

What's the Message – Lesson Seventeen

Our study of Genesis continues with the lesson . . . Jacob learns to trust.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We pray that today's lesson will help you to learn from the mistakes of Jacob, that it is far better to trust in God than in our own capabilities and means. Amen.

In our last lesson we learned how Jacob and his mother used deceit and craftiness to obtain for Jacob the rights of the first-born son, Esau. Then we saw in chapter 27, verse 21, that Esau became so angry over this trickery that he determined to kill his brother. As we mentioned last time, Rebekah learned of Esau's intent, and persuaded Isaac to send Jacob to her brother's home to seek a wife.

Now, in chapter 28 we read: Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, "You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women. Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take as wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother. God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May He give the blessings of Abraham to you and to your descendants with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham!"

Thus Isaac sent Jacob away; and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother.

So now Jacob is out on his own . . . on foot . . . with a journey of over 500 miles ahead of him. Talk about feeling lonely and helpless! What good would his craftiness do him now? Who could he count on to come to his aid in this wilderness?

But early in his journey, perhaps on the very first night, God appears to him in a dream where he saw a great ladder reaching up to heaven, with angels going up and down it, with God standing above it. And God said to him, "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done that of which I have spoken to you."

Talk about comforting reassurance! Yet it was also frightening to realize that he had been in the presence of God, and he said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

In due time Jacob arrives in Haran, and comes to a well where shepherds gather to water their flocks, and he meets Rachel, the beautiful daughter of Laban. Now Jacob may have been somewhat cocky about his accomplishments as a schemer in the past, but he definitely met his match in his uncle Laban. An agreement is made between them that Jacob would work seven years for Laban to have Rachel for his wife. But as we read in chapter 29, on the wedding night, Laban substitutes a veiled sister Leah so that Jacob does not discover the trickery until the next morning.

The fox has been out-foxed! So now Jacob agrees to work another seven years to have Rachel as his wife also. And the two sisters get into a contest to see who can honor their husband the most by giving him sons. In the end it is the un-loved Leah who bears six sons before Rachel has her first. After that, Jacob pleads with Laban to let him return to his homeland, but Laban is quick with another deal to keep Jacob's services for another six years.

The agreement is that the wages of Jacob will be that the speckled and spotted sheep and goats born to the flocks would belong to Jacob, and all the others would be Laban's. But before Jacob could go through the flocks and separate them, Laban picked out all the strong animals and left only the weakest for Jacob.

But, although we learn later that Laban changed Jacob's wages 10 times, no matter how the terms were adjusted, God intervened on Jacob's behalf in a manner that seems very strange to us, and it was Jacob's flock that grew

and prospered . . . and not Laban's. Thus Jacob grew rich with large flocks, and had many servants. After 20 years, God instructed Jacob in chapter 31, verse 3:

"Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you."

Now, those are selected highlights from three chapters of Genesis, but so what? What's the message for us to learn?

Teacher, do these chapters have any relevance for us today?

Yes indeed. These experiences of Jacob have several important lessons for us today. Is there anyone among us who has not ever felt alone and unsure of the future, struggling with doubts? Hardly. So, we are just like Jacob in this respect. We might not have the direct contact with God that Jacob experienced, but we can learn from these ancient accounts that God really is our "Mighty Fortress" . . . not only our shield and protector . . . but is also the One who keeps His promises to us because He loves us.

And there is a second lesson that is hard for most of us to learn, just like Jacob. That is, to be patient . . . to wait on God's timing . . . and let God be God. He worked for Laban for 14 years to have Rachel as his wife, then 6 more years to provide for his family before God told him it was time to go back home. Whereas Jacob had tried scheming in the past to make things happen the way he wanted, now it was out of his control, and he had to learn to trust in God, instead. Could it be that this is a lesson many of us still need to learn?

Our next lesson will deal with the testing of Jacob, a trial of great stress.