

JACOB'S TRIALS LED HIM TO VICTORY

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

God providentially allowed deceit and intrigue concerning Isaac's blessing of Jacob to cause Jacob to leave home and go to Haran. This sojourn was significant for four reasons. First, it allowed Jacob to select his wife (it turned out to be wives) apart from the ungodly Canaanites (cp. 28:1ff). Second, it provided Jacob with an abundance of wealth (32:10). Third, Jacob's return to Canaan to meet his brother, Esau, aided in his spiritual maturity so that he looked to God for blessing, and not to himself (32:24-30). Fourth, it allowed time for Esau's anger to subside so that Jacob and Esau could be reunited without hostility (33:4).

A comparison of Scripture indicates that Jacob was at least 71 years old when he departed for Haran. Isaac recognized that Jacob, not Esau, was to continue the Abrahamic dynastic line and God confirmed this (28:1-5). While in Haran, Jacob dealt with Laban who was as deceptive as he had been. Laban deceived Jacob in the marriage of his daughter (29:15-26) as well as in the agreements concerning his wages (31:41). Finally, when Jacob could take Laban's trickery no longer, he secretly left Haran with his family and flocks. This infuriated Laban. Now Jacob was hated by both Laban (31:2) and Esau (32:8). He was a man without a country, but these dire circumstances formed the basis for God's work with Jacob so that he would become the spiritual leader demanded by the Abrahamic Covenant.

I. Jacob's Removal from Canaan — 28:1-22

A. Reassurance from Isaac — 28:1-9

1. A blessing upon Jacob — 28: 1-5

28:1, 2 — There are two reasons why God allowed Jacob to leave Canaan. First, he needed to leave until Esau's anger cooled down so he would not kill him (cf. 27:41ff). Second, he needed to find a wife that was not of a cursed race, so he could produce a family that God could use to bless the world. Notice how God used man's failures to accomplish His purposes. Jacob went to the land of Mesopotamia, where his relatives lived, to find a wife.

28:3-5 — Isaac earlier had tried to bless Esau instead of Jacob (cf. notes on Gen 27 and 25:23), but now he pronounced the blessing of Abraham upon Jacob. The term "God Almighty" (v. 3) was also used in conjunction with God's promise to Abraham (17:1). God has the power to accomplish His purposes. It is clear that Isaac now realized that Abraham's posterity for the Abrahamic Covenant would come through Jacob.

2. A benefit to Esau — 28: 6-9

28:6-9 — Even though Esau was a worldly person (cf. Heb. 12:16), he heard Isaac forbid Jacob from taking a wife from Canaan, as he had done, and blessed him. So he tried to please his parents by taking a wife of Ishmael's clan, Abraham's posterity, in addition to the two wives he already had taken from the cursed Canaanites (cf. 26:34, 35). Although he had already forfeited his birthright and blessing, he became the father of the Edomites (cf. Obadiah).

B. Reassurance from God — 28:10-22

28:10, 11 — Jacob journeyed northward and tarried at Luz (Bethel) where he spent the night. He used stones to make a headrest for himself -- a common custom. This lonely night set the stage for the LORD's appearance to Jacob.

28:12-15 — One of the ways that the LORD God revealed Himself in the past was through dreams (cf. Heb. 1:1-3). Jacob had a dream that night of a ladder (stairway) which reached to heaven with angels traversing between heaven and earth while the LORD was standing at the top. The angels are the

LORD's agents who carry messages to the people on earth and carry the people's messages to Him. It demonstrates the fellowship that the LORD has with His people.

The LORD identified Himself as the God of Abraham and Isaac. He was not Jacob's God at this time. The LORD assured Jacob that the land on which he was lying would be given to him and his posterity. Furthermore, he would have seed as much as the dust of the earth and all the families of the earth would be blessed through them (this blessing will come to the entire world when Christ reigns as King of all nations). Notice that LORD extended the Abrahamic Covenant through him, even before he became a believer (this is evidence of the LORD's foreknowledge). The LORD knew that Jacob would trust in Him twenty years later after a wrestling match with him (32:24-30). Then the LORD promised to be with him and to keep him where he was going and to bring him back to this land where he would fulfill His promises (Christ will return to earth and gather the Israelite believers to the land of Canaan and give it to them to fulfill His promise to Abraham (15:18), to Isaac (28:2-3) and to Jacob (28:13-14).

28:16-22 — When Jacob awakened, he recognized that God had been there. He set up the stone he used as his head support and anointed it with oil and named the place Bethel, "House of God." This stone was not an object of worship but a memorial. Jacob responded to God's revelation in a conditional manner. He vowed to worship God and give Him a tenth of all he had if God would protect him, provide for him, and allow him to return to his homeland. This was a most significant episode in Jacob's life for it signified that God was calling this deceiver to have fellowship with Him.

There are three significant items to be noted. First, tithing was a principle of worship before the Law; it was not a ritual (cp. Mt 23:23). Second, Jacob was not a young man but was at least 71 years of age (cp. 47:9; 45:6; 41:46, 47, 54; 31:41; 30:25). Third, this appearance must have been necessary because of Isaac and Rebekah's failure to properly train their children. Jacob's scheming may also be evidence of their improper training or ungodly example..

II. Jacob's Residence in Haran — 29:1- 30:43

A. Provision for His Posterity — 29:1- 30:26

1. His wives — 29:1-29

a. Jacob's meeting with Rachel — 29:1-12

29:1-12 — God providentially arranged for Jacob to meet Rachel as she came to water Laban's sheep.

b. Jacob's marriage to Rachel — 29:13-29

29:13ff — Jacob was welcomed into Laban's house. Laban was Rebekah's brother who had departed from Haran almost 100 years earlier (cf. Gen 24). Laban had two daughters, Leah and Rachel, but Jacob's eyes were immediately drawn to Rachel because of her beauty. He agreed to work seven years to pay the dowry required for a bride. Because of Jacob's love for Rachel, the seven years seemed "but a few days." But Jacob reaped the deceit he had sown in his dealings with Esau. Probably Laban had Leah veiled so that she could not be seen clearly and then he presented Leah to Jacob as a wife instead of Rachel. In this he said he was following the custom of the land to give the eldest in marriage first, but he never let Jacob know of such a custom. However, Laban did promise that if Jacob would fulfill the wedding week's festivities for Leah, he could then also have Rachel as a wife for another seven years of labor. Jacob preferred Rachel because of her beauty and so he agreed. Leah was "tender-eyed," which means she was not attractive due to her dull eyes. After taking Rachel as his second wife, Jacob was obligated to stay and serve Laban another seven years. One can imagine the strain this placed in Jacob's home with two sisters striving to win his affection. God did not condone polygamy, but He overruled it for His own purposes.

2. His children — 29:30 - 30:26

29:30ff — Jacob's love for Rachel was openly evidenced and Leah was slighted. God compensated Leah by allowing her to bear children while Rachel remained barren until Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah had given birth to their sons.. In thirteen years or less, the following children were born to Jacob:

LEAH		BILHAH	ZILPAH	RACHEL
Reuben	Issachar	Dan	Gad	Joseph
Simeon	Zebulun	Naphtali	Asher	Benjamin (later)
Levi				
Judah	Dinah			

One cannot approve of Jacob's relationship to the handmaid to bear children. Much of the strife in the home was caused by the jealous relationship between Leah and Rachel (30:1). This is further illustrated by the episode with the mandrakes (30:14ff). This was a plant with a fruit somewhat similar to a small apple and somehow it was to have aphrodisiac properties. Rachel bargained with Leah to have this fruit so that she might have children. It is ironic that Rachel wanted the mandrakes, but Leah was given her fifth son. Later, however, God removed Rachel's reproach and she bore Jacob a son who was named Joseph. At this time eleven sons had been born to Jacob. God had fulfilled His promise to Jacob concerning posterity (28:14).

B Provision for His Prosperity — 30:27-43

1. His agreement with Laban — 30: 27-36

30:27-30 — When Jacob had served Laban faithfully for 14 years, he decided to return to the land God had promised him. Laban, however, wanted Jacob to stay with him because he had learned that God's blessing was upon him as long as Jacob stayed with him. Laban cared not for Jacob's prosperity, but for his own.

30:31-34 — Laban allowed Jacob to fix his own wages, but Laban had a very deceptive character (31:7). Jacob agreed to continue working for Laban and he asked that he be given the spotted and colored sheep and goats for his wages. Normally, sheep are white and goats are black, so any that were spotted were more rare. Laban quickly agreed to Jacob's terms.

30:35-36 — At the beginning of this agreement, Laban separated all the abnormally colored animals for two reasons. First, these animals were to be his, not Jacob's, and so they had to be separated. Second, he knew enough about recessive traits in the laws of heredity that he knew that he had to remove these off-colored animals to prevent breeding which would benefit Jacob. They were separated from the white sheep and black goats by a three-day journey.

2. His accumulation of wealth — 30:37-43

30:37ff — In spite of Laban's efforts to keep Jacob as a menial servant, God blessed Jacob abundantly. Jacob, however, was deceitful in the methods he used to try to enhance himself. First, he placed peeled streaked poles before the animals during their breeding season in an attempt to influence the color of the offspring. This was a superstitious belief that was held in Jacob's time. Although it is now known that his efforts had no effect on the outcome, it does show that Jacob was deceitful. Second, he isolated and congregated the multicolored animals so that the recessive tendencies in them would become more prevalent (v. 40). Third, he used his methods on the stronger of the animals so that the multicolored might be the strongest of the herd. Jacob is to be condemned for his selfish desires, but God overruled Jacob's sin and was responsible for Jacob's blessing (31:10-12). As a result, Jacob became a very wealthy man (30:43).

III. Jacob's Return to Canaan — 31:1- 33:20

A. Meeting with Laban — 31:1-55

1. Jacob's decision —31: 1-16

31:1ff — Jacob had served Laban for a total of 20 years (14 years for his two wives and 6 years for wages). Jacob saw that Laban's attitude toward him had changed. There are probably two reasons for this. First, Jacob's abundant prosperity would cause Laban and his sons to be jealous. Second, it appears that Laban now had sons who would have replaced Jacob as the chief heir. When Jacob suggested that he and his family go back to Canaan, Rachel and Leah agreed that it was time to depart. Jacob also had been commanded by the angel of the Lord to return to Canaan (cf. 28:12ff).

2. Secret departure — 31:17-21

31:17ff — Jacob waited until Laban had left his home to shear his sheep. Then he secretly departed, taking his family and earned possessions. Rachel, however, is to be condemned for stealing her father's images and taking them with her. Three reasons have been suggested for her theft:

- 1) Ancient beliefs taught that the presence of these idols, which were goddesses with prominent sexual features, guaranteed fertility.
- 2) The one who possessed the gods was almost guaranteed the wealth of the owner of these gods. Rachel had learned her selfishness from Laban and probably wanted to guarantee Jacob's original right to his wealth.
- 3) These gods (idols) were supposed to provide special protection.

3. Laban's pursuit — 31: 22-55

31:22ff — Three days after Jacob's departure, Laban learned of his departure. However, Jacob had traveled quickly, even though he had a great number of livestock, and it took Laban seven days to catch him. He overtook Jacob in trans-Jordan in "Mount Gilead." Before he met Jacob, God appeared to Laban in a dream and warned him not to harm Jacob (v. 24). It is significant and ironic that Laban's major concern was his idols. Rachel had hidden them in a camel's saddle and then she sat on the saddle, pleading the "custom of women" (v. 35). Laban did not find the idols and after heated words, Laban and Jacob made an agreement (sealed with a stone memorial) that they would not pass beyond that point to attack or hurt each other. This covenant was instigated by Laban probably as a precaution to keep Jacob from making any return to Haran to claim Laban's inheritance.

B. Meeting with God — 32:1-32

1. Jacob prepared to meet Esau — 32:1-8

32:1ff — Jacob was a man without a country: he was forbidden by oath to return to Mesopotamia, and he was hated by his brother. At that time he was met by the angels of God. No doubt they had been sent by God to encourage him. He named the place Mahanaim, which meant two camps. This probably had reference to the camp of angels and the camp of Jacob. Then Jacob sent messengers to greet his brother but they soon returned to report that Esau was on his way with 400 men to meet Jacob.

2. Jacob was afraid to meet Esau — 32: 9-23

a. His prayer — 32: 9-12

32:9-12 — Jacob was so fearful of his meeting with Esau that he humbly and sincerely pleaded with God for protection. He reminded God of His covenant promises but also his own unworthiness.

b. His plan — 32: 13-23

32:13ff — Jacob took precautions to protect himself and his family by sending ahead gifts for Esau as a token of the peace he desired. He had already divided his servants and livestock into two groups so one could escape if the other were attacked. Finally, in the evening, Jacob sent across the Jabbok his family while he remained on the other side.

3. Jacob wrestled with God — 32: 24-32

32:24ff — That evening, a Man appeared unto Jacob and wrestled with him. This Man was Christ before He received His permanent human body. This is called a "Christophany," an appearance of Christ. Many times this appearance of Christ is called "the angel of the Lord." Jacob realized that he was wrestling with God regarding his sinful life. God was fighting to bring Jacob to repentance. God could not bless him until Jacob would turn from his sin and trust in Him. Finally, God put Jacob's thigh out of joint to show him his weakness as a sinner. Jacob showed His faith in God by refusing to let go of God until He blessed him. As a result God blessed him and changed his name from Jacob ("supplanter") to Israel ("fighter of God" or "fighter for God") indicating that God had changed Jacob so he could be a blessing to others. Jacob named the place of this wrestling, Peniel, meaning, "face of God" since Jacob had seen God face to face.

C. Meeting with Esau — 33:1-20

33:1ff — Jacob was prepared to meet Esau by his wrestling match with God. Now that he was right with God, Jacob divided his family into three groups according to their priority to him. The maids with their children went first, then Leah with her children, and finally Rachel with Joseph. The meeting was not a confrontation, but a warm brotherly reuniting. After this joyous occasion, Esau departed for the mountains in Mt. Seir and Jacob headed for Israel and settled at Succoth and then at Shechem.