

Genesis, Part 27

J. Vernon McGee thinks this chapter should be titled, “The Chickens Come Home to Roost” because we see Jacob begin to reap what he has sown. Jacob thought himself to be clever. He had lived by his wits practiced deceit and used shady methods, especially in his dealings with his brother Esau. He was quite proud of his accomplishments but now he is about to experience “payback”.

In our last session, we saw Jacob doing one of the most despicable things a man could do. At his mother’s leading, he deceived his father into granting the birthright blessings that rightly belonged to his elder twin brother Esau—elder by mere seconds. However, those blessings had been promised by God to the younger of the two twins, and Rebekah plotted to “help” God with His promises that the “elder would serve the younger” (Gen 25:23). She connived with Jacob to deceive blind Isaac into giving the blessings to the younger twin rather than the elder. God didn’t need her help.

It should be noted that while Rebekah much favored Jacob over his brother Esau, Isaac favored Esau. That favoritism was the motivation behind the plans of both Rebekah and Isaac. Not only was Rebekah wrong in what she and Jacob did in deceiving Isaac into blessing Jacob instead of Esau, but Isaac was also wrong in attempting to bless Esau instead of Isaac to whom the blessings were promised by God. This trickery was not only unnecessary and wrong, but it demonstrated a lack of faith in the promises of God.

We previously concluded Chapter 27 with the first five verses of Chapter 28. It should be understood that the original writers of Scripture did not write with chapter or passage breaks. Those are later additions to make referencing passages easier by simply referencing its “address”—the book, chapter number, and verse number. As a result, we sometimes get somewhat awkward chapter breaks, such as we have here. Genesis 28:1-5 fits better with the conclusion of Chapter 27 than as the beginning of Chapter 28, which is why I included it in last session’s material. Since it is

“officially” a part of Chapter 28, I have also included it here as a segue into Chapter 28.

Genesis 28:1 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women. ² Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother. ³ God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. ⁴ May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!” ⁵ Thus Isaac sent Jacob away. And he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob’s and Esau’s mother.

Aware of the threat to Jacob by Esau, Rebekah suggested to her husband that Jacob should take a wife from among her kin. She neglected to tell him about the threat to their son’s life. Isaac agrees to send Jacob back to Haran and gives him a final blessing that recognizes him as the one chosen by God to carry forth the bloodline to Christ and be the recipient of the promises God had given to Abraham and Isaac. These promises were, therefore, passed on to Jacob.

All through the Bible we see that God does not want the godly to marry the ungodly. Intermarriage always leads to godlessness and ends in sorrow. If a godly partner hopes to convert an ungodly one, it should be done before marriage.

2 Cor 6:14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?

The Canaanites were about as ungodly as they came. Though motivated by the threat on Jacob’s life, Rebekah’s plan to have her son take a wife from among her kin, a godly clan, was a valid one.

With the blessings of his father, Jacob departed from his family and the danger posed by his brother to travel to Paddan-aram where he would find a wife—or two.

Esau Marries an Ishmaelite

Meanwhile “back at the ranch,” Esau has an awakening and attempts to gain the favor of his father.

Gen 28:6 Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he directed him, “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women,” ⁷ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram. ⁸ So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father, ⁹ Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth.

For the most part, Esau appears in these narratives as spiritually dense. When he heard of the marriage commands his father had issued to Jacob, he realized how displeasing his Hittite wives were to his parents. Apparently, with no real understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant, Esau took a third wife, this time from among the Ishmaelites, descendants of Ishmael, Abraham’s son by Hagar, his wife’s handmaiden. The text does not indicate whether or not she was a believer, and Esau probably did not care much about that. He aimed to please his father by marrying someone who was connected, albeit loosely, with the covenant family.

Jacob’s Dream

Meanwhile, Jacob has departed for Haran to escape the ire of his brother and find a wife from among his kin. Along the way, he has a dream.

Gen 28:16 Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep.

As we shall shortly see the “certain place” would be called Bethel and was formerly called Luz (v. 19). Bethel means “the House of God”. It is some 12 miles north of Jerusalem. Where Jacob had come from was about 25 or 30 miles south of Jerusalem, thus, Jacob covered some 40 miles that first day. He is moving along rather quickly, probably anxious to get away from Esau. He lies down for the night and uses a stone for his pillow. What follows would be a high point in the life of Jacob.

Gen 28:12 And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³ And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, “I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

Jacob has a dream, and in it, he sees a ladder whose top reaches heaven. Angels were ascending and descending on it. The ladder symbolizes Jesus Christ. Jacob is a perfect picture of the lost soul—in the darkness, fleeing for his life, burdened with sin, and ignorant of the fact that God is near him and wants to save him. The ladder pictures Christ as the only way from earth to heaven. He opens heaven for us and brings heaven’s blessings to our lives. Others see the ladder and the angels ascending and descending representing the petitions of Jacob being carried heavenward, and the answers of God being carried earthward. Both interpretations can be considered valid, but either way, they picture access to God.

The Lord appears to Jacob and restates the Abrahamic Covenant designating him as the heir (vs. 13-14). What was promised to Abraham and then to Isaac is now promised to Jacob as the line through which God will deal with mankind.

Gen 28:15 Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” ¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep

and said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.”¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

The Lord promises continuous support for Jacob. Jacob then awoke from his sleep with a new awareness of his relationship with the Lord.

That word translated here as “awesome” is translated in others as “dreadful”. It is an interesting word worth looking at deeper. It is the Hebrew *yare*’ (*yaw·ray*) and the same word translated as “afraid” when describing Jacob’s reaction in the same verse. The word means to be fearful, awed, to cause astonishment and be held in awe, to inspire reverence or godly fear or even dread with a sense of honor and respect. Jacob “was *in awe* and said, “How *awesome* is this place!” is probably the better translation here. Jacob is humbled and awed by this experience as his words and actions express in the following verses.

When Jacob left home he had a limited view of God and perhaps was also running away from God. But he found he had not left God and stated as much when he said, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it” (v. 16).

Gen 28:18 So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it.¹⁹ He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first.²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear,²¹ so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God,²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.”

Jacob arises early, sets up an altar with his “pillow stone” on top, and pours oil on it. The parallel structure between the two sections (Gen. 28:10–13 and 16–19) shows that the worship was a response to the vision. For example, “head” is repeated, first for Jacob’s head on the stone (v. 11), then for the top (lit., “head”) of the stairway (v. 12), and then for the top of

the pillar (v. 18). Another wordplay occurs with the word “standing”; first, the Lord stood at the top of the stairway (v. 13), and the stone was set ... up (lit., “stood up”) as a memorial (v. 18). These parallels show that Jacob’s miniature altar represented the vision.

Standing stones become important from this point on and are different from altars. Memorials were set up to recall divine visitations so that others might learn about God when they would ask, “What do these stones mean?” (Josh. 4:6)

Jacob then seems to bargain with God. He vowed that *if* God would be with him (as He had promised), and supply all his needs, *then* the Lord shall be his God—and he will tithe. *If* You do what You say *then* I will serve you.

Some argue that the words “if” here can also be translated as “since” which gives a very different meaning to the passage. Both interpretations are likely true: Jacob believed God’s Word, but there was still enough of the “old man” in him to try to bargain with God the way he bargained with Esau and Isaac. He was so accustomed to “scheming” that he tried to scheme his way into God’s blessing! Jacob did not always live up to this vow in the years that followed. He “met his match” in Laban, who was a schemer himself! For twenty years the two of them tried to outsmart each other, but, in the end, Jacob had been disciplined and God had kept his promises.

God said quite clearly, “¹³...I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵Behold, 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” (vs. 13-15). These promises are entirely based on the “I will” of God, which is why they are called “unconditional”. Man will not contribute to their fulfillment.

God does not bless people based on some promise *they* make. Often when someone is in a stressful or even life-threatening situation they will bargain

with God and promise to go to church if God will just get them out of this difficulty. God doesn't work that way. God deals with man by His grace and mercy not because you made some promise you may never keep or at best only partially and unenthusiastically keep out of a misplaced sense of obligation. If you love Him, you will *want* to serve Him not feel obliged to serve Him.

God by grace visits His people and promises them protection and provision so that they might be a blessing to others. They in turn were to respond in faith, fearing Him, worshiping Him, offering to Him, vowing to Him, and making memorials for future worshipers at such places.

Jacob Meets Rachel

An introductory passage for Chapter 29 of Genesis might be Galatians 6:7-8.

Gal 6:7 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

J. Vernon McGee puts it this way, "Probably the title we ought to put over this chapter is 'Chickens Come Home to Roost.'" In the beginning, we see Jacob begin to reap the harvest of his evil doing. While the Galatians passage is written to Christians it has a universal application in every age. There are many examples of this in Scripture that we won't go into now.

Jacob is a perfect example of this inflexible law that we sometimes refer to by its Hindu name "karma". He has spent his life living by his wits and thinks himself rather cocky and clever. He does not hesitate to use shady methods to achieve his objectives. With this chapter of Genesis, it is "pay-back-time" for our hero.

Genesis 29:1 Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. ² As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it, for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, ³ and when all

the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well. ⁴ Jacob said to them, “My brothers, where do you come from?” They said, “We are from Haran.” ⁵ He said to them, “Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?” They said, “We know him.” ⁶ He said to them, “Is it well with him?” They said, “It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!” ⁷ He said, “Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go, pasture them.” ⁸ But they said, “We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep.”

So Jacob “went on his journey” (literally “picked up his feet”) and came to the land of the “people of the east” meaning his family. That Jacob just “happened” upon a well that was near where his uncle Laban just “happened” to live, and where Laban’s daughter, Rachel, just “happened” to come to water the sheep while he was there demonstrates God’s providential actions in the lives of those who are His. The fact that the meeting took place at a well is significant because a well was often associated with God’s blessing (cf. 16:13–14; 21:19; 26:19–25, 33).

Gen 29:9 While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a shepherdess. ¹⁰ Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother’s brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother’s brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well’s mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother’s brother. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. ¹² And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s kinsman, and that he was Rebekah’s son, and she ran and told her father.

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

Rachel arrives on the scene and immediately attracts Jacob's attention. He removes the stone from the well and waters his uncle's sheep. Verse 11 tells us he then kissed Rachel and wept loudly. Why weeping? I can only assume it was from the joy of arriving at his destination and seeing Rachel.

Jacob announced himself and their family relationship. Immediately Laban was summoned, and he offered family hospitality. The kissing of relatives (vv. 11, 13) was a proper greeting in that culture. In calling Jacob his own flesh and blood (v. 14), Laban possibly was adopting Jacob, his nephew, as a son.

Gen 29:15 Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?"

Because Jacob helped tend to the sheep during his stay, Laban feels an obligation to pay some wages for that, and thus begins the "horse trading".

Gen 29:16 Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹ Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Laban has two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Leah is the elder and is described as her "eyes were weak". The word in Hebrew word means tender, soft or delicate. The writer was not suggesting she was blind or partially blind and needing glasses. I would deduce from this that she did not have very attractive eyes. Since women in this culture often hid their faces revealing only their eyes, those of Leah may have appeared unattractive. The statement following that "Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance" tends to support that conclusion. Rachel, on the other hand, really got Jacob's attention. He fell in love with Rachel and offered to serve her father for seven years to marry her, to which sneaky Laban agreed. So

Jacob happily served his uncle and, as verse 20 suggests, time flew by because of his love for Rachel.

Gen 29:21 Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.”²² So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast.²³ But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her.²⁴ (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.)²⁵ And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?”

After the agreed seven years, Jacob asks his uncle to fulfill his part of the deal and give him his bride. In this culture and before the giving of the Law there appears to have been no wedding ceremony and exchanging of vows as practiced today. There is the consummation of the marriage that lasted seven days along with the wedding feast.

When the time came for the wedding feast (vv. 21–22), hearts were merry and spirits high. But in the night Leah, Rachel’s older sister, was substituted by Laban. This was a masterpiece of shameless treachery—unloved Leah was given to a man in love with Rachel. Old sneaky Laban slips Leah into the nuptial tent instead of Rachel. I can only conclude the tent was dark and Jacob could not detect the switch until the light of morning. The following morning Jacob discovers he has been deceived by his sneaky uncle. He spent the night in marital bliss with Leah! Jacob demands, “Why have you deceived me?”

Gen 29:26 Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.²⁷ Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.”

After he had consummated the marriage sexually, Jacob could not morally and legally return Leah to her father. Laban comes up with a lame excuse about it being traditional that the elder daughter must marry before the younger. Those words must have pierced Jacob! In his earlier days he, the

younger, had deceptively pretended before his father to be the older brother (chap. 27) to gain his blessings. Laban's stinging words were left without any comment; the event was simply God's decree against Jacob.

Then Laban makes an offer, "Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years" (v. 27). Laban tells Jacob to complete Leah's week and he will give him Rachel, too—but for another seven years of service.

The term "complete the week" refers to the marriage ceremony/tradition that once married the bride and groom retired to the wedding tent and remained in seclusion for one week getting to know each other more intimately. How Laban made the switch is not clear.

Gen 29:28 Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. ²⁹ (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) ³⁰ So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah and served Laban for another seven years.

Laban did make one concession to Jacob, he allowed him to marry Rachel immediately, but he cruelly demanded an extra seven years' service for Leah.

The Bible demonstrates over and over the principle that what a man sows he reaps (Gal. 6:7). Some have called this irony or poetic justice, but it is more than that. It is divine retribution in which there is often a measure-for-measure turn of affairs. God orders the affairs of people to set things right. With Jacob, this deception was perfectly fitted; it was divine punishment to bring his own craftiness before his eyes. He had deceptively presented himself to his father under the guise of Esau the firstborn; now Leah the firstborn was deceptively introduced to him under the guise of Rachel the younger! After his initial reaction, Jacob recognized the deception for what it was and accepted it. He finished out the bridal week (Gen. 29:27; cf. week in v. 28) at the end of which he was given Rachel (two wives in seven days). Each daughter was given a servant girl as a wedding gift, a custom common in that society. Leah was given Zilpah (v. 24), and Rachel received

Bilhah, (v. 29; cf. 30:4–13.) Then Jacob worked another seven years, which he owed Laban in return for Rachel (29:30; cf. 31:38, 41).

So poor Jacob has been tricked by a trickster who was more tricky than he was. Laban gets 14 years of service out of his nephew and gets shed of two daughters, Leah and Rachel, along with their two handmaidens, Zilpah and Bilhah, with one stroke. Jacob has met his match in Uncle Laban. Karma.

Jacob's Children

Ole Uncle Laban has set up a situation that is ripe for disaster, and things soon go south. In verse 30 above we are told that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. This fact must have been obvious, especially to Leah. We can assume from verse 31 that Leah was treated differently by both Jacob and Rachel.

Gen 29:31 When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. ³² And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, “Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.” ³³ She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also.” And she called his name Simeon. ³⁴ Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, “Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” Therefore his name was called Levi. ³⁵ And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, “This time I will praise the Lord.” Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

Because Leah was “hated,” and the word is usually translated as “hated” or “enemy,” the Lord took pity on Leah and “opened her womb” so that she conceived—four times. She bore four sons to Jacob: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah.

While Leah is producing sons for Jacob, Rachel remains barren. Leah is blessed while Rachel and Jacob are chastised for the way Leah is treated.

Leah named her firstborn Reuben, indicating that the Lord had seen her misery. Another wordplay joins it: Now at last “my husband will be attached to me” (v. 34). This naming showed her hope but also her consolation and faith. Jacob never saw her affliction, but God did (cf. “Beer Lahai Roi,” lit., “the well of the living One who sees me,” 16:14; 24:62; 25:11). Simeon was so named because the Lord heard (*šāma’*) that Leah was not loved. Levi was named for her hope that her husband would become attached (*yillāweh*) to her, but it was not to be. Judah was her consolation; she would be satisfied to praise (*’ôdeh*) the Lord, for Judah means “let Him be praised.” Leah exhibited genuine faith during her great affliction.

Rachel remains barren as we shall see in our next session.

Learnings

The Lord doesn’t need our help in fulfilling what He has promised to do. That lesson is stressed over and over in Genesis. Every such attempt to “help” God out through some human effort has resulted in some form of disaster. God doesn’t need our help. Our obligation is to remain faithful trusting in His promises and “wait on the Lord”. if He calls us to some action, be certain it is actually Him calling you, and then step out in faith to do whatever He says to do.

God moves among His own through His providential actions in our lives. What often seems like a coincidence is not a coincidence at all but God moving to bring about His plan for our lives. Consider for a moment the various major and sometimes seemingly minor events in your life that resulted in a life-changing decision. Had that event/decision not occurred as it did your life might have been very different. In such meditation, we might also become more aware of the occasions when God moved in our lives to lead us away from some “here-hold-my-beer” moment that could have resulted in some disaster.

And then thank God for saving your stupid self from that disaster.