

Genesis in Biblical Perspective: The Gospel of Christ from Genesis – Lessons from Life

Genesis 27:46–28:22

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We begin where we left off in our last study. Esau has lost the birth right and now the family blessing by the duplicity of Jacob and Rebekah. Esau has now determined he is going to kill Jacob and the word has gotten out. Now Rebekah responds. This is the Word of God.

Genesis 27:46 – 28:5 says

[27:46] Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?" [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.

The grass withers, the flower fades, and the Word of our God abides forever. Father, would You allow the meditations of our heart from Your Word, the words of my mouth to be faithful to Your Word, empowered by the Spirit of God to cause us to glory in Christ for it's in Him, our Redeemer, we pray. Amen.

I'm so excited to be in Genesis 28 with you. Do you remember the tower of Babel? This passage is the initial reversal of the tower of Babel. Babel which is man's attempt to work to heaven, God confuses them with language. Now, here is God's stairway from heaven to bring men and women to Himself. Eventually we'll see the reversal of Babel at Pentecost where the languages will now hear the Gospel and when men and women come to Christ they're not divided up but they are joined together. This passage, however, is the beginning of the turn of Babel. This is a great passage of Scripture.

When I think of this passage I think of three things – God’s ladder, God’s gate, God’s house. Let’s get into our passage. Rebekah is in misery. She has gotten her way for she has accomplished everything she has wanted to but she is in misery. Esau was not the most discreet person that has ever lived. He has now been deceived out of the birth right because of the lust of his appetites. He has been deceived out of the family blessing. There are three blessings in a believing family. One is the birth right, one is the family blessing and the third is the covenant blessing. He has lost the first two already even though you would have thought as first born he would have gotten it. Esau made no secret about killing his brother Jacob. Esau is not discreet and Rebekah doesn’t miss a trick. She knows about it.

So now Rebekah comes up with a way to protect Jacob. Esau is guilty of bigamy and marrying outside the covenant for he married Hittite women from the Canaanites which meant he married under the curse of Ham. Rebekah thinks if Jacob does that then her life is worthless. She will just loathe her life if that happens and then she makes sure that Isaac knows that. The first scene we have in this passage is Rebekah in her self-centeredness and misery communicating to Isaac that they can’t let Jacob marry outside the covenant. Isaac comes up with a plan. Isaac thinks it’s his plan but it’s really Rebekah’s plan.

The first church I pastored was in Pineland, Florida. One of the first series I did on Sunday night was on the family. I preached on Ephesians 5 where husbands are supposed to love their wives sacrificially and lead them as servants. Then I preached on submission with fear and trembling as I stepped into that. Wives are to submit to their husbands, defined it, got to the end of the sermon and went to the back of the church. The wife of one of the elders came up to me and said “Pastor, don’t worry about this. I want you to know that I believe in submission too. In my home that is exactly what we believe and do.” I said “Margaret I’m glad to hear that.” She said “Yes sir, in our home my husband is the head of the house but I also need to tell you I’m the neck. I turn that head pretty much where I want it to go.”

Rebekah is a neck. She gives lip service to Isaac the head but she gets done what she wants to get done but God can draw straight lines with crooked sticks in His sovereignty in all of this. So Isaac sends Jacob away with two statements. The first one is that he gives him a command before he sends him away. The command has a negative and a positive. The negative part of the command to Jacob is ‘don’t marry outside the covenant.’ The positive part of the command is for him to go to Mesopotamia where our families have come from to Rebekah’s brother Laban to find a wife and marry within the covenant.

Then Isaac does something very significant and I will build further on this a little later. Remember that Jacob has the birth right (gets resources) by hook and

crook and he has the family blessing which comes with authority in the family. Now there is the covenant blessing given by God to Abraham, to Isaac and God reveals to Isaac and Rebekah at the birth of the twins that the younger will rule over the older. The older will serve the younger which is the covenant blessing God declared to go to this one. It is this one called Jacob. There is a theme in this verse I don't want you to miss about God's grace.

There are three things about God's grace. God's grace is sovereign, searching and sustaining. Because of God's grace God has declared and decreed His favor and grace to fall upon Jacob. Esau has not aligned himself with God's decrees of election. On the contrary, Esau has attempted to circumvent it until now. Now he gives the covenant blessing. Now Isaac gives to Jacob the blessing that had been promised to Abraham and then given to him. He blesses him fully with the blessing of Abraham. The covenant blessing was God's "I will give you a land. I will give you a seed. I will give you the blessing of Abraham through which all the families of the earth shall be blessed." I will bless all the families of the earth through you by the blessing I give to you. God makes that promise to him. Isaac affirms the Abrahamic covenant and gives it to Jacob. Now what happens?

Don't forget Esau. He is still there in the family. What happens to Esau? Let's look further in the passage. Genesis 28:6–9 says

[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.

Esau is aware that Jacob is being sent away to get a wife, away from his hand to kill him. Esau now is seeking favor, influence, acceptance, and redemption by getting a wife that they'll approve of because right now he has two Canaanite wives which are out of the covenant. So he secured a wife from his father Isaac's half-brother. So now Esau has three wives. After he marries his third wife he goes away never to return.

Now what happens to Jacob? Jacob left and goes on a dream trip, so let's see where he goes. Genesis 28:10–22 says

[10] 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. [12] And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth (Ladder is a tough translation here. More precisely it

would mean stairway and even more precisely it would mean a ramped stairway. In that day it would be something similar to a pagan ziggurat with this stairway steps going up. This ladder is what he sees in his dream.), *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. [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." [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."*

Now we come to the fourth scene and that is Jacob's dream trip. He is about two days away and he has gone about 50 miles. He arrives at a place called Bethel. Jacob is actually retracing the steps of his grandfather Abraham. This is the way Abraham had come down from Mesopotamia through this same pass in to the land of Canaan. Jacob came to this place and stopped because the sun was going down. It wasn't like he thought this is where my grandfather Abraham stopped so I'll stop here too. It was that the sun was setting and it was time to sleep for the night. Hebrews 1:1 says *[1] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets.* Dreams were one way that God spoke to them in the Old Testament. God now speaks to Jacob in this sleeping position with his head on a stone.

God says to him, "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac." Notice He doesn't say yet "I am the God of Jacob." God tells Jacob He is going to give him the blessing of Abraham. All that Isaac has blessed him with, He now reaffirms, all three points of it – the land, the seed, and he'll be blessed to be a blessing to all the earth. Shout to the north, the east, the west and the south. Your descendants shall gather from all of those locations and I will bless all the families of the earth through you. I will be with you when you are in this land and when you are out of this land for I will be with you.

Jacob awakes. He is amazed. This isn't just any place. This place is awesome. God is in this place and the stone he laid his head upon, he now turns up as a pillar. He anoints it with oil and consecrates it. Here he has seen the hand of God. He has seen the angels ascending and descending. He has seen the Lord above the ladder and beside him. It is here that the Lord has spoken to him who had not thought about Him one moment when he laid his head down. Yet God sovereignly, searchingly came to him. God closes what He says to Jacob by saying "Yahweh" I Am, for not only am I El Shaddai, God Almighty but I am the God who will be with you. So as Jacob awakes this place has been transformed into an awesome place. He consecrates it as a place of worship.

Then Jacob makes a covenant vow. It is the longest vow in the entire Old Testament. In this vow Jacob says "God, if You will go with me and bring me back to this place in peace, then You will be my God and I will give a tenth to You." Please notice that the tithe isn't something in the Mosaic administration of Israel but it's something that obviously the patriarchs knew about. Abraham knew to tithe to Melchizedek. Jacob knew to embrace a tithe as an act of worship. It is very clearly built into the response and expression of worship in the lives of God's people. Now the Pharisees will mess things up with the way that they'll handle it but it's clearly built in here as a principle in the lives of God's people. So Jacob makes this vow to God saying "If You do this then I'll do that. When I get back here You will be my God and I will worship You and I will give the tithe to You."

I'd like to give you three takeaways from this narrative that we have just looked at. The first takeaway is life lessons from the four individuals mentioned here – Rebekah, Isaac, Esau and Jacob. What do we learn from Rebekah? Rebekah believed and embraced God's promises and purposes but she didn't trust God to do it. It was going to be God's promises done her way. I believe this is a fundamental mistake we are making in Christian lives and in the church today. We say we want to fulfill God's mission but we don't realize that God's mission must be done in God's means. God's mission should be done in God's methods. God's mission must include God's message, the whole counsel of God. We are saying we want to see people come to Christ through evangelism and the Great Commission but we have to understand that God's mission has to be done by God's means. God's work is to be done God's way by God's power for God's glory. The end does not justify the means. The means, end, message and the mission are inseparably tied. When we take the way of the world to get the way of God done it will eventually explode in the Christian, in the church or in the leadership of that church. Rebekah wanted God's promises but she could not trust God's means for God to fulfill. She could not fully trust in the Lord.

The second life lesson is from Esau. It is the folly of self-made religion. He wants to be accepted, justified, received and in a position of influence so he thinks if they don't like this then he'll go and do this. Instead of repentance and trust, he makes another effort at self-affirmation, self-acceptance and self-promotion.

Esau keeps missing the point. He thought if they don't want me to have a Canaanite wife then I'll get an Ishmaelite wife which was just as wrong and now instead of a bigamist he is now a polygamist. So now instead of marrying two women outside of the covenant he has married three women outside of the covenant. Esau is always missing the point. Self-made religion to gain acceptance never can fulfill it.

A man said to me "Harry just because all these people don't believe in Jesus or follow Christianity, don't you think God will honor their sincere attempt to find Him through their religion?" The bottom line of what I shared with him was the religions of this world, whether it is the non-religion of this world like secularism or atheism which is still a religion (a faith commitment that is being made) or the religions of this world, no matter what the -ism is you put with it, these (religions of this world) are not attempts to seek God but they are attempts to avoid the God of the Bible. They are not attempts to find Him but attempts to avoid Him. Esau would love to have all the benefits of the covenant but he won't do business with the God of the covenant. The religions of this world are not attempts to find God but attempts to flee God. They are suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. That ought not to cause anger except that our God is not being worshiped. It ought to cause a broken heart for us, for men and women are wandering in the darkness calling darkness light but no matter how sincerely you call darkness light it is still darkness.

A third life lesson from the text is from Isaac. This is not a model family. The father knows nothing. The mother gets everything and I'm just not sure where we'll end up here with Jacob and Esau but I can see the hand of God. The hand of God is not only taking Rebekah's conniving and duplicitousness and Jacob's conniving and duplicities as the supplanter and even Esau's self-promotion and self-gratification of his appetites, and He is doing changing work here. The man who has pretty much gotten an extreme makeover in these last two chapters has been Isaac. He finally does what he should have been doing. God said when they were born that the blessing would go to Jacob. Then Jacob steals the birth right and then Isaac tries to have a private blessing ceremony to get the family blessing to Esau instead of honoring the decree of God's election. Jacob is the one God has placed His eternal love upon while affirming Esau's rejection of Him.

As Isaac plans to circumvent that because of his love for Esau, then all of a sudden he finds out the trickery and the blessing he gave to Jacob was such the blessing that the blessing he gave to Esau was an anti-blessing. It said in the Scripture that at that moment Isaac shook violently. It's the same word used to talk about earthquakes. God shook him to the foundations. God says "You cannot subvert Me, circumvent Me for My purposes stand." I believe Isaac was a believer and I believe he then was broken. So now when his son leaves no longer does he try to play any games, but now the blessing of Abraham is willingly, fully and completely placed upon God's elect. Isaac is broken and now

he is ready to be used of the Lord. Here is a great work that God has done in Isaac's life. Now he is ready to be an instrument of God's blessing to God's elect because he has been broken and God is now his God.

What is the life lesson we learn from Jacob? Jacob is experiencing the hound of God's grace even in his nearly saved superficiality. When I moved to Birmingham, Alabama I assure you I did not know anything about hunting or fishing. I had been fishing one time in my life and the whole time I sat on the pier the whole afternoon I kept thinking "I could have played 36 holes of golf today." When I got here and heard young boys and girls talking about getting their first deer in a youth group meeting, I thought "There must be something to this hunting around here." It seems everybody is doing it. So now I've actually been hunting twice now. I have to say it's interesting and I've enjoyed it but I have to confess that the thing I really loved the most was the dogs. Those dogs worked that field and the next thing you know, boom it's right there. You not only have bird dogs but hunting hounds as well.

That's what I want you to see here. God's grace is the hound from heaven. Jacob has come all the way down to a place called Bethel. There God has tracked him down. I don't think Jacob is saved yet. I think he's nearly saved because God is calling him. It is the same with me. I didn't go to church after I became a Christian, I went to church before I became a Christian. There were things that God was doing in my life. I wasn't converted yet. The church doesn't make you a Christian but there are some things that are happening in Jacob's life that shows His hand upon him. I don't think he's saved but you can see what the New Testament calls the effectual calling, the rising of the new heart with Jacob. We see the sovereignty of God's grace tracking him down.

Who did Abraham want the covenant to go to? He wanted it to go to Ishmael but God sovereignly says it will go to Isaac. Who does Isaac want the covenant to go to? He wants it to go to Esau but God says it will go to Jacob. This God who sovereignly called and decreed the election of Jacob now begins to search him out. Here is a fugitive on his way back to Mesopotamia who stops in a place that doesn't mean anything to him and just 48 hours before he was in the warmth of a tent. Here was a man who had all the protection of his father Isaac and all of his hired hands and now he is in the wilderness alone with only a stone to protect his head. Behind him is another hound, Esau who is after him. So behind him is a death camp and in front of him is Laban which is going to be a labor camp. He has nothing behind him and nothing in front of him but right here in the midst of nothing while he has put his head down this place becomes the place of God because God finds him out there. God the sovereign God now becomes the searching God and God's hand lays hold of him. God has now found him out.

Then Jacob responds rightly. He is amazed. He has the fear of God. You must not jettison the fear of God in attempting to embrace the love of God. The love of God actually enhances the fear of God, not the fear of eternity, not the fear of

death, but the fear of God. Awesome is the Lord our God. Majestic is He. We do business with Him who has sovereignly sought us out and made us one with Him. We who were His enemies now is our God of all glory. God's hand is sovereign and searching and then has even promised sustaining presence with him for He says He will be with him in and out of the land. God sovereignly searches and sustains Jacob. Jacob awakes, is amazed and now he sets up the stone which becomes the marker, the place where he'll worship the Lord. He then enters into a vow which is certainly appropriate but now I know he is not converted.

How do I know Jacob is not converted? It is when he says to God, "If God You will do this then I will do this." If he was converted he wouldn't use 'if then' but he'd use 'since then' – since You've made this promise and You are my God Almighty and I know You're promises are 'yes' and amen, then I will rest in You. No, he is still the negotiator. He has still not bowed. He will but still emulate his response to God's sovereign searching grace which is worship. Eradicate negotiating vows but emulate the fear of the Lord, the awesome of the place because this is where God is and God will be worshiped. No longer will I be a taker and a stealer. Now I bring the tenth for I'm a giver. I want to be a giver.

Finally what about Jacob and me? What happens to Jacob here has a great impact on you. I'd like to show you two passages of Scriptures. The first one is in Galatians 3. Remember the promise of the seed that comes to Jacob here? Who is the seed? It's going to be his sons, the twelve tribes, Israel. Yes, but who ultimately is Israel? This very covenant to Abraham then to Isaac and now to Jacob is talked about here. Galatians 3:6–9 says

[6] just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? [7] Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. [8] And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." [9] So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

You are the descendants of Abraham if you believe in Jesus Christ. Christ is the Seed God gave for our redemption. You are the ones that have been gathered from the east, west, north and south. That's why we send missionaries out because that's where the children of Abraham are coming. Don't they come to the land? Yes, but that little strip in Palestine was just a down payment. Let's look now at the second passage I want to show you and that's in Romans 4. Here we see the promise of Abraham and how it is understood by Paul. Romans 4:13 says *[13] For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world... (Palestine was just a down payment but it is the world that belongs to my Father. Jesus has all authority over all of the world.) did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.* There is the promise that has been given to us. We are the seed through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob the

descendants from all over who have been gathered into the Kingdom of God throughout this entire world. May God's Kingdom reign from the rising to the setting of the sun.

I can't leave a text like this without ending up with Jesus. I'd like to give you one more thought as we look at John 1. What about Jacob and Jesus? Jacob saw this marvelous vision. John 1:46–51 says

[46] Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." [47] Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" (They were called Israelites because of Jacob whose name was changed to Israel and he had a lot of deceit. Now here is an Israelite with no deceit in him.) [48] Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." [49] Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" [50] Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." [51] And he said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man. (ladder of Jacob)"

I know it's a fun Sunday school song but we're not climbing up Jacob's ladder. It's not Jacob's ladder but it's God's ladder. The ladder is Jesus and where the ladder lands from heaven to earth is the gate of heaven. Come to Christ. He is the Gate of Heaven. Where the ladder lands, no longer am I going to call this lose but we're now going to call this Bethel, the house of God. God's sovereign, searching, sustaining grace comes from heaven to you. You don't go up to it but it comes to you. It is grace and where He comes is the gate. Jesus is the ladder. Jesus is the gate. Jesus is the stairway. Jesus is the entrance and where He lands we no longer lose. We are now Bethel, God's house. He dwells in you.

I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This is God's past faithfulness. I will fulfill My promises to you Jacob which is God's future faithfulness. I am with you always which is God's present faithfulness. God is the ladder, Jesus. God is the gate, Jesus. Now, are you His dwelling place? Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the time we could be together. Thank You for the enormous privilege to come to Your Word. Thank You for the opportunity to spend these moments in it. If you have never received this Savior as your Lord and Savior or if you're waiting for a religion to give you a ladder to heaven, come to Jesus who is the Ladder from heaven to you. He is the Gate to come to and in it is the way of Life. When you come to Him say "Lord, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling" and now you have become His dwelling place.

You are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Christ in you is the Hope of glory. O God, thank You for Your sovereign, searching, sustaining grace. You have been faithful to our fathers. You will be faithful to the end and You are faithful now. You are our God, in Christ our Lord, Amen.

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