

## ***PATRIARCHS: Lesson Seven, Israel Settles in Canaan***

### ***Genesis 32-36***

**Subject:** Jacob wrestled with God, Dinah was raped, and loved ones were lost.

**Main Idea:** Complete, moment-by-moment dependence on God is the Christian's secret to a happy life.

**Principles:**

1. *Self-sufficiency is incompatible with the work of God.*
2. *Relying on yesterday's experiences with God will not sustain us.*
3. *The security found in our closest human bonds cannot compare with the security Christ gives to the believer.*

### **Introduction**

Perhaps it is true that independence is more prized in some cultures than others. Yet *all* people in *all* places at *every* time have sought independence from God. In fact, apart from His work in our lives, this desire is part of our nature. The sin nature within us rebels against God's sovereign control over our lives.

It is not surprising, then, to discover that one of God's goals for our lives is absolute dependence on Him. The reason people rebel against this goal is that they fail to believe that we are most satisfied when we are dependent on Him. But, in truth, the Christian finds the secret to a happy, joy and peace-filled life *through* trust and dependence. We can only trust Him enough to fully depend on Him once we have wrestled with the issues of His goodness, His love, and His ownership of us as our Creator, and come out on the side of faith.

Many Christians spend a good deal of their lives wrestling with the implications of issues for their lives and, unable to fully trust God, they continue to live an independent life. They take matters upon themselves, believing they are responsible to do so. As a result, they live a greatly burdened life. There is little joy or peace in their daily Christian experience, all because they are trying to live the Christian life by their own effort.

In our last lesson, we discovered that Jacob was not the man of great faith that Abraham was. Jacob was a schemer and a deceiver. He trusted his own wit rather than trusting God. But God did not leave Jacob in this condition. God had this same goal for Jacob's life that He has for each one of us. He wanted Jacob to live in complete, moment-by-moment dependence on Him. Learning this dependence is part of the life of faith and the result of it is real joy, rest, and peace – the very things unbelievers, mistakenly, think they can find by escaping God's control and the very things an "independent" believer berates himself or herself for being unable to produce.

The process by which believers grow in grace is known as *sanctification*.

- Although our sanctification has a definite beginning when we are regenerated and a definite completion upon our death and the receiving of our new bodies, during our lifetime, it will be an ongoing process.

- While we will not be perfectly like Christ in this life, some believers experience a greater measure of sanctification than others. This is because it is a work of God that requires our cooperation.
- The question arises, then, if we are to be dependent on God for everything, how can we have a role in our sanctification? What is that role?
- Most simply put, our role is entire surrender and perfect trust. Our role is one of constant yielding. We are only to ensure no barrier comes between us and the One on whom we fully depend. Our role is contentedness with the circumstances with which He surrounds us. Our role is to keep our eyes on Jesus and trust Him completely, moment-by-moment.

Jacob could not proceed in this process of sanctification as long as he continued putting his confidence in his own manipulations. He had to learn to *trust God* to defend him, rather than resorting to his old, self-dependent schemes. And that is what took place, according to Genesis 32-36. Little by little, Jacob learned that there was nothing and no one he could fully rely on except God. He learned complete, moment-by-moment dependence on God. This is, and always has been, the Christian's secret to a happy life.<sup>1</sup>

## **I. Reliance on Self Dissolved – Genesis 32-33**

### **A. Jacob Met Angels at Mahanaim – 32:1-2**

- Angels in His Past: We recall that when Jacob left Canaan twenty years earlier (31:38), he had a dream in which angels were ascending and descending a stairway. The first thing we learn about his return to Canaan is that angels met him. Surely this reminded him of his dream in which the Lord promised to protect him and bring him safely back to Canaan.
- A Second Camp: Jacob named the place “Mahanaim”, meaning *two camps*. The camp of angels was alongside his own camp as evidence that God was with him. This should have been very encouraging to Jacob, since he was quite anxious about meeting Esau.

### **B. Jacob Feared Meeting Esau – 32:3-21**

- Jacob's Message to Esau
  - Having recently left behind his father-in-law Laban, with whom he had just secured peace, Jacob now faced the prospect of encountering and making peace with his brother Esau. We will recall that Esau had been so angry with Jacob at the time he left Canaan, that he had threatened to murder him. Therefore, Jacob sent a humble message to his brother, informing him of his return to Canaan.
  - It is possible that the information about Jacob's cattle, donkeys, sheep, goats, male and female servants was his means of placing all he had before Esau, if necessary, in order to placate him.

3. The messengers returned with the information that Esau was coming to meet Jacob, accompanied by four hundred men!
  4. Terrified, Jacob divided all his family, servants, and possessions into two groups, hoping that one would escape if the other was attacked.
- ii. Jacob's Prayer: Jacob's prayer is unlike any other prayer recorded in Genesis. It is a model prayer; every believer can improve his or her prayer life by following it.
1. First, Jacob's prayer contained praise. Jacob reminded himself Who he was addressing: the God of his fathers, the God who had given him direction in the past, and the God who promised to prosper him.
  2. Second, Jacob humbly thanked the Lord. He acknowledged all God had done for him, stating his own unworthiness to receive these things.
  3. Third, he petitioned for help. Jacob asked the Lord to save him from Esau. He stated his need directly.
  4. Fourth, Jacob exposed his feelings to the Lord, saying he was afraid.
  5. Finally, Jacob reminded God of His promises to make him prosper and give him numerous descendants.
- iii. Jacob's Gifts
1. Having committed himself and his family to the Lord, Jacob then decided to send Esau a gift. The term used, *minhâh*, describes a gift "often given to a superior to gain his favor."<sup>ii</sup>
  2. Jacob divided the gift by herds and sent each herd in the care of his servants, with the instruction to keep space between the herds and that when each of them encountered Esau, they should say the gift was from Jacob and that he was coming behind.
  3. The question that begs to be answered is whether, having prayed, Jacob took wise action in offering Esau this gift or whether he was resorting to his old habit of scheming and manipulating to get what he wanted.
  4. Considering that Jacob had seen the camp of angels, an assurance of God's repeated promise of protection (28:15, 31:3) and was still terrified (as expressed in his prayer), leads one to believe that Jacob was struggling to trust God completely with the matter of his safety.
  5. Giving the gift, in and of itself, may have been a good and generous act. But Jacob had to decide where he would place his *confidence* – in his own resources or in God alone.

## C. Jacob Wrestled With God – 32:22-32

### i. Jacob's Position:

1. Jacob and his family settled down for the night on the north side of the Jabbok River. In the middle of the night Jacob made another decision. He would send his family ahead across the river. He got up, and after helping them cross the river, it seems he went back to the north side to sleep alone.
2. It is not without significance that the “Man” who wrestled Jacob approached him at this particular location. For, once Jacob crossed the Jabbok, he would re-enter Canaan. Would the Lord allow the scheming Jacob back into the Promised Land without Jacob, first, entering *inwardly* into the Promised Land of dependence on God?

### ii. The “Man” Who Wrestled Jacob: The very brief statement that “a man wrestled with him till daybreak” (32:24) is most mysterious. Martin Luther is not alone in holding this text to be one of the most obscure in the Old Testament.<sup>iii</sup> The primary question revolves around the identity of the “Man”.

1. There appear to be three possibilities: a mortal human being wrestled with Jacob, an angel wrestled with Jacob, or God wrestled with Jacob.
2. Two passages help clarify this for us. One is Genesis 32:30, in which Jacob, having completed the struggle, named the place “Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared’.” Exodus 33:20 tells us that no one can see God face to face and live. So how could this be?
3. The second passage is Hosea 12:4-5, in which Hosea refers to Jacob wrestling with an angel. Very significantly, however, he then identifies the angel as the Lord Himself.
4. From these two passages, we must conclude Jacob wrestled with the Lord. Although our present passage does not use the term “angel of the Lord”, we have learned from earlier uses of that term (Genesis 16:7-9, 22:11-15, 24:7) that it refers to a unique, physical manifestation of the Lord, known as a *theophany*. Since the only person of the Holy Trinity known to appear in human flesh is the Son of God, we are specifically led to identify *Jesus* (in some pre-incarnate human form) as the one who wrestled with Jacob. For this reason, we would say Jacob experienced a *Christophany*. This interpretation resolves any concerns about the inability of humans to see God (the Father) face-to-face and live.

### iii. God Unable to Win?

1. The “Man” could not overpower Jacob until he wrenched his hip socket.

2. Once we identify the “Man” as God (specifically, Jesus), a second question arises. Gordon Wenham (*The New Bible Commentary*) summarizes it: “... what was God doing attacking Jacob and yet being unable or unwilling to defeat him?”<sup>iv</sup>
3. John Calvin reminds us that God knew His intention and the outcome before entering the contest. Moses (the writer of Genesis), Calvin says, was writing “after the manner of men”, describing what God had predetermined to do for His own purposes.<sup>v</sup>
4. Wenham concludes, “Here, the paradox of the human condition is vividly summed up. On the one hand, God allows, even puts his people into, difficult or impossible situations, but it is the same God who delivers us from them.”<sup>vi</sup> Calvin put it this way: “[God] fights *against* us with his *left* hand, and *for* us with his *right* hand.”<sup>vii</sup>
5. Are you wrestling with the Lord, seeking to preserve a sense of control over your own life? If so, are you finding your circumstances going from bad to worse while, at the same time, experiencing increasing conviction that God is allowing it all for your own good?

#### iv. Jacob’s Hip Wrenched

1. The match ended when the “Man” wrenched Jacob’s hip. Jacob, the schemer and manipulator, finally “encountered Someone he could not defeat”<sup>viii</sup> with his own skills.
2. The blow left Jacob with a limp (32:31-32), but it was God’s loving wounding.
  - a. Any person’s choice to resist God will end in crippling. The greater our resistance to Him, the more of a “limp” we are left with. Bodily damage resulting from addictions and the loss of relationships or potential influence are just a few representations of a “limp.”
  - b. While we may prefer to attempt to control our own lives by our own methods, once our struggle to resist Christ’s Lordship ends, we discover that to be humbled under His powerful, loving hand is actually *to begin a life of true and rich blessing!* Those who have entered this submitted life find God willing to work through their weaknesses, infirmities, and past failures to bring about *blessings* that exceed their wildest imaginations.
3. K. Strassner summarizes the lesson of Jacob’s limp well: “The great preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones was once asked, ‘What does a person look like who has truly met God?’ Alluding to Genesis 32:31, he replied, ‘He walks with a limp.’<sup>vii</sup> That is incredibly perceptive, isn’t it? After encountering the living Christ, Jacob was

forever crippled—both physically and in regard to his ego. He could no longer strut around arrogantly as he had done before. His pride turned to lowliness (33:3). His greed turned to generosity (33:10–11). And his self-reliance had turned into worship (33:20).”<sup>ix</sup>

v. The Blessing and New Name

1. Even after Jacob’s hip was wrenched, he refused to let the “Man” go without receiving His blessing. From this, we surmise that Jacob now realized with Whom he had been wrestling.
2. The “Man” first asked Jacob to state his name. In so doing, Jacob was forced to consider his own character. It was a confession, for “Jacob” meant *to take advantage* of or *to deceive*. The Amplified Bible emphasizes Jacob’s confession: “The Man asked him, ‘What is your name?’ And (in shock of realization, whispering) he said, ‘Jacob (supplanter, schemer, trickster, swindler)!’”
3. The “Man” then renamed Jacob, “Israel”. In the Bible, a mid-life renaming indicates a change in the character of the person re-named. (Simon Peter and the apostle Paul were others who, similarly, were renamed.)
  - a. The “Man” indicated Jacob would be called “Israel”, because he had struggled with God and with humans and had overcome (32:28).
  - b. Hebrew Bible scholars have had difficulty agreeing on the meaning of the name “Israel”. Most commonly, it is understood to mean one of two things: *he struggles with God* or *God fights*. Obviously, there is some ambiguity about who is “fighting” or “struggling”, God or Jacob. In reality, *both were true*. Jacob struggled with God (and with humans, as the “Man” said), yet God did and would fight on behalf of Jacob!
4. Jacob asked the “Man” to reveal His own name and to bless him. The “Man” refused the first request but gave the latter.

vi. Conclusion

1. Jacob’s encounter with the “Man” would have brought him a new realization: his past struggles, particularly with Esau and Laban, resulted from his unwillingness to trust God to fight on his behalf! He had relied on his own skills, his own ability to scheme and manipulate others, rather than relying on God. His real fight, all along, had been with God. Jacob had insisted on living by his own wit.

2. God was not going to allow Jacob to enter the Promised Land in his own strength, just as we today cannot receive salvation or inherit all the spiritual blessings God has for us in our own strength.
3. It is significant that God ended the struggle. In fact, it marked a turning point in Jacob's life because he realized that, although he might outwit another human being, he couldn't deceive, overpower, or control God.
4. Both the wounding of Jacob's hip and his new name suggest that he was transformed into a humble man who understood that to fear and depend on God was to be blessed.

#### **D. Jacob Met Esau – 33:1-20**

##### **i. Esau Embraced Jacob**

1. When he saw Esau approaching, Jacob divided his family, lining them up with his favorite, Rachel, in the back, his maidservant wives in the front, and Leah in the middle.
2. Then, he ran ahead of all his family to meet Esau. He still felt afraid, but now God was fighting for him and he would trust God with the outcome. How different this was than the pre-Peniel Jacob who sent all his family and possessions ahead of him!
3. Jacob humbly bowed (seven times) as he neared Esau. While Jacob referred to himself as Esau's "servant" and to Esau as "my lord" Esau called Jacob "my brother."
4. Both Jacob and Esau had become different men than when they had last seen one another. Esau ran and embraced Jacob, weeping over him!
5. Esau initially refused Jacob's gift, but Jacob insisted Esau keep it. The Jacob who previously had been a "taker" was now a giver.

##### **ii. Jacob and Esau Traveled in Different Directions**

1. Esau offered to travel with Jacob, but Jacob politely declined.
2. Esau returned to Seir.
  - a. We learn in chapter 36 that the brothers permanently separated later, with Esau moving to Seir, east of Canaan, because their possessions were too great for them to occupy the same territory.
  - b. Apparently, Esau had already been gradually moving his possessions in that direction since 32:3 and 33:16 indicated Esau was already in Seir when Jacob returned to Canaan.
  - c. Keil and Delitzsch suggest that "with the increase of his family and possessions, he severed himself more and more from his father's house, becoming increasingly convinced, as time went on, that he could hope for no change in the

blessings pronounced by his father upon Jacob and himself, which excluded him from the inheritance of the promise, viz., the future possession of Canaan.”<sup>x</sup>

- d. There was no deceit in Jacob’s statement of intent to travel apart from Esau “until I come to my lord in Seir” (33:14). Jacob did not intend to go directly to Seir, where his brother was living. His destination was Canaan. But he was indicating that eventually, he might pay him a visit there.
3. Jacob set up camp at Succoth, on the eastern side of the Jordan Valley. This was apparently a lengthy stay.
    - a. His marriages had occurred fourteen years earlier. Therefore, his children were still young.
    - b. When he relocated to Shechem, in the following chapter, Dinah, second to the youngest of his eleven children, was no longer a small child.
    - c. From this position, Jacob certainly could have traveled to see his father from time to time, as he intended when he left Paddan Aram (31:18).<sup>xi</sup>
  4. After an unknown amount of time, Jacob relocated his family to Shechem, west of the Jordan River and directly west of the Jabbok River.
    - a. Shechem was the place where Abraham had first set up an altar upon his arrival in Canaan.
    - b. There, he was most directly within Canaan proper and could say he “safely” arrived back in Canaan, in answer to his prayer many years earlier (28:21).
    - c. He bought a plot of ground in Shechem, an indication of his faith in God’s promise (the possession of Canaan), and built an altar there. “This was the second piece of real estate in Canaan acquired by the patriarchs.”<sup>xii</sup>

**Summary Statement:** God did not allow Jacob to re-enter the Promised Land without forcing him to confront his lifelong habit of self-reliance.

**Principle:** *Self-sufficiency is incompatible with the work of God.*

Up to the time of his wrestling match with God, Jacob’s life has been a picture of the person who seeks to live the Christian life in his or her own strength.

- These Christians understand that belonging to Christ means becoming Christ-like, so *they try to present an image of maturity they have not genuinely achieved*. This is a great burden! And it leaves them fearful, fearful others will discover how truly inadequate they really are. They may have been Christians a long time. But they have grown very little. Therefore, they hide behind their own schemes and deceit, hoping their hypocrisy will not be discovered.
- But this is not the life of rest and peace that Christ promised us! Jesus said, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).
- Sadly, such Christians have failed to understand that God never intended for us to live the Christian life by our own efforts.
  - The truth is, only Christ can live the Christian life! The implication of this is not that we should live sinful lives. The implication is that we should *fully trust* the only One who can transform us to His likeness.
  - Such Christians have not finished wrestling with God. Once our wrestling is complete, the outcome is *complete yielding* of ourselves *in trust* to a God who loves us more than we can imagine.

**Application:** Have you ever fully yielded yourself to God? By this, I mean have you earnestly said to Him, “*Lord, my life is completely Yours. You can do anything You like with me. I trust You completely. And for that reason, I will no longer worry about anything. I am going to trust You completely to take care of me, since that is what You have promised to do.*”

Once we have made this decision, we have stopped wrestling with God for control of our lives. And the result will be entrance into a rich Christian experience, one full of joy and peace, one in which we grow at a rapid pace, not by our own effort, but because He works so freely in us when we depend on Him for everything.

Each of us has natural abilities and gifts the Lord has given us.

- Do you prefer to trust in your physical health and strength for endurance?
- Do you prefer to rely on a handsome or intimidating appearance to influence others?
- Do you prefer to depend on your wit, ability with words, or winsome personality to charm or manipulate?
- Do you prefer to trust your own goodness or wisdom will keep you out of trouble?

As long as we continue in this life of self-effort, we carry burdens the Lord never intended we carry. Self-dependence is contrary to the life of joy and peace Christ offers us.

**Transition:** After wrestling with God, Jacob’s reliance on “self” began to dissolve. However, Jacob mistakenly assumed this spiritual high point would carry him through his tomorrows without ongoing daily communion with God, because the next chapter has not a single mention of God in it.

## II. Reliance on Past Experiences Dissolved – Genesis 34

### A. Dinah's Rape by A Local Prince – 34:1-12

#### i. Dinah visited the women of the land

1. Considering that the Patriarchs understood the importance of remaining distinct from the Canaanites (24:3-4; 26:34-35; 28:1), one could call into question the wisdom of Dinah's decision to socialize with the local women. Her motives for doing this are not recorded, but the outcome was tragic.
2. Dinah could not have been more than a teenager at this time of this story (considering a later reference to the age of Joseph, 37:2).
3. While interacting with the women of Shechem, she was raped (or seduced – the language is not clear) by Shechem, a local prince, the son of the ruler Hamor.

#### ii. Reaction to the Rape

1. When Jacob learned what happened to Dinah, he waited until his sons came home.
  - a. The suggestion has been made that if Dinah had been Rachel's daughter rather than Leah's, he may not have been so passive.<sup>xiii</sup> Many commentators believe Jacob is portrayed unfavorably as being far too passive.
  - b. However, it is possible Jacob was exhibiting wise restraint, desiring to weigh his own response and communicate with his sons before taking action. Perhaps, contrary to his former way of living, he was learning "patience when the trials of life" confronted him.<sup>xivxv</sup>
2. When Dinah's brothers heard the news, they immediately came in from the fields, shocked and furious.
  - a. Apparently, they arrived home just as Shechem and his father Hamor arrived to negotiate with Jacob for Dinah.
  - b. One notices that Dinah's brothers were the ones who spoke on her behalf, just as Laban acted as negotiator in the marriage of his sister Rebekah (24:29, 33, 50).
3. Shechem wanted Dinah to become his wife.
  - a. He and his father offered Dinah's family a business deal, in which they would pay as large a bride price as requested (possibly to attempt to cover the offense of the rape), together with all the practical advantages of intermarrying with their people.
  - b. Shechem's desire was to become "one people" with Israel. For the elect line to intermarry with the Canaanites would have "run counter to Abraham's admonition (24:3), Rebekah's fear (27:46), and Isaac's command (28:1)."<sup>xvi</sup>

## B. Dinah's Brothers Revenge – 34:13-29

- i. Dinah's Brothers' Deceitful Response
  1. As we see, the habits of their father had not gone unnoticed by Jacob's sons. They acted deceptively. Their anger was justified and they were right to refuse Shechem's offer. However, they went about it in the wrong way – by deceit.
  2. The brothers told Hamor and Shechem they could only accept the arrangement if all the men among their people were circumcised. It is possible that they thought the Shechemites would never agree to such a thing.
- ii. Shechem's Willingness to Comply: Shechem was so eager to have Dinah that he was able to persuade the townsmen that their willingness to comply would be amply rewarded by eventually gaining all Jacob's possessions through ongoing intermarriage with them. The men of the town agreed and were circumcised.
- iii. Simeon and Levi Murdered the Shechemites: While they were still in pain and recovering, two of Dinah's own brothers, Simeon and Levi (Leah's second and third-born sons), attacked and killed every male in Shechem. Then "Jacob's sons" (apparently all of them) plundered the city.

## C. Jacob's Consternation – 34:30-31

- i. Jacob's Sons in Focus: Moses turns our attention increasingly toward the sons of Jacob from this point forward in Genesis. This particular chapter portrays their seedy character. They inherited their father's inclination toward self-reliance and deceit. But Simeon and Levi carried this to a further extreme than their father had. Although justified in their indignation, their deceit and murderous actions are unjustifiable.
- ii. Jacob's Confrontation with Simeon and Levi: Jacob told his sons they had brought harm on his reputation in Canaan. Although Jacob's household was large, it was not large enough to defend itself against the combined forces of Canaanite people groups.

**Summary Statement:** Jacob's sons gave Israel a bad name in the land by murdering local men. It is an ugly story which, at best, leaves us uncertain about Jacob's motives, while unquestioningly painting all the other characters at their worst. As previously noted, God appears to be absent, never once being mentioned.

**Principle:** *Relying on yesterday's experiences with God will not sustain us.*

**Application:** When you talk with some people about their spiritual lives, they will always take you back to "the time when..."

- While we should remember to give God glory for what He has done in the past and share those experiences with others, our spiritual growth will come to a grinding halt if we continue to *live* in the past. *We cannot rely on past experiences for present power in our spiritual lives!*
- It is of great importance that you take seriously the questions printed in each lesson that ask you to apply, in some way, what you are learning *to your present life and circumstances*. Perhaps you have noticed the phrases “be specific”, “today” (or “this week”), and “your own life” included in many of these questions.
- Gaining intellectual information and insights into God’s word will not benefit us any more than it did the Pharisees of Jesus’ day. Jesus chastised them harshly for priding themselves in their understanding of God’s word but failing to take it to heart.
- Are you willing to be transparent with others about what Christ is doing in your life *presently*? Or do you pride yourself in merely sharing your knowledge and insights?
- You may have had a “mountain top” experience with God in a certain place or an earlier time in your life but, while these should be remembered, recounted, and rejoiced over, they will not bring power into your present experience.

We will quickly find our spiritual lives as dry as an un-watered plant if we fail to invite God into our present, daily experience. For what do you need to actively depend on God *today*? Practicing moment-by-moment dependence keeps us spiritually vibrant and growing.

**Transition:** God was working to dissolve Jacob’s reliance on “self” and on past experiences. He also ensured Jacob would not place his confidence in human relationships.

### III. Reliance on Human Relationships Dissolved – Genesis 35-36

#### A. God Called Jacob Back to Bethel – 35:1-7

##### i. Bethel

1. God called Jacob to return to Bethel, the very place Jacob had encountered God when he left Canaan for Paddan Aram many years earlier while fleeing from Esau. On this former occasion at Bethel, Jacob had declared, “the Lord will be my God” (28:21). There, God had promised to be with him wherever he went and to return him safely to Canaan, affirming it would belong to Jacob and his descendants.
2. From Jacob’s vow at Bethel on the earlier occasion, it seems it had been his intention to return directly to Bethel as soon as he re-entered Canaan (28:20-22).
3. Being at Bethel, once again, would remind Jacob of the promises God made to him there and His faithfulness in keeping them. But, as we will see, God did not call Jacob back to Bethel only because of his past experience in that location. As we will see, He called him there to speak to him anew.

- ii. Purify Yourselves: Before they could enter the Lord's presence at Bethel, God instructed Jacob to purify his household. Specifically, he mentions changing their clothes and getting rid of foreign idols. These idols may have been those belonging to Laban that Rachel had stolen. But it is likely that more idols were acquired when Jacob's sons looted Shechem.
  1. The washing of their clothes (and bodies) was symbolic of a cleansing of their hearts.
  2. Jacob's family complied and gave him all the foreign gods they acquired together with jewelry (which they apparently considered to be charms or amulets.) Jacob buried these things under a tree at Shechem. All that was buried surely was worth a great sum of money. But purifying themselves of these things meant putting them away without attempting to profit from them by sale or in any other way.
- iii. The Terror of God
  1. God was surely fighting on behalf of Jacob and his household, for rather than seeking to destroy them for their horrid deed at Shechem, we are told, "the terror of God fell on all the towns around them so that no one pursued them" (35:5).
  2. Jacob and his household arrived at Bethel and built an altar there.

#### **B. Rebekah's Nurse Died – 35:8**

- i. While there, Rebekah's nurse Deborah died and was buried. Either Rebekah had sent her to help care for her grandchildren, or she had come to Jacob's household following Rebekah's death. Perhaps Jacob made regular, unrecorded visits to his father in Hebron, during his years in Succoth and Shechem.
- ii. The mention of Deborah's death is evidence that she was greatly valued by Jacob and his family.

#### **C. God Appeared to Jacob – 35:9-15**

- i. At Bethel, Jacob encountered the Lord anew, reaffirming Jacob's name change and all His covenant promises. God repeated His promises to both Abraham and Isaac, as well (12:2-3, 6-7; 15:4-5, 1-21; 17:4-8, 21; 22:16-18; 26:4-5 and 24). His unchanging promises are always applicable to our present experiences.
- ii. Like God's first appearance to him at Bethel, Jacob counted this special Christophany among the high points of his life. On his deathbed, he recalled these appearances with special fondness (48:3-4, 16). While a theophany was a rare Old Testament occurrence, encountering God by His Spirit should be the daily experience of every believer.

- iii. Jacob's return to Bethel may not only have been the fulfillment of his earlier vow (28:20-22), his fresh experience with the Lord strengthened him to enter a season of unusual suffering and loss.

#### **D. Jacob Experienced Great Losses – 35:16-29**

- i. Departure from Bethel: Chapter 35 concludes by telling of three great losses Jacob suffered following the wonderful fulfillment of his vow and appearance of the Lord. These occurred after the family departed from Bethel.
- ii. Rachel's Death
  - 1. Rachel died giving birth to her second son, Benjamin. At Joseph's birth, she had asked the Lord for a second son (30:24) and He graciously gave another.
  - 2. As she lay dying, she named him "Ben-Oni", meaning *son of my trouble*. But Jacob could not allow this beloved son to bear this remembrance and renamed him "Benjamin", meaning *son of my right hand*.
  - 3. With Benjamin's birth, Jacob had twelve sons, a number that holds significance in the Bible. Jacob's sons became the twelve tribes of Israel.
  - 4. Rachel died near Ephrath, an ancient name for Bethlehem.
- iii. Reuben's Incest
  - 1. Jacob's eldest son Reuben slept with his father's concubine Bilhah. Bilhah had been Rachel's servant, but was given to Jacob by Rachel for the purpose of bearing sons Rachel could reckon as her own. (Bilhah's sons were Dan and Naphtali.)
  - 2. Suggestions about why Reuben did this include the possibilities that he was concerned Bilhah might replace Rachel as his father's favorite wife. (Reuben was the son of Leah, whom Jacob had not loved as he had Rachel.) Another suggestion is that he was attempting to replace his father as patriarch prematurely.<sup>xvii xviii</sup>
  - 3. Reuben's birthright was taken from him as a result of his act (49:3-4).
    - a. Next in line would have been Simeon and Levi (in that order), but both of these sons had also disgraced their father.
    - b. We are meant to understand that Leah's fourth son Judah was, from this time forward, considered heir to family rulership and birthright. Judah was, indeed, honored by God. He was the ancestor of King David and his royal line. But, most importantly, Judah was the ancestor of Jesus Christ (Matthew 1).

- c. However, as we will see, *Rachel's* eldest son Joseph would also lead his family (37:10-11; 47:12) and it was he, in fact, who was blessed by Jacob with the firstborn's double portion (48:1-22).

iv. Isaac's Death

1. In addition to the losses of Deborah and Rachel and the permanent wedge driven between Jacob and Reuben, Jacob also suffered the loss of his father Isaac.
2. Isaac lived one hundred and eighty years. He was "old and full of years" when "gathered to his people". His sons Esau and Jacob buried him (35:28-29) in the cave at Mamre alongside Abraham, Sarah, and Rebekah (who, presumably, had died earlier). (49:31)

**E. Esau's Descendants – 36:1-43**

i. Esau's Family (36:1-14)

1. True to the form of Genesis, the genealogy of the non-elect brother, Esau, is given before the story of the elect brother, Jacob, continues.
2. The mention of Esau's foreign wives is a reminder that Esau shunned the Patriarchal Covenant with regard to his choice of wives. Two of the wives named in this chapter are not the same as those listed earlier (26:34; 28:9). It is possible these were three of Esau's many wives, the favored ones. Perhaps, also, two of the earlier named wives had died or taken new names.
3. The sons of these three wives are listed. We are told Esau's sons were born to him in Canaan before he moved to Seir (36:5).
4. Just as Lot had moved east of Abraham's location because their possessions were too great for the land to support both households, Esau also relocated east of Jacob.
  - a. The passage emphasizes that Esau *is* Edom (36:8, 9). In their later history, the Edomites and Israelites were constantly at war.
  - b. The passage also emphasizes the territory that Esau claimed was the land of Seir. One of Esau's wives had roots in Seir (36:18, 20, 25).
  - c. Esau's sons and grandsons are listed.

ii. The Rulers of Seir (36:31-39)

1. The central portion of the chapter lists the kings of Seir. Deuteronomy 2:12, 22 tell us that Esau partly exterminated these people and drove the remaining ones out of the land.

2. The same passage (Deuteronomy 2:2-6) tells us that God gave the land of Seir to Esau. Israel was warned against provoking the Edomites or attempting to take their God-given possession.
- iii. The Chiefs of Edom (36:40-43): The chapter ends by listing eleven chiefs who descended from Esau.

**Summary Statement:** Jacob experienced thrills and disappointments, according to Genesis 35-36.

- Among the high points, he purified his family and returned to Bethel, where the Lord appeared and reconfirmed His promises. Also, his twelfth son Benjamin was born.
- However, during this same period in Jacob's life, he lost Deborah, Rachel, and Isaac in death. He also suffered disrespect by his eldest son Reuben in a manner that drove a permanent wedge between them (49:3-4). Finally, Jacob was permanently separated from his twin brother Esau.

Jacob learned *not to rely* on his own natural abilities or any past experiences. The loss of so many important personal relationships was also instructive for him.

- God has made us relational beings. We should be thankful for the friends and family members He gives us. We should be thankful for the body of Christ and be actively engaged with them.
- However, there is no one that any of us can count on completely except God. Some special people in our lives are separated from us by life's circumstances. Eventually, we are separated, for a season, by death.
- Mature believers learn to look to God, and not to any human relationship, for their security.

**Principle:** *The security found in our closest human bonds cannot compare with the security Christ gives to the believer.*

John 17:23 teaches that believers are "in Christ", and Christ is "in God". John 10:28-29 records these words of Jesus concerning us, His sheep, "No one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me is greater than all; no one will snatch them out of my Father's hand." We are "in Christ" and He is "in the Father". *That* is true security!

**Application:** Consider the relationships in which you may be placing your confidence. To whom do you run when you have trouble? When you feel down?

- Do you tend to run to your "Isaac"?
  - Your physical or spiritual parent (or mentor)?
  - A person who shares your dreams?
- Do you tend to rely on your "Rachel"?
  - Your spouse?
  - The person you most admire?

- Is your security in your “Reuben”?
  - The person you’ve invested yourself in?
  - Your child – the hope of your future?

*No human relationship* can offer us the kind of security that we find in God through Christ.

### Conclusion

Christ offers us a life of joy and peace. We will never find these by our own efforts, by relying on yesterday’s victories, or by placing our security in people around us.

Perhaps you prize your independence. Perhaps you believe your freedom to choose on whom and what you will depend is necessary to your happiness. You should know that this is not what the Bible teaches. We enter the abundant life Christ promised us by utter surrender and moment-by-moment *dependence* on God. Won’t you embrace this secret to a happy Christian life?

---

<sup>i</sup> The phrase “The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life” and the thoughts surrounding it are taken from the classic by that title written by Hannah Whitall Smith in 1875.

<sup>ii</sup> Ross, A. P. (1985). Genesis. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>iii</sup> Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 131). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

<sup>iv</sup> Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (4th ed., p. 82). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>v</sup> Calvin, J., & King, J. (2010). *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Vol. 2, p. 198). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

<sup>vi</sup> Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (4th ed., p. 82). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>vii</sup> Calvin, J., & King, J. (2010). *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* (Vol. 2, p. 196). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

<sup>viii</sup> Ross, A. P. (1985). Genesis. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>vii</sup> This quote comes from an interview with Lloyd-Jones’s daughter, Lady Elizabeth Catherwood. The interview was recorded by 9 Marks Ministries and can be found within the Audio section at [9marks.org](http://9marks.org).

<sup>ix</sup> Strassner, K. (2009). *Opening up Genesis* (p. 132). Leominster: Day One Publications.

<sup>x</sup> Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, pp. 193–194). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

<sup>xi</sup> Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 199). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

<sup>xii</sup> Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (4th ed., p. 82). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ross, A. P. (1985). Genesis. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

---

<sup>xiv</sup> Mathews, K. A. (2005). *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Vol. 1B, p. 581). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>xv</sup> Mathews, K. A. (2005). *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Vol. 1B, p. 579). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>xvi</sup> Sailhamer, John H (1994). Genesis. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary – Abridged Edition: Old Testament* (p. 43). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>xvii</sup> Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition* (4th ed., p. 83). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

<sup>xviii</sup> Ross, A. P. (1985). Genesis. (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Eds.) *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.