ensure no-one "rips him off", by stealing or deceiving him regarding the flock. He is a man who doesn't have the trustworthy servants to call upon that Abraham had. There is an important business principle here. You cannot expand a business without good staff present at the point of expansion, and you cannot keep good staff if you are not stable and of good character yourself.

Laban is not a man who keeps good staff, nor has he the character to maintain trustworthy servants and be able to deal with them in a straight manner. He is hungry for wealth, and is a deceiver to try to get it, and Jacob will meet his match here. His question to Jacob indicates that Jacob has been working very hard indeed, to the point of embarrassment for Laban. Had he just been paying his board this discussion would not have ever come up until Jacob's time to leave had arrived. Jacob has been playing for time also, and waiting to make a deal for the girl he loves. He has no wealth with him from his father, so he must trade on his commodity, which is pastoral knowledge and physical energy and courage.

Verses 17-18. Laban has two daughters, the oldest one has plain looks, flat eyes, and is not well built, but Rachel is very beautiful, has strong and bright eyes, and is well built. It is Jacob who offers to serve for seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage. He estimates this as the "bride price" that would be offered for such a woman. It is a high price, and would be the level of dowry paid to the family of a noble woman. Take your annual salary and multiply it by seven and you have the value of the dowry here. It is considerable.

Verses 19-22. It was better that Laban married her to a relative, whose belief system matched his own than to a member of a surrounding pagan family. His comment here is a culturally normal one, and even is used today in some Arab cultures, but behind the words is a tricky customer. He agrees to Jacob's proposal gladly. Jacob really throws himself into the next years work and they fly by, because he is focused upon the prize of the woman he loves.

Jacob works hard and when the day arrives he requests his right to take Rachel as his wife and have sex with her. He has been sexually celibate through this time as he waits for Rachel to be given to him. This is a man with a weakness in the sexual area, and so he has been working hard through this time to control himself but as the day gets near he is

really keen to take Rachel as his wife and enjoy her sexually. This is not wrong, but his weakness will be used by Laban to fool him through the alcohol in the feast that Laban organizes for the wedding party. Psalms 12:1-2, Isaiah 6:5.

Verses 23-24. Laban has been cunning, for at a certain point in the first evening of the wedding feast he swaps daughters on Jacob. Because women were veiled during the feast there was no real way to tell them apart if the clothing was the same, but Laban has very likely ensured that Jacob is well and truly drunk also, for after seven years he would otherwise know the difference between the two girls, but drunk, he won't discover it until morning. Sober men know who they are making love to!

There is **never** a right time to get drunk, and anyone who gets drunk must be prepared to be made a fool of or worse! He has already had sex with Leah by the time he discovers the deception, and by custom of the ancient world, that act married him to her. Laban has also been very cunning with his choice of servant for Leah. He selects Zilpah as the maid of Leah. Her name means "fragrant dropping of perfume". Moses drops a hint of what is to come here, for this girl was "Laban's maid". Now a man didn't have a female "maid" in the ancient world except as a lover, so Laban has probably given Leah an attractive and sexually experienced woman, or at least a sexually schooled girl for a maid, so that Jacob might be further entangled in a sexual web and thereby bound further to Laban. Laban's plan is that Jacob never leaves his service, and like all intelligent/devilish plans, he has spotted the weakness of the man to launch right to that spot.

Verses 25-26. Laban is a carnal believer at the level of Lot, and such people can be "evil" in their deviousness. He has little to commend him by way of character, and Zilpah, his second secret weapon, is yet to work her charms on Jacob. This is a spiritually and morally dysfunctional family. His two daughters are virgins and moral, but they will show later that they have been influenced by the morality of their city and home, and will be comfortable in giving their maids to Jacob for sex later themselves. They have lived with their father having sex with his many "maids" and so they see it as alright or normal. Moses will simply tell the story here without moral observation or condemnation, for he has already made his comment in Genesis 2:21-24, where he had made it clear that God's plan is for one woman and one man.

Laban gives a very feeble excuse for his trickery regarding Leah. Had that been the custom to always give the older first, as it is in many cultures, then he could have told Jacob that before the feast and arranged the double marriage then. It is cunning driving this process, and there is more to come. Jacob's weakness is his sexual appetite, and he doesn't see the dangers in all this before he has four "wives" and a lot of trouble.

Verses 27-28. The deal is quickly made by Laban. Jacob had walked into the problem by offering seven years in the first place rather than letting Laban speak first. This is another basic rule in business dealings, you cannot go better than your first offer, and if you do not let the other person make the first offer, then you are on the back foot in the deal making process. Laban is in the driving seat here and he drives the bargain home well. He gets another seven years free service for his second daughter.

Jacob keeps on having sex with Leah through this week and will continue to do so in the years to come, but he makes it clear that he doesn't love her as he loves Rachel, and this is an evil thing. This duplicitous mental attitude hurts Leah deeply as we will see. Jacob is very self-centred and fails to really love these women as they both deserve, who are simply pawns in a power play. His lack of respectful love towards Leah, and his refusal to make her feel special in his eyes will open the door to greater evil down track. In marriage we have the godly obligation to make our partner feel special in our eyes, even at times when we may be distracted by business worry, or annoyance at an action of theirs. Marriage ought to build self esteem in both partners. Respect and adoration is to be expected – God expects it from us!

Verses 29-30. Laban has another "maid" named Bilhah, who is another sexual time bomb for Jacob, and he gives her to Rachel. Bilhah's name means "timid one", or "coy one". Jacob does not see it at this point, but his sexual appetite is his weakness, and it is this weakness that Laban uses to control him and obtain twenty years hard labour from him. Jacob plays favourites with his wives and later with his sons born to these women. This favouritism will come back to haunt him later in the jealousy of the other brothers against Joseph. He will pay a terrible price for this early evil of his.

Verses 31 -32. God hates the attitude of Jacob towards Leah. She is still enjoyed sexually but she is left in no doubt that she is second best to Rachel. Such an attitude is unworthy of a man of God and causes distress to Leah. Causing misery to any other person for selfish reasons will bring God's serious, and at times lasting judgment, and Jacob receives it here, and will continue to do so. God blesses Leah with a child and causes Rachel not to bear children. This indicates that Rachel is not without fault in this matter herself, and may be mocking her sister because she is the "ugly one", and so the Lord steps in and vindicates her and judges both Rachel and Jacob for their cruelty.

Leah's words on the birth of Reuben tell us that she has been in prayer about this whole matter and feels that the Lord has indeed answered her prayers. Sadly she believes that her production of children will lead to Jacob loving her, but it will not in itself. Love is a strange thing, and if it is not present strongly and passionately at the beginning, it only rarely grows over time. Jacob will beat the odds and learn to love Leah over time, but there is not the depth to his love that would have cemented the bonds of love between his family, and it remains dysfunctional until close to the end of his life. Jacob is not a family centred man, and does not now nor throughout his life attend strongly to the godly upbringing of his children. They are left to grow up by themselves, and his failure to be actively involved in their spiritual education will come back to hurt him deeply in the treatment of Joseph by the others. Proverbs 1:1-7, 2:1-22. He reaps what he sowed.

Verses 33-35. If this was a Hollywood movie we would call the next section "The Baby Battles", for each woman will try to out do the others in their production of children for Jacob to make themselves more powerful through their children.

Leah is desperate for the love of her husband, and Jacob's coldness is an evil thing towards her, for he clearly does not even try to show warm affection towards her. He is bitter about being deceived by her father, and in effect uses her for sex and children, but his bitterness is felt by her as directed to herself.

Leah is innocent of evil here and the Lord blesses her with her sons, but she has sadness from her husband and after four boys she stops bearing children, although still having sex with Jacob (Genesis 30:9). If a woman is not loved and adored by her husband she will get to the point where she is unable to sexually respond to him, and at the point she discovers she cannot have any more children she appears to stop her sexual relationship with him. This woman has spiritual nobility, and Jacob robs himself of great blessing by his despising of her, and then his later lukewarm love.

Jacob's attitude towards her is wrong, and the predictable result of his inattention and bitterness is that she will have her love for him killed completely. This evil in the heart of a marriage continues to kill many today! We are challenged by Paul to Love our wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it! Paul especially commands in Colossians, "Husbands love your wives and do not be bitter against them!" Ephesians 5:25-29, Colossians 3:19. Women are responders to their men and if a wife's love for her man is killed, then the normal cause is that the man killed that love! The principles here are lasting ones for marriage. Jacob is focused on enjoying sexual pleasures but not on appreciating the women who give themselves to him, and so he will lose them all, either by death or his own disinterest or bitterness.

Note the meaning of the names of Leah's sons. The oldest is called Reuben. His name means, "See/Look here, a Son!" It is a name that is a loud boast and a challenge to her sister Rachel. Her second son is called Simeon, meaning "hearing – the Lord has heard me". She has been praying about this, but cannot help praising God for her success at having the second one, and mocking Rachel for not being heard. Each son is an attempt to win Jacob's love, but each fail to do so, for he will not address his bitterness towards Leah and Laban. Her third son is called Levi, meaning "attachment". She longs for Jacob's loving affectionate attachment to her, for this is what marriage is about; it is to be a cleaving together of the husband and wife in mutual admiration/love, appreciation/respect and adoration. Genesis 2:24.

Her fourth son is called Judah, meaning "the praise of God". She is a believer who appreciates her answered prayers and by this fourth son she is not gloating over her victory over Rachel, she is simply praising God for the gift of another boy. She has given up trying to win Jacob's love. He has finally killed her love for him by his inattention and bitterness towards her, so she praises God for her boys and centres her life in her children. Children make a family, they do not make a marriage, and so when a woman centres her life in her children and sexually locks out her husband, then the marriage, and probably the family also, is in deep trouble. She has however through her prayers become the mother of the Messiah, who will come through Judah.

PERSONAL AND PASTORAL APPLICATION

1. Jacob is "working" for his goal rather than praying for his goal as his grand-father's servant did. He therefore gets what human works will get you! Works without faith will always reap a harvest of trouble, and Jacob gets trouble from his wives and sons. He is so busy working that he doesn't take the time to deal with his mental attitude sin towards Leah. He plays favourites and opens the door to jealousy in his household. Prayer alone opens the door to blessing; all our hard work does not achieve anything unless it is directed by the Lord. Unless the Lord builds the house, those that build it labour in vain. Psalms 127:1, Hebrews 4:1-11.

2. Jacob loses control with drink and sexual lust. We are called to be filled with the Holy Spirit, never wine, for the Lord wants to control all our comings and goings, and direct all our works for his glory and in holiness. Only in the Holy Spirit's control is there blessing in our work. Jacob is legalistic and self absorbed. He is ruled by his emotions and lusts, and so reaps great distress as a result.

Jacob is a warning to us, and only as Israel does he become an example to follow. These chapters are a chronicle of disaster and let us take the warnings here very seriously. Moral sins are to be feared and fled from, especially any sexual immorality! 1 Corinthians 6:18, 1 Timothy 6:10-11.

3. Marriage is built upon deep love and respect for the other. If any bitterness enters in, it will kill the marriage over time, if not dealt with. Bitterness is a destroyer of marriages, and no marriage should even go ahead in a climate of deception. Anyone coming to you as a pastor who does not whole-heartedly love their partner and respect and admire them is not to be married, for they are a time bomb ticking towards disaster.

Marriage is a godly institution and it is not to be perverted by sins like lust or drunkenness, but equally it is not to be abused and brought into disgrace by casualness towards it, nor by marrying people who are clearly not suited to one another, and who do not have passion for one another. To marry such people is to be part of the devil's plan for dysfunction to destroy the divine institution.

Satan's attack upon marriage and the family is aided and abetted by any pastor who marries people who clearly do not love and respect each other, or are unequally yoked. Every time a dysfunctional marriage is created the enemy rejoices! We are to set the example of Holy Spirit filled godly function, we are never to imitate the devil with dysfunctional lives, nor the sanctifying of other people's dysfunctional relationships. Anything that falls short of God's standard is not to be encouraged or supported, it is to be assisted to reach God's standard.

Marriage counselling must concentrate upon these things so that godly marriages are built up, and unequally yoked people are counselled away from each other before a marriage destined for dysfunction and divorce is created.

Notes

CHAPTER 30

GENESIS 30:1-21

30:1 And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. 2 And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? 3 And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. 4 And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her. 5 And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son. 6 And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan. 7 And Bilhah Rachel's maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son. 8 And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali. 9 When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife. 10 And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a son. 11 And Leah said, A troop cometh: and she called his name Gad. 12 And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a second son. 13 And Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed: and she called his name Asher. 14 And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes. 15 And she said unto her, Is it a small matter that thou hast taken my husband? and wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also? And Rachel said, Therefore he shall lie with thee to night for thy son's mandrakes. 16 And Jacob came out of the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, Thou must come in unto me; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes. And he lay with her that night. 17 And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son. 18 And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband: and she called his name Issachar. 19 And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son. 20 And Leah said, God hath endued me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun. 21 And afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name Dinah."

REFLECTION

SEXUAL POLITICS IN JACOB'S TENTS

This is not a pleasant chapter to read, for all the things I have noted in the previous two chapters come to full fruition here. Sin, especially sexual and mental attitude sins, will always worsen and destroy more and more of what is good over time. Jacob is distracted by work and by his visiting many marital beds. He is enjoying himself sexually, but the cost is incredibly high.

As you read this section do not think that God, or Moses, supports or approves of Jacob's actions. Moses doesn't have to openly condemn in the text, for as mentioned above, he has already given God's policy regarding marriage in Genesis 2, and so the Lord's disapproval of Jacob's actions does not need to be laboured here. The children born of these unions will be blessed however, and will go on to be the foundational fathers of the tribes of the nation Israel.

The children born of sin do not get judged for the sins of their fathers, except when they follow their father's sins! Exodus 20:5-6, Jeremiah 31:29-30, Ezekiel 18:1-4. They will be blessed as they are obedient to the Lord's Word through history, but the legacy of their sinful origin will emerge when they go away from the Lord's clear Word. Sadly in the history of the people of Israel they will spend much time walking like their fathers, and in their adultery, drunkenness and jealousy of each other, will show the strength of their Jacob-like Old Sin Nature.

Verses 1-2. Before we judge either of these two fallen people too hard, let us remember our own pointless and emotionally charged arguments! It is easy to get into self centred arguments in a marriage or family, and the challenge of the Lord is to pull back from emotional argument and sit with our problems long enough to pray over them and cast them upon the Lord. 1 Peter 5:5-8. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Genesis 18:14, Jeremiah 32:17.

The argument here gets very personal, with Rachel getting emotionally angry towards Jacob for not making her pregnant. "Give me children or I will die!" You can't get much higher on the emotional scale than this sort of comment. Jacob's response is just as emotional; rather than sitting with his wife and working the issues through, he immediately gets defensive. He takes the attack personally, when Rachel is simply venting her frustration at Leah winning the baby battles! This is not good marital communication at all, for each one is self centred, rather than other-centred as the Lord requires within marriage for success.

They are both venting their personal viewpoints rather than seeking the Lord's will and guidance in the midst of the trouble. They do not pray together, they fight and yell accusations at each other. In this we have another ugly illustration of dysfunction; of what the Lord hates in marriage, and what will destroy a marriage over time. Marriage is built on communication with respect, where each admires and hears the other, and responds in accordance with their joint desire to serve the Lord their God. Both have a lot to learn, but sadly they will enter into the sin of adultery to solve their problems rather than prayer like Rebekah did. Genesis 23:13ff.

A major longitudinal study of marriage and what are the factors that lead to divorce has been conducted in the USA from the early 1970s. It continues today, and the results have been a surprise to many. Three factors alone have been identified as relevant to the survival/destruction of a marriage. These three destructive factors are all found in the marriage of Jacob to Rachel, and in the other marriages Jacob enters into through his sexual behaviours. They are:

1. COMMUNICATION

Couples do well in their relationships if they feel heard by the other person, and then hear their concerns also. Couples that make time for respectful one on one communication invest in the success of their relationship. Those who have success in their marriages invest this time in each other regularly; time where and when no interruption is possible is crucial to their success. This means no friends, no children, no mobile phone, no distractions! Couples who want their marriages to be successful are advised to make time to just "hang out" together each week and talk together. A relaxed, happy and successful sexual relationship rests upon the foundation of each person feeling heard in all matters that concern them. People who do not feel heard, do not feel loved and adored, and over time their ability to love their partner will dry up within them.

2. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Conflict is not a problem if it is respectful, problem focused, and always gets somewhere. Conflict becomes a problem if it is associated with either person losing the plot, and/or it gets no-where, because the argument keeps going around and around without solution. Objective, or goal directed discussions are productive. Stepping back from conflict to asking, 'what are we fighting over and what are our objectives?', can achieve results quickly. If there is a fundamental difference in life goals, it will then become clear! The couple are at that point "unequally yoked" and need to refocus and pull the same weight. When both raise their voices it is a sign that communication has broken down and the chance of resolution of the issues are small. Couples who want to survive with satisfaction look for real ways to resolve their problems.

3. CONTEMPT

No relationship can survive the last destructive element; that is contempt. Successful relationships are built upon respect and admiration for the other person. When this is lost it must be addressed before all else, or the relationship will break apart. Human beings require, respect, admiration and adoration within relationships, if they are to last. Couples who want success ask how they can build adoration rather than simply reinforcing frustration.

Verses 3-4. Jacob doesn't need much convincing to have sex with Bilhah. The tradition was for this to occur in wealthy Middle Eastern homes, and the baby was accepted as the woman of the household's, who would ensure that the child touched her body first (landed on her lap) as it left its mother's womb. This was an early form of what we call surrogacy, but Moses has made it clear from the Garden of Eden onwards, that God considers this adultery.

There is no judgment upon the child, but the parents will pay dearly for this sin. This practice gives us the basis of the Biblical position on all forms of surrogacy whereby a couple attempt to have children by means of sexual or reproductive activity involving other people's sperm or eggs. Adoption is the only biblically legitimate form of obtaining children where a man and woman cannot conceive naturally.

Verses 5-8. Jacob is not concerned about the consequences of his actions here, and like all who are guided by Old Sin nature area of weaknesses like lust, rather than the Holy Spirit, he eagerly continues his sexual relationship with Bilhah. Neither he nor Rachel have been in fervent prayer over this matter, and the sons of Bilhah will prove ready murderers of their brother born to Rachel later!

Once again, I repeat, do not think Jacob is going to get away with his sin, for he is going to pay a terrible price for his sexual pleasures later when he loses Joseph. She calls Bilhah's first son Dan, meaning "Judgment", indicating that she believes God has judged her right and worthy of her sister as an equal. She calls the second boy born Naphtali, meaning "My conflict, or wrestling", indicating that she is wining the baby wars over her sister. Some commentators argue that the meanings indicate her prayers are answered, (that she has wrestled with God in prayer over this matter) but Moses is careful of this issue of answered prayer.

Moses has no-where mentioned they are praying at this point, and we cannot twist the text to make these names spiritual, for they have carnality as their source. The boy's names indicate spiritual activity but both parents are out of God's will here. These sons are born of sins; both jealousy and envy, and lust. The sins of the parents will have their consequences; it will just take another twenty years before they are seen.

Please remember believer - All sin has its flow on consequences, it is just a matter of time until they emerge! The boys will be a part of the Lord's plan, but they should have been born by Rachel as a result of answered prayer, not by adultery with Bilhah. The cultural acceptance of this practice did not make it righteous. What our society accepts is of no relevance to us as believers, for the Lord's opinion on matters alone carries any weight for us. We are His!

Verses 9-13. Leah is clearly still sexually active with Jacob, for after a certain period of time she realizes that she does not appear to be getting pregnant again and so she takes action to stay well ahead of Rachel. Isn't this a terrible situation here? Can you see what an awful family life these children grow up within? Anyone who contemplates polygamy in a weak moment is a fool indeed. Jacob is blissfully unaware of the upset he is creating, or perhaps he is enjoying the rivalry between these women as it meets his sexual appetite, but he will pay dearly for his foolishness.

Leah decides that if Rachel can use her maid then she can use hers also. Jacob makes no complaint and more sons are born to Zilpah. Moses by the very structure of his clipped sentences condemns these actions and reminds us how quickly we all can fall into sexual sin. All it takes is carelessness in our decision making, and lack of prayerful carefulness over decisions about our sexual relationship. Leah will later discover that all she needed to do was pray and she would have conceived more children, and Rachel will learn this lesson also in time.

These verses hit me like a sledge hammer, for in my counselling practice work I see at least two to seven people every week whose lives have been torn apart by sexual sin. They all tell the same story and it runs exactly down the line of Jacob's sinful pattern here. They have entered into a sexual relationship or behaviour without thought. At times I will ask people, "What were you thinking of?" I ask this, not because they were thinking, but because I want them to see that they had stopped operating with intelligent life guiding their path, and had started to follow their Old Sin Nature lust.

Jacob enters into all things his wives suggest and he will pay ten fold with grief for every moment of pleasure. Remember, God made sex to be pleasurable, and so the enjoyment of it is no guarantee to the righteousness of it in a particular situation. It is made to be pleasurable – at the time! Sexual pleasure is designed to be expressed and enjoyed ONLY within the safe relationship of a right man with his right woman and **no-where** else.

Many people think in hedonistic terms, that is, if it is pleasurable, then it must be alright, but this is a false decision making process that is satanic in its origin. Many things bring pleasure in the short term but death in the medium or long term. Pleasure seeking is a dangerous path, and Moses is telling the story here calmly and bluntly, without moral observation, because he knows where the story is going. Let us read on and be warned, and warn others lest they be nearly or actually destroyed like Jacob was by the consequences of his actions.

Leah obtains, through Zilpah, as had Rachel through Bilhah, two further sons in the baby wars. Their names are, Gad, which means "a troop is coming". Now pause and reflect upon this; she wants an army to out number her sister's two. Then she names the next one Asher, which means "the happy one", indicating that with this son she is really happy that she has won. Her focus is on her battle with her pretty, favoured sister and she is now content that through Zilpah she has won the battle. There is no spiritual thing here at all, just pure carnality on all parts, but out of all this sexual carnage, by faith later, the Lord will bring blessing to all. This chapter is an encouragement, because if a family can come back from this level of dysfunction and conflict and establish a nation, then there is hope for all. Romans 8:28.

Verses 14-15. Once again we confront the terrible cost within a marriage and family of many sexual partners for the husband. These woman actually bargain for their husband's sexual favours with fruit! It is almost funny, and if it did not have such serious consequences for Jacob and Joseph it would be.

We know the time this occurs in the year, for the mandrake fruit was ripe in May. It is a fruit that was associated with love and lovers. Song of Songs 7:13. Reuben, who is possibly a teenager at this time, goes into the fields and finds the mandrake fruit ripe. It is a lovely coloured fruit and it's smell was appreciated by the ancients who believed it was the food of love and aided conception and fertility. The shape of the root of the mandrake plant can appear like a man's body and so it was seen by women of that day and later ages as a potent aid to the conception of a son.

The two sisters are still living and working together, despite all the conflict, and Rachel sees Reuben coming in with the Mandrakes and giving them to his mother Leah. Rachel asks for some of them from her. Leah's answer shows her mental attitude; she sees her sister as stealing her husband from her. This tells us that Leah is still feeling rejected by Jacob's clear favouritism of Rachel as the beloved one. Rachel was clearly the one that Jacob was to sleep with this night, and so she offers her "turn" with Jacob to Leah, so that by sex she pays for the mandrakes that she then takes from Leah. What prostitute like dealing here! That is Moses point – this is great evil, and Jacob is responsible for it!

Verses 16-17. Leah has been upset by Rachel's attitude and has expressed her own sadness of spirit. She runs into the fields and meets Jacob there and tells him of her "deal" with Rachel. Jacob simply goes along with anything and so they sleep together. The first light in this whole sordid chapter now is turned on by Moses comment; "God heard Leah's prayer". For the first time in a long time there is prayer offered and the Lord gives Leah another son. She sees that prayer has opened the door for her, and that Zilpah was not needed at all, all she had to do was pray and wait for the Lord to answer her prayers.

Verses 18-21. Leah's response to the answer to prayer is however wrong. She praises God for the answer to her prayer, but then identifies the Lord's reason for blessing her as being that she gave her maid to Jacob. Her praise is right, but her deduction is wrong. Her actions were sinful, and God does not answer prayer according to deals we make, but according to his grace and in accordance with his plan. Leah still has much to learn of the Lord.

She names her two sons, Issachar and Zebulon. Notice her comment again in verse twenty. She longs to have Jacob love and stay with her. Women who love a man do not want to share their man any more than men who love their woman will enjoy sharing their women. This marriage is a grief to all, and the eleven boys grow up in an atmosphere of battle-field negativity. Leah also gives birth to one daughter Dinah.

The meaning of Issachar is "there is reward here", or he brings reward". The meaning of Zebulon is "dwelling place", for she hoped that Jacob would spend his time with her after his birth. The meaning of Dinah is "justice", indicating that she feels justified after her birth that she has done right. Jacob has other daughters, born probably to Bilhah and Zilpah, but these are unnamed. Genesis 37:35, 46:7. Dinah is introduced here because of the events of chapter 34.

PERSONAL AND PASTORAL APPLICATION

1. Marital conflict is only overcome by making time for respectful listening and communicating. Arguments are never productive unless each person hears the other first. Let us commit to truly hearing our partners and responding to them in Christ like ways, for then by respect and prayer we will both obtain the marriage we seek. Men and women seek safe intimacy and security in their marriage relationship. Both can find that in a godly marriage. Let us ensure we teach and live these things.
2. Carnality is often covered over by spiritual words. The boys and the girls are born into an atmosphere of sinful carnage in this home, and their mother's fight and deal for sexual favours from Jacob. It is a terrible mess, yet even in this worst of places the Lord will bring his glory as they start to pray and remember their calling before God, and start to stand where Abraham stood. This family is a reminder that no place is too bad to be restored to spiritual power and life; all it takes is the devotion of the people to the path of God again.
3. Each of these children is faced with the challenge of standing in the faith of their grand-father and great-grand-father, or in the dysfunction of their parents. All generations face this challenge. We must challenge every new generation to stand afresh in the place of faith and spirituality, rather than the place of carnality. Volition is the test that each generation faces; how ill we stand before God? God has no grand-children, only children.

Notes

GENESIS 30:22-43

“22 And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. 23 And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: 24 And she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son. 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. 27 And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake. 28 And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it. 29 And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me. 30 For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude; and the LORD hath blessed thee since my coming: and now when shall I provide for mine own house also? 31 And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock. 32 I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire. 33 So shall my righteousness answer for me in time to come, when it shall come for my hire before thy face: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the sheep, that shall be counted stolen with me. 34 And Laban said, Behold, I would it might be according to thy word. 35 And he removed that day the he goats that were ringstraked and spotted, and all the she goats that were speckled and spotted, and every one that had some white in it, and all the brown among the sheep, and gave them into the hand of his sons. 36 And he set three days' journey betwixt himself and Jacob: and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks. 37 And Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chesnut tree; and piled white strakes in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods. 38 And he set the rods which he had piled before the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink, that they should conceive when they came to drink. 39 And the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle ringstraked, speckled, and spotted. 40 And Jacob did separate the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the ringstraked, and all the brown in the flock of Laban; and he put his own flocks by themselves, and put them not unto Laban's cattle. 41 And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger cattle did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the cattle in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods. 42 But when the cattle were feeble, he put them not in: so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. 43 And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses”.

REFLECTION**THE BIRTH OF JOSEPH AND JACOB'S SELECTIVE BREEDING “CON JOB” ON LABAN**

Verses 22-24. Finally prayer is becoming the norm in the household. Rachel prays and the Lord hears her prayer and she conceives a son. She feels deeply the “reproach” of her childlessness, but finally has opted for God’s solution rather than through her maid again. She calls her son Joseph, which means, “taking away and adding”. This is not a name relating to mathematics but to the removal of her reproach and the adding of joy in Joseph’s birth. It is sad that she felt that the lack of a child was an insult/reproach to her from the Lord. She was, it is true, being disciplined for her attitude, but there was no spiteful dealing with her on God’s part. Hebrews 12:5-17.

All that was ever required was prayerful repentance and life change. She never really gets it fully, but the Lord blesses her in grace with Joseph, and he is her joy for a number of years. Rachel is a beautiful but tragic figure, who never really reaches the spiritual beauty that she was capable of, but she has over her grave, that she was loved, and surely she was, not just by Jacob, but by God also. She will have another son later, but will die in child-birth with this one. Genesis 35:16-21. Her last son will be renamed Benjamin by Jacob, (Son of my right hand), although before she dies Rachel calls him Ben-Oni (Son of my sorrow).

Verses 25-26. After the birth of Joseph Jacob realizes that the time has come to leave Haran and head back to the land of promise. He speaks directly with Laban and reminds him of the service that he has given over what is now nearly fifteen years. He asks for the gift of his wives and children. This is an indication of the control Laban has had over Jacob. He had had to work fourteen years for his two wives, and until that period is over his wives and children technically belonged to Laban, for the bride price had not been paid and their control rested with Laban as the senior household member. Jacob must seek permission to leave.

Verses 27-28. Laban has learned that there is blessing by association with Jacob and that he is too valuable to lose at this point. Jacob has taken his small sheep operation and turned it into a very productive ranching enterprise. He asks Jacob to select his wage level and stay for a time with him. There is a deep threat here also just under the surface. This man is, I believe from later actions he takes, capable of the murder of his own son-in-law after he has control of Jacob’s family and wealth.

Verses 29-30. Jacob has learned a lot from this tricky man, and so he spells out the increase that Laban has obtained at Jacob’s expense and from his hard work. The cattle herd has increased and has brought great wealth to Laban. Now Jacob cannot complain, for it was he who made the deal for labour, and he didn’t specify any percentage gain to himself from the work done. He made a hasty business deal and he has delivered to Laban several princesses dowries in this time, but he has no come back on Laban, for it was his deal! Jacob wants the opportunity to work a really profitable

percentage deal with Laban now, and so get superior wages for all the years he has been here. He does not want to just leave the house of Laban; he wants to leave in style and with great wealth.

Verses 31-32. Jacob has thought this through well before he has asked Laban these things. He asks for the mottled or chocolate coloured animals of the cattle, sheep and goats. These animals were not the “pure” breeds that were valued by Laban, but were good milk producers and were hardy. There were apparently enough of each category to build a sizeable herd from, with selective breeding, but not too many to make Laban feel he was losing too much initially.

Verses 33-34. Jacob explains that he will be paid only with these “second class” animals, and if any of the pure colours are found amongst his herds then that animal is stolen and is to be returned to Laban. Laban is now a very old man, and so is happy with the deal. He just wants Jacob’s good luck for him to continue.

Verses 35-43. Jacob’s plan is not to use magic as some try to explain here. It was a very clever selective breeding program that he put in place. He ensured by the use of the white rods (he used saplings of trees that when the bark is taken off are a bright white in colour), that the females he wanted to mate were held at the feeding and watering troughs long enough to be mated by a similar coloured male. This reduced the possibility that his flock or herd would produce any pure coloured offspring, for both parents were mottled.

He only mated his animals once a year to ensure that the offspring were strong, rather than twice yearly, as with the other surrounding flocks, when weak offspring may be produced at the Spring birth cycle. He kept his offspring strong, in good health, and ready to breed, and ensured that his animals were the ones controlled for the right partner to mate them at the troughs, and that Laban’s herds were not allowed to mate as often.

He also kept the herds/flocks apart so that they could not mate together in an uncontrolled manner in the open fields. By doing this he ensured his flock grew slowly at first, and did not build suspicion of a plan behind the growth, but built to the point of exponential growth, when each year his herds and flocks would double in size.

He became very prosperous with the increase and used the sale of animals (by which he also disguised the size of his expansion) to buy slaves in the market place to ensure his workers were never short of labourers in the fields. He is a smart businessman, as he does not cut back on staff, but expands his staff to ensure he is always well protected and his flocks/herds well managed by excess staff. Foolish businesses cut staff to cut costs, but all they do is stress their remaining staff who are therefore not productive – it is the path to losing a business. Laban is like modern business “sharks” – he runs a “lean and mean” operation, but Jacob’s way is better and he proves it. He prospers greatly, but Moses does not record that he or the Lord approves of Jacob’s trickery here.

PERSONAL AND PASTORAL APPLICATION

1. Beware in business when you make deals, for the deal will run its course. Be sure that what you seek is what you should be seeking by way of return so that no bitterness results. Beware also of “getting even” in any new deal made, for resentment is a bitter root to put down into another man’s soul. If people believe you have “ripped them off” or cheated them, they will harbour deep and abiding grudges that may sour relationships for generations. Never cut costs to expand business – always add to staff and resources and expand safely.
2. Rachel is a sad and tragic figure in her married life. She is loved dearly but is sad with her love, for she robs herself of joy by her bitterness towards Leah. Neither woman truly breaks through to spiritual maturity, for both are focused upon the physical rather than the spiritual. They remind us that we can gain the whole world and still be unhappy unless we have the blessing of the Lord upon our life.

Notes

CHAPTER 31**JACOB AND LABAN****GENESIS 31:1-18**

“31:1 And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. 2 And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before. 3 And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee. 4 And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock, 5 And said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before; but the God of my father hath been with me. 6 And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. 7 And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me. 8 If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the cattle bare speckled: and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked. 9 Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me. 10 And it came to pass at the time that the cattle conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle were ringstraked, speckled, and grisled. 11 And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob: And I said, Here am I. 12 And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grisled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred. 14 And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? 15 Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money. 16 For all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that is ours, and our children's: now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do. 17 Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels; 18 And he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padanaram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan.”

REFLECTION

Moses has identified that Jacob expanded his herding enterprise above and beyond that of Laban. He prospered greatly and the questions started early in the process, as we will see below, but they really began to flow by the end of the sixth year of working the deal he had with Laban about who owned what in the flock. Genesis 30:31-34. He had taken wages and taken plenty, but it is only in the last year that Laban's sons start to not just notice the significant inequality in the growth figures, but actively hate Jacob!

Now remember, Moses tells the story in such a way that he makes it clear that he does not praise Jacob for his dealings, for Jacob is almost as crooked as Laban. Jacob has tried to bless himself, when with a slight modification he could have blessed them both. He has tried to punish Laban for his exploitative actions and greed towards him, rather than leaving Laban in the hands of the Lord for discipline. Jacob could have expanded his own herds and flocks and also allowed Laban to prosper also, but he wanted to punish him. The Lord makes this point very clear to Moses, and so this story becomes a perfect illustration of what not to do, in contrast to the Lord's clear instruction! Deuteronomy 32:35-43, Psalms 94:1-14, 95:1-11.

These passages form an important back drop to this chapter, for the Lord makes it clear in the Old Testament, that vengeance indicates the vengeful person is not resting in faith, and as such he will not have rest in his spirit before the Lord. We are to trust the Lord to see us right and set things right when people are devious in their dealings with us. Romans 12:19, 1 Corinthians 6:1-8, Hebrews 10:30, 12:28-29.

Verses 1-2. Once again God makes sure that Jacob overhears the words of Laban's sons and perceives the change of heart of Laban also. Jacob needs to trust the Lord here rather than trust his own plans and deal making ability, and the Lord speaks to him directly to ensure he obeys. Jacob is not walking in the Spirit here, he is still in full operation of his plan to build himself up and pull Laban down, and so the Lord must step in with encouragement and with clear direction.

God will move him steadily back to the land of Canaan for that is where the blessing is for Jacob now. Notice the attitude of the sons of Laban; they, like their father expect Jacob to work for nothing, and they would resent any growth of his flock, but they really hate the fact that his flock is now as large as their own. They see that Laban's glory/wealth has been stolen by Jacob. They are both focused solely upon their wealth and this is the clue to Moses point here; there is a visible difference in God's way of dealing and in fallen man's way.

Jacob could have grown both flocks and herds and both would have been blessed, but Jacob is a capitalist every bit as much as Laban, and he wants to be the biggest and the best, just as Laban does. The countryside around Haran is not big enough for both of them.

It is time to leave, but Jacob fears a straight forward leaving, as he doubts that he would leave alive! In this he is probably right! He has overheard the hatred of the sons of Laban that likely goes to death threats towards him. When a

man is as wealth hungry as Laban is, he will not want to lose control of Jacob's flocks and herds, for they are supporting his status in the area. Such men will kill rather than let the person go.

We see this operate at the point where marriages end and one partner kills the other rather than let them go to another. It is this self centred (Narcissistic) dynamic that operates with Laban. Jacob does need to escape this man. If he gave him time to say goodbye, this man would engineer a way to take back the animals and have Jacob go with very little, and possibly nothing at all. All Laban has to do is arrange for Jacob to have "an accident" in the fields, and at his death, the wives, the children and all that Jacob owned goes back to the senior tribal leader, and that is Laban. Jacob is in serious jeopardy here, and he needs to turn to the Lord his God for guidance and deliverance. He does not do so, but God in grace comes to him.

These people, with the Narcissistic personality, cannot bear to part with wealth, even if they have apparently, or really, given it to another. I have seen many cases in my clinical work through the years where the self centred narcissistic person took great vengeance when their partner tried to leave them. I have seen people destroy property rather than give it to their partner, and even destroy good businesses in pure spite, rather than hand over 50% to the person entitled to it. I have seen one arrogant and proud man spend \$300,000 on lawyers to fight the legitimate splitting of assets worth only slightly more than that. Had he compromised early on he would have spent \$3,000!

People who love wealth hate to part with it and will fight even the smallest assault on what they consider "theirs", and they consider many things owned by others as, in their eyes, really "theirs". These people are dangerous to the partner who tries to leave them, and the escape must be carefully and secretly planned and suddenly executed. Those who do not take extra-ordinary care to escape people like Laban, may never escape, lose everything, or lose their lives! Jacob is right to plan his escape in the way he does given the nature of Laban. Proverbs 27:4, Titus 3:3-7.

The other factor we face here is the natural consequences for Jacob of being a trickster, or con man. The actions of Jacob have been as bad as Laban's, and have gone too far to come back from. There are some things that apology can recover, but the deviousness of Jacob's dealings does not allow for any way back. These two men cannot ever trust each other again; there is no solution possible here by negotiation, for both are self centred.

Remember Paul's words in Romans 12:17-21, that it is at times not possible to be at peace with another man, but the believer is called to ensure that there is no reason from their side for the trouble that exists. Jacob cannot claim the moral high ground here, even though he will later try to. They must separate permanently as a result of their mutual dealings here, and the contact between the two families will be over for good. There are spiritual dynamics at work here also with polytheism creeping into both families as we will see below and it's influence must be fought by Jacob within the very heart of his family. It may be that this will lead to the early death of Rachel.

Verses 3-4. The Lord directly intervenes to protect and advise Jacob of the required action to save his and his family's lives. Jacob is careful to call the two key wives into the fields where they can talk without any servant in Laban's pay as a spy overhearing them. The Lord's command is clear and concise; he is to return to the land promised to Abraham. He is to return to Isaac; to his natural and spiritual family, and he has the promise of the Lord as he goes that the Lord will be with him in his obedience to this command.

He does not realise just how strongly the Lord will protect him on this journey, even appearing to Laban to stop him doing Jacob violence. There is security for us all as we are obedient to the Lord. Moses and all the prophets clung to this truth, as must we all as we advance in our service of the risen Lord. Deuteronomy 33:27-29, Isaiah 41:9-15, Hebrews 13:5-6, 1 John 4:4.

Verses 5-6. He speaks with his two wives in the fields, well away from preying eyes and ears. Note Jacob's words here. He begins by speaking of Laban's change of heart towards Jacob and tries to get the women to give him any feedback as to what they know. He also tells them that the Lord God who appeared to him on the way has appeared again and he has a word from the Lord to advance on this new path. They have been in Haran together now for twenty years, and it would be easy for the two woman to want to stay amongst their own people, rather than follow Jacob into the land of Canaan as their aunt had done. Genesis 24:58-61.

Rebekah had moved quickly, but these women have been in no hurry to leave the land of their father, and so Jacob does need to sound them out and ensure they are with him before he announces his plan to escape. He pleads with them that he has worked himself to the bone for their father, and that they know to be true. They may not realise the full extent of Jacob's "selective breeding program", but they are happy with the results, and they do want to leave their father's control, and that is what Jacob needs to hear and know for sure.

Both women are in their late thirties or early forties at this point, with Jacob being around 100 years of age. Those who doubt the ages here, remember the grave in Westminster Abbey, that you can visit, of Thomas Parr, who died at 152, and who married first at aged 100, and who never forgave himself for committing adultery at age 110! This man is a modern example of old age and full sexual function. Don't let anyone tell you we are dealing with myth here.

Verses 7-8. Jacob now recounts that over the last six years Laban has tried to change the deal they came to, Genesis 30:31-34, and he has tried ten times to make variations in it. Why would someone do this? The answer is indicated above in our discussion of narcissism, for such people as these will always try to alter deals after the ink has

dried on them, and they will keep on trying to whenever they think you might be gaining, even if they are gaining more! These people are driven by lust and there is no logic to their actions, for envy and jealousy drive them.

Many examples of this fill my clinics every week, where frustrated, honest business men face the consequences of the evil of others in trying to change business deals for their own advantage. This occurs in all business fields, from real estate, to banking, to commerce. It occurs because of the Old Sin Natures of carnal men who can't bear to see others do better than them, even if they are gaining by the deal.

A businessman friend of mine was offered a good commission deal to sell commercial insurances for a major international firm during a time of economic tightness. He worked really hard, got on planes and went into Asia and worked from China through Australia and New Zealand, and put together business for this firm worth over a hundred million dollars. His commission for this was several million dollars and the firm tried to stop him being paid! They failed, but fought him right to the court steps!

Now pause and reflect upon this. The firm had made several hundred million dollars, and had a man who would win business against the existing financial conditions, and yet pure greed by the General Manager of the firm, who resented his agent making more money than he had, caused them to take action against their highest flier! What drove this? The answer is sheer greed, envy, and jealousy!

My friend stopped working for that company and it never did as well as it had then for many years, and they even dropped their percentage in commission and so ensured that they only ever got second rate agents from then on! This mental attitude will be with us until the Old Sin Nature of mankind is destroyed by the Lord's direct action. People like Laban and Jacob are everywhere, and people in business had better get used to these sorts of people, for they are ruthless but self defeating. Do not think that such people will appreciate you, for they will not! To defeat or escape from such people one needs to walk close to the Lord. Psalms 105:13-15.

Verses 9-10. Jacob says that it is God who has obtained the cattle for him, but that is not strictly true, for Jacob's trickery has achieved this. Jacob is still out of fellowship here, yet the Lord has spoken to him. There is a message here that is very encouraging. Even when we are way out of line the Lord's love for us is unchanging. We do not get what we deserve, but what God wishes for us in his grace. 2 Timothy 2:12-13.

Jacob tells of a dream where he saw all the animals becoming coloured due to the Lord's work. Now this previous dream has not been mentioned to date by Moses in the text and so we must be a little suspicious about it being told to the wives now, rather than when it occurred. Is he simply trying to justify his own actions? Commentators are divided on this score, but the weight of evidence, as Moses details it, makes me think Jacob is being Jacob here; he is not yet acting as Israel. God's grace in sticking with Jacob is all the more remarkable and a reminder that the Lord forgives and restores us.

Verses 11-12. Having spoken with the wives and knowing that they are with him in his plan to escape from their father's clutches Jacob goes on to tell them of his recent encounter with the Angel of the Lord (the pre-incarnate Jesus) in the real dream he has just had.

His response to the angel is direct and strong, indicating that he is ready to serve and obey the Lord. The angel of the Lord supports him, not because of Jacob's trickery, but because the angel has seen what Laban has done. The point for us all is clear. Leave your troubles in the Lord's hand and he will deal with those who corruptly try to abuse you. The Lord has been watching Laban all the time, and all Jacob had to do to prosper was trust in the Lord and deal honestly with Laban. Had he done that he would not be facing as much trouble as he now faces, but he would still be facing trouble from Laban. Having observed this, remember my observations about narcissists above, and see that Jacob would still have to escape this man, for even the most honest men are abused by these people.

Verses 13-14. The word of the Lord to Jacob and his wives is to trust the Lord and move out back to Isaac in the land of Canaan and the Lord will be with them and prosper them on their way. They are to head for Bethel and there they are all to worship the Lord as Jacob had when he had the vision that night. Spirituality is called for from all the household so that they might be in fellowship and safe on this perilous journey. Notice the concerns of the two women. They are not focused upon the spiritual significance of the appearance of the Angel of the Lord but upon the wealth inheritance they want from their father's house before they leave it. They are worried about their inheritances rather than leaving their inheritances in the Lord's hands.

Verses 15-16. The two women have been watching their father spend the money Jacob has made for him. This money is in effect their dowry and would normally be given back to the girls as they left the house. They have been watching it disappear as their father buys more and more slaves, cattle, sheep, goats and camels. They know their father and realise that he will not give any of these away to them as they go and they are bitter about that. If they flee they will not get anything from their father. We must leave our "stuff" in the Lord's hands, and trust His provision.

Now they are right and he will pointedly omit to mention any dowry payment in his later speech to Jacob. They make it clear to Jacob that they know he has "taken" wealth from their father, and they are happy with this "theft", because they see it is for them and their children that Jacob has done this. So they finish by saying, whatever God has said do it. Now notice the order of their logic. First they mention the wealth and Jacob getting it from Laban, then their obedience to the Lord's command. They are both all too alike their father, and we will find that this stretches to compromise in religious worship also.

Verses 17-18. Jacob moves quickly to escape. This is crucial when dealing with such a man as Laban. Any delay will allow the details of the plan to leak out and once Laban knows they are going their lives are in danger. Jacob knows the whereabouts of Laban and his plans, and he has wisely kept their flocks at least several days journey apart so that it will take some time for information about any moves he makes to reach Laban. They move quickly, and they empty their Haran home without arousing suspicion and break their camp in the hills and start to head south with their flocks and herds. They will be moving slowly, at the speed of the slowest animal, so they need several days start on Laban to try to make it not worth while his following them.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. God is faithful even when we are faithless and foolish. God does not give up on us because of our sinful and carnal ways. We are challenged to return to the Lord our God and serve him with focused energy in spirit and in truth for he loves our souls. Let us cast our cares upon him and serve him as he deserves to be served and walk in the Spirit, for then we minimize the carnage we face.
2. Beware the narcissists in your life. People who are ruled by their lusts will **NOT** operate logically at all. Do not expect them to see a logical path, for they see only self centred things that will lead to your destruction if you are not careful and prayerful in all your dealings with them. Do not try to be logical, nor to try to understand them; they are just self centred and evil! Just see that you are confronting evil and move in prayer towards the goal the Lord has set before you.
3. There is a time to flee from certain situations. Walk closely with the Lord and you will know when that time has come. When we walk with the Lord we will face the hatred of evil men. Jesus told us to not be surprised when we are hated; let us just ensure we are hated for the right reasons, not because we have been dishonest. John 15:18-21, 1 John 3:13-15.

REFLECTIONS UPON CONSECRATION

1. Consecration means full surrender of self to God, and is our correct path. (Romans 6:13)
2. This is the attitude of "denying self" and "not my will, but yours be done" (Matthew 16:24, 26:39, Galatians 2:20).
3. This is the only acceptable gift to God. (Romans 12:1,2)
4. The consecration of the Temple is a picture of the believer's life: the Outer Court (the body), the Holy Place (the soul) and the Holy of Holies (spirit).
5. You are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and therefore must be set apart as a holy vessel (Romans 12:1-2 cf 1 Kings 8:1-11)

GENESIS 31:19-55

“19 And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's. 20 And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled. 21 So he fled with all that he had; and he rose up, and passed over the river, and set his face toward the mount Gilead. 22 And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled. 23 And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead. 24 And God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. 25 Then Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mount: and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mount of Gilead. 26 And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword? 27 Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp? 28 And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? thou hast now done foolishly in so doing. 29 It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. 30 And now, though thou wouldest needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my gods? 31 And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me. 32 With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them. 33 And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the two maidservants' tents; but he found them not. Then went he out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent. 34 Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not. 35 And she said to her father, Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched but found not the images. 36 And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after

me? 37 Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both. 38 This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. 39 That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. 40 Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. 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. 42 Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight. 43 And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they have born? 44 Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. 45 And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. 46 And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. 47 And Laban called it Jegarsahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. 48 And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed; 49 And Mizpah; for he said, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. 50 If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee. 51 And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee: 52 This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm. 53 The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac. 54 Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. 55 And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place.”

REFLECTION

Verses 19-20. Laban heads out to shear his sheep. It is the time he will need to be most alert to dishonesty, for the theft of fleeces would be a serious business for his cash flow. He is pre-occupied and so Jacob makes his move at that point. There is a chance for Jacob to move south for several days before he is spotted as being absent. Rachel does a foolish thing at this point and it is not apparently for wealth related reasons. She steals her father's household idols or gods. It is a bizarre act when you are fleeing, unless you believe they are helpful or powerful.

The Syrian peoples, like the people of Ur, had many gods and goddesses in their pantheon; almost 3000 by some counts. The pagan peoples would have as many gods as they could afford to have made in each house as “good luck charms”. Laban is an idol worshipper as well as worshipping to the true God. Compromise religion is going to be the problem for his family, but also sadly for all of Israel's early history, and the battle against paganism is constant in their history until the Exile eliminates it from their psyche. Rachel may be herself an idol worshipper. This may be the reason she will die early in her new life in Canaan. We will come back to this point, for her theft and hiding of these idol statues puts everyone's life at risk.

Verses 21 – 22. Jacob passes over the Euphrates River and heads for the mountains of Gilead. To get across the river is no mean feat and may have involved barging animals with many trips required. Jacob works hard to make his escape. Laban is told that Jacob has gone on the third day, so Jacob is well across the river now and heading as fast as he can southwards. Laban's actions now are with the seriousness of a man who has seen his wealth evaporating, and he means Jacob serious harm. His violence is unmasked for all to see if any have had doubts to date.

Verses 23-24. Laban heads south with his “brethren”; that is, his close relations and their armed men. This is an “honour party”, out to avenge the family honour, and such war parties normally sought the death of their prey to avenge their sense of moral outrage. Later we find that there are four hundred armed men with him. This was a sizeable force with which to cross the river Euphrates and would have created considerable alarm amongst the surrounding nations and city states of the area. They were all used to Arab raiding parties of several hundred men and all city gates of the area were closed at night fall to ensure no such groups were able to easily overwhelm the outer defences of the cities and villages.

This was a serious pursuit and lasted seven days, but these men are able to move faster than Jacob with his animals. Jacob pushes his animals along as we will see, for he later will observe to Esau that his flocks and herds are “weak”. It has been a hectic few days of travel for them all. This is high drama and they catch Jacob by Mount Gilead. Look at your map at the back of your Bible and see just how far Jacob got to in ten days and you will see just how fast he travelled.

God moves at the last moment to warn Laban not to touch Jacob, and even to be careful about how he speaks to him. Laban is warned not to challenge Jacob's decision making that has led to his leaving. The Lord makes it clear that he is with Jacob and this alone protects Jacob when Laban catches him. The men he has taken with him are not there for decoration, and they will be promised part of any loot after Jacob has been caught, so the Lord's appearance to Laban on the last night is timely and crucial. The Lord delivers us! In him alone are we safe and secure from our enemies.

Verses 25-26. Laban arrives and makes camp opposite to Jacob. They are like two warring camps and their armed men will all be on alert, but Laban has made sure that he outnumbers Jacob well and truly. Laban seizes the

moral high ground immediately in the first stand up meeting the two groups have between their camps. Laban accuses Jacob of theft of his daughters. Now this is a joke, but it tells us that all Jacob's suspicions about this man are correct. He wants revenge and only the Lord's words hold him back from violence. He also wants to control his children and grandchildren and doesn't want them out of his sight. He is clear that Jacob has acted deceitfully in his escape and has acted in a culturally unacceptable manner. Laban accuses Jacob of acting as if he has kidnapped his daughters. It is high drama and total hypocrisy on Laban's part. Jacob needs to be careful here however, as a wrong reply will unleash the 400 armed thugs in his direction.

Verses 27-28. He asks the pointed questions as to why Jacob has fled and why so secretly? He is urgent and offended in his tone, and Jacob wisely answers nothing, but allow his father in law to vent his anger in this early time. Whenever you are in a tough business place it is always best advice to let the other people speak first, so that you can see their position. One of the ancient world's great thinkers was quoted as saying, "Speak friend, that I might know you". Jacob just listens while Laban pours out his venomous hypocrisy. He speaks as if he is a loving father and grandfather who just wanted to throw a party for Jacob and the team, yet it would have been a "sudden death party" had he thrown one at all!

This man is speaking lies and hypocrisy, but Jacob will not challenge him on the truth of anything he says here until the right moment when he is able to completely silence Laban. Jacob has learned what sadly many I see in my clinic don't understand, that you cannot ever challenge these people and escape with your life unless you time it perfectly, and expose them so thoroughly that they cannot answer you. They cannot handle the truth and will try to bury you if you let on you have spotted their lies in any way at all. They must be managed carefully or they will attack. The only way they can be answered and silenced is with what an old detective I worked with called, "The East-Lite File approach".

By this he meant that the evidence against them needs to fill several files, and it all needs to be laid on the table at one point, so that they are overwhelmed by it and silenced totally. Anything short of this and they will lie their way out. Remember narcissists do not think they are the same as others, they believe they are special and entitled to special treatment, and have special rights above normal people. Jacob will act carefully, especially after Laban mentions that the Lord has spoken to him the night before. Jacob will see that the Lord has indeed protected him.

Verses 29-30. Laban now gets to the important part of the issue. Jacob has left because he longed after his father's house. Laban recognizes that his desire to be gone is legitimate and that the Lord has told him not to challenge Jacob's decision to head south again. He warns Jacob that he has the power to use against him if he wants to, but that God has warned him not to. When a person warns a man of an obvious thing he is trying to pressure him, and that is exactly what Laban is doing here.

His men are anxious for a fight, especially the sons of Laban, who have already expressed their hatred of Jacob. The last words must have been a surprise to Jacob. Why have you stolen my household gods? Jacob would not have thought of such a thing and so he will answer with moral outrage to Laban and offer the death of anyone who has done such a thing. This gives him the opportunity to exert his authority over his people and reclaim the moral ground. Psalms 52:1-9, Proverbs 29:23-26, John 19:8-11.

Verses 31-32. Jacob now says that he feared Laban and his actions, but he stops short of accusing Laban of lies when he spoke of the party he would have thrown. "I feared you", is a statement that builds up Laban as a mighty man to be feared, and narcissists love to be respected or feared by people they consider their inferiors. Jacob is strong in his statements but careful in them also. He is able to speak strongly regarding the stolen gods for he has no knowledge of the theft of Rachel.

Verses 33-35. Rachel proves herself a cunning and desperate thief here. She must cover her tracks and does so easily by pretending she is having her period and must stay still. The men who Laban has will assist him in a thorough ransack of all of Jacob's tents, and will do a thorough job, but the superstitious fear of menstrual blood will keep Laban and his men from touching Rachel, and the fact that she is Laban's daughter means neither he nor they will violently move her either. She has been cunning, but the Lord has seen her actions and he will act against her, for these gods are an evil and were not to be taken in the first place, let alone treated as if they are of any value.

Verses 36-41. Jacob now is really angry and because Laban has failed to find the stolen gods, Jacob is ready and able to really and fully abuse him for his deceitful dealings, without Laban being able to answer back. Jacob has left his defence until now, and it is the right time to publicly accuse Laban of his deceitful dealings. Jacob mentions everything he has against Laban and does so in front of the full gathering of his men and Laban's men. By this public attack he protects himself from attack, because all the men know that Laban has been tricky with Jacob.

Jacob lists his grievances one by one and builds his overwhelming case for Laban to back off. Notice he gives Laban room to move, for he still has 400 armed men with him, and even the word of the Lord may be over-ruled by Laban if he is pushed far enough. Notice Jacob's defence, for the things said here must be true, or else some from the sons and other relative of Laban will challenge them. Jacob could have done more to build up Laban's flock, but he hasn't taken anything from the flock of Laban, nor has he charged Laban for lost animals and those eaten by lions and other predators. He has acted in accord with their deal, although he doesn't speak about the selective breeding he has done. He finishes on the charge that Laban has tried to change the deal ten times, and that he has worked for all the animals he now has. The men with Laban now know the truth and with the gods not found they are left without reason to attack Jacob for "honour".

Verse 42. It is here that Jacob really spells out publicly the true reasons for the peace that is here within the tension between the two groups; firstly, God has spoken and Laban fears the Lord of Abraham. Secondly the major force on the ground is that of Isaac, who is still able to muster an army himself, and who is only a few days march away from the mountains of Gilead. Isaac is the hidden threat to Laban and Jacob's reference to him may arouse concern on the part of Laban and his men, for they know they are at least ten days from home and Isaac is only a couple of days from them. In military term they have stretched their lines too far, and are over-extended and vulnerable to Isaac's men, who may be in the hills behind them for all they know. They know the story of Abraham chasing the army of Chedorlaomer, and they are in the area he was chased through! There are good reasons now to make peace with Jacob and let him go south to join Isaac again, and for them to head away to safety to their people north of the river.

Verses 43-44. Laban still argues that everything here is his, and his comments make it clear that this man would have killed Jacob to keep everything intact north of the river had he felt the need to. He is a totally self centred man and he will not accept that Jacob has a right to anything, but he realises that he has been outplayed in front of his men and must make a covenant of non-aggression with Jacob and through Jacob with Isaac. He fears the Lord, although he does not serve Him as his father did, but has allowed household gods to creep into his dwelling places.

Verses 45-46. Jacob builds the memorial stone pillar and gets all the men present to each place large flat stones around it forming a circular platform, and upon that platform they will eat a feast that will mark the covenant between them. This is a significant monument, with a large central stone and surrounded by enough stones for over 400 men to sit upon and eat. All covenants were sealed by a feast. It is a mark of the irony of this event that Laban said he would have put a feast on, but it is Jacob who has to kill some from his flock and actually put the feast on for Laban's men. This will seal the covenant between them. Notice the deal they make here.

Verses 47-48. It was customary to name a place after a covenant was made, with each person naming the place and thereby expressing what they hoped the covenant meant. Laban calls the place in the Chaldean language "the place where the great circle of stones was set up as a witness". Jacob calls it Galeed, or "the circle of witness". Both indicate that they believe the stones stand for a witness to their arrangement and thereby agree to the deal made.

Verses 49-50. Another name for this place was Mizpah, and it would be a place of sad massacre in Jeremiah's day. Jeremiah 41:1ff. The meaning was "watching place", meaning that this was the place where the Lord reminded them that he would watch over them both to ensure they kept their arrangement. The main concern that Laban had was for his girls, that Jacob would not take other women as wives and so undermine the authority of Leah and Rachel. It was a real fear, for the old Jacob had been known for his sexual appetite, but he was now on the path to being a changed man and he easily accepts this rule, for he seeks no other wives now.

Verses 51-54. This pillar marks the boundary line for Jacob and Laban. Both promise to not cross the line that this marks on the journey to Haran. Laban has ten days journey before he reaches home, and Jacob only three to five, so Laban gets the biggest territory to wander in if he wishes, but the truth is he will not re-cross the Euphrates River and both men know it. Jacob gives Laban a moral victory by agreeing to this. Laban walks away and can boast that he has the greatest area of influence, but Jacob walks away alive and free of this evil man, and he knows that God has promised him all the land, and no deal he has cut here will negate God's promise to Abraham Isaac and himself.

Note the words of verse 53. Laban does not speak as if the God of Abraham and Nahor is his God. He also tells us that Terah was also a worshipper of the true God. When did the idols enter into the house of Laban then? Had there been compromise before this date? Jacob swore the oath in the fear of his father Isaac, for he was the man of faith at this time. Jacob will operate in his own strength in a few moments, but he stands under his father's covering still at this point.

There is a good lesson here, for many make a stand in the "fear of their father", or under the mentorship of their pastor, but having done that they relax into the Lord's hands themselves, and the next thing they do often surprises everyone, for they speak with authority in the Lord in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is the normal path in the area of spiritual growth.

At this point Jacob finds inner strength and focus and he becomes the priest for them all and offers a sacrifice upon an altar he builds there and then, and calls upon the name of the Lord to cover them all. Jacob is starting to exercise his priesthood before his family now and he does not offer any compromise with the sons and grand-sons of Nahor, nor does he meet the idol worshippers half way! We are too used to compromise in our day, and the Lord has no place for it. We are to stand for truth alone and oppose all who stand for evil with the strong proclamation of the truth.

After Jacob leads them in true worship and prayers are said he then calls them all to eat bread together and they stay up all night eating and talking upon the great platform they have built. There is fellowship here on the basis of the true worship of the true God. As a result of the true worship there is a genuine leaving ceremony the following morning, with Laban recognizing that he is seeing them all for the last time and kissing them all goodbye. This is the level of separation that is now required between the families, for there is nothing that they have spiritually in common now.

Laban returned to his place, and sadly it is out of the path of redemptive history, for he will drift back into idolatry and his sons will follow him. There will be no believers in the next generation. Unless we grow in the Lord we will all fall by the wayside. Unless we follow the Lord ourselves with focused power, and urge our children to advance in the truth, they will follow the lies that surround all generations in the devil's world, and be pagans in the end.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Jacob stands up as the priest of the extended family and sets them all an example of steadfastness in the truth of the one true God. He prays for them all in God's name, and offers sacrifice for them all. They are witnessed to that there is a God who is above the little "gods" (demons) they have come to seek in the baggage.
2. Idolatry is a foolish thing, but is ever near us as a temptation, for satanic viewpoint is always present in our world – to make things more important than the path of God. We are challenged to worship, and pay attention to many little things that are of no consequence, but who demand our time or allegiance. We are to worship the Lord God alone and not give our time or energy to things that have no power to save us.
3. The Lord is our deliverer. There is no other who can save us from our enemies other than the Lord of Hosts. God delivers Jacob by the dream he sends Laban on the night before he comes upon Jacob. God's point to us all is that he will deliver us, and often at the 11th hour. Our task is to express our confidence in the Lord's deliverance and walk in the truth until we are delivered.

Notes

CHAPTER 32

JACOB AND ESAU

GENESIS 32:1-20

"1 And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. 2 And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim. 3 And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother unto the land of Seir, the country of Edom. 4 And he commanded them, saying, Thus shall ye speak unto my lord Esau; Thy servant Jacob saith thus, I have sojourned with Laban, and stayed there until now: 5 And I have oxen, and asses, flocks, and menservants, and women servants: and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find grace in thy sight. 6 And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, We came to thy brother Esau, and also he cometh to meet thee, and four hundred men with him. 7 Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed: and he divided the people that was with him, and the flocks, and herds, and the camels, into two bands; 8 And said, If Esau come to the one company, and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape. 9 And Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: 10 I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands. 11 Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children. 12 And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude. 13 And he lodged there that same night; and took of that which came to his hand a present for Esau his brother; 14 Two hundred she goats, and twenty he goats, two hundred ewes, and twenty rams, 15 Thirty milch camels with their colts, forty kine, and ten bulls, twenty she asses, and ten foals. 16 And he delivered them into the hand of his servants, every drove by themselves; and said unto his servants, Pass over before me, and put a space betwixt drove and drove. 17 And he commanded the foremost, saying, When Esau my brother meeteth thee, and asketh thee, saying, Whose art thou? and whither goest thou? and whose are these before thee? 18 Then thou shalt say, They be thy servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau: and, behold, also he is behind us. 19 And so commanded he the second, and the third, and all that followed the droves, saying, On this manner shall ye speak unto Esau, when ye find him. 20 And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me."

REFLECTION

Verses 1-2. Jacob has experienced what we call an anointing of the Lord at his meeting with Laban and he now moves into territory where Esau dwells and he knows he must face Esau before reaching his father Isaac. He is avoiding the direct dash to Isaac's camp, which was possible.

Why is this? Did Jacob only want to return home having not only financially been successful, but also having resolved the base of the conflict between him and his brother? I had observed above that there are some things in life that it is impossible to come back from, and Jacob's dealings would appear to be in this category, yet he will, under the Lord's power and guidance be able to make his peace with Esau. God's promise that he is going before him is seen in the appearance of the angels.

The multitude of angels that he sees are the reminder that God has more than enough supernatural power to assist and protect him in the coming meeting with Esau. He calls the place Mahanaim, meaning, the place of two camps of hosts. This reminds us that Jacob himself has several hundred people with him, and that there were several hundred angels seen. Like the staircase seen before he is reminded that there is contact between the two realms of earth and heaven, and that the angels are under orders from God to protect his own; that they are interested in and involved in the affairs of men.

Verses 3-4. Jacob calls trusted servants to him and briefs them as his messengers to Esau. They will go ahead of him and give news and obtain news for Jacob. He will be very careful in his dealings with his brother, for he expects Esau to offer violence to him and try to destroy his prosperity. Why doesn't he just avoid Esau? Look at your Bible map and see where Hebron is, where Isaac dwells, and then identify the other place names in this and the next chapter.

Jacob could head across the Jordan and run for Hebron, but he will cross the Jabbok River to see and try to make his peace with Esau. The reason for this is a good one, in it's relationship to the character of Jacob now. Jacob knows he must meet Esau at some point and so he does not delay any confrontation, he meets him now well before his father's death to get any problems into the open quickly and solve them fully and finally. He is right in this.

There is no benefit to anyone to hide from conflict or disagreement, for a conflict avoided will simply pop up later, and if you take the initiative then at least the conflict occurs on your terms and in your time. Jacob knows he has the Lord's promise at this point, and while the angels are with him he needs to advance and solve any problem he can, and come to an arrangement about any problem he cannot solve.

Verses 5-6. Jacob will not come with any arrogance or power projection. He will not come with any trumpeted spiritual superiority, but will come humbly and with cultural respect to Esau as his military superior. Jacob has won the battle against arrogance and also over confidence. He will be cautious, even as he boldly approaches his brother, for he knows his brother can kill him easily and seize all his goods. His brother has, over the last twenty years built up a reputation worthy of the blessing placed over him, and is, as we will see below, very wealthy from his farming and raiding activities.

The servants are well briefed, to remind Esau that he has been in exile with Laban these twenty years, but that he has come out with wealth that the Lord has given him. He refers to himself as a servant and to Esau as a lord, recognizing that the power is with Esau, even though the blessing was with Jacob. The request is "to find grace in his sight". It is a recognition on Jacob's part, that he needs Esau's grace blessing now, and especially the blessing of gracious forgiveness. It is Jacob's way of seeking his brother's forgiveness, recognizing that it can be asked for on the basis of grace alone, for his actions in the past do not give any cause to expect it on the basis of Jacob's past behaviours.

Verses 7-8. Jacob sends out his men and they return after a number of days with some startling news. Having been pursued by Laban with his "army" of men, now he faces the army of Esau with a similar number of men. It is a significant raiding party that is heading in his direction now. Look again at Esau's blessing. Genesis 27:39-40. Jacob can only guess that Esau may be coming to break the blessing for good by "breaking the yoke off his neck" by killing him. Jacob faces a choice now. Does he try to run, or does he advance to get this confrontation over through trusting in the Lord?

He has three things to depend upon; the blessing of Isaac, the promise of the Lord before he went into Haran, and the promise of the Angel of the Lord as he left. He will rest upon the Word of God, as we all must if we would have peace in adversity. With three spiritual pieces of "evidence" he moves forward in faith. Truly the Lord helps us and strengthens us in the path He wishes us to follow. Greatness comes to a life when that individual believes God's Word ahead of his experiences or the difficulties ahead of him.

He advances carefully towards the show down with Esau. He consciously and physically places his life where it is positionally anyway; in the Lord's hands alone. He does however take a precaution of dividing his people and goods into two groups, so that if Esau slays one group the other will have a time to escape. Does this prove he doubts the Lord's promises? It tells us that he is not perfect in his faith, and that is an encouragement to us all, for none of us are perfect in our faith as we begin to apply the Word! He is in fear and distress, but he is still thinking, and he is still advancing towards his date with destiny. It is not wrong to fear and be distressed at times; it is normal. It is wrong and sinful only to give in to our fears and distress and fail to follow through on the Lord's path.

We will be in fear many times in this life, but we have the Lord with us through our sorrow and distress, for he is the Lord who knows sadness and is acquainted with grief. Psalms 18:1-6, 31:13-18, 56:3-4, Isaiah 53:1-5. Read each of these amazing promise passages from the Old Testament and be encouraged to stand with your fear in the presence of your loving and gracious Saviour and Lord, for there, and there alone, will your fear evaporate away.

Verses 9-10. Jacob demonstrates just how far he has come on his spiritual journey from Haran here. He stops and prays. He casts his cares upon the Lord and recognizes that the Lord alone can and will lift him up. 1 Peter 5:5-7. Arrogance has been replaced by prayerful dependence upon the Lord alone. He recognizes that he stands in the line of promise and that what he asks for is not on the basis of any merit on his part but because he stands in the Plan of God. Daniel 9:3-10, 1Timothy 1:12-15.

He remembers in prayer that he is unworthy of any grace he receives, but he remembers that the Lord has told him to do this and in prayer he calls the Lord to honour his words and bring him through safely. He records that he has divided his group into two bands and seeks the Lord's blessing on them both, in spite of his doubts which have led to his division of the group into two. He rests upon the Lord's power, in his plan, and in his protection. Psalms 91:11-16, Philippians 4:6-7.

Verses 11- 12. He knows Esau and his reputation. Esau must have done the things Jacob fears here, and these are significant massacres that he speaks of in verse eleven. Esau has fallen upon his enemies and he has killed women with their children in their arms! Do not doubt the Lord's reasons for "hatred" of this man – he is in hell today awaiting the last judgment. Obadiah, Malachi 1:2. This is no pleasant picnic meeting with a maligned but good man; Esau is evil. Jacob knows this man is capable of great evil and that he has gained wealth by his sword.

His fears are well grounded, but his faith is now well grounded also; his faith is in the Lord ALONE, upon whom he casts himself for deliverance. 1 John 4:4. He rests upon the clear and certain word of the Lord that he will live and his seed after him, and that good will come to him if he returns to the land, not evil. Genesis 28:13-15. He claims the Word of God as more real than his fear, and so advances in the will and plan of God. He faces his fears with faith, and though he worries as he moves forward, he keeps on moving forward to his date with destiny. We are called to "mix the Word of God with our faith", and so we will advance in the Lord's plan under his blessing and protection. Hebrews 3:15 – 4:12.

Verses 13-16. He stays at the campsite for another night to rest and refresh him self for the next day's meeting. He is not in any rush, for the Lord's will is to be done without panic or haste, but steadily and systematically obeyed. He prepares a significant gift for Esau of animals from the flocks and herds. He separates them into a number of groups so that they will be driven apart by several hundred metres and Esau will come upon them group by group and see the gifts one by one and he hopes will be moved by Jacob's peace offering.

This is a tribute offering, and is Jacob's sincere attempt to make his peace with the brother who he has so seriously wronged. It is right and proper that he gives these gifts, and he sets a good example to us when we seek forgiveness from one we have wronged, that we come with more than just cheap words. Matthew 5:23-26. If we have seriously offended, or taken goods from someone we don't come with a "sorry I'm caught", we must come with adequate compensation and recognition of their righteousness.

Verses 17 – 20. He shows himself both penitent and wise here, for with the staggered present and the words of the servants he hopes to lower any rage Esau feels gradually to the point where they meet. Matthew 10:16. As identified above, his fears are well grounded in the experiences of the peoples of their day. Esau lived by his sword and he had the men to back his use of it.

Jacob will practise the policy of appeasement, and here it will be successful, but it will not be because of the presents, but because Esau has grown up over the last twenty years, and seeks peace with his brother for his father's sake. Both men are past their nineties, and while in good health and destined to live many more years, they are seeking the peace of mind that most seek as they age and draw closer to their meeting with their maker. Esau is an unbeliever, but he seeks peace in his last years, not hatred towards his brother. Simple exhaustion has worn him down, but Jacob is right in his penitence, for he has done wrong by his brother and he knows it and fully acknowledges it.

These are the human, psychological explanations, and for most these things are understandable, but the reason behind Esau's mercy here above all others, is that the Lord has gone before Jacob. He is safe because the Lord has removed the hatred from within Esau and replaced it with the desire for peace in the family. This man will reject worship of the Lord, but he respects those who do worship the Lord and has some goodness within him still (at least towards his family – if not towards those who cross him!) God goes before us if we walk with Him!

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. When we have caused offence it is right and proper to do anything we can to try to deal with the results of our trickery or foolishness. As far as possible we are to try to be at peace with all men, and we are to stop our attempts only when they make it clear that they will not make peace with us. Let us work to ensure there is no rock of offence on our side of any relationship we have.

2. Jacob moves to confront his problem with Esau; he does not try to avoid or deny it. If we have an issue to be faced, then let us prayerfully consider the correct action, and then take it without any undue delay. Problems are to be faced, not hidden from.
3. The angels are present to stand by us in all confrontations the Lord calls us to be involved in. We stand under God's three fold protection; the Lord fellowships with us, the Holy Spirit fellowships within us, and the angels surround us. Let us advance in the Lord's will and so resolve anything we can.
4. Jacob has won the battle against arrogance and over-confidence; he walks now in the filling of the Holy Spirit with thought and prayer. He has confidence in the Lord, but not over confidence in himself or his power. He has learned that he is a man and needs to Lord walking with him. The Lord goes before his people when they walk his paths – Hallelujah!

REFLECTIONS UPON OVERCOMING BY FAITH

1. By faith learn to accept conditions we face as God's will for our life and we are thankful and prayerful, rather than fearful and panic stricken - Romans 8:28, 1 Thessalonians 3:3; 5:18
2. By faith we maintain fellowship with God, walking in the light of the Word - Psalm 119:105, 1 John 1:7
3. By faith consistently day by day we examine our conduct, and sit with the truth about our conduct, and are daily confessing all known sins - 1 Corinthians 11:28, 31, 1 John 1:9.
4. By faith receive the Word of God daily as being more necessary than daily food. - Matthew 4:4; 5:6, 2 Peter 3:18
5. By faith approach the throne of grace boldly in every case of need, requesting aid, casting every care on Him. - Hebrews 4:15,16; 1 Peter 5:7
6. By faith resist the attempts of Satan and he will flee from you. - Ephesians 6:10-13, 1 Peter 5:8
7. By faith maintain the habit of thinking and meditating on spiritual values and priorities - Philippians 4:6-9
8. Walk by faith and not by sight – God's Word being more real than the problems faced - 2 Corinthians 5:7

REFLECTIONS UPON THE PILGRIM LIFE

1. A pilgrim is a sojourner in a strange place; a stranger in a foreign country.
2. The believer is a pilgrim in this world as our real home country is a heavenly one (John 15:19 Ephesians 2:19; 1 Peter 2:11).
3. This is illustrated in the lives of the Patriarchs (Genesis 47:9; Exodus 6:4; Hebrews 11:8-10; 13-16).
4. When the people of Israel were living in the promised land they were, from a spiritual point of view, still pilgrims as their day to inherit the land was yet future – and it still is even as we read this today (Psalm 39:12; 119:54).
5. So too are Christians, even when living in peace and prosperity under a so called "Christian government" we are still pilgrims, and as the days darken we see more and more biblical principles trampled by our governments. (Matthew 6:19-21; Luke 12:34).
6. The life of a Christian is a pilgrimage. This theme is worked out in great detail in John Bunyan's well-known allegory, "The Pilgrim's Progress".
7. Our heavenly home will not come gradually. The existing system will be destroyed and replaced by God Himself – nothing else will change things (2 Peter 3:12-13; Revelation 3:12; 21:2,10).

Notes

GENESIS 32:21-32

21 So went the present over before him: and himself lodged that night in the company. 22 And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two Women servants, and his eleven sons, and passed over the ford Jabbok. 23 And he took them, and sent them over the brook, and sent over that he had. 24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. 25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. 26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. 27 And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. 28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. 29 And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there. 30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved. 31 And as he passed over Peniel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh. 32 Therefore the children of Israel eat not of the sinew which shrank, which is upon the hollow of the thigh, unto this day: because he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh in the sinew that shrank."

REFLECTION

Verses 21-22. Jacob rests with the host for the first part of the night and may have planned to pray for the journey and the confrontation he will face, and will finally have the entire host head away in the early hours of the morning while it is still dark. He sends the entire camp ahead of him across the ford and waits back to spend time with the Lord in prayer. This tells us that he was very organized, with everyone in his encampment knowing their roll to break camp and move quickly and quietly, without any noise that will warn others of their moving. They are a well oiled machine and move off into the early morning darkness as a group and ford the stream quietly in the darkness.

The Arab, or Edomite raiders liked to attack with the sun over their shoulder, so a night attack or dawn attack was not preferred, but an attack as the sun came over the hills around 8-9am was. Jacob will be most vulnerable to attack as his great host fords the stream, so he ensures he gets them over it before the time most likely for an attack if there is to be one. Jacob is thinking, planning and prepared for any eventuality. He has faith that the Lord will deliver, for he has the Lord's words on that, but he is ready to fight if he must fight, or flee if he must flee. Nehemiah also practises this active faith. Nehemiah 4:14-18.

Notice also Moses reminds us again that the two concubines are not "wives", but errors of judgment on Jacob's part. Jacob is forgiven and the children are not to be considered illegitimate, but God does not approve of the actions, nor does he overlook the sins involved. Jacob is alone at the ford where once his entire camp was moving past him, and alone he faces a visitation from the Lord.

Verses 23-24. All he had he sent over the brook and waited alone in the darkness. He was met by the Lord, but not as he may have expected, for the Lord met him in the form of a man and wrestled with him all through the remainder of the night. Now Jacob is an older man and this tells us just how fit and strong he was still. He was a man who other men didn't mess around with. Moses refers to the angelic visitor as a man, for that is how he appears. Most think this to be the Lord, given the blessing that will be given is not given in God's name, but as if it is the Lord who speaks.

Jacob clearly believes it to have been the Lord. (Verses 28-30.) Jacob wrestles with the Lord through these last hours of the night quite physically and he won't give up. Now this is Jacob's nature, and this is what the Lord must alter before he can truly enter into the path the Lord has for him. He must be prepared to modify his walk under the Lord's guidance and change his ways within the family. He must look to the Lord's blessing alone, not his innate physical strength.

Verses 25-26. The Lord sees that he is not going to win against Jacob by simple wrestling in a human way, because this man just will not give up. So the Lord just touches the hollow of his thigh and puts his hip joint out of its socket. This is the most excruciating pain that can be felt, but Jacob still will not let the Lord go. The Lord says, stop this wrestling because it is now daybreak, but Jacob just clings to the Lord and refuses to let go until he is blessed. There is no trickery now to get this blessing, but just sheer desperation on Jacob's part.

He clings to the Lord and seeks his blessing, for he knows now that in his own strength he can do nothing, and as he faces Esau in a few hours he needs the Lord with him, and he needs to move forward in the Lord's blessing alone. All his strength is spent, but the Lord with a touch has put his hip out of joint; it is this power he needs now to carry him through his pain and fear. Only the Lord's blessing is worth having and with his last remaining strength Jacob seeks that above all else. Psalms 67:1-7, 115:12-13. He is now in the right place – in the hands of God alone – not his human strength.

Verses 27 – 28. The Lord gets Jacob to say his name aloud. Why does the Lord ask him his name for he knows it already? Jacob says his name aloud and it's very meaning reminds him that he is an "ankle tapper", a trickster, and that his blessing was gained by devious and tricky means. By saying his own name aloud Jacob remembers his weakness and announces it openly. The Lord then re-names him Israel, and calls him a prince of God.

Now the name actually means “God’s fighter”, for he fought with God and he has “won” the contest with men (Laban, and soon with Esau) and with God. It is the Lord’s way of saying that he is blessed by God’s grace and has been enabled to win, and will be enabled to win again. Israel does not leave this place saying “I am the greatest”. He will limp away from this encounter a humbled man and obedient to the Lord’s commands to him, aware that he has been blessed indeed. He will be called by Moses alternately Jacob (when he is in his human strength) and Israel (when he is operating under God’s power and guidance), whereas once Abram and Sarai gets new names, they alone are used. It is a reminder to us that Jacob is a fallen man with many weaknesses and he does not solve or resolve them all, and walks uncertainly with God at times.

While his hip is back in joint the nerve at the hip joint will give him pain for the rest of his life and his limp will remind him that he is just a weak man when compared to the mighty God who made him. The limp will also remind him of grace; that he survived the encounter with the Lord and was blessed by him. 2 Corinthians 12:7. Jacob’s limp and Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” were reminders of their frailty and need for absolute dependence upon God’s power, and were God’s way of safeguarding against any arrogance on their part, given the wonderful experiences they had experienced. Jacob is an encouragement to us, for he is far from perfect in his faith and his walk with God. Hosea 12:1-6.

Verses 29-32. Jacob asks the Lord his name. The Lord answers his question with a question, telling him that it is none of his business, in a polite way. John 21:20-22. Jacob then fully recognizes the significance of what has happened and calls the ford Peniel, meaning the face of God. The brook also may get it’s name from this incident, for it probably means “wrestling place”. The traditional Jewish habit of avoiding eating the nerve sinews of animals that are found where the leg muscles attach to the pelvis at the hip is also mentioned by Moses here, for it dated back to this incident. The damage to Jacob’s nerve is permanent, as is the renaming of this man. He will be the “God-Wrestler” all his life and he will be blessed by grace as he limps along in the plan of God for him and his family.

This reminds us all that the Lord can deal with us without our being perfect in every way! We are saved as sinners, and we are called to walk with the Lord in God’s strength and Holy Spirit power, for then alone we serve him as we ought. Our strength has nothing to offer the Lord, but through his strength we can do great things. John 14:11-12, 1 Corinthians 3:10-17.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. It does not matter if we limp through life with a physical ailment. If the Lord heals us of all our diseases we can be thankful, but genuine spiritual growth will lead us to praise him in our infirmities also, for like Paul and Jacob we can learn greater things and do greater things in Holy Spirit power through illness, than any man can do in their human strength. Our infirmities remind us of our human weakness and the unacceptable nature of all man’s works. All man does is weak unless empowered by the Holy Spirit. Let us walk in the Holy Spirit today, for only then can we please the Lord our God.
2. Jacob lacks complete faith that the Lord will deliver, but he shows he applies what faith he has by moving forward to meet Esau. The Lord does not demand that we have perfect faith, for he knows we are dust! Psalms 103:14. What the Lord seeks from us is that through our fears, worries, and weaknesses, we keep moving steadily forward in the power of the Holy Spirit alone.
3. Jacob wrestles with the Lord to learn the lesson that his strength is no match for Gods, and that God does not need his strength to accomplish the plan he has for him. Do not take this incident to teach that prayer is wrestling with God, for it is not that at all. Prayer is not laying hold on God’s reluctance and twisting God’s arm to bless us! Prayer is resting in the perfect character of God for blessing.

Notes

CHAPTER 33**JACOB AND ESAU****GENESIS 33:1-20**

“1 And Jacob lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. And he divided the children unto Leah, and unto Rachel, and unto the two handmaids. 2 And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost. 3 And he passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. 4 And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept. 5 And he lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and said, Who are those with thee? And he said, The children which God hath graciously given thy servant. 6 Then the handmaidens came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves. 7 And Leah also with her children came near, and bowed themselves: and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves. 8 And he said, What meanest thou by all this drove which I met? And he said, These are to find grace in the sight of my lord. 9 And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself. 10 And Jacob said, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me. 11 Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough. And he urged him, and he took it. 12 And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee. 13 And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die. 14 Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir. 15 And Esau said, Let me now leave with thee some of the folk that are with me. And he said, What needeth it? let me find grace in the sight of my lord. 16 So Esau returned that day on his way unto Seir. 17 And Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built him an house, and made booths for his cattle: therefore the name of the place is called Succoth. 18 And Jacob came to Shalem, a city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Padanaram; and pitched his tent before the city. 19 And he bought a parcel of a field, where he had spread his tent, at the hand of the children of Hamor, Shechem's father, for an hundred pieces of money. 20 And he erected there an altar, and called it Eleloheisrael.”

REFLECTION

Have your Bible maps open as you read this passage in it's entirety. Esau lives in Mount Seir which is the name for a mountain range that runs from what will be the home of the Edomites in the days of Moses, at the bottom of the Dead Sea, up through what will be the home of the Moabites and Ammonites. Esau is a fair way away from Jacob when Jacob's first servants meet him, but he has moved quickly up the road to meet his brother once he knows he is coming after twenty years away. He is not alone!

Verses 1-3. Jacob has now crossed over the ford of the river Jabbok and has caught up to his family and their animals in their herds moving steadily south. Jacob is at the head of the column and sees Esau coming at the head of an army of 400 men! It is the second time he faces vastly superior military forces in the open fields, where he has his women and children and they are unencumbered and are heading towards him to do their business with him. Humanly speaking, Jacob cannot know what is in Esau's mind, yet he has the mind of God, for the angel of the Lord has told him in vision, appearance and dream that he will be safe from his brother. 1 Corinthians 2:13-16.

Jacob quickly separates his family into four groups and sets them in order. Now look at the order here, for it is a sacrificial order. He places the concubines first, so they will be the first killed if there are people to be killed and Rachel and Joseph last, so they will have the chance to flee. It is the sort of open favouritism that will undo Joseph later, and not the sort of action that will build team spirit in the family. They should all be together, for the Lord's promise is to all for deliverance. They stand or fall together, but that is not the message they have received from their father and leader.

There was no need to divide his family. It is a sad reminder that this man is flawed and plays favourites with his wives and children. They are all the children of Israel, but from the beginning they are not bound together in the bonds of love and mutual care, but are divided by their father's game playing. Jacob is not to be praised in his actions here, but he is to be praised in going first ahead of them all to meet his brother alone. He humbles himself before his brother and prostrates himself on the ground in front of him seven times.

This is a very formal apology and also a recognition of Esau's military superiority and eldership. Jacob is not standing in the place of arrogance here, nor is he taking the blessing of their father as his right to authority; rather he is giving way to Esau as his superior, for at this time he certainly is. Proverbs 6:1-6. He is also ready to sacrifice himself for his family and this shows the courage we are all called to as leaders of our households. Ephesians 5:25-29.

Verses 4-5. Jacob has prayed for deliverance and received the promise of deliverance, and now he receives the reality of forgiveness and deliverance from the anger of his brother towards him. Esau shows himself a man

who loves his family members and does not now seek their harm. He has received his blessing and is happy with his life as a desert raider. He does not seek the blessing of Jacob for he has made his own path.

They are both older men now and all the disputes of the past are behind them both. They seek their own or the Lord's will for their lives, and are focused upon where they are going now with their lives, rather than backwards to their past conflict and differences. Both have accepted who they are and are content with the path they have made their own. Jacob is clear that the Lord God alone has blessed him and brought him through. He does not boast about his wealth and power, but gives glory to God for the things and people that the Lord has added to him since his departure twenty years before. Psalms 34:1-4, Proverbs 16:1-9, John 13:1ff.

Verses 6-7. By Jacob dividing his family into groups he has opened the door to a reverse order of value and status in his introductions to Esau. In effect the concubines have priority of place in introductions and Rachel is last. His attempt to protect Rachel has meant that she is introduced as the last or least important wife and Joseph as the last son. It is always a foolish thing to operate on the basis of the need to escape from a situation that the Lord has led you into! If the Lord has led us into a place, then he will lead us through whatever we are to face there, and lead us out the other side to the next step on our path to glory. Psalms 124:1-8, Jeremiah 29:11-14, 1 Corinthians 10:13, James 5:10-11.

Verses 8-9. Jacob has been generous in his gift, which even today would be worth several hundred thousand dollars, but Esau is more generous and noble. He does not need, nor does he desire the wealth of Jacob, but he does seek his fellowship and for there to be peace between them.

Esau is keen to tell his brother that he needs nothing from him, for it is his way of demonstrating his superiority. Neither need the other now, nor seek anything from the other except peace, and that will be granted by Esau, although there will be little peace between their descendents. Esau knows that Jacob seeks his forgiveness and he is careful not to grant it aloud, but to act in such a way that Jacob knows he is no longer at risk from his brother's vengeance. Esau does not desire vengeance any more, for he has better things to do with his time.

Jacob is an irrelevancy to Esau, and sadly so is the belief system of Jacob. Esau is a man quite content with his present life and all it brings to him, and he seeks nothing from God, Isaac, or Jacob. He is a self satisfied and self centred man. This is why he will disappear from the pages of redemptive history and the majority of his descendents will oppose the true line of Messiah. The greatest of them, Herod the Great, will seek to kill the Messiah as a child, exactly as Esau has killed mothers with their children. Genesis 32:8-11, Matthew 2:16-18.

Verses 10-11. Once a gift is given it should never be taken back lest the giver be seen as a game player. What is given is given on the basis of what God's grace has given to you, and so in grace it is offered, and if not accepted it is passed on to another to bless them. Jacob does not accept the gift back, but politely requests Esau to accept the gift, as from the Lord who has blessed Jacob in being restored to his brother. Esau now cannot refuse, and Jacob urges acceptance for he knows it is important. The reception of this gift also guaranteed Jacob's safety, for it was, in effect, a covenant between them to do no harm to each other. Jacob has been able to state what the gift means; restoration of fellowship between the brothers, and so Esau's acceptance lays the foundation for peace between them formally in front of witnesses.

Verses 12 – 13. Jacob plays for time here. The time may be the early autumnal birthing time when the herds are about to give birth and the next two months of settled grazing are required to ensure the mothers and their young get a good start before the winter months. Jacob appeals to a truth here, but uses it to buy the time and delays joining Esau at Mt Seir. Esau has, in effect, invited Jacob to use the pastures he has control over for grazing, and for Jacob to settle in Mt Seir and live close by Esau.

This is not the plan of God for Jacob, and Moses is silent about his journey there, if he made one at all. Commentators speculate about what happens next for Moses does not cover it, but simply records Jacob's return to the land of Canaan. It may be he pastured his flocks and herds around the Jabbok River and he himself joined Esau for a time in Mt Seir, or that they stayed there for a season as a group. We simply do not know. The next event with Dinah occurs after they have been outside the town of Shechem for a year or more.

Verses 14- 16. Esau is ready to leave a protective (and perhaps a coercive) force with Jacob to assist him and bring him on towards Mt Seir. This may be a necessity, as hostile forces may be around this area. This may be the reason that Esau has his four hundred men with him! Jacob does not mind however, believing himself to be well prepared for any attacks upon them that may be mounted.

Esau takes his leave towards Seir in the south, and Jacob heads for Succoth, about seven kilometres to the west, back over the other side of the Jabbok River. He is heading for good winter pasture in this move, and has gone back over the river they forded for the meeting with Esau. He is clearly not heading for Seir. When they next meet, at their father's funeral, they are friends, so whatever happens here Esau does not feel cheated by his brother again. Jacob has made friends and the friendship holds beyond Isaac's death.

Verses 17 – 20. It does appear to be the same time as the meeting with Esau that this occurs, with the autumn birthing of the cattle and sheep and goats being provided for by the building of winter stock quarters there in Succoth. He rests there over the winter months until the young are strong. It may be then that the visit to Esau occurs for a number of years are glossed over by Moses in the story around this point. From Succoth, at some time in the next few months or

years, he moves across the Jordan River and pitches his camp outside the walled city/village of Shalem belonging to King Hamor and Prince Shechem.

This is a way of saying he has negotiated grazing rights with this king (or Hittite Governor) and his court. This is one of the many small city-states of the region that operated here in Hittite times, independent places with their own governance, but paying taxes-tribute to the Hittite Empire.

Like Abraham and Isaac, Jacob must pay his way to secure grazing rights, and in return sell his produce through the market place in this city. He buys some land here and it is a considerable holding upon which to secure his tent city. This is the way the locals secure his commitment to their town. He must pay for the land upon which he pitches his tent, and there may be some responsibilities associated with this towards their defence in time of attack also, although the arrangement is a loose one and the king will seek the opportunity Dinah's seduction gives to try to tighten up the agreement they have and make it more beneficial to their town.

As a land holder Jacob may have to provide men to defend the town under their feudal law. This was the system that operated here in Hittite times. The locals are happy with the present loose arrangement for a time, and it suits Jacob, but he does not educate his children about the loose attitude to sexuality and the general paganism of the locals, nor does he physically guard his daughter Dinah from their influence, or warn of the threat of rape from these pagans.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Jacob does not operate on the basis of his father's blessing, but upon the basis of grace. He does not expect Esau to recognize his position as leader of the household by "birth-right", nor by father's blessing, and is content to be the servant of his brother, freely accepting his lordship over him. Jacob has now seen that the rulership that the Lord has promised him may be generations away and he is content to await the Lord's plan and the timing of the plan of God rather than any desires of his own. We need to be cautious about claiming "rights" in the Lord's service. If we are called to leadership in the Lord's work, then we are called to servant leadership, not rulership as men desire. Matthew 20:25-28.
2. Jacob is ready to place his life on the line for his wives and children, and this is the standard of the Christian husband today; a man is to be prepared to lay his life down for his wife, or else she should not marry him.
3. Favouritism will unhinge this family as the years roll by. Jacob is not to be followed in his example in this matter. He favours his wife Rachel, and his son Joseph. Now Joseph is, as we will see, well ahead of his brothers in truth and dependability, but he has the same arrogance that has led Jacob into trouble. Jacob has not taught his sons and daughters the things he should have. He is an example of careless parenting, and the results are the evidence that such a "hands off" approach is not to be followed by believers today. We are called to lead our children into truth and educate them in the paths that they should follow, not leave them to their own devices. Proverbs 22:6, Deuteronomy 4:9, 6:4-9, Psalms 78:1-8, Ephesians 6:4, 2 Timothy 3:15.
4. The Lord in grace protects Jacob, going before him in the path that he has been ordered to walk to keep him safe. Just so the Lord walks before us to ensure that where we walk in accordance with his will is a safe and secure path.

Notes

CHAPTER 34**JACOB AND DINAH**

GENESIS 34:1-31

“1 And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. 2 And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her. 3 And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel. 4 And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife. 5 And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter: now his sons were with his cattle in the field: and Jacob held his peace until they were come. 6 And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to commune with him. 7 And the sons of Jacob came out of the field when they heard it: and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter: which thing ought not to be done. 8 And Hamor communed with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you give her him to wife. 9 And make ye marriages with us, and give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you. 10 And ye shall dwell with us: and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein. 11 And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren, Let me find grace in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give. 12 Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife. 13 And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully, and said, because he had defiled Dinah their sister: 14 And they said unto them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us: 15 But in this will we consent unto you: If ye will be as we be, that every male of you be circumcised; 16 Then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. 17 But if ye will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone. 18 And their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem Hamor's son. 19 And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter: and he was more honourable than all the house of his father. 20 And Hamor and Shechem his son came unto the gate of their city, and communed with the men of their city, saying, 21 These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein; for the land, behold, it is large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us give them our daughters. 22 Only herein will the men consent unto us for to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised. 23 Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of their's be our's? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us. 24 And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city. 25 And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. 26 And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out. 27 The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister. 28 They took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field, 29 And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house. 30 And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. 31 And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?”

REFLECTION

Jacob is not wrong in making a grazing deal with the ruler of Shechem under Hittite Law, for he is in the land of Canaan and while they rule there their Law stands and must be kept by Jacob, just as local laws must be kept today by believers. The only exception is where their laws command us to disobey a clear command of God. We are commanded to pray for rulers and governments and to be good citizens even though it is clear that all the rulers of the world in Jesus day (and clearly many times since) were Satan's to offer to the Lord. Matthew 4:8-10, Hebrews 13:7, 17, 1 Peter 2:17.

While we must live in man's society we are commanded to not be "of it"; we are to maintain our witness to the truth in the midst of the devil's world. We are to live as doves amongst buzzards, as sheep amongst wolves. Matthew 10:16ff. While we pray for these evil men they may even try to abuse and kill us, but we are not to resist them, rather we are to pray for them. Matthew 5:44, 1 Peter 2:13-17.

Verses 1-3. Dinah makes a terrible mistake in visiting the homes of the unbelieving Hittites amongst whom they lived. This was, and always will be, simply an unsafe thing to do. For a young person to enter the houses of unbelievers is to place themselves at their mercy sexually. It is foolish for believers to party and relax with those to whom they ought to be giving the Gospel; it is to walk into danger every time it is done.

Dinah is out of the Lord's will here, and her father is also to be blamed for not exercising the control and guidance that he ought to have as her father in the midst of morally dangerous people. This young Hittite prince is not a bad man in his culture; he is a normal young man, who sees a beautiful young woman and takes her to himself and seduces her. There

is no rape here in the violent sense of the term, but he takes sexual advantage of her in a situation she ought not to have got herself into, and in which she has not had the guidance to know what even the dangers were.

Moses is particularly interested in the dynamic that emerges from the home of Jacob, and gives very specific instructions in the Mosaic Law about rape and seduction of women by men who force their attentions upon them. The Mosaic Law even went as far as covering the protection of beautiful young woman taken captive in warfare. The young woman captured was to be protected, and a full month was to be taken before the Hebrew man begins any sexual relationship with the woman. Deuteronomy 21:10-14. If he at any time decides he doesn't like her in that period, (and she is to shave her head and pare her nails so that her physical attractiveness is diminished through this time), then he is to set her free. She is not to be treated as a slave at any time.

Women were to be protected from being taken sexual advantage of, but all adultery was to be punished by death, and both the perpetrators of this sin were to be stoned to death. Compare this standard to the incident when a woman taken in adultery is brought before the Lord, without the man also! John 8:3ff. There was no double standard in the Mosaic Law. Special provision was made for the seduction of an unmarried woman where the girl is happy to marry the man, and the man is prepared to pay a dowry price, but in such cases there is no later right to divorce at all. Marriage was sacred and those who wilfully broke that divine institution of God for man were to be eliminated from society. Deuteronomy 22:22-29.

What has happened here to Dinah is wrong, but under the later Mosaic Law, if the man who seduced a woman accepted the faith of Israel and paid the bride price (dowry), then he was to be accepted as her husband. He would be required to commit totally to the woman and her faith, and there was no right at any future time of divorce in such a case. Having seen the latter Mosaic standard, let us see what happens in the tent of Jacob the day he hears the news of the results of Dinah's foolish trip into the town of Prince Shechem.

Verses 4- 7. Shechem loves Dinah and after having sex with her still loves her and wants her as his wife. This man is not an abuser, for such men despise the women they seduce. This man loves her genuinely, but he has gone about it the wrong way. He ought to have approached Jacob first, and not to do so is a serious insult. His pagan arrogance, as the ruler, has operated here and he is worthy of death for this, especially as he keeps Dinah hostage in his house while his father attempts the negotiating. On these two grounds here the sons of Israel are able to take action; their sister has been violated, and also kept captive in the house of her seducer.

Their "love story" is not the issue, for the course of their love has been dishonourable, and also no-where does Moses record that Dinah loves Prince Shechem, only that he loved her. The fact that Dinah is not allowed to return to her father's house would indicate she would not support the match if she was free. The father of Shechem attempts to negotiate with Jacob. Jacob does not answer King Hamor until the boys are all in camp, out of the fields. They are all angry to the greatest level possible; they feel personally the seduction of their sister and the dishonour it has brought to the whole family for her to be treated this way, rather than Shechem approach them and ask her hand properly well before any sexual contact.

Jacob is so shocked that he is silent, and says nothing, and initially this shock is understandable, but as the hours tick by his silence will be fatal to all the men of Shechem. Jacob needs to take the lead role here, but he does not, rather his sons take over and do the negotiating. Jacob may be depressed and burdened by his guilt here, in lacking the moral courage to take charge of his house and give moral and safety guidance to his children. He has let them bring themselves up and this evil is the result. Whatever his reasons, he is wrong not to shake himself into godly action here.

He remains silent and depressed at the turn of events, and here his depressed state is sinful, for he is the leader and ought to have taken charge and said the things that needed to be said. Depression as such is not sinful, but when we do not face our shortcomings they will build to Tsunami size, and that is what has happened to Jacob. Depression unfaced can become sin and great evil! His many years of inattention to his children's upbringing have produced an inability now to act when he needs to and many men will die as a result. His depression and its mental paralysis here is a result of sinful neglect, and as such his depression is a reflection of his own sinful self pity; as such it is self indulgent and evil!

I have seen many cases of this in my clinical work down the years. I worked many years ago with a woman who failed to speak up when her father's will was changed by a half brother on the last day of their father's life, when he was clearly in no fit state to change a will. This evil caused her to lose all her inheritance but she remained silent, not telling her children that they had been robbed. Her foolishness cost the entire family it's inheritance.

The reasons for this were based in her personality, that had become, by years of practise, guarded and secretive, to the point that she did not trust her own children, and so she robbed herself of the good counsel that could have been given, and the support that was there for her. She needed to speak up and seek guidance, but her pattern of secrecy and inaction caught up with her, just as Jacob's life pattern of avoidance of problems caught up with him. Silence is not golden, it can be cowardice or foolishness, and it certainly is here in Jacob's case! If we do not speak up when we should the Lord holds us responsible for what will unfold.

Verses 8-12. The local Hittite leader speaks to the entire gathering of the men of Jacob's house, with all there, from the youngest to the oldest. Jacob is at the centre and the boys are around him and the Hittite speaks and gives his "deal" that will be, in effect, a formal covenant of unity between them. This is something that they cannot really enter into, for these people are still totally pagan, and to marry their sister and daughter to this man's son is to join her

permanently to an unbeliever in the true God. The spiritual reality is the crucial one here, and through their anger and outrage they do see that, but Jacob does not rise up and explain a godly way through this impasse. He sits and listens and gives no spiritual, or moral guidance.

Hamor is cunning here, for he recognizes what he is doing. He is using the present situation to try to negotiate a full alliance with the camp of Jacob and thereby gain all the fighting men and the goods of Jacob through inter-marriages to his young women. He is aiming at the elimination within one or two generations of Jacob's camp as a separate entity. Inter-marriage will end their spiritual difference also, just as it has in the family of Nahor that stayed in Haran. It has only taken two generations to destroy their faith in the one true God.

Hittite philosophy, represented by their prince/governor Hamor, was to rule and control local populations by marriage alliances and shared worship of pagan gods; this is their plan here. This is also the reminder that we do not have a full account of all the children of Jacob, and that there are a number of daughters in the camp. This is a reminder also that Dinah didn't need to go into Shechem and should not have gone. They should have stuck to themselves and maintained their witness outside the gates of the city and drawn people to them with holiness.

Abraham and Isaac have dealt with these people and had Jacob passed on the wisdom that was in the tablets that Moses is working from, then Dinah would have been taught correctly and would have had no excuse for her foolish actions. Dinah has followed Lot and been enticed into a situation that will deepen in it's carnage. Refer back to Genesis chapter 19 for a full discussion of the dangers of compromise with immorality.

Verses 13 – 18. It was Jacob's place to reply to the prince of the Hittites here, but the boys speak up for him and he does not counter their words, nor seek to discuss things with them, but most significantly he does not call a halt to proceedings, seek Dinah's immediate return, and build an altar and pray! He does not seek the return of his daughter, and this shows weakness, and he does not seek time to build an altar and centre his answer upon the revelation of God's will and that opens the door to human works on the part of his sons, and human works will be evil here. It is sinful neglect of his own responsibilities as a father that has led to Dinah's ignorant and foolish act, and only the Lord can solve such a thing.

When we face a shocking thing, we must first seek time to look up to hear the Lord's words, well before we look out, and answer men. Jacob does not pray, and he does not speak, and so his boys centre themselves in their anger rather than in the doctrine of God's revelation.

The boys move into the same devious pattern of scheming that their father used to practise in his own life. They hatch a plan for revenge. They have seen slaves bought in the market place and then circumcised by Jacob as a covenant sign and brought into the family through this sign. They have observed that an adult male is completely debilitated on the third day after a circumcision and is unable to defend himself.

They use this observable fact and the truth that their sister cannot marry an uncircumcised man and add the two together and plan to murder all the men of Shechem in revenge for their sister's seduction. They do not desire, nor will they accept Shechem's men as their brothers, for they know that these men are pagans and they do not like them, nor do they like their beliefs. They do not intend to keep any covenant they make with these men.

It is this deliberate act of deception and the taking of God's name in vain by them in the promise they make to the men of Shechem that makes this act most evil. They have ignored and insulted the spiritual and have followed their own carnal desires, just as the prince of Shechem did. They make a request of the men of the city and open the door of hope for them that they have been forgiven and that there will be peace, when this is simply a way of destroying them all.

They threaten to "take their daughter" and be gone if the deal is not made. This is a clear threat, yet at no point do they ask for Dinah back, nor is her return offered by the ruling men of Shechem. Dinah's desires and thoughts are ignored by all. Both are as dishonest as each other here! The Lord does not directly judge these sons of Jacob for their act here, for the prince of Shechem deserved to die for this seduction of a leading princess of the family of Jacob, and the men of the city do desire to intermarry and so strengthen themselves by Israel's weakening. The issue for Moses, as he recounts this terrible tale, is that they have not prayed and sought the Lord's face, and they act from their Old Sin Natures rather than the will of God. They have not rebuilt an altar and solemnly prayed before it! Jacob has not prayed and led, he has sat in self centred pity. No believer can do this and have any spiritual leadership and credibility without evil resulting.

Verses 19 – 21. The young prince of Shechem is delighted at the news that his father brings to him. He has wisely stayed inside the city walls with Dinah. Moses makes the point that he is more honourable than the men of his city, indicating that this town is full of mostly tough and unreliable pagans. This is not the sort of place that you would want to pick your relatives from amongst. The young prince is the best of them and he is a seducer rather than a true man of honour who would ask for the girls hand before having sex with her. Once again, we have the point underlined for us by the way Moses tells us of the activities within the walls, that these people are corrupt and not to be entered into alliance with.

God's will would have been made clear had they waited and prayed. Had the sons of Jacob only done this under God's guidance they would have been blessed rather than become murderers. Had Jacob only taken the leadership and guided them it could have been different for all! The deal is put by the king to all the men of the city.

Verses 22 – 24. Notice the way the king sells the deal to the men of the city at the city gate. Now this is not a great city, but a walled village of several hundred people. The men meet and discuss the proposal and the trading advantages are discussed and argued. Jacob has a grazing deal with the city and the right to camp on the land he has purchased but what is being envisaged by the ruler is that the deal will mean greater wealth for the men of Shechem. He makes it clear that he believes it will be the absorption of Jacob's wealth into the city. Desire for wealth drives this deal. It is carnality all around, and the most ruthless will win the day, but they are the older sons of Jacob!

Verses 25 – 26. The two full brothers of Dinah took the lead in the slaughter that unfolded on the third day. They could enter the city with impunity as all the men were unable to move freely. They could enter house after house and kill the men, or perhaps the men were all in one place recovering. Men often lived quite separate lives, well away from their women's quarters, and women would stay out of the way if men were discussing things, so surprise could be had in each place if the timing of the attack was right. The two brothers probably had their servants with them, so it could have been a considerable force that executed the plan.

The others were in on the plan and also entered the city, but allowed the full brothers of Dinah to execute the judgment they had determined. The others would have been there in case Levi and Simeon got into trouble, and they were there to enter into every house when the time was right, and take all the women and children as their servants and all the goods of the city for themselves as plunder. The last person slain was Shechem himself, and the last prisoner taken was Dinah, who was released from the house arrest she had been under in Shechem's house.

Verses 27 – 31. Jacob's complaint is a case of speaking up "too little and too late". He had his chance to give guidance before, and his words now ring hollow and hypocritical. Notice his complaint. It is not about the morality of their actions, but simply the possible consequences for him self, and as an after-thought, for them. Jacob's concern is that they are few in number and the Canaanites are many and could kill them quickly and easily. He is of course right in this but the Lord, in Grace (not what they deserve), will deliver them again.

Waste no tears on the men of this town for they were evil men, but they were outplayed by even more nasty ones! This is the real shock; that believers in carnality can act even worse than unbelievers at times! Carnality is capable of great evil, and unless we walk in the Holy Spirit we can fall into all manner of sin and evil! There is no limit to evil if we do not guard our lives with Holy Spirit power. Jacob refused to pray and so he faces multiple murders. It is a dramatic event here, but a powerful illustration of why we are told to walk in the Spirit and give no place at all to the power of the fleshly old man within us all! Romans 8:1-13, Galatians 5:16-24, Ephesians 2:3, Philippians 3:3-4, 1 Peter 3:18-21, 2 Peter 2:10-18, 1 John 2:16.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. We are called to make no provision for our Old Sin Nature or it will lead to all manner of evils. The heart is deceitful and we are capable of anything that unbelievers are capable of. We walk in the Spirit, or we walk into disaster, disgrace and distress.
2. If there is a need for guidance the elders ought to speak up quickly and biblically or be silent permanently. Young hot headed men need the older men to moderate their legitimate and illegitimate anger. Anger is appropriate at times, but it is always wrong to express it without focused power and legitimacy. Anger against evil is appropriate but is always to be expressed within a legal framework. Execution of evil men is commanded by the scriptures to protect the weak, but it is after due process, and without deceit. The death of Shechem is not wrong, but the manner of it brings the person and work of God into disrepute. We must be careful to channel any anger through prayerful consideration of what will bring glory to God and what will not. Anger that does not work righteousness is to be rejected.
3. Immoral men and women have always existed and always will. We need to warn our children of evil and teach them truth and basic safety principles or they will be seduced by evil. Proper training of young people in reality is crucial to keep them safe, but free will may be exercised by them to their detriment. As parents we can only be without excuse and guilt if we have done our job. Jacob is guilty and grief stricken for he did not act as a proper parent earlier. Let us be warned!
4. Satan's greatest attempt to defeat good is by dilution and distraction. Hamor and Shechem attempt to destroy truth by their sexual politics and so win Jacob's wealth and destroy his faith. Jacob is not a morally upright man in many things but he does believe God and seeks to follow him, and his failures do not stop the Plan of God here. The destruction of Shechem is appropriate, for they attempted to destroy the separation of God's people, but God's people do not come out of this well, because they did not seek the Lord's face! Let us defeat evil, but by God's means and therefore to his glory, not by our Old Sin Natures and thereby bring disgrace upon the Lord's good name and upon us all.

CHAPTER 35**THE DEATHS OF RACHEL AND ISAAC****INTRODUCTION**

In verse 1 God tells Jacob to come back to Bethel and dwell there in safety with Him. This is the same place as he saw the vision of what we call "Jacob's ladder". Genesis 28:10-21. Jacob was living like what some call today "crisis Christians". These are believers who keep on living like pagans until they have a crisis in their life. Some Christians have to have a catastrophe in their lives before they seek God's face at all, let alone pray and read the scriptures regularly. The Lord God orders him to build a new altar; this is the Lord's command to get back into fellowship and deal with his sins. 2 Corinthians 13:5. We are ordered exactly as Jacob was to regularly examine ourselves and deal with any sin or disobedient pattern we find in our life. 1 John 1:9, Hebrews 2:1-4, 12:1-3.

The spiritual vacuum that Jacob has left in the family has been filled by false religion and Jacob now sees that he has to do something about it. He tells them to purify themselves spiritually and be ready to serve the living God in spirit and in truth. They are to clean out the strange gods from their bed rooms and clean their bodies and garments. Sadly, if parents do not set the example of godliness and true spirituality, then their children will pick up ungodliness from the people they come into daily contact with.

The family members will give him the gods and ear rings. Ear rings were involved with paganism and worship of the pagan gods. They had adopted the customs and jewellery of their pagan neighbours, and when you admire people and their "culture" you will tend to be influenced by their beliefs over time. They now changed their clothes, and then proper sacrifices and prayers were offered at the altar, and they had a family revival led by Jacob. [Verse 4]

A revival occurs when a believer deals with sin in their life under the authority of God, and so cleans up their personal and then their family witness. The blessing of God on Jacob is shown by a new name, Israel which means "prince of God" or "God will rule". God sees us all as he sees Jacob; he sees us how we will be under the control of the power of the Holy Spirit. He treats us all in grace, which we should be very thankful for. Jacob doesn't deserve the grace he receives, but then neither do we!

In **verses 11-13** God tells Jacob that he is a true physical and spiritual descendant of Abraham and will inherit the promises made to Abraham. For the rest of the Bible he is either called Jacob or Israel. When he is called Jacob it is a sign that he, or his people, are under the control of the old sin nature whilst when they are under the power of the Holy Spirit he, or his people, are called Israel. Just as the daily choice regarding spirituality or carnality was Jacob's, just so the daily choice is also ours as we deal with sin in our life. We too can be like the "princes of God" or we can "do a Jacob" and play the shyster!

The weakness in Jacob is seen in **verses 21-22** in the fact that he was over indulgent with his family especially Joseph. Jacob however faces his biggest test yet with his concubine Bilhah, when Reuben goes in and has sexual relations with her. Now he is following his father's example, and the woman herself does not complain about this activity, and she is at least twenty years older than Reuben, and may have been his nurse at times!

Jacob does nothing about this great evil as he is weak. This was a sin punishable by death under the Mosaic Law and so Moses writes about this and moves on, indicating his disapproval, but also his recognition that grace and forgiveness can operate at times. Moses is not condoning these things, and subsequent judgments upon Reuben and Bilhah in the family will probably be severe. The fact that Jacob records this in the tablets that get passed down to Moses tells us that he is disgusted and wants the sin recorded, but his weakness, as with Dinah, leads to lack of action.

The Lord can overcome all our weaknesses by his own actions in our lives, as long as our heart desires his glory. The Lord will either turn cursing into blessing through confession of sin, or there will be divine discipline because of unconfessed sin. The choice is ours! You should encourage your people to deal with sin quickly. Jacob was afflicted with sadness as a result of his inaction over these sins, and it was at a level which very few others experience, the sadness of losing a son, in his case Joseph. All the judgment that comes upon him comes because he fails as a father, and fails to live consistently as a godly man ought to live. He deserves to die under extreme discipline but God's grace keeps him, just as we are kept!

GENESIS 35:1-8

1 And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. 2 Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the strange gods that are among you, and be clean, and change your garments: 3 And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. 4 And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem. 5 And they journeyed: and the terror of God was upon the cities that

were round about them, and they did not pursue after the sons of Jacob. **6** So Jacob came to Luz, which is in the land of Canaan, that is, Bethel, he and all the people that were with him. **7** And he built there an altar, and called the place Elbethel: because there God appeared unto him, when he fled from the face of his brother. **8** But Deborah Rebekah's nurse died, and she was buried beneath Bethel under an oak: and the name of it was called Allonbachuth.

REFLECTION

Verses 1-3. Possibly ten full years have passed since Jacob returned from Mesopotamia. He has not yet formally settled into worship in the land and thereby fulfilled his vow, made in Genesis 28:20ff, and referred to in Genesis 31:13. He has been, like so often we can be, distracted by the affairs of daily life, and so the Lord calls him, as he calls us, to set aside the distractions and return to the life of worship.

He has simply not got around to formally worshipping again in the land. The pleasantness of the pastures, and the daily demands of pastoral life have hindered him from taking definite action on the spiritual front. The result has been a falling into paganism on the part of his family. This may have been led by Rachel, as she specifically is identified as the thief of her father's household good luck god idols. Genesis 31:19, 33-35.

God directly calls Jacob to fulfil his vow and return to Bethel and worship there as he had promised. God reminds him that as he has protected him from Esau, so he has kept him safe from all dangers, and the vow is now overdue, to be repaid with thanksgiving. Jacob is to purify his own heart and then deal with the impact of the infiltration of paganism into the family through the last thirty years. Psalms 101:1-7, Exodus 20:2-6, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, 1 Peter 2:1-2.

Jacob formally calls upon them all to purify themselves and set aside their gods and pagan religious ornaments. They have been on a slow but steady slide into paganism themselves. He formally orders them to bathe and clean up their appearance, change their clothes and dress up for a formal religious service. They may have been required to throw away some pagan type clothing also. They certainly are told to place all the statues of the gods and all their earrings and armlets and other "good luck" symbols associated with any paganism they have taken up through the last thirty years.

The wives are now in their fifties at least and the children are from late twenties to early teens. All are able to understand the actions that Jacob requires of them. He also requires all his servants to follow this instruction, as they are under his authority and must obey his command. Jacob has finally acted again as the true Patriarch and taken the spiritual leadership of his people. Psalms 66:13-20, 103:1-5, 116:16-19,

Verses 4-5. We are reminded by these things that as believers today we are to be careful of our dress, for we are not to give a pagan message by our appearance to those to whom we are to witness. The earrings were particularly signs of pagan influence with "good luck" type religious practises. As believers we are not to have anything to do with "good luck" religion activities, whether they are in the church or outside it. We worship the Lord of all and we do not need to do little superstitious activities to make us safe. We rest in the Lord's hands for our safety, not any good luck charms or activities. The Israelites would fall back into this practise of earring wearing during their time in Egypt and these would become the gold for the golden calf idolatry that they fell into. Exodus 32:2-6. God's judgment is upon all the pagan symbols of those who reject the truth about Him. Deuteronomy 7:2-11.

All the gold and all the statues of the gods were buried deep under the roots of the great Terebinth tree at Shechem; probably the same one that Abraham camped beside. Genesis 12:6. by digging under the tree the roots would over time entangle the gold and idols and destroy them making it impossible to dig them out again. By Joshua's day this place had become a holy place, in recognition of this act of separation of the people from paganism. Joshua 24:26.

Having buried the gods and prepared for their spiritual pilgrimage, the entire family sets off for Bethel and the building of the altar there to worship the true God of all. The Canaanites were baffled at how such a small group had defeated the entire city-state of Hamor and Shechem and so they were terrified of these people and locked their gates as they went by. None attacked them. Jacob's early fears were proved groundless. The Lord protected them as they moved towards Bethel.

Verses 6-8. They journeyed south until they arrived at the area known then as Luz, but by Moses time as Beth-el. When they arrive at the place Jacob had marked with the pillar thirty years before he builds an altar on the site. Where once he slept and saw the vision of the staircase, he now builds an altar with his grown up family around him. He had slept here alone thirty years before, and now he stands before an altar with several hundred people, who he leads in prayer. God has kept his word and Jacob has been blessed and has returned to this place in safety under God's care and protection.

It is here that Rebekah's old nurse, the one who likely cared for Jacob died, and Jacob buried her by the great Oak tree that was there. The name of the Oak tree was "the Oak of weeping" because of the lamentations made for Deborah, the slave/servant who cared for Jacob as a child. The fact that Deborah is with Jacob tells us that he must have visited his father's encampment at some time in order for her to join his company. It is a reminder that Moses tells only highlights of the story he received on the tablets. He is an editor and selects things relevant to the unfolding drama of redemption in his own day.

It also reminds us that being a servant of the people of God in this day meant deliverance into a household of faith and being loved for service rendered and treated as an equal before God. It is this respect for all members of the household that sets the stage for equality in the days of Paul. Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:22 – 4:6, Philemon 1ff. There is a “social welfare” system of the early believers, and that meant that no older person was left to die, but cared for until they died. This is our standard; to care for the weak until they go to be with the Lord.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Deborah was likely a slave in the household of Isaac; purchased in a slave market. She had been treated with dignity by Isaac, and then in her old age by Jacob, who she had cared for as a child. She had served faithfully and been saved in the household.

She was a servant, yet she was a princess of God and mourned as a family member on her death. She was a carer of others, and she was cared for by the family until her death. The care of the elderly poor in the church is a mark of that church’s application of agape love. We are to be known for our care of the saints who have served well. Let us ensure we care for those who have cared for the work of the Lord throughout their life.

2. Jacob leads a family revival by magnifying the worship of the Lord in the household and taking the lead in the elimination of all compromise worship of pagan nonsense. Revival begins when the parents take the lead in holiness and proper worship. Jacob’s dysfunctional family reminds us that it is never too late to set a good example and have a revival. There is to be no compromise with the fashions of evil, nor the jewellery of “good luck charms”; such things are not to be the dress of believers. 1 Timothy 2:9-10.
3. We can all be as carnal as Jacob was at times, and we can, like him, lead a revival when we face the sinful patterns of our life and change them through confession of sin and return to thorough worship of the Lord our God. Spirituality and carnality are daily choices of the believer, and they depend upon our choice to confront and deal with our sins and love on in the filling of the Spirit, or our lazy acceptance of the evils that will otherwise emerge from our Old Sin Nature. Let us take up the biblical challenge and walk in the Spirit.
4. We are called to be lights in a dark world, and that means an active separation from the evil that often surrounds us. We are to walk in the Spirit of the living God, not follow the dictates of the pagan world. Let us ensure that there is a “visible difference” between us and the worldliness of the enemy, without offence being given to those to whom we are to witness.

GENESIS 35:9-15

“9 And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him. 10 And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. 11 And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; 12 And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. 13 And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him. 14 And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, even a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. 15 And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel.”

REFLECTION

Verses 9 – 10. Moses reminds us that Jacob has been finally obedient in seeking the Lord at the place he promised to return to, even though it is ten years later. Genesis 28:10-17, 32:24-28. The Lord renames him again as Israel, and reminds him again of what it means. He is reminded that it is here that the blessing will be received, not anywhere else, just as Abraham and Isaac had been told that. Genesis 12:7, 17:1ff, 18:1, 26:2.

Jacob will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel. It is a reminder to Jacob to stop calling himself Jacob, but refer to himself with the new name God has given him, just as Abraham stopped referring to himself as Abram. This is a challenge for Jacob to stop seeing himself as he was and grasp the new spiritual reality and advance in the Holy Spirit’s power rather than his own.

Verses 11 – 12. The Lord calls himself by name here as the creator God to remind Old Israel that he is well able to do what he has promised and fulfil all prophetic words to him. God is almighty; there is no power shortage to protect Israel and to bring about the plan to fulfilment. This is our reminder today that God’s purposes will be worked out with the nation that grew from this man and that the destiny of the Jewish people is a great destiny.

There is still hope for Israel in our own day, but it is not with alliances with the USA or any other national group. In the last days Israel will sign a treaty with the Anti-Christ himself to guarantee their security, which of course it will not! Even though men try to destroy Israel, God’s promise from this day of Jacob’s life right through to our own still is the stable ground upon which Israel stands.

Verses 13 – 15. The promise of the land is one that has never been fulfilled in its completeness, although it came close briefly, but still only partially, under Solomon. The land will be Israel's descendants and it will be theirs for a thousand years in the millennial kingdom of the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is Jacob's great son, the Lord himself, who will be the king to rule over the land in its fullness.

Israel recognizes the Lord's presence in the place again by calling it Bethel and by setting up another, larger pillar of stone. He has his eleven sons to assist him this time and so the monument is large and significant, as is the worship conducted there. He pours a libation, or drink offering and anoints the pillar with oil as a symbol of the Holy Spirit of God's presence.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. It is never too late to be obedient if we are still alive! The Lord operates in grace and so if we still live we can return to the path he wants for us and blessing may still flow for us. God delights in turning cursing into blessing through his grace and power, in accordance with his plan. Let us walk closely to our Lord and not have to come back as far as Jacob had to.
2. God calls us to see ourselves as he sees us, not as our Old Sin Nature has made us. We are to see ourselves as the children of the living God, not the fallen sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. We are able to walk in God's power through the Holy Spirit and so we ought to walk.
3. God has a plan for Israel yet, so no matter what the nations of the earth decide to do about any problems caused by Israelis, the Lord has spoken and his plan will be fulfilled. Israel will be the centre of the world under the rulership of Jacob's descendent the Lord Jesus Christ.

GENESIS 35:16-29

“16 And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. 17 And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. 18 And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin. 19 And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. 20 And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day. 21 And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar. 22 And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: 23 The sons of Leah; Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun: 24 The sons of Rachel; Joseph, and Benjamin: 25 And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid; Dan, and Naphtali: 26 And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid: Gad, and Asher: these are the sons of Jacob, which were born to him in Padanaram. 27 And Jacob came unto Isaac his father unto Mamre, unto the city of Arbah, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned. 28 And the days of Isaac were an hundred and fourscore years. 29 And Isaac gave up the ghost, and died, and was gathered unto his people, being old and full of days: and his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.”

REFLECTION

Verses 16 – 17. The family travels onwards towards the south heading for Isaac's camp at Hebron and they come to the vicinity of what is now known as Bethlehem, but then as Ephrath. They do not even reach the township but on the roadside on the way Rachel begins to experience labour and the entire caravan stops to await the birth. Rachel goes into labour quickly and her labour is a “hard” or complicated one. It may be that it was a breech birth or some other complication that made the midwife fear for her life, but also want to encourage her in the process too. Rachel after a long labour is dying from the effort, but the midwife tells her that she has given birth to another son.

Verses 18 – 19. As she died, and Moses makes it clear that she knew she was dying, she names the boy, “Son of my sorrow”. Her sorrow was naturally first in her death, without being able to be the mother to him she had hoped to be, but maybe also it is a recognition on her part that she has been judged by the Lord for her part in the religious apostasy that has gripped the family for the last twenty years. Does Rachel die the “Sin Unto Death” here? We simply do not know for sure, but Moses gives every indication that there is both the sadness of the loss of her being a mother, and the recognition that her death is a judgment.

She is not taken the few miles down the road to be buried with Abraham in Hebron, and where Leah will be buried, Genesis 49:31, but will be buried here on the roadside outside what will be come the town of Bethlehem. Her son's people, the Benjamites, will inherit this area and go on to such great apostasy and evil that the other eleven tribes will attempt to exterminate them! Judges 19-20.

The life of Rachel is a life of tragedy and warning, for she worshipped God and yet also added in other gods as her good luck charms. Genesis 31:32-35. She trusted in superstition rather than resting in faith in the God of Abraham, and so she dies in a way that raises questions about her walk with the Lord, but she does not die lost to God, but as a child of God, just not the one she could have been. The story of the importance of Bethlehem however has a very happy ending for it

is here that the Lord Jesus Christ is to be born, and this new birth will be without complications and bring life to all. Micah 5:2-4, Matthew 2:1-18.

Verses 20 – 21. It was normal custom to bury quickly in the ancient Middle Eastern world, and so weeping and mourning would be for the day of the death, all the night following and the relatives would bury the following day. The exception to this was the Egyptian practise of embalming which meant several months delay could occur between death and burial for those who used the embalming techniques.

For the Israelites however, burial was quick, but prayers and mourning would continue for another six days and on the seventh special prayers would end the formal mourning time and people would return to their normal routines in the fields and city. This speedy burial routine was for hygiene reasons as to keep a body above ground more than twenty four hours was a dangerous thing for the health of all the others in the community. It was possible to bury with some delay in colder months but mostly very little delay was the norm.

If a person got ill and the family thought they could die, all those who they wished to be there for a funeral were alerted and gathered quickly, for once the death had occurred there was little delay in burial. An example of this is the sickness of Lazarus, and the urgency of his sisters telling the Lord to hurry to his bed side. John 11:1ff.

Why was Rachel not taken down the road to Hebron? It may be that Jacob may not have had the right to bury there, as only Isaac may have been able to nominate who was buried there. It may be that the blood shed from her birthing process was such that decay was very fast in the heat, and delay was not possible. Her tomb becomes the focus of her descendents and many gathered there in years to come to pray for children, and it became a place of pilgrimage for Israelite women seeking motherhood.

The pillar set above the grave was both a marker for later visits, but also a reminder of God's grace, mercy and love; that he did not forget Rachel and would visit her there in resurrection body at a later time. We mark graves today, in the Christian tradition, not to remind ourselves of the person's identity, but to mark where they are buried that we might find their place of burial, but also to record our faith that it is there that they will be raised in resurrection body like the Lord.

Moses makes the editorial comment that the pillar is still standing as the Exodus generation heads into the land. It may be that the spies reported this back to Moses, as they did other details of the land after their journey through it. Numbers 13:1ff. It was a well known marker in the days of Samuel several hundred years later. 1 Samuel 10:2. The next marker is that which marks the spot for the next camp made by Israel, by the flock watch tower beyond Bethlehem.

Verses 22 – 23. While Israel was camped to the south of Bethlehem a terrible thing occurred in his household. His oldest son Reuben takes advantage of his father's distraction after the death of Rachel to enter into the tent of Bilhah and seduces her (or perhaps she has seduced him – Moses leaves us knowing that both are keen on each other) and has sex with her.

Now Reuben may be close to thirty years of age and Bilhah at least forty, so neither have any excuse for this behaviour. The sexual activity of the father has made his son believe that anything goes. Even the family religious revival earlier has not been associated with a revival in morality. Israel hears of his son's actions and once again does nothing at this time, although he will later lose his birth right because of his moral instability. Genesis 49:3-4.

Verses 24 – 26. From verses 23 through 26 we have a list again of the twelve sons of Jacob. In verse twenty three Moses reminds us that Reuben is the firstborn, but this is simply to underline that his actions with Bilhah prove him unworthy of the leadership and he will lose it to the second youngest son, to Joseph. The leadership of this generation, at this time, will fall to Joseph, who will exercise it, in accordance with his two dreams (Genesis 37:5, 9), as their protector and deliverer. When old Israel gives his final blessing, the permanent leadership will be given to Judah, although he will be a leader in evil for a good while to come. Genesis 37:26.

All the sons are mentioned as having been born to Jacob in Padan Aram, although the last has been born just up the road outside Bethlehem. Moses has identified that all are born while away from the start point of his journey thirty years before, which was Hebron. He is now back home as the inheritor of his father's goods and position and will live within his father's camp until he is taken down to Egypt to be with Joseph.

Verses 27 – 29. Jacob arrives home into Hebron as a permanent settler here, rather than an occasional visitor. Isaac was nearly blind when Jacob left Hebron all those years before, and the death of Deborah reminds us that he has visited his father's camp since his return, but has not stayed there. This return is to take up residence and may be related to his father's deteriorating health. Moses ends this section with the account of Isaac's death at age 180, although as you will see from the calculations below, that death is at least 12 years away from Jacob's return to Hebron. Esau is alerted to the nearness of the death when the time comes and is there for the end and the burial. To be clear on the dates and ages of people let us get some facts down:

1. Joseph was 17 when he was sold into slavery. Genesis 37:2.
2. Joseph was 30 when introduced to Pharaoh. Genesis 41:46.
3. Joseph is 39 when Jacob enters Egypt. Genesis 45:6.
4. Jacob was then 130 years old. Genesis 47:9.
5. So Joseph was born when Jacob was 91.

6. Joseph's birth occurs in the 14th year in Haran, so Jacob fled to Haran in his 77th year.
7. Jacob was 77 when he fled from Esau to Haran.
8. Isaac at that time was 137 years old.
9. Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born. Genesis 25:26.
10. Jacob returns home at age 108, with Isaac at age 168 at that time.

If these calculations are correct, and they were first done by Martin Luther, and are backed by Keil and Delitzsch in their commentary, then Isaac is still alive when Joseph is lost. He is with Jacob and they share the grief of the loss of Joseph together. Joseph's promotion in Egypt occurs thirteen years after his slavery begins. Genesis 41:46. It is around this time that in Canaan Isaac dies. Moses places the report of the death of Isaac here, at this point in chapter 35, in the text to simply round off the life of Jacob and Isaac and move to the next major section which centres around Joseph. Moses has however given us enough figures to do the above calculations and fill in the gaps in the narrative.

Isaac's major part in the great drama of redemption is nearly over when Jacob returns, and it appears that he is now simply an old man being cared for by his relatives until his death. This may not be the full story however, for the supposed death of Joseph would have had such a catastrophic effect upon the family that I could not imagine Isaac not comforting his son and being in prayer for him and Joseph. They are both very old men by this stage and the physical action is being played out by others now, but the Plan of God is still working out and both men are alive. While we live there is a part to play in the plan and so these men will have been active spiritually until the end just as we are meant to be.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Death comes in God's time for us all. The Lord's plan is final and we enter his presence at the right moment for the plan to be complete for us. "To the Lord belong the issues of death". Psalms 68:20. "Precious in the sight of God is the death of his saints". Psalms 116:15. If we live we can serve, in prayer at very least, and as mentors of faith and example in our suffering, and as encouragers in all our words.
2. Rachel's death leaves unanswered questions. She had been an active compromiser of her faith by the use of idols and may have died under discipline; she certainly dies young. Rachel is not the person she could have been, and the challenge to us all, is that we live in such a way that this cannot be said of ourselves.
3. Old Age is not meant to be the end of our service. While we live we are to seek the Lord's service in any opportunities that come up. Life is not over until we see the Lord face to face. Until then we are urged to serve and work for the Lord's glory. Let us keep on our pathway of service.

Notes

CHAPTER 36**THE GENERATIONS OF EDOM (ESAU)****GENESIS 36: 1-43**

1 Now these are the generations of Esau, who is Edom. 2 Esau took his wives of the daughters of Canaan; Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite; 3 And Bashemath Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebajoth. 4 And Adah bare to Esau Eliphaz; and Bashemath bare Reuel; 5 And Aholibamah bare Jeush, and Jaalam, and Korah: these are the sons of Esau, which were born unto him in the land of Canaan. 6 And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the persons of his house, and his cattle, and all his beasts, and all his substance, which he had got in the land of Canaan; and went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob. 7 For their riches were more than that they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them because of their cattle. 8 Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir: Esau is Edom. 9 And these are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in mount Seir: 10 These are the names of Esau's sons; Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Bashemath the wife of Esau. 11 And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz. 12 And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz Esau's son; and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek: these were the sons of Adah Esau's wife. 13 And these are the sons of Reuel; Nahath, and Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah: these were the sons of Bashemath Esau's wife. 14 And these were the sons of Aholibamah, the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon, Esau's wife: and she bare to Esau Jeush, and Jaalam, and Korah. 15 These were dukes of the sons of Esau: the sons of Eliphaz the firstborn son of Esau; duke Teman, duke Omar, duke Zepho, duke Kenaz, 16 Duke Korah, duke Gatam, and duke Amalek: these are the dukes that came of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these were the sons of Adah. 17 And these are the sons of Reuel Esau's son; duke Nahath, duke Zerah, duke Shammah, duke Mizzah: these are the dukes that came of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Bashemath Esau's wife. 18 And these are the sons of Aholibamah Esau's wife; duke Jeush, duke Jaalam, duke Korah: these were the dukes that came of Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau's wife. 19 These are the sons of Esau, who is Edom, and these are their dukes. 20 These are the sons of Seir the Horite, who inhabited the land; Lotan, and Shobal, and Zibeon, and Anah, 21 And Dishon, and Ezer, and Dishan: these are the dukes of the Horites, the children of Seir in the land of Edom. 22 And the children of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. 23 And the children of Shobal were these; Alvan, and Manahath, and Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. 24 And these are the children of Zibeon; both Ajah, and Anah: this was that Anah that found the mules in the wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zibeon his father. 25 And the children of Anah were these; Dishon, and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah. 26 And these are the children of Dishon; Hemdan, and Eshban, and Ithran, and Cheran. 27 The children of Ezer are these; Bilhan, and Zaavan, and Akan. 28 The children of Dishan are these; Uz, and Aran. 29 These are the dukes that came of the Horites; duke Lotan, duke Shobal, duke Zibeon, duke Anah, 30 Duke Dishon, duke Ezer, duke Dishan: these are the dukes that came of Hori, among their dukes in the land of Seir. 31 And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel. 32 And Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom: and the name of his city was Dinhabah. 33 And Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his stead. 34 And Jobab died, and Husham of the land of Temani reigned in his stead. 35 And Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who smote Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his stead: and the name of his city was Avith. 36 And Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his stead. 37 And Samlah died, and Saul of Rehoboth by the river reigned in his stead. 38 And Saul died, and Baalhanan the son of Achbor reigned in his stead. 39 And Baalhanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his stead: and the name of his city was Pau; and his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab. 40 And these are the names of the dukes that came of Esau, according to their families, after their places, by their names; duke Timnah, duke Alvah, duke Jetheth, 41 Duke Aholibamah, duke Elah, duke Pinon, 42 Duke Kenaz, duke Teman, duke Mibzar, 43 Duke Magdiel, duke Iram: these be the dukes of Edom, according to their habitations in the land of their possession: he is Esau the father of the Edomites."

REFLECTION

Esau is 120 years of age when Isaac dies, the same as Jacob. They have both had many sons and daughters, so most of the details here are probably given to Jacob for the records at this time, but there are references in the text that may come from later periods. We will see the evidence emerge as to the source of this list as we go through it. It may be that Moses himself has information obtained while he was an official in the Egyptian army and diplomatic corps. Acts 7:20-25.

He is forty when he will flee from Egypt but had been educated as a Pharaoh and was able to access all their records about the peoples of the north, who were the threat to Egypt's borders. The Egyptian mines were in the lands controlled, or at least used by, the Edomites and Midianites. Moses lives for forty years amongst the Midianites and so would have met the descendents of these Edomite princes he mentions here. Exodus 2:16ff.

Wide spread finds of Egyptian artefacts by archaeologists in this area, from this time period, and many references in Egyptian records to the places in the area covered by the sons of Esau, makes it clear that the two peoples knew each other well. This chapter makes a natural break between the story of Jacob and Isaac and that of Joseph, which has

Egypt as it's centre, rather than Canaan. Moses, as a prince of Egypt, uses this record of the desert chiefs of the land of Edom, to the south of Canaan, to divide the record and remind us that the blessing of Esau was very real. Genesis 25:23. Esau's descendents had become a great people by the time of the Exodus and subsequently.

It may also be that this chapter has been added to by Jeremiah or Ezekiel, or the editor Ezra when he puts the Old Testament into it's nearly final form after the exiles return to Jerusalem one thousand years after Moses, although I believe the real evidence for anything major here is negligible. Note the parallel list in 1 Chronicles 1:35-54. All the people of Edom in Moses day traced their ancestry back to the men who are named in this chapter, and so, while to us it is a sequence of difficult names, it is vital information for Jacob, who traded with these men, and for the Exodus generation who met their descendents and could place them in relationship to either Hittite princes, or Jacob's brother Esau.

Verses 1 – 3. Notice that the name of one of the three wives and one of their fathers differs from the earlier list in Genesis 26:34, 28:9. These are not "errors in the text". This is a reminder of a custom amongst the Arabs even today, to rename a person in accordance with an event or significant action they have taken, or on marriage, so that the latter "nickname" or new name, becomes the name by which they are known later.

Esau delivers the genealogy probably at Isaac's death, or Moses has it from Egyptian archives, and he simply records the names as they are written, without reference back to the earlier names because in his day an alteration would be understood as a commonly occurring name change. Basmath (the fragrant one) has become Adah (the ornament), indicating she has become even more beautiful and an ornament to Esau's status through the years. Jehudith (the praise worthy) has become Aholibamah (tent high) indicating she grew very tall in the years after marrying. The daughter of Ishmael has become known as Basmath (the fragrant one).

Verses 4 – 8. Adah bears Esau Eliphaz (God is strength), and Bashemath bears Reuel (friend of God). It may be that the Eliphaz of Job 2:18 and following is this man's descendent of the same name, for the book of Job is set in the Patriarchal period, and he is called "Eliphaz the Temanite"(refer below to discussion of verse eleven). These men are named for God, so Esau has a belief that is centred in the existence of the true one God, yet remember, he is hated by God for his life and work is hypocrisy and pretence! Malachi 1:1ff. Remember, the very demons behind the pagan gods know God is real and they tremble. James 2:19. Orthodoxy proves nothing at all, for it is a changed life that proves genuine relationship with God, and sadly the Edomites do not manifest this.

This may explain a lot about the advice of Eliphaz in Job, for he says apparently theologically correct things, yet God's verdict is that he has spoken falsely. Job 42:7-9. The name Reuel is used of the priest of Midian who is Moses father in law, but as this man is alive 300 years later it is not the same man. This was clearly a common name in this day, like John today, which has the same original meaning.

The other sons are born of Aholibamah, and are Jeush (from the word meaning "to make haste"), Jaalam, (from the word meaning, "to veil or conceal", and meaning possibly akin to our word "occult", or magical practises) and Korah (from the root meaning "bald" and also smooth, and ice, hail and snow). It also was a name of at least three named Israelites from later periods, with the name meaning "baldy", indicating the baby was born totally without any downy hair. One such man will lead a great rebellion against Moses. Numbers 16:1-49, 26:9-11.

Two of the names are obvious references to the birth process or appearance, but the third, Jaalam may be an indication of occult practises creeping into the home of Esau. It may however also be a reference to the birth process, with the baby covered by it's birthing sack as if by a veil. These three men will establish major tribal groups and even before their deaths will be known by the title "Duke" (Alluph = later Arabic Caliph) , or "chief". Verses 14, 18.

Moses or a later scribe may be the one making the last comment in verse eight. It appears to be a comment built upon information that may come from a later date than the days of Jacob, and comes most likely from the days of Moses, but no further information is added in. Although, this speculation about editorial comment may be unnecessary, for notice that the genealogies are incomplete here. The genealogies appear to cover a period when these people, from one family develop into a great nation, so several hundred years may be in view here, yet the first generation only is mentioned, a fact that does tie the basic list of names here to Esau rather than Moses.

Esau certainly builds his power quickly, and likely absorbed the groups he conquered into his own tribe, as was the way with all the Arab groups through Biblical and into modern history. The men may be killed but the women and children were either, if noble in appearance, adopted as their own tribe, or if base in appearance, made slaves of the tribe. Esau becomes Edom over the next 400 years. By the time Moses leads the people into the wilderness the Edomites are a great power in the south of Canaan.

Verses 9 – 19. The sons of Eliphaz are given next in verses eleven. They are Teman, whose name may mean "southerner", although it is a name of foreign origin and so it's actual origin is lost. Omar is mentioned next in order, and his name means, "the talkative one", and it becomes a common Arabic name with a number of the great rulers having it in Moslem times. Zepho is a name made famous in our day by one of the Marx brothers, but then it's meaning was, "the observant one". Next came Gatam, the meaning of his name is unknown, and lastly Kenaz, meaning "hunter", which became a popular name later. Joshua 15:17, Judges 1:13. From these names no real spiritual messages or observations can be made, rather they are personal glimpses of the little babies, as they were born, or soon after their birth. They are little snap shots of family life in the desert tents of Esau.

And from Timna who was concubine to Esau's son Eliphaz he has another son Eliphaz Amalek. This last son was possibly the father of the Amalekites who attacked Israel as they left the Sinai. Exodus 17:8ff. They quite quickly became a people of their own separate from the other sons of Esau. Their descent from the concubine rather than the wives may be the reason they were quite different. They settled in the lands between Numbers 13:29, 14:43-45, 1 Samuel 15:3-7, 27:8.

They were particularly violent towards the Israelites and joined in with all who hated them to ride in and plunder when ever they could. They joined with the Midianites and other Arab tribes to attack. Judges 6:3, 7:12. They joined with the Ammonites in Judges 3:13. They were defeated in battle by King Saul. 1 Samuel 14:48, 15:2ff. David fought them regularly. 1 Samuel 27:8, 30:1ff, 2 Samuel 8:12. Hezekiah exterminated the last remnant of them around 700 BC. 1 Chronicles 4:42-43.

The sons of Reuel; Nahath, meaning "restful one", or "quiet one". The next is Zerah, meaning the "rising of the light". This may mean that for his father he "lit up" the room when he entered. The next is Shammah, meaning "astonished one", and finally Mizzah, meaning "fainting with fear". Each of these names, like the ones above, give evidence for a passionate and loving father naming his sons after a characteristic of their early lives. Missing are the descendents of Jeush, Jaalam, and Korah, and yet there is a long section about the Horite rulers of the land at the time of Esau's expansion.

This detail may be the final evidence which dates this section to Jacob's day, for there would be no reason for Moses to omit the real descendents of Esau and then record the names of foreign rulers whose people were obliterated from history by his day, and replaced by Esau's descendents, who he doesn't name! These Horite names would be important for Jacob to have recorded however, as his wanderings may have brought him into contact with them, and so information like this received from Esau would be helpful if he met them. On the balance of probabilities then it may be assumed that the list of names here was given to Jacob at the death of Isaac, and was complete at the time but the sons, who are not named as having descendents later had them, but too late to get on Esau's list of his grand-children.

Verses 20 – 29. 20. "These are the sons of Seir the Horite, who inhabited the land; Lotan, and Shobal, and Zibeon, and Anah, 21 And Dishon, and Ezer, and Dishan: these are the dukes of the Horites, the children of Seir in the land of Edom." These men are the leaders of the native dwellers of the land of Edom who Esau and his descendents dispossessed and absorbed. In the Greek language they are referred to as the Troglodutes, or cave dwellers, and this is thought to be the meaning of the word Horite also, although it may also refer to the ruling Hittites.

The men mentioned here are the tribal princes or chiefs of their groups. Also mentioned are two of the daughters of the Horites who had leadership status amongst them and after whom two important places are named. These two women, Timna (vs22) and Aholibamah (vs 25) provide the evidence for the leadership of women in this time, where the individual woman had the personal qualities that set her apart from her society.

It is clear that the Timna is the concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz (verse 12), that she was from the local people, and she was a powerful woman, and used her sexual powers to exert political power, and so built a nation of desert raiders around her. Aholibamah is a wife of Esau, as we have her lineage here and in verse 2 above.

Verses 30ff. These verses are clearly written well after the days of Moses, as the first king of Israel was Saul around 1100 BC. Eight kings are mentioned here and I suspect they are in lineal order and may cover a time period of 400 years. If this is correct, then these names may be given by Moses, to bring the days of Esau up to his own period, and he may have got this information while he was with Midian as a shepherd.

Each one of these kings is isolated from the others, with no son following any father. These men may be like the Judges of Israel, or it may be that kings amongst the Edomites were selected by the chiefs/dukes of the clans, as the most powerful warriors or leaders, and that hereditary kingship was not traditional amongst them, but kingship by nobility/bravery of action rather than birth.

There are some tantalizing details, but mostly they do not help us at all in assisting us in identification of these people. One event, the battle against the Midianites in verses 35 appears to have happened well before the Exodus, as by then they are allies of the Midianites. Numbers 22. The name of Hadad in verse 35 is probably not the one who rebelled in Solomon's day. 1 Kings 11:14. This man is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 1:50-51, and may be ruling when that book is written up, quite late in Judah's history. This doesn't add up though fully either. The most accepted identification of who Hadad was, is that he was the king to Moses asked to pass through his land. Numbers 20:14ff.

We are left wondering about who all these people really are, but sadly most are unbelievers and are enemies of truth rather than friends of the people of God, and so they are simply passing losers in the drama of life. These men, great in their day, honourable and wealthy, feared by their neighbours, are reminders that unless you walk with the Lord, there is no purpose nor lasting destiny to your life, except the lake of Fire. The Lord's words are relevant here, "What does a man gain if he gains the whole world and loses his eternal soul, for what can a man give in exchange for his soul? Matthew 16:26. Also refer to 1 John 2:15-17. It is a satanic deception to trust in honour or wealth for eternal destiny, for only spirituality from the Lord gives entry into eternity. Psalms 49:6-20, Revelation 20:11-15. He alone is the door to life.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATION

1. Greatness amongst men is not to be sought as a worthy goal. Only those who serve the Lord in spirit and truth are to be blessed forever and have an eternal destiny that has value. We are reminded to envy no man his wealth, power or position, for all these things fail them in the end. Only relationship with the one who is King of kings and Lord of all lords is of any lasting value. It is the service of the Lord that we are to seek, not the blessing of man.

REFLECTIONS UPON THE NATURE OF THE CHRIST – THE SEVEN “I AM” STATEMENTS

The use of the “ I AM” means that the Lord was saying that He is God. In Exodus 3:14 God reveals Himself to Moses as, I AM THAT I AM. Using this phrase at His arrest in John 18:2-6, He caused the army group to fall backwards due to His power as God flashing forth for a millisecond, before being led away as a willing sacrifice. We are not confronted with the Jesus of liberalism here, but with the Lord of lords, King of kings, God stepping down to speak authoritatively to mankind. There are seven “I AM’s” in the New Testament.

1. PROVISION - I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE John 6:30-35 - The feeding of the five thousand - a miracle involving bread. God provided miraculous physical food in the desert for forty years - Manna. Christ is our spiritual food. He says that he is the only source of spiritual food for you. There is life in no other. No one else can satisfy the spiritual hunger in man. He tells us He is the bread from heaven - He shows Himself as God. The bread of the Passover - unleavened, pierced and griddled; speaking of his body.
2. SPIRITUALITY - I AM THE LIGHT John 8:12 - The feast of Tabernacles (where He also told the people to have the everlasting water John 7:37-39). When the Lord says this He is saying that He is the only source of pure light as shown in His matchless character. He is stating that He is God. 1 John 1 says that God is light and in Him is there no darkness at all. We are to walk in the light in fellowship with God.
3. SALVATION - I AM THE DOOR John 10:7 - The Sheepfolds of Jerusalem, Psalms 22-24. To be the door of the sheepfold, He is the only way into the plan of God. Anyone that tries to come any other way is a liar and a thief. If this is not true there is no way to God.
4. GUIDANCE - I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD John 10:11 - the good shepherd, the only one who really cares. Many from other religions say that they really care but it is Jesus the good shepherd, the only one who really cares. All other systems drop you into hell.
5. RESURRECTION - I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE John 11:20-25 - The death of Lazarus. Christ conquers death proving He is God, the resurrection and the life, He is the way the truth and life forever. The only way to eternal life is in Christ Jesus. To reject Him is to have eternal life in the Lake of Fire
6. TRUTH/LIFE - I AM THE WAY THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE John 14: 6 - There is no other way to gain meaning in this life and eternal life than through him. We are related to the King of kings and Lord of lords who came and died for us that we might live. We should be obedient to our Lord who bought us with His blood. I am the way the truth and the life. The only way to live is in the truth, the only way to have life and have it more abundantly is in Him. The only way to God is through the God-man Jesus Christ. We need to live in Him as He is the only one who has the truth.
7. PRODUCTION - I AM THE TRUE VINE John 15:1-5 - Walking from the Passover meal past the Temple towards Gethsemane, He talks about the spiritual production that is ours in union with Him. Pointing at the great carved vine around the door to the temple he says, “I am the true vine” - the only way to spiritual productivity is in Christ Jesus through the fruit of the Spirit. Love Joy Peace and the other fruit are only available in Christ. You have to be in the vine to have fruit. Many unbelievers want joy and peace but they cannot have it without Christ.

There is peace, joy, and hope in no other relationship than the believer with The Lord. Abraham realised it, as did Isaac and Jacob. They were all frail and fault filled men, but their greatness was that they came back to their knees again and again and were restored and empowered by the Lord. They are our challenge to walk in the Grace God provides, not in the self righteousness and self satisfaction that the devil encourages. Let us follow our mentors in the true faith and walk as the Patriarchs did in mercy, grace and truth. Let us be encouraged by their failures, for God did not give up on them, and HE does not give up on us.