

BIBLE STUDY

# **ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB**

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Learning from Their Lives

L P DAVIS

The Lessons for our lives that are found in the accounts of how God used Abraham, Isaac and Jacob can give us insight as to how God guides us in the events of daily living.

## ABRAHAM, ISAAC, AND JACOB

### Introduction:

God is frequently referred to as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” In Abraham we see the nature of “God the Father”. In Isaac we see the “nature of God the Son”. In Jacob we see the impact of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit transforming a life of trickery and deceit into a person who had power with God.

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## Chapter 1 THE CALL AND RESPONSE OF ABRAHAM

Have you ever heard it said “It doesn’t make any difference what you believe as long as you believe in something?” Like so many saying that are around – there may be some partial truth in such a claim.

"It doesn't make any difference in what you believe, unless what you believe makes a difference in the way you think, in what you say and in what you do." There is a lot of truth in that idea. You could believe in communism and if it did not affect anything about you, then what difference does it make?. You can believe in Jesus Christ and if it does not affect anything about you, then what difference does it make?

This statement may capture very well the idea James expressed in his letter to the early Church in that he said "faith without works is dead." There are many people who "believe in God" but do not obey God or even try to obey His word. Does the "fact" that they believe in God really matter? Not much!

The prime example of men of faith in the Bible is Abraham. Paul tells us Abraham believed God and God counted that as righteousness. James asks the question, "How do we know Abraham had faith?" The answer is that he obeyed or carried out what God told him to do, though it did not make sense to him.

Abraham is also a good example of the fact that it is God Who chooses or initiates the relationships He has with people. It is the same way today in our personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. God initiated the action. Paul tells us "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly." Abraham had a *little* faith that grew to be a *great* faith and it is the same way with us. God grants to each one of us a “measure of faith.” If we do not exercise and act on the “measure of faith” however meager it may be, we will never grow in faith or faithfulness.

God's redemptive purpose started being revealed more clearly with Abraham who is described as "the father of all them that believe." Before Abraham, there were good men (Abel, Enoch, Noah) worshiped God. Abraham did not worship God, he and his family worshiped idols. It appears that Terah was the first in the line of Patriarchs (the first born of the descendants of Noah through the line of Shem) that strayed away from worshiping God. It was God Who took the initiative since Abraham was not especially different from his neighbors. We see at work here the sovereignty and grace of God. It is the same way in God's dealings with us.

Abraham is also a good example of God’s leadership and provision. From Joshua’s comments in 24:3 we see that after God called Abram, He started working in Abram’s life to complete the work He had begun in him.

It took a step of faith on Abram’s part. The action resulted in Abram “crossing over” from one side of the river to the other. In fact, the word *Hebrew* literally means “one who crossed over.” This is a picture of saving faith and repentance in action.

Between Adam and Abraham, God worked with men as individuals and dealt with their "sins." Starting with Abraham, God put into motion a way of dealing with the question of "sin." God's plan was to work on the question of the consequences of the Fall – the old sin nature.

If we check the generations of Noah’s son Shem and his descendants (Gen 11:11-26), we can place the call of Abram in time relative to the Flood and the Tower of Babel. Most of us find reading the “begats” about as interesting as watching paint dry. However, we can put certain events in a historical perspective relative to other more well-know happenings such as the Flood.

This is a list of the first born sons of Shem and the year number after the Flood in which they were born: Arphaxad (2), Salah (37), Eber (67), Peleg (101), Reu (131), Serug (163), Nahor (193), Terah (222), and Abram (???)

When we get to Terah we pick up some ambiguity in the times of the birth of his three sons. For example, in Genesis 11:26 it says “And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.” If we are not careful, we will say that all three had to be born in the same year and that Abram was the first born.

However, further investigation of the Scriptures (Acts 7:4) shows that Abram left the city of Haran after the death of Terah. Genesis 11:32 tells us that Terah died in Haran at the age of 205. We also know that Abram was about 75 years old when he came into the land of Canaan. That would mean that Terah was about 130 when Abram was born. Terah had a son when he was 70 and Bible scholars think that Haran was the first born. Therefore, it is probable that Abram was born about 350 years after the Flood.

If (as it appears) Abram was NOT the first born of Terah, then we see the sovereignty of God in action in choosing someone other than the first born for the “birth right” of being responsible for religious or spiritual things that was assigned to the descendants of Shem.

The call of Abram relative to the Tower of Babel and the scattering of the nations is more difficult to pin down. Many think the scattering happened in the life time of Peleg (Genesis 10:25 says “for in his days was the earth divided”). Peleg was born in about 100 AF and died in about 340 AF. The dispersion of people as a result of the confusion of languages probably happened between 100 and 340 AF. Abram was born around 350 AF which is also the approximate date of the death of Noah.

According to the account by Stephen (Acts 7:2-3) God had appeared to Abram while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran and gave him instructions to leave the old behind and find the new.

In Hebrews 11:8, we are told that upon hearing the call, Abraham believed and obeyed.

### Response to the Call

<sup>31</sup> Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and they went out together from Ur of the Chaldeans in order to enter the land of Canaan; and they went as far as Haran, and settled there. Genesis 11:31 (NASB95)

Do you start to see a small problem in what was happening with Abram? The account states that Terah (Abram's father) took him out of Mesopotamia. We don't know if God's call of Abram brought conviction to his father for having engaged in worship of other gods or if perhaps Abram's faith was just not fully developed. It had not grown to the point where he would be able to "believe all things." He left his country but not his kindred. This imperfect faith probably produced delays in God's plan for Abraham. (Your imperfect faith will produce delays in what God want to do with your life.) Part of the problem was that he did not see the entire vision God had for all of mankind. Many times we fail to properly respond to God's direction and the circumstances in which we find ourselves because we have not seen clearly and our faith is imperfect. Sometimes we make a decision that we are not willing to pay the price to accomplish the goal God has in mind for us. The time in Haran was apparently unproductive time.

Another possibility is that Abram may have been trusting in his earthly father, but Terah died. We may fail to find God's best for our lives because we will not let go of the security blankets we have acquired along the way. It may be necessary for these support systems to be removed from us before we become fully obedient to follow God's direction.

God did not give up on Abraham though his faith was deficient or imperfect. So, we shouldn't use the excuse that we don't have the level of faith Abraham had. Remember,

Abraham didn't have a great and perfect faith at first, but his faith was a quality type (real) faith in that it led to action. How do we know that God did not give up on Abraham?

### The Call Reviewed

<sup>1</sup> Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; <sup>2</sup> And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; <sup>3</sup> And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." Genesis 12:1-3 (NASB95)

Actually, this passage does not indicate God told Abraham again to leave. This may be the place where the writer (Moses) chose to tell why they left Ur in the first place.

Three significant things are given here: (1) A call was initiated by God. (2) There were specific things to do – God is not wishy-washy. (3) The land was a significant part of what God was to accomplish through Abraham.

### Responding Again

<sup>4</sup> So Abram went forth as the LORD had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup> Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his nephew, and all their possessions which they had accumulated, and the persons which they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan; thus they came to the land of Canaan. Genesis 12:4-5 (NASB95)

The route they took from Ur to the land of Canaan was indirect because of obstacles. There were natural obstacles (high mountain range) and there were obstacles related to traditions and family. [Legend has it that Abram stopped in Aleppo after having left Haran.]

At this point, Abraham is in the land. However, he did not own the land but he was there occupying as God's representative. In the Parable of the Ten Talents, we, as the Church, are told to "occupy until Christ returns." The land of Canaan was Abraham's inheritance, so it is with us, our inheritance is the ground (spiritual ground) we take and hold for God now. We are called of God to our stations in life and we need to occupy that territory for the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, we are to implement the will of God in every situation over which we have control or influence. That which we gain control of is our inheritance. We have been taught about "individual salvation" but, we understand little about the Government of God. Unless God's rule is established and His enemies are overthrown, we have no inheritance. The Church today is missing out on its opportunity to build its inheritance. We do not acknowledge the power of God by affirming it in particular situations we face and, consequently, we are simply treading water spiritually. It may be that we are just "hanging out in Haran."

### The Land

<sup>6</sup> Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite *was* then in the land. <sup>7</sup> The LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him. Genesis 12:6-7 (NASB95)

Abraham did not just stop at the border. He was not satisfied to be barely in. The place he came to (Shechem) means "shoulder." This is connected to the idea of consent or obedience. The territory was Moreh which means "teacher" implying knowledge and/or understanding. There is a very significant teaching here: "Consenting (obedience) leads to understanding." Most of us want it the other way around (we want to know or understand before we obey), but, Jesus said "If any man wills to do His will, he shall know." (John 7:17) All knowledge is by revelation as the result of obedience – everything else is just information.

God affirmed Abram in his obedience: He appeared to Abram and gave him the assurance "unto thy seed will I give this land." Abraham response was right and proper: he worshiped God. Notice that he built an altar unto the Lord. He sacrificed a burnt offering unto God. This is the first recording of a formal sacrifice made by Abraham, although his leaving Ur and Haran would be notable sacrifices. The burnt offering had significance in that it represented total commitment to God. This is what God wants from each of us: total surrender to Him. We can do it only when we have a personal encounter with God. True worship, sacrifice, surrender follow naturally from encounter. In speaking of salvation, the question is often asked, "Have you had a personal encounter with Jesus?" Those are not just idle words!

We often say "no man is an island unto himself" meaning that what we do affects and influences those around us. This is a very valid interpretation of that saying. One could also see that we are not "islands unto ourselves" in time as well as space. What Abraham would do, would affect future generations throughout the world. He himself would not know fulfillment of the promises except through future generation. Abraham was patient in his expectations. True faith does not abandon hope when its fulfillment is delayed.

### Moving On

<sup>8</sup>Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD. <sup>9</sup>Abram journeyed on, continuing toward the Negev. Genesis 12:8-9 (NASB95)

Though Abraham had fully surrendered himself (as represented by the burnt offering) at Shechem, he did not stop there but moved on. At a place between "Bethel and Ai" he made his dwelling place. This is where we find ourselves today, spiritually. We have pitched our spiritual tents in the land. Notice the orientation of the tent. It faced eastward toward Ai, to the west was Bethel.

Ai means "heap of ruins." Bethel means "house of God." Abraham entered his tent to rest. The spiritual significance here is "we find rest in our lives as to turn our backs on the way of the world (the heap of ruins) and face or point our life direction toward the *house of God*." That also means that each morning as Abraham left his tent, he came out facing Ai or the "heap of ruins." In a spiritual sense, we often find ourselves looking at a world that is in ruin. The challenge we face each day is to find ways to bring God's salvation to a world in ruin.

In later years the Tabernacle and the Temple would face the east so that the witness of Abraham's experience in Canaan would be reenacted each time the people came to worship. Once again, Abraham built an altar as a declaration that God had brought him there to rest. We are told Abraham journeyed on to the south. He even wandered off into Egypt but he returned to this second altar, his place of rest. Don't we find ourselves doing just that. Sometimes we wander off and we may find ourselves in a place that different than that to which God has called us. It is important that we not stay in Egypt, but return to our place of rest in Christ Jesus.

Abraham stands out as a truly great man because he believed and acted on God's promises. It meant surrendering his own will to be obedient and to agree with God. Just as God called Abram to come out of the world system, He calls us today to do the same and to benefit from His salvation.

Many people could characterize their lives as "Ai" – a heap of ruins. There are many who have no idea that life can be joyful. There are many who have no hope because all they see around them is "ruin." We need to be reaching out to people who are lost and undone, people who do not know God through His Son, Jesus Christ. You may be thinking "God hasn't called me to such a ministry." Oh, yes He has. You don't have to go to some far away place with a

strange sounding name as some have done, or to place that are hostile to Christianity as others have done. The fields are white unto harvest in our own neighborhoods.

If we have never “crossed over” as Abraham did, if we have never surrender our very life to God through Jesus Christ, if we have never called upon the name of the Lord for His salvation, then we need leave “Ai” – leave the “heap of ruins” and turn to God. We cannot afford to delay. Each one of us is only a heartbeat away from eternity.

Some may have been church members for years and yet their life is a mess – a heap of ruins. We should be experiencing the “rest” that God has promised to His children. We may have “made a decision for Christ” years ago but that decision did not produce any difference in our life. Some times people experience an emotional conversion – what is needed is a spiritual rebirth. So often we want to go directly to “Resurrection” and by pass the cross. We cannot hold on to the old life and experience the new life in Christ. How can we experience the power of His resurrection without experiencing the fellowship of His suffering – literally dying to self? It cannot be done! Some may have some “unfinished business” with God in that your decision to follow Jesus was never consummated in being “born again.” We need to be 100 percent sure about this by taking deliberate action to “get it right with God.”

Some of you may be thinking – “I know I have been born again, but I am not experiencing rest in the Lord.” We may need to turn our tent around. We may not be aligned with what God is doing and simply need to repent. We can let disobedience creep into our lives and we lose our sense of direction. Sometimes we think that “Repentance” is a one time thing associated with our salvation experience. Repentance is on-going and continuous – the more often we repent the better we will be lined up with what God is doing.

I know that all of us have spiritual business to conduct with God on a daily basis. Paul told us to present our bodies as living sacrifices upon God’s altar. That altar is always open.

## Chapter 2 ISAAC – A TYPE OF CHRIST

In the Biblical accounts of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob most of the attention is focused on Abraham and Jacob. We know relatively little about Isaac. We encounter Isaac in the end of the story of Abraham and again in the beginning of the story of Jacob. In the limited accounts of Isaac we can see significant similarities to Christ.

- Both Isaac and Jesus were sons according to God's promise. (Gen 17:16 & Acts 13:23)
- Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit. Isaac's birth was possible only because of God's power.
- Jesus is the only begotten of the Father. Isaac was Abraham's true (legitimate) son by Sarah.
- Jesus was delivered up to be sacrificed by the Father (Rom 8:32). Isaac was placed on the altar by Abraham
- Jesus rose from death. Abraham received Isaac back as from the dead. (Heb 11:19)
- The church was and is primarily of Gentiles (those far from God before Christ came). Isaac's bride (a figure of the church) was brought to him from a far country.
- Jesus was the Son Who was in Heaven and never left His Father's bosom. Isaac was born, lived his entire (except for a brief time in Gerar) in the promised land.
- Jesus had no particular physical distinctiveness that would attract people to Him. (Isa 53:2). Isaac was a man without distinctive character that would set him apart.
- Jesus said nothing in His defense when he was mocked and on trial. Isaac was mocked by Ishmael and Isaac said nothing in return.
- Jesus is the Son, doing nothing of Himself (John 5:19). Isaac followed Abraham to Moriah and was subject to him. What his father did, he accepted.
- Jesus is the inheritor of all things. All Isaac had he got by inheritance.
- Jesus came to earth and sowed the seed of the Word of God. Isaac (during a time of famine) "sowed seed in that land (of Gerar), and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him." (Gen 26:12)
- Jesus provides us with Living Water. Isaac dug wells where ever he went.
- The message of Jesus caused contention among the Jews and still causes strife with the worldly today. For His own, the fountain of living water is pictured as flowing down a broad street that goes out from the throne of God and there are trees on either side which bear fruit. The first two well dug by Isaac were named contention (Esek) and strife (Sitnah) while the third was called Rehoboth meaning "wide streets" and "he said, For now the LORD hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." (Gen 26:22)

The God of Isaac is "God the giver." Victory, life, salvation – all are bestowed and not attained or earned. In Isaac we see grace at work. Everything that is demanded, God Himself provides: that is the experience of Isaac.

Most studies of early Old Testament characters do not even consider Isaac except to relate how he was victimized by Jacob and Rebekah. We need to learn from Isaac to receive from God His provision; however, we need to move on to learn what God is doing in us. We find what God is doing in us in Jacob where we see what it means for Christ to be formed in us.

In the experience of Isaac, we see the Old Nature be taken care of in that the bond woman and her son were cast out and the new life (Isaac) was given a chance to thrive. When we come to Jacob, we will see how that once the Old Nature is out of the way and dealt with, that God must then deal with our natural strength.



### Chapter 3

## BETWEEN MORIAH AND BACK TO BEERSHEBA

### The Intervening Years - A Historical Account

After the testing of Abraham on Mt. Moriah, God repeated His covenant to Abraham. Abraham, Sarah and Isaac lived in Beersheba. They apparently moved to the area near Hebron because about 22 years after this Sarah died (at 127 years of age) in a place called Kirjatharba and was buried in a cave which Abraham purchased from Ephron the Hittite. (Interesting bit of information: supposedly, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Adam were buried in this same area.)

Shortly after this time, Abraham sent his chief servant (probably Eliezer) to Syria to find a wife for Isaac. He did not want his son to marry any of the people of Canaan. You may recall that the Canaanites were descendants of Ham, while Abraham was from the lineage of Shem. This desire may have stemmed from a sense of “racial” purity or from a sense of destiny as related to the blessings of Noah on his sons. (Shem had a better blessing than did Ham.) The other possibility was that the Canaanites were so “culturally” different that Abraham wanted no part of that culture. To a certain extent we (as very young children) tend to be “imprinted” with the culture around us. It is very difficult to change the imprint that young children received from their parents (or the day care worker – surrogate parents). This imprinting helps to set our life priorities – what is important to us. Eliezer went to Mesopotamia, to the city of Nahor and prayed for God to show him which young woman would be Isaac’s wife. God answered his prayer and he returned to Isaac with Rebekah.

Abraham and Isaac were living in Beersheba at the time. Some three years had passed since the death of Sarah. Isaac was 40 years old. Tradition tells us that Rebekah was around 14 years old. After they were married (that is, he took her to be his wife) Abraham (being 140 years old) decided to marry again. He married a woman named Keturah and they had six children. The best known of these six was named Midian. The Midianites were the people with whom Moses lived for forty years. The Scriptures note that all of Abraham’s possessions were given to Isaac.

At the age of 175, Abraham died. Guess who buried him. Isaac and Ishmael!

The focus of the Biblical narrative now moves to Isaac and to his descendants. However, we find a problem. Rebekah was barren. They tried for twenty years and no children. Apparently, Isaac had learned what NOT to do from Abraham’s and Sarah’s experience. He and Rebekah did not try to fix the problem but turned it over to God. God healed the situation and Rebekah had twins: Esau and Jacob.

Esau sold his birthright to Jacob when they were still fairly young. Some writers have speculated that the occasion was the mourning for the death of Abraham. This would have put the twins at age fifteen. My guess is that they were older. Nevertheless, the deed was done.

A famine came upon the land (this was 100 years since the famine in the time of Abraham). God specifically instructed Isaac to NOT go into Egypt. He did move to Gerar which was on the southern border of where he was living. Isaac encountered the same sort of fear Abraham had while in Egypt regarding his wife. He told the same story (that Rebekah was his sister) that Abraham had done. It was good that Abimelech was honorable and observant enough to determine what was going on. It worked out well and they lived there, planted crops, dug wells and endured the famine. It was in this area where the controversy arose over the well with the men of Gerar. Later they moved back to Beersheba. Esau married two Hittite women and it was there that Rebekah and Jacob plotted to deceive Isaac so that Jacob would receive his father’s blessing.

## Chapter 4 JACOB: DEALING WITH NATURAL STRENGTH

Genesis 27:1 - 33:11

In our study of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob we learn how God deals with us as His people. Abraham was sovereignly chosen by God when he was in Ur of the Chaldees. Isaac was not the first born of Abraham but was sovereignly chosen by God to be the son of the promise that God had made to Abraham. Jacob as not the first born of Isaac but was sovereignly chosen by God (even before he was born) to be the one through whom God's promises would be fulfilled. Each of these was chosen by God, not based on their own merit but was based on the merit of God. This is a threefold picture of grace. And just in case we still don't "get it" He did it again with the sons of Jacob – Judah was selected for the fulfillment of the coming of the Messiah rather than Reuben.

In Abraham we see something of the nature of God the Father. Abraham is described as the father of all them who believe (Rom 4:11). Abraham is the beginning or the starting point for God's plan of redemption that would deal (not just with individual sins) but with the sin problem of the human race. In referring to Abraham as the father, we see that the solution to the sin problem is a matter of birth and not of anything we can do.

In Isaac we see a type of Christ. All Isaac had, he got by inheritance. Everything was bestowed upon him and he accepted. In the experience of Isaac we see the old nature being taken care of. The bond woman and her son are cast out and the new life was given.

Having chosen us and having made provision to remove the old nature, God is still not through with us. We understand that the old nature is dealt with by death on the Cross of Christ. The Cross is God's provision and means of taking away the old nature and imparting new life to us as exemplified in the Resurrection. The Cross is the starting point and not the end point of God's salvation. There is more to be accomplished and this is what we see in the life and person of Jacob. In Jacob, we see that God deals not only with the old nature and its sinfulness but also with our natural strength and the strength of self.

In unregenerate mankind, the old nature and its sinfulness are indistinguishable from our natural strength and the strength of self. For the Christian, the Scriptures separate "old nature" and "natural strength." For example, before the fall, Adam had natural strength as a result of being created by God. However, he did not have an "old nature" – before the fall. Consider the life of Jesus. He was born (but not of the seed of Adam) without an "old nature" but He did have natural strength. He had a self and a personality and individualism but He did not abuse that natural strength and He did not choose to live by Himself. He said "I can of Myself do nothing." We can take that a step further and apply it to ourselves and we recall the words of Jesus that said "Apart from Me, you can do nothing."

For us, we start out with both an "old nature" and natural strength. While the Cross takes care of the "old nature" the natural strength must be dealt with. As Christians, we may be dedicated to doing God's will and have the best of intentions of being pleasing to God; yet, we fail by being mistimed, misdirected and misunderstood with a result of NOT being pleasing to God. This is where we are trying to build upon the Foundation but what we are putting up being wood, hay and stubble (1 Cor 3:12). We may be doing "God's work" but we are doing it in our own strength. Such work will not stand the test of judgment. This may be why we see so many programs in churches that come upon the scene and look impressive at the beginning but they fail to last because they are not built of gold and silver and precious stone but of wood, hay and stubble.

The gold represents the goodness of God that manifest itself in what He does for us. Every good and every perfect gift comes from God. These are lasting. We can think of silver as the redemption we have in Christ. That is lasting. The precious stones are not pure elements like gold and silver but are compounds that are formed from fairly common elements (what we might call dirt) that have been exposed to long periods of heat and pressure. Then they have to be cut and polished. This is a figure of the work of the Holy Spirit in and on the life a believer. Whatever comes our way, the Holy Spirit uses it as heat and pressure and stress to transform the common elements into compounds that are precious. That is what Romans 8:28 is talking about. Now what is God going to do with these precious stones? What does Romans 8:29 say? "We are being conformed to the image of His Son." Our tendency is to think of this as an individual transformation that will transform each one of us into a complete image of Jesus. That MAY be what it means but consider that as precious stones we collectively form a mosaic picture of Jesus. Collectively, we are the church, the body of Christ.

The birth of Isaac's sons was unusual. He was about 60 years old and the birth of these twins was an answer to prayer. Before they were born Rebekah received a message from God that she had two nations in her womb and that the elder would serve the younger.

- Do you think that Rebekah wanted to do God's will? Absolutely. As a consequence, Jacob was her favorite while Esau (being the first born) was Isaac's favorite.
- Do you think Rebekah told Jacob that he was chosen by God to be the leader in the family? Absolutely.
- Do you think Jacob wanted to do God's will? Absolutely. If he had been asked to write a purpose statement for his life, it would have been centered around obtaining the birthright and blessing. So, it is not surprising that Jacob was looking for any opportunity to achieve this goal. We don't know how many times he had tried to get the birthright from Esau but we have the account of his buying it for a bowl of beans.
- Do you think that the birthright was important to Esau? Not at that time. What was Esau's purpose in life? He was the type person that we see being appealed to in the beer ad that says, "You only go around once in life, so grab all the gusto you can." It is a "live for the moment and forget about tomorrow" type outlook on life. It is truly a tragic way to live life and wastes the opportunities in life. Many of our churches are filled with people who see no value in their spiritual inheritance and things of the spirit do not matter to them.

Question: Did Jacob need to buy the birthright from Esau? NO! He either did not need it or God had a way to transfer the birthright to him. How would that happen? We have no idea, since Jacob intervened with a "natural strength" solution, he nor we will know the way God would bring about what He had predetermined to make happen. From Jacob's and Rebekah's viewpoint, they could check off "Obtain Birthright" on their "To Do" list. The next item on the list was "Obtain Blessing."

Who can you trust? That's not an unusual question. It matters very little if the setting is in the highest levels of government, in the business world, at church or in the family; the question of being able to trust each other is key to being able to function and to carry out things that need to be done. One of the most damaging deeds to trust is deception. It is especially damaging in family relationships since it communicates a lack of care and genuine love for the other person.

Why would one person deceive another person? A general generic guess at a reason would be simply this: to gain advantage for one at the expense of the other. Think

of the message that such action sends to another person. It says, "I think only of myself and what I want and I care nothing for you." It is a classic example of putting things ahead of people. It is what is behind the old adage, "Let the buyer beware." Now while we may have our defenses up and be on the look out for possible deception when we go into the market place to buy something, we normally do not have the defenses up in a family situation. As a consequence, deception in the family is especially damaging to the person who is deceived and to the relationship. In spite of all the bad consequences, some people will go to any length and use any means to get their way. We see the creativeness that deception sparks in the case of Jacob and Esau and the stolen blessing.

#### Deception in the Family – 27:1-4

<sup>1</sup>Now it came about, when Isaac was old and his eyes were too dim to see, that he called his older son Esau and said to him, "My son." And he said to him, "Here I am." <sup>2</sup>Isaac said, "Behold now, I am old *and* I do not know the day of my death. <sup>3</sup>"Now then, please take your gear, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me; <sup>4</sup>and prepare a savory dish for me such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die." Genesis 27:1-4 (NASB95)

How old was Isaac at this time? Some say 100, others 137 and one reference has him at 160 years old. He eventually lived to be 180. If he were 100, then Jacob and Esau would have been about 40 years old. About 20 years or more had passed since Esau sold his birthright. Isaac was preparing to give Esau his blessing.

#### God's Will Apart from God's Way

<sup>5</sup>Rebekah was listening while Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game to bring home, <sup>6</sup>Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, <sup>7</sup>'Bring me some game and prepare a savory dish for me, that I may eat, and bless you in the presence of the LORD before my death.' <sup>8</sup>"Now therefore, my son, listen to me as I command you. <sup>9</sup>"Go now to the flock and bring me two choice young goats from there, that I may prepare them *as* a savory dish for your father, such as he loves. <sup>10</sup>"Then you shall bring *it* to your father, that he may eat, so that he may bless you before his death." Genesis 27:5-10 (NASB95)

Rebekah knew God's will and she and Jacob were working to bring about that will by their natural strength and wit. Never do we see them ask God for His instruction about what to do about the blessing going to Esau.

The blessing and the birthright are not significant issues in our society. These were extremely important in the world in which Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lived. The **birthright** was the assurance that the first born son would receive the largest share of the inheritance. Usually, this share was a double portion. If there were nine heirs, then the birthright would give the eldest son 20 percent of the estate while the others would get ten percent each. The first born son could not be denied this right without cause since it was protected by law. If there were sufficient cause, then the right might be lost as in the case of Reuben who committed incest by sleeping with his father's concubine. The birthright could also be sold as in the case of Esau who sold his favored position to Jacob for a piece of bread and a bowl of soup. The **blessing** did not involve the inheritance of wealth but the conference of power or the right of leadership in the extended family or clan. Apparently, Isaac was thinking that his effectiveness as the leader of the family was nearing an end and he was ready to pass on the mantle of leadership to Esau.

Rebekah overheard the plan of Isaac to bless Esau and she did not want that to happen. Rebekah wanted the leadership role to go to Jacob. It is my suspicion that what she really wanted was to be the one in control herself and since she was closer to Jacob than to Esau figured that her influence would be greater if Jacob were the designated leader. In fact, she was already in control of Jacob as indicated in the eighth verse where she instructed him to do all that

she has told (commanded) him to do.

### Personal Ambition Trumps Honesty – 27:11-14

<sup>11</sup> Jacob answered his mother Rebekah, “Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man. <sup>12</sup> “Perhaps my father will feel me, then I will be as a deceiver in his sight, and I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing.” <sup>13</sup> But his mother said to him, “Your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get *them* for me.” <sup>14</sup> So he went and got *them*, and brought *them* to his mother; and his mother made savory food such as his father loved. Genesis 27:11-14 (NASB95)

Jacob was not without a built-in sense of “right and wrong.” He immediately knew that what they were about to do was wrong and that if the trickery were discovered that bad consequences would happen. It is interesting that he had a concern that Isaac would discover his true nature of his being a “deceiver” and he did not want that to happen. How often do we find ourselves as well as others being concerned that someone will see through the facade of our public persona and discover who we really are deep down inside? Our response to such a concern is typically to work on shoring up the facade rather than changing who we are to be who we are pretending to be.

It is difficult to change our basic tendencies unless we have some accountability interaction from those close to us. In Jacob’s case, he had just the opposite of what he needed in that his mother was encouraging him to do the wrong thing. The lesson for us is very clear and it is that as adults and parents we have a responsibility to provide accountability to those whose lives we can influence to point them in the direction of righteousness rather than deception.

While Esau was out stalking a deer so that he could carry out the wishes of Isaac, Rebekah was home fixing goat meat to fool Isaac.

### Lies Need a Good Cover – 27:15-17

<sup>15</sup> Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her elder son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. <sup>16</sup> And she put the skins of the young goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. <sup>17</sup> She also gave the savory food and the bread, which she had made, to her son Jacob. Genesis 27:15-17 (NASB95)

“One lie leads to another,” it has been said and we could add to that “deception begets deceptions.” Usually one bit of trickery is not enough. First it was goat meat disguised as venison, now it is wearing the clothes of someone else and covering up the bare spots with goat skin. So often in life we attempt to flavor up the common place to make it appear to be something that it is not. Many people put on the garb of Christianity (go to church, sing in the choir, serve on the board) without ever having been born again. There is plenty of deception still around. Sometimes the tragedy of deception is that we are the ones being deceived.

It is one thing to appear to be something that we are not (image is everything or so the adage goes); it is quite another thing to act the part of something you are not. Jacob was all dressed up but he still needed to play the role to pull off the deception.

### Who Are You? – 27:18-20

<sup>18</sup> Then he came to his father and said, “My father.” And he said, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?” <sup>19</sup> Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn; I have done as you told me. Get up, please, sit and eat of my game, that you may bless me.” <sup>20</sup> Isaac said to his son, “How is it that you have *it* so quickly, my son?” And he said, “Because the LORD your God caused *it* to happen to me.” Genesis 27:18-20 (NASB95)

Apparently, Esau and Jacob sounded enough alike that Isaac could not be sure who was speaking to him when Jacob called to him. When he responded to Isaac’s question, he had to lie

about who he was to keep up the deception. He then lied about what he had done, he lied about the nature of the food that Isaac was to eat and finally he invoked the name to God to try to give all of the deception some credibility.

I think there are many nominal Christians who live in this kind of deception all the time. They have never been born again and yet when asked if they are saved will tell you a resounding "yes!" They brag about all that they have done for the kingdom of God and if it were examined it would be found to be work for the Boy Scouts and the Kiwanis Club – not that there is anything wrong with these fine organizations, they are not the kingdom of God any more than goat meat is deer meat. A lot of churches have sermons given in them Sunday after Sunday that are all very interesting, but the source of the message and the philosophy behind it is humanism rather than the principles and message of the word of God. All this goes on under the umbrella of the "church" and many fail to see the deception that it there since the name of God is invoked about what is being done.

#### Defending Against Deception Is Difficult – 27:21-27

<sup>21</sup> Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come close, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are really my son Esau or not." <sup>22</sup> So Jacob came close to Isaac his father, and he felt 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, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. <sup>24</sup> And he said, "Are you really my son Esau?" And he said, "I am." <sup>25</sup> So he said, "Bring *it* to me, and I will eat of my son's game, that I may bless you." And he brought *it* to him, and he ate; he also brought him wine and he drank. <sup>26</sup> Then his father Isaac said to him, "Please come close and kiss me, my son." <sup>27</sup> So he came close and kissed him; and when he smelled the smell of his garments, he blessed him and said, "See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the LORD has blessed; Genesis 27:21-27 (NASB95)

Isaac was suspicious that something was amiss. Though he could not see well, he could tell that everything did not fit together really well. He tried to check out his concerns by getting closer to Jacob and because he could not see, he had to rely on feeling. His conclusion was that he sounded like Jacob but he felt like Esau. Based on his feeling, he was going to bless Jacob.

A precaution for us in the church is that many are being deceived by what has been called the "feel good gospel." Don't tell anyone about sin and the consequences of it. Don't mention anything that is negative, we just want everyone to feel good about themselves. Even though it sounds like humanism it makes us feel good and we give our blessing to it by saying, "that was a really good message."

The problem of detecting deception is not limited to the church and spiritual concerns, but it is rampant in business and government associations. We have an uneasiness about what we are told and then our concerns are assuaged by more lies. Our hope that people are trustworthy is usually our undoing because those who initiate deception will "double down" and continue to lie when they are challenged by truth.

Though Isaac had suspicions, the deception was done so well that further checking was not able to prove anything. Isaac was relying on all the senses he had. His hearing, his feeling, and his sense of smell. The three was giving him mixed signals: hearing said "no" and feeling and sense of smell said "yes." So Isaac took a vote and it was two to one in favor of the deception. This may be a good lesson for all of us to learn. If what we are being told causes serious questions about its validity - it doesn't sound right, or it doesn't feel right, or it doesn't smell right, then we need to be reluctant to bless it.

What Isaac was lacking was the ability to see. If he could have seen clearly, then he would have been able to tell the difference between Jacob and Esau and he could not

have been deceived. Our best protection is to have spiritual insight that is provided by the Holy Spirit (one of the Gifts of the Spirit is discernment) in our lives.

### The Blessing Bestowed – 27:28-29

<sup>28</sup> Now may God give you of the dew of heaven, And of the fatness of the earth, And an abundance of grain and new wine; <sup>29</sup> May peoples serve you, And nations bow down to you; Be master of your brothers, And may your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, And blessed be those who bless you." Genesis 27:28-29 (NASB95)

A father's blessing in that culture had the force of a legal will and it was considered to be very important. The elements of the blessing of Isaac started out with what appears to be a wish for the one being blessed to be spared from the curse that was pronounced by God upon the earth after the sin incident in the Garden of Eden. That was followed by a desire for the person to be a leader in his sphere of influence rather than being dominated by others. The first part of verse 29 is similar to the blessing of Deuteronomy 28 that would come to those who obeyed God. The middle part of this verse is an affirmation of the customs of the world that would give a higher position to the first born. The last sentence of verse 29 sounds very similar to the original covenant that God initiated with Abraham.

You know "rest of the story." About the time Jacob left, Esau came in with the venison to find that Isaac was filled with food and fresh out of blessings. Esau was devastated. He felt that his brother Jacob had not been fair. The results on the relationship were predictable.

### A Grudge Is Born – 27:41-45

<sup>41</sup> So Esau bore a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob." <sup>42</sup> Now when the words of her elder son Esau were reported to Rebekah, she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, "Behold your brother Esau is consoling himself concerning you *by planning* to kill you. <sup>43</sup> "Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, flee to Haran, to my brother Laban! <sup>44</sup> "Stay with him a few days, until your brother's fury subsides, <sup>45</sup> until your brother's anger against you subsides and he forgets what you did to him. Then I will send and get you from there. Why should I be bereaved of you both in one day?" Genesis 27:41-45 (NASB95)

Doing "the what" of God's will without regard to doing things "the way" of God's will creates havoc, controversy, and animosity. Esau hated Jacob. He had every intention of killing him, but not until his daddy died. We can fall into this same error of attempting to do what God wants done and ignoring God's way. Even in sharing the gospel with people, we can come across as prideful, condemning, arrogant, and self-serving. The result: those who are lost hate the church.

Esau was angry because he was tricked and treated unfairly. He did not really care about the long-term significance of the outcome. The blessing of God goes with those who want His will. The discipline of God works to bring us into doing things His way.

Jacob was the able, seemingly clever, natural man. He was God's choice to inherit the blessing – not because he was clever – but just because God wanted it. All Jacob's cleverness did not help him to realize or receive what God had for him. Jacob's intention was that God's will would be done. This was right and good. However, he did not wait for God's time and look to God to do it. No matter how perfect the heart's intentions may be, if it is man using his natural strength to do it, the result is failure to please God. Jacob had not learned to know and to quietly wait for the God Who said, "I will work, and who shall hinder it?" (Isa 43:13 ASV)

Thus far in his life, Jacob has managed to buy a birthright that he was not going to be able to use, he had stolen a blessing that God had already promised to give him, he had caused

his father to be so emotionally upset that he literally shook, he had made his brother so mad that he intended to murder him and made it necessary that he leave home and go live with relatives. None of this was necessary! *By impatience, we run ahead of God and cause ourselves all kinds of grief. All Jacob's scheming and cleverness did not help him to realize or receive what God had reserved for him.* The birthright (the double inheritance) did him no good since he was in exile for 20 years. The blessing did him little good with regard to leadership of the family since he had so thoroughly alienated his brother that any kind of civil interaction was impossible at the time. We can argue that Jacob's intentions were good in that he wanted to see God's will worked out. However, *it does not matter how perfect the heart's intention is, if all our actions are simply we using our natural strength because the result is failure to please God.*

I wonder if it ever occurred to Jacob, life was not supposed to be this way. I wonder if it ever occurred to him that he did not have a clue as to how God operates. He had a lot to learn not only about God, but also to know God and to have a face-to-face encounter with God. The learning and encounter are the fruits of discipline.

#### Continuing Deception – 27:46

<sup>46</sup>Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am tired of living because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife from the daughters of Heth, like these, from the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?" Genesis 27:46 (NASB95)

Do you think we are seeing a pattern of "lies, lies, and more lies?" Rebekah was very "creative" in fabricating a good sounding explanation of why something should be done. Unfortunately, the explanation did not have much connection to the truth. The reason was plausible in that Esau had married two Hitite women and apparently Rebekah was using them as a reference to her dislike. She obviously did not hold Esau in high regard and that was likely transferred to his wives.

My guess is that she did not have one iota (smidgen) of guilt since she had convinced herself that she was helping accomplish God's will. I'm sure she did not want to worry Isaac with the news that Esau was planning to kill Jacob as soon as Isaac died and that was the real reason for sending him away. She certainly did not want to have one of her sons murder the other son. As it turned out, Rebekah's attempt to avoid harm to Jacob did work to keep racial purity in the chosen descendants of Isaac through Jacob. There was a precedent for this in that Abraham took action to make sure Isaac did not choose a wife from the Canaanites.

The lesson for us is simply this: If we are not discerning of our motives, then we can find a way to rationalize doing almost anything one could imagine.

#### Plan Implemented and Blessing Repeated – 28:1-5

<sup>1</sup>So Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and charged him, and said to him, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan." <sup>2</sup>"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." <sup>3</sup>"May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples." <sup>4</sup>"May He also give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your descendants with you, that you may possess the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Abraham." <sup>5</sup>Then Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau. Genesis 28:1-5 (NASB95)

It is not surprising that Isaac followed the "suggestion" of Rebekah regarding finding a wife for Jacob. After all, he had "been there and done that" himself. Although in his case the wife was brought to him rather than his needing to go find her. Abraham had one of his servants



go and make the necessary arrangements. If that had happened in Jacob's case, he would have been spared the stressful interactions with his uncle Laban.

What is surprising is that Isaac pronounced a blessing upon Jacob that was more inclusive than the one recorded in the earlier account (27:28-29) where Jacob deceived Isaac since it included reference to the blessing of Abraham (implied in the earlier account) and a reference to the land. Apparently, Isaac was now resolved to live with the situation that had developed since the blessing, once given, could not be taken back. To his credit, he did not hold a grudge against Jacob and was able to interact with him as a father would to a son.

### Esau's Reaction – 28:6-9

<sup>6</sup>Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take to himself a wife from there, *and that* when he blessed him he charged him, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," <sup>7</sup>and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram. <sup>8</sup>So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; <sup>9</sup>and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth. Genesis 28:6-9 (NASB95)

Here we gain some empathetic insight into the person of Esau. These verses show that he really cared about what his father Isaac thought and reacted to attempt to do something that he presumed would be pleasing to Isaac. He had already married two Hitite women and upon learning that Isaac's preference was for his sons to marry someone in the family line of Abraham, he then married his cousin, a daughter of Ishmael. "Ironically the unchosen son of *Isaac* married into the unchosen line of *Ishmael*! So Esau tried to better his marital reputation by marrying a third wife. Esau had no understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant and its purity. He was still living on the human level." (Walvoord and Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*)

As a sobering reminder of what can happen among believers, the writer of Hebrews warned that a person who misses the grace of God may become like a bitter root whose infidelity to God affects others. Esau provides a classic example of someone who failed to act on God's grace. In Hebrews chapter twelve (KJV), Esau was said to be "a profane person," which means "a common person, one who lives for the world and not God." Esau despised his birthright and sold it to Jacob, and he missed the blessing because it was given to Jacob.

Warren Wiersbe observed that "some people have the idea that a 'profane person' is blasphemous and filthy; but Esau was a congenial fellow, a good hunter, and a man who loved his father. He would have made a fine neighbor – but he was not interested in the things of God. God's grace does not fail, but we can fail to depend on God's grace. Esau is a warning to us not to live for lesser things."

### The Start of a Two-Decade Detour – 28:10-19

<sup>10</sup>Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. <sup>11</sup>He came to 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>He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. <sup>13</sup>And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, 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 descendants. <sup>14</sup>"Your descendants 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 descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. <sup>15</sup>"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." <sup>16</sup>Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." <sup>17</sup>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." <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>He called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. Genesis 28:10-19 (NASB95)

Jacob had it relatively easy up to now in his life. Now he was on his way to Haran and had lost the support of his family and perhaps realized for the first time that he was vulnerable and was not self sufficient. That first night was spent sleeping out in the open with a rock for a pillow. He had a strange dream or vision during the night. You've heard of Jacob's ladder, well this is where he saw the ladder. There God renewed the covenant he had made with Abraham and had confirmed with Isaac. That covenant was unconditional in that God made no demands on Jacob for its fulfillment.

Jacob went to sleep fearfully and full of anxiety, but he awakened with a sense of assurance and confidence. This was by no means a complete conversion of the schemer that he was; however, he did realize the possibilities of being in God's camp. Now, instead of just being full of anxious fear, he was full of awe or reverential fear. He named the place Bethel, which means the House of God. The significance of the event was not realized without a response. Jacob did respond. The next morning he decided to do something religious, so he set up the stone he had used for a pillow and made it a pillar for a reminder of what had happened. The next thing he did was to make a vow.

#### Let's Make a Deal – 28:20-22

<sup>20</sup>Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, <sup>21</sup>and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. <sup>22</sup>"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." Genesis 28:20-22 (NASB95)

This vow is classic Jacob. God has just given him the greatest unconditional, no-strings-attached covenant promise that anyone could have and Jacob responded with "Let's Make a Deal." His deal was something to the effect of "If you will provide for my needs and keep me safe, then I will let you be my God and I'll name this place in your honor and I'll become a tither." What Jacob was offering to God was not his to give. First of all, God is God. It is not a question of our letting Him be God. It is not a question of our "accepting" Jesus as Lord. He is Lord! One day, every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God. Regarding naming a place in honor of God is redundant. All of creation already bears the mark of the Creator. The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork. Tithing is not a bargaining tool that we can use with God. It already belongs to him. In fact, all of everything belongs to him.

The experience at Bethel made a significant impression on Jacob but it did nothing to change the basic Jacob. *Miracles may impress people and get their attention, but they are not necessarily life changing.*

In the initial verses of chapter twenty nine, we find that he continued his journey and was led to a well in the area where Laban lived. The timing of his arrival was perfect in that Laban's daughter was bringing the sheep of which she was in charge to water them at the well. This was a very convenient opportunity for Jacob to make a good impression on his relatives and start a relationship that would result in his finding a wife (or two) and become prosperous.

After about a month of their hospitality, Laban decided that Jacob was probably not going home anytime soon. Laban was a schemer but he was tactful and subtle in his approach to Jacob who had been a houseguest too long.

#### A Win-Win Situation? – 29:15-20

<sup>15</sup>Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, 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>And Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and face. <sup>18</sup>Now Jacob loved

Rachel, so 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 to give her to another 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 his love for her. Genesis 29:15-20 (NASB95)

Jacob had been helping out the home and with the flock, but it was strictly a voluntary situation. As such, Laban could not be sure how much Jacob would do and when. So he attempted to formalize the relationship by hiring Jacob to work for him. Jacob was given the option of making the first proposal for what he should be paid. I would imagine that Laban was expecting Jacob to want money, sheep, or cattle and was not expecting Jacob to ask only for room and board and his youngest daughter. Jacob's offer to work for seven years was so generous that Laban did not think twice about agreeing to the deal. Jacob was buying time for Esau's anger to cool, he was obtaining a young, beautiful wife, and Laban was getting free labor.

### Know Who You Are Dealing With – 29:21-25

<sup>21</sup> Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her.”<sup>22</sup> Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a feast.<sup>23</sup> Now in the evening he took his daughter Leah, and brought her to him; and *Jacob* went in to her.<sup>24</sup> Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid.<sup>25</sup> So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?” Genesis 29:21-25 (NASB95)

I would imagine that both men recognized the need for the older daughter to be married before the younger daughter and both probably thought that seven years was adequate time for a husband to be found for Leah. But that didn't happen. To Jacob “a deal was a deal” and he thought that Laban's gamble hadn't paid off but that was Laban's problem. To Laban, “a deal may have been a deal” but tradition was more important than any deal to him.

It wasn't until morning that Jacob discovered that he has been deceived. He had worked seven years for Rachel and he was greatly disappointed and angry with the trickery that his uncle pulled. Here was a family member whom he had trusted using deceit to cheat him and deny him something that was his. I wonder, if at this time, Jacob thought about the trickery that he pulled on his own father to get the blessing that his father wanted to give to Esau.

What happened to Jacob could be characterized as the “mirror image” of what he did to Isaac. In his trickery the younger son pretended to be the older son and in Laban's trickery, the older daughter pretended to be the younger daughter. We can recognize the wrongness of such trickery when we are the victims but we have difficulty recognizing it when we are the ones doing the deception. Jacob was learning that when we live by our wits that someone will come along who will outsmart us. Such behavior leads to distrust and more deception as Laban would later learn in his dealings with Jacob. Jacob eventually paid his uncle back by increasing the number of his own flock at the expense of Laban's flock.

### Getting More than You Bargain For – 29:26-30

<sup>26</sup> But Laban said, “It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the firstborn.”<sup>27</sup> “Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for another seven years.”<sup>28</sup> Jacob did so and completed her week, and he gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife.<sup>29</sup> Laban also gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid.<sup>30</sup> So *Jacob* went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years. Genesis 29:26-30 (NASB95)

Laban thought that he had tradition on his side and although he rationalized his actions he was willing to appease Jacob by giving Rachel to him to be his second wife if Jacob would work for him another seven years. This apparently worked since Jacob was so much in love with Rachel. So he married Leah one week and Rachel the next. That is two marriages in one week.

*I believe that it is nearly impossible to know if a particular event is good or bad at the time it happens.* In retrospect, we can see that God used all the things that happened to Jacob to fulfill the promises that God had made to him. The sons of Jacob were to be the originators of the tribes of Israel. If Rachel had been Jacob's only wife, then there would have been only two sons because Rachel had difficulty conceiving and she died shortly after the birth of her second child. Instead there were twelve sons which was important for the rapid growth of this people into a great nation that was to happen over the next 500 years. [We must not conclude from this that the end (12 sons) justifies the means (2 wives and 2 maid servants). We can conclude that God can use the circumstances that we encounter to bring about His will in our lives.]

The account of the birth of Jacob's children to Leah, Rachael, Bilhah, and Zilpah is given in the last several verse of chapter twenty nine and the first half of chapter thirty. The customs of that day with multiple wives and handmaiden substituting for wives is rather strange to us today who see marriage as a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman. A total of eleven sons and one daughter were born over the next several years. Leah had six sons and a daughter, Rachel had one son during this time, and the two handmaidens each had two sons.

#### Obligations Fulfilled - New Beginning – 30:25-28

<sup>25</sup> Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country." <sup>26</sup> "Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me depart; for you yourself know my service which I have rendered you." <sup>27</sup> But Laban said to him, "If now it pleases you, stay with me; I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account." <sup>28</sup> He continued, "Name me your wages, and I will give it." Genesis 30:25-28 (NASB95)

The timing of this conversation was apparently at the end of the second seven-year period of the time Jacob had spent with his uncle. He had fulfilled his part of the bargain with Laban and was now ready to get back to living out the benefits of the blessing and birthright. Laban was no fool, he saw that Jacob was blessed of God. He was successful in managing the affairs of Laban's farm and Laban was ready to make a deal with Jacob. He was ready to share the wealth and wealth was related to stock – livestock, that is.

You know the story of how Jacob and Laban made a deal so that Jacob would have the less desirable spotted and dark colored animals and Laban would keep the white animals. Laban probably thought he had the better deal but it turned out that the genetics of cross breeding favored Jacob's part of the deal. (This was in spite of all the conniving subterfuge that Jacob carried out to put multicolored sticks in the watering troughs to influence the outcome of the breeding. See the details of the account in the remainder of chapter thirty.)

One of the requests of Jacob (when he encountered God at Bethel) was for God to give him material prosperity. If Jacob had not agreed to stay an additional six years, he would not have accumulated the great wealth that he had since all of that occurred during that period of time.

### Success Engenders Resentment – 31:1-5

<sup>1</sup>Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth."<sup>2</sup> Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not *friendly* toward him as formerly.<sup>3</sup> Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."<sup>4</sup> So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field,<sup>5</sup> and said to them, "I see your father's attitude, that it is not *friendly* toward me as formerly, but the God of my father has been with me. Genesis 31:1-5 (NASB95)

Because of Jacob's success in acquiring bigger herds at the expense of Laban and his family, strong resentment and jealousy came up from his in-laws. During this time, God told him it was time to go back to his home in Canaan. Jacob told no one except his wives about leaving. In a period of about six years, Laban had changed from seeing Jacob as the key to his success to seeing him as a rival who was becoming more successful than Laban was. Laban had agreed to the deal to let Jacob keep the mixed colored sheep and goats without knowing that would be what would naturally happen. By the time he figured out that Jacob had taken advantage of him, Jacob had become a very rich man.

In the remainder of chapter thirty one, we see the rationalizing by Jacob and his wives in giving reasons to justify their actions of leaving Laban without even saying good bye. Since God had instructed Jacob that this was the time to leave, there was no need to be deceptive in their actions. Jacob had not learned to trust God to take care of the situations that might arise by telling Laban that he was taking his family back to Canaan.

We also see that Rachael stole some of the household idols from her father. I would imagine that Laban would have been glad to give his daughter whatever she would have asked for.

The situation in this extended family had gotten so bad that common courtesies were not even being observed. This is what happens when people are concerned with materialism and worldly success.

Throughout all this, Jacob was drawn by a goal or sense of destiny that God's promise to Abraham was going to be fulfilled and that he was to be involved as it was unfolding. He saw that God had blessed him. Therefore, he was determined to return to the land and occupy it rather than just being content to live out his life in Haran.

Through all the things that happened to him, God was teaching him important lessons. However, he had not implemented these lessons in his life. He was learning that scheming breaks down relationships. He was learning that gaining earthly treasures by trickery robs you of your peace. He was learning that true satisfaction could not come to him apart from being in God's will; that is, returning to the land of Canaan. Even though he was learning all these things, he still could not give up putting his trust in his own natural strength.

This is where so many of us are today: scheming, planning, manipulating to bring in the Kingdom of God in our own way. Do we think we know all the answers? Do we insist on doing things our way? Are we impatient and run ahead of God? Are we more like Jacob than being like Jesus? How do we get to the point of having Christ formed in us so that we can say with Him, "I do nothing of My own, but I do the will of Him Who sent Me?" We are about to see in the experience of Jacob how this change must happen.

### Fear Revisited – 32:1-2

<sup>1</sup>Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him.<sup>2</sup> Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim. Genesis 32:1-2 (NASB95)

When Jacob left Canaan it was motivated by fear of what his brother Esau would do in revenge for his stealing the blessing from Isaac. Twenty years earlier, when Jacob was leaving

Canaan he had a vision and now as he starts to return, he has another vision. Before, it was angels going up and down a ladder that reached from heaven to earth. This time, he can see two armies of angels surrounding and traveling with him and his family. Things appear to be going quite well for Jacob: He has God's command to return to Canaan, God's covenant promise, and God's protection in the angelic host. Now whom does Jacob trust? JACOB! *God's grace does not alter the flesh.* Why was there fear? Jacob was still depending on Jacob.

### Improving Your Chances – 32:3-8

<sup>3</sup>Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. <sup>4</sup>He also commanded them saying, "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 and donkeys *and* flocks and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my lord, that I may find favor in your sight." ' " <sup>6</sup>The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." <sup>7</sup>Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; <sup>8</sup>for he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape." Genesis 32:3-8 (NASB95)

Jacob thought that this humble and flattering message would actually bring about a change in Esau. Jacob was still Jacob. He was still clever. Clever people have many worries. They buy the radar detectors so they won't get caught speeding – they worry and are jumpy and nervous every time it beeps at them. Those who scheme and contrive and do not simply trust and believe, find themselves as Jacob, "greatly afraid and distressed."

It is interesting that Jacob was obedient to God's command but *obedience does not equal trust*. He was trying to obey God and escape his brother at the same time. He decided he needed to do something. He divided his entourage into two groups. He was substituting his two companies for the Mahanaim (two companies) God had already provided.

### Real Security Is Found in God – 32:9-12

<sup>9</sup>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 relatives, and I will prosper you,' <sup>10</sup>I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff *only* I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. <sup>11</sup>"Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me *and* the mothers with the children. <sup>12</sup>"For You said, 'I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.'" Genesis 32:9-12 (NASB95)

We begin to see some hope. This is the first real prayer from Jacob. Before this he had been all scheming and bargaining and now he is scheming and praying. We need to learn that if we pray, we don't need to scheme. If we scheme, then our prayers are probably without the requisite faith. After he prayed he sent three waves of gifts to Esau by his servants in an attempt to pacify his brother as see in verses 13 through 23.

Jacob was like so many of us who think that to trust God completely is too risky and even reckless. It is ironic that we in the modern day church see such behavior as Jacob took (praying and scheming) as praise worthy and to be copied. This is error.

The crisis time for Jacob came the night before his meeting with Esau. Jacob was alone and he recognized that the situation was a matter of life and death. Each of us must come to these "life and death" struggles. First is the question of whether we are going to hold on to the "old nature" or take on the "new life" in Christ. After that, we wrestle with relying on our natural strength versus doing things God's way in His strength.

### Direct Sovereign Intervention – 32:24-30

<sup>24</sup> Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. <sup>25</sup> When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. <sup>26</sup> Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." <sup>27</sup> So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." <sup>28</sup> He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." <sup>29</sup> Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob named the place Peniel, for *he said*, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved." <sup>31</sup> Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh. <sup>32</sup> Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip. Genesis 32:24-32 (NASB95)

Notice that it was God who brought this fight to Jacob. God was determined to bring about an utter surrender from Jacob. Jacob possessed tremendous natural strength and it appeared that God was not going to win the battle. God may overthrow our plans again and again, but we don't admit defeat, we do not surrender. We think that we have not planned well enough and we tend to think that nothing is too hard for us to do.

Jacob had never surrendered before. The discipline over the past 20 years had brought him to Peniel – to the place where God could touch him. *When we do not surrender under the discipline of God, then it may be necessary for God to touch our strength and put it out of commission.* Our natural strength may differ from Jacob's – ambition, boasting, emotion, self love, etc. Once God had touched Jacob's thigh, He could not leave him for now Jacob was dependent on God. We are the strongest with God when we are the weakest naturally. It is the small faith that accomplishes much. With our abundance of natural strength we are of no use to God. On the other hand, with no strength at all, we can hold on to God. As Jacob was holding on to God, we see a very revealing exchange unfold in the conversation between "the man" and Jacob.

God (the man) told Jacob to let Him go because daylight was approaching. Jacob would not let go unless "the man" agreed to bless him. It would seem that this exchange is teaching us that we should hold on to God until He blesses us. Seeking the blessing was what caused Jacob to deceive his father and, some twenty years later, Jacob was still seeking to be blessed. Apparently, being blessed does not provide lasting satisfaction but only a desire for more blessings. Throughout the history of the children of Israel, they were guilty of "delighting themselves in the goodness (blessings) of God" but they did not "delight themselves in the Lord (Himself)." This misplaced motivation resulted in serious consequences for Israel and Judah (destruction of Israel by Assyria and seventy years of exile for Judah). The most important message for the church is that it is God who "holds on" to us and we should "hold on" (be faithful) to God and delight ourselves in Him regardless of the outcome.

### Repentance and Forgiveness

Have you ever had someone cheat you or try to cheat you? Has anyone ever thought that you cheated them? What happened to the relationship when the question of being cheated entered the picture? In most cases the relationship goes on the rocks: there is suspicion, at best, and even hatred. The only way that such relationships can be restored is for forgiveness to take place. Even if the guilty party makes restitution, there is still a rift in the relationship until forgiveness enters the picture.

What does it take to facilitate forgiveness when we are dealing with others? The typical approach that people take is what usually works when a relationship starts out on a neutral basis when no one feels cheated. We see sales people and lobbyists using such techniques when trying to build good relationship and/or want to influence someone to think or act favorably toward

them. These techniques are typically the use of flattery and giving gifts. We see Jacob attempting to use both these methods as he sent his servants ahead to meet Esau and to deliver messages and gifts. While these may have a positive impact when starting there is no negative history, they are typically ineffective if past experiences have been bad.

If the strain in a relationship is caused by a disagreement based on **real** differences (rather than perceived differences), then what most of us would like to see is evidence that there has been a **real** change in the person with whom we have the difference. If we could recognize a real change in the person, then forgiveness and restoration of relationships would come easily and naturally. This “real change” is the definition of repentance. It is no wonder that the message of John the Baptist was “repent.” This was what was needed to prepare the way so that we can enter into belief when the Messiah came. This need was further reinforced in the letter from the elder John in chapter 1 verse nine where he reminded his readers “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.” We know that confession (acknowledging wrong actions as sinful) is needed before we can turn away (repent) from such behavior.

After Jacob’s encounter with God, Jacob was a changed person and he was given a new name to signify that change. He would not be Jacob (the schemer) but be known as Israel – one who has power with God. Only now was Jacob ready to meet Esau. At this point, Jacob could not trust his natural strength for it was gone.

### The Meeting – 33:1-11

<sup>1</sup> 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*. Genesis 33:1-11 (NASB95)

Even though Jacob had encountered God and had experienced his natural strength being broken, he was still attempting to protect himself and his family. It has been suggested that lining up the family the way he did was to put the most expendable (least valued) in front and the most valued in the rear. The lesson for us would be that even if we have been born again of the Spirit of God, we still tend to rely on what we know that works. We have to learn to trust God as we experience His faithfulness and His power in our lives, then the trust comes naturally.

Jacob may have lined up his family in order of increasing importance, but he walked on out ahead of them all indicating that if there were trouble he was willing to experience it first. This is an example of the sacrificial love that pleases God since it is the kind of love that He showed to us in dying for our sins.

As Jacob walked to meet Esau, he bowed seven times as an indication that he was seeking Esau's forgiveness. Esau could see that Jacob was different. Such an act of humility to ask for forgiveness was not like the Jacob he knew twenty years ago. Esau



could also see that Jacob walked with a limp. Although Esau did not realize the significance of the limp, it was evidence that Jacob had an encounter with God. When people see us, do they see evidence that we have had an encounter with God?

God had already answered the prayer of Jacob regarding his brother. Esau's anger had subsided and it is likely that he had not missed the birthright and the blessing that he did not have. Esau, glad to see his brother, ran to meet him.

Esau wanted to meet the rest of Jacob's family. As each came up to be introduced, he or she also bowed before Esau. In doing this, they were saying that they respected him. Showing respect for other people is the best possible action to gain acceptance.

When forgiveness takes place and acceptance is granted, then the giving of gifts to put ourselves in a favorable light is no longer necessary. Esau had no need for the present sent by Jacob. However, apparently, Jacob had a need to give the gifts and to see them accepted as evidence of Esau accepting him. It is a strange thing about giving and receiving gifts. If I totally reject you, then I would not receive a gift from you. I believe that this is why many people never receive the gift of salvation from God - they have totally rejected God.

When the meeting took place God had already prepared the heart of Esau so that he was no longer holding a grudge against Jacob. Esau had prospered and the double portion of the inheritance he had not gotten because he sold his birthright did not make any difference. The double portion had not done Jacob any good either.

Jacob tried to give Esau part of his wealth to appease him but by now both had discovered that material possessions are not as important as relationships.

As Jacob approached Esau, he was not aware that God had changed Esau. However, Esau could see that Jacob had changed. *If God has made a change in our lives, it should be evident to those who know us.* He was walking with a limp, he was doing things that were not typical of Jacob (offering gifts, bowing down, thinking of others, exposing himself to danger). The change in Esau may have happened as soon as he saw the change in Jacob. Many times, we have conflicts with others and we pray for God to change the other person. However, it may be that for such a change to take place, it is we who must first change. We who are called of God hold the key to what happens to, in, and through the rest of the world.