

Genesis 25 - 28

Lesson 7

Wednesday, March 25, 2020

I know it's often difficult for us to remember one lesson from another as weeks begin to roll out. So, let me provide you with a summary from last week's lesson.

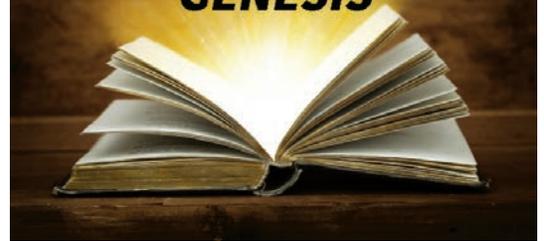
Jacob's need for transformation (25:19-28:9)

- a. From the womb he comes forth grasping the heel of his brother. The Hebrew for 'heel' is *'aqed'* and the name 'Jacob' *'ya aqob'*, is a play on words. The picture here is that even in infancy Jacob is a self-centered, self-oriented man.
- b. Genesis 25:27-34. Capitalizing on his brother's hunger. Jacob solicits from his brother the birthright in return for food.
- c. Genesis 27:1-45. To exploits one's own brother is bad enough, but to deliberately deceive one's own father, now senile and physically incapacitated, is to stoop even lower.

Preparation for transformation (28:10-32:21)

- a. Genesis 28:10-22. It is inaccurate to say that these episodes in Jacob's life are meant to put a premium on deceit. Ethically there is no question about the impropriety of Jacob's behavior.
- b. Here is a classic example of someone who arrogates the will of God. Was Jacob predestined to surpass his brother (25:23)? Yes. Does this give him the right to become manipulative, exploitative, and deceitful? A thousand times, no. The end does not justify the means.
- c. The chapters about Abraham were introduced with God speaking to the patriarch: 'now the Lord said to Abram' (12:1). By contrast, a number of episodes take place in Jacob's life before God enters the picture directly. All through the affair with Isaac, Esau, and Rebekah, God does not speak. Nor does God enter during the first part of Jacob's flight.
- d. This changes in Bethel. For the first time God confronts Jacob directly, in a dream. We should also observe that this is the first time that Jacob is alone. On all previous occasions he is with someone else: he is with Esau in the womb (25:22); he is with Esau after the latter's hunting excursion (25:29); he is with his mother, Rebekah (17:6-17); he, as Jacob, is with his father (28:1-5). But on this occasion of solitude God steps into his life. Jacob's response upon waking is unusual but not unexpected: 'and he was afraid' (28:17), afraid of God. He also is afraid of Laban (31:31) and Esau (32:7,11).
- e. What makes this response unusual is that it contrasts with that of Jacob's father and grandfather and even Lot, who, when confronted by God or angels, greeted them. On occasion, the angels might even be offered food and overnight lodging! The antecedent to Jacob's fear is Adam's 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid' (3:10). It is the fear spawned by a guilty conscience.
- f. The divine presence is sufficient to score the point. At no juncture does God take Jacob to task. There are no lectures, no fulminations by God, no Nathan's 'You are the man.' On the contrary, Jacob found:
 - a. The gift of divine friendship: he was lonely and alone.
 - b. The grace of divine forgiveness: the guilt in his life is heavier than the stone of which his head rests.
 - c. The goal of a divine purpose: in vv.13-15 he receives the same covenantal promises made to Abraham and is thus a link to God's chain.
- g. One must not overlook the context and circumstances of these promises. "We must remember that God promises all this to a man in flight from the land of promise, a man in flight because he bilked his brother and deceived his father, a 'heel-grabber,' who now is on the run from the wrath of a brother out to kill him.
- h. Commentators sometimes misconstrue Jacob's vow (28:20-22) as an attempt by Jacob to strike a bargain with God as he had done earlier with Esau (Quid pro quo). But for several reasons, that clearly is not the case.

Overview of the Bible GENESIS



- a. First, it misunderstands the role of vows in the Bible, the purpose of which surely is not to dictate to God on what terms one will serve him.
- b. Secondly, the wording of a good bit of Jacob's vow simply picks up on what God has already promised Jacob. For example, God's "I am with you and will watch over you" resurfaces in Jacob's "If God will be with me and will watch over me." God does not strike deals, but he is not above being held accountable to the truthfulness of the word he has spoken.
- i. Genesis 29-31. In this preparation for transformation God first has shown himself to Jacob. Now, God will hold up a mirror to Jacob. The method is to let Jacob spend the next twenty years living with a person whose character is much like his own: Laban.
- j. But Jacob, a perpetrator of deceit, is about to become the victim of deceit at the hands of Laban.

Transformation (32:22-32)

Twenty years earlier Jacob, alone then too, was confronted by God at Bethel. On the first occasion he was fleeing the land of promise; here, he is returning to that land of promise after an extended hiatus. In the blackness of night God and man met. Now it will happen again. Jacob is not the seeker, but the sought.

God, in the form of a "man," engages Jacob in a wrestling match, one that lasts through the night, almost until dawn (v. 24b). One is reminded of the nocturnal conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus (John 3), in which Jesus broke down systematically and thoroughly all of Nicodemus's defenses, verbally wrestled with Nicodemus, and went to the heart of the problem, which was Nicodemus's heart.

At least three distinguishing characteristics of Jacob surface here that separate him from the pre-Penial Jacob:

1. A consciousness of weakness: "And Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with Him" (v. 25b). The victor in his wrestlings with Esau, Isaac, and Laban, Jacob is now victim, not wrestling but clinging. Whether Jacob's affliction is temporary or permanent, he leaves this encounter with a physical reminder of who is to be in charge of Jacob's life. If the effects of the injury are temporary, then one may compare it with adult circumcision such as the second generation of Israelites experienced before they entered the Promised Land and Jericho (Joshua 5). Certainly, that incision on the body was painful and necessitated a time for limping and recuperation and healing (Josh. 5:8).
2. A consuming hunger for God: "I will not let you go, unless you bless me" (v. 26b). The blessing of Isaac is meaningless unless accompanied by the blessing of God. Jacob obtained Isaac's blessing through duplicity, but he can obtain God's blessing only by honest and prayerful request. It is to Jacob's credit, however, that although he is injured (v. 25), he does not release his hold on the man (v. 26).
3. A confession of unworthiness: "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob" (v. 27). His problem is his nature.

This, then, is Jacob's response. What are the results?

1. A new name and character: "Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed" (v. 28).
2. A new power: "you have prevailed" (v. 28b)
3. A new blessing: "and there he blessed him" (v. 29)
4. A new testimony: "I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved" (v. 30). Jacob affirms the truth of a passage such as Exod. 33:20, in which God says, "No one may see me and live." The coming daylight is a danger not to God, but to Jacob. For that reason, God says to Jacob, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."
5. A new day, a new start: "the sun rose upon him" (v. 31a)
6. A new reminder of his own weakness: "limping upon his thigh" (v. 31b). The name is changed, but the leg is not healed, at least not immediately.

Application:

Here we are with our lives out of joint. God has purposes in these things to bring us to our senses and remind us that we can't do it without him.

