The Patriarchs from the book of Genesis Part 24 – March 10, 2024

With input from https://www.bibleref.com/Genesis29; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bethel\_(god);

https://2or3.co/2013/03/25/bethel-bethlehem-and-bethesda/

Last time we ended with Jacob’s dream, commonly called Jacob’s ladder, which ended with a promise from God and Jacob’s response to the experience:

**Genesis 28:15-17**

*15 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 what I have promised you.” 16 Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “The Lord is certainly in this place, and I did not know it!” 17 And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!”*

We also recognized that this promise of God is not tied to any good deeds on Jacob’s part, its simply God’s good pleasure that He makes and keeps this promise. Which is a reflection on His promise of redemption to us *“not of works, so that no one may boast”*

Remember that Jacob is on his journey required by his father Isaac at the beginning of this chapter: **Genesis 28:2** *Arise, go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father; and from there take to yourself a wife from the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother.*

After the dream and Jacob’s response we start with the next day in his journey:

**Genesis 28:18** *So Jacob got up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had placed as a support for his head, and set it up as a memorial stone, and poured oil on its top.*

Now Jacob commemorates the holiness of this place. He takes the stone where his head rested during his dream and sets it up as a pillar. This might mean that Jacob took what was once a long, flat-laying stone and stood it upright on end. He pours oil on the top of the stone as part of this ceremony. This stone should not be confused with an altar. Jacob's marker here is a post or standing stone, an indication of this holy place which Jacob will formally name in the next verse.

*19 Then he named that place Bethel; but previously the name of the city had been Luz.*

Bethel means “House of God” in Hebrew

God will mention the name of this place again, when Jacob returns in 20 years (20 years - Chapter 31 verse 41) back to Canaan in **Genesis 31:13** *“I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a memorial stone, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.’”*

Bethel was the site of Abraham’s altar in Canaan (Gen 12:8, 13:3-4), the place where Abraham called on the Lord, and worshipped.

Later God appeared and spoke to Jacob at Bethel, inducting him into the Abrahamic Covenant and giving Jacob a new name, Israel. Consequently, Jacob built an altar and offered sacrifices (Gen 35:6-15) at Bethel.

Later when the kingdom of Israel divided in two, Bethel became the site of an apostate temple (1 Kings 12:21-33)

**Back to Genesis 28:20-21** *Jacob also made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and give me food to eat and garments to wear, 21 and I return to my father’s house in safety, then the Lord will be my God.*

Jacob mentions God being with him and keeping him safe. He also adds two things God did not say explicitly: providing for him bread and clothing.

Jacob is responding to God’s promise. If the Lord will really be with him, and keep me safe, and provide food and clothing, and, bring him back to his father's household in peace, then the Lord will be his God.

When we think of Jacob's situation, his emphasis on these things makes sense. Jacob was literally running away from his home to spare his life from his brother's fury (Genesis 27:41). He is apparently alone in the wilderness, traveling to find a wife among his mother's relatives (Genesis 28:1–2). Before this visit from the Lord, his future was murky and his path was dangerous. Now, because of God, Jacob has hope that he will be provided for, kept safe, and be able to return home.

It is interesting to note that God has already promised Jacob that He will be with him. The Lord has already made Jacob His man. Jacob doesn't declare the Lord to be his God in hopes that the Lord will take care of him. Jacob makes that declaration in response to God's promises and care. His worship and commitment follows God's gifts of grace, just as our does (**Ephesians 2:8–10** *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

*22 And this stone, which I have set up as a memorial stone, will be God’s house, and of everything that You give me I will assuredly give a tenth to You.”*

Previously, Jacob's grandfather Abraham gave to God's priest Melchizedek such a tithe (Genesis 14:20). Jacob volunteers to worship the Lord in this financial way as well. Giving to God specific tithes and offerings was one of the ways Israel would later demonstrate their obedience to and dependence on the Lord.

**Genesis Chapter 29:1** *Then Jacob set out on his journey, and went to the land of the people of the east.*

Jacob set out once again for Haran. The text literally reads that Jacob "picked up his feet." It's like the meeting with God had filled him with new confidence about his purpose and future. In time, he came to the land of the people of the east, or the eastern lands. He had left behind the land of Canaan. He was closer to reaching his destination than he realized.

2*He looked, and saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, because they watered the flocks from that well. Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large. 3 When all the flocks were gathered there, they would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep. Then they would put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.*

As he nears the area, he comes to a well in a field. Wells were places of great significance in this region where water was life. Wells were also often associated with God's blessing. Jacob's ancestor Abraham had gone through considerable trouble over wells during his time in Canaan (Genesis 21:25). Jacob's father, Isaac, as well, had experienced disputes over wells and access to water (Genesis 26:18–22).

Three flocks of sheep and their shepherds are gathered near the well, which is covered with a large stone. The shepherds are waiting for all the sheep to arrive, so they can be watered all at once.

This stone would have served to keep dirt and dust from collecting in the well. It would also have prevented wild animals from using it as a water source. In order to be of any use, the stone covering the mouth of the well would have been both large and difficult to move.

*4 Jacob said to them, “My brothers, where are you from?” And they said, “We are from Haran.” 5 So he said to them, “Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?” And they said, “We know him.” 6 And he said to them, “Is it well with him?” And they said, “It is well, and here is his daughter Rachel coming with the sheep.”*

Is Jacob beginning to sense that God is truly with him "on the way," leading him where he should go? Jacob's quest was to find this very family, in order to seek out a wife (Genesis 28:1–2). Just as God led the servant of Abraham directly to a well, in order to find a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24:12–16), God has led Jacob to the right place at the right time. This is also an overriding clarity to the Jewish reader that God is in control of the lineage of the Messiah and it is obvious, so much that when Matthew declares the genealogy as the opening in his first chapter it presents God’s undeniable divine sovereignty:

*This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:*

*2 Abraham was the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers,* … and so on.

**Genesis 29:7-9:** *Then he said, “Look, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them.” 8 But they said, “We cannot, until all the flocks are gathered, and they roll the stone from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep.”*

Jacob seems to have taken some borrowed ownership of the situation around the well. He ordered the shepherds gathered with their flocks to water the sheep and get back to the pasture. This seems like a brash statement from a stranger, so perhaps the other men were being rude to Jacob. Or, he's simply trying to assert himself in an effort to win over Rachel.

Here, the shepherds respond that Jacob's plan is not how they do things. They wait until all of the sheep have arrived, all of the flocks, then they roll away the well's heavy stone covering and water all of the flocks at once. It's not clear exactly why they do it this way. Some commentators suggest, however, that the first flocks to arrive would usually be the first to be watered. Laban won't follow that practice in the following verses.

*9 While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a shepherdess.*

This story represents an interesting parallel to the experiences of Jacob's own mother, Rebekah. A servant sent by Abraham, Jacob's grandfather, was sent to find a wife for Isaac, Jacob's father (Genesis 24:2–4). That man located Rebekah by using a test performed at a well in this same region (Genesis 24:13–14).

*10 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 mouth of the well, and watered the flock of his mother’s brother Laban.*

The other shepherds have just told Jacob that they wait for all the flocks to arrive before watering the sheep, likely in order of arrival. Jacob ignores all of that and rolls the heavy stone away from the mouth of the well, apparently all by himself. He immediately waters Laban's flock of sheep without asking or being asked.

Suddenly, Jacob is a take-charge kind of guy. In the following verses, he will express even more openly his joy at finding Rachel and, by extension, Laban.

*11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and raised his voice and wept. 12 Jacob told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and that he was Rebekah’s son, and she ran and told her father.*

Now he kisses his cousin and starts crying loudly! Jacob seems to have been overcome with joy that he had so quickly found his family upon arriving in the region, as well as making contact with a woman who could be a potential wife. Isaac had sent him to marry one of Laban's daughters, after all (Genesis 28:1–2).

To kiss a relative would not necessarily have been seen as a romantic gesture in this era. It may, however, have seemed strange to do without first identifying oneself as a relative, especially when bursting into tears immediately afterwards. We would assume Rachel was confused.

*13 So when 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. Then he told Laban all these things. 14 And Laban said to him, “You certainly are my bone and my flesh.” And he stayed with him a month.*

Many years earlier, Laban had heard about the arrival of the servant of a relative and had run out of the city to greet him (Genesis 24:28–29). That time it was Abraham's servant who came to offer great wealth as part of his request to take Rebekah away and marry her to Isaac (Genesis 24:34–38).

Perhaps when Laban heard from Rachel that Rebekah's son had arrived, he expected to find a similar opportunity for wealth. Or perhaps he was just excited to meet his nephew. As the events of this chapter will reveal, it is often difficult to know whether Laban is driven by greed or by love. I would say he was quirky, or jumped to irrational conclusions quickly, like those men and women in Washington.

*15 Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?”*

Jacob had apparently arrived at Laban's house without a clear exit strategy.

Now we learn Jacob had apparently started to work for Laban without an explicit arrangement for payment, a mark of good character. Laban realized that arrangement shouldn't continue indefinitely, even though Jacob was a relative. The following verses will reveal that Jacob was a good worker. It's possible Laban didn't want to lose him.

To that end, he approached Jacob to ask what wages he would want to continue to work for him. By now, Jacob had probably begun to think about returning home. Laban's offer would require him to stay longer with his uncle. In the end, what started as a stay of one month (Genesis 29:14) will turn into 20 years (Genesis 31:41)!

*16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.*

*17 And Leah’s eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in figure and appearance.*

Before telling us Jacob's response, the story backs up to add some characters to the plot. Laban had two daughters. Leah is the older of the two. The text has already introduced Rachel, the younger sister and a shepherdess (Genesis 29:6–9). Since Isaac had sent Jacob to marry one of Laban's daughters (Genesis 28:1–2), Jacob must have been considering these two since arriving at Laban's household.

We're told very little about the women, other than a brief idea of their physical appearance. Unfortunately for Leah, she is not as attractive as her younger sister, nor will she be loved by Jacob.

As the rest of the chapter will reveal, these differences between Leah and Rachel—and Jacob's response to them—will drive the events of his life for many years to come.

*18 Now 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 to give her to another man; stay with me.” 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him like only a few days because of his love for her.*

Why would Jacob make such an offer, beyond being deeply in love with Rachel? Perhaps he lacked any access to his father's great wealth. Though he had been sent by his father, Jacob was also fleeing his angry brother (Genesis 27:41), and apparently left alone and without much in the way of supplies (Genesis 28:11). It was customary for a groom or groom's family to pay a "bride price" to the family of the woman he wished to marry. If Jacob was without funds, he may have thought it necessary to make such an offer of longtime service.

Still, even at the lowest wage for a common worker during this time, seven years of free labor would apparently far exceed any normal payment for a bride price. Perhaps Jacob imagined that during that time he, as a nephew, would grow to inherit some of Laban's wealth. Or perhaps he just enjoyed the work and the surroundings and didn't mind the thought of spending the next seven years there. It's hard to know for sure.

*21 Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may have relations with her.” 22 So Laban gathered all the people of the place and held a feast. 23 Now in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to him; and Jacob had relations with her. 24 Laban also gave his female slave Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a slave.*

Laban's intentions are clearly not good. Jacob, the cheater (Genesis 25:29–34; 27:33–36), is working towards a taste of his own medicine.

Jacob's words read like a demand. It's possible there had already been tension between Jacob and Laban and that Jacob felt the need to be strong with Laban to bring their deal to a close. Now the seven years was over, and Jacob asked Laban to make good on his end of the deal: Give me your daughter for my wife. More specifically: Give me my wife so that I may consummate the arranged marriage, indicating that Jacob and Rachel had remained chaste during those seven years.

This only further highlights the nature of Laban's upcoming deception. Seven years have passed; this is plenty of time to explain customs or iron out small details. And yet, when the wedding night is over, Jacob will be stunned to find that he's been tricked (Genesis 29:25). Laban's excuse, coming so long after the deal was made, will only confirm that his deceit was intentional (Genesis 29:27).

*25 So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, “What is this that you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?”*

Laban's betrayal of Jacob and, arguably, of his own daughter Rachel, takes place in this verse. Jacob had offered to work for seven years, free of wages, in order to marry Rachel (Genesis 29:18–19). When the appointed time came, however, Laban finds a way to substitute Leah, the older daughter, instead!

For the modern reader, it's difficult to understand exactly how Jacob could have missed this key detail on his wedding night. Clearly, this supports the idea that he and Rachel had not been intimate before this point (Genesis 29:21). Somehow, Laban switched Rachel for Leah in Jacob's chambers before they had consummated their marriage. The fact that Jacob slept with Leah without realizing she was not Rachel may be explained by wedding customs that would have involved the veiling of the bride. Likewise, cultural attitudes towards modesty might have meant her identity was unclear during the night. Also, a celebration involving wine can sometimes lead to a lack of judgment.

All of these are speculation, however. All we know for sure is that Laban successfully tricks Jacob into consummating—and therefore, by that culture's customs, marrying—someone other than the woman he had worked seven years for. As painful as this would have been to Jacob, his own past was one of deception and trickery (Genesis 27:33–41). Like it or not, Jacob is now learning what it feels like to be cheated.

Laban's deception seems outrageous, unfair, and even monstrous. And it is. However, it's hard not to see echoes of Jacob's own deception of his dying, blind father Isaac (Genesis 27:19). Isaac and Esau together experienced a similar terrible moment of shock when they realized Jacob had impersonated Esau and had stolen the family blessing (Genesis 27:30–36).

Scripture never explicitly labels this an act of retribution from God for Jacob's deception. It could be argued the parallel is so obvious that it doesn't need to be stated, but the fact is the Bible does not directly say this is a punishment. Perhaps, though, Jacob began to learn empathy for those he had harmed. One would hope this would inspire him not to follow in the footsteps of his mother Rebekah and his uncle Laban.

Later in his life, both Jacob's prior deception and this moment will be reflected in an encounter with God. There, Jacob will be asked to state his name, in order to be blessed (Genesis 32:24–28).