

Lesson 42
Jacob Goes To the School of “Hard Knocks”

Genesis 28:1-30:43

I. INTRODUCTION

A. These three chapters in Genesis give us insight into the building of a true believer into a man of God. Jacob was a self-centered, conniving, rebellious believer that was tested and trained by the wisdom and grace of God.

B. God often has to break a child of God before God can effectively use him.

II. GOD MEETS JACOB 28:1-22

A. Jacob Flees to Laban in Padan-aram (28:1-5)

1. Isaac exhorted Jacob. Rebekah persuaded Jacob to leave and visit her brother Laban. Jacob left to flee Esau's wrath and to seek a wife among his own people (28:1). NOTE. Little did Jacob or Rebekah know that they would never see each other again, for she would die during the 20 years Jacob would be away. NOTE: Jacob's leaving seemed to be a very small incident at the time, but God had other purposes, and that which seemed an ordinary journey and a short stay was to be part of a bigger plan involving many other lives. Jacob would learn lessons that would never leave him the rest of his days.

2. Isaac sent Jacob away and you can imagine the homesickness of Jacob, a “momma's boy,” during those first nights away from home. He must have wondered about his relationship to God and whether he would ever return to the land of promise. This was a crisis experience as Jacob left home for the first time.

B. Esau Marries Mahalath, Daughter of Ishmael (28:6-9). Esau apparently never gave up hope that Isaac might change his mind on the birthright, for he takes to be his wife a daughter of Ishmael, hoping to gain favor with his father. NOTE. Such is the reasoning of the unsaved man. He had married a Canaanite woman, an unbeliever, and now marries a daughter of Ishmael who is also an unbeliever. Carnal minds do carnal acts and do not comprehend spiritual truths (1 Cor. 2:14).

C. Jacob Has a Dream (28:10-17)

1. Jacob, while on his way to Padan-aram, stops overnight at a lonely spot called Bethel. God reveals Himself for the first time to Jacob in a dream. During the dream, he sees a ladder stretching from heaven to earth with angels ascending and descending. God speaks to him, confirming His intent to give the land of Palestine to Jacob and to his seed. This is a re-emphasis upon the faithfulness of God to keep the Abrahamic Covenant. NOTE. While Jacob was a believer, Bethel begins God's breaking process to make him a man of God. From a human viewpoint, there was nothing lovely or of worth in Jacob, but God could see the possibilities of this man, and was willing, in marvelous patience, to begin to mold him. NOTE. Jacob's walk with God was so superficial that after the dream he admitted his faith was weak. He said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not” (28:16).

2. What is the significance of angels on the ladder? The ladder, appearing as it does in a context of the covenant and Jacob's life, seems to emphasize contact between heaven and

earth. God will be in touch with earth (and Jacob and his people) in a program through history to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant. His host of angels will aid Him in this program.

D. Jacob Makes a Vow (28:18-22). Jacob, after the revelation of God, wants to make a bargain with God and he puts a conditional "if" on his response to God's promise. NOTE. Jacob ignored God's gracious promise and offered to bargain with God. This man had a long way to go before he was willing to believe God and walk in faith rather than the flesh. NOTE. Jacob is a good example of a believer who makes many mistakes and suffers discipline from God because of his sins, but he is also one with whom God overrules his mistakes and sins and teaches him still deeper lessons.

III. GOD BREAKS JACOB 29:1-35

A. Jacob Arrives in Haran (29:1-8). Jacob comes to Haran and inquires about Laban and the shepherds say that he is well and his daughter Rachel is coming to water some sheep. Jacob, sensing the providence of God, seeks to get rid of the other shepherds so he can be alone with Rachel.

B. Jacob Meets Rachel (29:9-12). Jacob treats Rachel with courtesy and greets her with a kiss of greeting. It becomes obvious, however, that this is love at first sight. NOTE. Two of the greatest things that can happen to a person happened to Jacob within a few days--he had an experience with God and he met the woman he was to marry,

C. Jacob Meets Laban and is Invited to His Home (29:13-14)

D. Laban Makes His First Bargain with Jacob (29:15-17). Laban agrees to pay Jacob wages. Laban had two daughters: Leah and Rachel. Rachel caught Jacob's eye from the beginning for she was beautiful to look upon.

E. Jacob Falls in Love With Rachel, and Agrees to Serve for Her (29:18-22). Jacob agrees to serve 7 years for Rachel for he loved her. The years seemed like a few days so great was his love for Rachel. Jacob was a very patient person for he was willing to wait a long time for something he really wanted. The love of Jacob for Rachel is really the only fine thing in his life until he comes to Paniel.

F. Jacob is Deceived Laban (29:23-26). Jacob served for 7 years and wanted Rachel to become his wife but Laban deceived Jacob and gave him Leah rather than Rachel. The next morning Jacob realized that he had lain with Leah and was furious with Laban because of his sly ways. Laban reminds him of the custom that the oldest daughter has to be married first. He knew it all the time and tricked Jacob.

NOTE. Jacob did not discover the switch until the morning. Why did he fail to recognize Leah at the wedding ceremony? Because she wore a veil, which she did not remove until, they arrived in the bridal chamber. There the darkness of the room at night evidently concealed her true identity. NOTE. We also see that Leah was tricky for she went along with the whole plan because she loved Jacob. NOTE. God was disciplining Jacob for his own deceitfulness with Esau. The deceiver is at length deceived. Jacob was reaping the harvest of his evil doings. What a man sows he shall reap (Gal. 6:7-8). Jacob was riding out his discipline in fellowship. NOTE. Jacob had lived by his wits. He was clever and had never met his match. He felt he did not need the help of God. In Uncle Laban, Jacob met a man who was more than a match for him. The man who lives by the flesh shall ultimately fall.

G. Jacob Serves Another Seven Years for Rachel (29:27-35)

1. Laban agreed that after one week Jacob could marry Rachel but he would have to serve 7 more years before he could take her away.

2. Jacob had no real love for Leah and Jehovah saw that she was hated and blessed her by giving her four sons by Jacob: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. Leah was convinced that this would cause her husband to love her but Jacob only had eyes for Rachel (29:32-34). NOTE. It is difficult for anyone to love someone with whom they have been forced into a relationship. Jacob really never loved Leah.

3. POINT: All these things were happening to Jacob in order to break him that he might learn to walk in dependence on the Lord and not trust his human wits.

IV. GOD BLESSES JACOB 30:1-43

A. Bilhah, Rachel's Maid, Has Sons by Jacob (30:1-8). Rachel realizes that she is unable to bear children and she is jealous of Leah who has given Jacob four sons. Rachel insisted that she have children or she would die. She squabbles with Jacob and he tells her that God is in control of life, not him (30:2). She therefore gives Bilhah, her handmaid, to Jacob that she might have children through her. Jacob takes Bilhah to wife and she bears two sons: Dan and Naphtali. NOTE. Rachel thought God had judged her for her barrenness (30:6), but really He was judging Jacob for his bad attitude towards Leah (29:31). Jacob wanted children by Rachel for he loved her.

B. Zilpah, Leah's Maid, Has Sons by Jacob (30:9-13). Apparently Leah could not be outdone by Rachel. When Leah realized she could have no more children, she gave her handmaid Zilpah to Jacob for a wife. Zilpah brought forth two more sons to Jacob: Dan and Asher.

C. Leah Bears Two More Sons to Jacob (30:14-21). Leah had not been able to have children but Reuben, her son, brings home some mandrakes (love apples). These yellow love apples are about the size of a nutmeg, with a strong and agreeable odor; and were used by the ancients, as they still are by the Arabs, as a means of promoting childbearing. The mandrakes did no good biologically but may have had a psychological affect on Leah. It was God who gave Leah two more sons (30:17): Issachar and Zebulun. Leah also gave birth to a girl, Dinah, by Jacob (30:21). Notice that Leah longs for Jacob's love (30:20).

D. Rachel Gives Birth to Joseph (30:22-24). God did not forget Rachel and she brought forth Joseph. This was an exciting moment for Rachel, and "Joseph" means, "add to me another son." She longed for another son and later God gave her Benjamin.

E. Jacob Prepares to Leave but Makes Another Bargain with Laban (30:25-34). The birth of Joseph by Rachel seems to have been a turning point in Jacob's life, for he is now motivated to go back to the Promised Land. NOTE. Perhaps Jacob was initially adopted by Laban but later Laban had sons (30:35; 31:1) and then cut Jacob from the inheritance. This, of course, would not be to Jacob's liking and give him a desire to return to his homeland.

1. Laban did not want Jacob to leave for he realized that God had blessed him because of Jacob's presence (30:27). NOTE. There seems to have been no spiritual reality in the life of Laban but he appreciated this life in Jacob and was glad for the material blessings he was reaping by being associated with Jacob.

2. Laban tells Jacob to "name his salary" and he will pay it (30:38). But Jacob is a clever man. His quick mind hits upon a deal that he suggests to Laban. Laban accepts the terms, and Jacob launches his big "livestock venture."

3. Jacob's proposal was that all off-color sheep and goats to be born would be reckoned as his and all normal color animals counted as Laban's. In that area, sheep were normally white (Psa. 147:16) in color and goats are normally black or brownish black. There are only a few exceptions. The deal evidently meant that Laban could separate and tend all the off-color animals at the outset (30:35), so that Jacob had to start from zero and hope to see some off-colored animals born. Jacob served more

F. Jacob's Clever Bargain Pays Off (30:35-43). Jacob used spotted rods before the ewes at the watering areas during the breeding season (30:37). This was probably a superstitious effort to make the color of the lambs to be born subject to prenatal influence. However, some scholars believe there may be some truth in this for they say the lamb, especially, is susceptible to the things that the mother sees during the gestation period. They claim that the effects of such sight can be passed on to the offspring. These facts are the method Jacob used to produce the desired effects, which would

indicate that men today have not exhausted this field. NOTE. Whatever the scientific basis for this kind of animal husbandry, the text confirms that it was ultimately God who brought so many spotted cattle to Jacob (31:9-12). NOTE. Jacob's methods reveal that he is still depending upon himself even after his disappointments at the hand of Laban. Jacob has not reached the place where he is willing to cast himself wholly upon the will and wisdom of God. Jacob is an example of a true believer with a new nature walking in the power of the flesh; he never cried out "O wretched man that I am." The spiritual side of Jacob does not come out until after Peniel where God breaks him completely. Jacob's life tells us: (1) there is no good in the old nature, and (2) there is no power in the new nature. The true believer must be yielded to God and walking in the power of the Holy Spirit. NOTE. Jacob was 20 years learning to walk in dependence on God.