



GENESIS 28-31 JACOB'S TWENTY YEARS IN HARAN

Now we will study what happened after Jacob tricked his father Isaac into giving him, instead of Esau, the important paternal blessing. When Esau found out, he began plotting to kill his devious brother. It is logical to ask, why didn't Isaac simply revoke his vow since it had been done fraudulently, and thus avoided Esau's plans to murder his brother? *The Archaeological Commentary* throws some historical light on the matter: "According to the Nuzi Tablets, which were found in the region where the patriarchs lived, and whose laws and customs they generally followed, state *an oral blessing*, such as that given on the death-bed, was irrevocable and legally binding. This could explain why the blessing of Jacob by Isaac, although done through deception, was still upheld."

As a result of the deception, Rebekah urged Jacob to flee to her brother's home in Haran, thinking it would be "for a few days, until your brother's fury turns away" (Gen. 27:44). Little did she know these would turn into 20 long years. Moreover, Isaac had another reason for him to go to Haran, saying: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padam Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother" (28:1-2). The reason for not marrying Canaanites was due to their terrible paganism. At least marrying among relatives kept intact the family traditions, morals, and lineage.

When Esau realized his father had given Jacob still another blessing, he thought marrying a relative would please him. So he married one of Ishmael's daughters, Mahalath, and ended up with three wives. This really did not improve things, in fact made them worse. *The Explanatory Bible Commentary* notes, "Though he did not marry a 'wife of the daughters of Canaan,' he married into a family which God had rejected. It showed he had partially reformed but not truly repented, for he gave no evidence of abating his vindictive purposes against his brother, nor of cherishing that pious spirit that would have gratified his father."

One night, as Jacob traveled northward, God intervened and gave him a very special dream. "And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at

his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven, and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. 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 spoken to you" (28:12-15).

Jacob, as Abraham had done, believed in faith on the promises of God. He took the stone he had used as a headrest and "set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel... Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. *And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house*, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You" (28:18-22).

Here we see Jacob committing himself to *tithing* as true evidence of his faith in God--for James later said, "Faith without *works* is dead" (James 2:20).

Regarding the famous pillar stone, Jacob identified it as representing God's house and the vision of the Almighty God speaking to him from heaven and giving him great promises. So he consecrated the stone as a reminder of that dream and those promises. When Jacob came back to Bethel, he again consecrates a pillar stone (35:14). It is possible he took it as a token of his covenant with God, for prior to his death, he prophesied about Joseph and said, "*from there* is the Shepherd, the *Stone* of Israel" (Gen. 49:24). This has been understood by some authors as referring to the stone that symbolized God's presence among Israel and his great promises of prosperity and grace.

J.H. Allen explains, "The phrase, *from there*, means 'out of there, or out of that place.' Since the

place from where the stone came was the inheritance of Joseph, and since Bethel, the place of the stone, was the inheritance of Joseph, we must know it came *from there*, i.e. Bethel. Thus, the very fact that Jacob, when dying in Egypt, made use of those words in reference to that Bethel stone, carries proof on its very fact that the stone was not, at that time, in the place where it had formerly been, but that it was with them there in Egypt, and had previously been committed to the care of the house of Joseph” (*Judah’s Sceptre and Joseph’s Birthright*, p. 237).

Allen goes on to trace the possibility that this pillar stone, which identified Israel’s promises, was preserved by the Davidic monarchy until the Babylonian captivity, when Jeremiah takes one of the king’s daughter’s, called Tea Tephi to Ireland. Allen continues in his book, mentioning about Irish historians who agree on the following facts: 1) About 585 B.C. a notable man came to Ulster, the most northern province of Ireland, accompanied by a princess, the daughter of an eastern king, and that in company with them was one Simon Berach, and that this royal party brought with them many remarkable things. Among them was the harp, an ark and *the wonderful stone called Lia-fail, or stone of destiny*. 2) This eastern princess was married to King Herremón on condition, made by this notable patriarch, that he should abandon his former religion, and build a college for the prophets. This Herremón did, and the name of the school was Mur-Ollam, which is the name, both in Hebrew and Irish, for school of the prophets. He also changed the name of his capital city, Lothair—to that of Tara. 3) The name of this Eastern princess is given as Tea-Tephi, and it is a well-known fact that the royal arms of Ireland is *the harp of David*, and has been for two thousand and five hundred years” (p. 229).

Allen mentions one last point: “Tea Tephi herself *was crowned upon this pillar-stone*. But at this juncture history comes to our help, and with unquestioned authority declares that, from that time until the present, *every king and queen who has reigned in Ireland, Scotland or England has been crowned upon that self-same pillar or coronation stone*...On the occasion of Queen Victoria’s coronation, June 28th, 1837, an article appeared in the London *Sun*, which gives a description of the coronation chair and the coronation stone...Between the seat and this board is enclosed

a stone, commonly called Jacob’s, or the fatal Marble, Stone...*History relates that it is the stone whereon the patriarch Jacob laid his head in the plains of Luz*...This stone was conveyed into Ireland by way of Spain about 700 years before Christ. From there it was taken into Scotland by King Fergus, about 370 years later; and in the year 350 B.C., it was placed in the abbey of *Scone*, by King Kenneth, who caused a prophetic verse to be engraved upon it, of which the following is a translation: ‘Should fate not fail, where ever *this stone* is found, the Scots shall monarch of that realm be crowned’” (p. 251-252, emphasis added).

We do not teach the *Stone of Scone* has to be Jacob’s pillar stone, yet it certainly could be. But our salvation is not based upon this teaching, which primarily deals with a possible connection with Jacob’s pillar stone and the modern kings of England. This information is given so you will know where this teaching proceeds, which was explained in our past booklets on modern Israel, particularly in Herbert W. Armstrong’s, *The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy*.

Back to the story about Jacob. After leaving Bethel, he continues northward, to the area of northern Syria, where Haran is located. Being near the place, he rested by a well where some shepherds had gathered. He found out they knew Laban, and then told him soon, one of his daughters would arrive. It is customary in that part of the country for unwed daughters to tend sheep. “Now while he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a shepherdess” (29:9).

The fact Jacob is able to roll the heavy rock that seals the stone opening of the well shows he had great strength, and he then helps Rachel water the flock. When he confirms she is Laban’s daughter, he gives her a customary kiss and cries out of relief and joy. She invites him to her home, and is greatly welcomed by Laban, who says, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh” (29:14).

So begins the long period of Jacob working for Laban, and in the process, God would perfect his spiritual character and transform him into a truly righteous man. Our Bible Reading Program explains, “In many ways, Jacob is every man. Or, to be more precise, every man [and woman] is like Jacob. We all start out grasping, self-oriented, and concerned with our needs. As we grow, we become less self-centered and *more motivated by principle*.

But as we become mature, we learn to love God and *act out of devotion to Him*. We must learn to live with God, and along the way *our character is changed, shaped and molded*, going through various phases as we become more and more *like God Himself*. For this reason, the character development of Jacob is one of the most interesting studies of the book of Genesis.”

Jacob had met his match in Laban--and the means of his discipline--for Jacob “the deceiver” became “the deceived” and had to take some of his own medicine. The Bible teaches the principle that what a man sows he reaps (Gal. 6:7), and this deception perfectly fitted Jacob, for it was divine punishment to *bring his own craftiness before his eyes*. Laban’s first trick was to switch his daughters in marriage. Since Jacob did not have any dowry, he volunteered to give his salary as a shepherd for seven years. The seven years quickly passed since he truly loved Rachel, but on the wedding night, Laban switched his daughters. With the drinking in these happy occasions and in the darkness, Jacob was not aware of the switch until the morning. He then told Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me? And Laban said, “It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years. Then Jacob did so and fulfilled her week. So he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife also. And Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as a maid. Then Jacob also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served with Laban still another seven years” (29:25-30). Jacob, the second-born son who posed as the firstborn, is now tricked into accepting a firstborn daughter instead of the second-born. There is poetic justice in all of this.

This set-up of two wives would cause untold misery and the Bible later prohibits it (Lev. 18:18).

Now we come to the births of the twelve sons of Jacob. Leah would give Jacob six sons and a daughter: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun and Dinah--for God had seen “that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb” (29:31). All the names of the children reflect her anguish of being loved less than Rachel and of the joy of being blessed with children. At first, Rachel could not

have children, and gave Bilhah as a surrogate mother, and she had Dan and Naphtali, which legally become Rachel’s sons. For a time, Leah had trouble having more children, so she gave Jacob her maid Zilpah, and she bore two sons, Gad and Asher. Finally, God healed Rachel of her barrenness and she had two sons, Joseph and much later, Benjamin. The incident about the mandrakes helping Leah have children has to do with these herbs having roots similar to the figure of a human being and considered a type of aphrodisiac.

Now, with a large family to feed, Jacob would turn the tables on Laban. After 20 years, Jacob was ready to return home and fulfill God’s instructions to dwell in the Promised Land. Laban had seen how God was with Jacob, and had greatly profited from his labors. So Jacob proposed to keep only the spotted or black sheep that would be born, which are relatively rare. “Jacob knew more about crossbreeding and the laws of heredity than Laban credited him. Through the use of a visual stimulus (branches of certain trees which Jacob marks with white stripes) the monochromes give birth to multicolored young. In the process, not only does Jacob get more flocks than Laban bargained for, but he gets healthier flocks as well. Now it is Laban’s turn to be outwitted” (*Evangelical Commentary*).

“Thus the man [Jacob] became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks, female and male servants, and camels and donkeys” (30:43).

While Jacob was having children, so was Laban. He had various sons who envied Jacob’s wealth, and even Laban was jealous of him. “Now Jacob heard the words of Laban’s sons, saying, ‘Jacob has taken away all that was our father’s, and from what was our father’s he has acquired all this wealth’” (31:1). So Jacob knows it is time to leave, and has the approval of his wives, but fears Laban will take them and his wealth in the process, so he plans yet another deception. He will leave while Laban is shearing sheep, a week-long process (31:18).

In the next study, we will cover all the adventures as Jacob travels back to his home.