

### GENESIS

#### Lesson 28 - Chapters 28 and 29

##### READ GEN 28 all

Isaac, having agreed with Rebecca that the last thing the family needed was more Canaanite women added to the clan through marriage, instructs Jacob to go take a wife from his mother's family up in Mesopotamia. Let me remind you once again that the term enmeshed family doesn't go nearly far enough in explaining the societal structure of that era; because Isaac is demanding all this of a son who is in his late 70's.

Then Isaac blesses Jacob before he departs with the blessing we see in Vs 3 and 4. Let's not just hurry by this blessing. If God has shown me one thing about the OT, it's that you ALWAYS want to look closely when a blessing or a curse is pronounced. We tend to read them as little more than quaint, and sometimes puzzling, sayings of a long extinct culture; but almost to a fault they are prophetic, and we will eventually find a link to that blessing or curse in later parts of the OT, or sometimes, in the NT.

Back in Genesis 27:27-29, we see the blessing Isaac gave to Jacob, the BLESSING, that one that Esau assumed he had been cheated out of; and what we notice if we look closely is that it contained only SOME of the elements of the covenant promise that God had originally made to Abraham, then was handed off to Isaac in its entirety. WHY? Because, Isaac was in the middle of a real battle with his faith. I think we can also safely assume that Isaac was not entirely convinced that the one he gave the blessing to was Esau (which, of course, it was NOT).....and that he wasn't exactly enamored with the character of either of his twin sons. So, either he gave the blessing half-heartedly, because he was unconvinced his son would actually carry it forward, or he was withholding part of it until he sensed the time was right.

Now, many years earlier, when Abraham was given the covenant promise by God, one of the elements of the covenant included that Abraham would be the father of a great nation. If we look back at Gen 12:2, perhaps you will remember that I told you that the Hebrew word used for "nation" was "goy". And, that when goy is used it usually means "gentile nations". However, let me parse that just a little bit more: in Abraham's time, to take the word "goy" to mean strictly non-Hebrew would have had no meaning: because until Isaac was born, there was no distinction between Hebrew and non-Hebrew nations produced by Abraham. That is, though Abraham was called the first Hebrew, it was with the birth of his sons Ishmael and Isaac that the first fork in the road, the differentiation between Hebrew and non-Hebrew offspring, would really occur, with Isaac being the Hebrew and Ishmael and all the other sons and daughters of his being the non-Hebrews. So, as "goy" is used in Gen 12:2, in the earliest development of the Hebrew people, it is referring to BOTH Hebrew and non-Hebrew nations: nations at large without regard to being Hebrew or non-Hebrew.

Now, coming back to Genesis 28:3, we see what appears to be the same blessing that God gave to Abraham, and then Abraham gave to Isaac, now being transferred by Isaac to Jacob; but there is an important difference. Where most bibles say that Isaac said to Jacob something like “that you may become a company of people....or.....company of nations” the Hebrew for “company of people or company of nations” is “kahal ammim”. This is entirely different than what God promised to Abraham, AND what was promised to Isaac; that is, that they would produce “goy”.....a mixture of nations. For “kahal ammim” in its most literal translation is used in Hebrew as the **OPPOSITE** of what God told Abraham. Literally, “kahal ammim” means a “holy convocation of fellow countrymen”. Put in other words, it means an assembly of people, for holy purposes, consisting of people from the same tribe or groups of tribes.

That is, Jacob, soon to be renamed “Israel”, will be the first in the line of covenant promise to produce ONLY Hebrews. He will produce ONLY nations of Hebrew people.....ONLY the people who would become called, by the time of Moses, “His (God’s) precious treasure”.

Let me summarize that again: Abraham produced both Hebrew and non-Hebrew offspring (just as God promised him in Gen 12:2), with Isaac being the Hebrew. Abraham’s son Isaac also produced Hebrew and non-Hebrew people, with Jacob being the Hebrew. But, Jacob produced ONLY Hebrews.....all the tribes of Israel....which is exactly what the blessing of “kahal ammim”, a holy convocation of fellow countrymen, is telling us.

Well, moving on, beginning in V6, we are told that Esau observed that Isaac sent Jacob to Mesopotamia to get a wife, because his father detested Canaanite women. Poor Esau; he’s already taken 2 Canaanite wives, which had greatly displeased his father, and now in a misguided attempt to make amends, he goes to his father’s brother’s family, Esau’s uncle Ishmael, the son Abraham had sent away, and Esau takes an Ishmaelite woman as his 3rd wife. What a knucklehead. But, as matter-of-fact as this event is told, its future effect is beyond calculation. Because here an alliance through intermarriage is formed, that bonds the two dispossessed firstborns, rejected by Yahoveh as possible heirs to the covenant line of promise, Ishmael and Esau, into what will rather quickly turn into a permanent anti-Israel group of nations. It is the alliance and gene pool mixing of Ishmael and Esau who form the vast bulk of Islam in the world today, and the entire bulk of Arabs. This report of such few words in verse 9, radically altered the course of history, and set in motion the circumstances that will bring about the anti-Christ and the end of history as we know it.

Jacob leaves Beer-sheba, and travels about 40 miles when he stops after 2 or 3 days for a night’s rest at an anonymous, very rocky place. It is here in the Torah that we find Jacob making a separate identity for himself, which allows him to become the 3rd and last Patriarch. It was necessary for him to leave his land, and his father, mother, and siblings for God to work with him.....just exactly as it was so with his grandfather, Abraham. There Jacob has a dream, a vision actually, and in it, he’s given a glimpse of the Heavenly spirit world. He sees angels, Malach Elohim, in Hebrew (so we know that these are heavenly messengers, angels) going back and forth from Heaven to earth; receiving their instructions from God in Heaven and then going forth to do His will on Earth.

And, there, God Himself gives Jacob the promise of the land, and of many descendants, and that these descendants will bless all the families of the earth. He also tells Jacob not to worry,

because God will be with him wherever he goes, and He WILL bring him back to this land, because He has promised the land to Jacob and his descendants forever and it will happen just as promised. By the way: in V13 where most Bibles say God or Lord, the original Hebrew is Yahweh.....God's personal name.....so this was God the Father speaking to Jacob, and Jacob was quite aware of that fact.

But, the entire tone of this episode is one of surprise; first because Jacob had no clue that God would come to him in such a manner, and second because Jacob was likely feeling pretty defeated right about now. This was no happy trip to Mesopotamia he was on; he was running for his life. And, he was leaving the scene of a disaster of his own making; he had deceived his father and his brother to obtain the blessing, and had to walk away empty handed just to survive.

This blessing upon Jacob represented the official transfer, if you would, of the covenant promise from Isaac to Jacob. Jacob had been blessed a few days earlier with similar blessing by his father, but only NOW does Yehoveh validate those blessings.

Notice also that since our Torah study beginning with Genesis 1, we have watched God transfer His place of residence from Heaven to Earth, the Garden of Eden, and back again. And, let's not too quickly pass this "ladder", or better perhaps "stairway" between Heaven and Earth: for this is another Biblical "type" of what is to come: you see, these two facts worked together. This stairway represented the connection between man and God that was currently broken. In the beginning, Man could come directly to God, because God was present WITH man. But rebellion and sin broke that connection, and God removed Himself BACK to Heaven. Yet, for those who trust, there is the ladder, the stairway, by which God sends His ministering Angels to do His work on Earth. Later, another connection between heaven and earth would come, the Wilderness Tabernacle. Still further into the future, the real ladder would come; the One who would reconnect God with Man, Yeshua. Think that's just allegory or a nice story? Listen to what Jesus Himself says in John 1:51: "**...truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man**".

Oh, what we miss by not thoroughly studying the Torah. For without FIRST seeing what was happening with Jacob, here, in Genesis, how in the world are we to FULLY understand this kind of odd statement made by Jesus 1800 years later, and recorded in what we call the NT? Yet, what an easy link to make once we know both. For Jacob, this was both current reality AND prophecy. For us, this is not only reality, it is prophecy **fulfilled**. Yeshua is our ladder, the ONLY ladder that re-connects us with God. It's upon Him that the Angels ascend and descend, today, in our time.

Jacob was truly awestruck by what he was shown. He called the place "house of God", or as we better know it Beth-el.....beth, house.....el, God. Or more correctly, el Beit-el, which means "the house of the god, El". Watch the use of the word El occurring before the exodus from Egypt. For, up to God giving Moses His personal name at Mt. Sinai, God was most known as El Shaddai.....with emphasis on the El part. In other words, before Mt. Sinai, no one knew God's personal name. So, he was known by a number of titles, most beginning with either IL

or EL. After Mt. Sinai, we'll see the use of the word El start to diminish, as it is slowly being replaced by the word Yehoveh.

There is another interesting happening here that we should take a look at: the anointing of the stone that Jacob had laid his head on to sleep during that vision. What is the meaning of this? Well, first off, we can see just how old this concept of anointing with oil is, for this is taking place around 1800 BC. As to exactly what meaning this held in Jacob's mind is not clear, but obviously it had something to do with his encounter with God. Probably it meant to establish a new covenant bond between Jacob and Yehoveh, one that involves a vow; because it was unknown in that time to use a rock as a memorial marker after anointing it with oil (and, we also won't find it for that purpose in the Bible). Anointing with oil was in rather widespread use in this era, and often marked the making of an agreement, not unlike the more extensive covenant of salt that involved animal sacrifice. Marking boundaries and creating memorial markers using a stone (they were called Standing Stones) was also common.....but they weren't anointed with oil.

Yet, I think it goes beyond that. Here we have Jacob resting on a rock, and then anointing it; I think it is possible that there is a link between this and Messiah, because Messiah means, in Hebrew, the anointed one. One must also inquire just why Yeshua is so often referred to as.....of all things.....a rock. Now certainly, allegorically, we can see the physical characteristics of solidness, and steadiness, of a rock and apply it to Yeshua. But, we must remember that the context of the New Testament is just as Hebrew as the context of the Old Testament. The Jewish people just didn't pick up any old metaphor that struck them; this was an ancient, traditional society that had an enormous history of well-established meanings in the events of the past, particularly as involved the Patriarchs. I seriously suspect that the calling of Messiah Yeshua the "rock" referred as far back as this event with Jacob, whereby he anointed the rock that he rested his head upon.

Jacob vowed to God that He would give all his allegiance to Him.....and that of all God gives him, he will return a tenth. Once again, we see the principle of the tithe so very early on in scripture.

### **READ GEN 29 all**

When Jacob left his family at Beer-Sheba, it was with spiritual agitation, a heavy heart, fear and trepidation, guilt.....

But, after his encounter with Yehoveh, something was changed in him. He was more certain, focused, calm....he was filled with that inner state that gentile Christians call "a peace without understanding". Hebrews would say he received HaShem's shalom.

We don't know how long it took for Jacob to reach Haran, about a 400-mile journey from the southern end of Canaan. But, when he arrived he immediately sought out his mother's family. Sometimes we get so focused on the Land of Canaan, the Promised Land that eventually would become Israel, that we forget the ancestral connection between the Promised Land and Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia was Abraham's birthplace; and a large part of his family

remained there. We find Abraham sending a servant back to what he certainly considered his roots, to find a suitable wife for his son, Isaac. And, now Jacob goes back to exactly the same place, for the same purpose. But, what a contrast between how Eliezar, Abraham's servant, came to Haran, versus how Jacob arrived. Eliezar arrived with an entourage of men, camels, and gifts to offer a potential bride for Isaac. Jacob arrived with the shirt on his back, and nothing else.

His search is rewarded at a water well, where 3 flocks of sheep were waiting to be watered; the shepherds point out Rachel, Jacob's first cousin, his mother's niece, daughter of Laban.

We learn a little bit about how water well etiquette worked in those days. Water wells were important places because much work was involved to create one, and much care was involved in maintaining it. Further, a well was owned by someone; either the local king, or in this case, a local family. And since the humans of the settlement the well was dug for needed water daily.....and the animals that were part of their lives also had to drink regularly as well.....the well became a place of meeting for the country folk, much the same as the city gates was the place of meeting for city folk.

And we find there was a large rock over the top of the well. This was normal and customary; first, it was to keep dust, small varmints, and even children from falling into the well and polluting it. But, it was also to keep people who wanted water from helping themselves. Rather, water had to be purchased from the wells owner. The shepherds with those flocks of sheep were waiting until evening, when the owner of the well would come, roll the rock off, and collect a fee from them; then, their animals could drink.

In our scene, Jacob wants the shepherds to water their animals and leave, so he can have a private conversation with the family members he has come to find. So, since Jacob is family, he feels justified in rolling the rock off the mouth of the well and allowing the sheep to drink.....so that the Shepherds will go.

Jacob introduces himself to Rachel, and as is customary, kisses this family member. Kissing in this era did not necessarily denote sexuality or affection. Kissing was a greeting, generally the equivalent of a handshake, today, although it was not usually done between strangers. Then Jacob weeps with joy knowing his journey is over, and he has likely even met his future wife. It was a good day. We're told Rachel is a shepherdess; this is a somewhat unusual occupation for a woman in this area of the world; Bedouin women of the Sinai and Arabian Peninsulas, hundreds of miles to the south, often tended flocks and herds..... but Mesopotamian women and eventually Israeli women did not.

Laban, Rachel's father, hears of Jacob's arrival and comes to meet him. Here is a good chance for us to better understand something that even scholars will identify as "contradictions" in the Bible. In verse 5, when Jacob inquires of his mother's family, he asks some shepherds if they know "Laban, the son of Nahor". Now, in earlier chapters of Genesis, we're told that Laban is the son of B'tu'el, not Nahor. So, what gives? Well, Nahor is actually Laban's grandfather. And, what is being described here is which CLAN Laban belongs to.....the clan of Nahor. Often when we get more formal identities of people in the Bible, it will say "of

the tribe of so and so, and the son of X". "Son of....' doesn't necessarily actually mean a father and son biological relationship as we think of it. Sometimes it DOES mean father and son, but just as often it is attaching a person with his clan, as it is here. Knowing which is which is in the context, and the expectation of the author that the reader knows full well that Nahor is Abraham's brother, and Laban is his grandson. So, these supposed contradictions of names are not contradictions at all; it was just the normal way of speaking and explaining one's identity in that era.

Laban, of course, offers his hospitality to his nephew. A month passes and the self-serving Laban broaches the question to Jacob: "what shall be your wages". This is the signal that it is understood that Jacob is a semi-permanent visitor. Of course Laban sees that Jacob would be a valuable addition to his family, as he is a gifted shepherd and a hard worker. He also likely noticed that Jacob was quite taken with the beautiful Rachel. Jacob offers 7 years of his labor to Laban in return for her hand. By the way, this was NOT the custom of those times for a father to in essence sell his daughter to a man in exchange for servitude. And, a little later we find that Laban's two daughters reveal the shame they felt for being, quite literally sold for a price when they say in Genesis 31:14,15, "Are we not counted as strangers? For he (Laban, their father) has sold us".

Well the 7 years pass, and Jacob goes to Laban to extract his "wages", which is none other than Rachel. Then, Jacob gets a taste of just how devastating deceit and betrayal can be: after the wedding ceremony, Laban switches out Rachel for Leah, his older and as yet unmarried daughter. No doubt, Jacob instantly thought back to that day he disguised himself as his brother and fooled his father; he must have assumed that what he was now experiencing was simply God's payback for the dirty dealing he had perpetrated upon his father, Isaac, and his brother Esau several years earlier. In fact, the word DECEIVE is played up in this story of Jacob acquiring a bride, because it is so organically connected to the central theme of DECEIVE in the story of Jacob stealing the blessing from Esau.

So, in exchange for another 7 years of bond-servitude to Laban, Jacob also gets Rachel, who he marries right away after the customary 7-day wedding ceremony between he and his substitute-bride, Leah. This elderly man, 80 years old, suddenly finds himself in the position of trying to please not ONE but TWO wives.

Another dark side of Jacob is now revealed to us, in that he unfairly loved, and openly favored, Rachel more than Leah. The reason is suggested to us in V17, when it says that while Leah's "eyes were weak"; since beauty is often related to the appearance of ones eyes.....particularly among Middle Eastern cultures.... strong eyes or weak eyes were idioms that indicated either beauty or plainness. So, what we're being told is that Rachel was considered to be beautiful while Leah was not; and it was apparently primarily on the basis of physical beauty that Jacob made his choice. There is NO reference at all to Jacob having consulted God on his choice of a wife. And, there is every reason to suspect that Leah should have been his choice over Rachel, as we'll see shortly. What irony: Esau, the firstborn, handsome and macho, was passed over by God for Jacob, quiet and plain. Rachel, beautiful and impetuous, was passed over by God for Leah, quiet and plain. Why do I say Rachel was passed over? Let's see what happens next.

Almost immediately, Leah starts giving Jacob children. Rachel cannot seem to get pregnant. First, Leah conceives Rueben.....the firstborn of Jacob. Put this little fact onto paper, or into your memory, because in a few weeks, we're going to come back to this important detail. She goes on to give Jacob 3 more sons: Simeon, Levi, and Judah. In naming these children, Leah gives God all the praise and glory: Rueben means "look, a son", because she felt God had seen that she was treated as a 2nd class citizen by Jacob, who fawned only over Rachel. Simeon means "hearing", because God heard her prayers for another son. Levi means "joined" because she hoped now that she had given Jacob yet another son, Jacob would love her more. And, Judah means "praise", because she praised God for blessing her with 4 healthy sons.

In offering her praise to God for these children, Leah was showing her character. And, God was blessing her for it. Not only did she give birth to Jacob's firstborn, but look at two of the others: Levi and Judah. Leah, the plain one, was honored with carrying and giving birth to the Israelite line of priests and servants to God.....the Levites; and bringing Judah into this world, from whom the line of promise would be fulfilled in Jesus. For Yeshua was a Judah-ite.....we call the descendants of Judah, Jews.

In a sad ending to this chapter, we are told Leah suddenly lost her ability to have children.