

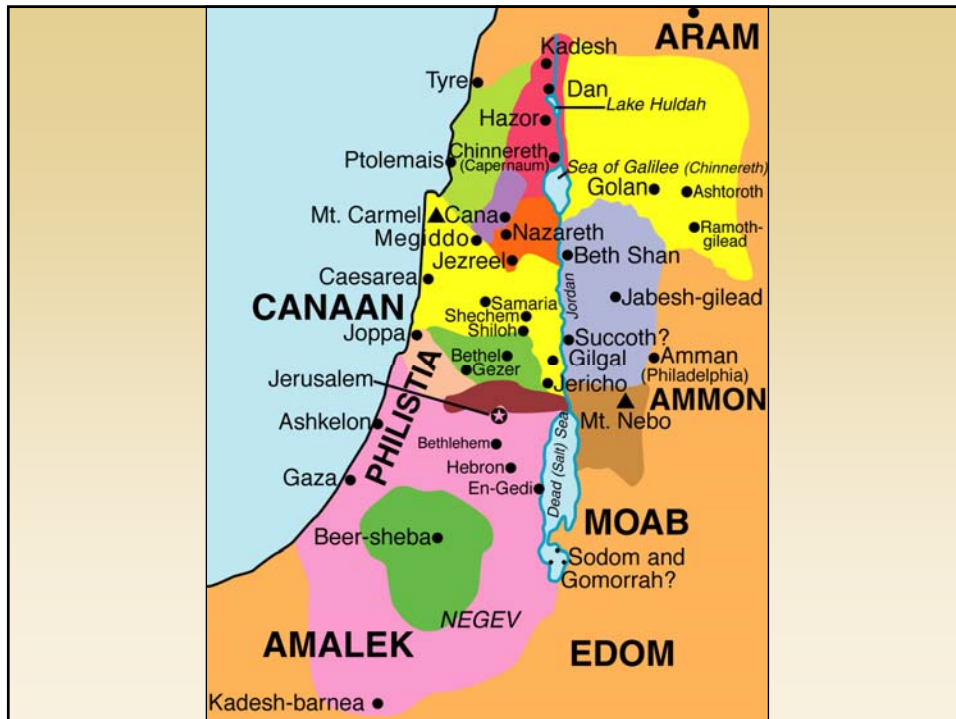


Genesis

Beginnings

Week 6
Chapters 27-31

A Theft, a Ladder, and a Wife





Isaac and the blessing (26:34 – 28:9)

- ❖ The family is completely polarized. Esau and Jacob never appear in this story together. Neither do Rebekah and Esau.
- ❖ Isaac sets out to have a private blessing without witnesses (why?), but Rebekah schemes to deceive her husband. Jacob goes along willingly. Notice that he even pulls God into his lies.
- ❖ It is easy to see the deceit, but the story is ambiguous. Did not God tell Rebekah before the birth of the twins that the elder would serve the younger? Hasn't Esau already traded his birthright for lunch? Hadn't Esau's choice of a wife made his parents miserable?
- ❖ The theft of the blessing cannot be undone – not because the blessing is some sort of magical power but because there is simply no convention for undoing it . . . like a world with marriage but without divorce.
- ❖ There is no record of Rebekah ever seeing her beloved son again! The deception has its own tragic consequences for everyone.
- ❖ Yet again, the “outsider” takes God blessing with him. We shouldn't try to limit God's grace and blessing to those within the community of faith.
- ❖ God works with who we are – even our scheming and deception. This story is no model of behavior. It is testimony to the work of a very surprising and sometimes inexplicable God.

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Jacob's Ladder (28:10-22)

- ❖ Jacob has been banished, exiled, so that he might escape Esau's wrath. As he travels northward, one night God comes to him.
 - See that this is all God's initiative. Jacob has no control. He is asleep. Is there anything worthy about Jacob? Other than lying about God during the deception, he has never uttered God's name. But now the God of his father will be his God too!
- ❖ The angels going up and down the ladder (ramp or staircase) play no role. They may be God's messengers but there is no need for them to be intermediaries. God speaks to Jacob directly.
 - The humans had tried to build a tower to heaven. But God must “come down” and he does – *Emmanu-el*, “God-with-us.” There is no need to climb “Jacob's ladder.” God is right beside Jacob.
- ❖ Bethel (*beth-el*) means “house of God.” The stone is anointed, meaning consecrated or set aside as will be the anointed ones of Israel.
- ❖ What do we make of Jacob's “ifs?” If God is faithful then Jacob will be faithful. Would we expect Jacob to be faithful to a God who is not?
 - Jacob will enjoy both God's *presence* and *protection* – as do we!

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Marriage at Haran (29:1-30)

- ❖ When Jacob meets Rachel she is perhaps no more than twelve years old. But he loves her immediately and the writer wants us to see that this love will prove to be enduring and pure.
- ❖ Jacob agrees to work for Laban for seven years to pay the “bride price” for he has no money. But the trickster is tricked! Jacob must work for another seven years to pay off Rachel – and he does.
 - See the irony in Jacob’s being trapped by the “birthright” of the older sister to be married first.
 - Later, marriage to sisters will be forbidden (Lev. 18:18).

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Sons for Jacob (29:31 – 30:24)

- ❖ The promises of God will be fulfilled in the coming sections: descendents, possessions, and the return home.
- ❖ Seeing that Leah is unloved, God opens her womb. Rachel is loved by Jacob but it barren.
- ❖ Rachel, like Sarah, sends her maid in to have children by Jacob. Not to be out done, Leah does the same.
 - The rivalry between these sisters is intense and very sad.
- ❖ Things come to a head over the mandrake roots – which were believed to induce fertility. In the end, God remembers Rachel and she finally has a son from her own womb – Joseph. Much later, she will have one more, Benjamin.
- ❖ If there was ever a story against polygamy, this is it!

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The twelve sons

❖ Leah

- Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah
- Later – Issachar and Zebulun
- Also – Dinah (There may have been other girls. Dinah is mentioned because she figures into the story later.)

❖ Bilhah/Rachel

- Dan, Naphtali

❖ Zilpah/Leah

- Gad, Asher

❖ Rachel

- Joseph
- Much later (Genesis 35) -- Benjamin

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Jacob prospers at Laban's expense (30:25 – 31:16)

- ❖ Jacob knows he needs to head home but Laban isn't ready to let him go. When Jacob comes up with a plan to get his wages, Laban tricks him by hiding the animals that would belong to Jacob.
- ❖ However, using some sort of genetic engineering (!?), Jacob manipulates the flocks and herds so that he becomes wealthy.
- ❖ Laban and his sons' envy has grown. When the Lord tells Jacob it is time to go, so he tells Rachel and Leah who agree to go.
 - We can see verses 1-16 as a theological reflection on all that has come before.
 - The time has come for the return from exile!

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Where is Jesus in this?

- ❖ Jesus is Emmanuel (*emmanu-el*) – God-with-us
 - In Jacob’s encounter with God at Bethel we see God-with-us, coming down from the heavens, desiring a personal relationship.
 - Richard Foster et al write: “The unity of the Bible is discovered in the development of life ‘with God’ as a reality on earth, centered in the person of Jesus.” They call this the *Immanuel Principle* of life.
 - God is with us no less than God was with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We are called to this with-God life.
- ❖ Jesus also brought the true and eternal return from exile. Notice how much the story of exile permeates these narratives. Exile and isolation are part of humankind’s tragic existence. Our alienation and restlessness cannot be healed until we find our rest in God, until we come home.