



JACOB MEETS HIS MATCH

Genesis 28:10–31:16

We can rejoice in God's promises, knowing He is always faithful. But this doesn't keep us from suffering the consequences of our own sinful actions. Jacob was uniquely blessed by God, but he and his family suffered needlessly because of his selfish decisions.

Jacob is now running for his life because Esau is making plans to kill him. He's being sent to safety, to the family home of his mother Rebekah in Mesopotamia, five hundred miles away.

Now it's a long journey alone, and as Jacob is camping out one night, he has a dream that sets the stage for everything that will happen to him for the rest of his life. In Genesis 28, that dream is described in

verses 12-15, as Jacob sees a ladder descending from heaven and hears the promises of God being repeated to him.

Let me tell you something. Jacob has essentially ruined just about everything he's touched. He's deceived and divided his family. Now while he's out here in the wilderness alone, God shows up in this dream to reassure Jacob that He will keep His promises. God will bless Jacob in spite of Jacob!



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The Lord wants Jacob—and all of us—to grasp the truth that when your sin drives you into a spiritual wilderness, God's grace can still reach you there.

Right now, you might be experiencing the consequences of your sin. You're in the wilderness, so to speak. God knows what you've done; God knows where you are. And you're not beyond the reach of His grace.

God's not going to show up in a dream of a ladder from heaven but in the truth of His Word. He's closer to you than you might think. Indeed, as the old song goes, "He's only a prayer away." Pray right now, confessing your sin to Jesus Christ—no matter where you are, no matter how far you've strayed from Him.

Well here, in this dramatic dream, the Lord repeats to Jacob the covenant promises. God gave the same promises to Abraham back in chapter 12 and then to Isaac in chapter 26—the promises of a literal land, a literal nation, and a literal blessing through Israel that will one day impact the entire earth.

In chapter 29 Jacob arrives at his ancestral homeland in Haran. Almost immediately, the prettiest girl in the place shows up, and she just happens to be his cousin. Jacob is invited to stay with his Uncle Laban and work for him, tending his flocks.



We read in verse 15 that after about a month Laban hires Jacob permanently. In fact, he asks Jacob to name his wages.

Well, Jacob doesn't want money. He wants to marry Laban's daughter, and he offers to work for seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage. Laban agrees, and after seven years, he finances a huge wedding party. But he secretly switches the bride, who would have been completely veiled, and the next morning Jacob is in for the wedding surprise of the century. It isn't Rachel lying next to him; it's her older sister, Leah.

Naturally, Jacob is furious and confronts his uncle:

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?" Laban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn." (verses 25-26)

In other words, "That's not how we do it here in Mesopotamia."

Let me tell you, Jacob the deceiver has just been out-deceived. Jacob had taken advantage of his father Isaac who couldn't see well; and Laban has taken advantage of the fact that Jacob couldn't see in that dark wedding tent. Jacob had pretended to be his older brother, and now Leah has pretended to be her younger sister.

That's what you call getting a dose of your own medicine!

After a heated exchange, Laban agrees to give Rachel to Jacob, but only if Jacob promises to work for him on the family farm for another seven years. Jacob agrees. Verse 30 reads:

So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.

Now that phrase, "he loved Rachel more than Leah," sets the tone for a truckload of family problems. We begin in verses 31-32:

When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. 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."

The Lord then gives Jacob three more sons by Leah. By the way, in spite of Jacob, God is fulfilling His promise in giving him a growing family.

But the problems are growing too. Genesis 30:1 says:

When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!"

What's he supposed to do about her jealousy? Well, Rachel has a solution; she gives Jacob her maid Bilhah that she might bear children on Rachel's behalf. Jacob goes along with the plan, and Bilhah has two sons.

Then when Leah ceases having children, she gives Jacob her maid Zilpah, who bears Jacob two more sons.

Beloved, this chapter isn't a manual on marriage and family. God reports what's going on and works in spite of it, but He isn't condoning polygamy and adultery. This passage is filled with intrigue, manipulation, competition, and greed.

God uses the sinful decisions of all involved ultimately to produce the twelve sons of Jacob, but that's something God could have done had Jacob been faithful to one wife, according to God's design. In fact, keep in mind that Leah, Jacob's first wife, is the woman who



bears Judah, and Judah will become the royal tribe from which the promised Messiah will come.

After twenty years of these women competing against each other, Leah has six sons (and one daughter), Bilhah has two sons, Zilpah has two sons, and Rachel, finally, has one son, Joseph.

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(Romans 5:20).*

Again, the timeless principle here is that God’s grace and goodness can intersect your life, not because you’ve been faithful, but in spite of the fact that you haven’t. I’m not trying to justify sin here; I’m trying to exalt the grace of God. Where sin increased, the apostle Paul wrote, grace abounded more (Romans 5:20).

Now back here in Genesis 30:25, Jacob is ready to leave town. But Laban knows Jacob’s been good for the family business, so he urges Jacob to stay and set his own wages.

Jacob tells Laban he’ll stay if he can keep any speckled and spotted sheep and goats, and all the black sheep that are born. Laban quickly agrees because this gives him the advantage since most sheep are white and most goats are black or brown.

Now people often are confused by what Jacob does in verse 37. Jacob is simply employing an old supersti-

tion by peeling rods of certain trees and placing them before the flocks as they mate. In other words, he’s not trusting God; he’s up to his old tricks.

Amazingly, Jacob’s flocks multiply. God blesses Jacob’s flocks, not because of his superstition but in spite of it.

As we come to Genesis 31, we find Laban’s sons accusing Jacob of stealing their inheritance. Even Laban is becoming hostile, as he sees Jacob prospering in spite of his efforts to take advantage of Jacob’s labor. Those deceptive efforts, Jacob says, included Laban changing his wages ten times (verse 7). Jacob certainly has met his match in old Uncle Laban.

Finally, the Lord speaks to Jacob in verse 3 and says, “Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.” That’s all Jacob needs to hear.

God is going to continue to be faithful to Jacob in prospering him and protecting him, not because Jacob deserves it but because God has promised it.

That’s grace. Sin abounded, but God’s grace abounded more.

What principles should always guide your family relationships?

How have you seen God’s grace at work in your life through the years? How does this shape your perspective on the challenges you face?

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