



IN THE
BEGINNING
SCRIPTURE SHARED
AN 8-WEEK STUDY OF GENESIS

Week 6: Jacob

Week 6, Day 1 - Genesis 29:1-30 (Jacob marries Leah and Rachel)

¹ Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east: ² As he looked, he saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying there beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, ³ and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.

⁴ Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." ⁵ He said to them, "Do you know Laban son of Nahor?" They said, "We do." ⁶ He said to them, "Is it well with him?" "Yes," they replied, "and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with the sheep." ⁷ He said, "Look, it is still broad daylight; it is not time for the animals to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them." ⁸ 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."

⁹ While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. ¹⁰ Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban, and the sheep of his mother's brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of his mother's brother Laban. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud. ¹² 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.

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

¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹ Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." 22 So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. 23 But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. 24 (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) 25 When morning came, 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?" 26 Laban said, "This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. 27 Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." 28 Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. 29 (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) 30 So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban for another seven years.

Understanding the Passage:

The deceiver has become the deceived. Jacob's question to Laban the morning after the wedding to Leah ("Why have you deceived me?") echoes what his own father said about him after he stole his brother's blessing: "Your brother came deceitfully." (Genesis 27:35) Jacob wanted the younger to have priority over the elder, but he should, from his own experience, know that is not how families worked in his time.

Jacob's sin follows him. Though he loves Rachel (as proven by his ability to super-humanly roll away a stone that multiple shepherds could not do together), they will struggle to have children together. In the verses after today's passage, the scripture tells us that Leah will bear six of his twelve sons. In addition to those six boys, Rachel will watch her maidservant and Leah's maidservant each bear two sons for Jacob before she finally gives birth to her own two sons -- the last ones, Joseph and Benjamin. Jacob's household is an unhappy one, and he has himself to blame.

Leah also suffered. She was desperate for Jacob's love, which led to an obsession with having children (verse 32: "Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, '...now my husband will love me.'"). Her success in this obsession didn't repair her heart or lead Jacob to love her more than her sister. In our lives, there are things that are broken and meant to be fixed only by the redemption of God that we instead try to fix ourselves. Though Jacob never saw her misery, God did. Leah responded to her first two births by saying, "God has seen my misery" and "the Lord heard that I was unloved." But her focus is still on receiving Jacob's love rather than resting in God's love. It is not until the birth of her fourth son that she says, "Now I will praise the Lord" and she stopped having children (for a time). She turned away from her obsession with Jacob and redirected her focus on God.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Read Galatians 6:7-8. How does this relate to Jacob?
2. Is Jacob worthy of the continuation of the covenant? If not, does it matter?
3. Leah is compared negatively to Rachel. We've all been the victims of that kind of comparison at some point. How did you feel? Are there people in your own life that you need to stop comparing?

Week 6, Day 2 - Genesis 31:1-6, 14-18, 25-35, 43-55 (Jacob flees from Laban, they agree to separate)

¹ Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's; he has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father." ² And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him as favorably as he did before. ³ Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you." ⁴ So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was, ⁵ and said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me as favorably as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. ⁶ You know that I have served your father with all my strength; ⁷ yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me.

¹⁴ Then Rachel and Leah answered him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? ¹⁵ Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us. ¹⁶ All the property that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you."

¹⁷ So Jacob arose, and set his children and his wives on camels; ¹⁸ and he drove away all his livestock, all the property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

²⁵ Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsfolk camped in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁶ Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You have deceived me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword. ²⁷ Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and not tell me? I would have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre. ²⁸ And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? What you have done is foolish. ²⁹ It is in my power to do you harm; but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Take heed that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.' ³⁰ Even though you had to go because you longed greatly for your father's house, why did you steal my gods?" ³¹ Jacob answered Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. ³² But anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsfolk, point out what I have that is yours, and take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

³³ So Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two maids, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah's tent, and entered Rachel's. ³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. Laban felt all about in the tent, but did not find them. ³⁵ And 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.

⁴³ 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 today about these daughters of mine, or about their children whom they have borne? ⁴⁴ Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me." ⁴⁵ So Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar. ⁴⁶ And Jacob said to his kinsfolk, "Gather stones," and they took stones, and made a heap; and they ate there by the heap. ⁴⁷ Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸ Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." Therefore he called it Galeed, ⁴⁹ and the pillar Mizpah, for he said, "The Lord watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other. ⁵⁰ If you ill-treat my daughters,

or if you take wives in addition to my daughters, though no one else is with us, remember that God is witness between you and me.”

⁵¹ Then Laban said to Jacob, “See this heap and see the pillar, which I have set between you and me. ⁵² This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. ⁵³ May 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, ⁵⁴ and Jacob offered a sacrifice on the height and called his kinsfolk to eat bread; and they ate bread and tarried all night in the hill country.

⁵⁵ Early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them; then he departed and returned home.

Understanding the Passage:

This is the third time we’ve seen the issue of money and possessions causing members of Abraham’s family to have to part ways (the first was Abraham and Lot, the second was Jacob and Esau). Money causes division among people, especially family. Laban’s sons believe that Jacob has prospered at their expense. When Jacob hears of their grumbling, he is afraid of what will happen to him and his household.

When Jacob departs from Laban, he heads to the land of his father: Canaan. Remember that this is the land that God promised to Abraham, the place where his descendants would number like the stars and the world would be blessed through them. It is fitting that Jacob makes his way back to this place.

Though Laban is clearly a polytheist (demonstrated by his ownership of the household idols that Rachel stole), the words of the God of Jacob come through clearly to him. He is warned not to hurt Jacob and though we imagine he would like to kill him for taking his daughters and livestock, Laban obeys. This demonstrates to us the power of God even among people who do not know or have a relationship with God. When God speaks, it is undeniable.

Notice that it is Laban that pushes for a treaty to settle the dispute. Jacob has God on his side and feels no motivation to establish a treaty. Laban must have recognized how vulnerable he was without Jacob’s God and wanted to protect himself and what was left of his household.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Why were Rachel and Leah agreeable to leaving their father? Do you think this is related to the way he gave them away in marriage?
2. Do you wish that God still spoke to us today the way that God spoke to Jacob and Laban?
3. Do you think Laban followed Jacob because he took his daughters or his household gods? How does this show the difference in priorities between Laban and Jacob?

Week 6, Day 3 - Genesis 32:22-32 (Jacob wrestles with God, is renamed)

22 The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had. 24 Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. 26 Then he said, "Let me go, for the day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go, unless you bless me." 27 So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." 28 Then the man said, "You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed." 29 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. 30 So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved." 31 The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the hip socket, because he struck Jacob on the hip socket at the thigh muscle.

Understanding the Passage:

Jacob is on the way to meet his long-estranged brother when he has this encounter with God. Though it's his first physical encounter with God, it is not the first time that God has wrestled with Jacob. Throughout Jacob's whole life, God has metaphorically wrestled with him to get him to become the man that God wants him to be.

In this encounter, we see that God is not fully victorious. Jacob is determined to keep fighting with God, never letting go. He does not want to yield or submit to God. God stays in this struggle all night because God deeply wants Jacob to change. But God does not fully overpower him, which God could do, because God does not force us to change against our will.

However, Jacob is changed -- to an extent -- through this encounter. He is strengthened so that he can go forth to meet and reconcile with Esau. Without the blessing of God, he wouldn't be able to deal with Esau. The New Interpreter's Bible commentary says, "To go through it with God before we go through it with others provides resources of strength and blessing for whatever lies in the wings of life." To encounter his brother, Jacob needed more than he could scrounge up on his own strength. He needed God. In his sermon, *The Magnificent Defeat*, Frederick Buechner writes, "Power, success, happiness, as the world knows them, are his who will fight for them hard enough; but peace, love, joy, are only from God."

Jacob is also changed by the limp that results from God striking Jacob at his hip socket. Even though he prevails against God in the wrestling, Jacob bears the scar from that encounter for the rest of his days as a reminder of what it means to struggle against the almighty. For us, there are times in which we continue to push back against God or run away from God, and though we might be successful at this separation in the short term, there are always consequences of our struggling. Instead of choosing resentment over those consequences, see if you can try to reframe the result in your mind so that you are reminded that it is better to draw near and align ourselves with God than to fight against God.

Separately, note that God asks Jacob to let God go before daybreak. This is not to protect God, but to protect Jacob. In Exodus 33:20, God tells Moses that if anyone were to see God's face, they would die. As always, God's concern is for Jacob's (and our) well-being.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. Have you ever found yourself wrestling with God? What was that experience like?
2. In what ways do you think God is trying to change you through your struggle?
3. What is the significance of Jacob's new name?

Week 6, Day 4 - Genesis 33:1-11 (Jacob and Esau are reconciled)

¹ Now Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two maids. ² He put the maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. ³ He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.

⁴ But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ⁵ When Esau looked up and saw the women and children, he said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob said, "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." ⁶ Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down; ⁷ Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. ⁸ Esau said, "What do you mean by all this company that I met?" Jacob answered, "To find favor with my lord." ⁹ But Esau said, "I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself." ¹⁰ Jacob said, "No, please; if I find favor with you, then accept my present from my hand; for truly to see your face is like seeing the face of God—since you have received me with such favor. ¹¹ Please accept my gift that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have everything I want." So he urged him, and he took it.

Understanding the Passage:

Jacob's midnight encounter with God changed him in more ways than one. Before, Jacob was fearful, made pleas with God to protect him from Esau (can you believe after everything else he'd been through, Jacob still didn't trust God to protect him?), and sent gifts ahead to pacify his brother. After the wrestling match, he courageously moved from the back of the pack (he was trailing his servants and herds) to the front where he met Esau face-to-face.

What can we take from this story? The first lesson is that all reconciliation begins with God. Without the encounter at Jabbok, Jacob would not have been able to properly reconcile with his brother. Being reminded of God's blessing - that he has a special relationship with God - gave Jacob the strength to face his worst fear.

But it is not enough to just be reconciled to God - we have to extend ourselves in humility, mercy, and love to those whom we've hurt. We can never achieve full reconciliation with God while we are still estranged from our brothers and sisters. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that if we have a grudge against another person, we need to work it out before we can present ourselves to God.

To reconcile himself to Esau, Jacob begs Esau to accept the gift of livestock that he brought to him (verse 11). The Hebrew word for gift (*birkāṭî*) is the same as blessing -- the thing

which Jacob had stolen from Esau many years earlier. He is deliberately trying to show Esau that he wants to share his blessing with him. Remember that it is through Abraham's descendants that others are to be blessed. Jacob shows us how the blessed can be a blessing to others.

Though Jacob did not get to see God's face during his nighttime wrestling match, he tells Esau that seeing his face is like seeing the face of God (verse 10). When Esau treats him with kindness and mercy, Jacob is able to finally see the divine spark that exists in his brother. He no longer sees Esau as a rival, but as a vessel of grace and forgiveness, which is exactly how he's experienced God throughout his life. Seeing God in others allows us to build bridges where there were none before.

The Midrash Tanhuma (one of the ancient Jewish rabbinical commentaries) tells this story:

Two donkey drivers were walking by the way and they hated each other.

One of their donkeys sat down.

The second driver saw it, but kept going.

Then, after having passed, this second driver thought:

It is written in the Torah,

"If you see the ass of one who hates you lying under its burden, you shall surely lift it up."

Immediately the second driver returned and helped the first to raise the donkey.

The first driver then began to think,

"So-and-so is thus my friend, and I did not even know it."

Both entered an inn and ate and drank together.

What happened here? The kindness that was extended from one of the donkey drivers to the other (motivated by the instruction of God to care for enemies) creates a bridge between the two that leads to reconciliation. We, too, can choose to overcome our pride and extend ourselves in humility to those with whom we are estranged -- but only by the help of God.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. How does the wrestling match prepare Jacob to meet Esau?
2. Is there someone in whom you have "seen the face of God"? Take a few minutes to write about that encounter and how it changed you.
3. With whom do you need to reconcile? Spend some time in prayer asking God to give you the courage you need to face that person and start the process of reconciliation.

Week 6, Day 5 - Genesis 35:1-4, 16-20 (Jacob renews covenant with God, again)

¹ God said to Jacob, "Go to the town of Bethel. That is where I appeared to you when you were running away from your brother Esau. Live there and make an altar to honor me as El, the God who appeared to you." ² So Jacob told his family and all the other people with him, "Destroy all these foreign gods that you have. Make yourselves pure. Put on clean clothes. ³ We will leave here and go to Bethel. There I will build an altar to the God who has always helped me during times of trouble. He has been with me wherever I have gone." ⁴ So the people gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had, and they gave him all the rings they were wearing in their ears. He buried everything under an oak tree near the town called Shechem.

16 Jacob and his group left Bethel. Before they came to Ephrath, Rachel began giving birth to her baby. 17 She was having a lot of trouble with this birth. She was in great pain. When her nurse saw this, she said, "Don't be afraid, Rachel. You are giving birth to another son." 18 Rachel died while giving birth to the son. Before dying, she named the boy Benoni. But Jacob called him Benjamin. 19 Rachel was buried on the road to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). 20 Jacob put a special rock on Rachel's grave to honor her. That special rock is still there today.

Understanding the Passage:

Because Abraham's covenant with God is intended to last for generations after it is established, it is binding on the descendants and is renewed with the descendants. But the descendants are sometimes far enough removed from the original covenant that they do not take it as seriously.

We first see Jacob make a covenant with God (Genesis 28:20-22) after Jacob ran away from home. He was sleeping in the wilderness and dreamed of a ladder that reached up to heaven. But he goes on to manipulate Laban's flocks and allow idol worship in his family. Why didn't that covenant work?

It's because it wasn't really a renewal of the Abrahamic covenant. Jacob worked in a backdoor so that he could break the covenant. He says to God, "if you take care of me I will give you 10% of my possessions and income." It wasn't about pledging loyalty to God no matter what, it was about pledging loyalty to God IF God would be with him and provide for him all of his needs.

Did God do that? Yes. But Jacob forgot about God's provision and so he forgot about the "covenant." This is relatable for modern Biblical readers because everyone can recall a time when they made a vow when things weren't going well and then forgotten about it when things start to go their way again. It's easy to forget how hopeless you were when you have a reason to hope again. For Jacob, his first "covenant" with God came when he was running from his brother, had no protection, and was worried about where he would land. But over the course of time, he marries two women, has many children, amasses a large herd of animals, and is a successful shepherd. He forgot the goodness of God because he was taking his blessings for granted.

By the time Jacob gets to Bethel, he knows God has been with him, God has fulfilled God's promise, and Jacob is ready to put away idols. He remembers that God upheld God's end of the bargain. He is ready to be in a relationship with God that isn't dependent on what happens in his life.

Sadly, right after Jacob renews the Abrahamic covenant, his wife Rachel dies. Being in covenant with God doesn't mean that all shall be well always, but that God is with us always.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. When have you looked back and seen that God was present in your life, upholding the covenant, even when you ignored God or broke the covenant?
2. Is it easier for you to see God's faithful presence when you look back at your life rather than in the current moment? If so, what are some things you can do to remind yourself of God's faithfulness at all times?

Video Questions:

1. Have you ever felt like the “not chosen” one? How did it make you behave?
2. How do you think Jacob felt being on the other end of deception?
3. Have you ever had someone hold up a mirror to your behavior or attitude that made you realize you were guilty of a sin that you didn’t realize you were even committing?
4. Do you think God could have overpowered Jacob and chose not to or was God not able to?
5. What is something you’re wrestling with God about right now? What are you trying to control?
6. Have you ever submitted to God after wrestling for a while? What was the end result?
7. At the end of this week, we see Jacob renewing – for real this time – the covenant of his grandfather and father with God. Why do you think it took him so long?
8. David describes Jacob’s faith journey. How was Jacob shaped by all of those life events?

Prayer requests and other notes.