



Jacob's Life in Haran Genesis 28-30

Introduction

A. God's Purposes

In last week's lesson, we saw how Jacob, instead of patiently relying on God's promises, resorted to the use of deception and manipulation to achieve success. Every member of Isaac's family was involved in ungodly actions, yet God's mercy and grace overcame their weak ways. Isaac wanted to bless Esau instead of believing God's covenant with Abraham. Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of stew. Rebekah and Jacob schemed dishonestly to manipulate Isaac's blessing. But by His providence, God worked through all their human errors to continue His purposes for Israel and the seed line through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

B. Sin's Consequences

Significantly, Isaac's family suffered the consequences of their sins later on. Isaac was emotionally distraught over his opposition to God's will. Esau was sent away from the chosen people of God. Rebekah was separated from her sons. Jacob would later experience great family difficulties with his father-in-law, wives and sons.

C. Rebekah's Plan

Esau became incensed because his father blessed Jacob and vowed to kill Jacob after Isaac passed away. Rebekah heard about Esau's intentions and persuaded Jacob to leave home and visit her family in Haran. She convinced Isaac that this would be a good opportunity for Jacob to find a wife with the same background and belief system as theirs.

OUTLINE of GENESIS 28-30

I. Jacob and Esau's Departures - Genesis 28:1-9

II. Jacob's Dream - Genesis 28:10-22

III. Jacob, Rachel and Laban - Genesis 29:1-30

IV. The Children of Jacob - Genesis 29:31-30:24

V. Jacob Outsmarts Laban - Genesis 30:25-43

I. Jacob and Esau's Departures - Genesis 28:1-9

A. Jacob's Mission - Genesis 28:1-5

Jacob agreed to Rebekah's plan and sent Jacob to Padan Aram to find a suitable wife among his mother's relatives, "*from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother.*" He stressed the importance of not taking

a wife from among the Canaanite women. This was important because marrying a Canaanite would spoil the purity of the line.

Isaac blessed Jacob again and reiterated God's promises to him. Jacob left for Padan Aram to find Rebekah's family.

B. Esau's Choice - Genesis 28:6-9

Esau recognized that Isaac and Rebekah were grieved over his earlier marriages to Hittite (Philistine) women, and that he was no longer accepted in the family. He left home to join Ishmael, taking one of Ishmael's daughters for a wife. Significantly, the unchosen son of Isaac married into the unchosen line of Ishmael.

C. Differences Between Brothers

The sons of Isaac and Rebekah were very different. Jacob was heir to God's promise and was a man of faith and prayer. At times, however, his trust in God was weakened by his self-serving, human spirit. On the other hand, Esau was a man of slick maneuvers and cunning ways. He was by nature strong-willed, self-reliant, shrewd and even unethical (Adapted from J.J. Davis, Paradise to Prison).

II. Jacob's Dream - Genesis 28:10-22

On his 400-mile trip to Padan Aram, Jacob was lonely and apprehensive concerning Esau's threat. He stopped to rest one night west of the Jordan River. As he slept, he had a vision of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven with "*angels ascending and descending on it*". This vision symbolized the uninterrupted relationship between God in heaven and His people on earth. The angels carried man's needs to heaven and brought God's direction to man on earth.

In his dream, the Lord appeared to Jacob for the first time, revealing Himself as "*the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac.*" There God confirmed to Jacob the covenant promises He had made to Abraham and Isaac, the promises of the land, the seed, and the blessing. God promised to be with Jacob wherever he might go and also to bring him back to the land.

When Jacob awoke, he was overcome with reverence for the Lord. He set up a stone to mark the place and named it "*Bethel*" which means "House of God". He vowed that upon the fulfillment of God's promises to

him, he would acknowledge Him as His God and surely give Him a tithe. It is difficult to discern whether Jacob was bargaining with God to buy his favor or worshiping Him with this promise and gift. John MacArthur ([The MacArthur Bible Commentary](#)) notes that the word "if" in verse 20 may also be translated "since" and that may be best to take Jacob's statement that way, consequently seeing "Jacob's vow and offering as genuine worship based on confidence in God's promise."

III. Jacob, Rachel and Laban - Genesis 29:-1-30

A. God's Gracious Providence - Genesis 29:1-8

Jacob arrived in the land of his mother's family not knowing exactly where he was. He came upon a well where young shepherds were waiting for the removal of the heavy stone well cover to water their sheep. Jacob struck up a conversation with them and was amazed to learn that this was Laban's water-source and that his daughter, Rachel, was coming to water his sheep. God's gracious providence had led Jacob to the specific well where his relatives watered their sheep.

B. Jacob Meets Rachel - Genesis 29:9-12

When Jacob saw Rachel he rolled the stone cover aside and watered Laban's flock. Then he kissed Rachel and wept. The emotion of the moment swept over him. He was overwhelmed with the greatness and goodness of God in overriding his human failures, bringing him to people with the same background and spiritual values as his, and presenting to him Rachel and a hint of love at first sight. After he identified himself to her, Rachel ran to tell her father the welcome news.

C. Agreement With Laban - Genesis 29:13-20

It had been almost one hundred years since Laban last saw his sister, Rebekah. Laban was still a man with mixed motives – some sincere and honest – others selfish, deceitful and manipulative. He observed that Jacob was a very competent shepherd, and also deeply in love with Rachel. Jacob proposed that he would work seven years to earn Rachel as his wife. This was a very generous offer and Laban readily accepted it. He not only wanted Jacob as an excellent shepherd but as a prospective heir to Isaac's fortune.

D. Laban's Deceitful Trickery - Genesis 29:21-26

After Jacob served seven years faithfully, he asked for Rachel in marriage. But Laban had conceived an evil scheme of replacing Rachel with his elder daughter, Leah. He kept Leah's face veiled throughout the wedding day and evening. The next morning Jacob was shocked

to see that he had married Leah instead of Rachel. He confronted Laban who gave the excuse that it was customary for the "*elder daughter to be given in marriage before the younger*". As Jacob had deceived Isaac and Esau with crafty trickery many years earlier, Laban now deceived Jacob. Jacob was chastened with what he deserved. "*For whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights*" (Proverbs 3:12). "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap*" (Galatians 6:7). Jacob's deceptive trickery with Esau had not met with divine approval. However, God overruled Jacob's errors to fulfill His promises to His people.

E. Seven More Years - Genesis 29:27-30

Jacob and Laban settled the controversy by agreeing that Jacob would serve Laban another seven years for Rachel. We should not overlook the strength and beauty of Jacob's love for Rachel in these passages. His commitment and devotion to her were tender, honest and deep. Rachel became his second wife and Jacob found himself married to two sisters.

IV. The Children of Jacob - Genesis 29:31- 30:24

A. The Sisters and Their Maids - Genesis 29:31-30:13

God saw that Leah was unloved, so He showed His own love for her by opening her womb to conceive. She gave birth to four sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah, who became the first four heads of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Rachel was unable to conceive and became very jealous of her sister. She demanded that Jacob give her children and he became angry with her. The whole family became gripped with bitterness and turmoil. Rachel resorted to the same error as Sarah and Hagar many years earlier (Genesis 16:3) and offered Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, to bear a child for her. Bilhah gave birth to a son, Dan, and then to another son called Naphtali.

Leah responded by giving her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob as a wife. Zilpah gave birth to two sons, Gad and Asher.

Application

The terrible contention between the two sisters illustrates the extreme distress and bitterness caused by jealousy. Rachel's jealousy of Leah caused Jacob's family continual disturbance and disruption. Jealousy is rooted in pride which is the very essence of sin. Jealousy involves constantly contrasting oneself to others in an attempt to find self-satisfaction. Do you have moments or periods of envying another person or wanting what they have? Ask yourself why you feel this way. Deep

down, is it vanity, selfishness, conceit or arrogance that darkens your soul? Take it to the Lord and ask him to gird up the loins of your mind with his truth and enable you to overcome this destructive sin.

**B. Rachel and the Mandrakes -
Genesis 30:14-24**

Leah's son, Reuben, found some mandrakes in the field as he was working and took them to his mother. A mandrake is an herbal plant whose yellow berries were thought to stimulate sexual desire and promote conception. Rachel, who apparently slept with Jacob at night, traded Leah some night time with Jacob for the mandrakes.

God opened Rachel's womb and she bore a son and named him Joseph. Leah then gave birth to two more sons, Issachar and Zebulun. Later she gave birth to a daughter and called her Dinah. One more son, Benjamin, has yet to be born to Rachel.

Two purposes may be seen in this chapter. The main purpose has been to show how the fathers of the twelve tribes came into being. The second purpose demonstrates how rivalry, shamelessness, jealousy and bigamy tears at the roots of human relationships. The continuous jealousy on the part of the two sisters reached the depths of childishness and envy.

V. Jacob Outsmarts Laban - Genesis 30:25-43

A. Laban's Agreement - Genesis 30:25-34

After many years of working hard for Laban, Jacob desired to establish his own home. He asked Laban to fulfill his part of their agreement, allowing him to leave with his wives and children. Laban's own wealth had increased tremendously under Jacob's supervision. He knew that the Lord had blessed him because of Jacob.

Furthermore, he was not content with what he had gained through Jacob, but desired to further manipulate the Lord through him to fulfill his own selfish desires. When Jacob agreed to take for his wages only the brown lambs and the speckled and spotted goats, the opportunistic Laban struck a deal. Since most lambs were white and most goats were black or dark brown, Laban felt that he would definitely increase his flocks and wealth through Jacob's request.

B. Jacob's Plan and Trust - Genesis 30:35-43

Jacob's plan was to reproduce his flocks of spotted animals by placing fresh white strips of poplar, almond and chestnut trees in front of them at the watering troughs as they were breeding. He thought that these visual impressions during mating would determine the color of the offspring. Jacob's idea probably came from the ancient superstition that offspring were affected by the fears and experiences of their mothers during pregnancy. However, it was God's mercy, grace, and power, not superstition, that brought about the result of an abundance of healthy, spotted offspring.

Applications

1. Do you ever try frantically or fearfully to manipulate God in order to get your own way? Will you turn away from this worldly way of living and begin to cast all your cares upon God and pray for His perfect will to be done in your life?
2. Do you ever try to selfishly manipulate other people in order to procure God's blessing for yourself? What traits of Laban do you see in your own life? Will you use this opportunity to repent of trying to procure your own blessings and surrender your desires to God?

- DAY THREE: Read Genesis 31:30-35.**

- 9. a. By whom were the idols stolen?
 - b. Where were they hidden?
10. Why was Laban not able to find the idols?

DAY FOUR: Read Genesis 31:36-55.

11. After Laban's ineffective search, what were Jacob's first words?
12. What major points did Jacob make concerning his time with Laban?
13. How did Jacob refer to God's rebuke of Laban?
14. What was the outcome of this meeting?

DAY FIVE: Read Genesis 32:1-23.

15. What message did Jacob send to his brother, Esau?
16. a. What was the motivation of Jacob's prayer?
- b. What were the basic elements of his prayer?
17. What present did Jacob prepare for Esau?
18. What were Jacob's specific instructions to his servants concerning their words to Esau?

DAY SIX: Read Genesis 32:24-32; Judges 13:17-18 and Hosea 12:3-4.

19. a. With whom did Jacob wrestle through the night?
- b. What happened physically to Jacob as he prevailed against his opponent?
20. What three things changed as a result of Jacob's struggle? Briefly describe each.