

Lesson 10 (Study Notes): [Birthright Blessings; Marriage in the Covenant](#)

Class Member Reading: [Genesis 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29](#) (Refreshingly straightforward!)

The Marriage of Isaac and Rebekah

Encourage listeners/class members to read these stories closely, watching for the clever little details. These stories are some of the best in biblical literature. Also, I love that the reading assignment is simply six continuous chapters of the Bible! This is scripture study. It also makes a huge difference to read in a modern translation, so try it out. This is the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

24Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. ²Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, ‘Put your hand under my thigh (Euphemism, probably involving a curse of sterility or even death to children if the oath is not kept) ³and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and earth, that **you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites**, among whom I live, ⁴but will go to my country and to my kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac.’ (Intermarriage with the Canaanites was seen as a threat to identity and destiny of the Israelites, forbidden in Deut. 7:1-4. Intermarriage with foreigners is forbidden in Ezra 9-10. This phrasing as well as other wording reflects the command of God to Abraham, and makes Rebekah an Abraham/prophetic figure in her own right...more than Isaac in fact, despite the renewal of the covenant with Isaac narrated in 26:2-5) ⁵The servant said to him, ‘Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land; must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?’ ⁶Abraham said to him, ‘See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my birth, and who spoke to me and swore to me, “To your offspring I will give this land”, he will send his angel before you; you shall take a wife for my son from there. ⁸But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there.’ (I appreciate the respect for [the] woman this statement demonstrates) ⁹So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

10 Then the servant took ten of his master’s camels and departed, taking all kinds of choice gifts from his master; and he set out and went to Aram-naharaim, to the city of Nahor. ¹¹He made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water; it was towards evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹²And he said, ‘O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴Let the

girl to whom I shall say, “Please offer your jar that I may drink”, and who shall say, “Drink, and I will water your camels”—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master.’ (“steadfast love” is *chesed*, a rich Hebrew word that means covenantal, enduring love)

15 Before he had finished speaking, there was **Rebekah**, who was born to Bethuel son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, coming out with her water-jar on her shoulder.¹⁶The girl was very fair to look upon, a virgin whom no man had known. She went down to the spring, filled her jar, and came up.¹⁷Then the servant ran to meet her and said, ‘Please let me sip a little water from your jar.’¹⁸‘Drink, my lord,’ she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink.¹⁹When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, ‘I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.’²⁰So she **quickly** emptied her jar into the trough and **ran** again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. (Her running parallels Abraham’s running to serve the angels in 18:6-7)²¹The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether or not the Lord had made his journey successful.

22 When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold nose-ring weighing a half-shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels,²³and said, ‘Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?’²⁴She said to him, ‘I am the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.’²⁵She added, ‘We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night.’²⁶The man bowed his head and worshipped the Lord²⁷and said, ‘Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness towards my master. As for me, the Lord has led me on the way to the house of my master’s kin.’

28 Then the girl ran and told her mother’s household about these things.²⁹Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran out to the man, to the spring.³⁰As soon as he had seen the nose-ring, and the bracelets on his sister’s arms (Note Laban’s selfishness and materialism. This author is deftly skilled at characterizing the figures in this story), and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah, ‘Thus the man spoke to me’, he went to the man; and there he was, standing by the camels at the spring.³¹He said, ‘Come in, O blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside when I have prepared the house and a place for the camels?’³²So the man came into the house; and Laban unloaded the camels, and gave him straw and fodder for the camels, and water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.³³Then food was set before him to eat; but he said, ‘**I will not eat until I have told my errand.**’ He said, ‘Speak on.’

34 So he said, ‘I am Abraham’s servant.’³⁵The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become wealthy; he has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male and female slaves, camels and donkeys.³⁶And Sarah my master’s wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has.³⁷My master made me swear, saying, “You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I live;³⁸but you shall go to my father’s house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.”³⁹I said to my master, “Perhaps the woman will not follow me.”⁴⁰But he said to me, “The Lord, before whom I walk, will send his angel with you and make your way successful. You shall get a wife for my son from my kindred, from my father’s house.”⁴¹Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my kindred;

even if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.”

42 ‘I came today to the spring, and said, “O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you will only make successful the way I am going! ⁴³I am standing here by the spring of water; let the young woman who comes out to draw, to whom I shall say, ‘Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,’ ⁴⁴and who will say to me, ‘Drink, and I will draw for your camels also’—let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master’s son.”

45 ‘Before I had finished speaking in my heart, there was Rebekah coming out with her water-jar on her shoulder; and she went down to the spring, and drew. I said to her, “Please let me drink.” ⁴⁶She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder, and said, “Drink, and I will also water your camels.” So I drank, and she also watered the camels. ⁴⁷Then I asked her, “Whose daughter are you?” She said, “The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor’s son, whom Milcah bore to him.” So I put the ring on her nose, and the bracelets on her arms (Interesting to note that family relationship is stressed in this context, where in the event itself Rebekah’s character is emphasized). ⁴⁸Then I bowed my head and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to obtain the daughter of my master’s kinsman for his son. ⁴⁹Now then, if you will deal loyally and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so that I may turn either to the right hand or to the left.’

50 Then Laban and Bethuel answered, ‘The thing comes from the Lord; we cannot speak to you anything bad or good. ⁵¹Look, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master’s son, as the Lord has spoken.’

52 When Abraham’s servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the Lord. ⁵³And the servant brought out jewellery of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments. ⁵⁴Then he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they rose in the morning, he said, ‘Send me back to my master.’ ⁵⁵Her brother and her mother said, ‘Let the girl remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.’ ⁵⁶But he said to them, ‘Do not delay me, since the Lord has made my journey successful; let me go, that I may go to my master.’ ⁵⁷They said, ‘**We will call the girl, and ask her.** (I am glad this story emphasizes Rebekah’s own choice, even though the story makes it clear these events are guided by God)’ ⁵⁸And they called Rebekah, and said to her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ She said, ‘I will.’ ⁵⁹So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham’s servant and his men. ⁶⁰And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, ‘May you, our sister, become thousands of myriads; may your offspring gain possession of the gates of their foes.’ (This story has an impressive and unusual focus on the woman; Rebekah is the main character in addition to Abraham’s servant)

⁶¹Then Rebekah and her maids rose up, mounted the camels, and followed the man; thus the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

62 Now Isaac had come from Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. ⁶³Isaac went out in

the evening to walk in the field; and looking up, he saw camels coming. ⁶⁴And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, ⁶⁵and said to the servant, ‘Who is the man over there, walking in the field to meet us?’ The servant said, ‘It is my master.’ (The wording suggests Abraham has already died, which suggests the stories are a bit out of order) So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent. He took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her (One of the few references to romantic love in the Bible). So Isaac was comforted after his mother’s death.

Abraham Marries Keturah

²⁵Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. ²She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. ³Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. ⁴The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. ⁵Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. ⁶But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, while he was still living, and he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastwards to the east country. (Interesting how we don’t pay much attention to this story. Keturah was the mother of most of Abraham’s sons!)

The Death of Abraham

⁷ This is the length of Abraham’s life, one hundred and seventy-five years. ⁸Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. ⁹His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, ¹⁰the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with his wife Sarah. ¹¹After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

Ishmael’s Descendants

¹² These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah’s slave-girl, bore to Abraham. ¹³These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ¹⁴Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. ¹⁶These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. ¹⁷(This is the length of the life of Ishmael, one hundred and thirty-seven years; he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.) ¹⁸They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria; he settled down alongside all his people.

The Birth and Youth of Esau and Jacob

¹⁹ These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham’s son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, ²⁰and

Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹**Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife**, because she was barren; and the Lord granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. ²²The children struggled together within her; and she said, ‘If it is to be this way, why do I live?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord. ²³And the Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger.’ ²⁴When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. ²⁶Afterwards his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau’s heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

27 When the boys grew up, Esau was a skilful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. ²⁸Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Esau Sells His Birthright

29 Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished. ³⁰Esau said to Jacob, ‘Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!’ (Therefore he was called Edom.) ³¹Jacob said, ‘First sell me your birthright.’ ³²Esau said, ‘I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?’ ³³Jacob said, ‘Swear to me first.’ So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright. (This is an odd story, intended most likely to be humorous, but Jacob doesn’t come across very well in it)

Isaac and Abimelech

26 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar, to King Abimelech of the Philistines. ²The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, ‘Do not go down to Egypt; settle in the land that I shall show you. ³Reside in this land as an alien, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven, and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall gain blessing for themselves through your offspring, ⁵because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.’

6 So Isaac settled in Gerar. ⁷When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, ‘She is my sister’; for he was afraid to say, ‘My wife,’ thinking, ‘or else the men of the place might kill me for the sake of Rebekah, because she is attractive in appearance.’ (The third variation on this story, though this time Rebekah is in the least danger and again the foreign king is in the right

and protests the patriarch's deceptive behavior)⁸When Isaac had been there a long time, King Abimelech of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw him fondling his wife Rebekah.⁹So Abimelech called for Isaac, and said, 'So she is your wife! Why then did you say, "She is my sister"?' Isaac said to him, 'Because I thought I might die because of her.'¹⁰Abimelech said, 'What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us.'¹¹So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, 'Whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death.'

12 Isaac sowed seed in that land, and in the same year reaped a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him,¹³ and the man became rich; he prospered more and more until he became very wealthy.¹⁴He had possessions of flocks and herds, and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him.¹⁵(Now the Philistines had stopped up and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham.)¹⁶And Abimelech said to Isaac, 'Go away from us; you have become too powerful for us.'

17 So Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar and settled there.¹⁸Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of his father Abraham; for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the names that his father had given them.¹⁹But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water,²⁰the herders of Gerar quarrelled with Isaac's herders, saying, 'The water is ours.' So he called the well Esek, because they contended with him.²¹Then they dug another well, and they quarrelled over that one also; so he called it Sitnah.²²He moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth, saying, 'Now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.'

23 From there he went up to Beer-sheba.²⁴And that very night the Lord appeared to him and said, 'I am the God of your father Abraham; do not be afraid, for I am with you and will bless you and make your offspring numerous for my servant Abraham's sake.'²⁵So he built an altar there, called on the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac's servants dug a well.

26 Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army.²⁷Isaac said to them, 'Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?'²⁸They said, 'We see plainly that the Lord has been with you; so we say, let there be an oath between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you²⁹so that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.'³⁰So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank.³¹In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths; and Isaac set them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.³²That same day Isaac's servants came and told him about the well that they had dug, and said to him, 'We have found water!'³³He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba to this day.

Esau's Hittite Wives

34 When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath

daughter of Elon the Hittite; ³⁵and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah. (Clearly the foil/bad example contrasting all the effort Abraham and his servant went to in order to find Isaac's wife. Note that later Esau does marry one of his relatives however).

Isaac Blesses Jacob

(This is a detailed, well written, and entertaining story, but again Jacob comes across in a problematic way... Rebekah and Jacob both deceive Isaac in order to further God's plans?)

27When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called his elder son Esau and said to him, 'My son'; and he answered, 'Here I am.' ²He said, 'See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. ³Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me. ⁴Then prepare for me savoury food, such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may bless you before I die.'

5 Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, ⁶Rebekah said to her son Jacob, 'I heard your father say to your brother Esau, ⁷"Bring me game, and prepare for me savoury food to eat, that I may bless you before the Lord before I die." ⁸Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you. ⁹Go to the flock, and get me two choice kids, so that I may prepare from them savoury food for your father, such as he likes; ¹⁰and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.' ¹¹But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, 'Look, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a man of smooth skin. ¹²Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.' ¹³His mother said to him, 'Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me.' ¹⁴So he went and got them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savoury food, such as his father loved. ¹⁵Then Rebekah took the best garments of her elder son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them on her younger son Jacob; ¹⁶and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷Then she handed the savoury food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

(The level of deception is disturbing; Jacob is required to lie again and again in order to receive his blessing) **18** So he went in to his father, and said, 'My father'; and he said, 'Here I am; who are you, my son?' ¹⁹Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, so that you may bless me.' ²⁰But Isaac said to his son, 'How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?' He answered, 'Because the Lord your God granted me success.' ²¹Then Isaac said to Jacob, 'Come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not.' ²²So Jacob went up to his father Isaac, who felt him and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.' ²³He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands; so he blessed him. ²⁴He said, 'Are you really my son Esau?' He answered, 'I am.' ²⁵Then he said, 'Bring it to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you.' So he brought it to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank. ²⁶Then his father Isaac said to him, 'Come near and kiss me, my son.' ²⁷So he came near and kissed him; and he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said,

‘Ah, the smell of my son
is like the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed.

²⁸ May God give you of the dew of heaven,
and of the fatness of the earth,
and plenty of grain and wine.

²⁹ Let peoples serve you,
and nations bow down to you.

Be lord over your brothers,
and may your mother’s sons bow down to you.

Cursed be everyone who curses you,
and blessed be everyone who blesses you!’

Esau’s Lost Blessing

30 As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother Esau came in from his hunting. ³¹He also prepared savoury food, and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, ‘Let my father sit up and eat of his son’s game, so that you may bless me.’ ³²His father Isaac said to him, ‘Who are you?’ He answered, ‘I am your firstborn son, Esau.’ ³³Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, ‘Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him?—yes, and blessed he shall be!’ ³⁴When Esau heard his father’s words, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, ‘Bless me, me also, father!’ ³⁵But he said, ‘Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing.’ ³⁶Esau said, ‘Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright; and look, now he has taken away my blessing.’ Then he said, ‘Have you not reserved a blessing for me?’ ³⁷Isaac answered Esau, ‘I have already made him your lord, and I have given him all his brothers as servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?’ ³⁸Esau said to his father, ‘Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!’ And Esau lifted up his voice and wept. *You are supposed to sympathize with Esau here. Note the worldview here, the idea that it was impossible to revoke or replace the blessing.*

39 Then his father Isaac answered him:

‘See, away from the fatness of the earth shall your home be,
and away from the dew of heaven on high.

⁴⁰ By your sword you shall live,
and you shall serve your brother;

but when you break loose,
you shall break his yoke from your neck.’

Jacob Escapes Esau’s Fury

41 Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, ‘The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob.’ *Note Esau’s respect for his father...eventually the brothers reconcile, as told in*

Gen. 33:1-20 ⁴²But the words of her elder son Esau were told to Rebekah; so she sent and called her younger son Jacob and said to him, ‘Your brother Esau is consoling himself by planning to kill you. ⁴³Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran, ⁴⁴and stay with him for a while, until your brother’s fury turns away— ⁴⁵until your brother’s anger against you turns away, and he forgets what you have done to him; then I will send, and bring you back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?’ (There are two narratives of Jacob leaving his family—one because of Esau’s anger, and one to find a proper wife as his father did)

46 Then Rebekah said to Isaac, ‘I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women such as these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?’

28 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, ‘You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women. ²Go at once to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father; and take as wife from there one of the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother. ³May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples. ⁴May he give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your offspring with you, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien—land that God gave to Abraham.’ ⁵Thus Isaac sent Jacob away; and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob’s and Esau’s mother.

Esau Marries Ishmael’s Daughter

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 charged him, ‘You shall not marry one of the Canaanite women’, ⁷and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram. ⁸So when **Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please his father Isaac**, ⁹Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath daughter of Abraham’s son Ishmael, and sister of Nebaioth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had. (So Esau does obey, if late, polygamously, and perhaps reluctantly)

Jacob’s Dream at Bethel

10 Jacob left Beer-sheba and went towards Haran. ¹¹He came to a certain place and stayed there for the 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. ¹²And he dreamed that there was a ladder (Don’t imagine our ladder, but rather a ramp that led to the top of a Babylonian temple, or ziggurat) set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³And the Lord stood beside him 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; ¹⁴and 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 all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you

and in your offspring. ¹⁵Know that 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.’ ¹⁶Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!’ ¹⁷And 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.’ (This was likely originally intended as an etiology linking Israelite worship at Bethel to a founding figure, when in reality it was a pre-existing Canaanite temple to the God El)

18 So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar (Pillars were how the Canaanites marked holy land and were later forbidden by Israelites) and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first (This is inaccurate, and an attempt to distance this story from the ancient Canaanite place of worship). ²⁰Then 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, ²¹so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, ²²and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God’s house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you.’

Jacob Meets Rachel

29Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east. ²As he looked, he saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying there beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well’s mouth was large, ³and 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 on the mouth of the well. Note similarities to the story of Moses.

4 Jacob said to them, ‘My brothers, where do you come from?’ They said, ‘We are from Haran.’ ⁵He said to them, ‘Do you know Laban son of Nahor?’ They said, ‘We do.’ ⁶He said to them, ‘Is it well with him?’ ‘Yes,’ they replied, ‘and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with the sheep.’ ⁷He said, ‘Look, it is still broad daylight; it is not time for the animals to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them.’ ⁸But 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.’

9 While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep; for she kept them. ¹⁰Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother’s brother Laban, **and the sheep** of his mother’s brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well’s mouth (a feat of extraordinary strength; look again at vs. 3), and watered the flock of his mother’s brother Laban. ¹¹Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and **wept aloud**. ¹²And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s kinsman, and that he was Rebekah’s son; and she ran and told her father. Happy beginning, with a few subtle touches suggesting Jacob’s flaws.

13 When Laban heard the news about his sister’s son Jacob, he ran to meet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, ¹⁴and Laban

said to him, ‘Surely you are my bone and my flesh!’ And he stayed with him for a month.

Jacob Marries Laban’s Daughters

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?’ (after working for free for a month!) ¹⁶Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷Leah’s eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. ¹⁸**Jacob loved Rachel** (another reference to romantic love.. remember that for most of human history marriages have been primarily political and economic, not romantic) so he said, ‘I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.’ ¹⁹Laban said, ‘It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.’ ²⁰So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they **seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. All in all this is a great love story.**

21 Then Jacob said to Laban, ‘Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.’ ²²So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. ²³But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. ²⁴(Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) ²⁵When morning came, 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?’ (Brilliant reversal—the deceiver is deceived! It is also ironic that while Jacob tricked Esau into giving him the birthright for a bowl of lentils, he cannot gain his beloved wife even after seven years of hard labor) ²⁶Laban said, ‘This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷Complete the week of this one (week of wedding celebration), and we will give you the other also in return for serving me for another seven years.’ ²⁸Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife (back to back weddings!). ²⁹(Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) ³⁰So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban for another seven years.

31 When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. ³²Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben; for she said, ‘Because the Lord has looked on my affliction; surely now my husband will love me.’ ³³She 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 named him Simeon. ³⁴Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, ‘Now this time my husband will be joined* to me, because I have borne him three sons’; therefore he was named Levi. ³⁵She conceived again and bore a son, and said, ‘This time I will praise* the LORD’; therefore she named him Judah; then she ceased bearing.

Additional Reading:

Other Passages: