

genesis

God's Book of Beginnings

Jacob Leaves for Haran (Genesis 28)

Isaac Advises Jacob – Esau Reacts

28:1-5 After Jacob and Rebekah deceived Isaac to gain Esau's blessing ^{Genesis 27:1-29} and Rebekah used Esau's Hittite wives as an excuse for Jacob to leave the area to find a wife ^{Genesis 27:46}, Isaac blessed Jacob and told him not to marry a Canaanite ^{Genesis 24:2-3}. Isaac then insisted Jacob go to Paddan Aram and marry one of the daughters of Laban (his "mother's brother"). God wanted to maintain purity in the line of descent ^{Ezra 9:1-2}, so Jacob could not marry a Canaanite. Isaac asked for Jacob to be blessed by "God Almighty" (*El Shaddai*) who blessed Abram ^{Genesis 17:1}.

28:6-9 Following Esau hearing about everything his father had spoken to Jacob, he realized how "displeasing" his marriages to the Canaanite (Hittite) women were to Isaac ^{Genesis 26:34-35}. In his human desire to please Isaac, Esau married Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael ^{Galatians 4:21-25}.

Jacob's Dream at Bethel

28:10-15 Jacob left Beersheba for Haran, and after a day's travel, he slept with a stone pillow. Jacob dreamt of "the angels of God ascending and descending" ^{John 1:51} a stairway (ladder) from earth to heaven. Jacob also heard the Lord, "the God of ... Abraham and ... Isaac" ^{v.13}, speaking from heaven, reiterating the Abrahamic Covenant ^{Genesis 12:2-3} to him ^{Psalms 105:10}.

The ladder to/from heaven was a graphic portrayal of God's personal involvement in earthly affairs.

God's confirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob focused on a reemphasis of His promises of the land "on which [he was] lying", an abundance of descendants and universal blessings.

The LORD also vowed He would always protect Jacob and that He would bring him back to the PL.

28:16-19 Afterward, Jacob woke up and understood the sacredness of where he was ^{Exodus 3:5}. Luz was the name of the place Jacob had slept and dreamt. He set up his pillow stone as a pillar (memorial of worship), consecrated it with oil ^{Leviticus 8:10-11} and renamed it Bethel.

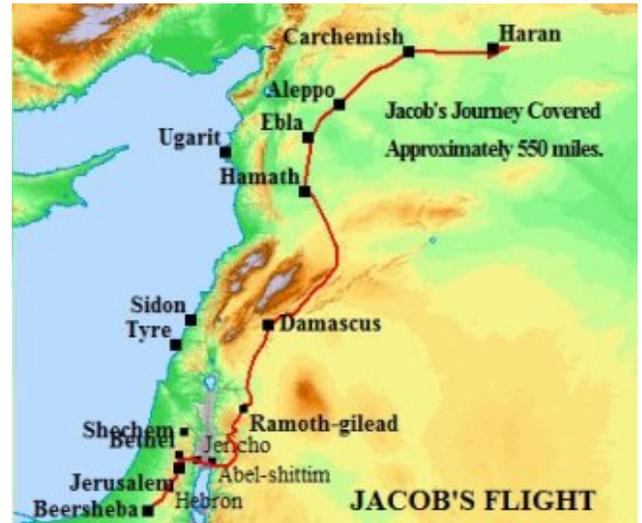
The name Bethel is transliterated from the Hebrew *Bêl-'ēl* which literally means: "house of God".

Stone monuments were a common way to remember important God-associated events ^{Exodus 24:3-4}.

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Bethel (formerly Luz) was about fifty miles north of Beersheba and six miles north of Jerusalem.

Later, God would remind Jacob of this event at Bethel ^{v.19} when He instructed Jacob to return to the PL (his “native land” ^{Genesis 31:13}). Soon after, Jacob reminded his family of this occasion and their responsibility to cleanse their homes before returning to Bethel to build an altar ^{Genesis 35:2-4}.



28:20-22 God's promises ^{v.13-15} led Jacob to vow: "the LORD [would always] be [his] God", the pillar represented "God's house" and he would give a tithe of all God gave him ^{Malachi 3:10}. This interpretation is based on the conclusion "if" ^{v.20} should have been translated "since". Although not yet commanded by the law ^{Leviticus 27:30}, this is the 2nd mention of a tithe ^{Genesis 14:20b}.

Jacob's Life in Paddan Aram – Part 1 (Genesis 29)

Jacob Arrives at Haran

29:1-8 Eventually, Jacob arrived at the land of his destination. He observed a field, shepherds, three flocks of sheep and a well covered with a "large stone". In response to his inquiries, Jacob learned the shepherds were from Haran and knew of Laban (who was well) and family. Some sheep approached, being accompanied by Rachel ^{Exodus 2:16}, one of Laban's daughters.

Jacob's arrival where he met Laban's shepherds and daughter (Rachel) was providential ^{Genesis 24:15}. Jacob should not have been surprised, because earlier the LORD had promised His help ^{Genesis 28:15}.

A "stone [was] over the mouth of the well" to decrease evaporation and/or to keep out blowing dust.

29:9-14a While talking with the shepherds, Jacob saw Rachel bring in her father's sheep. Jacob rolled away the stone, watered Laban's sheep, then kissed Rachel and wept ^{Ruth 1:9b}. Jacob explained to Rachel he was her cousin. She then told Laban, who greeted Jacob fondly. It was approximately 97 years between Eliezer's ^{Genesis 24:10} and Jacob's ^{v.1} arrivals at Paddan Aram.

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

29:14b-20 After a month, Laban asked Jacob what "wages" he wanted in return for his work.

Jacob responded by stating he would work for seven years in order to marry Rachel ^{Hosea 12:12},

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Laban's younger daughter, because Jacob had fallen in love with her. Laban agreed with this. The seven years Jacob worked seemed short to him, because of his deep love for Rachel.

Laban's older daughter, Leah ('cow'), had "weak" eyes (better translated as "delicate", indicating a pale color), as opposed to the more common (and culturally-preferred) dark and sparkling eyes. The latter probably described his "lovely in form, and beautiful" younger daughter, Rachel ('ewe').

All of the key patriarchal wives were beautiful: Sarah ^{Genesis 12:11,14}, Rebekah ^{Genesis 24:16}, Rachel ^{v.17}.

29:21-26 After the seven years, Laban gave a wedding feast ^{John 2:1-2} and then the marriage was consummated ^{Genesis 24:67}. However, Laban chose to deceive Jacob ^{Genesis 27:35, Leviticus 19:11} by sending Leah, instead of Rachel, to Jacob. Wanting his older, less attractive daughter to be wed first, Laban used custom as an excuse ^{v.26}. He gave Zilpah to Leah as her maidservant.

Laban's deceptive success was probably due to Jacob's drinking, the bride's veil and dark of night.

Jacob had deceived his Father (Isaac) ^{Genesis 27:5-30}, but "[reaped] what he [had sown]" ^{Galatians 6:7b} when he was deceived by the brother (Laban) of his Mother (Rebekah) ^{v.22-25}.

29:27-30 Laban offered Rachel to Jacob if he agreed to give him another seven years of labor. Jacob agreed, and Laban gave him Rachel at the end of the 7-day bridal celebration ^{Judges 14:12} for Jacob & Leah. Jacob & Rachel consummated their marriage, and he worked 7 more years. As with Leah, Laban gave a maidservant to Rachel; she was a servant girl named Bilhah.

Polygamy with Rachel and Leah brought grief and constant struggle throughout the life of Jacob.

Later, the Mosaic Law made it perfectly clear that polygamy with sisters was a sin ^{Leviticus 18:18}.

However, God used both of the wives, as well as their handmaids, to produce the 12 Tribes of Israel.

Jacob's Children

29:31-35 The LORD had great pity for Leah, so He "opened her womb" ^{Ruth 4:13}, and allowed her to give birth to the first 4 sons of Jacob: Reuben ('see, a son'), Simeon ('one who hears'), Levi ('attached') and Judah ('celebrated'), but during this time, Rachel remained childless.

Jacob's Life in Paddan Aram – Part 2 (Genesis 30)

Jacob's Children (continued)

30:1-8 Rachel became frustrated at being barren ^{Isaiah 49:21} and blamed Jacob, but he reminded her that God is the only one with the power to give life ^{2 Kings 5:7} (and besides, Leah's sons proved he was not the problem). Rachel thought her shame would be less by giving Jacob her maidservant, Bilhah ^{Genesis 16:1-2}. Jacob slept with Bilhah, she became pregnant ^{Genesis 16:4} and she gave birth to two sons for Jacob: Dan ('judgment') and Naphtali ('my struggle').

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A barren wife in that culture was a “disgrace” to her husband ^{v.23}, and no better than a ‘dead wife’.

A surrogate would sit on the knees of the wife when giving birth to symbolize the wife giving birth.

30:9-13 Having (temporarily) “stopped having children”, Leah decided to give Jacob her maidservant, Zilpah, who “bore Jacob” two sons : Gad (‘good fortune’) and Asher (‘happy’).

30:14-16 During the wheat harvest ^{Exodus 34:22}, when Reuben was in the fields, he gathered mandrake plants for his mother, Leah. Rachel saw the plants and wanted to have some. Consequently, she agreed to let Jacob sleep with Leah that night in exchange for the plants.

Mandrakes ^{Song of Songs 7:13} are short-stemmed herbs, superstitiously associated with fertility.

30:17-21 “God listened to Leah” and allowed her to give birth to two more sons for Jacob. These sons, Issachar (‘reward’) and Zebulun (‘honor’), brought Jacob’s total to ten.

Jacob had multiple daughters ^{Genesis 46:7}, with only one named: **Leah’s daughter, Dinah** ^{Genesis 34:1-26}.

30:22-24 God heard Rachel’s cries and “remembered [her]” ^{Genesis 8:1}. God took “away [Rachel’s] disgrace” ^{Luke 1:25} by opening her womb and blessing her with the birth of her first son ^{Genesis 21:2}, Joseph (‘may Jehovah add’). Rachel then pled for “another son” ^{Genesis 35:16-18}.

Jacob was as grateful, happy and relieved as Rachel was when she finally bore him a son ^{Genesis 37:3}.

Jacob’s Flocks Increase

30:25-30 Jacob requested Laban’s permission to travel back to his “homeland” ^{Genesis 28:15}.

Not wanting to lose the LORD’s great blessing (through Jacob) on his wealth (his “livestock”), Laban told Jacob to name his price to stay ^{Genesis 29:15}. Jacob essentially responded with ‘Haven’t I done enough?’, but yielded, saying he wanted to “do something for [his] household”.

It had been 14+ years since Jacob had left his homeland, and he was aware of his desire to return.

30:31-43 In order to keep Jacob from leaving, Laban agreed to give him all of the speckled or spotted goats and sheep in all of his flocks. However, both Laban and Jacob did what they could to take advantage of the other man. First, Laban immediately (and secretly) removed the existing speckled/spotted goats/sheep and put them “in the care of his sons” a significant distance from where Jacob was tending the rest of Laban’s flocks. In addition, Laban “changed [Jacob’s] wages ten times” ^{Genesis 31:41}. Conversely, Jacob used his intimate knowledge of livestock breeding to make sure “the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob” ^{v.42} and he applied folklore tradition to (supposedly) increase the percentage of speckled/spotted goats/sheep born, in order to enlarge his portion of the flocks.

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