



## **THE GOD OF JACOB**

Have you ever stopped to think how unusual of a title that is?

God calls Himself the “God of Jacob.”

Not just once...but twenty-four times!

And if you include the title, “God of Israel” (which was Jacob’s name after God changed it in Genesis 32), then you have over two hundred references to this unique name of God.

### **Why is it so unique?**

Because Jacob is not your typical “hero” in the Bible. He does not rank anywhere near such Bible heroes as Moses, Joshua, David, Elijah, or Daniel. Who ever sings, “Dare to Be a Jacob”?

But, surprisingly, God does not call Himself the “God of Moses” or the “God of Daniel.” Instead, He chooses to associate Himself with one particular person in the Bible...Jacob.

Jacob is flawed.

He is a manipulator. A deceiver. A finagler.

For the most part, he is not a good brother, son, husband, or father.

He is not even a very good follower of God.

Yet God loves him. God is patient with him. God pursues him. God changes him.

### **Why is God the “God of Jacob”?**

Because we are all Jacobs to some extent.

And God still loves us!

That should encourage us all.

*May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble;  
May the name of the **God of Jacob** defend you. (Psalm 20:1)*

*The LORD Almighty is with us;  
The **God of Jacob** is our fortress. Selah. (Psalm 46:7, 11)*

*As for me, I will declare this forever;  
I will sing praise to the **God of Jacob!** (Psalm 75:9)*

*Sing for joy to God our strength;  
Shout aloud to the **God of Jacob!** (Psalm 81:1)*

*Blessed is he whose help is the **God of Jacob**,  
Whose hope is in the LORD his God! (Psalm 146:5)*

*“All flesh shall know  
That I, the LORD, am your Savior  
And your Redeemer, the **Mighty One of Jacob.**” (Isaiah 49:26b)*

Genesis 25-35 shines the spotlight on Jacob. He is the son of Isaac, the grandson of Abraham. He has a twin brother named Esau who is the polar opposite of him in almost every way. He marries two sisters, Leah and Rachel...though he really only wanted to marry Rachel. He has twelve sons (and one daughter) with his twelve sons becoming the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus, Jacob is the originator of the nation of Israel...and an interesting character worth studying in his own right.

### **A Chiastic Outline of the Life of Jacob**

- A Rebekah struggles in childbirth—Jacob named (25:19-34)
- B Interlude: Rebekah in a foreign place (26:1-35)
- C Jacob fears Esau (27:1-28:9)
  - D Jacob encounters Yahweh & His angels (28:10-22)
  - E Jacob's arrival in Haran (29:1-30)
    - F Jacob's children are multiplied (30:1-24)
      - G Jacob's decision to return to Canaan after the birth of Joseph (30:25-26)
    - F Jacob's flocks are multiplied (30:27-43)
  - E Jacob's departure from Haran (31:1-55)
  - D Jacob encounters Yahweh & His angels (32:1-32)
- C Jacob fears Esau (33:1-20)
- B Interlude: Dinah in a foreign place (34:1-31)
- A Rachel struggles in childbirth—Jacob renamed (35:1-29)

## BACKGROUND TO THE BOOK OF GENESIS

**DATE:** Genesis was written approximately 3500 years ago (~1410 BC). It is one of the oldest books that we have in our modern world...and certainly one of the most read ancient documents.

**AUTHOR:** Early Jewish and Christian traditions have unanimously attributed the authorship of Genesis—and the rest of the Pentateuch (“the five scrolls”)—to **Moses (1526-1406 BC)**.

**PURPOSE:** Moses wrote Genesis (and the Pentateuch), so that Israel, standing on the edge of the Promised Land, would know who they were and where they fit in the grand story of history.

*This **Book of the Law** shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.* —Joshua 1:8-9

Genesis still speaks to us today, telling us who we are and where we stand in history as well.

**OUTLINE:** Thematically, Genesis is divided into two main sections.

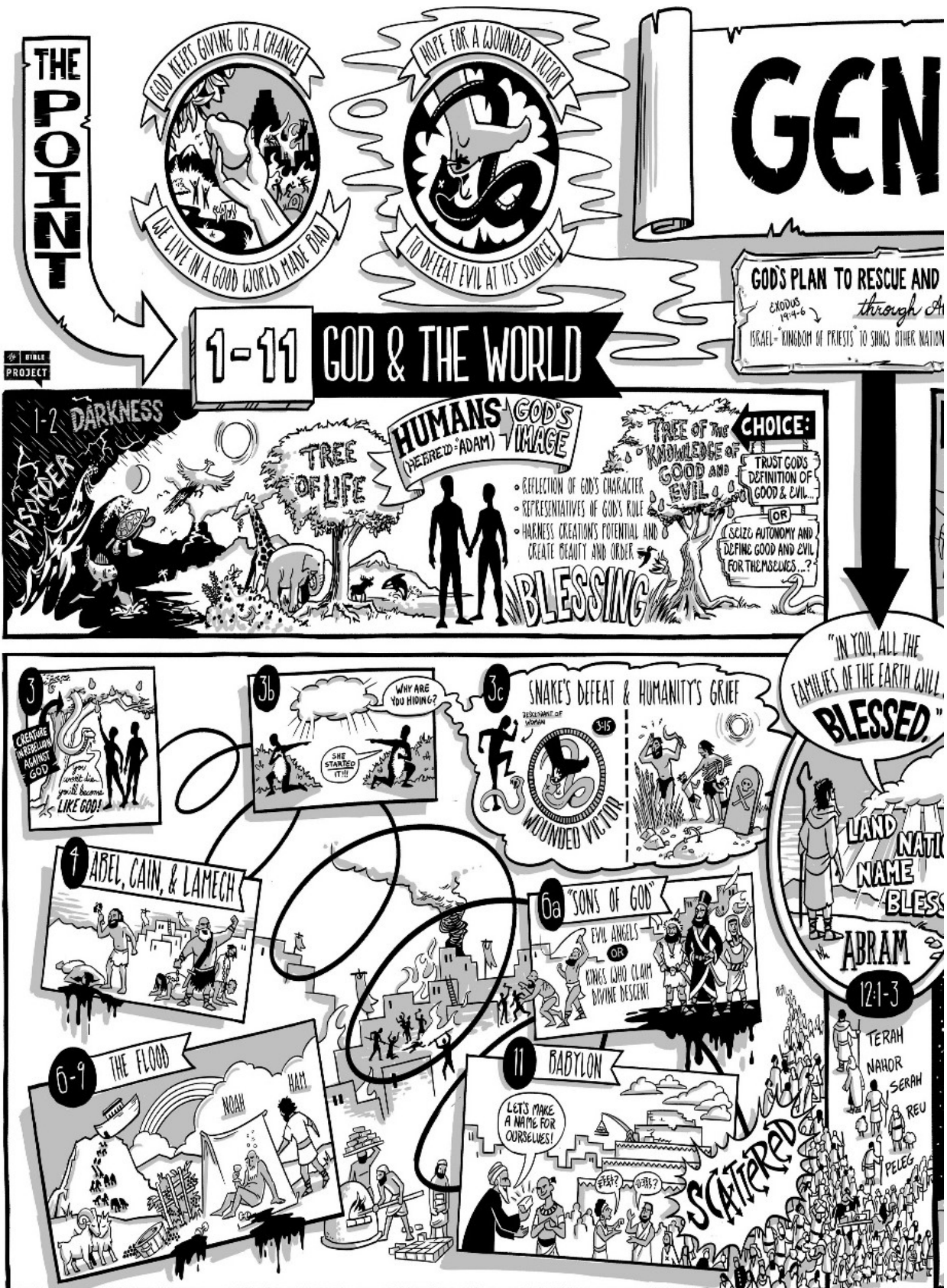
- I. THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD (1:1-11:32)**
  - A. The Creation (1:1-2:25)
  - B. The Fall (3:1-5:32)
  - C. The Flood (6:1-9:29)
  - D. The Nations (10:1-11:32)
- II. THE BEGINNING OF THE NATION OF ISRAEL (12:1-50:26)**
  - A. The Life of Abraham (12:1-23:20)
  - B. The Life of Isaac (24:1-25:18)
  - C. The Life of Jacob (25:19-36:43)
  - D. The Life of Joseph (37:1-50:26)

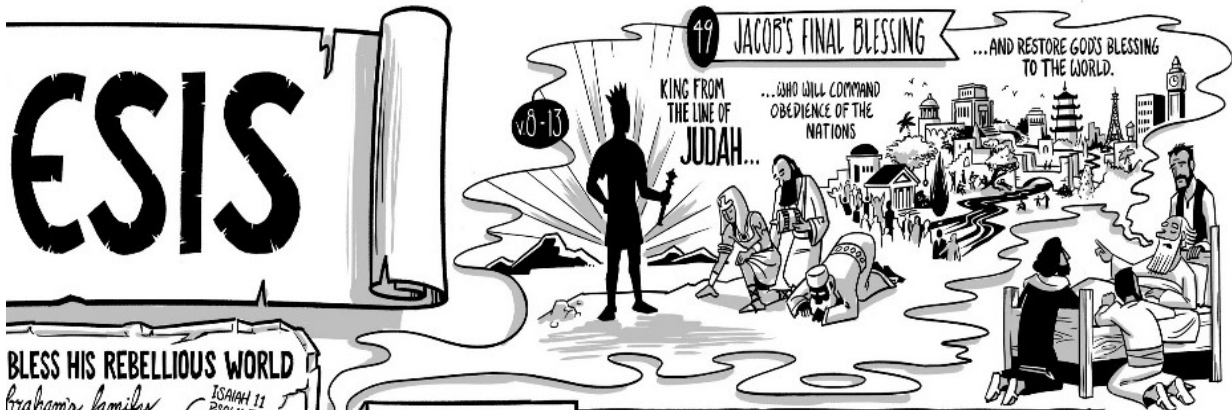
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The following study guide takes you through a weekly five-day exploration of Genesis 25-35.

- Day 1: **OBSERVATION.** Reading the passage and observing what it says.
- Day 2: **MEDITATION.** Reading key verse(s) over and over and memorizing them.
- Day 3: **INTERPRETATION.** Doing a word study and/or exploring parallel passages.
- Day 4: **DEVOTION.** Reading an excerpt from a classic commentary on Genesis.
- Day 5: **APPLICATION.** Seeking to live out God’s Word in your daily life.

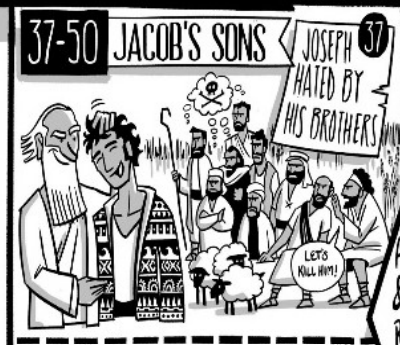
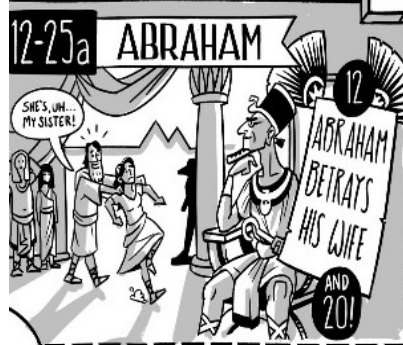
**We encourage you to do this study individually *and* corporately.** Spending time alone in God’s Word is a daily discipline that grows our faith. However, our spiritual growth is also connected to and lived out in community. Sharing what you are learning with others, praising God together, and loving and praying for one another are essential to our growth and to our joy.





**BLESS HIS REBELLIOUS WORLD**  
*Abraham's family* → **ISAIAH 11**  
**ROMAN 72**  
 IS WHAT GOD IS LIKE. | FULFILLED IN THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM.

## 12-50 GOD & ABRAHAM'S FAMILY



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## TWINS ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 25:19-28

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#### **DAY ONE** **Observation**

Just as Sarah struggled with infertility, so does Rebekah. But, in this case, Isaac prays fervently for his wife and God answers his plea. Rebekah not only becomes pregnant but pregnant with TWINS! And these two boys, who start off fighting in the womb, will continue fighting each other long after they are born.

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 25:19-28. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.**

<sup>19</sup> This is the genealogy of Isaac, Abraham's son. Abraham begot Isaac. <sup>20</sup> Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah as wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. <sup>21</sup> Now Isaac pleaded with the Lord for his wife, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his plea, and Rebekah his wife conceived. <sup>22</sup> But the children struggled together within her; and she said, "If all is well, why am I like this?" So she went to inquire of the Lord.

<sup>23</sup> And the Lord said to her:

"Two nations are in your womb,  
Two peoples shall be separated from your body;  
One people shall be stronger than the other,  
And the older shall serve the younger."

<sup>24</sup> So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb. <sup>25</sup> And the first came out red. He was like a hairy garment all over; so they called his name Esau. <sup>26</sup> Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

<sup>27</sup> So the boys grew. And Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field; but Jacob was a mild man, dwelling in tents. <sup>28</sup> And Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob. (NKJV)

**What thought or verse stands out to you in Genesis 25:19-28? Why?**

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How old was Isaac when he married Rebekah? (25:20) \_\_\_\_\_

How is Rebekah described? (25:20) \_\_\_\_\_

After 20 years of marriage, Rebekah finds herself barren, struggling with infertility just like Sarah, her mother-in-law, did. **What does Isaac do in light of his wife's ongoing struggle?** (25:21)

\_\_\_\_\_

What does this tell you about Isaac? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What does Rebekah do when her pregnancy is more difficult than she imagined? (25:22)

\_\_\_\_\_

What does this tell you about Rebekah? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Complete the following sentences based on this passage:

Two \_\_\_\_\_ are in your womb.

One people shall be \_\_\_\_\_ than the other.

The \_\_\_\_\_ shall serve the younger.

The first child came out \_\_\_\_\_ like a \_\_\_\_\_ garment.

His brother came out with his hand taking hold of Esau's \_\_\_\_\_.

What words or phrases would you use to describe Esau?

What words or phrases would you use to describe Jacob?



## DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Genesis 25:24-28 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them.

*When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb.  
The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment;  
so they named him Esau.  
After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel;  
so he was named Jacob.  
Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.*

*The boys grew up,  
and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country,  
while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents.  
Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau,  
but Rebekah loved Jacob. (NIV)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

**Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.**

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### DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

**Read and compare Genesis 16:1-3 and 25:20-22.** These two accounts detail how Abraham-Sarah and Isaac-Rebekah each responded to their struggles with infertility.

*Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said.*

*So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. (16:1-3)*

*This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. (25:20-22)*

**What differences do you see between Abraham-Sarah and Isaac-Rebekah in their struggles?**

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Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 25" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 25:22 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "struggled" and click on the Strong's number (H7533) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "struggled"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** (Note especially Strong's Definitions and Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon.)

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**Read the following passages that use this Hebrew word. Mark key phrases as you read.**

*Abimelek went to the tower and attacked it. But as he approached the entrance to the tower to set it on fire, a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head and **cracked** his skull. (Judges 9:52-53)*

*From that year they harassed and **oppressed** the children of Israel for eighteen years—all the children of Israel who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead. (Judges 10:8)*

*Asa was angry with the seer because of this; he was so enraged that he put him in prison. At the same time Asa **brutally oppressed** some of the people. (2 Chronicles 16:10)*

*You **crushed** the heads of Leviathan;  
You gave him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. (Psalm 74:14)*

**Based on these passages, how would you describe what Rebekah was feeling in her womb?**

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Go back to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and find the word “enquire” in Genesis 25:22. Click on the Strong’s number (H1875) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for “enquire”?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** (Note especially Strong’s Definitions and Gesenius’ Hebrew Lexicon.)

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**What does this Hebrew word imply about Rebekah’s prayers?** (see also Deut. 4:29 and Ps. 34:4).

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Go back to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and find the names “Esau” and “Jacob” in Genesis 25:25-27. Click on the Strong’s numbers (H6215 and H3290) to bring up the meaning of their names.

**What does the name “Esau” mean?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does the name “Jacob” mean?** \_\_\_\_\_

## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from **Matthew Henry's Exposition of the Old Testament**. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was a pastor, preacher, and author from Chester, England. He is best known for his exhaustive, six-volume, verse-by-verse commentary on the Scriptures. Charles Spurgeon stated that, "Every minister ought to read it entirely and carefully through once at least."

### GENESIS 25:19-28

We have here an account of the birth of Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah: their entrance into the world was (which is not usual) one of the most considerable parts of their story; nor is much related concerning Isaac but what had reference to his father while he lived and to his sons afterwards. For Isaac seems not to have been a man of action, nor much tried, but to have spent his days in quietness and silence. Now concerning Jacob and Esau we are here told:

**I. They were prayed for.** Their parents, after they had been long childless, obtained them by prayer. *Isaac was forty years old when he was married*; though he was an only son, and the person from whom the promised seed was to come, yet he made no haste to marry. He was sixty years old when his sons were born (25:26), so that, after he was married, he had no child for twenty years.

Note, Though the accomplishment of God's promise is always sure, yet it is often slow, and seems to be crossed and contradicted by Providence, that the faith of believers may be tried, their patience exercised, and mercies long waited for may be the more welcome when they come. While this mercy was delayed, Isaac did not approach to a handmaid's bed, as Abraham had done, and Jacob afterwards; for he loved Rebekah, (24:67). But...

**1. He prayed:** he entreated the Lord for his wife. Though God had promised to multiply his family, he prayed for its increase; for God's promises must not supersede, but encourage, our prayers, and be improved as the

ground of our faith. Though he had prayed for this mercy often, and had continued his supplication many years, and it was not granted, yet he did not cease praying for it; for men ought always to pray, and not to faint (Lu. 18:1), to pray without ceasing, and knock till the door be opened, He prayed *for* his wife; some read that he also prayed *with* his wife.

Note, Husbands and wives should pray together, which is intimated in the apostle's caution, that their *prayers may not be hindered*, 1 Peter 3:7. The Jews have a tradition that Isaac, at length, took his wife with him to mount Moriah, where God had promised that he would multiply Abraham's seed (22:17), and there, in his prayer with her and for her, pleaded the promise made in that very place.

**2. God heard his prayer**, and was entreated of him. Note, Children are the gift of God. Those that continue instant in prayer, as Isaac did, shall find, at last, that they did not *seek in vain*, Isa. 45:19.

**II. They were prophesied of before they were born** and great mysteries were wrapped up in the prophecies which went before them. Long had Isaac prayed for a son; and now his wife is with child of two, to recompense him for his long waiting. Thus God often outdoes our prayers, and gives more than we are able to ask or think. Now Rebekah being with child of these two sons, observe:

**1. How she was perplexed in her mind concerning her present case:** *The children struggled together within her*. The commotion she felt was altogether extraordinary and made her very uneasy. Whether she was ap-

prehensive that the birth would be her death or whether she suspected it to be an ill omen, it seems she was ready to wish that either she had not been with child or that she might die immediately and not bring forth such a struggling brood:

*If it be so, or, since it is so, Why am I thus?* Before, the lack of children was her trouble, now, the struggle of the children is her woe.

Note, The comforts we are most desirous of are sometimes found to bring along with them more occasion of trouble and uneasiness than we thought of... We know not how to be pleased; we know neither how to be in need nor how to abound.

**2. What course she took for her relief:** *She went to enquire of the Lord...* Note, The word and prayer, by both which we now enquire of the Lord, give great relief to those that are upon any account perplexed. It is a great relief to the mind to spread our case before the Lord, and ask counsel at his mouth...

**3. The information given her, upon her enquiry, which expounded the mystery:** *Two nations are in thy womb*, v. 23. She was now pregnant, not only with two children, but two nations, which should not only in their manners and dispositions greatly differ from each other, but in their interests clash and contend with each other; and the issue of the contest should be that the elder should serve the younger, which was fulfilled in the subjection of the Edomites, for many ages, to the house of David, till they revolted, 2 Chr. 21:8.

Observe: God is a free agent in dispensing his grace; it is his prerogative to make a difference between those who have not as yet done either good or evil (Rom. 9:12)...

Moreover, in the struggle between grace and corruption in the soul, grace, the younger, shall certainly get the upper hand at last.

**III. When they were born there was a great difference between them**, which served to confirm what had been foretold (v. 23), was presage of the accomplishment of it, and served greatly to illustrate the type.

**1. There was a great difference in their bodies.** Esau, when he was born, was rough and hairy, as if he had been already a grown man, whence he had his name *Esau*. This was an indication of a very strong constitution, and gave cause to expect that he would be a very robust, daring, active man. But Jacob was smooth and tender as other children.

Note, The difference of men's capacities, and consequently of their condition in the world, arises very much from the difference of their natural constitution; some are designed by nature for activity and honor, others as manifestly marked more for obscurity. This instance of the divine sovereignty in the kingdom of providence may perhaps help to reconcile us to the doctrine of the divine sovereignty in the kingdom of grace.

Moreover, it is God's usual way to choose the weak things of the world, and to pass by the mighty, 1 Corinthians 1:26, 27.

**2. There was a clear contest in their births.** Esau, the stronger, came forth first; but Jacob's hand *took hold of his heel*. This signified Jacob's pursuit of the birthright and blessing; from the first, he reached forth to catch hold of it, and, if possible, to prevent his brother. Also of his prevailing for it at last, that, in process of time, he should undermine his brother, and gain his point.

This passage is referred to in Hosea 12:3:

*In the womb he grasped his brother's heel; as a man he struggled with God.*

Hence he had his name, *Jacob*, a supplanter

**3. They were very unlike in the temper of their minds and the lifestyle they chose.**

They soon appeared to be of very different dispositions. Esau was a man for this world. He was a man addicted to his sports, for he was a hunter; and a man who knew how to live by his wits, for he was a cunning hunter. Recreation was his business; he studied the art of it, and spent all his time in it. He never loved a book, nor cared for being within doors; but he was a man of the field, like Nimrod and Ishmael, all for the game, and never happy except when he was upon the stretch in pursuit of it: in short, he was set up for a soldier.

Jacob was a man for the other world. He was not cut out for a statesman, nor did he affect to look great, but he was *a plain man, dwelling in tents*, a quiet man...that preferred the true delights of solitude and retirement to all the pretended pleasure of busy noisy sports: he dwelt in tents... This was that son of Isaac on whom the covenant was entailed.

**4. Their interest in the affections of their parents was likewise different.**

They had but these two children, and, it seems, one was the father's darling and the other the mother's.

Isaac, though he was not a stirring man himself (for when he went into the fields he went to meditate and pray, not to hunt), yet loved to have his son active. Esau knew how to please him, and showed a great respect for him, by treating him often with venison, which gained him the affections of the good old man, and won upon him more than one would have thought.

Rebekah was mindful of the oracle of God, which had given the preference to Jacob, and therefore she preferred him in her love. And, if it be lawful for parents to make a difference between their children upon any account, doubtless Rebekah was in the right, that loved him whom God loved.

**What thought from Matthew Henry's words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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## DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Genesis 25:19-28 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your daily life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 25:19-28?**

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In the midst of their struggle with infertility and all the emotions that they felt, Isaac and Rebekah prayed—not just individually but also with each other.

**What is a burden or struggle on your heart right now?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Whom can you ask to pray with you regarding this burden?** \_\_\_\_\_

Pray right now to the Lord and find a time to pray with the person you listed above.



Esau and Jacob are twins but they are as different as night and day.

**List your siblings or other close family members below. Write 1-3 words to describe each one.**

**What 1-3 words would you use to describe yourself, particularly as you were growing up?**

It is easy to compare ourselves to others, especially our own siblings. It is also easy to wish that we were different at times, or even someone else. But God created each one of us uniquely, for His purpose. Contentment comes as we learn to rejoice in the particular personality and gifts that God has given us...and to appreciate the personality and gifts in others as well.

**Take time now to send a note or text of encouragement to someone in your family.**

## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*Praying without ceasing means at least three things. First it means that there is a spirit of dependence that should permeate all we do... So even when we are not speaking consciously to God, there is a deep, abiding dependence on Him that is woven in to the heart of faith. Second... it means praying repeatedly and often. Third, it means not giving up on prayer. Don't ever come to a point in your life where you cease to pray at all.*

John Piper

*Families that learn to appreciate their points of uniqueness and to chuckle at their idiosyncrasies pull together in affection rather than apart in irritation.*

Kent & Barbara Hughes

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- With 1-2 words, describe each of your siblings or close family members growing up.
- How do Isaac and Rebekah respond to their crisis with infertility? How is their response different than Abraham and Sarah? What can you learn from Isaac and Rebekah's example?
- What was unique about Rebekah's pregnancy? What was unique about her delivery?
- What was Esau like? How would you describe him in more modern terms?
- What was Jacob like? How would you describe him in more modern terms?
- How do you think favoritism impacted this biblical family?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Matthew Henry? If so, what?
- Esau and Jacob were twins but as different as night and day. This simple fact reminds us that God creates us each differently for His purposes. Write down one positive trait that you see in each person in your group. Then go around and share these words with each other.

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## FOOLISHNESS ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 25:29-34

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#### **DAY ONE** **Observation**

A prophecy accompanied the birth of Esau and Jacob—*the older shall serve the younger*. Rebekah clutched onto this prophecy...and probably shared it with Jacob, her favorite, at some point. Jacob was just waiting for the right moment to snatch the “birthright” (the privileges of being the firstborn) from Esau.

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 25:29-34. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.**

Now Jacob cooked a stew; and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary. <sup>30</sup> And Esau said to Jacob, “Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary.” Therefore his name was called Edom.

<sup>31</sup> But Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright as of this day.”

<sup>32</sup> And Esau said, “Look, I am about to die; so what is this birthright to me?”

<sup>33</sup> Then Jacob said, “Swear to me as of this day.”

So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. <sup>34</sup> And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. (NKJV)

**What thought or verse stands out to you in this passage? Why?**

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**Note Esau’s words and actions in this passage. What observations can you make about him?**

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**Note Jacob’s words and actions in this passage. What observations can you make about him?**

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## DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Hebrews 12:14-17 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them.

*Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy;  
without holiness no one will see the Lord.  
See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God  
and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.  
See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau,  
who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.  
Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing,  
he was rejected.  
Even though he sought the blessing with tears,  
he could not change what he had done. (NIV)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

**Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.**

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### DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

The “birthright” is a key concept in this passage. Without understanding the significance of the birthright, it is impossible to understand why Esau’s choice is so foolish.

**Read the following passages that describe the significance of the birthright.**

*Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son.’ (Exodus 4:22)*

*The Lord said to Moses, “Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal.” (Exodus 13:1-2)*

*If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love. He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father’s strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him. (Deuteronomy 21:15-17)*

*These were the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel. He was the firstborn, but his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel, because Reuben defiled his father’s bed. He is not listed in the genealogy according to birthright. (1 Chronicles 5:1)*

*He shall cry to Me, ‘You are my Father,  
My God, and the rock of my salvation.’  
Also I will make him My firstborn,  
The highest of the kings of the earth.  
My mercy I will keep for him forever,  
And My covenant shall stand firm with him. (Psalm 89:26-28)*

*For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. (Romans 8:29)*

*He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:18)*

**What do you learn from these verses? What were the privileges of being the firstborn?**

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Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 25" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 25:34 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "despised" and click on the Strong's number (H959) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "despised"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**How many times is it used in Genesis?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See Search Results by Book.)

**What is its definition?** (Note especially the Outline of Biblical Usage and Gesenius' Lexicon.)

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**Read the following passages that use this Hebrew word. Mark key words or phrases.**

*When the Philistine looked and saw David, he **disdained** him, for he was but a youth, ruddy and handsome in appearance. (1 Samuel 17:42)*

*As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal the daughter of Saul looked out of the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, and she **despised** him in her heart. (2 Samuel 6:16)*

*They mocked God's messengers, **despised** His warnings, and ridiculed His prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against His people and there was no remedy. (2 Chronicles 36:16)*

*When Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite servant and Geshem the Arab heard of it, they jeered at us and **despised** us and said, "What is this thing that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" (Nehemiah 2:19)*

*The one who walks in his uprightness fears the Lord,  
But the one who is perverted in his ways **despises** Him. (Proverbs 14:2)*

*He is **despised** and rejected by men,  
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.  
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;  
He was **despised**, and we did not esteem Him. (Isaiah 53:3)*

**What do you learn about this Hebrew word for "despise"? What does it tell you about Esau?**

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## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from Alexander MacLaren's *Expositions of Holy Scriptures*. **Alexander MacLaren** (1826-1910) was a Baptist pastor in Manchester, England whose sermons were known for their "profundity of thought, logical arrangement, eloquence of appeal, and power over the human heart."

Isaac's small household represented a great variety of types of character. He himself lacked energy, and seems in later life to have been very much of a tool in the hands of others. Rebekah had the stronger nature, was persistent, energetic, and managed her husband to her heart's content. The twin brothers were strongly opposed in character; and, naturally enough, each parent loved best the child that was most unlike him or her: Isaac rejoicing in the very wildness of the adventurous, dashing Esau; and Rebekah finding an outlet for her womanly tenderness in an undue partiality for the quiet lad that was always at hand to help her and be petted by her.

One's sympathy goes out to Esau. He was a *man of the field*—by which is meant, not cultivated ground, but open country, which we might call prairie. He was a *backwoodsman*—he liked the wild hunter's life better than sticking at home looking after sheep. He had the attractive characteristics of that kind of men, as well as their faults. He was frank, impulsive, generous, incapable of persevering work or of looking ahead, passionate. His descendants prefer cattle-ranching and gold-prospecting to keeping shops or sitting with their lungs squeezed against a desk.

Jacob had neither the high spirits nor the animal courage of his brother. He was a *plain man*. The word is literally 'perfect,' but cannot be used in its deepest sense; for Jacob was very far indeed from being that, but seems to have a lower sense, which might perhaps be represented by steady-going, or respectable, in modern phraseology. He went quietly about his ordinary work, in contrast with his daring brother's escapades and unsettledness.

The two types are intensified by civilization, and the antagonism between them increased. City life tends to produce Jacobs, and its Esaus escape from it as soon as they can. But Jacob had the vices as well as the virtues of his qualities. He was orderly and domestic, but he was tricky and keenly alive to his own interest. He was persevering and almost dogged in his tenacity of purpose, but he was not above taking mean advantages and getting at his ends by miry roads. He had little love for his brother, in whom he saw an obstacle to his ambition. He had the virtues and vices of the commercial spirit.

But we judge the two men wrongly if we let ourselves be fascinated, as Isaac was, by Esau and forget that the superficial attractions of his character cover a core worthy of disapprobation. They are crude judges of character who prefer the type of man who spurns the restraints of patient industry and order; and popular authors, who make their heroes out of such, err in taste no less than in morals. There is a very unwholesome kind of literature, which is devoted to glorifying the Esaus as fine fellows, with spirit, generosity, and noble carelessness, whereas at bottom they are governed by animal impulses, and incapable of estimating any good which does not appeal to sense, and that at once.

The great lesson of this story lies on its surface. It is the folly and sin of buying present gratification of appetite or sense at the price of giving up far greater future good. The details are picturesquely told. Esau's eagerness, stimulated by the smell of the mess of lentils, is strikingly expressed in the Hebrew: "Let me devour, I pray thee, of that red, that red there." It is no sin to be hungry, but to let

appetite speak so clamorously indicates feeble self-control. Jacob's coolness is an unpleasant foil to Esau's impatience, and his cautious bargaining, before he will sell what a brother would have given, shows a mean soul, without generous love to his own flesh and blood. Esau lets one ravenous desire hide everything else from him. He wants the pottage which smokes there, and that one poor dish is for the moment more to him than birthright and any future good.

Jacob knows the changeableness of Esau's character, and is well aware that a hungry man will promise anything, and, when fed, will break his promise as easily as he made it. So he makes Esau swear; and Esau will do that, or anything asked. He gets his meal. The story graphically describes the greedy relish with which he ate, the short duration of his enjoyment, and the dark meaning of the seemingly insignificant event, by that accumulation of verbs, "He did eat and drink, and rose up and went his way: so Esau despised his birthright."

We may learn, first, **how profound an influence small temptations, yielded to, may exert on a life.**

Many scoffs have been directed against this story, as if it were unworthy of credence that eating a dish of lentils should have shaped the life of a man and of his descendants. But is it not always the case that trifles turn out to be determining points? Hinges are very small, compared with the doors which move on them. Most lives are molded by insignificant events. No temptation is small, for no sin is small; and if the occasion of yielding to sense and the present is insignificant, the yielding is not so.

But the main lesson is, **the madness of flinging away greater future good for present gratifications of sense.** One cannot suppose

that the spiritual side of the *birthright* was in the thoughts of either brother. Esau and Jacob alike regarded it only as giving the headship of the family. It was merely the right of succession, with certain material accompanying advantages, which Jacob coveted and Esau parted with.

However, even in regard to merely worldly objects, the man who lives for only the present moment is distinctly beneath him who lives for a future good, however material it may be. Whoever subordinates the present, and is able steadily to set before himself a remote object, for which he is strong enough to subdue the desire of immediate gratifications of any sort, is, in so far, better than the man who, like a savage or an animal, lives only for the instant.

The highest form of that nobility is when time is clearly seen to be the servant to eternity and life's aims are determined with supreme reference to the future beyond the grave. But how many of us are every day doing exactly as Esau did—flinging away a great future for a small present! A man who lives only for such ends as may be attained on this side of the grave is as *profane* a person as Esau, and despises his birthright as truly.

Esau knew that he was hungry, and that lentil porridge was good, "What good shall the birthright do me?" He failed to make the effort of mind and imagination needed in order to realize how much of the kind of "good" that he could appreciate it would do to him. The smell of the smoking food was more to him than far greater good which he could only appreciate by an effort. A sixpence held close to the eye can shut out the sun. Resolute effort is needed to prevent the small, intrusive present from blotting out the transcendent greatness of the final future. And for lack of such effort, men by the thousand fling themselves away.

To sell a birthright for a bowl of lentils was plain folly. But is it wiser to sell the blessedness and peace of communion with God here and of heaven hereafter for anything that earth can yield to sense or to soul?

How many shrewd men of the highest commercial standing are making as bad a bargain as Esau's! The *pottage* is hot and comforting, but it is soon eaten; and when the bowl is empty, and the sense of hunger comes back in an hour or two, the transaction does not look quite as advantageous as it did. Esau had many a minute of rueful meditation on his bad bargain before he in vain besought his father's blessing. And suspicions of the folly of their choice are apt to haunt men who prefer the present to the future, even before the future becomes the present, and the folly is manifest.

*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?*

—Mark 8:36

So a character like Esau's, though it has many fine possibilities about it, and attracts liking, is really of a low type, and may very easily slide into depths of degrading sensualism, and be dead to all nobleness. Enterprise, love

of stirring life, impatience of dull plodding, are natural to young lives. Unregulated, impulsive characters, who live for the moment, and are very sensitive to all material delights, have often an air of generosity and joviality which hides their essential baseness; for it *is* base to live for flesh, either in more refined or more frankly coarse forms.

It is base to be incapable of seeing an inch beyond the present. It is base to despise any good that cannot minister to fleeting lusts or fleshly pleasures, and to say of high thought, of ideal aims of any sort, and most of all to say of religion, 'What good will it do me?'

To estimate such precious things by the standard of gross utility is like weighing diamonds in grocers' scales. They will do very well for sugar, but not for precious stones. The sacred things of life are not those which do what the Esaus recognize as "good." They have another purpose, and are valuable for other ends. Let us take heed, then, that we estimate things according to their true relative worth; that we live, not for today, but for eternity; and that we suppress all greedy cravings. If we do not, we shall be "profane" persons like Esau, "who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright."

**What thought from Alexander MacLaren's words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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## DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Genesis 25:29-34 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your daily life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 25:29-34?**

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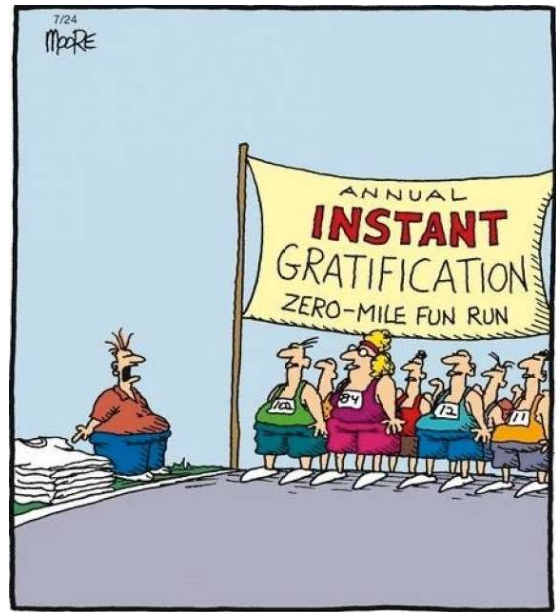
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**In what ways is instant gratification promoted in our culture today?**

**In what ways have you been impacted by our culture's addiction to instant gratification?**



"Runners on your mark. Get set. Go! ...  
OK, come get your T-shirts."

**Consider your smartphone.** Statistics indicate that the average person touches their phone over 2500 times per day. We check it first thing in the morning and all throughout the day. We have access to instant information and constant distraction and little time for the things that matter. *Are you exchanging the most important things in life for a few morsels of instant gratification?*

**What are the most important things in life? What are the things that have eternal value?**

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**In what practical ways can you make these things a priority in your daily life?**

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## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*How often do we put the question to ourselves, "What is my mess of pottage?" It is important to verbalize the question. We are in constant danger of being tempted to give up something very precious in order to indulge a sudden strong desire. The desire may involve greedy eating and drinking, lusting after money or material things, letting loose our anger in abandonment of reason, succumbing to depression without check, cursing God in despair or disappointment, giving in to a sweeping sexual desire...*

*The mess of pottage that is dangerous to you and to me is any temptation to gratify the feelings of the immediate moment in a way that shows we despise the promises of the living God for our future.*

Edith Schaeffer

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- What are some of the messages or advertisements that you have seen recently that promote instant gratification or getting what you want *now*?
- What are some of the dangers and consequences of instant gratification?
- What is the significance of the birthright?
- Why did Jacob want the birthright so much? Why did Esau care less about it?
- What does this story teach you about Esau? About Jacob? About their relationship?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Alexander MacLaren? If so, what?
- Discuss the ways that our culture's emphasis on instant gratification has impacted you. *Do you tend to make impulse purchases? Are you addicted to your phone? Do you have a hard time waiting for anything?* What is one practical way that you can counteract this emphasis on instant gratification and make the most important things a priority in your daily life?

FOR WHAT  
SHALL IT  
PROFIT A  
MAN IF HE  
SHALL GAIN  
THE WHOLE  
WORLD, AND  
LOSE HIS  
OWN SOUL?

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MARK 8:36



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## FLASHBACK ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 26:1-33

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#### DAY ONE Observation

Genesis 26 seems out of place chronologically since it appears to take place before Isaac and Rebekah have children. But this chapter's "flash-back" serves a purpose in giving us our closest look at the person of Isaac and showing us how both the blessings and failings of Abraham are passed down to his son, Isaac.

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 26:1-33. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.**

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup> And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. <sup>3</sup> Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. <sup>4</sup> I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, <sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."

<sup>6</sup> So Isaac settled in Gerar. <sup>7</sup> When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance. <sup>8</sup> When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife. <sup>9</sup> So Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'"<sup>10</sup> Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." <sup>11</sup> So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

<sup>12</sup> And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him, <sup>13</sup> and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. <sup>14</sup> He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him. <sup>15</sup> (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) <sup>16</sup> And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."

<sup>17</sup> So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. <sup>18</sup> And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them. <sup>19</sup> But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water,

<sup>20</sup> the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. <sup>21</sup> Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also, so he called its name Sitnah. <sup>22</sup> And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

<sup>23</sup> From there he went up to Beersheba. <sup>24</sup> And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham's sake." <sup>25</sup> So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.

<sup>26</sup> When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, <sup>27</sup> Isaac said to them, "Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?" <sup>28</sup> They said, "We see plainly that the Lord has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, <sup>29</sup> that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord." <sup>30</sup> So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. <sup>31</sup> In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. <sup>32</sup> That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, "We have found water." <sup>33</sup> He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day. (ESV)

**What thought or verse stands out to you in this passage? Why?**

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**Mark or highlight the seven promises given to Isaac in 26:3-4. Note the words *I will* and *shall*.**

**What does God say to Isaac in 26:24?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Write down three things you learn about Isaac from his words and actions in this chapter.**

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## DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Genesis 26:23-25 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them.

*From there he went up to Beersheba.  
That night the Lord appeared to him and said,  
“I am the God of your father Abraham.  
Do not be afraid, for I am with you;  
I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants  
for the sake of my servant Abraham.”  
Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the Lord.  
There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well. (NIV)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

**Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.**

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## DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

Many of the events in Isaac's life in Genesis 26 are a *re-run* of previous events in Abraham's life.

**Re-read the following passages from Abraham's life.**

<sup>2</sup>Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. <sup>3</sup>And he journeyed on from the Negev as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, <sup>4</sup>to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord. <sup>5</sup>And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, <sup>6</sup>so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together, <sup>7</sup>and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land.

<sup>8</sup>Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. <sup>9</sup>Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left." (Genesis 13:2-9)

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From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. <sup>2</sup>And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. <sup>3</sup>But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." <sup>4</sup>Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? <sup>5</sup>Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." <sup>6</sup>Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. <sup>7</sup>Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

<sup>8</sup>So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. <sup>9</sup>Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." <sup>10</sup>And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?" <sup>11</sup>Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' <sup>12</sup>Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife. <sup>13</sup>And when God caused me to wander from my father's house, I said to her, 'This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, 'He is my brother.''" (Genesis 20:1-13)

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<sup>22</sup>At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do. <sup>23</sup>Now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or

with my descendants or with my posterity, but as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned.” <sup>24</sup> And Abraham said, “I will swear.”

<sup>25</sup> When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech’s servants had seized, <sup>26</sup> Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today.” <sup>27</sup> So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. <sup>28</sup> Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. <sup>29</sup> And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?” <sup>30</sup> He said, “These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well.” <sup>31</sup> Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. <sup>32</sup> So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines. <sup>33</sup> Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. <sup>34</sup> And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines. (Genesis 21:22-34)

**What parallels do you see between Abraham and Isaac in these passages?**

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Genesis 26 focuses on digging wells. In the desert, finding water is absolutely essential to life. Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type “Genesis 26” into the “Search the Bible” box. Find the verses that mention the names of the wells (26:20-22, 33). **What are the meanings of each of these names?**

**Esek (H6230)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Sitnah (H7856)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Rehoboth (H7344)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Shebah (H7656)** \_\_\_\_\_

Now click on 26:31 and find the word “peace.” Click on the Strong’s number (H7965).

**What is the Hebrew word for “peace”?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from Alexander MacLaren's *Expositions of Holy Scriptures*. **Alexander MacLaren** (1826-1910) was a Baptist pastor in Manchester, England whose sermons were known for their "profundity of thought, logical arrangement, eloquence of appeal, and power over the human heart."

### THE FIRST APOSTLE OF PEACE

*Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. (26:12)*

The salient feature of Isaac's life is that it has no salient features. He lived out his hundred and eighty years in quiet, with little to make history. Few details of his story are given, and some of these are not very creditable. He seems never to have wandered far from the neighborhood of Beersheba. These quiet, rolling stretches of thinly peopled land contented him, and gave pasture for his flocks, as well as fields for his cultivation. Like many of the tribes of that district still, he had passed from the purely nomad and pastoral life, such as Abraham led, and had begun to 'sow in that land.' That marks a stage in progress. His father's life had been like a midsummer day, with bursts of splendor and heavy thunderclouds; his was more like a calm day in autumn, windless and unchanging from morning till serene evening. The world thinks little of such lives, but they are fruitful.

Our text begins with a sweet little picture of peaceful industry, blessed by God, and therefore prospering. Travelers tell us that the land where Isaac dwelt is still marvelously fertile, even to rude farming. But to be merely a successful farmer and sheep-owner might have seemed poor work to the heir of such glowing promises, and the prospect of a high destiny often disgusts its possessor with lowly duties. 'But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it,' and the best way to fit ourselves for great things in the future is to bend our backs and wills to humble toil in the present...

The Philistines' envy was very natural, since Isaac was an alien, and, in some sense, an intruder. Their stopping of the wells was a common act of hostility, and an effectual one in that land, where everything lives where water comes, and dies if it is cut off.

Abimelech's reason for 'extraditing' Isaac might have provoked a more pugnacious person to stay and defy the Philistines to expel him. 'Thou art much mightier than we,' and so he could have said, 'Try to put me out, then,' and the result might have been that Abimelech and his Philistines would have been the ones to go. But the same spirit was in the man as had been in the lad, when he let his father bind him and lay him on the altar without a struggle or a word, and he quietly went, leaving his fields and pastures. 'Very poor-spirited,' says the world; what does Christ say?

*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3)*

Isaac was not 'original.' He cleaned out the wells which his father had dug, and with filial piety gave them again the old names *which his father had called them*. Some of us nowadays get credit for being 'advanced and liberal thinkers,' because we regard our fathers' wells as much too choked with rubbish to be worth clearing out, and the last thing we should dream of would be to revive the old names. But the old wells were not enough for the new time, and so fresh ones were added. Isaac and his servants did not say, 'We will have no water but what is drawn from Abraham's wells. What was enough for him is enough for us.' So, like all wise men, they were conservatively progressive and progressively conservative.

The Gerar shepherds were sharp lawyers. They took strong ground in saying, 'The *water* is ours; you have dug wells, but we are ground-owners, and what is below the surface, as well as what is on it, is our property.' Again Isaac yielded, moved on a little way, and tried again. A second well was claimed, and given up, and all that Isaac did was to name the two 'Contention' and 'Enmity,' as a gentle rebuke and memorial. Then, as is generally the result, gentleness wearied violence out, and the Philistines tired of annoying before Isaac tired of yielding. So he came into a quiet harbor at last, and traced his repose to God, naming his last well 'Broad Places,' because the Lord had made room for him.

Such a quiet spirit, strong in non-resistance, and ready to yield rather than quarrel, was strangely out of place in these wild days and lands. He obeyed the Sermon on the Mount millenniums before it was spoken. Whether from temperament or from faith, he is the first instance of the Christian type of excellence in the Old Testament. For there ought to be no question that the spirit of meekness, which will not meet violence by violence, is the Christian spirit. Christian morals alter the perspective of moral excellences, and exalt meekness above the 'heroic virtues' admired by the world. The violets and lilies in Christ's garden outshine voluptuous roses and flaunting sunflowers. In this day, when there is a recrudescence of militarism, and we are tempted to canonize the soldier, we need more than ever to insist that the highest type is 'the Lamb of God,' who was 'as a sheep before her shearers.' To fight for my rights is not the Christian ideal, nor is it the best way to secure them. Isaac will generally weary out the Philistines, and get his well at last, and will have escaped much friction and many evil passions.

Isaac won the friendship of his opponents by his patience, as the verses after the text tell. Their consciences and hearts were touched, and they 'saw plainly that the Lord was with him,' and sued him for alliance. It is better to turn enemies into friends than to beat them and have them as enemies still. 'I'll knock you down unless you love me' does not sound a very hopeful way of cementing peaceful relations. But *when a man's ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.* [Proverbs 16:7]

But Isaac won more than the Philistines' favor by his meek peacefulness, for 'the Lord appeared unto him,' and assured him that, undefended and unresisting as he was, he had a strong defense, and need not be afraid: 'Fear not, for I am with thee.' The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is, in the sight of God, of great price...and it brings visions of God, and assurances of tranquil safety to him who cherishes it. The Spirit of God comes down in the likeness of a dove, and that bird of peace sits only on the charmed wave of a heart stilled from strife and wrath, like a quiet summer's sea.

Isaac's new home at Beersheba, having been thus hallowed by the appearance of the Lord, was consecrated by the building of an altar. We should hallow by grateful remembrance the spots where God has made Himself known to us. The best beginning of a new undertaking is to rear an altar. It is well when new settlers begin their work by calling on the name of the Lord. Beersheba and Plymouth Rock are a pair. First comes the altar, then the tent can be trustfully pitched, but 'except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.' And if the house is built in faith, a well will not be lacking; for they who 'seek first the kingdom of God' will have all needful 'things added unto them.'

**What thought from Alexander MacLaren’s words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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**DAY FIVE**  
**Application**

Re-read Genesis 26:1-33 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your daily life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 26:1-33?**

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It is hard not to notice that Isaac repeats the very same habit of deception as his father, Abraham. As the saying goes, “More is caught than taught.” Our children, and others around us, may hear what we say but they will usually follow our example more than anything else.

In revealing His character to Moses, God states that He visits *the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation* (Exodus 34:7). The moral impact of our actions to the third and fourth generation highlights the sobering reality that not only are we impacted by the sin patterns of our parents (and grandparents) but we also impact the generations after us with our own sin patterns.

**What habits, tendencies, or actions have you picked up from your parents or grandparents?**  
(Consider how you deal with fear, conflict, stress, money, success, politics, alcohol, anger, etc.)

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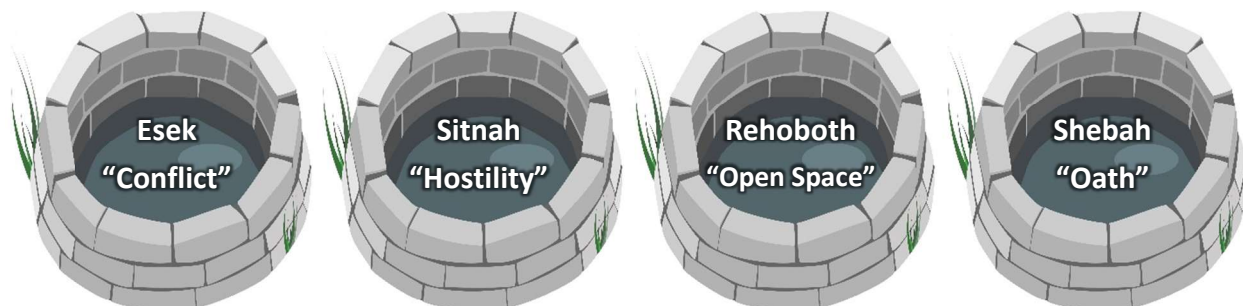
**What habits, tendencies, or actions have you developed that could negatively impact others?**  
(Consider how you deal with fear, conflict, stress, money, success, politics, alcohol, anger, etc.)

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In Genesis, Isaac appears to be a quiet man—sensitive, contemplative, submissive, peaceable. In this chapter, we see that Isaac is willing to move on and dig another well rather than start a fight.

**Note the progression in the names of the wells that Isaac dug.**



The first two wells mark the beginning of what usually happens in conflict. We have a disagreement or offense with someone and it leads to a deep-seated hurt and resentment, even hatred.

What is different about Isaac's response is that he chooses to keep digging wells rather than digging in his heels for a conflict. He chooses peace over outright hostility. This leads to the experience of "open space" (freedom) and the "oath" of a treaty (peace).

**Read the following Proverbs related to conflict.** Mark key words and phrases as you read.

*Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs. (Proverbs 10:12)*

*A hot-tempered person stirs up conflict, but the one who is patient calms a quarrel. (Proverbs 15:18)*

*A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends. (Proverbs 16:28)*

*To start a conflict is to release a flood; stop the dispute before it breaks out. (Proverbs 17:14)*

*Avoiding quarrels brings a person honor; for any fool can explode in anger. (Proverbs 20:3)*

*The greedy stir up conflict, but those who trust in the Lord will prosper. (Proverbs 28:25)*

*An angry person stirs up conflict, and a hot-tempered person commits many sins. (Proverbs 29:22)*

**What do you learn about conflict from these Proverbs?**

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Conflict and hurt are realities in this life but you do not have to let it lead to open hostility. Instead we can experience "open space" and "peace" if we are willing to dig another well rather than building a wall. *Is there some bitterness or resentment that you need to release to the Lord today?*

## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*We see Isaac as a timid, peace-loving man who avoids conflict with his neighbors whenever possible, such a contrast to his contentious sons who are forever squabbling.*

Gordon Wenham

*He that is not a son of Peace is not a son of God. All other sins destroy the Church consequentially; but Division and Separation demolish it directly.*

Richard Baxter (1615-91)

*To put a wall between you and others is to build a wall between you and God.*

Jim Elliff

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- Whom have you known in your life that was somewhat like Isaac—of more of a quiet nature, contemplative, submissive, more willing to seek peace than a fight? How did this person impact you? What did you learn from them?
- What parallels do you see between Abraham's life and Isaac's life?
- What promises does God give to Isaac? How do you think these promises impacted him?
- Why do you think the Bible spends so much time talking about Isaac digging wells?
- When is avoiding conflict a good thing? When is it a bad thing? How can you tell the difference between good conflict avoidance and bad conflict avoidance?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Alexander MacLaren? If so, what?
- Read the Proverbs regarding conflict on page 34. What do you learn from these verses? How hard is it for you to "let things go" and not harbor resentment?
- Pray for one another. Ask God to help you be a digger of wells more than a builder of walls.

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## THE BLESSING ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 26:34-28:9

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#### DAY ONE Observation

This long section details one of the most dramatic and traumatic scenes in the book of Genesis. Isaac is nearing the end of his life and he wants to put his blessing upon Esau—despite what he knows about God’s promise and Esau’s carnality. Rebekah steps in to “save the day” but makes everything worse in the end.

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 26:34-28:9. Mark words or phrases as you read. Pause after each section to answer the observation questions included in the margin.**

<sup>34</sup> When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. <sup>35</sup> They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

**What does Esau do to bring grief to his parents?**

**27** When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him, “My son.”

**Highlight** the word “bless” or “blessing” as you read.

“Here I am,” he answered.

**How would you describe Isaac based on this passage?**

<sup>2</sup> Isaac said, “I am now an old man and don’t know the day of my death. <sup>3</sup> Now then, get your equipment—your quiver and bow—and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. <sup>4</sup> Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die.”

<sup>5</sup> Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, <sup>6</sup> Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, <sup>7</sup> ‘Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the Lord before I die.’ <sup>8</sup> Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: <sup>9</sup> Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. <sup>10</sup> Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies.”

**How would you describe Rebekah based on this passage?**

<sup>11</sup> Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “But my brother Esau is a hairy man while I have smooth skin. <sup>12</sup> What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing.”

**What is Jacob’s fear?**

<sup>13</sup> His mother said to him, “My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me.”

**What is Rebekah’s response?**

<sup>14</sup> So he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she prepared some tasty food, just the way his father liked it. <sup>15</sup> Then Rebekah took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and put them on her younger

son Jacob. <sup>16</sup> She also covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck with the goat-skins. <sup>17</sup> Then she handed to her son Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.

**List all the lies that Jacob tells in this passage.**

<sup>18</sup> He went to his father and said, “My father.”

“Yes, my son,” he answered. “Who is it?”

<sup>19</sup> Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

<sup>20</sup> Isaac asked his son, “How did you find it so quickly, my son?”

“The Lord your God gave me success,” he replied.

<sup>21</sup> Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near so I can touch you, my son, to know whether you really are my son Esau or not.”

<sup>22</sup> Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” <sup>23</sup> He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau; so he proceeded to bless him. <sup>24</sup> “Are you really my son Esau?” he asked.

“I am,” he replied.

<sup>25</sup> Then he said, “My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I may give you my blessing.”

Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he drank. <sup>26</sup> Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come here, my son, and kiss me.”

<sup>27</sup> So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his clothes, he blessed him and said,

**What blessings does Isaac bestow on Jacob (posing as Esau)?**

“Ah, the smell of my son  
is like the smell of a field  
that the Lord has blessed.

<sup>28</sup> May God give you heaven’s dew  
and earth’s richness—  
an abundance of grain and new wine.

<sup>29</sup> May nations serve you  
and peoples bow down to you.

Be lord over your brothers,  
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.

May those who curse you be cursed  
and those who bless you be blessed.”

<sup>30</sup> After Isaac finished blessing him, and Jacob had scarcely left his father’s presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting.

<sup>31</sup> He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father.

Then he said to him, “My father, please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

**What is Isaac’s response when he realizes he has been deceived?**

<sup>32</sup> His father Isaac asked him, “Who are you?”

“I am your son,” he answered, “your firstborn, Esau.”

<sup>33</sup> Isaac trembled violently and said, “Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!”

<sup>34</sup> When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me—me too, my father!”

**What is Esau’s response when he realizes Jacob stole his blessing?**

<sup>35</sup> But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.”

<sup>36</sup> Esau said, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!” Then he asked, “Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?”

<sup>37</sup> Isaac answered Esau, “I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?”

<sup>38</sup> Esau said to his father, “Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!” Then Esau wept aloud.

<sup>39</sup> His father Isaac answered him,

**List the things that Isaac reveals about Esau’s future.**

“Your dwelling will be  
away from the earth’s richness,  
away from the dew of heaven above.

<sup>40</sup> You will live by the sword  
and you will serve your brother.  
But when you grow restless,  
you will throw his yoke  
from off your neck.”

<sup>41</sup> Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, “The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob.”

**What does Esau plan to do?**

<sup>42</sup> When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, “Your brother Esau is planning to avenge himself by killing you. <sup>43</sup> Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban in Harran. <sup>44</sup> Stay with him for a while until your brother’s fury subsides. <sup>45</sup> When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I’ll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?”

**What does Rebekah tell Jacob to do?**

<sup>46</sup> Then Rebekah said to Isaac, “I’m disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living.”

**What commands does Isaac give to Jacob?**

**28** So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him. Then he commanded him: “Do not marry a Canaanite woman. <sup>2</sup> Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother’s father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother. <sup>3</sup> May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. <sup>4</sup> May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham.” <sup>5</sup> Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau.

**What blessings does Isaac bestow on Jacob?**

<sup>6</sup> Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he commanded him, “Do not marry a Canaanite woman,” <sup>7</sup> and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. <sup>8</sup> Esau then realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; <sup>9</sup> so he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already had. (ESV)

**How does Esau respond to all this?  
What does this tell you about him?**

**What thought or verse stands out to you in this passage? Why?**

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**How many times are the words “bless” or “blessing” used in this passage?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Write down one or two words to describe each of the following in this passage.**

- Isaac \_\_\_\_\_
- Rebekah \_\_\_\_\_
- Jacob \_\_\_\_\_
- Esau \_\_\_\_\_
- Isaac & Rebekah’s Relationship \_\_\_\_\_
- Jacob & Esau’s Relationship \_\_\_\_\_

## DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Read Genesis 28:1-4 several times. This is the blessing that Isaac should have given Jacob from the beginning, but his love for Esau and for wild game blinded him.

*So Isaac called for Jacob, blessed him, commanded him and said to him,  
“Don’t take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.  
Get up, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father,  
and take for yourself a wife from there, from the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother.*

*Now may El Shaddai bless you,  
and make you fruitful  
and multiply you so that you will become an assembly of peoples.  
And may he give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your seed with you  
that you may take possession of the land of your sojourn, which God gave to Abraham.” (TLV)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

**Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.**

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### DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 27" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 27:12 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "blessing" and click on the Strong's number (H1293) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "blessing"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**How many times is it used in Genesis?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See Search Results by Book.)

**What is its definition?** (Note especially the Outline of Biblical Usage and Gesenius' Lexicon.)

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In Genesis, we see God pouring out His blessing on humanity and on His people (1:28; 9:1; 12:2).

**Read the following excerpt from *The Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*.**

The Hebrew root *brk* occurs 327x verbally in the OT. Its highest concentrations occur in Genesis, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Psalms... It must be stressed that *nothing was more important than securing the blessing of God in one's life or nation...* A blessed life was the ideal; a life without God's blessing was the ultimate nightmare. Real success was impossible without the much-coveted blessing. "Where modern man talks of success, OT man talked of blessing" (Wenham)...

God's blessing is his formative, empowering word, often with overtones of appointing destiny. It is not an empty pronouncement or simply an expression of wish or goodwill, nor is it a bare command... Rather, the blessing of God has content; it actualizes and enables... *That which is blessed functions and produces at the optimum level, fulfilling its divinely designated purpose.*

In Genesis, we also see God's people speaking blessing over others, particularly fathers over their children (27:27-29; 28:1-4; 48:15-16; 49:1-28). In the case of Isaac and Jacob, their blessings were in line with God's specific covenant promises to them and prophetic in nature. Yet we can also see the value of blessing others by speaking words of encouragement and benediction over them.

**Read the following passages of Scripture.** Mark key words or phrases as you read.

*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.' So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."* (Numbers 6:22-27)

*May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble;  
May the name of the God of Jacob defend you.*

...

*May He grant you according to your heart's desire,  
And fulfill all your purpose. (Psalm 20:1, 4)*

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,  
that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 15:13)*

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,  
may have power, together with all the saints,  
to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,  
and to know this love that surpasses knowledge —  
that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:17b-19)*

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely.  
May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)*

*Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way.  
The Lord be with you all. (2 Thessalonians 3:16)*

**What kind of blessings can we speak over others in the name of God and the Lord Jesus Christ?**

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Unfortunately, what should be a beautiful chapter with Isaac blessing his sons in accordance with God's Word turns out to be a tragedy of blindness, deception, hostility, and family breakdown. No one stands as an "innocent" in this story. All have some culpability in the family's demise. But Jacob's deception (egged on by Rebekah) becomes a theme in his life that creates trouble.

Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 27" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 27:36 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "supplanted" and click on the Strong's number (H6117) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "supplanted"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** \_\_\_\_\_

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## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from **Matthew Henry's Exposition of the Old Testament**. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was a pastor, preacher, and author from Chester, England. He is best known for his exhaustive, six-volume, verse-by-verse commentary on the Scriptures. Charles Spurgeon stated that, "Every minister ought to read it entirely and carefully through once at least."

In this chapter we return to the typical story of the struggle between Esau and Jacob. Esau had profanely sold the birthright to Jacob; but Esau hopes he shall be never the poorer, nor Jacob the richer, for that bargain, while he preserves his interest in his father's affections, and so secures the blessing. Here therefore we find how he was justly punished for his contempt of the birthright (of which he foolishly deprived himself) with the loss of the blessing, of which Jacob fraudulently deprives him. Thus this story is explained, Heb. 12:16-17, *Because he sold the birthright, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected*. For those that make light of the name and profession of religion, and throw them away for a trifle, thereby forfeit the powers and privileges of it.

### Verses 1-5

**I. Isaac's design to make his will, and to declare Esau his heir.** The promise of the Messiah and the land of Canaan was a great trust, first committed to Abraham, then, by divine direction, transmitted to Isaac. Isaac, being now old, and not knowing, or not understanding, or not duly considering, the divine oracle concerning his two sons, that *the elder should serve the younger*, resolves to entail all the honor and power that were wrapped up in the promise upon Esau his eldest son. In this, he was governed more by natural affection, and the common method of settlements, than he ought to have been, if he knew (as it is probable he did) the intimations God had given of his mind in this matter. Note, We are very apt to take our measures rather from our own reason than from divine revelation, and thereby often miss our way...

**II. The directions he gave to Esau, pursuant to this design.** He calls him to him, v. 1. For Esau, though married, had not yet removed; and, though he had greatly grieved his parents by his marriage, yet they had not expelled him...

1. He tells him upon what considerations he resolved to do this now (v. 2): *I am old*, and therefore must die shortly...

2. He bids him to get things ready for the solemnity of executing his last will and testament, by which he designed to make him his heir, v. 3-4. Esau must go hunting and bring some venison, which his father will eat of, and then bless him. ...Perhaps Esau, since he had married, had brought his venison to his wives, and seldom to his father, as formerly (25:28), and therefore Isaac, before he would bless him, would have him show this piece of respect to him...

### Verses 6-17

Rebekah contrives to procure for Jacob the blessing which was designed for Esau...

**I. The end was good, for she was directed in this intention by the oracle of God**, by which she had been governed in dispensing her affections. God had said it should be so, that the elder should *serve the younger*; and therefore Rebekah resolves it shall be so, and cannot bear to see her husband designing to thwart the oracle of God.

**II. The means were bad, and no way justifiable.** If it was not a wrong to Esau to deprive him of the blessing (he himself

having forfeited it), yet it was a wrong to Isaac, taking advantage of his infirmity. It was a wrong to Jacob too, whom she taught to deceive, by putting a lie into his mouth, or at least by putting one into his right hand...

He himself also was aware of the danger, lest he should bring upon himself his father's curse, which he dreaded above anything... If Rebekah, when she heard Isaac promise the blessing to Esau, had gone to Isaac, and, with humility and seriousness, put him in remembrance of that which God had said concerning their sons—if she further had shown him how Esau had forfeited the blessing both by selling his birthright and by marrying foreign wives, it is probable that Isaac would have been prevailed upon knowingly and wittingly to confer the blessing upon Jacob, and needed not thus to have been cheated into it. This would have been honorable and laudable, and would have looked well in the history; but God left her to herself, to take this indirect course, that he might have the glory of bringing good out of evil, and of serving his own purposes by the sins and follies of men, and that we might have the satisfaction of knowing that, though there is so much wickedness and deceit in the world, God governs it according to his will, to his own praise.

Rebekah endeavors to deceive:

1. **Isaac's sense of tasting**, by dressing some choice pieces of kid, seasoning them, serving them up, so as to make him believe they were venison: this it was no hard matter to do. See the folly of those that are nice and curious in their appetite, and take a pride in humoring it. It is easy to impose upon them with that which they pretend to despise and dislike, so little perhaps does it differ from that to which they give a decided preference. Solomon tells us that dainties are *deceitful meat*; for it is possible for us to be deceived by them in more ways than one, Prov. 23:32.

2. **His sense of feeling and smelling**. She put Esau's clothes upon Jacob, his best clothes, which, it might be supposed, Esau would put on, in token of joy and respect to his father, when he was to receive the blessing. Isaac knew these, by the stuff, shape, and smell, to be Esau's... Lest the smoothness and softness of Jacob's hands and neck should betray him, she covered them, and probably part of his face, with the skins of the kids that were newly killed, v. 16.

*Lastly*, it was a very rash word which Rebekah spoke, when Jacob objected the danger of a curse: *Upon me be thy curse, my son*. Christ indeed, who is mighty to save, has said, *Upon me be the curse, only obey my voice*; he has borne the burden of the curse, the curse of the law, for all those that will take upon them the yoke of the command, the command of the gospel. But it is too daring for any creature to say, *Upon me be the curse*...

## Verses 18-29

I. **The art and assurance with which Jacob managed this intrigue**. Who would have thought that this plain man could have played his part so well in a design of this nature? His mother having put him in the way of it, and encouraged him in it, he dexterously applied himself to those methods that he had never accustomed himself to... Note, Lying is soon learnt. The psalmist speaks of those who, *as soon as they are born, speak lies*, Ps. 58:3. I wonder how Jacob could so readily turn his tongue to say, *I am Esau thy first-born*... How could he say, *Eat of my venison*, when he knew it came, not from the field, but from the fold? But especially I wonder how he could have the assurance to father it upon God, and to use his name in the cheat: *The Lord thy God brought it to me* (v. 20). Is this Jacob? Is this Israel indeed, without guile? It is certainly written, not for our imitation, but for our admonition...

**II. The success of this management.** Jacob with some difficulty gained his point, and obtained the blessing.

1. Isaac was at first dissatisfied, and would have discovered the fraud if he could have trusted his own ears; for *the voice was Jacob's voice*, v. 22... This may be alluded to to illustrate the character of a hypocrite. His voice is Jacob's voice, but his hands are Esau's. He speaks the language of a saint, but does the works of a sinner; but the judgment will be, as here, by the hands.

2. At length he yielded to the power of the cheat, *because the hands were hairy* (v. 23), not considering how easy it was to counterfeit that circumstance; and now Jacob carries it on dexterously, sets his venison before his father, and waits at table very officiously, till dinner is done, and the blessing comes to be pronounced in the close of this solemn feast. That which in some small degree extenuates the crime of Rebekah and Jacob is that the fraud was intended, not so much to hasten the fulfilling, as to prevent the thwarting, of the oracle of God: the blessing was just going to be put upon the wrong head, and they thought it was time to bestir themselves.

Now let us see how Isaac gave Jacob his blessing, v. 26-29. (1.) He embraced him, in token of a particular affection to him... (2.) He praised him. *He smelt the smell of his raiment, and said, See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed*, that is, like that of the most fragrant flowers and spices... (3.) He prayed for him, and therein prophesied concerning him. It is the duty of parents to pray for their children, and to bless them in the name of the Lord... Three things Jacob is here blessed with—Plenty (v. 28), Power (v. 29), and Prevalency with God, and a great interest in Heaven: *Cursed by every one that curseth thee and blessed be he that blesseth thee*...

## Verses 30-40

**I. The covenant-blessing denied to Esau.** He that made so light of the birthright *would now have inherited the blessing, but he was rejected and found no place of repentance, though he sought it with tears*, Heb. 12:17...

Isaac, when first made sensible of the imposition that had been practiced on him, *trembled exceedingly*. Those that follow the choice of their own affections, rather than the dictates of the divine will, involve themselves in such perplexities as these. But he soon recovers himself and ratifies the blessing he had given to Jacob: *I have blessed him, and he shall be blessed*... Now, at last, he is sensible that he was in an error when he designed it for Esau. Either himself recollecting the divine oracle, or rather having found himself more than ordinarily filled with the Holy Ghost when he gave the blessing to Jacob, he perceived that God did, as it were, say Amen to it... Isaac hereby acquiesced in the will of God, though it contradicted his own expectations and affection. He had a mind to give Esau the blessing, but, when he perceived the will of God was otherwise, he submitted; and this he did *by faith* (Heb. 11:20)...

## II. A common blessing bestowed upon Esau.

1. This he desired: *Bless me also*, v. 34. *Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?* v. 36. Note, The worst of men know how to wish well to themselves; and even those who profanely sell their birthright seem piously to desire the blessing. Faint desires of happiness, without a right choice of the end and a right use of the means, deceive many into their own ruin. Multitudes go to hell with their mouths full of good wishes...

2. This he had: It was promised him, that he should have a competent livelihood—the *fatness of the earth, and the dew of heaven*.

Note, Those that come short of the blessings of the covenant may yet have a very good share of outward blessings. God gives good ground and good weather to many that reject his covenant, and have no part nor lot in it...

Yet it was far short of Jacob's blessing. For him God had reserved some better thing. In Jacob's blessing *the dew of heaven* is put first, as that which he most valued, and desired, and depended upon; in Esau's *the fatness of the earth* is put first, for it was this that he had the first and principal regard to. Esau has these, but Jacob has them from God's hand: *God give thee the dew of heaven*, v. 28. It was enough to Esau to have the possession; but Jacob desired it by promise, and to have it from covenant-love...

#### Verses 41-46

**I. The malice Esau bore to Jacob**, v. 41. Thus he went in the way of Cain, who slew his brother because he had gained that acceptance with God of which he had rendered himself unworthy. Esau's hatred of Jacob was a cruel hatred. Nothing less would satisfy him than to slay his brother. *I will slay my brother*. How could he say that word without horror? How could he call him *brother*, and yet vow his death? Note, The rage of persecutors will not be tied up by any bonds, no, not the strongest and most sacred... He is loath to grieve his father while he lives, and therefore puts off the intended murder till his death, not caring how much he then grieved his surviving mother. Note, Those are bad

child-*ren* to whom their good parents are a burden... Note, Those who think to defeat God's purposes will undoubtedly be disappointed them-selves. Esau aimed to prevent Jacob, or his seed, from having the dominion, by taking away his life; but who can disannul what God has spoken? Men may fret at God's counsels, but cannot change them.

#### II. The methods Rebekah took.

1. She gave Jacob warning of his danger, and advised him to withdraw for a while, and shift for his own safety. She tells him what she heard of Esau's design, that he comforted himself with the hope of an opportunity to kill his brother, v. 42. Would one think that such a bloody barbarous thought as this could be a comfort to a man? If Esau could have kept his design to himself his mother would not have suspected it; but men's impudence in sin is often their infatuation; and they cannot accomplish their wickedness because their rage is too violent to be concealed...

2. She impressed Isaac with an apprehension of the necessity of Jacob's going among her relations upon another account, which was to take a wife. She would not tell him of Esau's wicked design against the life of Jacob, lest it should trouble him; but took another way to gain her point. Isaac saw as uneasy as he was to Esau's being unequally yoked with Hittites; and therefore, with a very good color of reason, she moves to have Jacob married to one that was better principled.

**What thought from Matthew Henry's words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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## DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Genesis 26:34-28:9 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your daily life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 26:34-28:9?**

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From all intents and purposes, Isaac and Rebekah had a beautiful early marriage. They loved each other, prayed for each other, and even “played” with each other in a physically intimate way so that those who saw them knew that they were in love (26:8-9). Yet, when we come to Genesis 27, we see a marriage that has deteriorated. There is no honest communication. There is no concern for each other. Instead, there is deception, manipulation, over-exaggeration, and favoritism. The family that was so close to begin with has descended into hatred, hostility, and chaos.

**How would you describe your parents’ marriage? What did you see in their relationship?**

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**If you are married (or were married), how would you describe your own marriage?**

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**How would you evaluate your communication with others?** Mark an “X” where you think you are on the following scales. Ask someone who knows you well for their honest evaluation as well.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| ◆-----◆   | ◆-----◆  |
| <i>I tend to exaggerate and stretch the truth</i>         | <i>I speak simply and honestly</i>             |
| ◆-----◆   | ◆-----◆  |
| <i>I tend to beat around the bush</i>                     | <i>I am direct and clear</i>                   |
| ◆-----◆   | ◆-----◆  |
| <i>I speak a good game but often don’t follow through</i> | <i>What I say I will do, I do</i>              |
| ◆-----◆   | ◆-----◆  |
| <i>People often question my words</i>                     | <i>People can count on my words being true</i> |

**Read out loud the following blessings and prayers in Scripture.**

*The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.' So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."* (Numbers 6:22-27)

*May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble;  
May the name of the God of Jacob defend you.*

...

*May He grant you according to your heart's desire,  
And fulfill all your purpose.* (Psalm 20:1, 4)

*Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,  
that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* (Romans 15:13)

*May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.* (2 Corinthians 13:14)

*And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,  
may have power, together with all the saints,  
to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,  
and to know this love that surpasses knowledge —  
that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.* (Ephesians 3:17b-19)

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely.  
May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.  
He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.* (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

*May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father,  
who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,  
encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.* (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17)

*Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way.  
The Lord be with you all.* (2 Thessalonians 3:16)

*Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead,  
that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,  
make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight,  
through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.* (Hebrews 13:20-21)

**Make one of these blessings your own prayer.** Memorize it. Pray it and speak it to the Lord.

**Now speak one of these blessings and prayers over someone close to you—your spouse, your children, a loved one, or a friend.** Pray for them and ask God to fulfill His Word in their life.

## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*Throughout Scripture, the blessing  
always included five key elements:*

*Meaningful and appropriate touch  
A spoken message  
Attaching high value to the person  
Picturing a special future  
An active commitment*

*Each of the elements serves a specific  
purpose for both the one giving and the  
one receiving the blessing.*

John Trent

*O, what a tangled web we weave  
when first we practice to deceive!*

Walter Scott (1771-1832)

*Deception may give us what we want  
for the present, but it will always take it  
away in the end.*

Rachel Hawthorne

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- When do you remember telling your first lie? Why did you tell it? What were the results?
- Take time to analyze what you learn about each person in this story—Isaac, Rebekah, Esau, and Jacob. Who do you tend to identify with the most in this story? Why?
- How would you describe Isaac and Rebekah’s marriage and communication with each other? How do you think they ended up in this kind of marriage?
- What does it mean to be “blessed”? Why was the “blessing” so important?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Matthew Henry? If so, what?
- Do you remember your father or an important person in your life speaking a blessing over you? If so, how did it impact you? If not, how do you think it would have impacted you?
- Read the blessings on page 48 out loud as a group. Pray for one another and for others in your family using these blessings as a guide for your prayers.

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## GRACE ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 28:10-22

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#### DAY ONE Observation

Jacob is on the run. He is running from Esau's murderous anger. He is also running from God. Jacob seems to have no interest or faith in God. Everything he wants, he has pursued with his own conniving smarts. But now, with nothing, out in the middle of nowhere, Jacob is pursued by God for no reason except grace.

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 28:10-22. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.**

<sup>10</sup> Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran.

<sup>11</sup> And he reached a certain place and spent the night there because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head and lay down in that place.

<sup>12</sup> Then he had a dream, and behold, a ladder stood on the earth with its top touching heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup> And behold, Yahweh stood above it and said, "I am Yahweh, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your seed. <sup>14</sup> And your seed will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. <sup>15</sup> Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go. And I will bring you back to this land; for I will not forsake you until I have done what I have promised you."

<sup>16</sup> Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely Yahweh is in this place, and I did not know it." <sup>17</sup> And he was afraid and said, "How fearsome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

<sup>18</sup> So Jacob rose early in the morning and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. <sup>19</sup> And he called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. <sup>20</sup> Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey on which I am going, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, <sup>21</sup> and I return to my father's house in peace, then Yahweh will be my God. <sup>22</sup> Now this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You." (LSB)

What thought or verse stands out to you in this passage? Why?

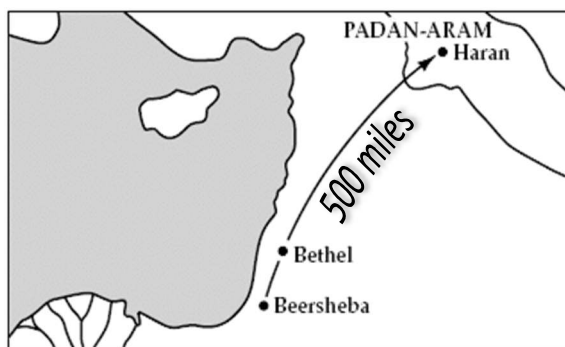
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Jacob's journey from Beersheba (southern Israel) to Haran (modern-day Turkey) was approximately 500 miles...on foot! His first stop in Bethel was about 40-50 miles away which indicates that Jacob had a lot of energy (and fear!) on that first day of travel. He is obviously tired and exhausted.



Jacob has a significant dream at Bethel. **Mark or highlight** the word “behold” in this passage.

What three things does Jacob “behold” in his dream? (28:12-13)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

How does God identify Himself to Jacob? (28:13) \_\_\_\_\_

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What seven promises does God give to Jacob? Note the use of “will” and “shall” in 28:13-15.



1. \_\_\_\_\_ (28:13b)
2. \_\_\_\_\_ (28:14a)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ (28:14b)
4. \_\_\_\_\_ (28:14c)
5. \_\_\_\_\_ (28:15a)
6. \_\_\_\_\_ (28:15b)
7. \_\_\_\_\_ (28:15c)

How does Jacob respond to this dream? \_\_\_\_\_

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## DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Genesis 28:12-15 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them over and over until you memorize them.

*And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground with its top reaching the sky,  
and God's angels were going up and down on it.*

*The Lord was standing there beside him, saying,*

*"I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.*

*I will give you and your offspring the land on which you are lying.*

*Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth,*

*and you will spread out toward the west, the east, the north, and the south.*

*All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.*

*Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.*

*I will bring you back to this land,*

*for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." (CSB)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

**Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.**

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## DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 28" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 28:12 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "ladder" and click on the Strong's number (H5551) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "ladder"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in Genesis?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See Search Results by Book.)

**What is its definition?** \_\_\_\_\_

Jesus references Jacob's dream in John 1:44-51. **Read this passage below.**

Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the law (and so did the prophets): Jesus the son of Joseph, from Nazareth."

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Nathanael asked him.

"Come and see," Philip answered.

Then Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said about him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

"How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

"Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you," Jesus answered.

"Rabbi," Nathanael replied, "You are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel!"

Jesus responded to him, "Do you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than this." Then he said, "Truly I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

**According to Jesus, what does the ladder or staircase represent in Jacob's dream?**

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**What does the name "Bethel" mean?** Click on Strong's #H1008 in Genesis 28:19.

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Jacob makes a conditional promise to God in 28:20-22 (just like a person like Jacob would do!).

**What does Jacob want God to do for him if he is to worship God and dedicate a tithe to Him?**

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## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from Alexander MacLaren's *Expositions of Holy Scriptures*. **Alexander MacLaren** (1826-1910) was a Baptist pastor in Manchester, England whose sermons were known for their "profundity of thought, logical arrangement, eloquence of appeal, and power over the human heart."

From Abraham to Jacob is a great descent. The former embodies the nobler side of the Jewish character—its capacity for religious ideas; its separation from the nations; its consciousness of, and peaceful satisfaction in, a divine Friend... These all were deep in the founder of the race and flowed to it from him. Jacob, on the other hand, has in him the more ignoble qualities... He is a crafty schemer, selfish, over-reaching, with a keen eye to the main chance. Whoever deals with him has to look sharply after his own interests. Self-advantage in its most earthly form is uppermost in him; and, like all timid, selfish men, shifty ways and evasions are his natural weapons. The great interest of his history lies in the slow process by which the patient God purified him, and out of this stone raised up a worthy child to Abraham. We see in this context the first step in his education and the very imperfect degree in which he profited by it.

**1. Consider the vision and its accompanying promise.** Jacob has fled from home on account of his brother's fierce wrath at the trick which their scheming mother and he had contrived. It was an ugly, heartless fraud, a crime against a doting father, as against Esau. Rebekah gets alarmed for her favorite; and her fertile brain hits upon another device to blind Isaac and get Jacob out of harm's way, in the excuse that she cannot bear his marriage with a Hittite woman. Her exaggerated expressions of passionate dislike for the *daughters of Heth* has no religious basis. They are partly feigned and partly petulance. So the poor old blind father is beguiled once more, and sends his son away. Starting under such auspices, and coming from such an atmosphere, and journeying back to Haran, the hole of the pit whence Abraham had been dug,

the wanderer was not likely to be cherishing any lofty thoughts. His life was in danger; he was alone, a dim future was before him, perhaps his conscience was not very comfortable. These things would be in his mind as he lay down and gazed into the violet sky so far above him, burning with all its stars. Weary, and with a head full of sordid cares, plans, and possibly fears, he slept; and then there flamed on...this vision, which speaks indeed to his need, as he discerned it, but reveals to him and to us the truth which ennobles all life, burns up the dross of earthward-turned aims, and selfish, crafty ways.

We are to conceive of the form of the vision as a broad stair or sloping ascent, rather than a ladder, reaching right from the sleeper's side to the far-off heaven, its pathway peopled with messengers, and its summit touching the place where a glory shone that paled even the lustrous constellations of that pure sky. Jacob had thought himself alone; the vision fills the wilderness. He had felt himself defenseless; the vision musters armies for his safety. He had been groveling on earth, with no thoughts beyond its fleeting goods; the vision lifts his eyes from the low level on which they had been gazing. He had been conscious of but little connection with heaven; the vision shows him a path from his very side right unto its heights. He had probably thought that he was leaving the presence of his father's God when he left his father's tent; the vision burns into his astonished heart the consciousness of God as there, in the solitude and the night.

The divine promise is the best commentary on the meaning of the vision. The familiar ancestral promise is repeated to him, and the

blessing and the birthright thus confirmed. In addition, special assurances are given—God’s presence in his wanderings, his protection, Jacob’s return to the land, and the promise of God’s persistent presence, working through all paradoxes of providence and sins of His servant...

We pass from the lone desert and the mysterious twilight of Genesis to the beaten ways between Galilee and Jordan, and to the clear historic daylight of the gospel, and we hear Christ renewing the promise to one whom He called a son of Jacob, *an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile*. The very heart of Christ’s work was unveiled in the terms of this vision: From henceforth *ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man*. So, then, the fleeting vision was a transient revelation of a permanent reality, and a faint foreshadowing of the true communication between heaven and earth. Jesus Christ is the ladder between God and man. On Him, all divine gifts descend; by Him all the angels of human devotion, consecration, and aspiration go up. This flat earth is not so far from the topmost heaven as sense thinks. The despairing question of Jewish wisdom, *Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? . . . What is his name, and what is his son’s name, if thou canst tell?*—is answered once for all in the incarnate and crucified and ascended Lord, by and in whom all heaven has stooped to earth, that earth might be lifted to heaven.

Every child of man, though lonely and earthly, has the ladder-foot by his side—like the sunbeam, which comes straight into the eyes of every gazer, wherever he stands...

Jacob’s vision was meant to teach him, and is meant to teach us, the nearness of God, and the swift directness of communication, whereby His help comes to us and our desires rise to Him... The seen is but a thin veil of

the unseen. Earth, which we are too apt to make a workshop, or a mere garden of pleasure, is a Bethel—a house of God. Everywhere the ladder stands; everywhere the angels go up and down; everywhere the Face looks from the top. Nothing will save life from becoming, sooner or later, trivial, monotonous, and infinitely wearisome, but the continual vision of the present God, and the continual experience of the swift ascent and descent of our aspirations and His blessings.

It is the secret of purity too. How could Jacob indulge in his craft, and foul his conscience with sin, as long as he carried the memory of what he had seen in the solitary night on the uplands of Bethel? The direct result of the vision is the same command as Abraham received, ‘Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.’ Realize My presence, and let that kill the motions of sin, and quicken to service.

It is also the secret of peace. Hopes and fears, and dim uncertainty of the future, no doubt agitated the sleeper’s mind as he laid him down. His independent life was beginning. He had just left his father’s tents for the first time; and, though not a youth in years, he was in the position which youth holds with us. So to him, and to all young persons, here is shown the charm which will keep the heart calm, and preserve us from being too eagerly longing for earthly satisfaction. ***I am with thee*** should be enough to steady our souls; and the confidence that God will not leave us till He has accomplished His own purpose for us, should make us willing to let Him do as He will with ours.

**2. Notice the imperfect reception of the divine teaching.** Jacob’s startled exclamation on awakening from his dream indicates a very low level both of religious knowledge and feeling. Nor is there any reason for taking the words in any but their most natural sense; for it is a mistake to ascribe to him the know-

ledge of God due to later revelation, or, at this stage of his life, any depth of religious emotion. He is alarmed at the thought that God is near. Probably he had been accustomed to think of God's presence as in some special way associated with his father's encampment, and had not risen to the belief of His omnipresence. There seems no joyous leaping up of his heart at the thought that God is here. Dread, not unmingled with the superstitious fear that he had profaned a holy place by laying himself down in it, is his prevailing feeling, and he pleads ignorance as the excuse for his sacrilege. He does not draw the conclusion from the vision that all the earth is hallowed by a near God, but only that he has unwittingly stumbled on His house; and he does not learn that from every place there is an open door for the loving heart into the calm depths where God is throned, but only that *here* he unwittingly stands at the gate of heaven. So he misses the very inner purpose of the vision, and rather shrinks from it than welcomes it. Was that spasm of fear all that passed through his mind that night? ...

The morning light brought other thoughts, when it filled the silent heavens, and where the ladder had stretched, there was but empty blue. The lesson is sinking into his mind. He lifts the rude stone and pours oil on it, as a symbol of consecration. His vow shows that he had but begun to learn in God's school. He

hedges about his promise with a punctilious repetition of God's undertaking... Clause by clause he goes over it all, and puts an 'if' to it. God's word should have kindled a greater faith than that! What a fall from *Abram believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness!* Jacob barely believed, and will wait to see whether all will turn out as it has been promised. That is not the glad, swift response of a loving, trusting heart. Nor is he contented with repeating to God the terms of his engagement, but he adds a couple of clauses which strike him as being important, and as having been omitted. There was nothing about 'bread to eat, and raiment to put on,' nor about coming back again 'in peace,' so he adds these...

Where in it is the surrender of the heart? Where is the outgoing of love and gratitude? Where the clasping of the hand of his heavenly Friend with calm rapture of thankful self-yielding, and steadfastness of implicit trust? God did not want Jacob's altar, nor his tents; *He wanted Jacob...* By the unwearied long-suffering of his patient Friend and Teacher in heaven, the crafty, earthly-minded Jacob 'the supplanter' is turned into 'Israel, the prince with God, in whom is no guile.' May we, who are slow learners too, take heart to believe that He will not be soon angry with us, nor leave us until He has done that which He has promised to us.

**What thought from Alexander MacLaren's words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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## DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Genesis 28:10-22 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your daily life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 28:10-22?**

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Jacob was on the run. He was alone. He was trying to make life work on his own. He certainly had no sense of his part in God's eternal redemptive plan. His thinking was small—self-focused...self-motivated...time-bound...earth-bound.

Yet God's presence was all around him. Out in the middle of nowhere, with no one around, he was enveloped by God's glory. He was always living in Bethel, *the house of God*.

God's presence is always much closer than we think. It is so easy to go through our day without a sense of living *coram deo*—before the face of God. But every moment of every day, His presence is with us. Indeed, *in Him we live and move and have our very being* (Acts 17:28).

**Take time today or this week to take a walk outside.** Don't miss the things around you. Listen to the sounds. Look at the wonders. Consider the heavens above you. Try to fathom the scope of the universe. Try to fathom the scope of His love. Allow yourself to be in awe of the glory of God.



**What amazes you about God's creation? What causes you to marvel at His wonders?**

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**How can you be more aware of God's presence in your daily life? How can you live *coram deo*?**

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**1. We are all sinners.**

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Romans 3:23

**2. Our sin deserves death.**

*For the wages of sin is death...*

Romans 6:23a

**3. Jesus Christ died for our sins.**

*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Romans 5:8

**4. Eternal life is a free gift.**

*But the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Romans 6:23b

**5. We must trust in Jesus Christ alone for our salvation.**

*If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, leading to righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, leading to salvation.*

Romans 10:9-10

Jesus Christ is the bridge between heaven and earth.  
He is the Mediator between God and man.  
He is the ladder that Jacob dreamed of.  
To know God, you must know Jesus.

**Have you trusted in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior?**

## The Romans Road of Salvation

## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*To live coram Deo is to live one's entire life in the presence of God, under the authority of God, to the glory of God.*

R. C. Sproul

*The "ladder" pointed to **CHRIST HIMSELF**, the One who spanned the infinite gulf which separated heaven from earth, and who has in His own person provided a Way whereby we may draw near to God.*

*That the "ladder" reached from earth to heaven, told of the COMPLETE provision which Divine grace has made for sinners. Right down to where the fugitive lay, the ladder came, and right up to God Himself the "ladder" reached!*

A. W. Pink

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- Share a time in your life when you felt alone and scared. What was this time like? What was going through your mind? How did things eventually turn out?
- What does Jacob see in his dream? What does it mean?
- What promises does God give to Jacob?
- What is Jacob's response to this dream? What does he say? What does he do? What "deal" does he make with God?
- What does Jesus reveal about this story in John 1?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Alexander MacLaren? If so, what?
- Share a time in your life when God really showed up and made His presence known to you. What was this experience like? What did you learn from it?
- Discuss what it means to live *coram Deo*. Pray that you will sense God's presence each day.

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## DISAPPOINTMENT ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 29:1-30

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#### DAY ONE Observation

Jacob travels ~500 miles from Beersheba to Haran. After a treacherous journey, he arrives safely and not only finds his family's relatives but also finds the most beautiful woman that he has ever seen—Rachel! Jacob is in love...but he is also naïve. And his uncle Laban will take full advantage of his naiveté.

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 29:1-30. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.**

Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east.

<sup>2</sup> And he looked, and behold, a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it, for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, <sup>3</sup> and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." <sup>5</sup> He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him." <sup>6</sup> He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well; and behold, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!" <sup>7</sup> He said, "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go, pasture them." <sup>8</sup> But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."

<sup>9</sup> While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. <sup>10</sup> Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. <sup>11</sup> Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. <sup>12</sup> And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

<sup>13</sup> As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, <sup>14</sup> and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

<sup>15</sup> Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" <sup>16</sup> Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup> Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. <sup>18</sup> Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you

seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” <sup>19</sup> Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.”

<sup>20</sup> So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

<sup>21</sup> Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” <sup>22</sup> So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. <sup>23</sup> But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. <sup>24</sup> (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) <sup>25</sup> And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” <sup>26</sup> Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. <sup>27</sup> Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.”

<sup>28</sup> Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. <sup>29</sup> (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) <sup>30</sup> So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. (ESV)

**What thought or verse stands out to you in this passage? Why?**

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**Highlight** the word “behold” in this passage. List the five things that are “beheld” (29:2,6,7,25).

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**How would you describe each of the following people in this passage?**

Jacob \_\_\_\_\_

Rachel \_\_\_\_\_

Leah \_\_\_\_\_

Laban \_\_\_\_\_

**What did Laban say to Jacob to justify his action? (29:26)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**If you had to give a book or movie title for this passage, what would it be?**

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## DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Genesis 29:16-20 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them.

*Now Laban had two daughters;  
the name of the older was Leah,  
and the name of the younger was Rachel.  
Leah had weak eyes,  
but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful.  
Jacob was in love with Rachel and said,  
“I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.”  
Laban said, “It’s better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.”  
So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel,  
but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. (NIV)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

**Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.**

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## DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

Genesis 29 has deliberate allusions to Genesis 24. In Genesis 24, Abraham's servant goes to the area of Mesopotamia to find a wife for Isaac. In Genesis 29, Jacob travels to the same area to find a wife for himself. **Read the two accounts and mark any similarities and differences you see.**

Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to...the city of Nahor. <sup>11</sup> He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water.

<sup>12</sup> Then he prayed, "Lord, God of my master Abraham, make me successful today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. <sup>13</sup> See, I am standing beside this well, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. <sup>14</sup> May it be that when I say to a young woman, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too'—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

<sup>15</sup> Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milkah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. <sup>16</sup> The woman was very beautiful, a virgin; no man had ever slept with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again. <sup>17</sup> The servant hurried to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water from your jar." <sup>18</sup> "Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink. <sup>19</sup> After she had given him a drink, she said, "I'll draw water for your camels too, until they have had enough to drink." ...

Then the man knelt low, worshiped the Lord, <sup>27</sup> saying, "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the Lord has led me to the house of my master's relatives." <sup>28</sup> The girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. (24:10-21)

Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples. <sup>2</sup> There he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. <sup>3</sup> When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?" "We're from Harran," they replied.

<sup>5</sup> He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?" "Yes, we know him," they answered.

<sup>6</sup> Then Jacob asked them, "Is he well?"

"Yes, he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep."

<sup>7</sup> "Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture."

<sup>8</sup> "We can't," they replied, "until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep."

<sup>9</sup> While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherd. <sup>10</sup> When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep. <sup>11</sup> Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. <sup>12</sup> He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father. (29:1-12)

**What similarities do you see?**

**What differences do you see?**

Laban, Rebekah's brother and Rachel's father, also figures predominantly in these two stories. **Read the two accounts and mark any similarities and differences you see.**

Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring. <sup>30</sup> As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, "Thus the man spoke to me," he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring. <sup>31</sup> He said, "Come in, O blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels." (24:29-31)

As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. <sup>14</sup> Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood." After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, <sup>15</sup> Laban said to him, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be." (29:13-15)

**What do you learn about Laban from these two accounts?** \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 29" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 29:25 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "beguiled" and click on the Strong's number (H7411) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "beguiled"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**How many times is it used in Genesis?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See Search Results by Book.)

**What is its definition?** \_\_\_\_\_

Go to Gen. 27:35 and click on the word "subtilty" (H4820). **What is the root word?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does this tell you?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from Martin Luther's **Commentary on Genesis**. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German pastor and theologian who was instrumental in the start of the Reformation. Luther wrote over 600 works during his lifetime, including books, treatises, commentaries, catechisms, and songs.

### Genesis 29:1-3

Moses depicts Jacob, the very saintly patriarch and heir of the blessing, as altogether poor, downcast, and lowly. He is sent away with the height of contempt, with danger and great wretchedness, so that he flees on foot, alone, and without a retinue. Although servants, camels, gold, and silver were not lacking, he has to be very poor and very miserable, and have nothing in his purse but provisions for the journey. What is the reason? It is the reason we have heard above (ch. 27). Rebecca, his mother, said: "Listen, my son, and flee." Flight is the cause of this, likewise the fury of his brother, who was threatening him with death... This flight and the danger in which he found himself did not allow extensive preparation and a retinue, lest he be hindered by the slowness of the pack animals and the camels and be caught by his angry brother...

Jacob has no knowledge of the people, the places, or the byways. He does not know where he will have suitable lodging from night to night. Thus, it was an exceedingly dangerous and troublesome journey. In the meantime he struggled in faith with death and the devil throughout the journey. He was uncertain about where he was going or with what fortune he would arrive at his destination. By chance, however, he spies a well in the field and makes his way to it. This, too, is a servile act, except that here consolation begins to be shown to him when he comes to a place in which he is safer and less apprehensive. In addition, he hears about his uncle Laban. I have nothing more to say. Therefore I shall add nothing...

### Genesis 29:4-8

Laban is Nahor's grandson, not his son. Nahor had already died. Bethuel, Nahor's son, was the father of Laban and Rebecca. But Nahor is mentioned because he is the father and head of this household. Jacob asks: "Does he have peace?" That is, "Is he well?" This is a Hebraism.

The grammarians raise a question concerning the stone of the well... I do not think that the removal of the stone was forbidden by any law, but I think that the size of the stone was so great that one or two men were not able to remove it. But because there was no large supply of water in Mesopotamia, they guarded the wells carefully and covered them with large stones. Furthermore, the shepherds of the flocks were not all strong men, but young men and maidens like Rebecca were employed to tend the flocks and hold them in check. They assembled at the fountain and waited for stronger men to roll the stone back, just as Jacob approaches and removes the stone without anyone's help...

### Genesis 29:9-12

The commentaries of the Hebrews have noted—and the text seems to indicate the same thing—that when the Holy Spirit rushed upon the patriarch Jacob, he was so strengthened by that impulse that he was able to roll away the stone without the help of anyone. Then, when he found Rachel, his blood relation, he took courage and gained great hope that at last he would obtain what he had in mind and what his father had commanded him with respect to taking a wife. Therefore he is immediately inflamed

with love at first sight, and natural desire toward his kinswoman comes to the fore, so that the two-fold impulse of faith and love made his body and heart more animated. For he wanted to show himself as a man of strength and agility—in order that he might capture the maiden’s heart and entice her to fall in love with him. And these things, too, are only natural. But they are recorded by the Holy Spirit in order that no one may think that they are disgraceful or forbidden. For it is a Christian and godly thing to love a girl to join her to you in marriage, since there is a natural desire and inclination of sex to sex. Although this is not completely without sin, yet God does not want it to be despised as dishonorable. For it is a work of God created in man’s nature, and it should not only not be despised or vilified but should even be honored. For God wants to be glorified in all works, both small and great...

After he has rolled the stone away, he approaches the maiden, and kisses her. He is unknown and a stranger before he greets her. This also seems disgraceful, and according to these ways of ours, it is neither customary nor proper. But previously he heard the other shepherds say: “Behold, Rachel is coming, etc.” Therefore he knew that she was a blood relation of his, and among those people it was customary to add kisses when they met and greeted one another. This is a custom today in Belgium and also in other lands. Our people only hold out the hand, and they embrace maidens or matrons modestly and shyly. There are as many customs as there are lands.

It was, therefore, an indication of love toward his kinswoman and future wife which he demonstrated with this kiss, just as if he had stretched out his hand or had offered her some gift. This was the source of that strength when he moved the stone away. It sprang from affection for his kinswoman, then from love toward his spouse, who, as he saw, had

been chosen and presented to him by God. In the third place, special joy was added, because he saw that he had finally reached port after such a difficult and dangerous journey...

We should read this with reverence and thank God that we know we are pleasing to God even when we sleep, eat, drink, marry; when husbands, children, and wives live together; when we manage the household; when we milk goats. We should exercise ourselves in these matters; for they are just as great and wonderful as those sublime works, because they are done by a great person who believes and is an heir of the kingdom of heaven. If it pleases God, some day or hour will come when we will also do great and heroic works.

### **Genesis 29:13-15**

The beginnings are favorable, as usually happens in the case of hypocrites. For throughout the history Laban will be described as a greedy and grasping man. And the name Laban agrees beautifully, for it means “white.” Hypocrites have a great show of godliness, discipline, and morals, so that nothing seems saintlier, nothing more honorable, and nothing more religious than they are. But it would have been more appropriate if the word had been turned around and he had been called Nabal [“fool”]. Accordingly, he displays great piety and love toward his cousin. But, in the meantime, he thinks: “Behold, I have obtained a very good and useful servant who will be compelled to do and bear everything according to my will, for he is a fugitive and an exile who has been able to find no other place to which to withdraw. He is poor, starving, and naked. In this prison and with sufficiently strong bonds he will be detained in my house. For without me he would have to perish of hunger.”

Yet at first he fawns on him, as hypocrites usually do. “You are my bone and my flesh,”

he says. He runs to meet him, embraces and kisses him, as if he loved him in earnest and truly. But soon he betrays his hidden and faithless heart, just as in other circumstances a fish and a guest often become worthless after three days, as is commonly said. Accordingly, Laban is described as a very pretentious hypocrite so far as external works and words are concerned. Inwardly, however he maintains idolatry, pride, greed, and contempt for his neighbor. He considers only his own advantage. With such a fellow the good and saintly man Jacob has to live...

### **Genesis 29:16-20**

By rights, of course, we should love the female sex simply for the sake of offspring and procreation. It was created by God to serve this purpose, not for us to misuse it merely to satisfy lust. The structure of a woman's whole body bears this out. It has its own organs and members with which to conceive, nourish, and carry the fetus. But few consider this, and Jacob, too, strays from this purpose. For he loves Rachel because of her beauty, and he does not love Leah, who is less beautiful...

He who can have a wife who is beautiful and whose strength is unimpaired should have her by all means. He who cannot have a choice should marry the one who is offered, whether she is beautiful or not. Furthermore, after original sin, marriage is decidedly troublesome and burdensome to the flesh because the union is indissoluble. For although passion and the love of sex for sex remains, yet that bond concerning which a wife should be an inseparable companion for life in the eyes of her husband is very hard and difficult. For no matter what calamity befalls either their bodies, their property, or their offspring, that firm and indissoluble bond remains. And every choice is removed; nor is any change, any rejection or repudiation, permitted...

But Jacob loves his bride with a true love and to an extraordinary degree, so that those seven years barely seemed to equal a period of three or seven days. Furthermore, what is most important of all, after he has become a bridegroom, he waits seven years until he is united with his bride. If today anyone had to wait so many years for his wedding day and in the meantime had to serve as a pauper and beggar, he would surely abandon both his bride and his father-in-law... But Jacob does it all out of love for a maiden—love by which he was captivated to such an extent that those seven years seemed to be only days, that is, as if they had been no more than seven days.

Augustine also admires this patience and waiting and asks how Jacob was able to show such patience, since it is contrary to and beyond man's nature. For all descriptions of love and lovers bear out what he says: "I love impatiently." And deferred love in particular disheartens men and makes them impatient. Love songs complain that days and months are too long, as that man in the poet says: "If I do not find this day longer now than a whole year." But Augustine replies that this time and these years seemed so short because his chores were not burdensome and difficult. For love is all-powerful, just as, on the other hand, he who hates can endure nothing. Love does for nothing what in other circumstances a man could not be induced to do for any reward or in response to any plea...

Now we shall explain the things that pertain to grammar. The text says that Leah's eyes were "weak of sight"; and I think it has been rendered well enough. It seems to me that she was an honorable maiden with good morals and unimpaired strength, but not beautiful, especially not in the eyes, which are man's greatest adornment. Thus Pliny calls the eyes the king among the members of the human body, and they surely are the outstanding part of the body. Therefore beautiful eyes are a

miracle, as it were, in the human race; for they signify excellence of character and nature... On the other hand, small and dull eyes, which are not sharp and alive, darken and deform the whole face. Leah had eyes like this, with which she did not have sharp vision. Because of her tender or weak eyes, therefore, she was not in favor...

But Rachel was beautiful. The meaning in the Hebrew word contains the proportion of quality. Rachel's eyes had the right shape, and her forehead, her cheeks, and her whole body had the proper arrangement and symmetry of its members. There is true beauty and charm when the face has a suitable and symmetrical proportion of the eyes, the forehead, the cheeks, and the other parts...

### **Genesis 29:21-30**

Jacob calls her his wife, even though she is a virgin. For Scripture does not distinguish between a wife and a betrothed woman, as can be seen in Moses and Matthew, where betrothed virgins are called wives. Therefore Jacob regards Rachel as his lawful wife, and he burns with true marital love toward her, as young men and bridegrooms are wont to do. But the ardor of the bridegroom is strongest when the time for embracing and copulating draws near. In this patriarch of ours, however, this very pure and ardent love toward his wife Rachel is most shamefully disturbed.

Laban, the scoundrel, would deserve to be cursed into the abyss of hell... He called and invited men to the nuptial feast, which is customarily done solemnly and in an honorable manner, but he gathered together not for the glory and honor of the bridegroom and the bride but to deceive and make sport of Jacob and hold him captive with his tricks... He was an exceedingly evil old fox completely ruined by greed.

Jacob, however, joyful and aglow with love toward his Rachel, suspects nothing wrong or evil; but full of hope and joy he waits for his very charming bride in order that he may have pleasure in the joy he has hoped for and desired for such a long time...

Jacob loves the maiden so ardently that he does and endures everything for seven whole years. Indeed, he enriches that greedy old fox Laban with the stipulation and condition that he give him his daughter Rachel in marriage. But in return for such faithful service Laban thanks him by secretly taking away from him his wife, the virgin whom Jacob loved and had sought and desired for so many years, and at that in the very hour of the marital joy he had longed for most. Laban not only snatches her away—which, of course, is very annoying in itself—but he also thrusts on him another, and in this way puts a perpetual burden on his neck...

It is an evil too dreadful and cruel, and the patience is incredible. I surely would not have endured it but would have disputed with Laban and would have summoned him to court, in order that he would have been compelled by the laws to give my wife back, and I would have rejected the other one and sent her back to her father. For not Leah but Rachel had been betrothed to him, and this had been publicly reported and was undoubtedly known throughout the whole town. I think, however, that those whom Laban gathered together as his guests were fickle and worthless fellows, good-for-nothing rascals, who were compelled to approve and excuse this crime to please Laban...

But terrible cupidity impelled greedy Laban to commit such a great crime, not so much in order to foist his older daughter on Jacob as to detain him for seven more years. For he was aware of wonderful success and of the increase of his property. Therefore it was

shameful and horrible for Jacob to be detained by such a monstrous crime in order to satisfy the greedy desires of this old fox...

How Rachel herself felt is not told, but it is reasonable to suppose that her indignation was not less. For she undoubtedly knew that she was the bride, and it was known to the whole neighborhood that Jacob was serving for Rachel during those seven years. Therefore she was disturbed by this wrong just as much as the bridegroom himself. She was sure that she was the bride and that she was to be led to the bridal chamber. But in the very hour in which she thinks she will enjoy love and the bridegroom she has longed for, she is most shamefully deceived, not without great grief, not without tears and wailing...

But the cruel father was not at all moved. Perhaps he even restrained her with threats. Leah knew that she was not the bride but the bride's sister, and perhaps she offered some resistance to the wish of her father. Yet out of human affection, she allowed herself to be taken away and to be forced to commit this wrong... It seems that Rachel manifested not a little feeling and hatred toward her sister Leah for this very reason. Therefore this was an unfortunate marriage for Jacob and Rachel because of the unexpected deception, and in the case of the very saintly patriarch Jacob an example of exceptional chastity and of a cross and the greatest patience is set forth. For I do not know whether anyone of the saints, not to say the heathen, would have been able to bear this cross with such great patience. It is too high and too terrible...

Jacob's heart was occupied with and absorbed in love and joy, and he gave thanks to God because he had a bride from whom he was hoping for descendants. He was drunk, not with wine but with love for Rachel, whom he had sought and desired for such a long time. This drunkenness of love is certainly great

insensibility. Stupefied, as it were, by this, he could not notice or feel the deceit. For he suspects nothing evil but is completely absorbed in thought and in love. He is sure that his bride can no longer be taken from him. Therefore nothing was further from his mind than that the old fox felt obliged to take his bride away from him and to substitute Leah.

This is how I spoke above concerning Isaac when he blessed Jacob instead of Esau. Although he recognized Jacob's voice, and although his heart felt beforehand that deceit and trickery were at hand, nevertheless, since he was occupied with the desire to pronounce a blessing, he gives no thought even to the things he feels and hears. Such examples occur often in life when hearts fall back from the external senses into the thoughts with which they were previously occupied, and when they think that it is impossible for them to be deceived or to suffer any harm; for they trust their hearts more than their eyes and ears. Therefore we must think that Jacob, too, drunk as he was with love, was stupefied and carried away, as it were, so that he thought of nothing less than that he could be deceived. That powerful ardor of love blinded him...

Here some interpreters ask whether there was a true marriage that night between Leah and Jacob. I reply that there was not. Then was it adultery? By no means! What then? A monstrosity! For if you look at the deed itself, Jacob is not Leah's husband; but he taints and defiles a woman who was not betrothed to him. Yet he is without guilt; but this guilt clings to faithless Laban, who deceives the bridegroom and the bride and tears the marriage asunder by uniting Jacob with another woman than the one he had promised in marriage...

For who would fear that a father would defraud his very own daughter of the joy hoped for for such a long time? The daughter

had no other thought than that this night she would become a bride to be united with her very dear bridegroom. And Jacob entered with true marital love, without any doubt that he would embrace Rachel as his wife. For the treacherous rascal Laban had promised this and had pretended for seven whole years. But in one moment he destroys the marriage that has been pretended for such a long time. This is plain rascality...

Thus this union of Jacob and Leah is not a marriage, and the deed per se is a defilement. But it is excused on the ground of invincible ignorance. Leah is also excused; she should not be regarded as a harlot. She is excused on the ground of the authority of her father, who said: "I bid, compel, and order you as your parent. You, Leah, are a bride on the strength of my authority and will." Therefore she goes forth in simplicity and in pure filial obedience; and although it is probable that she allowed herself to be brought without reluctance, yet she is excused on the ground of paternal power and filial obedience...

But after his complaint there will be a true marriage when God grants a dispensation for this union and confirms it by giving offspring: Simeon, Levi, Reuben, etc. ...

Jacob accepts the condition offered by his greedy and unjust father-in-law. In this way the whole business is settled. But the question

is asked, why Jacob consents. For although Laban mentions the custom of the country—and perhaps it was the custom in that region for the older daughters to be given in marriage first—yet this is a futile argument. It is strange that Jacob was ignorant of this custom since during a period of seven years one can easily observe the customs of any region. But as soon as he hears this custom mentioned, he consents. He would have had every right to reject Leah and say: "No matter what the custom is, you pledged Rachel to me, and in accordance with our agreement I have served you seven years for her. I will keep her and no other." But what should the saintly man do? He lets it pass. He bears this wrong with equanimity in order that he may obtain Rachel, who was his one true bride; and he sees that he cannot obtain her except on the completely unfair condition that he keep Leah, whom he did not love. For he thought: "What am I to do? Leah has been deceived on the authority of her father, just as I have been deceived by his crafty scheme. If I forsake her, she will be forsaken forever. She has been defiled by me and deprived of her best dowry, namely her virginity."

Thus Jacob is persuaded by mercy, love, and patience not to repudiate Leah. This is an outstanding example of the special mercy and virtue because of which he keeps with him the woman who, as he knows, has been substituted for his bride.

**What thought from Martin Luther's words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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## DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Genesis 29:1-30 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your daily life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 29:1-30?**

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There is probably no greater illustration of disappointment than Genesis 27:25—*And it came to pass in the morning, that behold...Leah!* After waiting, wanting, and serving for seven years in order to enjoy his first sexual experience with the love of his life, Rachel, Jacob wakes up to an unexpected surprise and a harsh reality.

Whom he thought was Rachel turned out to be Leah.

What he desired and expected did not come to pass.

Jacob's emotions are hot, his mind is hurting, his heart is crushed, and his hopes are shattered.



Disappointment  
is the gap  
between  
expectation  
and reality.

JOHN MAXWELL



**What has been one of the biggest disappointments of your life? Why?**

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The reality is that we will always butt up against disappointment in this life. There is no escaping the curse of sin, the finality of death, or the bondage of decay that plagues this earth. All our disappointments remind us that we are longing for a King and kingdom that will make all things new.

Someone has said that *disappointment is His appointment*. God uses disappointment in our lives to expose our false expectations, draw us closer to Him, and point us to what is truly eternal.  
**How has God used a disappointment in your life to change you or grow you?**

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## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*Genesis 29 is a miniature of our disillusionment, experienced from Eden onwards.*

Derek Kidner

*If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.*

C.S. Lewis

*Disappointment is the nurse of wisdom.*

Sir Boyle Roche

*Disappointment is the initial shock of the universe reminding you that life doesn't always go according to plan.*

Sarah Dessen

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- What has been one of the biggest disappointments that you have faced in life?
- What similarities and differences do you see between the servant's search for Isaac's wife in Genesis 24 and Jacob's search for a wife in Genesis 29?
- What do you learn about Jacob in this passage? About Rachel? About Laban? About Leah?
- Would you describe Jacob's desire for Rachel as love? Why or why not?
- Put yourself in each of the following people's shoes on that fateful night described in Genesis 29:21-25. What emotions would you feel if you were Jacob? Rachel? Leah?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Martin Luther? If so, what?
- Read the quotes above on disappointment. Which one stands out to you the most? Why?
- How can God use a disappointment in your life to expose false expectations or draw you closer to Him? Do you have an example in your own life? Share it with the group.



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## DYSFUNCTION ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 29:31-30:24

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#### **DAY ONE** **Observation**

Jacob's family is a dysfunctional mess! His dream of an idyllic marriage to Rachel is shattered by Laban's deception, his unexpected marriage to Leah, and the bitter struggle between Leah and Rachel for his attention. The birth of twelve children in rapid succession (within 7-8 years) only adds to the dysfunction.

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 29:31-30:24. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.**

When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. <sup>32</sup> So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, "The Lord has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me." <sup>33</sup> Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the Lord has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon. <sup>34</sup> She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi. <sup>35</sup> And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now I will praise the Lord." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

**30** When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!" <sup>2</sup> And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" <sup>3</sup> So she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear a child on my knees, that I also may have children by her." <sup>4</sup> Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, and Jacob went in to her. <sup>5</sup> Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. <sup>6</sup> Then Rachel said, "God has judged my case; and He has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan. <sup>7</sup> And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. <sup>8</sup> Then Rachel said, "With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali.

<sup>9</sup> When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife. <sup>10</sup> And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. <sup>11</sup> Then Leah said, "A troop comes!" So she called his name Gad. <sup>12</sup> And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. <sup>13</sup> Then Leah said, "I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed." So she called his name Asher.

<sup>14</sup> Now Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." <sup>15</sup> But she said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" And Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes." <sup>16</sup> When Jacob came out of the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night.

<sup>17</sup> And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.  
<sup>18</sup> Leah said, “God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband.” So she called his name Issachar. <sup>19</sup> Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. <sup>20</sup> And Leah said, “God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons.” So she called his name Zebulun. <sup>21</sup> Afterward she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah.  
<sup>22</sup> Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb.  
<sup>23</sup> And she conceived and bore a son, and said, “God has taken away my reproach.” <sup>24</sup> So she called his name Joseph, and said, “The Lord shall add to me another son.” (NKJV)

**What thought or verse stands out to you in this passage? Why?**

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**What meaning or explanation is given for the name of each of the sons born to Jacob?**

|        |          |   |
|--------|----------|---|
| LEAH   | Reuben   | <i>The Lord has looked on my affliction. Now my husband will love me.</i> |
|        | Simeon   |   |
|        | Levi     |   |
|        | Judah    |   |
| BILHAH | Dan      |   |
|        | Naphtali |   |
| ZILPAH | Gad      |   |
|        | Asher    |   |
| LEAH   | Issachar |   |
|        | Zebulun  |   |
| RACHEL | Joseph   |   |

**Why does God open Leah’s womb? (29:31)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is Rachel’s attitude toward her sister? (30:1)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What is Jacob’s attitude toward Rachel? (30:2)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why does God open Rachel’s womb? (30:22)** \_\_\_\_\_

## DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Genesis 29:31-35 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them.

*When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved,  
he enabled her to conceive,  
but Rachel remained childless.  
Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said,  
“It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.”  
She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said,  
“Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.”  
So she named him Simeon.  
Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said,  
“Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.”  
So he was named Levi.  
She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said,  
“This time I will praise the Lord.”  
So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children. (NIV)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

**Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.**

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### DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

**Compare the responses of Isaac and Jacob to the infertility of their wives.**

Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean. Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. (Genesis 25:20-21)

When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!" Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?" (Genesis 30:1-2)

**What differences do you see between Isaac and Jacob?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 29" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 29:31 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "hated" and click on the Strong's number (H8130) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "hated"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does this Hebrew word tell you about Jacob's attitude and relationship toward Leah?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Read the following Proverb which uses this same Hebrew word.**

*Under three things the earth trembles;  
under four it cannot bear up:  
a slave when he becomes king,  
a fool when he is filled with food;  
an **unloved** woman when she gets a husband,  
and a maidservant when she displaces her mistress. (Proverbs 30:21-23, ESV)*

**Based on this Proverb, how would you describe Leah's emotional state in Genesis 29?**

\_\_\_\_\_

Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 29" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 29:35 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "praise" and click on the Strong's number (H3034) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "praise"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**In what book of the Bible is it used the most?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See Search Results by Book.)

**What is its definition?** (Note especially Strong's Definitions and Gesenius' Lexicon.)

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Genesis 29:35 is the first place that this Hebrew word is used. It marks a change in Leah's heart. The name "Judah" (Hebrew, *yehudah*) is from this Hebrew word and means "I will praise."

**Read the following passages that use this Hebrew word.** Mark key words as you read.

*I will **give thanks** to the Lord with my whole heart;  
I will recount all of Your wonderful deeds. (Ps. 9:1)*

*The Lord is my strength and my shield;  
My heart trusts in Him, and He helps me.  
My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I **praise** Him. (Psalm 28:7)*

*You turned my wailing into dancing;  
You removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,  
That my heart may sing Your **praises** and not be silent.  
Lord my God, I will **praise** You forever. (Psalm 30:11-12)*

*Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?  
Put your hope in God, for I will yet **praise** Him, my Savior and my God. (Psalm 42:5)*

*It is good to **praise** the Lord and make music to Your name, O Most High,  
Proclaiming Your love in the morning and Your faithfulness at night. (Psalm 92:1-2)*

*Praise the Lord! **Give thanks** to the Lord, for He is good! His love endures forever. (Psalm 106:1)*

*Hallelujah! I will **praise** the Lord with all my heart  
In the assembly of the upright and in the congregation. (Psalm 111:1)*

**What do you learn about praise from these verses?** \_\_\_\_\_

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## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from Martin Luther's **Commentary on Genesis**. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German pastor and theologian who was instrumental in the start of the Reformation. Luther wrote over 600 works during his lifetime, including books, treatises, commentaries, catechisms, and songs.

### Genesis 29:31-35

Everyone should know that God cares for him in his calling. For God cares about little, mediocre, and big things. He is the Creator and Governor of everything. But who would believe that God cares for Leah? Surely all men should conclude firmly that God has regard for and cares for them, no matter how small, abject, and lowly they are...

Jacob has possession of his wife for whom he has had such a great desire. In addition, he has Leah, whom he did not love or care about. Rachel understands this, and she has the keys and the management of the whole household. She is always close to Jacob and is the dear girl. The whole house and the neighborhood know that Leah is despised and neglected by Jacob. For his fondness for Leah springs from mercy, not from marital ardor and the love of a bridegroom. Therefore wretched Leah sits sadly in her tent with her maid and spends her time spinning and weeping. For the rest of the household, and especially Rachel, despises her because she has been scorned by her husband... No one cares about her; no one has any regard for her, not even Jacob himself. But the LORD alone must look into the matter, must break and crucify Jacob's disposition and must even break Rachel's spirit.

Listen to Moses, who says: *The LORD saw...* No one else sees it. God has regard for and blesses the downcast, weeping, odious, and saddened woman; but He humbles the one who is proud... The Lord closes Rachel's womb and lets her be barren, which was no smaller cross. Indeed, it was death itself for Rachel, as she will complain bitterly later on. But He honors the one who is cast off by opening her womb and making her a mother.

Leah adorns her son with this name **Reuben** as a public testimony against those who despised and hated her. It is as though she were saying: "Now you see that I have not been cast off by God. God has not despised me as you have despised me. For God has had regard for me. I am naming him Reuben in order that you may cease from hatred and contempt. He is a son of vision. God sees. I see. You see that I am not cast off, as I formerly seemed to you." In this way the Lord comforts the wretched and detested Leah; and she herself confesses, gives thanks, and taunts all those who despised her. This undoubtedly displeased Rachel, who was loved very much by Jacob and was always regarded as the true mother of the house. Yet she remains barren. Indeed, three additional sons are given to Leah...

Previously the Lord saw; now He also hears. "This firstborn son," Leah said, "should have won me favor and authority, but I am still despised." The Lord hears her prayer and gives a second son, **Simeon**. She names him Simeon because she has been heard...

Leah conceives again and bears another son. "Although I know that I am loved more by him than I was before, yet he has not joined me to himself as the companion of his table and his couch. So far Rachel has enjoyed this kindness and honor. But now he will be united and dwell with me." Therefore she calls her third son **Levi**, that is, a joining or uniting...

Leah conceives again and bears a fourth son. "I was content with one, two, but especially three sons. In addition, however, I am getting a fourth! Now I praise and thank the Lord. Indeed, now I shall be praised, preferred, and

loved as the mother of the house. I have been lifted up from my humility and wretchedness, and my sister has fallen from her honor and loftiness.” ...This is how the Holy Spirit buoyed up and comforted Leah. He had regard for her humility (cf. Luke 1:48) and heard her prayer. Later He added courage, so that she said: “I will thank the Lord!” ...

God gives Leah four evidences of comfort, namely, four sons. First, against Rachel’s contempt He has regard for her humility. Secondly, because she was being neglected by her husband, He hears her prayer. Thirdly, lest she seem to be a stranger and completely excluded, God grants that her husband is joined to her and clings to her. Fourthly, she triumphs victoriously over her trials. She is no longer looked down on and despised, but she praises God and gives thanks. We, too, should follow this example and learn that after a trial God is wont to grant liberation and consolation in rich abundance. In this way, sorrow and disturbance are overcome. But it is hard for the flesh to wait...

### **Genesis 30:1-8**

“If I do not have children, I shall die!” says Rachel. “I prefer being without life to being without children. And if my flesh is worn out and barren, nevertheless let my husband beget children from my maidservant. If children from her are also denied, it is my wish that GOD would call me out of this life.” There was no small reason for this desire, for Jacob undoubtedly proclaimed to both that he had the promise that the Blessed Seed would be born from him, and because of this proclamation the desire for acquiring offspring was kindled, especially in Rachel. The less hope she had, the greater her desire was. Consequently, she determines either to bear children or die. Thus later she dies in childbirth. This desire and feeling of the godly woman is good and saintly, but it is so strong

that she falls into a paroxysm of envy and jealousy toward her sister...

Accordingly, this is handed down not as an example but in order that we may abstain from the example and from imitating it. We should observe it but not imitate it. For there are some things which we should imitate and some things which we should observe. Hope, believe, pray, just as Leah did. But you should not marry four wives, as Jacob did...

Jacob is angry because of this violent struggle. “I am not at fault!” he says. “You are the wife whom I love most and with whom I have dwelt more frequently than with your sister. I am not God, who could grant you fertility and the power to bear children.” ...

One wonders why the Holy Spirit busies Himself with it, namely, how Rachel envied Leah, how the one bore children and the other was barren, likewise that Rachel almost blasphemed and struggled too violently for offspring from her husband, with the result that Jacob is angry with her in a carnal manner and actual dissension arises between the spouses. Is this not childish? ...

God delights in describing such lowly matters to give evidence that He does not despise, abhor, or withdraw from, the management of a household... Why does He do this? Because He is the Creator and He governs and preserves them as His creation, even though the flesh has been corrupted by sin. Nor is the flesh of celibates uncorrupted, and they themselves have also been born from the same source. Why, then, do they disparage it and prefer their impure chastity to marriage? Therefore the Holy Spirit wants to teach us and to give evidence by dealing with these lowly, human, and common matters, in order that we may know that He wants to be with us, to care for us, and to show that He is our Creator and Ruler...

Now beside the two sisters Jacob also marries two maidservants. Although I make no positive statement, yet in that age it seems to have been the custom of that region for barren wives to hand their maidservants over to their husbands. Thus Laban adds a maidservant to both of his daughters, perhaps to the end that in case the daughter did not give birth, the maidservant might take her place and that the house might be built from her. Thus Sarah gave a maidservant to Abraham... Isaac did not follow this custom. Nor would Jacob have employed it if he had not been deceived by Laban and the women had not demanded it so emphatically. For one must also consider that at that time fertility was regarded as an extraordinary blessing and a special gift of God, as is clear from Deut. 28:4, where Moses numbers fertility among the blessings.

We do not regard this so highly today. Although we like and desire it in cattle, yet in the human race there are few who regard a woman's fertility as a blessing. Indeed, there are many who have an aversion for it and regard sterility as a special blessing. Surely this is also contrary to nature. Much less is it pious and saintly. For this affection has been implanted by God in man's nature, so that it desires its increase and multiplication. Accordingly, it is inhuman and godless to have a loathing for offspring. And this judgment flows from the Word of God in Gen. 1:28, where He said: "Be fruitful and multiply." From this they understood that children are a gift of God...

*And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. Then Rachel said: God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name **Dan**.*

These are not the words of a wanton harlot. For Rachel gives thanks to God because she has been heard. She mentions God as a judge and assigns to Him the gift of fertility. "I have

cried out," she says, "and I have prayed. But blessed be the Lord, who has judged me and has heard my voice!" It is a most beautiful thanksgiving. Yet she still clings to the flesh. Therefore she says: "God has judged me and pleaded my cause." ...But why, dear Rachel, are you so happy? In spite of all he is not your son. He has not been born from your flesh. Your womb and your breasts do not know this son. What of it? Nevertheless, she congratulates herself that she has an adopted son from her maidservant. So great was her admiration of fertility...

But now Rachel's joy increases with the birth of the second son. Among the Hebrews, however, it is asked what **Naphtali** means. The grammarians are at loggerheads, and the case is still before the judge. But Santes Pagninus and Minster translate: "With wrestlings of God I have wrestled"; that is, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister." ...

*When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Then Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. And Leah said: "Good fortune!" So she called his name **Gad**.*

The saintly mothers certainly had a very ardent and anxious desire for offspring. Therefore after Leah has been barren for three years, she grieves that her husband is being estranged from her; and because there is no hope that offspring will be born from her body, she joins her maidservant to him...

Zilpah bears a second son for Leah, and she again congratulates herself to an extraordinary degree. For only offspring was sought. **Asher** means "blessed." "Now I will be blessed and happy," she says, "and all wives and daughters will call me fortunate. I will be a beloved mother of the house for Jacob, so that it will be said that Jacob loves Leah and despises the other woman as barren."

*In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah: Give me, I pray, some of your son's mandrakes.*

Reuben was a lad eight or nine years of age when this happened. He went out to his father while he was pasturing the flocks of Laban or working in the field, as boys are wont to do. Perhaps he was even sent by his mother. Because it was the time of the wheat harvest, he happened to find mandrakes. The lad did not understand what he found and brought to his mother. It seems that it was a beautiful fruit and that he was captivated by its color. When he returned home, the women quarreled over them. Rachel is so delighted with the mandrakes that she hands over her husband to Leah and yields her right for the sole purpose of taking them away from the lad...

*And God hearkened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.*

The fifth son of Leah was born in the tenth year. Leah gives thanks, and just as she prayed and wept, so she now praises God with a joyful heart...

*And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said: God has endowed me with a good dowry; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons. So she called his name **Zebulun**.*

*Afterwards she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah.*

So far Moses has enumerated the offspring of Leah: six sons and one daughter, likewise two sons from her maidservant. Now the birth of Joseph from Rachel follows.

*Then God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her and opened her womb.*

Moses has employed a significant word: "The Lord remembered." It is as though he were saying: "She had almost despaired within herself, and she was convinced in her heart that God would never remember her, yes, that He had forgotten her forever." "I shall not be a mother," she thought, "but I am the most wretched of all women. I should have been the mother of the house, but God has forgotten me." In this way she was led down into hell, where no hope of help seems to be left. In despair she takes hold of her maidservant and hands her over to her husband, which she would not have done if she had not given up all hope. Yet she despairs in such a way that she retains a spark of faith. In her despair she retains that sobbing which Paul calls ineffable (cf. Rom. 8:26), but this is so deeply buried and covered with impossibility and contrary emotions of the heart that she is barely conscious of that sobbing or sighing.

Thus Hannah, the mother of Samuel, also despaired of offspring and could not be conscious of her sobbing and of that desire for offspring in the inmost depths of her heart. But God, who searches the heart, understands the ineffable sobbing, which can neither be felt nor expressed with any words...

But just as the prayer and the sobbing are ineffable, so the hearing and the joy are inestimable, as Paul says (Eph. 3:20): "Now to Him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think." He does not give what His saints seek on the surface of their hearts and with that foam of words, but He is an almighty and exceedingly rich Bestower who gives in accordance with the depth of that sighing. Therefore He lets prayer be directed, grow, and be increased; and He does not hear immediately. For if He were to answer at the first outcry or petition, prayer would not increase but would become cold. Therefore He defers help. As a result, prayer grows from

day to day and becomes more efficacious. The sobbing of the heart also becomes deeper and more ardent until it comes to the point of despair, as it were. Then prayer becomes most ardent and passionate...

It is said about Rachel: *God remembered*. It is as though Moses were saying: "The only feeling Rachel had was that all her prayers and tears had been in vain and useless, and that she had been utterly obliterated and deleted from the heart and the memory of God." But you should not come to this conclusion, my dear Rachel; for you are making a big mistake. That feeling of yours is carnal; it is the flesh that is feeling and is weak. God has never forgotten you, but from the beginning, when you began to ask for offspring, He immediately heard and marked all the words of your sobbing. But your prayer was not yet ardent and strong enough. Therefore it had to grow and become strong, and for this reason God put matters off until the second, third, fourth, and fifth year... Therefore God remembered, although He had never forgotten you for one moment. But this was finally the time for Him to hear your sighs, when you thought that they had been completely buried, covered, and forgotten...

This should be frequently stated and repeated, lest we cast aside all hope and confidence with regard to our praying. Even

though this praying is cold at the outset and does not immediately obtain help, yet we should know that help is postponed in order that prayer may become more perfect and stronger. For there is wonderful power and omnipotence in prayer... He helps all who call upon Him, and He helps so richly and liberally that they are compelled to acknowledge that they never hoped for any such thing. Therefore we should never lose heart; but we should persist in praying, wishing, and seeking until hope and the awaited liberation appear...

Today...most married people do not desire offspring. Indeed, they turn away from it and consider it better to live without children, because they are poor and do not have the means with which to support a household. This is especially true of those who are devoted to idleness and laziness and shun the sweat and the toil of marriage altogether. But the purpose of marriage is not to have pleasure and to be idle but to procreate and bring up children, to support a household. This, of course, is a huge burden full of great cares and toils. But you have been created by God to be a husband or a wife and that you may learn to bear these troubles. Those who have no love or children are swine, stocks, and logs unworthy of being called men or women; for they despise the blessing of God, the Creator and Author of marriage.

**What thought from Martin Luther's words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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## DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Genesis 29:31-30:24 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 29:31-30:24?**

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One thing is clear about this passage—Jacob’s family is seriously messed up! Leah is unloved and desperate. Rachel is envious and angry. Jacob is passive and checked out. And the ever-growing number of kids are used as pawns in a child-birthing competition.

Why does Scripture give us a glimpse into this dysfunctional family? Probably because all of us grow up in dysfunctional families to some degree. There is no perfect environment. Unhappy wives. Selfish husbands. Angry moms. Passive dads. Arguing parents. Unloved children. Sibling rivalry. Betrayed relationships. Family conflicts. Ugly divorces. Broken homes. Damaged hearts.

**What is one thing that you wish were different about your life or family growing up? Why?**

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**What is one thing that you wish were different in your life or family today? Why?**

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In the midst of this crazy childbearing competition, there is one moment when Leah stops trying to earn her husband’s love or prove her worth through fertility. It is after the birth of her fourth son. She names him, Judah—“I will praise the Lord.”

Instead of lamenting what you may have lost or never had, you can choose to praise the Lord. You can choose to see your blessings. You can choose to trust God’s redemption of all your pain.

**Take time to read and reflect on Psalm 146.** Mark key words or phrases as you read.

Praise the Lord!  
Praise the Lord, O my soul!  
While I live I will praise the Lord;  
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being!

Do not put your trust in princes,  
Nor in a son of man, in whom there is no help.  
His spirit departs, he returns to his earth;  
In that very day his plans perish.

Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help,  
Whose hope is in the Lord his God,  
Who made heaven and earth,  
The sea, and all that is in them;  
Who keeps truth forever,  
Who executes justice for the oppressed,  
Who gives food to the hungry.  
The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners.  
The Lord opens the eyes of the blind;  
The Lord raises those who are bowed down;  
The Lord loves the righteous.  
The Lord watches over the strangers;  
He sustains the fatherless and widow;  
But the way of the wicked He turns upside down.

The Lord shall reign forever—  
Your God, O Zion, to all generations.  
Praise the Lord!

**How often should we praise the Lord?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Why should we not put our hope in other humans, no matter how powerful they may appear?**

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**Why should we put our hope in the Lord?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**What can you praise the Lord for today?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*A dysfunctional family is any family with more than one person in it.*

Mary Karr

*On the human plane, this story demonstrates the craving of human beings for love and recognition, and the price of thwarting it; on the divine level, it shows once again the grace of God choosing difficult and unpromising material.*

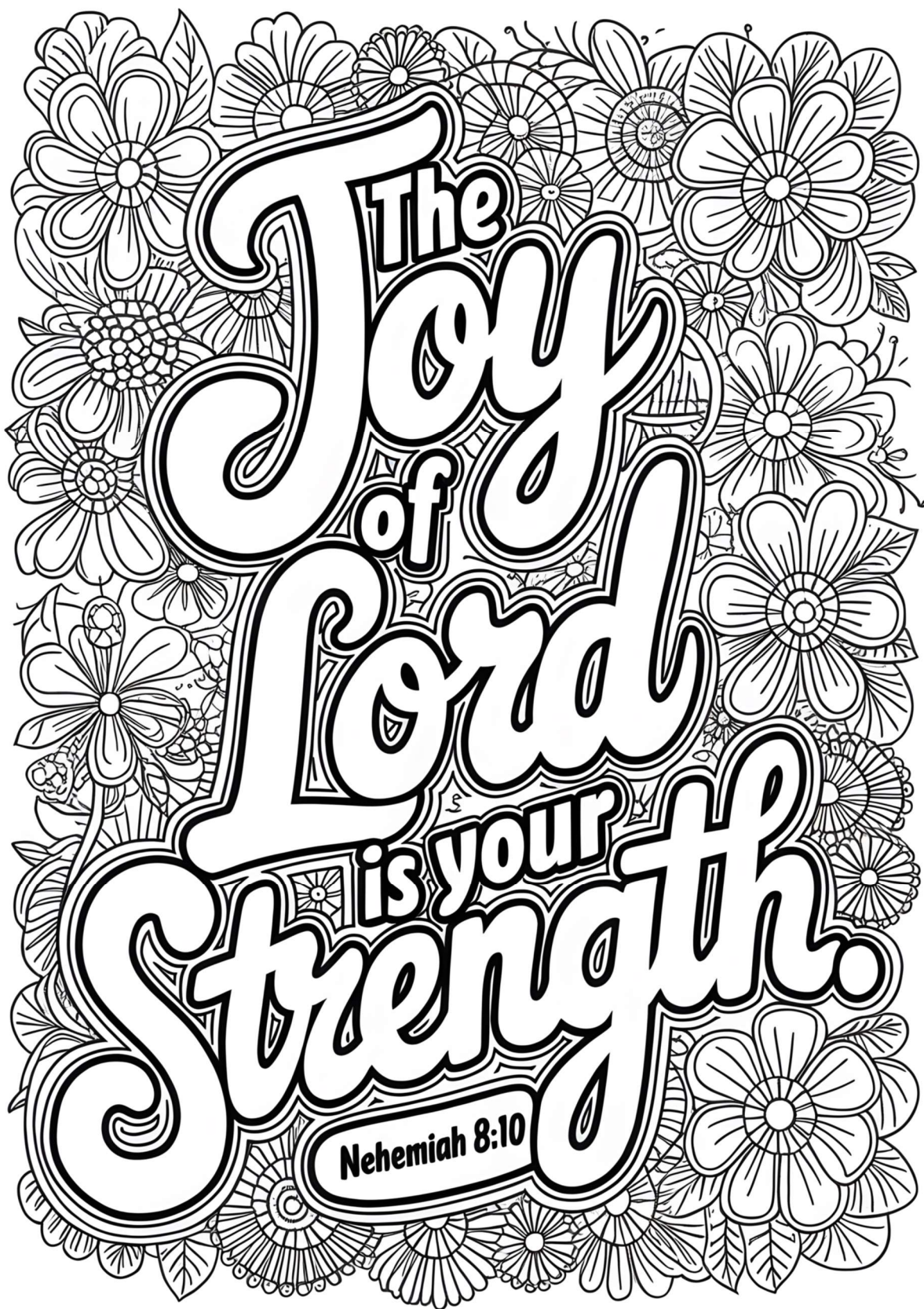
Derek Kidner

*[After the birth of Judah]  
Leah had finally taken her heart's deepest hopes off of her husband and children, and had put them on the Lord. Jacob and Laban had stolen Leah's life, but when she gave her heart finally to the Lord, she got her life back.*

Timothy Keller

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- Write down all the members of your family growing up. Next to their names write down one word to describe them. Then write down one word to describe your parent's marriage and one word to describe your family as a whole. Share your words with your group.
- What do the names of Leah's first four children tell you about her?
- What does Rachel's demand to Jacob and his response to her tell you about the state of their relationship at this point?
- What surprises you the most about this passage? Why?
- Based on this passage, what one word would you use to describe Leah? Rachel? Jacob? God?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Martin Luther? If so, what?
- Read Psalm 146 together as a group. What thoughts stand out to you from this psalm? What can you praise the Lord for today?



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## SEPARATION ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 30:25-31:55

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#### **DAY ONE** **Observation**

Jacob's "few days" in Haran (27:44) turn out to be twenty years. He came to Haran with the shirt on his back and a promise from God to bless him. Twenty years later, he is ready to leave with two wives, twelve children, and a lot of flocks. Jacob has been blessed but his experience in Haran has been far from pleasant.

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 30:25-31:55. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Stop to answer the questions between each section of this passage.**

<sup>25</sup> As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. <sup>26</sup> Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you." <sup>27</sup> But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you. <sup>28</sup> Name your wages, and I will give it." <sup>29</sup> Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. <sup>30</sup> For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?" <sup>31</sup> He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it: <sup>32</sup> let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages. <sup>33</sup> So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen." <sup>34</sup> Laban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said." <sup>35</sup> But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge of his sons. <sup>36</sup> And he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock.

**How has Laban benefited from the twenty years of labor that Jacob has provided?** (At this point Jacob has served Laban for fourteen years for Leah and Rachel plus six years of additional labor.)

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**Does Laban want Jacob to leave?** ☐ Absolutely ☐ Sort of ☐ Absolutely not!

**Is Jacob ready to leave?** ☐ Absolutely ☐ Sort of ☐ Absolutely not!

**What does Jacob request for his wages?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**What does Laban do as soon as he strikes this agreement with Jacob?** \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>37</sup> Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. <sup>38</sup> He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, <sup>39</sup> the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. <sup>40</sup> And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban's flock. <sup>41</sup> Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks, <sup>42</sup> but for the feeble of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feeble would be Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. <sup>43</sup> Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

**What strange breeding practice does Jacob employ?** \_\_\_\_\_

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There is a key word play in this passage. The word "white" (Hebrew, *laban*) is used several times. This is also the meaning of Laban's name. Go back and mark or highlight the word "Laban" or "white" in Gen. 30:25-43. **What is the result of Jacob using a "white" stick with Laban's flocks?**

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**31** Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth." <sup>2</sup> And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before. <sup>3</sup> Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you."

<sup>4</sup> So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was <sup>5</sup> and said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me with favor as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. <sup>6</sup> You know that I have served your father with all my strength, <sup>7</sup> yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. But God did not permit him to harm me. <sup>8</sup> If he said, 'The spotted shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped. <sup>9</sup> Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me. <sup>10</sup> In the breeding season of the flock I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled. <sup>11</sup> Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!' <sup>12</sup> And he said, 'Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. <sup>13</sup> I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred.'" <sup>14</sup> Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? <sup>15</sup> Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money. <sup>16</sup> All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do."

**What do Laban and his sons think about Jacob?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does Jacob think about Laban?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What do Leah and Rachel think about their father, Laban?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does God do, say, or promise to Jacob in the following verses?**

31:3 \_\_\_\_\_

31:7 \_\_\_\_\_

31:9 \_\_\_\_\_

31:10-13 \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>17</sup> So Jacob arose and set his sons and his wives on camels. <sup>18</sup> He drove away all his livestock, all his property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. <sup>19</sup> Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods. <sup>20</sup> And Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he intended to flee. <sup>21</sup> He fled with all that he had and arose and crossed the Euphrates, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.

<sup>22</sup> When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, <sup>23</sup> he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him for seven days and followed close after him into the hill country of Gilead. <sup>24</sup> But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad."

<sup>25</sup> And Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen pitched tents in the hill country of Gilead. <sup>26</sup> And Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? <sup>27</sup> Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? <sup>28</sup> And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly. <sup>29</sup> It is in my power to do you harm. But the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.' <sup>30</sup> And now you have gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods?" <sup>31</sup> Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. <sup>32</sup> Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours, and take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

<sup>33</sup> So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's. <sup>34</sup> Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle and sat on them. Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them. <sup>35</sup> She said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me." So he searched but did not find the household gods.

**What do you learn about the following people from this passage (31:17-35)?**

Jacob \_\_\_\_\_

Laban \_\_\_\_\_

Rachel \_\_\_\_\_

**What do you learn about God from this passage?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>36</sup>Then Jacob became angry and berated Laban. Jacob said to Laban, "What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? <sup>37</sup>For you have felt through all my goods; what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. <sup>38</sup>These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. <sup>39</sup>What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. <sup>40</sup>There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. <sup>41</sup>These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. <sup>42</sup>If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night."

**How would you describe Jacob's emotions in this passage?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How does Jacob describe the past twenty years of his life? What has he had to endure?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**What has Jacob come to know about God after these twenty years?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

<sup>43</sup>Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day for these my daughters or for their children whom they have borne? <sup>44</sup>Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I. And let it be a witness between you and me." <sup>45</sup>So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. <sup>46</sup>And Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. <sup>47</sup>Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. <sup>48</sup>Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." Therefore he named it Galeed, <sup>49</sup>and Mizpah, for

he said, “The Lord watch between you and me, when we are out of one another’s sight. <sup>50</sup> If you oppress my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me.”

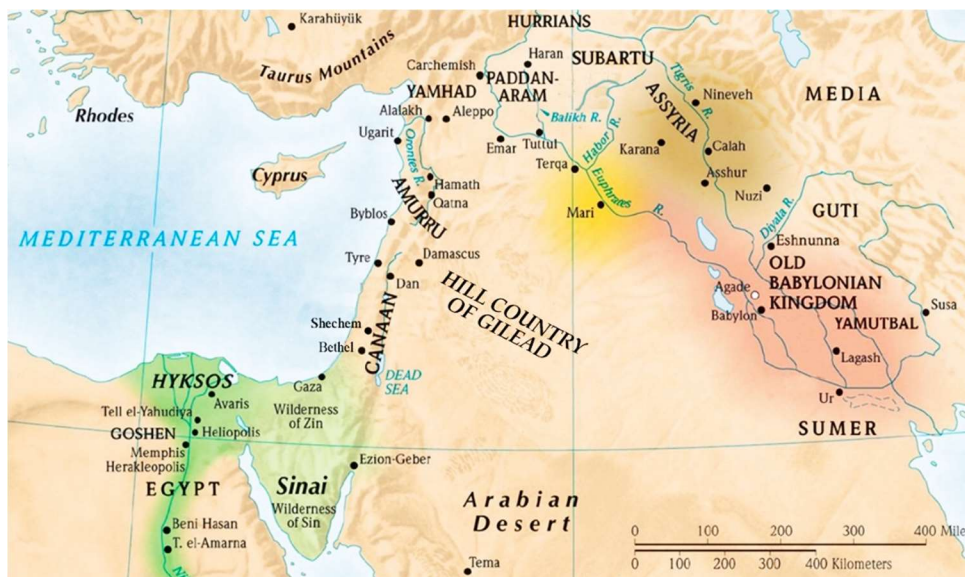
<sup>51</sup> Then Laban said to Jacob, “See this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me. <sup>52</sup> This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm. <sup>53</sup> The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.” So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, <sup>54</sup> and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country.

<sup>55</sup> Early in the morning Laban arose and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned home.

Circle the area of Paddan-Aram where Jacob began his journey.

Circle the hill country of Gilead where Laban overtakes Jacob.

Using the map scale, approximately how many miles did Jacob travel before Laban caught him?



What does Laban propose between himself and Jacob? (31:44) \_\_\_\_\_

What do they use as a “sign” of their agreement? (31:45) \_\_\_\_\_

What does Jacob do after their agreement? (31:54) \_\_\_\_\_

What does Laban do? (31:55) \_\_\_\_\_

After reading this whole passage, what strikes you the most or stands out to you? Why?

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## DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Genesis 31:38-42 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them.

*"I have been with you for twenty years now.*

*Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks.*

*I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself.*

*And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night.*

*This was my situation:*

*The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night,  
and sleep fled from my eyes.*

*It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household.*

*I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks,  
and you changed my wages ten times.*

*If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me,  
you would surely have sent me away empty-handed.*

*But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you." (NIV)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

**Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.**

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## DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

**Hermeneutics** (from the Greek word, *hermeneuo*, “to interpret,” cf. John 1:38, 42) is the science of interpreting a particular text. It governs *how* we interpret Scripture. Proper hermeneutics employs a **literal-historical-grammatical** approach. In other words, proper interpretation involves reading the text literally (not allegorically) in its historical and grammatical context.

This is important as we study a text like Genesis 30:37-43 in which Jacob takes various branches from trees and peels white strips in them in order to help breed streaked, spotted, and speckled animals. *What in the world is going on in this passage?*

First, we must understand a common historical and cultural belief in the ancient world. **Read the following excerpts regarding the ancient belief in “maternal impression.”**

The Greek philosopher Empedocles [5<sup>th</sup> cent BC] described the power of the woman’s imagination to influence their offspring: “For often women have fallen in love with statues of men and with images and have produced offspring which resemble them” (*Aetius*, 5.12.2).

This is one example of how the ancient Greeks and Romans believed in the theory of “maternal impression”—that an object seen, or even just imagined, by a woman as she conceived somehow imprinted itself on the unborn child. The best-known example of this is in the early Greek novel, Heliodorus’ *Aethiopica*, where the heroine, Chariclea, turns out to have been born in Ethiopia; there, she had been rejected by her black mother, who was afraid she would be accused of adultery because of Chariclea’s white skin. But, the story assures us, this only happened because her mother had been looking at a painting in the bedroom showing Andromeda white and naked. (*Health and Well Being in the Ancient World*, The Open University, open.edu)

There existed a strong conviction that things seen before and during conception make so powerful an impression on the mind that their characteristics are stamped on the offspring. . . If on the way home from the ritual bath (a procedure preliminary to intercourse), a “woman encounters a dog, her child will have an ugly dog-face. If she meets an ass, it will be stupid, if an ignorant lout, it will be an ignoramus.” (Rabbi J. Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*).

Now from this natural phenomenon that occurs in our *parashah* we learn the requirement for intelligent creatures to sanctify their minds when they are copulating, for we see that with animals the fetus takes on the form of the parent’s thought. For this reason the Sages said (Shevuot 18b): “A man must always sanctify himself during intercourse.” This sanctification refers to purifying one’s mind, so that he does not think about other women or anything else other than his wife. If animals, who have no intelligence to understand the benefit of a matter or its detriment, and only act out of instinct, have the power to mold their offspring according to their thoughts at the time of copulation, how much more so for human beings... (Rabbi Bahya ben Asher, quoted in *Maternal Impressions: From Sheep to Humans*, thetorah.com)

So did Jacob have this ancient belief and employ it in his breeding methods? It is a strong possibility. Did it work? On the surface, it seems like this method yields results. But is there something else at play? The immediate context of this passage tells us what really was happening.

“In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. The angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob.’ I answered, ‘Here I am.’ And he said, ‘Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.’” (Genesis 31:10-13)

In talking with Leah and Rachel, Jacob reveals a dream that he had *before* he employed his peeled stick method in Genesis 30. In other words, God had already told him what He was going to do. That is why Jacob knew to ask Laban for all the streaked, speckled, or spotted animals.

**If this is the case, then based on your knowledge of Jacob from the previous chapters of Genesis, why do you think Jacob may have peeled these branches and put them in the watering troughs?**

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**Do you think the births of all these speckled animals was due to Jacob’s “ingenious” breeding methods or due to God’s sovereign grace in his life? What does Jacob conclude? (cf. Gen. 31:42)**

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Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type “Genesis 30” into the “Search the Bible” box. Click on Genesis 30:27 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the phrase “I have learned by experience” and click on the Strong’s number (H5172) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage.

**What is the Hebrew word for this phrase?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** (Note especially Strong’s Definitions and Gesenius’ Hebrew Lexicon.)

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**What does this word tell you about Laban’s spiritual beliefs and practices?** \_\_\_\_\_

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Laban is not a true follower of God even though he “speaks the language” at times. His superstitious beliefs have influenced Rachel (31:34) and probably Jacob as well. Thus, it would not be unusual for Jacob to use superstitious practices to try to “help God out.” He still has much to learn.

## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from John Calvin's *Commentary on the Bible*. **John Calvin** (1509-64) was a key figure in the Protestant Reformation. He was a pastor in Geneva, Switzerland and a theologian who shaped much of the theology of the Protestant church. Though "Calvinism" can be controversial in the church today, there is no question that Calvin was a man who loved Christ and taught the Word of God.

**30:25.** *Send me away, that I may go.* Seeing that Jacob had been retained by a proposed reward for his services, it might appear that he was acting craftily in desiring his dismissal from his father-in-law. I cannot, however, doubt that the desire to return had already entered his mind, and that he ingenuously avowed his intention. First, having experienced, in many ways, how unjust, how perfidious, and even cruel, Laban had been, there is no wonder that he should wish to depart from him, as soon as ever the opportunity was afforded. Secondly; since, from the long space of time which had elapsed, he hoped that Esau's mind would be appeased, he could not but earnestly wish to return to his parents; especially as he had been oppressed by so many troubles, that he could scarcely fear a worse condition in any other place.

But the promise of God was the most powerful stimulant of all to excite his desire to return. For he had not rejected the benediction which was dearer to him than his own life. To this point, his declaration refers, "I will go to my own place and to my country" for he does not use this language concerning Canaan, only because he was born there, but because he knew that it had been divinely granted to him. For if he had said that he desired to return, merely because it was his native soil, he might have been exposed to ridicule; since his father had passed a wandering and unsettled life, continually changing his abode. I therefore conclude, that although he might have dwelt commodiously elsewhere, the oracle of God, by which the land of Canaan had been destined for him, was ever fresh in his memory...

**27.** *I pray thee, if I have found favor in thine eyes.* We perceive hence, that Jacob had not been a burdensome guest, seeing that Laban soothes him with bland address, in order to procure from him a longer continuance in his service. For, sordid and grasping as he was, he would not have suffered Jacob to remain a moment in his house, unless he had found his presence to be a certain source of gain. Inasmuch therefore, as he not only did not thrust him out, but anxiously sought to retain him, we infer that Jacob had undergone incredible labors, which had not only sufficed for the sustenance of a large family, but had also brought great profit to his father-in-law...

It appears, then, that the wealth of Laban had so increased, from the time of Jacob's coming, that it was as if his gains had visibly distilled from heaven. Moreover, as the Hebrew word נָחַשׁ (*nachash*) means to know by omens or by divination, some interpreters imagine that Laban, having been instructed in magic arts, found that the presence of Jacob was useful and profitable to him...

**29.** *Thou knowest how I have served thee...* Jacob could not hope that the perfidious old fox would, of himself, perform an act of justice; neither does he simply commend his own industry, but shows that he had to deal with an unjust and cruel man. Meanwhile, it is to be observed, that although he had labored strenuously, he yet ascribes nothing to his own labor, but imputes it entirely to the blessing of God that Laban had been enriched. For though when men faithfully devote themselves to their duty, they do not lose their labor; yet their success depends entirely upon the favor of God... The use of

this doctrine is twofold. First, whatever I attempt, or to whatever work I apply my hands, it is my duty to desire God to bless my labor, that it may not be vain and fruitless. Then, if I have obtained anything, my second duty is to ascribe the praise to God; without whose blessing, men in vain rise up early, fatigue themselves the whole day, late take rest, eat the bread of carefulness, and taste even a little water with sorrow...

**30.** *And now, when shall I provide for mine own house also?* He reasons, that when he had so long expended his labors for another, it would be unjust that his own family should be neglected. For nature prescribes this order, that every one should take care of the family committed to him... Had Jacob been alone, he might have devoted himself more freely to the interests of another; but now, since he is the husband of four wives, and the father of a numerous offspring, he ought not to be forgetful of those whom he has received at the hand of God to bring up....

**31.** *Thou shalt not give me anything...* Jacob does not demand for himself certain and definite wages; but he treats with Laban, on this condition, that he shall receive whatever offspring may be brought forth by the sheep and goats of a pure and uniform color, which shall prove to be particolored and spotted... A question arises, by what hope, or by what counsel had Jacob been induced to propose this condition? A little afterwards, Moses will relate that he had used cunning, in order that particolored and spotted lambs might be brought forth by the pure flock; but in the following chapter he more fully declares that Jacob had been divinely instructed thus to act. Therefore, although it was improbable in itself that this agreement should prove useful to him, he yet obeys the celestial oracle, and wishes to be enriched in no other manner than according to the will of God. But Laban was dealt with according to his own disposition:

for he eagerly caught at what seemed advantageous to himself, but God disappointed his shameful greed...

**35.** *And he removed that day.* From this verse the form of the compact is more certainly known. Laban separates the sheep and goats marked with spots from the pure flock, that is, from the white or black, and commits these to his sons to be fed; interposing a three days' journey between them and the rest; lest, by promiscuous intercourse, a particolored offspring should be produced. It follows, therefore, that, in the flock which Jacob fed, nothing remained but cattle of one color: thus but faint hope of gain remained to Jacob, while every provision was made for Laban's advantage. It also appears, from the distance of the places, in which Laban kept his flocks apart, that he was suspicious as well as covetous; for dishonest men are wont to measure others by their own standard; thus it happens that they are always distrustful and alarmed...

**37.** *And Jacob took him rods of green poplar.* As to physical causes, it is well known that the sight of objects by the female has great effect on the form of the fetus [Note: this is Calvin's mistaken belief at that time.] Now Jacob did three things. For first, he stripped the bark from twigs that he might make bare some white places by the incisions in the bark, and thus a varying and manifold color was produced. Secondly, he chose the times when the males and females were assembled. Thirdly, he put the twigs in the waters, for like the drinking feeds the animal parts, it also urges on the sexual drive...

**43.** *And the man increased exceedingly.* Moses added this for the purpose of showing that he was not made thus suddenly rich without a miracle. We shall see hereafter how great his wealth was. For being entirely destitute, he yet gathered out of nothing, greater riches than any man of moderate wealth

could do in twenty or thirty years. And that no one may deem this fabulous, as not being in accordance with the usual method, Moses meets the objection by saying, that he was enriched in an extraordinary manner...

**31:1.** *And he heard the words...* There is no doubt that the Lord corrected the infirmity of his servant, and gently spurred him on as he proceeded in his course. For if Laban had treated him kindly and pleasantly, his mind would have been lulled to sleep; but now he is driven away by adverse looks. So the Lord often better secures the salvation of his people, by subjecting them to the hatred, the envy, and the malevolence of the wicked, than by suffering them to be soothed with bland address. It was far more useful to Jacob to have his father-in-law and his sons opposed than to have them courteously fawning to his wishes; because their favor might have deprived him of the blessing of God...

Wherefore let us not think it hard to be awakened by the Lord, when we fall into adversity, or receive but little favor from the world; for hatred, threats, disgrace, and slanders, are often more advantageous to us than the applause of all men on every side...

**4.** *And Jacob sent.* He sends for his wives, in order to explain to them his intention, and to exhort them to accompany him in his flight; for it was his duty as a good husband to take them away with him; and therefore it was necessary to inform them of his design. And he was not so blind as to be unmindful of the many dangers of his plan. It was difficult for women, who had never left their father's house, to travel to a remote region by an unknown way. Moreover, there was ground to fear lest they, in seeking protection for themselves, might betray their husband to their father... If his wives had refused to accompany him, the call of God would have compelled him to depart. But God granted

him what was far more desirable, that his whole family, with one consent, were prepared to follow him: moreover, his wives, with whose mutual strife his house before had rung, now freely consent to go with him into exile. So the Lord, when in good faith we discharge our duty, and shun nothing which he commands, enables us to succeed, even in the most doubtful affairs...

**13.** *I am the God of Bethel.* It is not wonderful that the angel should assume the person of God: either because God the Father appeared to the holy patriarchs in his own Word, as in a lively mirror, and that under the form of an angel; or because angels, speaking by the command of God, rightly utter their words, as from his mouth...

He does not call himself the God of Bethel, because he is confined within the limits of a given place, but for the purpose of renewing to his servant the remembrance of his own promise; for Jacob had not yet attained to that degree of perfection which rendered the more simple rudiments unnecessary for him. But little light of true doctrine at that time prevailed; and even that was wrapped in many shadows. Nearly the whole world had apostatized to false gods; and that region, nay, even the house of his father-in-law, was filled with unholy superstitions. Therefore, amid so many hindrances, nothing was more difficult for him than to hold his faith in the one true God firm and invincible...

Further, by this oracle the Lord declared that he is always mindful of the godly, even when they seem to be cast down and deserted. For who would not have said that the outcast Jacob was now deprived of all celestial help? And truly the Lord appears to him late; but beyond all expectation shows, that he had never been forgetful of him. Let the faithful, also, at this day, feel that he is the same towards them; and if, in any way, the wicked

tyrannically oppress them by unjust violence, let them bear it patiently, until at length, in due time, he shall avenge them.

**16.** *For all the riches which God has taken from our father.* Rachel and Leah confirm the speech of Jacob; but in a profane, common manner, not with a lively and pure sense of religion. For they only make a passing allusion to the fact, that God, in pity to his servant, had deigned to honor him with peculiar favor; and in the meantime, insist upon a reason of little solidity, that what they were carrying away was justly their due, because a part of the inheritance pertained to them...

**19.** *And Rachel had stolen...* How great is the propensity of the human mind to idolatry: since in all ages this evil has prevailed; namely, that men seek out for themselves visible representations of God... It is not indeed to be believed, that Bethuel had been entirely ignorant of the call of Abraham; yet neither he, with his family, was, on that account, withdrawn from this vanity... Therefore, that idolatry is almost innate in the human mind, the very antiquity of its origin bears witness. And that it is so firmly fixed there as scarcely to be capable of being uprooted, shows its obstinacy. But it is still more absurd, that not even Rachel could be healed of this contagion, in so great a length of time. She had often heard her husband speaking of the true and genuine worship of God: yet she is so addicted to the corruptions which she had imbibed from her childhood, that she is ready to infect the land chosen by God with them. She imagines that, with her husband, she is following God as her leader, and at the same time takes with her the idols by which she would subvert his worship. It is even possible that by the excessive indulgence of his beloved wife, Jacob might give too much encouragement to such superstitions. Wherefore, let pious fathers of families learn to use their utmost diligence that no stain of evil may remain in their wives or children...

**20.** *And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban.* By the Hebrew form of expression: "stole away the heart of Laban," Jacob departed privately, or by stealth, unknown to his father-in-law. Jacob had no hope of deliverance but in flight. For Laban had determined to hold him all his life as a captive, as if he had been a slave bound to the soil, or sentenced to the mines. Therefore let us learn, by his example, when the Lord calls us, we must often strive courageously against every kind of obstacle, and not be surprised if many arduous difficulties oppose themselves against us...

**22.** *And it was told Laban.* The Lord gave to his servant the interval of a three days' journey, so that having passed the Euphrates, he might enter the boundaries of the promised land. And, in the meantime, he cooled the rage of Laban, the assault of which, in its first heat, might have been intolerable severe. By permitting Jacob to be intercepted in the midst of his journey, God intended to show his own interposition the more illustrious. It seemed desirable that Jacob's course should not be interrupted, and that he should not be filled with alarm by the hostile approach of his father-in-law; but when Laban, like a savage wild beast, breathing nothing but slaughter, is suddenly restrained by the Lord, this was far more likely to confirm the faith of Jacob, and therefore far more useful to him...

Whence we learn, that those perturbations which, at the time, are troublesome to us, yet tend to our salvation, if only we obediently submit to the will of God; who purposely thus tries us, that he may indeed show more fully the care which he takes of us. It was a sad and miserable sight, that Jacob, taking so large a family with him, should flee as if his conscience had accused him of evil: but it was far more bitter and more formidable, that Laban, intent on his destruction, should threaten his life. Yet the method of his deliverance was more illustrious than any victory...

**23. *And pursued him seven days' journey.*** Since the cruelty of Laban was now appeased, or at least bridled, he did not dare severely to threaten; but laying aside his ferocity, he descended to feigned and hypocritical flattery. He complains that he had been injured, because he had been kept in ignorance of Jacob's departure, whom he would rather leave sent forth with customary tokens of joy, in token of his paternal affection. Thus hypocrites, when the power of inflicting injury is taken away from them, heap false complaints upon the good and simple, as if the blame rested with them. Wherefore, if at any time wicked and perfidious men, when they have unjustly harassed us, put forward some pretext of equity on their own part, we must bear with the iniquity; not because a just defense is to be entirely omitted; but because we find it inevitable that perverse men, ever ready to speak evil, will shamelessly cast upon us the blame of crimes of which we are innocent. Meanwhile, we must guard against giving them the occasion against us that they seek...

**30. *Wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?*** The second head of accusation which is alleged against Jacob is, that he had not departed through love to his country, nor for any just and probable cause; but that, in fact, he was implicated in an act of robbery. Heavy and disgraceful charge, of which Jacob was far from being guilty! But we learn hence, that no one can live so innocently in the world, but he must sometimes bear undeserved reproach. Whenever this may happen to us, let that precious promise sustain us, that the Lord, in his own time, will bring forth our innocence as the morning light (Psalm 37:6).

**32. *That Rachel had stolen them.*** Moses relates the manner in which Rachel had concealed her theft; namely, by sitting on the idols, and pretending the custom of women as her excuse. It is a question, whether she did this through shame or pertinacity. It was dis-

graceful to be caught in the act of theft; she also dreaded the severe sentence of her husband. Yet to me it appears probable that fear did not so much influence her as the obstinate love of idolatry. For we know how greatly superstition infatuates the mind. Therefore, as if she had obtained an incomparable treasure, she thinks that she must attempt anything rather than allow herself to be deprived of it. Moreover, she chooses rather to incur the displeasure of her father and her husband, than to relinquish the object of her superstition. To her stratagem she also adds lying words, so that she deserves manifold censure.

**42. *Except the God of my father.*** Jacob here ascribes it to the favor of God that he was not about to return home empty... He therefore denies that he has been made rich by the kindness of his father-in-law; but testifies that he has been favorably regarded by the Lord: as if he had said, I owe it not to thee, that thou hast not further injured me; but God, who is propitious to me, has withstood thee.

The expression "the fear of Isaac," is to be taken passively for the God whom Isaac revered; just as, on account of the reverence due to him, he is called the "fear and the dread" of his people. A similar expression occurs immediately after, in the same chapter. Now the pious, while they fear God, are by no means horror-struck at his presence, like the reprobates; but trembling at his judgment, they walk circumspectly before him.

*God has seen my affliction, and the labor of my hands.* This was spoken from a pious feeling that God would bring help to him when afflicted, if he should conduct himself with fidelity and honesty. Therefore, in order that the Lord may sustain us with his favor, let us learn to discharge our duty rightly; let us not flee from our proper work; and let us not refuse to purchase peace by submitting to many inconveniences. Further, if they from

whom we have deserved well treat us severely and unjustly, let us bear our cross in hope and in silence, until the Lord shall succor us: for he will never forsake us, as the whole Scripture testifies...

**44.** *Let us make a covenant, I and thou.* Laban here acts as men conscious of guilt are wont to do, when they wish to guard themselves against revenge: and this kind of trepidation and anxiety is the just reward of evil deeds. Besides, wicked men always judge of others from their own disposition: whence it happens that they have fears on all sides...

Meanwhile Moses shows how placable Jacob was, and how easily he permitted himself to be conciliated. He had endured very many and grievous wrongs; but now, forgetting all, he freely stretches out the hand of kindness: and so far is he from being pertinacious in defending his own right, that he, in a manner, anticipates Laban himself, being the first to take a stone, and set it up for a pillar. And truly it becomes the children of God, not only with alacrity to embrace peace, but even ardently to search for it, as we are commanded in Psalms 34:14.

As to the heap of stones, it was always the practice to use some ceremony which might confirm the compact on both sides; on this occasion a heap of stones is raised, in order that the memory of the covenant might be transmitted to posterity. That Jacob took part

in this was a proof, as we have said, of a mind disposed to peace. He freely complained, indeed, when it was right to do so; but when the season of pacification arrived, he showed that he cherished no rancor.

**53.** *The God of Abraham.* It is indeed rightly done, that Laban should adjure Jacob by the name of God. For this is the confirmation of covenants; to appeal to God on both sides, that he may not suffer perfidy to pass unpunished. But he sinfully blends idols with the true God, between whom there is nothing in common. Thus, truly, men involved in superstitions, are accustomed to confound promiscuously sacred things with profane, and the figments of men with the true God...

**54.** *And called his brethren to eat bread.* In courteously receiving his kindred, by whom he had been ill-treated, as his guests, Jacob showed his kindness. Moses also intimates that it was by the special favor of God that, after the most dreadful storm which threatened Jacob with destruction, a placid serenity suddenly shone forth.

To the same cause is to be assigned what immediately follows, that Laban departed in a friendly manner: for by this method the Lord openly manifested himself as the guardian of his servant, seeing that he wonderfully delivered him as a lost sheep out of the jaws of the wolf.

**What thought from John Calvin's words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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## DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Genesis 30:25-31:55 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 30:25-31:55?**

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Genesis 30-31 give us a glimpse into the superstition, incomplete faith, and idolatry that is still manifest in Laban and Jacob's families. Laban talks about God but still practices divination and worships idols. Rachel is so enamored with her dad's idols that she steals them for herself. And Jacob, though he has had an encounter with God and is aware of God's promises to him, still operates on his own and tries to finagle his way to God's blessings. His faith is incomplete at best.

**What habits, weaknesses, or sins do you have a hard time letting go of from your past?**

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God has already revealed to Jacob that he is going to bless him with streaked and speckled flocks but Jacob still resorts to a strange practice of peeling branches with white streaks. It appears that Jacob is still trying to control and manipulate things on his own, even though God is in control.

**In what ways do you still try to control your life and manipulate your circumstances?**

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It is funny that Jacob becomes wealthy with a huge flock of speckled and spotted sheep. Jacob has all the oddball sheep for his oddball family! In some sense, we are all God's oddball sheep.

**What is something about you or about your life that can make you feel odd or "out of place" at times? Why do you feel this way? How can God use even this for His glory?**

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Rejoice in the fact that the God who created you and knows you best loves you the most!

## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*Invariably we want life to easy and smooth. We pray and we plan as far as we can to make life go that way. But sometimes the best way for God to get our attention and move us on to new levels of obedience is through a breakdown of our comfort...*

*It was not Jacob's clever plan and hard work that had made him rich but God's blessing. ...How easy it is for us to trust in our clever ideas and strategies—some of which are even more far-fetched than Jacob's breeding sticks—and to give them credit for our prosperity and success.*

Ian Dugaid

*I've given up on normal as a life goal, having realized that 'normal' is just a setting on one's dryer.*

Patsy Clairmont

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- What is one of the strangest or oddest things that you have ever seen in your life?
- How would you describe Jacob's relationship with his father-in-law, Laban?
- What does Jacob do to try to help increase the number of speckled or spotted animals? Do you think that his breeding method works? Why or why not?
- What all does God reveal to Jacob in 31:1-13?
- How would you describe Leah and Rachel's relationship to their father?
- Read Jacob's speech to Laban in 31:36-42. What do you learn about Jacob from his speech? How long do you think he held this pent-up anger?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of John Calvin? If so, what?
- No one shines as a "spiritual giant" in this passage. All of them have issues. Laban is a greedy hypocrite. Rachel is a stealing idolater. Jacob is an angry, half-hearted God follower. Yet God is still at work in their lives! How does this story encourage you? In what ways do you feel like one of God's oddball sheep? Praise God that He works through broken vessels!

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## WRESTLING ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 32

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#### **DAY ONE** **Observation**

Genesis 32 is one of the most significant chapters in the Old Testament. It explains the origin and meaning of the name “Israel” and marks the climax of Jacob’s life. Everything in Jacob’s story leads up to this event.

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 32:1-32. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.**

Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. <sup>2</sup> And when Jacob saw them he said, “This is God’s camp!” So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

<sup>3</sup> And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, <sup>4</sup> instructing them, “Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, ‘I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. <sup>5</sup> I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.’”

<sup>6</sup> And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him.” <sup>7</sup> Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, <sup>8</sup> thinking, “If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape.”

<sup>9</sup> And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,’ <sup>10</sup> I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. <sup>11</sup> Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. <sup>12</sup> But you said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.’”

<sup>13</sup> So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, <sup>14</sup> two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, <sup>15</sup> thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. <sup>16</sup> These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove.” <sup>17</sup> He instructed the first, “When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, ‘To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?’ <sup>18</sup> then you shall say, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.’” <sup>19</sup> He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, “You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, <sup>20</sup> and you shall say, ‘Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.’” For he thought, “I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me.” <sup>21</sup> So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp.

<sup>22</sup> The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup> He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. <sup>24</sup> And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. <sup>25</sup> When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. <sup>26</sup> Then he said, "Let me go, for the day has broken." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." <sup>27</sup> And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." <sup>28</sup> Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed." <sup>29</sup> Then Jacob asked him, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And there he blessed him. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered." <sup>31</sup> The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. <sup>32</sup> Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob's hip on the sinew of the thigh. (ESV)

**What thought or verse stands out to you in this passage? Why?**

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**What is Jacob feeling after he hears Esau is coming?** \_\_\_\_\_

**In light of Esau's coming, what "strategy" does Jacob employ in each of the following verses?**

32:7-8 \_\_\_\_\_

32:9-12 \_\_\_\_\_

32:13-20 \_\_\_\_\_

In the middle of the night, Jacob finds himself alone and in an unexpected wrestling match.

**Who wrestles with Jacob?** \_\_\_\_\_

**How long do they wrestle?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What happens to Jacob to end his wrestling?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does Jacob want from this person?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What changes in Jacob after this event?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why is the place called Peniel?** \_\_\_\_\_

## DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Genesis 32:24-30 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them.

*So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.  
When the man saw that he could not overpower him,  
he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.  
Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."  
But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."  
The man asked him, "What is your name?"  
"Jacob," he answered.  
Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,  
because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."  
Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."  
But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?"  
Then he blessed him there.  
So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying,  
"It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." (NIV)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

**Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.**

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### DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 32" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 32:7 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "distressed" and click on the Strong's number (H3334) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "distressed"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Next click on Genesis 32:10 and find the word "mercies" and click on the Strong's number (H2617) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "mercies"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** (Note especially Gesenius' Lexicon.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Next click on Genesis 32:10 and find the word "truth" and click on the Strong's number (H571) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "truth"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its root word (etymology)?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Click on the root word for the transliteration.)

**What is its definition?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Read the following passages in which these two Hebrew words are used together.**

*And He passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in **love** and **faithfulness**, maintaining **love** to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-8a)*

*All the paths of the Lord are **steadfast love** and **faithfulness**,  
For those who keep His covenant and His testimonies. (Psalm 25:10)*

*For great is Your **love**, reaching to the heavens;  
Your **faithfulness** reaches to the skies. (Psalm 57:10)*

***Lovingkindness** and **truth** have met together;  
Righteousness and peace have kissed each other. (Psalm 85:10)*

*But You, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God,  
Slow to anger, and abundant in **mercy** and **truth**. (Psalm 86:15)*

*For His **lovingkindness** is great toward us;  
And the **truth** of the Lord is everlasting. Hallelujah! (Psalm 117:2)*

*I bow down toward Your holy temple and give thanks to Your name  
For Your **steadfast love** and Your **faithfulness**,  
For You have exalted above all things Your name and Your word. (Psalm 138:2)*

*Do not let **mercy** and **truth** leave you;  
Bind them around your neck,  
Write them on the tablet of your heart. (Proverbs 3:3)*

**What do you learn about these two qualities from these verses?**

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Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 32" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 32:20 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "appease" and click on the Strong's number (H3722) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "appease"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**In what book of the Bible is it used the most?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See Search Results by Book.)

**What is its definition?** (Note especially the Outline of Biblical Usage and Gesenius' Lexicon.)

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The wrestling match in Genesis 32 has to be one of the most unique and interesting stories in the Bible. **Read Hosea 12:2-6 to see how the prophet Hosea interprets this passage.**

*The Lord also brings a charge against Judah,  
And will punish Jacob according to his ways;  
According to his deeds He will recompense him.  
He took his brother by the heel in the womb,  
And in his strength he struggled with God.  
Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed;  
He wept, and sought favor from Him.  
He found Him in Bethel,  
And there He spoke to us—  
Even the Lord, the God of hosts,  
The Lord is His name!  
So you, by the help of your God, return;  
Observe mercy and justice,  
And wait on your God continually.*

**What additional things do you learn about the wrestling match in Genesis 32 from Hosea?**

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Next click on Genesis 32:28 and find the name “Israel” and click on the Strong’s number (H3478) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for “Israel”?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** (Click on the two Hebrew root words (etymology) for additional insight.)

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The name “Israel” has some lexical ambiguity. It can mean “one who wrestles with God” referring to Jacob’s struggle with God. But Hebrew scholar, Robert Alter, gives another possible meaning.

Names with the *el* ending generally make God the subject, not the object, of the verb in the name. This particular verb, *sarah*, is a rare one, and there is some question about its meaning, though an educated guess about the original sense of the name would be: “God will rule,” or... “God will prevail.”

Hebrew names often utilize word plays in their meaning, giving two or three senses at the same time. In this case, Jacob wrestles and prevails by ultimately acknowledging that God alone rules.

## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from Alexander MacLaren's *Expositions of Holy Scriptures*. **Alexander MacLaren** (1826-1910) was a Baptist pastor in Manchester, England whose sermons were known for their "profundity of thought, logical arrangement, eloquence of appeal, and power over the human heart."

### THE TWOFOLD WRESTLE—GOD'S WITH JACOB AND JACOB'S WITH GOD (GEN. 32)

Jacob's subtlety and craft were, as is often the case, the weapons of a timid as well as selfish nature. No wonder, then, that the prospect of meeting his wronged and strong brother threw him into a panic, notwithstanding the vision of the camp of angels by the side of his defenseless caravan of women and children.

Esau had received his abject message of propitiation in grim silence, sent no welcome back, but with ominous haste and ambiguous purpose began his march towards him with a strong force. A few hours will decide whether he means revenge. Jacob's fright does not rob him of his ready wit; he goes to work at once to divide his party, so as to ensure safety for half of it. He schemes first, and prays second. The order might have been inverted with advantage, but is like the man in the lowest phase of his character. His prayer shows that he is beginning to profit by the long years of schooling. Though its burden is only deliverance from Esau, it pleads with God on the grounds of His own command and promise, of Jacob's unworthiness of God's past mercies, and of His firm covenant. A breath of a higher life is stirring in the shifty schemer who has all his life been living by his wits.

Now he has come to a point where he knows that his own power can do nothing. With Laban, a man of craft like himself, it was diamond cut diamond; and Jacob was equal to the position. But the wild Bedouin brother, with his four hundred men, is not to be managed so; and Jacob is driven to God by his conscious helplessness. It is the germ, but only the germ, and needs much tending and

growth before it matures. The process by which this faint dawning of a better life is broadened into day is begun in the mysterious struggle which forms the main part of this lesson, and is God's answer to his prayer.

**1. We have the twofold wrestling.** The silent night-long wrestle with the 'traveler unknown' is generally regarded as meaning essentially the same thing as the wonderful colloquy which follows. But I venture to take a somewhat different point of view, and to suggest that there are two well-marked stages. In the first, which is represented as transacted in unbroken silence, 'a man' wrestles with Jacob, and does not prevail; in the second, which is represented as an interchange of speech, Jacob strives with the 'man,' and does prevail. Taken together, the two are a complete mirror, not only of the manner of the transformation of Jacob into Israel, but of universal eternal truths as to God's dealings with us and our power with Him.

As to the former stage, the language of the narrative is to be noted, 'There wrestled a man with him.' The attack, so to speak, begins with his mysterious antagonist, not with the patriarch. The 'man' seeks to overcome Jacob, not Jacob the man. There, beneath the deep heavens, in the solemn silence of night, which hides earth and reveals heaven, that strange struggle with an unknown Presence is carried on. We have no material for pronouncing on the manner of it, whether ecstasy, vision, or an objective and bodily fact. The body was implicated in the consequences, at all events, and the impression which the story leaves is of an outward struggle. But the purpose of the incident is the same, however the question as to its form be

answered. Nor can we pronounce, as some have done, on the other question, of the personality of the silent wrestler. Is the angel a transient manifestation in human form of Him who afterwards became flesh and dwelt among us or some other supernatural embodiment of the divine presence? Any of these hypotheses is consistent with the intentionally reticent text. What it leaves unspoken we shall wisely leave undetermined. God acts and speaks through 'the man.' That is all we can know or need.

What, then, was the meaning of this struggle? Was it not a revelation to Jacob of what God had been doing with him all his life, and was still doing? Was not that merciful striving of God with him the inmost meaning of all that had befallen him since the far-off day when he had left his father's tents, and had seen the opened heavens, and the ladder, which he had so often forgotten? Were not his disappointments, his successes, and all the swift changes of life, God's attempts to lead him to yield himself up, and bow his will? And was not God striving with him now, in the anxieties which gnawed at his heart, and in his dread of the morrow? Was He not trying to teach him how crime always comes home to roost, with a brood of pains running behind it? Was not the weird duel in the brooding stillness a disclosure, which would more and more possess his soul as the night passed on, of a Presence which in silence strove with him, and only desired to overcome that He might bless?

The conception of a Divine manifestation wrestling all night long with a man has been declared 'crude,' 'puerile,' and I know not how many other disparaging adjectives have been applied to it. But is it more unworthy of Him, or derogatory to His nature, than the lifelong pleading and striving with each of us, which He undoubtedly carries on? The idea of a man contending with God has been

similarly stigmatized; but is it more mysterious than that awful power which the human will does possess of setting at naught His counsels and resisting His merciful strivings?

The close of the first stage of the twofold wrestle is marked by the laming of Jacob. The paradox that He, who could not overcome, could yet lame by a touch, is part of the lesson. If His finger could do that, what would the grip of His hand do, if He chose to put out His power? It is not for want of strength that He has not crushed the antagonist, as Jacob would feel, with deepening wonder and awe. What a new light would be thus thrown on all the previous struggle! It was the striving of a power which cared not for a mere outward victory, nor put forth its whole force, lest it should crush him whom it desired to conquer only by his own yielding. As Job says, 'Will He plead against me with His great power?' No; God mercifully restrains His hand, in His merciful striving with men. Desiring to overcome them, He desires not to do so by mere superior power, but by their willing yielding to Him.

That laming of Jacob's thigh represents the weakening of all the life of nature and self which had hitherto been his. He had trusted to his own cunning and quick-wittedness; he had been shrewd, not over-scrupulous, and successful. But he had to learn that 'by strength shall no man prevail,' and to forsake his former weapons. Wrestling with his hands and limbs is not the way to prevail either with God or man. Fighting with God in his own strength, he is only able to thwart God's merciful purpose towards him, but is powerless as a reed in a giant's grasp if God chooses to summon His destructive powers into exercise. So this failure of natural power is the turning-point in the twofold wrestle, and marks as well as symbolizes the transition in Jacob's life and character from reliance upon self and craft to reliance upon his divine

Antagonist become his Friend. It is the path by which we must all travel if we are to become princes with God. The life of nature and of dependence on self must be broken and lamed in order that, in the very moment of discovered impotence, we may grasp the hand that smites, and find immortal power flowing into our weakness from it.

2. So we come to the second stage, in which **Jacob strives with God and does prevail.** ‘Let me go, for the day breaketh.’ Then did the stranger wish to go; and if he did, why could not he, who had lamed his antagonist, loose himself from his grasp? The same explanation applies here which is required in reference to Christ’s action to the two disciples at Emmaus: ‘He made as though He would have gone further.’ In like manner, when He came to them on the water, He appeared as though He ‘would have passed by.’ In all three cases the principle is the same. God desires to go, if we do not desire Him to stay. He will go, unless we keep Him.

Then, at last, Jacob betakes himself to his true weapons. Then, at last, he strangely wishes to keep his apparent foe. He has learned, in some dim fashion, whom he has been resisting, and the blessedness of having Him for friend and companion. So here comes in the account of the whole scene which Hosea gives: *He wept, and made supplication unto Him* (12:4). That does not describe the earlier portion, but is the true rendering of the later stage, of which our narrative gives a more summary account. The desire to retain God binds Him to us. All His struggling with us has been aimed at evoking it, and all His fullness responds to it when evoked. Prayer is power. It conquers God. We overcome Him when we yield. When we are vanquished, we are victors. When the life of nature is broken within us, then from conscious weakness springs the longing which God cannot but satisfy. *When I am weak, then am I strong.*

As Charles Wesley puts it, in his grand hymn on this incident—

*‘Yield to me now, for I am weak,  
But confident in self-despair.’*

And God prevails when we prevail. His aim in all the process of His mercy has been but to overcome our heavy earthliness and selfishness, which resists His pleading love. His victory is our yielding, and, in that yielding, obtaining power with Him. He delights to be held by the hand of faith, and ever gladly yields to the heart’s cry, ‘Abide with me.’ I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me,’ is music to His ear; and our saying so, in earnest, persistent clinging to Him, is His victory as well as ours.

3. **We have the new name, which is the prize of Jacob’s victory,** and the sign of a transformation in his character. Before this time he had been Jacob, the worker with wiles, who supplanted his brother, and met his foes with duplicity and astuteness like their own. He had been mainly of the earth, earthy. But that solemn hour had led him into the presence-chamber, the old craft had been mortally wounded, he had seen some glimpse of God as his friend, whose presence was not ‘awful,’ as he had thought it long ago, nor enigmatical and threatening, as he had at first deemed it that night, but the fountain of blessing and the one thing needful. A man who has once learned that lesson, though imperfectly, has passed into a purer region, and left behind him his old crookedness. He has learned to pray, not as before, prayers for mere deliverance from Esau and the like, but his whole being has gone out in yearning for the continual nearness of his mysterious antagonist-friend. So, though still the old nature remains, its power is broken, and he is a new creature. Therefore he needs a new name, and gets it from Him who can name men, because He sees the heart’s depths, and

because He has the right over them. To impose a name is the sign of authority, possession, insight into character. The change of name indicates a new epoch in a life, or a transformation of the inner man. The meaning of 'Israel' is 'He who strives with God'; and the reason for its being conferred is more accurately given by the Revised Version, which translates, 'For thou hast striven with God and with men.' His victory with God involved the certainty of his power with men. All his life he had been trying to get the advantage of them, and to conquer them, not by spear and sword, but by his brains. But now the true way to true sway among men is opened to him. All men are the servants of the servant and the friend of God. He who has the ear of the emperor is master of many men.

Jacob is not always called Israel in his subsequent history. His new name was a name of character and of spiritual standing, and that might fluctuate, and the old self resume its power; so he is still called by the former appellation, just as, at certain points in his life, the apostle forfeits the right to be 'Peter,' and has to hear from Christ's lips the old name, the use of which is more poignant than many reproachful words; 'Simon, Simon...' But in the last death-bed scene, when the patriarch lifted himself in his bed, and with prophetic dignity pronounced his parting benediction on Joseph's sons, the new name reappears with solemn pathos.

That name was transmitted to his descendants, and has passed over to the company of believing men, who have been overcome by God, and have prevailed with God. It is a charter and a promise. It is a stringent reminder of duty and a lofty ideal. A true Christian is an 'Israel.' His office is to wrestle with God. Nor can we forget how this mysterious scene was repeated in yet more solemn fashion, beneath the gnarled olives of Gethsemane, glistening in the light of the

paschal full moon, when the true Israel prayed with such sore crying and tears that His body partook of the struggle, and 'His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.' The word which describes Christ's agony is that which is often rendered 'wrestling,' and perhaps is selected with intentional allusion to this incident. At all events, when we think of Jacob by the brook Jabbok, and of a 'greater than our father Jacob' by the brook Kedron, we may well learn what persistence, what earnestness and effort of the whole nature, go to make up the ideal of prayer, and may well blush for the miserable indifference and torpor of what we venture to call our prayers. These are our patterns, 'as many as walk according to this rule,' and are thereby shown to be 'the Israel of God'—upon them shall be peace.

**4. We have, as the end of all, a deepened desire after closer knowledge of God.** The desire to know that name does not come to Jacob, as we might have expected, when he was struggling with his unknown foe in the dark there. It is the end, and, in some sense, the issue, of all that has gone before. Not that he was in any doubt as to the person to whom he spoke; it is just because he knows that he is speaking with God, who alone can bless, that he longs to have some deeper, clearer knowledge still of Him. He is not asking for a word by which he may call Him; the name is the expression of the nature, and his parting request is for something far more intimate and deep than syllables that could be spoken by any lips.

The certain sequel of the discovery of God as striving in mercy with a man, and of yielding to him, is the thirst for deeper acquaintance with Him, and for a fuller, more satisfying knowledge of His inmost heart. If the season of mysterious intercourse must cease, and day hide more than it discloses, and Jacob go to face Esau, and we come down from the

mount to sordid cares and mean tasks, at least we long to bear with us as a love-token some whisper in our inmost hearts that may cheer us with the peaceful truth about Him and be a hidden sweetness. The presence of such a desire is a sure consequence, and therefore a good test, of real prayer.

The Divine answer, which sounds at first like refusal, is anything but that. *Why dost thou ask after My name? Surely I need not to give thee more revelation of My character. Thou hast enough of light; what thou needest is insight into what thou hast already.*

We have in what God has made known of Himself already to us—both in His outward revelation, which is so much larger and sweeter to us than it was to Jacob, but also in His providences, and in the inward communion which we have with Him—sources of certain knowledge of Him so abundant and precious that we need nothing but the loving eye which shall take in all their beauty and completeness, to have our most eager desires after His name more than satisfied. We need not ask for more sunshine, but take care to spread ourselves out in the full sunshine which we have, and let it drench our eyes and fire our hearts.

*And He blessed him there.* Not till now was he capable of receiving the full blessing. He needed to have self beaten out of him; he needed to recognize God as lovingly striving with Him; he needed to yield himself up to Him; he needed to have his heart thus cleansed and softened, and then opened wide by panting desire for the presence and benediction of God; he needed to be made conscious of his new standing, and of the higher life budding within him; he needed to experience the yearning for a closer vision of the face, a deeper knowledge of the name—and then it was possible to pour into his heart a tenderness and fullness of blessing which before there had been no room to receive, and which now answered in sweetest fashion the else unanswered desire, ‘Tell me, I pray thee, Thy name.’

In like manner we may each be blessed with the presence and benediction of Him whose merciful strivings, when we knew Him not, came to us in the darkness; and to whom, if we yield, there will be peace and power in our hearts, and upon us, too, the sun will rise as we pass from the place where our foe became our friend, and by faith we saw Him face to face, and drank in life by the gaze.

**What thought from Alexander MacLaren’s words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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## DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Genesis 32 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 32:1-32?**

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Genesis 32 is a microcosm of Jacob's life. Jacob had been "wrestling with God" from the very beginning. What God wanted to give him, Jacob fought to get. What God promised to provide by His grace, Jacob worked hard to possess by his own craftiness and cleverness. Because Jacob could never stop and trust the Lord, he could never stop and rest. His life was a wrestling match.

But God kept pursuing him and finally broke him. With a simple touch of his finger, Jacob's hip was wrenched out of joint. His greatest strength became his greatest weakness. God crippled him to bless him and to teach him to cling to Him alone.

Once Jacob stopped wrestling against God and started clinging to him, he prevailed. In a strange way, Jacob succeeded by surrendering. He won by losing. He became strong by becoming weak. This is the paradoxical, counterintuitive, upside-down, inside-out way of God.

So in what areas of your life are you wrestling against God? What are you trying to obtain or hold onto or control by your own strength? A good test is to ask yourself the following questions.

**What am I worried about?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What am I angry about?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What am I discouraged about?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What has been on my mind a lot?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What am I afraid of losing?** \_\_\_\_\_

**What am I most proud of?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Based on your answers, what do you think is something that you are holding onto too tightly?**

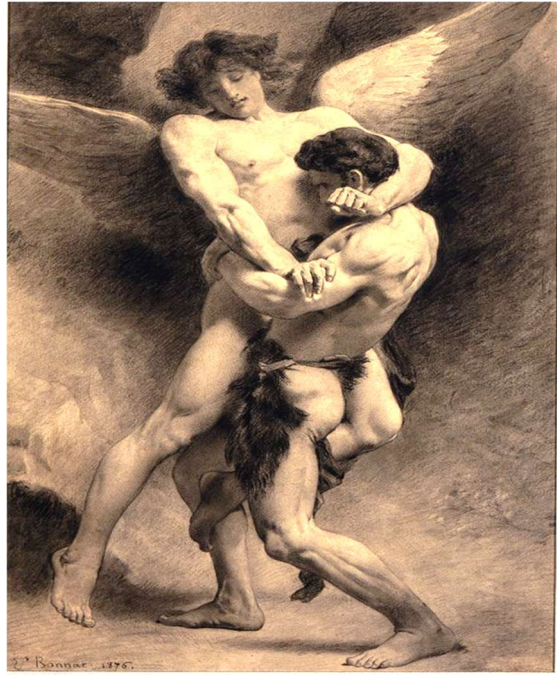
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Open your hands before the Lord. Imagine that thing in your hands—your loved one, health, need to be right, competence, security, desire for control, hunger for acceptance, pride, whatever it is. Offer it to the Lord. Lay it at His feet. Ask for strength to trust Him. Then leave it before Him.

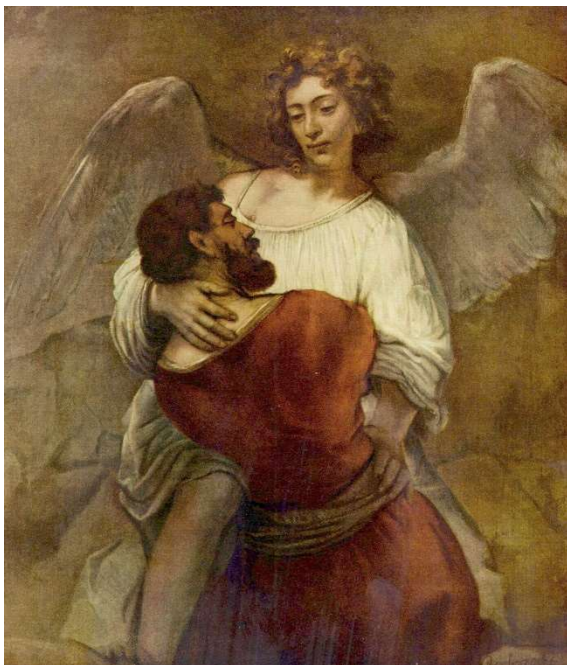
Jacob wrestling the Man-Angel-God has captured the imaginations of people throughout history. Examine the following works of art. What stands out to you in each one?



Gustave Doré (1855)



Léon Bonnat (1876)



Rembrandt (1659)



Eugène Delacroix (1861)

Which painting strikes you the most? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*The physical struggle symbolized the spiritual struggle between Jacob's self-will and God's will.*

Howard Vos

*Jacob has been wrestling all of his life—in the womb, in the birthright, with Laban, with his wives. Jacob hasn't been wrestling with these people but ultimately with God.*

Robert Alter

*In this encounter is encapsulated the story of Jacob's life.*

Ian Dugaid

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- Have you ever been in an intense fight or wrestling match? What was this experience like?
- What do you think was going through Jacob's mind as he waited to meet Esau?
- What strategies does Jacob employ to deal with his anxiety in this situation? In what ways do we employ similar strategies in our own times of stress and anxiety?
- What observations can you make about Jacob's wrestling match? Answer the basic questions of who, what, when, where, how, why.
- What is the significance of Jacob's name change?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Alexander MacLaren? If so, what?
- MacLaren compares Jacob's wrestling in Genesis 32 with Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Both involved intense struggle. Both were resolved through surrender to God. What is something in your life that is hard to hand over to the Lord? Why? In what area of your life is it most difficult to pray—*Lord, not my will but Yours be done*?
- Pray together as a group with open hands before the Lord.

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## RECONCILIATION ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 33

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#### DAY ONE Observation

Twenty years earlier, Jacob left Beersheba to escape the “sweet revenge” that Esau was planning for Jacob after he deceptively stole his blessing. Now Jacob has to face Esau again. There is no escape. What will happen?

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 33:1-20. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.**

Then Jacob lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. <sup>2</sup> He put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last. <sup>3</sup> But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

<sup>4</sup> Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. <sup>5</sup> He lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children, and said, “Who are these with you?” So he said, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.” <sup>6</sup> Then the maids came near with their children, and they bowed down. <sup>7</sup> Leah likewise came near with her children, and they bowed down; and afterward Joseph came near with Rachel, and they bowed down. <sup>8</sup> And he said, “What do you mean by all this company which I have met?” And he said, “To find favor in the sight of my lord.” <sup>9</sup> But Esau said, “I have plenty, my brother; let what you have be your own.” <sup>10</sup> Jacob said, “No, please, if now I have found favor in your sight, then take my present from my hand, for I see your face as one sees the face of God, and you have received me favorably. <sup>11</sup> Please take my gift which has been brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me and because I have plenty.” Thus he urged him and he took it.

<sup>12</sup> Then Esau said, “Let us take our journey and go, and I will go before you.” <sup>13</sup> But he said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds which are nursing are a care to me. And if they are driven hard one day, all the flocks will die. <sup>14</sup> Please let my lord pass on before his servant, and I will proceed at my leisure, according to the pace of the cattle that are before me and according to the pace of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir.”

<sup>15</sup> Esau said, “Please let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.” But he said, “What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord.” <sup>16</sup> So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. <sup>17</sup> Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built for himself a house and made booths for his livestock; therefore the place is named Succoth.

<sup>18</sup> Now Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, when he came from Paddan-aram, and camped before the city.

<sup>19</sup> He bought the piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the hand of the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred pieces of money.

<sup>20</sup> Then he erected there an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel. (NASB)

**What thought or verse stands out to you in this passage? Why?**

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**Mark or highlight the words "bowed down" and "lord" and "servant" in this chapter. What do these words tell you about Jacob's attitude and approach toward his brother, Esau?**

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**In contrast to these words, how does Esau address Jacob? (33:9)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What does Esau do when he sees Jacob? (33:4)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How does Jacob view his family and his possessions? (33:5, 11)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**How does Jacob respond to Esau's offer to lead their journey or leave some of his men for him?**

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**Why do you think Jacob responds this way?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**What does Jacob do when he arrives at Shechem in the land of Canaan? (33:18-20)**

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**In what way has Jacob changed?** \_\_\_\_\_

**In what way is he still the same?** \_\_\_\_\_

## DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Genesis 33:9-11 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them.

*But Esau said,*

*“I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.”*

*Jacob said,*

*“No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand.*

*For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God,*

*and you have accepted me.*

*Please accept my blessing that is brought to you,*

*because God has dealt graciously with me,*

*and because I have enough.”*

*Thus he urged him, and he took it. (ESV)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

**Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.**

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## DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 33" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 33:4 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "kissed" and click on the Strong's number (H5401) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "kissed"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Read the following verses in Genesis that use this Hebrew word.**

Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and **kiss** me, my son." So he came near and **kissed** him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed!" (27:26-27)

Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob **kissed** Rachel and wept aloud. (29:10-11)

As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and **kissed** him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month. (29:13-14)

Early in the morning Laban arose and **kissed** his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned home. (31:55)

But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and **kissed** him, and they wept. (33:4)

Now Israel's eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father **kissed** them and embraced them. (48:10)

When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people. Then Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and **kissed** him. (49:33-50:1)

**In what different ways is a kiss used in these verses?** \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type “Genesis 33” into the “Search the Bible” box. Click on Genesis 33:10 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word “present” and click on the Strong’s number (H4503) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for “present”?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**In what OT book is it used the most?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See Search Results by Book.)

**What is its definition?** (Note especially Strong’s Definitions and Gesenius’ Hebrew Lexicon.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**What does this Hebrew word imply about Jacob’s present to Esau?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Next, click on Genesis 33:11 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word “blessing” and click on the Strong’s number (H1293) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage.

**What is the Hebrew word for “blessing”?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**In what chapter of Genesis is it used the most?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See Concordance Results.)

**What is its definition?** (Note especially the Outline of Biblical Usage and Gesenius’ Lexicon.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
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Many Bible versions translate this word in Genesis 33:11 as “present” or “gift,” including the NIV, NASB, NRSV, LEB, NET, and CSB. But it is clear that Jacob uses a different word intentionally here.

**What do you think Jacob is trying to convey by switching from the Hebrew word, *mincha* (used in 32:13, 18, 20, 21; 33:10) to the Hebrew word, *berakah*, in Genesis 33:11?**

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\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from **Matthew Henry's Exposition of the Old Testament**. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was a pastor, preacher, and author from Chester, England. He is best known for his exhaustive, six-volume, verse-by-verse commentary on the Scriptures. Charles Spurgeon stated that, "Every minister ought to read it entirely and carefully through once at least."

We read, in Genesis 32, how Jacob had power with God, and prevailed; here we find what power he had with men too, and how his brother Esau was mollified and reconciled to him; for so it is written, Prov. 16:7, "When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

### Verses 1-4

**I. Jacob discovered Esau's approach.** Jacob sets himself upon his watch-tower to see what answer God will give to his prayers, Hab. 2:1.

**II. He put his family into the best order he could to receive him,** whether he should come as a friend or as an enemy, consulting their decency if he came as a friend and their safety if he came as an enemy. Observe what a different figure these two brothers made. Esau is attended with a guard of 400 men, and looks big; Jacob is followed by a cumbersome train of women and children that are his care, and he looks tender and solicitous for their safety; and yet Jacob had the birthright, and was to have the dominion, and was every way the better man. Note, It is no disparagement to very great and good men to give a personal attendance to their families, and to their family affairs. Jacob, at the head of his household, set a better example than Esau at the head of his regiment.

**III. At their meeting, the expressions of kindness were interchanged in the best manner that could be between them.**

1. Jacob bowed to Esau. Though he feared Esau as an enemy, yet he did obeisance to him as an elder brother...

Note, (1) The way to recover peace where it has been broken is to do our duty, and pay our respects, upon all occasions, as if it had never been broken. It is the remembering and repeating of matters that separates friends and perpetuates the separation. (2) A humble submissive carriage goes a great way towards the turning away of wrath. Many preserve themselves by humbling themselves: the bullet flies over him that stoops.

2. Esau embraced Jacob: *He ran to meet him*, not in passion, but in love; and, as one heartily reconciled to him, he received him with all the endearments imaginable, *embraced him, fell on his neck, and kissed him*. Some think that when Esau came out to meet Jacob it was with no bad design, but that he brought his 400 men only for state, that he might pay so much the greater respect to his returning brother. It is certain that Jacob understood the report of his messengers otherwise (32:5-6). Jacob was a man of prudence and fortitude, and we cannot suppose him to have a groundless fear to such a degree as he did this, nor that the Spirit of God would stir him up to pray such a prayer as he did for deliverance from a merely imaginary danger: and, if there was not some wonderful change wrought upon the spirit of Esau at this time, I see not how wrestling Jacob could be said to obtain such power with men as to call him a *prince*.

Note, (1.) God had the hearts of all men in his hands, and can turn them when and how he pleases, by a secret, silent, but resistless power. He can, of a sudden, convert enemies into friends, as he did two Sauls, one by restraining grace (1 Sam. 26:21, 25), the other by renewing grace (Acts 9:21-22).

(2.) It is not in vain to trust in God, and to call upon him in the day of trouble; those that do so often find the issue much better than they expected.

3. They both wept. Jacob wept for joy, to be thus kindly received by his brother whom he had feared; and Esau perhaps wept for grief and shame, to think of the bad design he had conceived against his brother, which he found himself strangely and unaccountably prevented from executing.

### Verses 5-15

We have here the discourse between the two brothers at their meeting, which is very free and friendly, without the least intimation of the old quarrel. It was the best way to say nothing of it. They converse,

**I. About Jacob's retinue.** Eleven or twelve little ones, the eldest of them no fourteen years old, followed Jacob closely: *Who are these?* says Esau. Jacob had sent him an account of the increase of his estate (32:5), but made no mention of his children; perhaps because he would not expose them to his rage if he should meet him as an enemy, or would please him with the unexpected sight if he should meet him as a friend: Esau therefore had reason to ask, *Who are those with thee?* to which common question Jacob returns a serious answer, such as became his character: They are *the children which God hath graciously given thy servant*. It had been a sufficient answer to the question, and fit enough to be given to profane Esau, if he had only said, "They are my children," but then Jacob would not have spoken like himself, like a man whose eyes were ever towards the Lord.

Note, It becomes us not only to do common actions, but to speak of them, *after a godly sort*. Jacob speaks of his children as God's gifts, as a *heritage of the Lord*, Ps. 127:3.

Though they were many, and much his care, yet he accounts them great blessings. His wives and children, hereupon, come up in order, and pay their duty to Esau, as he had done before them; for it becomes the family to show respect to those to whom the head of the family shows respect.

### II. About the present he had sent him.

1. Esau modestly refused it because he had enough, and did not need it. Note, Those who wish to be considered men of honor will not *seem* to be mercenary in their friendship: whatever influence Jacob's present had upon Esau to pacify him, he would not have it thought that it had any, and therefore he refused it. His reason is *I have enough*, I have *much*, so much that he was not willing to take anything that was his brother's.

Note, (1) Many come short of spiritual blessings, and are out of covenant, yet have much of this world's wealth. Esau had what was promised him, the fatness of the earth and a livelihood by his sword. (2) It is a good thing for those that have much to know that they have enough, though they have not so much as some others have. Even Esau can say, *I have enough*. (3) Those that are content with what they have must show it by not coveting what others have. Esau, for his part, needs it not, either to supply him, for he was rich, or to pacify him, for he was reconciled: we should take heed lest at any time our covetousness impose upon the courtesy of others, and take advantage of their generosity.

2. Jacob affectionately urges him to accept it, and prevails. Jacob sent it, through fear, but, the fear being over, he now importunes his acceptance of it for love, to show that he desired his brother's friendship, and did not merely dread his wrath... It is a very high compliment that he passes upon Esau: *I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of*

*God*, that is...Jacob saw God's favor to him in Esau's: it was a token for good to him that God had accepted his prayers.

Note, Creature-comforts are comforts indeed to us when they are granted as answers to prayer, and are tokens of our acceptance with God. It is matter of great joy to those that are of a peaceable and affectionate disposition to recover the friendship of those relations with whom they have been at variance... If what we have in this world increase under our hands, we must take notice of it with thankfulness, to the glory of God, and own that therein he has dealt graciously with us, better than we deserve. It is he that gives *power to get wealth*, Deut. 8:18.

He adds, "*I have all*," (33:11) so the word is. Esau's enough was much, but Jacob's enough was all. Note, a godly man, though he have but little in the world, yet may truly say, "I have all," because he has the God of all, and has all in him; all is yours if you be Christ's, 1 Co. 3:22... He that thinks he has all is sure he has enough. He has all in prospect; he will have all shortly, when he comes to heaven: upon this principle Jacob urged Esau, and he took his present. Note, It is an excellent thing when men's religion makes them generous, free-hearted, and open-handed, scorning to do a thing that is paltry and sneaking.

### III. About the progress of their journey.

1. Esau offers himself to be his guide and companion, in token of sincere reconciliation. We never find that Jacob and Esau were so sociable with one another, and so affectionate, as they were now.

Note, As for God his work is perfect. He made Esau, not only not an enemy, but a friend. This bone that had been broken, being well set, became stronger than ever. Esau has become fond of Jacob's company, courts him

to Mount Seir: let us never despair of any, nor distrust God in whose hand all hearts are. Yet Jacob saw cause modestly to refuse this offer, wherein he shows a tender concern for his own family and flocks, like a good shepherd and a good father. He must consider the children, and the flocks, with young, and not lead the one, nor drive the other, too fast. This prudence and tenderness of Jacob ought to be imitated by those that have the care and charge of young people in the things of God. They must not be over-driven, at first, by heavy tasks in religious services, but led, as they can bear, having their work made as easy to them as possible. Christ, the good Shepherd, does so, Isa. 40:11.

Now Jacob will not desire Esau to slacken his pace, nor force his family to quicken theirs, nor leave them, to keep company with his brother, as many would have done, that love any society better than their own house; but he desires Esau to march before, and promises to follow him leisurely, as he could get forward. Note, It is an unreasonable thing to tie others to our rate; we may come with comfort, at last, to the same journey's end, though we do not journey together, either in the same path or with the same pace. There may be those with whom we cannot fall in and yet with whom we need not fall out by the way. Jacob intimates to him that it was his present design to come to him to Mount Seir; and we may presume he did so, after he had settled his family and concerns elsewhere, though that visit is not recorded...

2. Esau offers some of his men to be his guard and convoy. He saw Jacob but poorly attended, no servants but his husbandmen and shepherds, no pages or footmen; and therefore, thinking he was as desirous as himself to take power upon him, and look great, he would needs lend him some of his retinue, to attend upon him, that he might appear like Esau's brother; but Jacob humbly refuses his offer,

only desiring he would not take it amiss that he did not accept it: *What needeth it?*

Jacob is humble, and needs it not for state; he desires not to make a fair show in the flesh, by encumbering himself with a needless retinue. Note, It is the vanity of pomp and grandeur that they are attended with a great deal of which it may be said, *What needeth it?*

Plus, Jacob is under the divine protection, and needs it not for safety. Note, Those are sufficiently guarded that have God for their guard and are under a convoy of his hosts, as Jacob was. Those need not be beholden to an arm of flesh that have God for their arm every morning. Jacob adds, *Only let me find grace in the sight of my lord; having thy favor, I have all I need, all I desire from thee.* If Jacob thus valued the goodwill of a brother, much more reason have we to reckon that we have enough if we have the goodwill of our God.

## Verses 16-20

1. **Jacob comes to Succoth.** Having in a friendly manner parted with Esau, who had gone to his own country, he comes to a place where, it should seem, he rested for some time, set up booths for his cattle, and other conveniences for himself and family.

2. **He comes to Shechem.** After a perilous journey, in which he had met with many difficulties, he came safely, at last, into

Canaan. Note, Diseases and dangers should teach us how to value health and safety, and should help to enlarge our hearts in thankfulness, when our going out and coming in have been signally preserved.

Here, he buys a field. Though the land of Canaan was his by promise, yet, the time for taking possession not having yet come, he is content to pay for his own, to prevent disputes with the present occupants. Note, those that have heaven for free must not expect to have earth so.

Then, he builds an altar. In thankfulness to God, for the good hand of his providence over him. He did not content himself with verbal acknowledgments of God's favor to him, but made real ones. Note, Where we have a tent, God must have an altar, where we have a house, he must have a church in it...

He dedicated this altar to *El-elohe-Israel-God, the God of Israel*, to the honor of God, in general, the only living and true God, the best of beings and first of causes; and to the honor of the God of Israel, as a God in covenant with him. Note, In our worship of God we must be guided and governed by the joint-discoveries both of natural and revealed religion. God had lately called him by the name of *Israel*, and now he calls God *the God of Israel*... Note, Our honors become honors to us indeed when they are consecrated to God's honor. Israel's God is Israel's glory!

**What thought from Matthew Henry's words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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## DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Genesis 33 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your daily life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 33:1-20?**

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**Read and reflect on Psalm 133.**

*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is  
For brothers to dwell together in unity!  
It is like the good oil upon the head,  
Coming down upon the beard,  
Aaron's beard,  
Coming down upon the edge of his robes.  
It is like the dew of Hermon  
Coming down upon the mountains of Zion;  
For there, Yahweh commanded the blessing—life forever.*

**What are the benefits and blessings of a close, unified relationship with another person?**

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**If unified relationships are such a beautiful thing, why do we struggle so much with conflict?**

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Esau and Jacob had so much to overcome in their relationship. They had fought from the time that they were in the womb. They were as different as night and day in their personalities. Jacob had deceptively stolen Esau's blessing. Esau had breathed fiery murder at Jacob. They had been separated for twenty years. But, in the end, they found reconciliation. And in Jacob's mind and heart, experiencing reconciliation with Esau was like experiencing the goodness of God Himself.

*Is there someone in your life that you are harboring anger or bitterness toward? Is there someone that has hurt you or offended you that you are still angry about and not willing to forgive?*

If so, then seek God's strength to forgive and then seek reconciliation, if it is possible.

# The Path to Forgiveness

1

**I must see the importance and value of forgiveness and seek it.**

Forgiveness sets you free. Resentment keeps you bound to the past. Forgiveness helps you own your present and move into your future. Resentment harms you emotionally, physically, relationally, and spiritually.

*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*  
Ephesians 4:32

2

**I must understand what forgiveness is and what it is not.**

Forgiveness is not excusing someone's behavior, forgetting what they did, minimizing the hurt, removing needed boundaries, or necessarily reconciling.

Forgiveness is a conscious decision to release feelings of resentment or revenge toward someone who has offended you or harmed you.

*But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.*  
Matthew 5:44

3

**I must be specific about who and what I am forgiving.**

Whom do I need to forgive?

What did they do or not do?

4

**I must be honest about the impact that their action had on me.**

How did their action impact me...

Physically?

Emotionally?

Mentally?

Relationally?

Financially?

Spiritually?

5

**I must be willing to speak the words of forgiveness to God, to myself, and to them, if this is possible or advisable.**

\_\_\_\_\_, I forgive you for what you did. Even though it hurt me in these ways, I have given it over to God and I have forgiven you.

6

**I must remind myself of the forgiveness that I have given.**

Forgiveness is a one-time decisional act that may take time for your mind and emotions to catch up with.

*"Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven." —Matthew 18:21-22*

7

**I must choose to pray for them, desire their good, and seek reconciliation, if possible.**

Praying for them and desiring their good is an exercise of grace that helps heal your heart.

Forgiveness is a one-way decision. Reconciliation is a two-way decision.

You can forgive but not necessarily reconcile if they have not repented or continue to harm you.

*If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*  
Romans 12:18

## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*Giving Esau these gifts represented for Jacob nothing less than a reversal of a life of stealing from his brother. Jacob was demonstrating by his deeds that he was truly repentant for what he had done.*

Ian Dugaid

*He that is not a son of Peace is not a son of God. All other sins destroy the Church consequentially; but Division and Separation demolish it directly.*

Richard Baxter (1615-91)

*There is a big difference between forgiveness and reconciliation. It takes two to reconcile, so it is not always possible to be reconciled. But it takes only one to forgive.*

Philip Graham Ryken

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- What is one of the best endings to a movie that you have ever seen? Why?
- After 20 years of separation, Jacob and Esau have an emotional reunion in front of a large crowd of people. What do you think that moment was like to watch?
- How would you describe the attitude and actions of Jacob in this chapter?
- How would you describe the attitude and actions of Esau in this chapter?
- What seems to have changed in them individually? What changed in their relationship?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Matthew Henry? If so, what?
- What do you appreciate about your spouse? About your family? About your church family?
- Why is it hard to keep these relationships healthy and unified? Why is it hard to forgive?
- Pray together for the unity of your families, your group, and your church.

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## ABUSE ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 34

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#### **DAY ONE** **Observation**

God had called Jacob to return to the land of Canaan, presumably to Bethel and Beersheba where he started his journey (28:10). But for some reason, Jacob stops in Shechem (15 miles north of Bethel), buys some land, and settles down. His extended delay in Shechem results in some tragic consequences.

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 34:1-31. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.**

Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. <sup>2</sup> And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her.

<sup>3</sup> His soul was strongly attracted to Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the young woman and spoke kindly to the young woman. <sup>4</sup> So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor, saying, “Get me this young woman as a wife.”

<sup>5</sup> And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter. Now his sons were with his livestock in the field; so Jacob held his peace until they came. <sup>6</sup> Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. <sup>7</sup> And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter, a thing which ought not to be done. <sup>8</sup> But Hamor spoke with them, saying, “The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. <sup>9</sup> And make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to yourselves. <sup>10</sup> So you shall dwell with us, and the land shall be before you. Dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions for yourselves in it.”

<sup>11</sup> Then Shechem said to her father and her brothers, “Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. <sup>12</sup> Ask me ever so much dowry and gift, and I will give according to what you say to me; but give me the young woman as a wife.”

<sup>13</sup> But the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father, and spoke deceitfully, because he had defiled Dinah their sister. <sup>14</sup> And they said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a reproach to us. <sup>15</sup> But on this condition we will consent to you: If you will become as we are, if every male of you is circumcised, <sup>16</sup> then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to us; and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. <sup>17</sup> But if you will not heed us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone.”

<sup>18</sup> And their words pleased Hamor and Shechem, Hamor’s son. <sup>19</sup> So the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob’s daughter. He was more honorable than all the household of his father. <sup>20</sup> And Hamor and Shechem his son came to the gate of their city, and spoke with the men of their city, saying: <sup>21</sup> “These men are at peace with us. Therefore let them dwell in the land and trade in it. For indeed the land is large enough for them. Let us take

their daughters to us as wives, and let us give them our daughters. <sup>22</sup> Only on this condition will the men consent to dwell with us, to be one people: if every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. <sup>23</sup> Will not their livestock, their property, and every animal of theirs be ours? Only let us consent to them, and they will dwell with us.” <sup>24</sup> And all who went out of the gate of his city heeded Hamor and Shechem his son; every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city.

<sup>25</sup> Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males. <sup>26</sup> And they killed Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah from Shechem’s house, and went out. <sup>27</sup> The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. <sup>28</sup> They took their sheep, their oxen, and their donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the field, <sup>29</sup> and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; and they plundered even all that was in the houses.

<sup>30</sup> Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, ”You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few in number, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I.” <sup>31</sup> But they said, “Should he treat our sister like a harlot?” (NKJV)

**What thought or verse stands out to you in this passage? Why?**

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**Where is Dinah going? (34:1)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What happens to her? (34:2)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe Prince Shechem in 3-5 words based on what you read about him in this chapter.**

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**How does Jacob respond to this crime? (34:5)** \_\_\_\_\_

**How do Dinah’s brothers respond? (34:7)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What proposal do her brothers make? (34:15)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What do Simeon and Levi do? (34:25)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Why do they do it?** \_\_\_\_\_

## DAY TWO Meditation

Read Genesis 34:25-27 several times. This is not a typical Bible passage to meditate on but it reveals the depth of the tragedy and anger that are in this chapter. Put yourself in Dinah's brothers' shoes as you read.

*On the third day, when they were still in pain,  
two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers,  
took their swords,  
went into the unsuspecting city,  
and killed every male.  
They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with their swords,  
took Dinah from Shechem's house,  
and went away.  
Jacob's sons came to the slaughter and plundered the city  
because their sister had been defiled. (CSB)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

If you have ever felt a deep level of anger toward injustice or abuse, then you can probably understand the emotions of this chapter. We live in a sin-cursed world where bad things happen, injustice occurs, and abuse hurts. **Take your emotions to God and write out your prayer below.**

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## DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

**Read and compare the following three passages in Genesis.**

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. (3:6a)

Then the sons of God saw the daughters of humankind, that they were beautiful. And they took for themselves wives from all that they chose. (6:2)

And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her and lay with her, and violated her. (34:2)

**What similar words or actions do you see in these verses?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 34" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 34:7 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "grieved" and click on the Strong's number (H6087) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "grieved"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** (Note especially Strong's Definitions and Gesenius' Hebrew Lexicon.)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Where is this Hebrew word first used?** (See Concordance Results.) **What does this tell you?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Where is Dinah located during the negotiations between Hamor and Jacob's sons?** (cf. 34:26)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Analyze Jacob's speech in 34:30. How many times does he use "I" or "me" or "my"?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contrast Jacob's response to Dinah's brothers' response. What does this tell you?**

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## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from **Matthew Henry's Exposition of the Old Testament**. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was a pastor, preacher, and author from Chester, England. He is best known for his exhaustive, six-volume, verse-by-verse commentary on the Scriptures. Charles Spurgeon stated that, "Every minister ought to read it entirely and carefully through once at least."

At this chapter begins the story of Jacob's afflictions in his children, which were very great, and are recorded to show: 1. The vanity of this world. That which is dearest to us may prove our greatest vexation, and we may meet with the greatest crosses in those things of which we said, "This same shall comfort us." 2. The common griefs of good people...

### Verses 1-5

Dinah was, from all that appears, Jacob's only daughter, and we may suppose her therefore the mother's fondling and the darling of the family, and yet she proves neither a joy nor a credit to them; for those children seldom prove either the best or the happiest that are most indulged. She is reckoned now but fif-teen or sixteen years of age when she here oc-casioned so much mischief. Observe:

1. **Her vain curiosity**, which exposed her. She went out, perhaps unknown to her father, *to see the daughters of the land*. Probably it was at a ball, or on some public day. Being an only daughter, she thought herself solitary at home, having none of her own age and sex to converse with; and thus she must needs go abroad to divert herself, to keep off melancholy, and to accomplish herself by conversation better than she could in her father's tents. Note, It is a very good thing for children to love home; it is parents' wisdom to make it easy to them, and children's duty then to be easy in it.

Her pretense was *to see the daughters of the land*, to see how they dressed, and how they danced, and what was fashionable among

them. She went to *see*, yet that was not all, she went to be *seen* too; she went to see the daughters of the land, but, it may be, with some thoughts of the sons of the land too... Note, The pride and vanity of young people betray them into many snares.

2. **The loss of her honor**. *Shechem, the prince of the country*, a slave to his own lusts, took her, and lay with her, it should seem, not so much by force as by surprise. Note, Great men think they may do anything; and what more vulnerable than an untaught and naïve young girl?

3. **Shechem's courting of her**, after he had defiled her...trying to make the best of what was bad.

4. **The tidings brought to poor Jacob**. As soon as his children grew up they began to be a grief to him... He *held his peace*, as one astonished, that knows not what to say: or he said nothing, for fear of saying amiss; he smothered his resentments, lest, if he had suffered them to break out, they should have transported him into any decencies. Or, it should seem, he had left the management of his affairs very much (too much) to his sons, and he would do nothing without them... Note, Things never go well when the authority of a parent runs low in a family...

### Verses 6-17

Jacob's sons, when they heard of the injury done to Dinah, showed a very great resentment of it... It is here called *folly in Israel*, according to the language of after-times; for Israel was not yet a people, but a family only.

This folly is most shameful in *Israel*, in a family of Israel, where God is known and worshipped, as he was in Jacob's tents, by the name of *the God of Israel*. Folly in Israel is scandalous indeed...

Hamor came to treat with Jacob himself, but he turns him over to his sons; and here we have a particular account of the treaty, in which, it is a shame to say, the Canaanites were more honest than the Israelites.

**I. Hamor and Shechem fairly propose this match**, in order to a coalition in trade. Shechem is deeply in love with Dinah; he will have her upon any terms. His father not only consents, but solicits for him, and gravely insists upon the advantages that would follow from the union of the families. He shows no jealousy of Jacob, though he was a stranger, but rather an earnest desire to settle a correspondence with him and his family, making him that generous offer, *The land shall be before you, trade you therein*.

**II. Jacob's sons basely pretend to insist upon a coalition in religion...** If Jacob had taken the management of this affair into his own hands, it is probable that he and Hamor would soon have concluded it; but Jacob's sons meditate only revenge, and a strange project they have for the compassing of it—the Shechemites must be circumcised; not to make them holy (they never intended that), but to make them sore, that they might become an easier prey to their sword.

**1. The pretense was specious.** It is the honor of Jacob's family that they carry about with them the token of God's covenant with them; and it will be a reproach to those that are thus dignified and distinguished to enter into such a strict alliance with those that are *uncircumcised*. Therefore, *if you will be circumcised, then we will become one people with you*. Had they been sincere herein their proposal

of these terms would have had in it something commendable; for Israelites should not intermarry with Canaanites, professors with profane; it is a great sin, or at least the cause and inlet of a great deal, and has often been of pernicious consequence. The interest we have in any persons, and the hold we have of them, should be wisely improved by us, to bring them to the love and practice of religion (*He that winneth souls is wise*); but then we must not, like Jacob's sons, think it enough to persuade them to submit to the external rites of religion, but must endeavor to convince them of its reasonableness, and to bring them acquainted with the power of it.

**2. The intention was malicious**, as appears by the sequel of the story; all they aimed at was to prepare them for the day of slaughter. Note, Bloody designs have often been covered, and carried on, with a pretense of religion; thus they have been accomplished most plausibly and most securely: but this dissembled piety is, doubtless, double iniquity. Religion is never more injured, nor are God's sacraments more profaned, than when they are used as a cloak of maliciousness...

## Verses 18-24

**1. Hamor and Shechem gave consent themselves to be circumcised.** To this perhaps they were moved, not only by the strong desire they had to bring about this match, but by what they might have heard of the sacred and honorable intentions of this sign, in the family of Abraham, which, it is probable, they had some confused notions of, and of the promises confirmed by it, which made them the more desirous to incorporate with the family of Jacob. Note, Many who know little of religion, yet know so much of it as makes them willing to join themselves with those that are religious. Again, If a man would take upon him a form of religion to gain a good wife, much more should we embrace the

power of it to gain the favor of a good God, even circumcise our hearts to love him, and, as Shechem here, *not defer to do the thing*.

**2. They gained the consent of the men of their city...** They themselves had great influences upon them by their command and example. Note, Religion would greatly prevail if those in authority would appear forward and zealous for it.

They made a very cogent argument, *Shall not their cattle and their substance be ours?* They observed that Jacob's sons were industrious thriving people, and promised themselves and their neighbors advantage by an alliance with them; it would improve ground and trade, and bring money into their country. Now, it was bad enough to marry upon this reason, yet we see covetousness the greatest matchmaker in the world... It was worse to be circumcised upon this reason. The Shechemites will embrace the religion of Jacob's family only in hopes of interesting themselves thereby in the riches of that family. Thus there are many with whom gain is godliness, and who are more governed and influenced by their secular interest than by any principle of their religion.

### Verses 25-31

Here, we have Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob's sons, young men not much above twenty years old, cutting the throats of the Shechemites, and thereby breaking the heart of their good father.

**I. The barbarous murder of the Shechemites.** Jacob himself was used to the sheephook, but his sons had got swords by their sides, as if they had been the seed of Esau, who was to live by his sword; we have here:

**1. Slaying the inhabitants of Shechem—all the males,** Hamor and Shechem particularly,

with whom they had been treating in a friendly manner but the other day, yet with a design upon their lives. Some think that all Jacob's sons, when they wheedled the Shechemites to be circumcised, designed to take advantage of their soreness, and to rescue Dinah from among them; but that Simeon and Levi, not content with that, would themselves avenge the injury—and they did it with a witness...

It was true that Shechem had done ill; but what was that to all the Shechemites? Does one man sin, and will they be wroth with all the town? Must the innocent fall with the guilty? This was barbarous indeed. But that which above all aggravated the cruelty was the most perfidious treachery that was in it. The Shechemites had submitted to their conditions, and had done that upon which they had promised to become one people with them; yet they act as sworn enemies to those to whom they had lately become sworn friends, making as light of their covenant as they did of the laws of humanity. And are these the sons of Israel? ... This also added to the crime, that they made a holy ordinance of God subservient to their wicked design, so making that odious; as if it were not enough for them to shame themselves and their family, they bring a reproach upon that honorable badge of their religion; justly would it be called a bloody ordinance.

**2. Seizing the prey of Shechem,** and plundering the town. They rescued Dinah, and, if that was all they came for, they might have done that without blood, as appears by their own showing; but they aimed at the spoil; and, though Simeon and Levi only were the murderers, yet it is intimated that others of the sons of Jacob *came upon the slain and spoiled the city*, and so became accessory to the murder. In them it was manifest injustice; yet here we may observe the righteousness of God. The Shechemites were willing to gratify

the sons of Jacob by submitting to the penance of circumcision, upon this principle: *Shall not their cattle and their substance be ours?* And see what was the issue; instead of making themselves masters of the wealth of Jacob's family, Jacob's family become masters of their wealth. Note, Those who unjustly grasp at that which is another's justly lose that which is their own.

**II. Jacob's resentment of this bloody deed of Simeon and Levi.** Two things he bitterly complains of:

1. The reproach they had brought upon him thereby: *You have troubled me*, put me into a disorder, for you have made me *to stink among the inhabitants of the land*, that is, "You have rendered me and my family odious among them. What will they say of us and our religion? We shall be looked upon as the most perfidious barbarous people in the world." Note, The gross misconduct of wicked children is the grief and shame of their parents. Children should be the joy of their parents; but wicked children are their trouble, sadden their hearts, break their spirits, and make them go mourning from day to day...

2. The ruin they had exposed him to. What could be expected, but that the Canaanites, who were numerous and formidable, would confederate against him, and he and his little family would become an easy prey to them?

*I shall be destroyed, I and my house.* If all the Shechemites must be destroyed for the offence of one, why not all the Israelites for the offence of two? Jacob knew indeed that God had promised to preserve and perpetuate his house; but he might justly fear that these vile practices of his children would amount to a forfeiture, and cut off the entail.

Note, When sin is in the house, there is reason to fear ruin at the door. The tender parents foresee those bad consequences of sin which the wicked children have no dread of. One would think this should have made them to relent, and they should have humbled themselves to their good father, and begged his pardon; but, instead, they justify themselves, and give him this insolent reply, *Should he deal with our sister as with a harlot?*

No, he should not; but, if he do, must they be their own avengers? Will nothing less than so many lives, and the ruin of a whole city, serve to atone for an abuse done to one foolish girl? By their question they tacitly reflect upon their father, as if he would have been content to let them deal with his daughter as with a harlot. Note, It is common for those who run into one extreme to reproach and censure those who try to keep the balance. Those who condemn the rigor of revenge shall be misrepresented, as if they countenanced and justified the offence.

**What thought from Matthew Henry's words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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## DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Genesis 34 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 34:1-31?**

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Genesis 34 is a stark reminder that there is evil in the world. Shechem takes advantage of the naiveté of the young girl, Dinah, violates her, rapes her, and then tries to console her. It is a sick example of how those who feign to be the closest to us often have the most selfish of intentions.

If there is abuse in your past, it is not something that should be glossed over or ignored. Seek the input, counsel, and comfort of someone who can help you process your memories and feelings.

Even if you do not have sexual or physical abuse in your past, almost all of us suffer from some type of neglect, pain, trauma, or betrayal. We all have needs as humans—for love and security—and it usually does not take long for us to realize that even the people closest to us will let us down to some degree. Thus, over time, we can build walls to cover over our wounds.

**When is the first time in your life that you can remember feeling unloved or unwanted?**

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**When is the first time in your life that you can remember not fitting in or not being accepted?**

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**When is the first time in your life that you can remember feeling unsafe or vulnerable?**

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**How have you responded to life's wounds? What are your tendencies?** Check all that apply.

- |  |                                      |                                    |                                       |  |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shut down     | <input type="checkbox"/> Work harder | <input type="checkbox"/> Complain  | <input type="checkbox"/> Become angry | <input type="checkbox"/> Become critical |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-medicate | <input type="checkbox"/> Waste time  | <input type="checkbox"/> Criticize | <input type="checkbox"/> Blame others | <input type="checkbox"/> Isolate myself  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Addiction     | <input type="checkbox"/> Thrill seek | <input type="checkbox"/> Achieve   | <input type="checkbox"/> Buy stuff    | <input type="checkbox"/> Fantasize       |

We all develop strategies to try to meet our needs, manage the pains of life, find acceptance and approval, feel secure and significant, look good, cover our wounds, and deny the reality of death.

Dinah was looking for love and acceptance.

Shechem was looking for quick pleasure and power.

Jacob was looking for minimal discomfort and problems.

Simeon and Levi were looking for justice and revenge.

In the end, they made things worse for themselves and hurt others along the way.

The big question in Genesis 34 is “where is God?” His name is not used or mentioned anywhere in this chapter. *Is He absent? Is He uninvolved? Does He not see the pain and the abuse?*

No, He is grieving over the choices of those whom He has created and loves. The grief that Dinah’s brothers feel is the same grief that God feels over our sins and the sins committed against us.

The God who came down in human flesh, experienced need, was misunderstood, suffered abuse, endured scorn and shame, was mocked and beaten, and died on a Roman cross understands our pains, our wounds, and our suffering. He comes to us. He weeps with us. He intercedes for us.

**Read and reflect on Isaiah 53:3-6.** Mark key words and phrases as you read.

He was despised and rejected by mankind,  
A man of suffering, and familiar with pain.  
Like one from whom people hide their faces  
He was despised, and we held him in low esteem.  
Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering,  
Yet we considered him punished by God,  
Stricken by him, and afflicted.  
But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
He was crushed for our iniquities;  
The punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
And by his wounds we are healed.  
We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
Each of us has turned to our own way;  
And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

**How does knowing that God loves you, suffered for you, died for you, and desires to save you and heal you change the way that you look at the wounds, pains, and sins in your life?**

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## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*Up and down. Success and failure. What are we to make of Jacob? One minute he is Israel, striving with God and man and overcoming. The next minute, he is a compromising and compromised bystander to an atrocity. What are we to say except that he looks a lot like us?*

Ian Dugaid

*Jacob and his sons, the appeaser and the avengers, swayed respectively by fear and fury, were perhaps equally distant from true justice. They exemplify two perennial but sterile reactions to evil.*

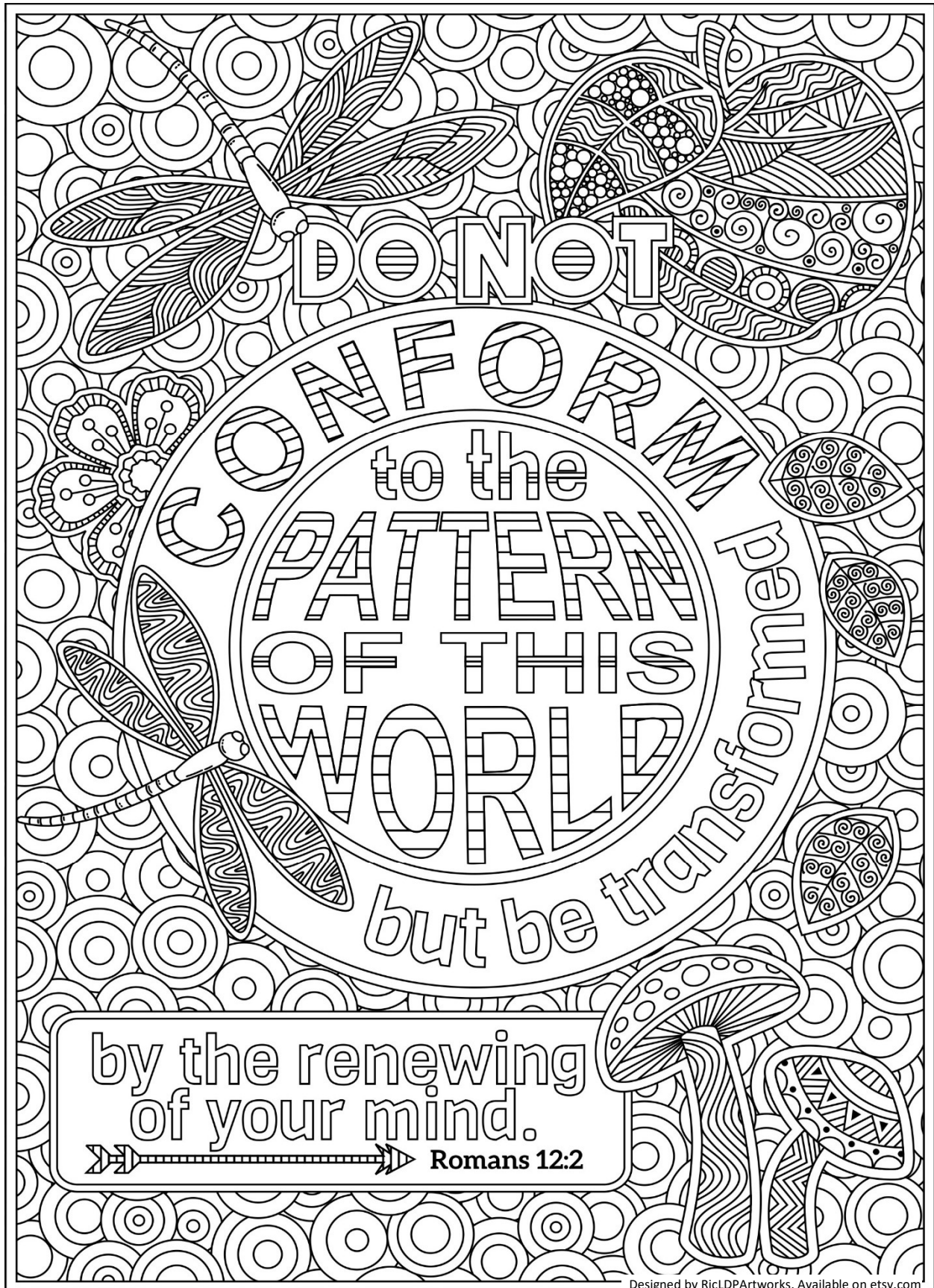
Derek Kidner

*A Jesus who never wept could never wipe away my tears.*

Charles Spurgeon

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- When do you first remember realizing that the world is a dangerous place?
- What do you think it was like to be Dinah, the lone daughter among a cadre of boys, and the daughter of Leah, the unloved wife of Jacob? What do you think she was looking for?
- What words would you use to describe Shechem based on this chapter? How do you think the scenario played out when he met Dinah?
- What does Jacob's reaction tell you about him? What does Dinah's brothers' reaction tell you about them?
- Though some would see a level of justice in the brothers' actions, what made their actions so diabolical and damaging?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Matthew Henry? If so, what?
- Dinah's experience in this chapter reminds us that this world is dangerous and we will all suffer some of its hurts, tragedies, and abuse. How should we not deal with our pain? How should we deal with our pain? Share a pain on your heart and pray for one another.



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## COMING HOME ACCORDING TO GOD

### Genesis 35

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#### DAY ONE Observation

In Genesis 35, Jacob's life comes full circle. He returns to Bethel where he first encountered God. Then he returns to Hebron where he arrives just in time to bury his father, Isaac. Along the way, he not only rededicates himself and his family to God but he also experiences the losses and the sorrows of life.

**Ask God to speak to your heart as you read Genesis 35:1-29. Mark words or phrases that stand out to you. Write down the main message or your thoughts next to each paragraph.**

Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."<sup>2</sup> And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments."<sup>3</sup> Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone."<sup>4</sup> So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem.

<sup>5</sup> And they journeyed, and the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob. <sup>6</sup> So Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. <sup>7</sup> And he built an altar there and called the place El Bethel, because there God appeared to him when he fled from the face of his brother. <sup>8</sup> Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried below Bethel under the terebinth tree. So the name of it was called Allon Bachuth.

<sup>9</sup> Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him. <sup>10</sup> And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name." So He called his name Israel. <sup>11</sup> Also God said to him: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. <sup>12</sup> The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land." <sup>13</sup> Then God went up from him in the place where He talked with him. <sup>14</sup> So Jacob set up a pillar in the place where He talked with him, a pillar of stone; and he poured a drink offering on it, and he poured oil on it. <sup>15</sup> And Jacob called the name of the place where God spoke with him, Bethel.

<sup>16</sup> Then they journeyed from Bethel. And when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath, Rachel labored in childbirth, and she had hard labor. <sup>17</sup> Now it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, "Do not fear; you will have this son also." <sup>18</sup> So it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. <sup>19</sup> So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). <sup>20</sup> And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.

<sup>21</sup> Then Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. <sup>22</sup> And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard about it.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: <sup>23</sup> the sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; <sup>24</sup> the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin; <sup>25</sup> the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali; <sup>26</sup> and the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant, were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram.

<sup>27</sup> Then Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kirjath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had dwelt. <sup>28</sup> Now the days of Isaac were one hundred and eighty years. <sup>29</sup> So Isaac breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people, being old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him. (NKJV)

**What thought or verse stands out to you in this passage? Why?**

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**What commands does God give Jacob after the tragedies and atrocities in Shechem? (35:1)**

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**How does Jacob respond? (35:2-4)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Who dies in Bethel? (35:8)** \_\_\_\_\_

**What promises does God reiterate to Jacob when he arrives in Bethel? (35:10-12)**

*Your name shall not be called Jacob anymore but \_\_\_\_\_ shall be your name.*

*A \_\_\_\_\_ and a company of \_\_\_\_\_ shall proceed from you.*

*And \_\_\_\_\_ shall come from your body.*

*To Abraham, Isaac, you, and your descendants, I give this \_\_\_\_\_.*

**Who dies in Bethlehem? (35:19)** \_\_\_\_\_

**List the sons of Jacob. (35:22-26)** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Who dies in Hebron? (35:29)** \_\_\_\_\_

## DAY TWO Meditation

Quiet your heart and allow God to speak through His Word. Slowly read Genesis 35:2-4 several times. Reflect on each word. Meditate on them.

*So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him,  
“Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you,  
and purify yourselves and change your clothes.  
Then come, let us go up to Bethel,  
where I will build an altar to God,  
who answered me in the day of my distress  
and who has been with me wherever I have gone.”  
So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears,  
and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. (NIV)*

**Write down the observations that you can make from this passage, sketch out any images or thoughts that you have, or simply rewrite the passage below giving emphasis to key words.**

**Offer the passage back to God in the form of a personalized prayer.**

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### DAY THREE Interpretation

In interpretation, you are digging deeper into the Scriptures in order to understand its meaning better. A word study on a key word or looking up parallel passages can help expand and deepen your understanding.

Go to [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) and type "Genesis 35" into the "Search the Bible" box. Click on Genesis 35:3 to bring up the verse in the Hebrew. Find the word "distress" and click on the Strong's number (H6869) to bring up the Hebrew word, its definition, and its usage in the Old Testament.

**What is the Hebrew word for "distress"?** \_\_\_\_\_ (Use the transliteration.)

**How many times is it used in the Old Testament?** \_\_\_\_\_ (See KJV Translation Count.)

**What is its definition?** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Read the following passages that use this Hebrew word.** Mark key phrases as you read.

*The Lord is a refuge for the persecuted,  
A refuge in times of **trouble**. (Psalm 9:9)*

*May the Lord answer you in the day of **trouble**!  
May the name of the God of Jacob protect you! (Psalm 20:1)*

*Do not be far from me,  
For **trouble** is near and there is no one to help. (Psalm 22:11)*

*Turn to me and be gracious to me,  
For I am alone and afflicted.  
The **distresses** of my heart increase;  
Bring me out of my sufferings. (Psalm 25:16-17)*

*This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him  
And saved him out of all his **troubles**. (Psalm 34:6)*

*God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in **trouble**.  
Therefore we will not fear,  
Even though the earth be removed,  
And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. (Psalm 46:1-2)*

*Call upon Me in the day of **trouble**;  
I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. (Psalm 50:15)*

*The Lord is good,  
A stronghold in the day of **trouble**;  
And He knows those who trust in Him. (Nahum 1:7)*

**What do you learn from these verses about “trouble”? What do you learn about God?**

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Use [blueletterbible.org](http://blueletterbible.org) or a good Bible dictionary to find out the meaning of the following names.

- Bethel (35:7) \_\_\_\_\_
- Allon Bachuth (35:8) \_\_\_\_\_
- Ben-Oni (35:18) \_\_\_\_\_
- Benjamin (35:18) \_\_\_\_\_
- Bethlehem (35:19) \_\_\_\_\_

One of the mysteries of these chapters is “what happened to Rebekah?” The death of Rebekah’s nurse, Deborah, is recorded but nothing is mentioned of Rebekah’s death. The best guess is that Rebekah died while Jacob was in Paddan Aram. Her nurse, Deborah, may have delivered the news and joined Jacob’s family. Thus, the death of Deborah would be Jacob’s last tie to his mom.

**Read Rebekah’s final words to Jacob recorded in Scripture.**

*When the words of her older son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she summoned her younger son Jacob and said to him, “Listen, your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. So now, my son, listen to me. Flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran, and stay with him for a few days until your brother’s anger subsides—until your brother’s rage turns away from you and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send for you and bring you back from there. Why should I lose you both in one day?” (Genesis 27:42-45)*

**What was Rebekah’s plan? What actually transpired?** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Read Jacob’s final words in Genesis 49.** This is the last mention of Rebekah in the Old Testament.

*Then he gave them these instructions: “I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites.”*

## DAY FOUR Devotion

Read the following excerpt from **Matthew Henry's Exposition of the Old Testament**. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was a pastor, preacher, and author from Chester, England. He is best known for his exhaustive, six-volume, verse-by-verse commentary on the Scriptures. Charles Spurgeon stated that, "Every minister ought to read it entirely and carefully through once at least."

In this chapter we have three communions and three funerals. I. Three communions between God and Jacob. 1. God ordered Jacob to Bethel; and, in obedience to that order, he purged his house of idols, and prepared for that journey (1-5). 2. Jacob built an altar at Bethel, to the honor of God that had appeared to him, and in performance of his vow (6-7). 3. God appeared to him again, and confirmed the change of his name and covenant with him (9-13), of which appearance Jacob made a grateful acknowledgment (14-15).

II. Three funerals. 1. Deborah (8). 2. Rachel (16-20). 3. Isaac (27-29)...

### Verses 1-5

#### I. God reminds Jacob of his vow at Bethel.

Jacob had said in the day of his distress, *If I come again in peace, this stone shall be God's house* (28:22). God had performed his part of the bargain, and had given Jacob more than bread to eat and raiment to put on—he had got an estate, and had become two bands; but, it should seem, he had forgotten his vow, or at least had too long deferred the performance of it. Seven or eight years it was now since he came to Canaan; he had purchased ground there, and had built an altar in remembrance of God's last appearance to him when he called him *Israel* (33:19-20) but still Bethel is forgotten. Note, Time is apt to wear out the sense of mercies and the impressions made upon us by them; it should not be so, but so it is. God had exercised Jacob with a very sore affliction in his family (ch. 34), to see if this would bring his vow to his remembrance, and put him upon the performance of it, but it had not this effect; therefore God

comes himself and puts him in mind of it: *Arise, go to Beth-el*. As many as God loves he will remind of neglected duties, one way or other, by conscience or by providences...

#### II. Jacob commands his household to prepare for this solemnity...

Before solemn ordinances, there must be solemn preparation. *Wash you, make you clean, and come, and let us reason together*, Isa. 1:16-18. Masters of families should use their authority for the promoting of religion in their families. Not only we, but our houses also, should serve the Lord, Jos. 24:15. Observe the commands he gives his household:

1. They must *put away the strange gods*. Strange gods in Jacob's family! Strange things indeed! Could such a family, that was taught the good knowledge of the Lord, admit them? Could such a master, to whom God had appeared twice connive at them? Doubtless this was his weakness. Note, Those that are good themselves cannot always have those about them so good as they should be. In those families where there is a face of religion, and an altar to God, yet many times there is much amiss, and more strange gods than one would suspect. In Jacob's family, Rachel had her *teraphim*, which, it is to be feared, she secretly made some superstitious use of. The captives of Shechem brought their gods along with them, and perhaps Jacob's sons took some with the plunder. However they came by them, now they must *put them away*.

2. They must be clean, and *change their garments*; they must observe a due decorum, and make the best appearance they could. Simeon

and Levi had their hands full of blood, it concerned them particularly to wash, and to put off their garments that were so stained. These were but ceremonies, signifying the purification and change of the heart. What are clean clothes, and new clothes, without a clean heart, and a new heart? ...

**III. His family surrendered all they had that was idolatrous or superstitious.** Perhaps, if Jacob had called for them sooner, they would sooner have parted with them, being convicted by their own consciences of the vanity of them. Note, Sometimes attempts for reformation succeed better than one could have expected, and people are not so obstinate against them as we feared. Jacob's servants, and even the retainers of his family, gave him all the strange gods, and the earrings they wore, either as charms or to the honor of their gods; they parted with all... Jacob took care to bury their images, we may suppose in some place unknown to them, that they might not afterwards find them and return to them. Note, We must be wholly separated from our sins, as we are from those that are dead and buried out of our sight...

**IV. He removes without molestation from Shechem to Bethel.** *The terror of God was upon the cities.* Though the Canaanites were much exasperated against the sons of Jacob for their barbarity against the Shechemites, yet they were so restrained by a divine power that they could not take this fair opportunity, which now offered itself, when they were upon their march, to avenge their neighbors' quarrel. Note, The way of duty is the way of safety. While there was sin in Jacob's house, he was afraid of his neighbors; but now that the strange gods were put away, and they were all going together to Bethel, his neighbors were afraid of him. When we are about God's work, we are under special protection. God is with us, while we are with him and, if he be for us, who can be against us?

## Verses 6-15

Jacob and his retinue having safely arrived at Bethel, we are here told what passed there.

**I. There he built an altar,** and no doubt offered sacrifice upon it, perhaps the tenth of his cattle, according to his vow, *I will give the tenth unto thee*. With these sacrifices he joined praises for former mercies, particularly that which the sight of the place brought afresh to his remembrance; and he added prayers for the continuance of God's favor to him and his family. And he called the place (i.e., *the altar*) *El-bethel, the God of Bethel*. As, when he made a thankful acknowledgment of the honor God had lately done him in calling him *Israel*, he worshipped God by the name of *El-elohe Israel*; so, now that he was making a grateful recognition of God's former favor to him at Bethel, he worships God by the name of *El-beth-el, the God of Bethel*, because there God appeared to him. Note, The comfort which the saints have in holy ordinances is not so much from *Bethel, the house of God*, as from *El-beth-el, the God of the house*. The ordinances are but empty things if we do not meet with God in them.

**II. There he buried Deborah, Rebekah's nurse.** We have reason to think that Jacob, after he came to Canaan, while his family dwelt near Shechem, went himself to visit his father Isaac at Hebron. Rebekah probably was dead, but her old nurse (of whom mention is made (24:59) survived her, and Jacob took her to his family, to be a companion to his wives and an instructor to his children; while they were at Bethel, she died, and died lamented, so much lamented that the oak under which she was buried was called *Allon-bachuth, the oak of weeping*... We do not know where death may meet us; perhaps at Beth-el, the house of God. Therefore let us be always ready. Family-afflictions may come even when family-reformations are on foot...

III. **God appeared to him**, to own his altar, to answer to the name by which he had called him, *The God of Bethel*, and to comfort him under his affliction...

1. He confirmed the change of his name. It was done before by the angel that wrestled with him; here it was ratified by the divine Majesty... There it was to encourage him against the fear of Esau; here against the fear of the Canaanites. Who can be too hard for Israel, a prince with God? It is below those who are thus dignified to droop and despond.

2. He renewed and ratified the covenant with him, by the name *El-shaddai. I am God Almighty, God all-sufficient*, able to make good the promise in due time, and to support thee and provide for thee in the meantime. Two things are promised him which we have met with often before—(1) That he should be the father of a great nation, great in honor and power. (2) That he should be the master of a good land, described by the grantees, Abraham and Isaac, to whom it was promised. The land that was given to Abraham and Isaac is here entailed on Jacob and his seed...

These two promises had a spiritual signification, of which we may suppose Jacob himself had some notion, though not so clear and distinct as we now have; for, without doubt, Christ is the promised seed, and heaven is the promised land; the former is the foundation, and the latter the top-stone, of all God's favors.

3. He then went up from him, or *from over him*, in some visible display of glory, which had hovered over him while he talked with him. Note, The sweetest communions the saints have with God in this world are short and transient, and soon have an end. Our vision of God in heaven will be everlasting; there we shall be ever with the Lord; it is not so here.

IV. **Jacob erected a memorial**. He set up a pillar. When he was going to Padan-aram, he set up for a pillar that stone on which he had laid his head. This was agreeable enough to his low condition and his hasty flight; but now he took time to erect one more stately, more distinguishable and durable, probably placing that stone in it. In token of his intending it for a sacred memorial of his communion with God, he poured oil and the other ingredients of a drink-offering upon it. His vow was, *This stone shall be God's house*, that is, shall be set up for his honor, as houses to the praise of their builders; and here he performs it, transferring it to God by anointing it. He confirmed the name he had formerly given to the place, *Beth-el, the house of God*.

#### Verses 16-20

We have here the story of the death of Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob.

1. She fell in travail by the way, not able to reach to Bethlehem, the next town, though they were near it; so suddenly does pain sometimes come upon a woman in travail, which she cannot escape, or put off...

2. Her pains were violent. She had hard labor, harder than usual: this was the effect of sin (3:16). Human life begins with sorrow, and the roses of its joy are surrounded with thorns.

3. The midwife encouraged her. No doubt she had her midwife with her, ready at hand, yet that would not secure her. Rachel had said, when she bore Joseph, *God shall add another son*, which now the midwife remembers, and tells her her words were made good. Yet this did not avail to keep up her spirits... We are apt, in extreme perils, to comfort ourselves and our friends with the hopes of a temporal deliverance, in which we may be disappointed; we had better found our comforts on that which cannot fail us, the hope of eternal life.

4. Her travail was to the life of the child, but to her own death. Note, Though the pains and perils of childbearing were introduced by sin, yet they have sometimes been fatal to very holy women, who, though not saved in childbearing, are saved through it with an everlasting salvation. Rachel had passionately said, *Give me children, or else I die*; and now that she had children (for this was her second) she died. Her dying is here called *the departing of her soul*. Note, The death of the body is but the departure of the soul to the world of spirits.

5. Her dying lips called her newborn son *Benoni, The son of my sorrow*. And many a son, not born in such hard labor, yet proves the son of his parent's sorrow, and the heaviness of her that bore him. Children are enough the sorrow of their poor mothers in the breeding, bearing, and nursing of them; they should therefore, when they grow up, study to be their joy, and so, if possible, to make them some amends. But Jacob, because he would not renew the sorrowful remembrance of the mother's death every time he called his son by his name, changed his name, and called him *Benjamin, The son of my right hand*; that is, "very dear to me, set on my right hand for a blessing, the support of my age, like the staff in my right hand."

6. Jacob buried her near the place where she died... No mention is made of the mourning that was at her death, because that might easily be taken for granted. Jacob, no doubt, was a true mourner. Note, Great afflictions sometimes befall us immediately after great comforts. Lest Jacob should be lifted up with the visions of the Almighty with which he was honored, this was sent as a thorn in the flesh to humble him. Those that enjoy the favors peculiar to the children of God must yet expect the troubles that are common to the children of men. Deborah, who, had she lived, would have been a comfort to Rachel

in her extremity, died but a little before. Note, When death comes into a family, it often strikes double...

7. Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave, so that it was known, long after, to be Rachel's sepulcher (1 Sam. 10:2), and Providence so ordered it that this place afterwards fell in the lot of Benjamin. Jacob set up a pillar in remembrance of his joys, and here he sets up one in remembrance of his sorrows; for, as it may be of use to ourselves to keep both in mind, so it may be of use to others to transmit the memorials of both...

## Verses 21-29

I. **Jacob's removal.** He also, as his fathers, sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, and was not long in a place. Immediately after the story of Rachel's death he is here called *Israel*, and not often so afterwards: the Jews say, "The historian does him this honor here because he bore that affliction with such admirable patience and submission to Providence." Note, Those are Israel's indeed, princes with God, that govern their own passions. He that has this rule over his own spirit is better than the mighty. Israel, a prince with God, yet dwells in tents; the city is reserved for him in the other world.

II. **The sin of Reuben.** A piece of abominable wickedness it was that he was guilty of, that very sin which the apostle says (1 Cor 5:1) is not so much as named among the Gentiles, *that one should have his father's wife*... Reuben's crime was so provoking that, for it, he lost his birthright and blessing (49:4). The first-born is not always the best, nor the most promising. This was Reuben's sin, but it was Jacob's affliction; and what a sore affliction it was is intimated in a little word, *and Israel heard it*. No more is said—that is enough; he heard it with the utmost grief and shame, horror and displeasure...

III. **A complete list of the sons of Jacob**, now that Benjamin the youngest was born. This is the first time we have the names of these heads of the twelve tribes together; afterwards we find them very often spoken of and enumerated, even to the end of the Bible, Rev. 7:4; 21:12. 4.

IV. **The visit which Jacob made to his father Isaac at Hebron.** We may suppose he had visited him before since his return, for he *sorely longed after his father's house*; but never, till now, brought his family to settle with him, or near him. Probably he did this now upon the death of Rebekah, by which Isaac was left solitary, and not disposed to marry again. The age and death of Isaac are here recorded, though it appears, by computation, that he died not till many years after

Joseph was sold into Egypt, and much about the time that he was preferred there. Isaac, a mild quiet man, lived the longest of all the patriarchs, for he was 180 years old; Abraham was but 175.

Isaac lived about forty years after he had made his will (27:2). We shall not die an hour the sooner, but abundantly the better, for our timely setting our heart and house in order. Particular notice is taken of the amicable agreement of Esau and Jacob, in solemnizing their father's funeral (35:29), to show how wonderfully God had changed Esau's mind since he vowed his brother's murder immediately after his father's death (27:41). Note, God has many ways of preventing bad men from doing the mischief they intended; he can either tie their hands or turn their hearts.

**What thought from Matthew Henry's words stands out to you the most? Why?**

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## DAY FIVE Application

Re-read Genesis 35 and consider the truths that you have learned this week. Seek to apply the message of this passage to your life.

**What thought or truth impacted you this week from your study of Genesis 35:1-29?**

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Jacob has had quite a journey. His pride, ambition, deception, manipulation, selfishness, foolishness, favoritism, passivity, and apathy have landed him in a whole lot of trials and troubles. But God has remained faithful despite Jacob's faithlessness. Coming back to Bethel is the proof. God has never abandoned him and He continues to bless him despite his failures.

God's faithfulness to Jacob gives hope to us all!

In returning to Bethel, Jacob needed to repent. He had allowed idolatry to infiltrate his own life and the lives of his family. Finally, perhaps for the first time in his life, Jacob takes the leadership of the spiritual lives of his family. He doesn't stand in the background. He commits himself to the Lord, gets his own life back on track, and leads his family to worship God alone.

**How is your own spiritual relationship with the Lord right now?** Be honest.

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**What idols, sins, or distractions have you allowed to creep into your life?**

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**Are you willing to forsake these idols?** ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ I want to but I am struggling to let go

Jacob and his family made a definite action to forsake their idols. They took them off and buried them. In a symbolic way, they put them to death. There are principles to take from their actions.

- Forsaking sin and idolatry takes a definite decision and action (Matthew 5:29-30).
- Physically burying something or burning something that represents these sins and idols can imprint your decision on your mind and be a witness to others (Acts 19:18-20).
- To "put off" a sinful habit you need to "put on" a new habit (Ephesians 4:17-24).

If you are willing to make a change in your life, then find some way to actualize or memorialize your decision. If it is forsaking a sin or idol, then write those sins or idols on a piece of paper or find some object that can represent these sins or idols and then go bury it somewhere or burn it. Your decision to follow the Lord can have a great impact on those around you!

**Who are some of the people that you have leadership or influence over?** \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

**What kind of example do you want them to see of your life?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Like Jacob, you may fail at times, but God is faithful to continue His work *in* you and *through* you.

**Take time to read and reflect on Psalm 46.** Write any thoughts you have next to these verses.

- <sup>1</sup> God is our refuge and strength,  
A very present help in trouble.  
<sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear,  
Even though the earth be removed,  
And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;  
<sup>3</sup> Though its waters roar and be troubled,  
Though the mountains shake with its swelling. *Selah*
- <sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God,  
The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.  
<sup>5</sup> God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved;  
God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.  
<sup>6</sup> The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved;  
He uttered His voice, the earth melted.  
<sup>7</sup> The Lord of hosts is with us;  
The God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*
- <sup>8</sup> Come, behold the works of the Lord,  
Who has made desolations in the earth.  
<sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two;  
He burns the chariot in the fire.  
<sup>10</sup> Be still, and know that I am God;  
I will be exalted among the nations,  
I will be exalted in the earth!  
<sup>11</sup> The Lord of hosts is with us;  
The God of Jacob is our refuge. *Selah*

## ADDITIONAL NOTES AND PRAYER REQUESTS

*If God can love Jacob,  
then He can love anyone.*

*Jacob is not the biblical "hero" that  
we talk about. His story is more  
embarrassing than impressive.  
Yet God calls Himself,  
the "God of Jacob."*

*Why?*

*Because all of us are like Jacob.  
We are all heelcatchers,  
struggling to make life work,  
wrestling with God,  
trying to figure out who we are.*

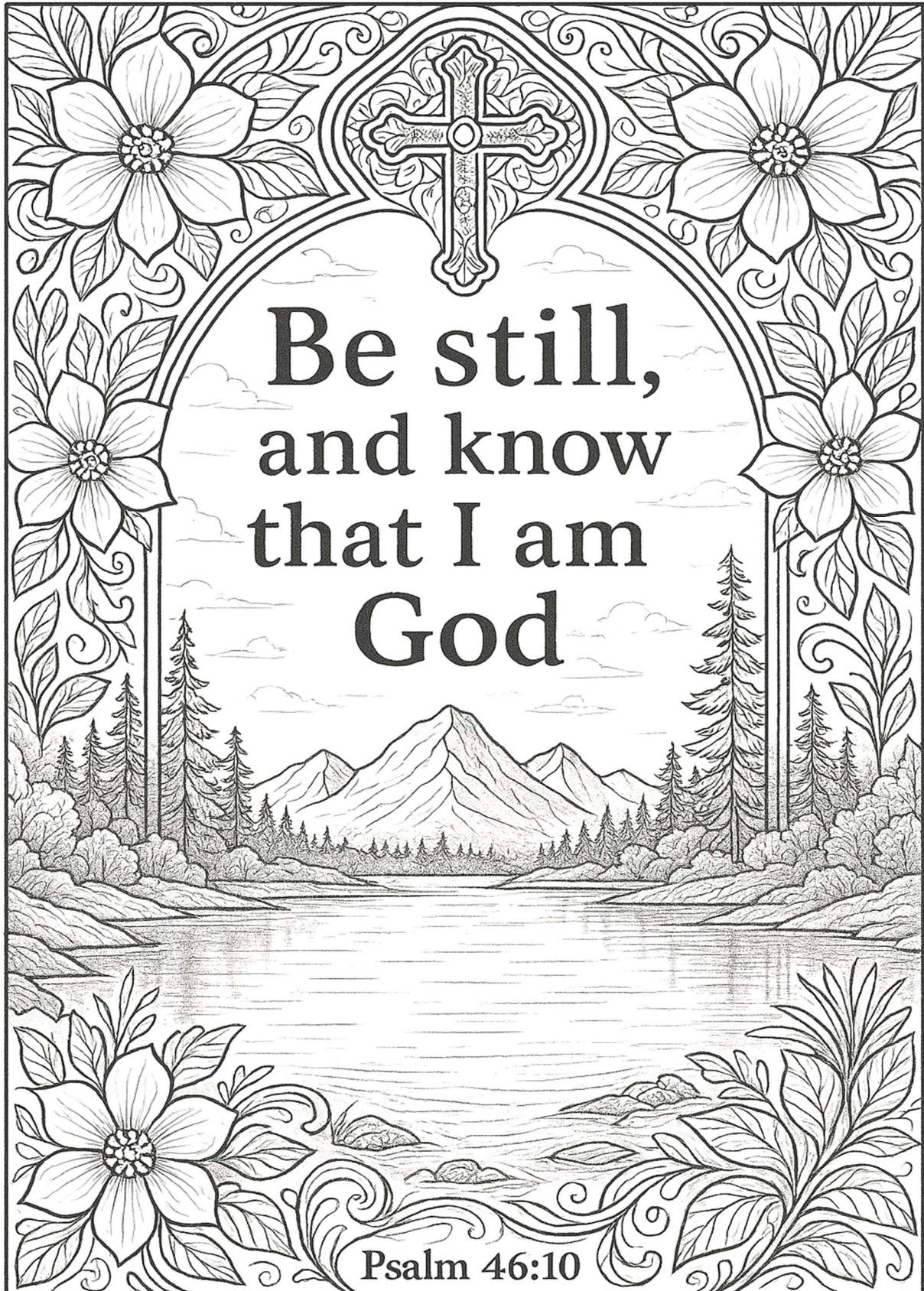
*Jacob's story is our own.*

*The God who loves Jacob loves us all.  
And He is a refuge to all those who  
cling to Him alone.*

Steve Foster

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR FAMILY DISCUSSION:

- What stands out to you the most from Jacob's story so far? Why?
- Why do you think Jacob delayed returning to Bethel? What were the consequences of his delay?
- What do you think is significant about Jacob's message to his family in 35:2-3? How do they respond to his message? What does this teach you?
- Why do you think the death of Rebekah's nurse, Deborah, is recorded?
- What promises does God make to Jacob? What promises has He already kept?
- What tragedies and sorrows does Jacob experience in this chapter? How do you think each one of them affected him?
- Did you discover anything new, interesting, or meaningful in your study of this passage this week? Or in your reading of Matthew Henry? If so, what?
- Jacob and his family make a huge commitment to God and then right afterwards there are several tragedies and losses. What does this tell you?
- Read Psalm 46 together. Pray together as a group using this psalm as your guide.



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## FINAL THOUGHTS FROM GENESIS 25-35

Things that I have learned during this study:

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**Who is Jesus to you?** Have you acknowledged Him as your only Savior and Lord? There is no other name under heaven by which people can be saved (Acts 4:12). Jesus entered our world to save us from our sins. He died on the cross for you and for me. He rose again to give us eternal life. Have you placed your trust in Him? If not, do so today!

*If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.* —Romans 10:9-10

This study guide was written and compiled by Pastor Steve Foster for use with the Genesis sermon series at Community Bible Church, Baton Rouge, LA. You are welcome to reproduce any part of it for your own personal study. For any other use, please contact [pastor@516church.org](mailto:pastor@516church.org).



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