

June 23- Genesis 27-30 Jacob steals Esau's blessing and marries

Chapter 27

Jacob's name "the supplanter" now comes on full display as he tricks his elderly father into giving him the blessing intended for his preferred, elder son, Esau. Isaac knew that he didn't have long left to live, that his eyes had grown dim, and he wanted to ritually pass down the inheritance of his blessing to Esau while they could still celebrate this rite of passage together. Isaac loved Esau's game, so he sent him out to hunt game and prepare a stew for him so that he could bless him over a meal. However, Rebekah was listening and she wanted her favored son, Jacob, to receive the blessing instead. We can see where Jacob gets his craftiness from in this story, for the stealing of the blessing was Rebekah's plan! She sent Jacob to slaughter two lambs for her from among the flock so that she could prepare Isaac's favorite feast for him, while Jacob put furry skins on himself and dressed in Esau's smelly clothes to trick his blind father. And it worked! Though not without some suspicion from Isaac.... Notice how he asks so many questions (not unlike little red riding hood asking the wolf "are you really my granny?"). Jacob was timid and worried it wouldn't work, but he trusted his mother and went through with it. Isaac blessed his youngest son with every good thing he could imagine: the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth, plenty of grain and wine, and his brothers for servants. Unfortunately, culturally the only blessing that Isaac could then offer to Esau when he finally showed up was the opposite of what he had offered to Jacob -a pretty rotten hand indeed. Both Esau and Isaac were devastated by this violating trick, and as a result Esau hated his brother and was determined to get revenge -to kill him- after his father died. Rebekah overheard this and sent her preferred son far away to her brother, Laban, to find a wife from among her own people, as she couldn't stand the wives Esau had chosen from among the Canaanites. Ever the mastermind, Rebekah made Isaac think that this plan was his idea, and he was the one to send Jacob away to find a wife!

Chapter 28

Isaac sends his son away with yet another blessing, in line with the blessing of chapter 27, it's clear that Jacob is the one through whom God's promises to Abraham will be fulfilled, so Isaac passing the blessing of Abraham which he received as a young man down to his youngest son as he prepares to journey to find a wife. While journeying to Haran, Jacob dreams and receives a vision and word from the Lord. God introduces God's self personally to Jacob, just as God had personally connected with both Abraham and Isaac. The Lord promises: "I will give you and your offspring the land on which you lay, and your offspring will be numerous. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land." Jacob marked the spot on which these promises occurred with an altar, and named the place Bethel "house of God." Then, Jacob made a vow in return to God -but in typical Jacob fashion, it's a conditional promise. "IF God will be with me..... and bring me back home again safely..... then this stone pillar will be God's house, and I will give God 1/10th of all that I have."

Chapter 29

Just as Abraham's servant found a bride for Isaac at the well, so too now Jacob sees his bride at the well and falls instantly in love with her -especially after he hears that she is the daughter of his mother's brother (definitely from among her mother's own people as she is from her mother's own family). Rachel works as a shepherd of her father's sheep and Jacob waters the sheep for her -an unexpected, generous act of service. Laban is a trickster just like his nephew, and while he welcomes Jacob warmly and he stays for a month, Laban invites Jacob to work for him for a wage. Jacob, who did not come with expensive jewelry or gifts to pay a bride price as Abraham's servant had, offers to work for Laban for 7 years in exchange for his daughter RACHEL's hand in marriage. The scripture says that Leah's eyes were "lovely".... But, no one really knows how this word should be translated from the Hebrew, it could just as easily meant ugly or sickly, which would perhaps explain why he so

prefers Rachel over Leah. Jacob worked for 7 years, which felt like nothing because he so loved Rachel, but Laban tricked him and gave him Leah to lie with on the wedding night, because it was not culturally appropriate for the younger daughter to marry before the elder. The fact that he couldn't find someone else to marry Leah in 7 years perhaps reveals that Laban was concerned he would never be able to marry Leah off without tricking someone into it. Jacob was horrified to discover the violating trick that had been played on him -not unlike the way he tricked his blind father into believing that he was his brother. Because Jacob had already consummated the marriage with Leah, the marriage could not be undone. So, Laban offered Jacob the one he truly wanted to marry in exchange for another 7 years of service to pay her bride price. Laban gave Rachel to him to be his bride that very week in exchange for his promise to work for 7 years. The Lord saw that Leah was unloved and had compassion on her by making her abundantly fertile, so that at least she would have society's blessing through her many sons, even if she didn't have the praise of her husband. The names she chooses for her first three sons are sad and express her complicated emotions about the dysfunctional family system she finds herself in. She bears all of these sons in hopes that this accomplishment will make her husband love her, but finally by the 4th son (perhaps after seeing that her fertility does not change her status in her husband's eyes) she decides to praise God for herself rather than for any approval she might win from her husband.

Chapter 30

Rachel was the favored wife, and therefore the wife with the first rights to sleep with her husband. After seeing her sister have 4 sons, and she still remain childless, Rachel decides to have children through her maid (just like Sarah at first thought she would have to have a son through Hagar), so she gives her maid to Jacob as a wife and the maid bore two sons for Rachel. The names Rachel gives to her children, similarly convey her complicated emotions of desperation and jealousy. When Leah saw how Rachel had received children through her maid, she too followed suit and gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob as a wife and Zilpah bore two children for Leah to Jacob, which made Leah happy. Reuben found mandrakes while working in the field and brought them to his mother - mandrakes were a potent treatment for infertility. Rachel was still desperate to bear a child herself to Jacob, and so she paid for some of her sister's mandrakes (her sister who didn't need any help with fertility) by offering her her right to sleep with Jacob first that night. Through this "buying" time with her husband, Leah conceived a 5th son, and then a 6th son, and then a daughter. Finally, at long last, not the mandrakes, but God opened Rachel's womb and she bore her first child, Joseph, the balm for her many years of childlessness. She prayed to God for another son, and that prayer would be answered through the birth of Benjamin in chapter 35. Thus Jacob had 12 sons and 1 daughter. Not a bad start to the "many nations" God promised he would father.

The 7 years of working for Rachel's bride price concluded, and Jacob wanted to return home to his own country and to make a name for himself rather than just being seen as one among Laban's household, so Jacob asked Laban to give him every striped or spotted sheep or goat as his wages. Laban at first thought he had outsmarted Jacob by taking away all the spotted and striped animals and giving them in his son's care, but he didn't understand that even a white sheep or goat can carry the genes to produce spotted or striped animals. Jacob thought he played a role in producing the spotted or striped sheep by placing spotted or striped sticks for them to look at where they mated. Jacob only bred animals like this from among the strongest of Laban's herds, therefore Jacob became a wealthy man through this rudimentary genetic engineering. The strongest of the sheep and goats produced striped and spotted offspring for Jacob to take with him as his wages.