THE PENTATEUCH PART I: GENESIS
LESSON 13: Genesis 27:46-30:24
Jacob's Journey from Refugee Son to Patriarch Part I

• [Lesson 12](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_12.htm)  • [Genesis Lessons List](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Genesis_Menu.php)  • [Lesson 14](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_14.htm)

Beloved Father,

Guide us in our study of the journey of Your servant Jacob, a man who struggled with his sinful human nature but who, through trials and sufferings, learned to trust You and to serve You in faith and obedience.  Help us to see ourselves in his story as we struggle with temptations in our journey through this sinful world.  With Your help, Lord, we know that we can rise above the failings of our human flesh to become men and women of faith, living life in the Spirit and reaching our full potential as holy children of a Holy Father.  We pray in the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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*That is, it is not by being children through physical descent that people become children of God; it is the children of the promise that are counted as the heirs.  The actual words of the promise were: I shall come back to you at this season and Sarah will have a son.  Even more to the point is what was said to Rebecca when she was pregnant by our ancestor, Isaac, before her children were born, so that neither had yet done anything either good or bad, but in order that it should be God's choice which prevailed,'not human merit, but his call'she was told: the elder one will serve the younger.  Or as Scripture says elsewhere: I loved Jacob but hated Esau.*
[Romans 9:8-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans9.htm#v8) (quoting from [Malachi 1:2-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/malachi/malachi1.htm#v2))

*And be careful that there is no immoral person, or anyone worldly minded like Esau, who sold his birthright for one single meal.  As you know, when he wanted to obtain the blessing afterwards, he was rejected and though he pleaded for it with tears, he could find no way of reversing the decision.* [Hebrews 12:16-17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews12.htm#v16)

God continued the 3-fold Abrahamic Covenant:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **First Generation**  | **Second Generation**  | **Third Generation**  |
| Abraham  | Isaac  | Jacob  |
| Land: [12:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v2); [15:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v7), [18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v18); [17:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v8); [22:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v17)  | Land: [26:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v3)  | Land: [28:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v13); [35:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v12)  |
| Descendants [12:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v2); [15:4-5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v4); [17:2-6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v2); [22:17](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v17)  | Descendants: [26:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v3)  | Descendants: [28:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v14); [35:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v10)  |
| World-wide blessing [12:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v2); [22:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v18)  | World-wide blessing: [26:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v4)  | World-wide blessing: [28:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v14)  |

* Jacob was 15 years old when Abraham died.
* Jacob left Canaan and spent 20 years in Haran.
* He was 130 when he went into Egypt with his family, where he lived for 17 years.
* He was 147 when he died in Egypt.

In the previous lesson we studied the differences between two brothers, Esau and Jacob: one a man of the material world who lived for the "now" while despising his birthright ([Gen 25:29-34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v29)) and the other man, his younger twin brother, who although an imperfect man appreciated the covenantal promises God made to his grandfather Abraham and aspired to risk everything to receive those same promises.  It was not that God condemned Esau from the womb of his mother Rebekah unjustly.  God knew in advance the hearts of both these men and His choice fell upon the younger'a repeated theme in the Old Testament.  But God's choice of Jacob did not mean that Esau could not have made the choice of his own free will to cooperate in God's plan.  Contrast the lives of Esau the elder brother and his younger brother Jacob with the elder brother Aaron and his younger sibling Moses.  God chose the younger brother Moses to be His covenant representative to the tribes of Israel, but Aaron was not dispossessed of his spiritual blessing like Ishmael and Esau because Aaron submitted to God's choice.  Aaron served God by serving his brother, and for his obedience God rewarded Aaron by making him the first High Priest of the Sinai Covenant.  In Esau's case the murder in his heart revealed that he had chosen, like Cain, to be a "seed of the serpent" ([Gen 3:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v15); [4:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis4.htm#v8); [27:41](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v41)), a disposition of his heart that God recognized from the womb of Rebekah.

Concerning God's choice of one man over another St. Paul wrote: *What should we say, then?  That God is unjust?  Out of the question! For speaking to Moses, he said: I am gracious to those to whom I am gracious and I take pity on those on whom I take pity.  So it is not a matter of what any person wants or what any person does, but only God having mercy.  Scripture says to Pharaoh: I raised you up for this reason, to display my power in you and to have my name talked of throughout the world.  In other words, if God wants to show mercy in someone, he does so, and if he wants to harden someone's heart, he does so* ([Rom 9:14-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans9.htm#v14); quoting from [Ex 33:19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus33.htm#v19) and [Gen 19:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v16)).  If we believe that God is righteous and just then we must believe that His choices are also righteous and just and are made to fulfill His divine plan for the salvation of man.

**Please read Genesis 27:46-28:9: Jacob is sent to Paddan-Aram to Choose a Wife and Esau Marries Again
27:46*Rebekah said to Isaac, 'The Hittite women sicken me to death.  If Jacob were to marry a Hittite woman like these, one of the local women, what would there be left in life for me?'* 28:1*So Isaac summoned Jacob and blessed him; and he gave him this order: 'You are not to marry any of the Canaanite women.* 2*Go off to Paddan-Aram, the home of Bethuel your mother's father, and there choose a wife for yourself from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother.* 3*May El Shaddai bless you; may he make you fruitful and make you multiply so that you become a group of nations.* 4*May he grant you the blessing of Abraham, you and your descendants (seed\*) after you, so that one day you may own the country where you are now living as a stranger'which God gave to Abraham.'* 5*Then Isaac sent Jacob away, and Jacob went to Paddan-Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean and brother of Rebekah the mother of Jacob and Esau.* 6*When Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan-Aram to choose a wife there,* 7*and that in blessing him he had given his this order: 'You are not to choose a wife from the Canaanite women,' and that, in obedience to his father and mother, Jacob had gone to Paddan-Aram,* 8*Esau then realized how much his father Isaac disapproved of the Canaanite women.* 9*So Esau went to Ishmael and chose for wife, in addition to the wives he had, Mahalath daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael and sister of Nebaith.***\* = literal Hebrew (*Interlineal Bible, vol. 1,* page 71).

Isaac finally gave the proper public blessing to Jacob in the presence of witnesses ([Gen 28:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v6)).

**Question:** Compare Abraham's concern for choosing the right wife for Isaac with Isaac's concern or lack of concern for choosing a wife for his sons.
**Answer:** Abraham planned and made provisions for the selection of Isaac's wife, but there is no mention of Isaac's instruction or intervention in Esau's selection of a bride or of Isaac's concern of a bride for Jacob until Rebekah intervened.  According to [Genesis 28:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v8), Esau didn't even realize that a Canaanite inhabitant, a Hittite woman, was an inappropriate choice for a wife and that such a choice would displease his father.

How is it that a life that started with such promise seems to have failed to reach its full spiritual potential?  Isaac appears to fall short as a concerned father, as a leader of his family, and as an example of righteousness.  He allowed his family to become divided over the destiny of his sons, he was determined to give the non-elect son the divine blessing of his father Abraham, and he took no action in the selection of a bride for his sons. It was Rebekah who convinced him to send Jacob to Paddan-Aram (the biblical name for Upper Mesopotamia) to find the home of Bethuel, his mother's father, and to find a wife from among the daughters of Rebekah's brother Laban.([1](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_13.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end1))

**Question:** How did Rebekah, a prudent and loving mother, use Isaac's disappointment over Esau's marriage to fulfill a two-part plan to protect Jacob?  How was it was a plan that also protected Esau from himself?  See [Gen 27:35](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v35), [43-45](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v43).
**Answer:** Both Isaac and Rebekah were distressed when Esau married the Hittite women.  Rebekah's plan was to use that disappointment in Esau's selection of wives to urge her husband to send Jacob to Paddan-Aram, not only to find a wife but to fulfill Rebekah's plan to save Jacob from the murderous wrath of his brother and to save Esau from the crime of fratricide.

**Genesis 28:1-2:** 28:1*So Isaac summoned Jacob and blessed him; and he gave him this order: 'You are not to marry any of the Canaanite women.* 2*Go off to Paddan-Aram, the home of Bethuel your mother's father, and there choose a wife for yourself from the daughters of Laban your mother's brother.*

**Question:** Notice both the negative and positive commands.  Where were these same commands given before?  See [Gen 24:2-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v2).
**Answer:** Probably without knowing it Isaac has repeated Abraham's commands to the Unnamed Servant before he left for Paddan-Aram.  This mission is God ordained just as the previous mission of the Unnamed Servant was God's plan for the continuation of the "promised seed."

**Genesis 28:3-4:** 28:3*May El Shaddai bless you; may he make you fruitful and make you multiply so that you become a group of nations.* 4*May he grant you the blessing of Abraham, you and your descendants (seed\*) after you, so that one day you may own the country where you are now living as a stranger'which God gave to Abraham.'*

**Question:** What was Isaac's parting blessing to Jacob? How does this blessing compare with the blessing Isaac thought he was giving to Esau when Jacob deceived his father?  In whose name is the blessing given?  See [Gen 17:1-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v1) and [26:28-29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v28).
**Answer:** He gave Jacob a three part blessing: 1) fertility in descendants who will 2) become people an assembly of nations, and 3) the blessing of Abrahamic covenant which included descendants who will possess the land of Canaan.  In this blessing Isaac explicitly mentioned the many descendants and the land specified in Abraham's blessing in [Genesis 17:1-8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v1) when God first revealed the name El Shaddai to Abraham.  This blessing is more explicitly the Abrahamic blessing than Isaac's previous blessing.  Isaac also pronounced this blessing of Jacob in the name of El Shaddai.

The prophecy that Jacob's descendants will become a group or community of nations (verse 3) is another way of stating the part of God's blessing to Abraham in [Genesis 17:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v4): *For my part, this is my covenant with you: you will become the father of many nations*.  What is curious about this blessing is that Jacob was the father of 12 tribes who formed one nation, not many nations.  Later, in the year 930 BC, the nation of Israel split into two separate nations (the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah) but not many nations.

**Question:** How was this same blessing repeated to Jacob and by whom in [Genesis 35:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v11).  What was the mission of the nation of Israel and what was the future implication for Israel, in the positive and in the negative, in that blessing?  How was the prophecy concerning "many nations" ultimately fulfilled?  See [Ez 23:22-34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel23.htm#v22); [32:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel32.htm#v3); [Mt 21:7-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew21.htm#v7); [25:32](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew25.htm#v32); [28:19-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew28.htm#v19); [Lk 21:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke21.htm#v24).
**Answer:** God, appearing to Jacob in [Genesis 35:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v11) called Himself "El Shaddai" and repeated the blessing, referring to an "assembly" or "community" of nations that will descend from Jacob.  Israel's mission was to carry belief in the One True God to the many nations of the earth, but this blessing was to be reversed when Israel came under divine judgment for her sin of becoming like the immoral pagan nations instead of being a good example to them.  Under God's judgment He removed His hand of protection and Israel was attacked by a community of nations ([Ez 23:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel23.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v24); [32:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel32.htm#v3)) instead of being blessed by drawing the nations together in worship of Yahweh.  In the positive, this prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus Christ who is the King of all nations of the earth, ruling from His Kingdom of Heaven on earth, the universal Catholic Church and drawing the community of world nations into covenant with Him in His Church.  It is mother Church who will give birth, through Christian baptism, to children from every nation under heaven

**Question:** What is significant about how Rebekah's twins are named in the Scripture passage at the end of [Genesis 28:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v5)?  What is the connection to a similar naming in [Genesis 25:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v9)?
**Answer:** Jacob is given precedence over Esau as the re'shiyt; the narrator names Jacob first and then Esau just as he reversed the birth order by naming Isaac before Ishmael in [Genesis 25:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v9).

The public blessing Isaac gave Jacob was in essence a restatement of the special blessing Jacob receive by fraud, the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant, but it does not specifically include the world-wide blessing except in reference to the Abrahamic blessing except in the reference to "a group of nations" coming from Jacob.  It is significant that by this public act Isaac recognized Jacob as the legitimate heir of Abraham's covenantal blessings.

**Question:** If the Patriarchs knew God as El Shaddai, why did the inspired writer use the word "Elohim" (god plural) and God's covenant name "Yahweh" so often in the Genesis narrative?
**Answer:** If the inspired writer did not make it clear that Elohim, El Shaddai, and Yahweh are all different names for the same One True God, readers could receive the false impression that there was more than one god who was Creator, who was intimately involved in planning man's destiny, and who orchestrated the Exodus experience.  The major theme of Genesis is that the God of Creation is same God of the Patriarchs and the same God who will lead Israel out of bondage in Egypt and into the Promised Land'there is only One True God.

**Question:** Both Abraham and Isaac were wealthy men ([Gen 13:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v2); [24:35](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v35); [26:13-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v13)).  Compare the provisions Isaac gave Jacob to make his journey to secure a bride in Paddan-Aram, approximately 600 miles from Beersheba, with what Abraham sent with the Unnamed Servant in [Genesis 24:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v10), [22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v22), [53](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v53) to make the same journey.
**Answer:** The Unnamed Servant was sent with ten camels, with men servants, with gold jewelry, with additional gold and silver for a bride price, and with rich presents to give the girl's family.  Abraham also petitioned God to send His angel ahead of the servant to guide and protect him on his journey.  Jacob was sent out alone, with no spiritual guidance and with no provisions or material wealth.  Unlike the Unnamed Servant, Jacob was more an exile and a refugee than an emissary.

Isaac sent Jacob to Paddan-Aram to find a bride but he sent him without any assistance.  Where were the camels Abraham's Unnamed Servant took on his journey in search of a bride for Isaac, where were the additional servants, the bride price, and the display of wealth?  Did Isaac get his revenge for Jacob's deception by sending Jacob away as an exile without resources?  The fear Jacob expressed to his mother when she first suggested the plan to secure the spiritual blessing by deceiving Isaac had come to pass ([Gen 27:11-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v11)).  Jacob was not cursed'God's divine caused Isaac to give Jacob the Abrahamic blessing in front of witnesses before his departure, but the result was the same as Jacob feared; he was essentially sent into exile with nothing. Isaac's lack of generosity was a gesture that cost Jacob years of his life in labor for a bride-price and kept him in exile from his homeland for 20 years ([Gen 31:38](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v38), [41](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v41)).  Did Isaac allow himself to be convinced by his wife as a way of getting rid of Jacob so he could favor Esau?  Isaac was either a very simple and unintuitive man or he was as manipulative as his wife but without Rebekah's higher motives.

However, it can be said that for once Rebekah and Isaac were in agreement about Jacob.  Isaac agreed to send Jacob to Paddan-Aram, but once again it is Rebekah who seemed to grasp the importance of the destiny God planned for her son.  The fathers of the Church applauded Rebekah's intervention in securing the future of her beloved Jacob: *Do you see, dearly beloved, how much perspicacity this loving mother showed in rescuing Jacob from danger by supplying a plausible excuse for his journey, neither highlighting Esau's wickedness nor revealing the reason to the father but giving appropriate advice to her son so that he might be persuaded through fear to accept what was said by her and propose a convincing plan to his father* (St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 54:14-15*)?The fathers of the Church also saw Isaac's blessing of Jacob to go to on a difficult journey to a distant land to take a wife as a foreshadow of God the Father sending His Son on a long and difficult journey to secure His bride, the New Covenant Church, gathered from all the distant lands across the face of the earth.

**Genesis 28:8-9:** 28:8*Esau then realized how much his father Isaac disapproved of the Canaanite women.* 9*So Esau went to Ishmael and chose for wife, in addition to the wives he had, Mahalath daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael and sister of Nebaith.*

**Question:** Finally realizing that his father was disappointed in his choice of wives, who did Esau choose as a third wife and what was the significance of naming her brother, Nebaith?  See [Gen 25:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v13); [26:34](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v34) and [36:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis36.htm#v3).
**Answer:** He chose a daughter of Ishmael'this was still a woman who was a descendant of the accursed line of Canaan indicating that Esau did not understand the significance of the blessed line of Shem. Naming the bride's brother is significant in this passage because later, when the descendants of Esau are named, we learn that he had two wives named Basemath: one the daughter of the Hittite Elon and a second Basemath who was the sister of Ishmael's firstborn son Nebaith.

There is no error in Scripture regarding the name of Ishmael's daughter'Esau married two different daughters of Ishmael's line and two of his wives bore the same name.  That Basemath the daughter of the Hittite is not mentioned later in Esau's genealogy probably indicates that she died without bearing any children.

**Question:** What was ironic about Jacob's journey and Esau's new bride?
**Answer:** Jacob, in obedience to the wishes of his father and mother to not marry a woman of the cursed line of Canaan, left the land of Canaan to go forward to secure his bride and his destiny while Esau remained the tragic figure of a man who lived in the moment and always made the wrong choice.  He wanted the approval that Jacob had but was not willing to make the changes in his life that allowed him to succeed.

**Please read Genesis 28:10-22: Jacob's Vision of the Stairway to Heaven
28:10*Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran.* 11*When he had reached a certain place, he stopped there for the night, since the sun had set.  Taking one of the stones of that place, he made it his pillow and lay down where he was.* 12*He had a dream: there was a ladder, planted on the ground with its top reaching to heaven; and God's angels were going up and down on it.* 13*And there was Yahweh, standing beside him (above\*) and saying, 'I, Yahweh, am the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac.  The ground on which you are lying I shall give to you and your descendants (seed\*).* 14*Your descendants (seed\*) will be as plentiful as the dust on the ground; you will spread out to west and east, to north and south, and all clans on earth will bless themselves by you and your descendants.* 15*Be sure, I am with you; I shall keep you safe wherever you go, and bring you back to this country, for I shall never desert you until I have done what I have promised.'* 16*Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Truly, Yahweh is in this place and I did not know!'* 17*He was afraid and said, 'How awe-inspiring this place is!  This is nothing less than the abode of God, and this is the gate of heaven!'* 18*Early next morning, Jacob took the stone he had used for his pillow (at or under his head\*), and set it up as a pillar, pouring oil over the top of it.* 19*He named the place Bethel (place/house-of-God\*), but before that the town had been called Luz.* 20*Jacob then made this vow, 'If God remains with me and keeps me safe on the journey I am making, if he gives me food to eat and clothes to wear,* 21*and if I come home safe to my father's home, then Yahweh shall be my God.* 22*This stone I have set up as a pillar is to be a house of God, and I shall faithfully pay you a tenth part of everything you give me.'* (\* = literal translation, *Interlineal Bible, vol. 1, page 7;* in verse 13 *alav* can mean "above", "over", or "beside"; also see Gen 18:2).**

**Genesis 28:10:** *Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran.*

Jacob's destination, the city of Haran, was a prosperous commercial center located in Upper Mesopotamia about sixty miles above the confluence of the Balikh and Euphrates rivers.  This journey marked a new beginning for Jacob.  He was leaving his childhood behind and was beginning his pilgrimage as a patriarch.  As he set out to make the approximately 600 mile journey from Beersheba to Haran he not only traveled the same path as Abraham's Unnamed Servant but the same path his grandfather Abraham trod 125 years earlier.  Jacob was making the third journey.  But unlike Abraham, who made the journey with his beautiful wife, his young nephew, his retainers and his herds and flocks of animals to a land promised him by a personal God, Jacob's future appeared to be bleak'he was leaving behind an angry brother who was planning his death and ahead of him he was going to find a scheming uncle who planned to enslave him.  He was friendless and alone with only his staff for protection (Gen 32:10/11).

**Genesis 28:11:** *When he had reached a certain place, he stopped there for the night, since the sun had set.  Taking one of the stones of that place, he made it his pillow and lay down where he was.*

It was dangerous to travel at night so Jacob stopped at sunset near the Canaanite town of Luz.  It was a settlement strategically located on the intersection of the north-south road that passed through the central hill country and the main east-west road that led from Jericho to the Mediterranean Sea.([2](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_13.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end2))  Jacob had no provisions with him, no tent and no bedding, and therefore he selected a place to rest near large stones on a hill.  It is difficult to determine from the Hebrew passage if he placed his head near the stone as a protection so no one could seek up on him from behind or if he actually rested his head upon the stone (*Interlineal Bible, vol. 1*, page 71).

**Question:** What was Jacob's emotional state at this stage of the journey?  What did he do?  See [Genesis 35:3b](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v3).
**Answer:** Jacob was in great distress and called upon the God of his fathers.

Each of the Patriarchs received visionary experiences of God.  This was to be Jacob's first vision of God and a turning point in his life when the God of his fathers extended to Jacob the promises made to his father and grandfather.  Like Abraham's first vision of God ([Gen 15:1-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v1)), the vision took place at night in the form of a dream.

**Genesis 28:12-13:** 28:12*He had a dream: there was a ladder, planted on the ground with its top reaching to heaven; and God's angels were going up and down on it.* 13*And there was Yahweh, standing beside him (above\*) and saying, 'I, Yahweh, am the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac.  The ground on which you are lying I shall give to you and your descendants (seed\*).*

In the Hebrew the passage can be translated that God was either above him or beside him.  St. Jerome and the other Church fathers prefer to translate this passage that God was "above" Jacob as Jesus was "above" on the Cross.

**Question:** How did God identify Himself to Jacob?
**Answer:** As "I AM" (YHWH) the God of his fathers Abraham and Isaac.

**Question:** What is the significance of this vision in Jacob's life?
**Answer:** It is a vision that will take Jacob's focus away from his past and point him toward an alternate future.  For the first time the God of his fathers offered Himself to Jacob as his God.

Keep in mind that any series of three (events, persons, or things/images) points to something significant in salvation history.

**Question:** What three images did Jacob see in his vision?
**Answer:** Jacob saw:

1. A ladder or stairway reaching from earth to heaven
2. Angels ascending and descending the stairway/ladder
3. God at the top of the stairway as Master over heaven and earth

The precise translation of the rare Hebrew word *sullam* is uncertain.  Scholars link this word to a similar Akkadian cognate *simmiltu* which is translated "stairway" or "ladder."   The Greek Septuagint translation of the word as *klimax* renders the word as either a ladder or a flight of steps like those that connected the different levels on a ziggurat (Waltke*, Genesis* page 390).  That Jacob will identify this image as a "gate of heaven" connects the vision to a ziggurat since a similar term was applied to the tower of Genesis chapter 11, a tower which stretched from heaven down to earth that was considered to be a gateway into the heavens (Babel means "gate of god").  The motion of the angels ascending and descending the stairway between heaven and earth signified the connection between the material and the spiritual.  This site, like the garden in Eden, was a doorway between the natural and the supernatural.

**Question:** Have you ever experienced a holy site that is an axis point between heaven and earth?
**Answer:** Yes, this avenue between the natural and supernatural is opened in the priest's words of consecration over the bread and wine that become, through the descent of God the Holy Spirit from heaven, the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ.  If we are watching with spiritual eyes wide open and unhindered by the material world, we would all see the angels of the Glory Cloud descending and ascending above the altar as God the Son is present on the altar.

The messengers of God that Jacob saw in the vision will be part of Jacob's journey away from and coming back to the Promised Land ([Gen 28:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v12); [32:2-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis32.htm#v2)).

**Question:** What are the three primary missions of God's messengers, the angels?  Give Scripture examples from the Genesis chapters we have studied.
**Answer:** God's messengers serve three functions:

1. They are sent by God to guard and protect ([Gen 3:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v24)).
2. They are sent to carry God's communications ([Gen 18:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis18.htm#v2); [19:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v15); [22:11-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v11)).
3. They are sent to guide ([Gen 19:1-22](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v1)).

**Question:** How did God identify Himself to Jacob in addition to His connection to Abraham and Isaac?  Is this a contradiction of [Exodus 6:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus6.htm#v3)?  How does the inspired writer use these various names of God in the narrative?  Also see [Gen 15:7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v7); [26:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v2) and [Ex 3:13-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus3.htm#v13).
**Answer:** God identified Himself as I AM, the Hebrew consonants YHWH, which most scholars translate with vowels as "Yahweh."  This is not a contradiction of [Exodus 6:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus6.htm#v3).  The Patriarchs may not have identified the Hebrew verb form "to be," usually translated as "I AM," as a personal name of God.  In [Exodus 3:13-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus3.htm#v13) God made it known to Moses that the Hebrew verb is indeed a divine name.  In Genesis God's personal name "Yahweh," is consistently used in the context of God's covenantal relationships.  Elohim is used with reference to His universality over nations and as divine Creator, and El Shaddai is the revelation of His divinity to the Patriarchs.

**Genesis 28:13b-14:** 13b*The ground on which you are lying I shall give to you and your descendants (seed\*).* 14*Your descendants (seed\*) will be as plentiful as the dust on the ground; you will spread out to west and east, to north and south, and all clans on earth will bless themselves by you and your descendants.*

**Question:** What promise did God make to Jacob?  What are the implications of the promise?  See [Gen 12:1-3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v1); [22:17-18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v17); [26:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v4).
**Answer:** This was God's affirmation of the complete Abrahamic blessing in the 3-fold Abrahamic covenant which included the world-wide blessing that was not part of Isaac's special spiritual blessing in [Genesis 27:27-29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v27) and was only alluded to in [28:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v4).

In addition, God gave Jacob His assurance that although he is alone with no friend and no family, that God will protect Him and will keep His promises.

It is significant that God promised to give Jacob's descendants land that spreads out in all the cardinal directions.   Pagan deities laid claim to certain ethic groups of certain cities, but there were no pagan gods who claimed universal dominion.  Yahweh isn't just a regional god, He is the universal God.

**Genesis 28:15:** *Be sure, I am with you; I shall keep (guard\*) you safe  wherever you go, and bring you back to this country, for I shall never desert you until I have done what I have promised.'* The word keep/guard is the Hebrew verb *samar.* It is the same word found in [Genesis 2:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis2.htm#v15) where Adam was commanded to "guard" the garden Sanctuary and in [Genesis 3:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v24) in which the cherubim were posted at the entrance of the garden Sanctuary to "guard" (*samar*) the way to the Tree of Life (*Interlinear Bible,* pages 5,8, 72).

**Question:** In addition to the repeat of the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, what personal promise in three parts did God make to Jacob to ease his distress, beginning with the assuring statement: "I am with you"?  In what three ways did God promise to be "with" Jacob?  Why was this necessary?
**Answer:** God promised Jacob:

1. I shall keep you safe (guard you) wherever you go.
2. I will bring you back to this land.
3. I will never desert you.

This is exactly what the distressed and friendless Jacob needed to hear'he was not alone in his life's journey.

 God's promise "I am with you" is a promise that God made in the past and will repeat in the future:

* To Isaac when he was afraid of the famine ([Gen 26:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v3)).
* To Jacob at Bethel ([Gen 28:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v15)).
* To Moses when God commanded him to go back to Egypt ([Ex 3:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus3.htm#v12)).
* To David ([Ps 23:4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm23.htm#v4)).
* To Israel ([Ps 46](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm46.htm)).
* In translating the Messianic name Emanuel, "God-is-with-us" ([Mt 1:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew1.htm#v23)).
* Jesus' promise to the Apostles and disciples after the Resurrection ([Mt 28:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew28.htm#v20)).
* The promise to all Christians ([Heb 13:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews13.htm#v5)).

It is a promise that supports and sustains all other covenantal promises.

Yahweh's words *'... for I shall never desert you until I have done what I have promised'* seem strange'will God desert Jacob after he returns to Canaan twenty years later?  The Hebrew word translated "until" does not indicate a situation change as it does in English (see [2 Sam 6:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel6.htm#v23) where the same word is used to indicate that David's wife Michal had no children "until" the day of her death'meaning she never had children).  The reference is not to his temporary return but to Jacob's final return to the "promised land" of Canaan in [Genesis 50:12-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis50.htm#v12).   After Jacob's death in Egypt his sons will take his embalmed body back to Hebron and bury Jacob in the cave at Machpelah.  It is interesting that Abraham in his first vision of Yahweh and now Jacob in his first visionary experience both received prophecies that alluded to Israel's exile in Egypt (see [Gen 15:13-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v13)).

**Genesis 28:17-18** 28:17*He was afraid and said, 'How awe-inspiring this place is!  This is nothing less than the abode of God, and this is the gate of heaven!'* 18*Early next morning, Jacob took the stone he had used for his pillow (at or under his head\*), and set it up as a pillar, pouring oil over the top of it.*

Jacob is amazed that he failed to recognize the sanctity of this place when he first settled down for the night.  How could a place that looked so ordinary be so extraordinary!  But he was also afraid.

**Question:** Why was Jacob afraid?  Scripture does not mention that either Abraham or Isaac experienced fear in their visitations.  See [Gen 12:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v1); [15:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis15.htm#v1); [17:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis17.htm#v1); [22:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis22.htm#v1); [26:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis26.htm#v1).
**Answer:** Perhaps Jacob's fear of God was related to his sin in having wronged his brother and father.

**Question:** Can you think of three other men who were fearful in the presence of God because of their sins?  How does this experience expand Jacob's understanding of fear?  Hint: see [Gen 3:10](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v10); [Is 6:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/isaiah/isaiah6.htm#v5); [Lk 5:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke5.htm#v8) and [Heb 10:31](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews10.htm#v31).
**Answer:** Adam was fearful of God after the sin of eating the forbidden fruit, Isaiah mourned his sins when ushered into God's presence in the heavenly Sanctuary, and St. Peter confessed that he was a sinner when he realized Jesus was not an ordinary man and he was face to face with the Divine.  For the first time in his life, Jacob must have realized there was more to fear than the wrath of his brother Esau!

Jacob embraced the vision, realizing that this was a holy site and that he had witnessed the portal into the abode of God'this place was the "gate of heaven."

**Question:** Have you ever come face to face with the supernatural and experienced a vision of the meeting of heaven and earth where time is suspended and God is present before you?
**Answer:** In the sacrifice of the Mass, when the priest as Christ's representative says the words of Consecration, time is suspended and the same sacrifice that occurred in the spring of 30 AD is made present upon the altar when Jesus the Messiah appears and gives Himself to His bride the Church, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.  If we were seeing this supernatural event with the eyes of pure faith we would see angels ascending and descending above the altar.

**Genesis 28:18-22:** 28:18*Early next morning, Jacob took the stone he had used for his pillow (at his head\*), and set it up as a pillar, pouring oil over the top of it.* 19*He named the place Bethel (place/house-of-God\*), but before that the town had been called Luz.* 20*Jacob then made this vow, 'If God remains with me and keeps me safe on the journey I am making, if he gives me food to eat and clothes to wear,* 21*and if I come home safe to my father's home, then Yahweh shall be my God.* 22*This stone I have set up as a pillar is to be a house of God, and I shall faithfully pay you a tenth part of everything you give me.'*

The next morning, to commemorate his encounter with God and God's promises to him, Jacob set up a memorial.  Jacob took the stone he slept near (or on), anointed it with oil, and he erected it as a "standing stone," in Hebrew a *massebah* (plural = *masseboth*).([3](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_13.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end3)) Jacob named the place Beth-el, "place/house of god."  God's revelation of His divine name, which the inspired writer carefully included in verse 13, makes it clear to the reader that the god who appeared to Jacob was Yahweh, the god of his fathers and not the principle deity of the Canaanite pantheon, "El."

Jacob associated the stone by his head with the theophany.  Abraham camped between Ai and Bethel 100 years earlier and built an altar near his camp. It is possible that the place Abraham built his altar was this elevation'it was an accepted practice to erect worship sites on elevations like hilltops and mountains ([Josh 8:30](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/joshua/joshua8.htm#v30); [2 Sam 24:21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2samuel/2samuel24.htm#v21); [2 Chr 3:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/2chronicles/2chronicles3.htm#v1)).  Was the stone Jacob erected as a memorial part of Abraham's stone altar?  The text does not identify this as the same site as Abraham's altar but it is an interesting possibility to consider.  When Abraham first came to Canaan and when Yahweh first appeared to him at Shechem he built altar.  After leaving Shechem he traveled to the mountain district east of Bethel when he camped: *From there he* [Abraham] *moved on to the mountainous district east of Bethel, where he pitched his tent, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east* ([Gen 12:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v8))*.* Later, after his return from Egypt, Abraham *went from the Negeb to Bethel, where he had first pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai, at the place where he had formerly erected the altar.  There he invoked the name of Yahweh* ([Gen 13:3-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v3)).

The vow Jacob made in verses 20-22 is the longest vow in the Old Testament.

**Question:** What conditional three-part vow did Jacob make when he set up the memorial stone?  Compare Jacob's vow with Hannah's vow in [1 Samuel 1:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1samuel/1samuel11.htm#v11).  Is a conditional vow which tests God's willingness to grant a petition like Jacob's appropriate?
**Answer:**

1. *If God remains with me and keeps me safe on the journey I am making...*
2. *if he gives me food to eat and clothes to wear,  and*
3. *if I come home safe to my father's home,*

According to Jacob's "if" and "then" clauses: **if** God kept him safe on the journey, **if**     God gave him food and clothes and **if** Jacob returned safely to his father's house, only **then** Yahweh would be his God and he vowed that he would give back to God a tenth of everything God gave him.  Hannah's vow was preceded by a humble prayer petitioning God to grant her a child.  It is appropriate to petition God in prayer, like Hannah and the Unnamed Servant, to fulfill a request, and it is appropriate to promise God some act of appreciation if the petition is granted, but it is not appropriate to make "deals" with God: "do this for me and I'll do that for you."  A relationship with God should not be based on material reward and the satisfaction of one's ambitions.  Both the Unnamed Servant and Hannah based their petitions upon an established relationship with the Lord and upon God's will for their lives.  Jacob was not ready to establish a relationship until God fulfilled Jacob's demands.

**Question:** What Scripture verse from the Old Testament did Jesus quote during His temptation by the devil that we should remember when tempted to make "deals" with God?  See the Temptation of Christ in [Mt 4:5-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/matthew/matthew4.htm#v5) and [Dt 6:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/dueteronomy/deuteronomy6.htm#v16) which is a reference to [Ex 17:1-7](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus17.htm#v1); also see [Ps 95:8-9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/psalms/psalm95.htm#v8).
**Answer:** During His temptation Jesus quoted from [Deuteronomy 6:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy6.htm#v16), telling Satan: *Do not put the Lord your God to the test.* Jesus was quoting from a passage in the book of Exodus that referred to an incident during the Exodus journey to Mt. Sinai when the children of Israel did not trust God to provide for them but instead made demands upon God.  A relationship with God must be based on faith and trust in good times and in times of trial and suffering.

Unlike Abraham and Isaac who accepted God's promised blessings without conditions, Jacob made a "deal."  He had a long way to go before he reached his potential as a holy father of a holy people.  But we shouldn't be too severe in our criticism of Jacob.  Most of us who were raised in Christian families began as Jacob.  God was the god of our parents until the time came when we had to make the decision for ourselves whether or not we were going to have a personal relationship with God, putting our faith and trust in Him to guide our lives, or whether we were going to go our "own way" without a relationship with God'taking a non-stand as a "cultural Christian."  As the story of Jacob progresses, compare Jacob's response to people and events as compared to Abraham's Unnamed Servant who made the same journey to fulfill the same kind of mission.

Isaac never lived near Bethel, but Abraham did.  The site of Bethel where Jacob experienced his theophany will become important to Jacob just as Hebron, the site of Abraham's theophany, became a site to which Abraham always returned.  Bethel is mentioned 12 times in Genesis.   Bethel is mentioned 4 times in association with Abraham and 8 times in association with Jacob: [12:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v8) (twice); [13:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v3) (twice); [28:19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v19); [31:13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v13); [35:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v1), [3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v3), [6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v6), [8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v8), [15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v15), and [16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v16). Abraham pitched his camp near Bethel and erected an altar near his camp.  Since the top of Bethel hill is the highest point in that part of Canaan (2,886 feet above sea level), it was probably the site from which Lot viewed the fertile Jordan plain and decided to settle near Sodom ([Gen 13:10-11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v10)).  The town near the site, which was named Luz, came to be called "Bethel" ([Gen 28:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v18)).

The place-name "Bethel" in Genesis:

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| [Genesis 12:8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis12.htm#v8)  | *From there he* [Abraham] *moved on to the mountainous district of Bethel, where he pitched his tent, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east.  There he built an altar to Yahweh and invoked the name of Yahweh.*  |
| [Genesis 13:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v3)  | *By stages he* [Abraham] *went from the Negeb to Bethel, where he had first pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai, at the place where he had formerly erected the altar.  There he invoked the name of Yahweh.*  |
| [Genesis 28:19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v19)  | *He named the place Bethel, but before that the town had been called Luz.*  |
| [Genesis 31:13a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v13)  | *I am the God who appeared to you at Bethel, where you poured oil on a pillar and made a vow to me.*  |
| [Genesis 35:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v1), [3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis235.htm#v3), [6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v6), [8](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v8), [15-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v15)  | *God said to Jacob, 'Move on, go to Bethel and settle there.  Make an altar there for the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.  [..]. We must move on and go to Bethel.  There I shall make an altar for the God who heard me when I was in distress, and gave me his help on the journey I made.'  [..].  When Jacob arrived at Luz in Canaan'that is, Bethel'and all the people with him, he built an altar there and named the place El-Bethel, since it was there that God had appeared to him when he was fleeing from his brother. [..].  Jacob named the place Bethel where God has spoken to him.  They left Bethel, and wile they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and her pains were severe.*  |
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The theophany at Bethel, the "gate" between heaven and earth, is a "type" of Jesus Christ.  In Sacred Scripture "types" are defined as:  *A biblical person, thing, action, or event that foreshadows new truths, new actions, or new events.   In the Old Testament, Melchizedech and Jonah are types of Jesus Christ.  A likeness must exist between the type and the archetype, but the latter is always greater.  Both are independent of each other* (*Catholic Dictionary*, John A. Hardon, S.J.).

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| **The Typology of Bethel and Jesus Christ**  |
| **Bethel in** [**Genesis 28:12-18**](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v12)  | **Jesus**  |
| Bethel was a gateway between heaven and earth.  | Jesus said: *I am the gate.  Anyone who enters through me will be safe* ([Jn 10:9](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john10.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v9)).  |
| Bethel provided access to God.  | Jesus is the only access to the Father ([Jn 14:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john14.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v6)) and the mediator between God and men ([1 Tim 2:5](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1timothy/1timothy2.htm#v5)) who gives free access to the Father by one Spirit ([Eph 2:18](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ephesians/ephesians2.htm#v18))  |
| Angels were present as ministering spirits.  | He sends His angels as ministering spirits to serve those who will inherit salvation ([Heb 1:14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/hebrews/hebrews1.htm#v14)).  |
| Bethel was a "ladder" to heaven.  | Jesus said to Nathaniel: *In all truth I tell you, you will see heavens open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man* ([Jn 1:51](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john1.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22v51)). *The Cross is the only ladder to heaven* (St. Rose of Lima).  |
| At Bethel heaven and earth were joined and time was suspended in the presence of God.  | In the Sacrament of the Eucharist, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in 30 AD is present on the altar; heaven and earth become joined and time'past, present and future is suspended in the perfect sacrifice of the Redeemer Messiah.  |
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The fathers of the Church saw Jacob's ladder as prefiguring the Cross of Jesus Christ:

* *Our father Jacob too prayed at Bethel and saw the gate of heaven opened, with a ladder going up on high.  This is a symbol of our Savior that Jacob saw; the gate of heaven is Christ, in accordance with what he said, "I am the gate of life; everyone who enters by me shall live for ever." [..].  Again, the ladder that Jacob saw is a symbol of our Savior, in that by means of him the just ascend from the lower to the upper realm.  The ladder is also a symbol of our Savior's cross, which was raised up like a ladder, with the Lord standing above it* (Aphrahat / Aphraates (c. 270-350 AD), "On Prayer 5", *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol. I, page 188*).
* *Through the resurrection of Christ the way was opened. Therefore with good reason the patriarch Jacob relates that he had seen in that place a ladder whose end reached heaven and that the Lord leaned on it.  The ladder fixed to the ground and reaching heaven is the cross of Christ, through which the access to heaven is granted to us, because it actually leads us to heaven.  On this ladder different steps of virtue are set, through which we rise toward heaven: faith, justice, chastity, holiness, patience, piety and all the other virtues are the steps of this ladder.  If we faithfully climb them, we will undoubtedly reach heaven. And therefore we know well that the ladder is the symbol of the cross of Christ.  As, in fact, the steps are set between two uprights, so the cross of Christ is placed between the two Testaments and keeps in itself the steps of the heavenly precepts, through which we climb to heaven* (Chromatius, Bishop of Aquileia (d. 400 AD), "Sermon 1.6", *Ancient Christian  Commentary on Scripture, vol. I, page 188*).
* *Jacob displayed his staff to take a wife, but Christ bore the wood of the cross to redeem the Church.  In his sleep Jacob put a stone under his head and saw a ladder extending to heaven, while the Lord leaned upon the ladder* (Caesarius Bishop of Arles (470-543 AD), "Sermon 87.2", *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol. I, page 188*).

When Jacob first climbed the hill of Bethel the site looked barren and devoid of life.  But after his vision he realized the supernatural significance of the place.  The village of Luz was nearby but that name and its earthly significance paled in comparison to the supernatural experience on the hill top.   Therefore, Jacob named the hill "Beth-el" (place/house-God) or "God's place/house," recognizing its holiness and placing a standing-stone pillar as a sign of God's presence.  To non-Christians, and sometimes to Christians who take their faith for granted, the Church seems barren and uninspiring.  But when the Church looks that way to them they are failing to recognize God's presence among His people'they are only seeing the natural and are missing the vision of the supernatural within the pillars of the Church (see [1 Tim 3:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1timothy/1timothy3.htm#v15)).  Bible scholar Dr. Bruce Waltke wrote: *The church often appears insignificant (*[*1 Cor 1:26-31*](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1corinthians/1corinthians1.htm#v26)*) and our lives dark and hard until God opens our eyes to see God's presence transforming us into the axis between heaven and earth, the gateway to God.  The church receives this awe-inspiring revelation by hearing God's word and participating in his sacraments (cf.* [*Luke 24:30-32*](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke24.htm#v30)*).  However, if the church thinks of itself as a significant worldly place, like Luz, it will not gain this insight (*[*Phil. 3:7-11*](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/philippians/philippians3.htm#v7)*)* (Waltke*, Genesis,* page 395)*.*

**Please read Genesis 29:1-14: Jacob Arrives at Laban's Home in Paddan-Aram and Meets Rachel
29:1*Continuing his journey, Jacob reached the Land of the Easterners.* 2*And there, out in the open, he saw a well with three flocks of sheep lying beside it; this well was used for watering the flocks.  Now the stone on the mouth of the well was a large one,* 3*and only when all the flocks had collected there, did they roll the stone off the mouth of the well and water the sheep; then they would replace the stone over the mouth of the well.* 4*Jacob said to the shepherds, 'Friends, where are you from?'  They replied, 'We are from Haran.'* 5*He asked them, 'Do you know Laban son of Nahor?'  They replied, 'We do.'* 6*Then he asked them, 'Is he well?'  'He is,' they replied, 'and here comes his daughter Rachel with the flock.'* 7*Then he said, 'But it is still broad daylight, not the time to round up the animals.  Why don't you water the sheep and take them back to graze?'* 8*To which, they replied, 'We can't, until all the shepherds have assembled to roll the stone off the mouth of the well; then we can water the sheep.'* 9*He was still talking to them, when Rachel arrived with her father's flock, for she was a shepherdess.* 10*As soon as Jacob saw Rachel, his uncle Laban's daughter, with his uncle Laban's flock, he went up and, rolling the stone off the mouth of the well, watered his uncle Laban's sheep.* 11*Jacob then kissed Rachel and burst into tears.* 12*He told Rachel he was her father's kinsman and Rebekah's son, and she ran to tell her father.* 13*As soon as he heard her speak of his sister's son Jacob, Laban ran to greet him, embraced him, kissed him and took him to his house.* 14*Jacob told Laban everything that had happened, and Laban said to him, 'You are indeed my bone and flesh!'***

At some point after leaving Bethel hill Jacob crossed the Jordan River, crossing from the west to the east, and traveled north along what was probably the great trade route known as the King's Highway (see Gen 32:10/11). At the end of a journey that must have taken at least 30 days, he arrived at a well where he found three flocks of sheep with their shepherds. In this passage, the word "well" is repeated a significant seven times: 29:2 (three times), 3 (twice), 8, and 10.

**Question:** What direction is Haran from Canaan?  Why does Scripture call Northern Mesopotamia "the land of the Easterners?"
**Answer:** Haran is northeast of Canaan.  Both Ur and Babylon are due east.  Since the fall of man in Eden to move to the "east" was to move away from God.

Jacob arrived in a land where Yahweh was not worshipped.  Any movement to the east in Genesis is usually seen in the context of divine judgment ([3:24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis3.htm#v24); [4:16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis4.htm#v16); [19:17-26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v17)), in man's search for personal power ([11:2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis11.htm#v2)), and in valuing the material over the spiritual ([13:11](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis13.htm#v11)), all of which results in man's further descent into sin and his alienation from God as he moves farther away from a relationship with God ([19:17-38](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis19.htm#v17); [25:6](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis25.htm#v6)).

**Question:** What did Jacob first see in arriving in the "Land of the Easterners" and what was the significance of this detail?
**Answer:** He saw three flocks of sheep.  The number three points to an event of significance that follows; it is usually an event that will be associated with a work of God and which has an impact on salvation history.

The three flocks and their shepherds are resting beside a well that is covered by a very large stone.  The reader's attention is drawn to the well by the seven time word repetition and the details given about the well in the passage.  It was a common practice to cover wells, protecting the water from debris and from thirsty animals falling into the well.

**Genesis 29:4-8:** 294*Jacob said to the shepherds, 'Friends, where are you from?'  They replied, 'We are from Haran.'* 5*He asked them, 'Do you know Laban son of Nahor?'  They replied, 'We do.'* 6*Then he asked them, 'Is he well?'  'He is,' they replied, 'and here comes his daughter Rachel with the flock.'* 7*Then he said, 'But it is still broad daylight, not the time to round up the animals.  Why don't you water the sheep and take them back to graze?'* 8*To which, they replied, 'We can't, until all the shepherds have assembled to roll the stone off the mouth of the well; then we can water the sheep.'*

**Question:** What four questions did Jacob ask the shepherds?
**Answer:**

1. Where are you from?
2. Do you know Laban son of Nahor?
3. Is he well?
4. Why don't you water the sheep and take them back out to graze?

Jacob did not realize the location of the well until he asked the shepherds where they were from.  It was then that he realized he had reached Haran, the home of his uncle Laban, a man known to the shepherds and whose daughter was approaching the well with her sheep as they spoke.  Notice that Jacob, unlike Esau, did not despise his father's occupation.  His comment to the shepherds on bringing the animals in too soon is an indication that he understood how to take care of animals.

**Question:** What was the shepherds' answer to Jacob's question concerning the watering of the sheep so early in the day?
**Answer:** The rock was too heavy for the three shepherds to move the stone by themselves; they needed the combined strength of many shepherds to roll the stone off the opening to the well.  It was necessary to wait together until all the shepherds brought in their flocks.

**Genesis 29:9-11:** 29:9*He was still talking to them, when Rachel arrived with her father's flock, for she was a shepherdess.* 10*As soon as Jacob saw Rachel, his uncle Laban's daughter, with his uncle Laban's flock, he went up and, rolling the stone off the mouth of the well, watered his uncle Laban's sheep.* 11*Jacob then kissed Rachel and burst into tears.*

**Question:** In view of the shepherds' answer to Jacob's fourth question concerning the watering of the sheep, what is the significance of what happened in the next part of the narrative?
**Answer:** With supernatural strength, Jacob moved the stone off the well head.  It was God who gave him the strength to move the stone aside.

This heroic act was Jacob's introduction to Rachel as he watered her sheep and then, in his enthusiasm both kissed Rachel, the common greeting between kinsmen but which must have startled the girl since he had not yet introduced himself, and then he burst into tears.

**Question:** Why did Jacob burst into tears?
**Answer:** Perhaps his reaction was a sign of his great emotional distress since leaving his father's home'making the long and dangerous journey with no resources and without any companionship ([Gen 35:3](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis35.htm#v3)).  His emotional display, after the very manly act of moving the stone, was probably an outpouring of his enormous relief, knowing he had safely arrived at his destination and was again in the company of family.

**Genesis 29:12-14:** 29:12*He told Rachel he was her father's kinsman and Rebekah's son, and she ran to tell her father.* 13*As soon as he heard her speak of his sister's son Jacob, Laban ran to greet him, embraced him, kissed him and took him to his house.* 14*Jacob told Laban everything that had happened, and Laban said to him, 'You are indeed my bone and flesh!'*

Laban's words to Jacob: *'You are indeed my bone and flesh!'* is the language of covenant kinship.

**Question:** Where was this phrase first spoken earlier in the book of Genesis?
**Answer:** In [Genesis 2:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis2.htm#v23) these were Adam's first words to his bride Eve: *And the man said: This one at least is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!*

The incident at the well of Haran is the second time a bride has been courted at a well.  There are three different encounters between a man and a woman at a well in the Pentateuch.  The first encounter was between the Unnamed Servant and Isaac's bride Rebekah at the well in [Genesis 24](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm), the second was this encounter between Jacob and his future bride Rachel, and the third will be between Moses and his future bride Zipporah in [Exodus 2:16-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus2.htm#v16)'in Scripture brides are courted at wells.

**Question:** Read the accounts of these three encounters.  What seven elements do they all have in common?  See [Gen 24:4-67](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v4); [28:1-2](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v1); [29:2-14](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis29.htm#v2), [18-19](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis29.htm#v18), [28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis29.htm#v28); [Ex 2:15-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/exodus/exodus2.htm#v15).
**Answer:** Each encounter has the same basic elements:

1. The man travels to a distant land.
2. He arrives at a well.
3. A girl comes to draw water at the well.
4. The man approaches the girl and speaks with her.
5. The girl returns to her people to tell them what the man has told her.
6. The man is introduced to the girl's people.
7. The girl becomes the bride of a bridegroom.

**Question:** An event repeated three times in Scripture points to a more significant fourth event that is important in God's plan of salvation.  What is the 4th "well encounter" in Scripture between a woman and a man that will have a profound impact on salvation history?  Hint: It is found in one of the New Testament Gospels.  Are the same elements of the "well narratives" present in this story?
**Answer:**

1. Jesus was traveling from the Galilee to Jerusalem.
2. He arrived at a well near Shechem in Samaria (the region of the Holy Land that had been the Northern Kingdom of Israel) that was called "Jacob's well."
3. A woman came to draw water at the well.
4. Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman.  He told her that He was the Messiah.
5. She went to tell her people about Jesus.
6. She brought her people to meet Him and they received His words with gladness.

**Question:** Who is the bride and who is the bridegroom in the well narrative in [John chapter 4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/john/john4.htm)??  What Old Testament prophecy was Jesus fulfilling? Hint: see [Ez 37:15-28](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/ezekiel/ezekiel37.htm#v15).
**Answer:** The seventh element is also present in this narrative: Jesus was the bridegroom and Samaria (the once lost Northern Kingdom of Israel) was the bride that Jesus was calling into covenant union with her promised Redeemer-Messiah.  He was fulfilling the prophet Ezekiel's prophecy that the Messiah would restore the broken and scattered Kingdom of Israel

Jacob's encounter with Rachel completes his journey and is the beginning of his mission.

**Question:** What part of Jacob's "deal" with God in [Genesis 28:20-21](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v20) had the Lord fulfilled?
**Answer:** Part one of his demand was fulfilled: *If God remains with me and keeps me safe on this journey* ([Gen 28:20a](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis28.htm#v20)).

**Question:** Compare Jacob's response to finding Rachel to the Unnamed Servant's response in finding Rebekah in [Genesis 24:11-27](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v11).
**Answer:** Upon arriving at the well at the end of his journey the first act of the Unnamed Servant was to petition God for His assistance in finding God's choice in a bride from Abraham's family.  When the servant met Rebekah he recognized that God had fulfilled his petition and the servant immediately acknowledged God's graciousness in answering his prayer, bowing down, worshipping Yahweh, and giving God his thanks.  As for Jacob, although he must have realized the first part of his requirement for accepting the God of Abraham and Isaac as his god had been fulfilled and that the strength he was given to move the stone was not his, he failed to offer any public sign of acknowledgment or thanksgiving.

We do not know, of course, what Jacob felt in his heart, and his tears could also have been a sign that he realized the God of Abraham was faithful in His promises.

**Please read Genesis 29:14b-30: Jacob asks for Rachel
29:14b*After Jacob had been staying with him for a month,* 15*Laban said to Jacob, 'Just because you are my kinsman (brother\*), why should you work for me for nothing?  Tell me what wages you want.'* 16*Now Laban had two daughters, the elder named Leah, and the younger Rachel.* 17*Leah had lovely eyes, but Rachel was shapely and beautiful,* 18*and Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel.  So his answer was, 'I will work for you for seven years in exchange for your younger daughter Rachel.'* 19*Laban replied, 'It is better for me to give her to you than to a stranger; stay with me.'* 20*So Jacob worked for seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him like a few days because he loved her so much.*** = literal translation (*Interlinear Bible, vol. 1, page 74*).

The key word in the narrative concerning Jacob's life in Haran is the Hebrew word "worked/ served," which represents Jacob's life as a servant in exile. In this passage the root 'bd is repeated seven times in Genesis 29:15, 18, 20, 25, 27 (twice), and in verse 30 (Interlinear Bible, vol. 1, page 74).

**Question:** Laban greeted Jacob as a kinsman (brother) but now in verse 15 Laban wanted to treat Jacob as a hired man.  What accounted for this change?
**Answer:** Jacob had not come like the Unnamed Servant with gifts, a display of wealth and a bride price.  When Laban first greeted Jacob he must have been expecting the same signs of wealth he saw years earlier from this branch of the family.  When that he realized Jacob was indigent, Laban was unwilling to house and feed a poor relation for nothing.

Jacob's exile from the "promised land" now becomes an exile of servitude, prefiguring his descendants' exile of servitude in Egypt in the book of Exodus.

**Genesis 29:16-19:** 29:16*Now Laban had two daughters, the elder named Leah, and the younger Rachel.* 17*Leah had lovely eyes, but Rachel was shapely and beautiful,* 18*and Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel.  So his answer was, 'I will work for you for seven years in exchange for your younger daughter Rachel.'* 19*Laban replied, 'It is better for me to give her to you than to a stranger; stay with me.'*

Laban had two daughters and he also had sons ([Gen 31:1](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v1)). The names of his daughters reflected the family's occupation as herders of cattle and sheep.  The elder daughter was called Leah, a name which meant "cow."  She had (literally) "soft" eyes, which some translations render as "weak" or "near sighted;" it is also possible that her eyes were large and tender like the animal for which she was named.  The younger daughter was called Rachel, a name which meant "ewe lamb"; she was described as shapely, physically appealing.  Jacob did not petition God to choose a bride for him.  Jacob loved Rachel, but significantly God will intervene to choose Leah.

**Question:** What offer did Jacob make to Laban?
**Answer:** In the absence of a material bride-price Jacob will work for Laban for seven years in exchange for Rachel as his wife.

Laban's response is less than enthusiastic (Jacob is only better than a stranger), but he seems to have agreed to Jacob's terms.  Notice, however, that Laban's words were ambiguous.  He did not name the girl and he did not repeat the bride-price, shrewdly failing to explicitly agree to give Jacob Rachel as his bride after seven years of labor.  He is behaving in the same slippery fashion that he exhibited in the negotiations with the Unnamed Servant, but Abraham's servant saw through Laban's manipulations and insisted that the girl either came with him then or he was free of his obligation to return with a bride.  Jacob lacked the Unnamed Servant's discernment.   Laban was treating his daughters in the same way that he bargained for livestock.  It is a complaint his daughters will make against him later (see [Gen 31:15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis31.htm#v15)). "Smooth" Jacob, the deceiver, has met his match.  Ironically Jacob who deceived a member of his family, his father, will in turn be cruelly deceived by a family member, his uncle.

**Genesis 29:20:** 29:20*So Jacob worked for seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him like a few days because he loved her so much.*

**Question:** What is ironic about this statement?  See [Gen 27:44](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis27.htm#v44).
**Answer:** When she sent her son to Haran Rebekah told him it would "only be a few days," but those days stretched out into years.  Ironically those years that Jacob thought only seems like a few days because he believed he was working for his beloved Rachel will stretch out into many more years. It is also sadly ironic that Rebekah deceived her husband and herself while her brother deceived Jacob.

**Please read Genesis 29:21-30: Laban's Deception and Jacob's Two Weddings**
29:**21*Then Jacob said to Laban, 'Give me my wife for my time is up and I should like to go to her.'* 22*Laban gathered all the people of the place together, and gave a banquet.* 23*But when night came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he slept with her.* 24*(Laban gave his slave-girl Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her slave.)* 25*When morning came, it was Leah!  So Jacob said to Laban, 'What have you done to me?  Did I not work for you for Rachel? Why then have you tricked me?'* 26*Laban replied, 'It is not the custom in our place to marry off the younger before the elder.* 27*Finish this marriage week and I shall give you the other one too in return for your working for me for another seven years.* 28*Jacob agreed and when he had finished the week, Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife.* 29*(Laban gave his slave-girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her slave.)* 30*So Jacob slept with Rachel too, and he loved Rachel more than Leah.  He worked for Laban for another seven years.***

Wedding banquets usually lasted for seven days, during which time the bride remained veiled ([Gen 24:65](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v65); [Judg 14:12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/judges/judges14.htm#v12); [Tob 8:20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/tobit/tobit8.htm#v20)).  That Laban gave his daughters a personal servant was also common, if the father could afford such a gesture ([Gen 24:61](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/genesis/genesis24.htm#v61)).  But Laban deceived Jacob in giving him Leah and not Rachel as a bride.

**Question:** What is ironic about the way in which Jacob was deceived?
**Answer:** Jacob deceived his father who could not see. Isaac's vision was "dark" because of his disabling physical blindness, and now Laban deceived Jacob in the darkness of the night while Jacob was probably disabled by too much to drink.

**Question:** What excuse did Laban make when Jacob confronted him about the deception?  What was the problem with Laban's excuse?
**Answer:** He said it was not his peoples' custom to marry the younger daughter before the elder.  That this was the custom has nothing to do with the agreement that was struck between the two men, but Jacob is too dumbfounded to make any response.

**Question:** What was Laban's counter proposal and what was Jacob's response.
**Answer:** Laban offered to give Jacob Rachel for seven more years of labor.  Jacob agreed.

**Question:** Compare Jacob's response to people and events in securing a bride from the Mesopotamian branch of the family with the Unnamed Servant's response to people and events in Genesis chapter 24.  What are the differences between the two men?
**Answer:**

1. The Unnamed Servant continually made references to God's part in his mission while Jacob never mentioned God.
2. The servant sought the selection of a bride on God's choice of a girl who exhibited the quality of generosity of spirit over physical beauty, while Jacob focused only on Rachel's physical beauty.
3. The servant did not let himself be outmaneuvered by Laban, while Jacob was sadly out maneuvered by Laban at every turn.

**Question:** Why did God choose such an imperfect man to be the father of the people from whom the "promised seed," Jesus of Nazareth, would be born?
**Answer:** The plan that Abraham was to be the father of a people who would bear the "promised seed" was already set in place.  God choose Jacob to carry the "promised seed" in spite of his imperfections because God knew the kind of man Jacob had the potential of becoming.

**Please read Genesis 29:31-30:24: Jacob's Family and the Rivalry between his Wives**
29:**31*When Yahweh saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb, while Rachel remained barren.* 32*Leah conceived and gave birth to a son whom she named Reuben, meaning 'Yahweh has seen my misery'; and she said, 'Now my husband will love me.'* 33*Conceiving again, she gave birth to a son and said, 'Yahweh heard that I was unloved, and so he has given me this one too'; and she named him Simeon.* 34*Again she conceived and gave birth to a son, and said, 'This time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.'  Accordingly, she named him Levi.* 35*Again she conceived and gave birth to a son, and said, 'Now I shall praise Yahweh!'  Accordingly, she named him Judah.  Then she had no more children.* 30:1*Rachel, seeing that she herself gave Jacob no children, became jealous of her sister. And she said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or I shall die!'* 2*This made Jacob angry with Rachel, and he retorted, 'Am I in the position of God, who has denied you motherhood?* 3*So she said, 'Here is my slave-girl, Bilhah. Sleep with her and let her give birth on my knees; through her, then, I too shall have children!'* 4*So she gave him her slave-girl Bilhah as concubine.  Jacob slept with her,* 5*and Bilhah conceived and gave birth to a son by Jacob.* 6*Then Rachel said, 'God has done me justice; yes, he has heard my prayer and given me a son.' Accordingly she named him Dan.* 7*Again Rachel's slave-girl Bilhah conceived and gave birth to a second son by Jacob.* 8*Then Rachel said, 'I have fought a fateful battle with my sister, and I have won!'  So she named him Naphtali.* 9*Now Leah, seeing that she had ceased to bear children, took her slave-girl Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as concubine.* 10*So Leah's slave-girl Zilpah gave birth to a son by Jacob.* 11*Then Leah exclaimed, 'What good fortune!'  So she named him Gad.* 12*Leah's slave-girl Zilpah gave birth to a second son by Jacob.* 13*Then Leah said, 'What blessedness!  Women will call me blessed!'  So she named him Asher.* 14*One day, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben found some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, 'Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.'* 15*Leah replied, 'Is it not enough to have taken my husband, without your taking my son's mandrakes as well?  So Rachel said, 'Very well, he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes.'* 16*When Jacob came back from the fields that night, Leah went out to meet him and said, 'You must come to me, for I have hired you at the price of my son's mandrakes.'   So he slept with her that night.* 17*God heard Leah, and she conceived and gave birth to a fifth son by Jacob.* 18*Then Leah said, 'God has given me my reward for giving my slave girl to my husband.'  So she named him Issachar.* 19*Again Leah conceived and gave birth to a sixth son by Jacob,* 20*and said, 'God has given me a fine gift; now my husband will bring me presents, for I have borne him six sons.  So she named him Zebulun.* 21*Later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.* 22*Then God remembered Rachel; he heard her and opened her womb.* 23*She conceived and gave birth to a son, and said, 'God has taken away my disgrace!'* 24*She named him Joseph, saying, 'May Yahweh add another son for me!'***

Ironically the rivalry between two brothers that disrupted the harmony of the family God selected to bear the "promise seed" and led to a family disaster is now continued in the rivalry between two sisters, which will also cause discord that will lead to a family disaster.

The sisters not only vie for Jacob's affections but compete over who will sleep in his bed'even extending the competition to include their slave-girls.  The names of the children reflect the rivalry between Leah and Rachel in their contest to have the most children with the etymology of each son's name reflected in the struggles and victories between the sisters.

**Question:** When Rachel confronted Jacob, blaming him for not giving her children, what was Jacob's defense?
**Answer:** He blamed God for her bareness.  It was obvious to Jacob and everyone else that Leah was giving him children so the problem had to be Rachel's infertility which was God's doing.

**Genesis 30:14-16:** 30:14*One day, at the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben found some mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, 'Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.'* 15*Leah replied, 'Is it not enough to have taken my husband, without your taking my son's mandrakes as well?  So Rachel said, 'Very well, he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes.'* 16*When Jacob came back from the fields that night, Leah went out to meet him and said, 'You must come to me, for I have hired you at the price of my son's mandrakes.'   So he slept with her that night.*

The dispute over the mandrakes, in Hebrew "love fruits" (*duda'im*), in verses 14-16 concerned the belief that mandrakes were a powerful aphrodisiac and enhancer of fertility.([4](http://www.agapebiblestudy.com/genesis/Lesson_13.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22end4)) Ironically, when Rachel traded a place in Jacob's bed for Ruben's mandrakes she only succeeded in giving Leah another child.  The narrative debunked the superstition about mandrakes.  It is ironic that Jacob, reduced to the status of a hireling by his uncle, is also reduced to the status of a hireling by his wives in this passage: *for I have hired you at the price of my son's mandrakes.*

**Question:** Who was the senior wife?
**Answer:** By rights the senior wife should be the first legal wife, Leah, but not only had Leah forfeited Jacob's love to Rachel but Rachel had usurped her place as the senior wife.  It was Rachel who determined with whom Jacob slept.

Leah was unloved but Yahweh took mercy on her, blessing her with fertility and sons.  God eventually took pity on barren Rachel, opening her womb and giving her Joseph, a beloved son who will figure prominently in the last section of the book of Genesis'increasing the family tensions but also becoming an important player in God's plan for the twelve sons of Jacob and the destiny of the children of Israel.

Jacob's twelve sons and one daughter

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **LEAH'S SONSand daughter**  | **ZILPAH'S SONS(Leah's servant)**  | **RACHEL'S SONS**  | **BILHAH'S SONS(Rachel's servant)**  |
| Ruben #1  | Gad # 7  | Joseph #11  | Dan #5  |
| Simeon #2  | Asher #8  | Benjamin #12  | Naphtali #6  |
| Levi #3  |    |    |    |
| Judah #4 **+**  |    |    |    |
| Issachar #9  |    |    |    |
| Zebulun #10  |    |    |    |
| Dinah\*  |    |    |    |

\* = daughter; **+** = bearer of the "promised seed"

**Questions for group discussion:**

Isaac was selected by God to bear the "promised seed" of the future Redeemer.  He was the son of a righteous father who was raised to know about Yahweh's blessings and covenant promises to the family.  In Abraham's test of faith in chapter 22 Isaac even submitted to his father in being offered up for sacrifice as a "type" of Christ.  It is sad that a life that had such promise of greatness seemed to miss the mark when Isaac failed as a model righteous leader, husband, and father later in his life.

**Question:** What other son of a righteous father, selected by God to be the leader of his covenant people and a bearer of the "promised seed," began his role as God's representative with great promise but later failed as a moral and spiritual leader of his people?  See [Dt 17:14-20](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/deuteronomy/deuteronomy17.htm#v14); [1 Kng 2:1-4](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings2.htm#v1); [3:5-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings3.htm#v5); [10:14-15](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings10.htm#v14); [26](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings10.htm#v26), [29](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings10.htm#v29); [11:1-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1kings/1kings11.htm#v13).  Why did he fail?
**Answer:** Solomon son of David.

Having a righteous father and being chosen by God for an important role in salvation history does not mean that one will not be seduced into sin and drawn away from God if one is not both faithful to God's commands and vigilant in avoiding sin.

**Question:** Can you think of other men and women who accepted God's call as leaders within the Church, or within their communities, who showed great promise but later failed to remain faithful, straying off the path of righteousness?  What were the reasons for their failures?  What is the lesson we should all take to heart from their bad examples?
**Answer:** There can be various answers.

God does not choose "perfect" men and women to accomplish His plans'*for all have sinned and deprived of the glory of God* ([Rom 3:23](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans3.htm#v23); New American Bible).

**Question:** How might you describe God's selection process and why He chooses who He chooses to serve His divine plans?  When God chooses someone does His choice assure their salvation?  Why does Scripture record so many failures of the biblical heroes and heroines?
**Answer:**

1. God uses human beings as they are with all their virtues and imperfections.  He even chose pagan pharaohs and kings (the Egyptian pharaoh of the Exodus, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and Cyrus of Persia) to fulfill His plans.  He chooses men and women to serve His purpose, and He makes the best use of that human resource, each of whom has the free will choice to rise to a greater spiritual height or to miss the mark.
2. There is no assurance that those who God used to fulfill His plans will be ultimately saved; Jesus chose Judas but he rejected his divine election.  Everyone receives a special call to salvation, but of their own free will every man and woman will accept or reject that call. A person may be useful in serving God's plans in this life but fail to accept the gift of salvation by remaining free of sin in order to receive the gift of eternal life in the next life when all sins are laid bare in judgment before the throne of God ([Rom 2:12-16](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/romans/romans2.htm#v12); [Rev 20:11-12](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/revelation/revelation20.htm#v11)).
3. That Scripture accurately records the strengths and failures of the biblical heroes and heroines with such candor is a testament to the truthfulness of Sacred Scripture.  Men and women are imperfect and are susceptible to sin.  It is God the Holy Spirit who calls men and women to righteousness, but it is a righteousness that must be lived daily with a continual renunciation of sin and a continual turning back to God.  The record of the lives of the people in Sacred Scripture are a lesson for us all ([1 Cor 10:11-13](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/1corinthians/1corinthians10.htm#v11)).