

Lesson 7: Birthright Blessing; Marriage in the Covenant

Reading Preparation:

- Genesis 25-35

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Lesson Notes:

[1. Esau and Jacob](#)

Isaac's wife, Rebekah becomes pregnant with twins. However, upon experiencing complications she inquires of the Lord. She receives very important information.

Genesis 25:23

23 And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

Rebekah learns that her second born son, not the first shall receive the patriarchal blessing and birthright. According to the scriptures, Esau is the first born (Gen. 25:25), and Jacob is second (Gen. 25:26). In this family, we learn that Isaac, the father of the two boys loved Esau while the favorite of the mother was Jacob (Gen. 25:28).

It is important to note Jacob is described in Gen. 25:27 as a 'plain man' which in Hebrew means 'whole, complete, or perfect' (LDS Bible Dictionary, in Holy Bible. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1979, footnote 27b, 37).

[1.1. What is the Birthright Blessing?](#)

LDS Bible Dictionary states,

"Under the patriarchal order, the right or inheritance of the firstborn is known as birthright. This generally included a land inheritance as well as the authority to preside. The firstborn of flocks and of human families was considered as belonging to the Lord, and was expected to be dedicated to him. This dedication could be either literal or by the payment of redemption money (Ex. 13:11-16)" (LDS Bible Dictionary, in Holy Bible. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979, 625).

The birthright blessing, according to the patriarchal order, belongs to the oldest or firstborn child. We will see when the Lord deems otherwise, it changes.

[1.2. Blessing Lost](#)

Generally speaking, when something is lost it is because the owner did not place sufficient value upon the object. When something is truly important to us we are careful to insure that it is put in a secure place. When an item does not have great value or importance to us, we may be willing to trade or sell it to the highest bidder. This truth is exemplified by Esau and the value he holds for his birthright. The rightful holder of the birthright seems not to value it greatly for he is willing to sell it.

Genesis 25:29-34

29 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field and he was faint:
30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint:...
31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.
32 And Esau said, Behold I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?
33 And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob.
34 ...and he [Esau] did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way; thus Esau despised his birthright.

We may ask ourselves, is this yet another example of a younger brother taking advantage of a weakened older brother in order to obtain the desired blessing? While this may appear to be our initial conclusion, it is not supported by the information we have from the scriptures. Esau the hunter states he is so weak from hunting that he is at the point of death. I believe, instead he is exaggerating his physical need in order to gain some of the soup his brother has prepared. It would also appear from the latter statement (Genesis 25:34), that he, in fact, did not place great value on his birthright!

Here is yet further support of Esau's lack of value for his birthright.

Genesis 26:34-35

34 And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite:
35 Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.

Why was Esau's decision to marry wives from the Hittites additional grief to his parents?

Ellis T. Rasmussen notes,

"Esau had ...chosen his wives from the Hittite families before the incident of the transmission of the birthright blessing. It seems a safe assumption that it was because he had not married well." (Patriarchs of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1964, 98-99).

What does it mean, "he had not married well?" It means that Esau had chosen to marry someone outside the covenant. You will recall that marriage within the covenant was so important to Abraham and Sarah they had sent their trusted servant to travel over five hundred miles to obtain a bride for Isaac! The action of Esau to marry outside the covenant would have made the blessings of the birthright null and void for his progenitors.

The time has now arrived for Isaac to confer upon his oldest son, Esau, the birthright blessing. Rebekah overhears this will occur upon Esau's return from getting his father some venison. Rebekah tells Jacob to follow her directions and she will take the responsibility. She precedes to prepare a meal for Isaac. She also takes a hairy skin which she then places over Jacob in order to fool Isaac whose eyesight is poor, into believing Jacob is really his hairy, oldest son, Esau.

Genesis 27:21-23

21 And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not.
22 And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.
23 And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him.

Isaac has just finished giving the birthright blessing not to his son, Esau, but to Jacob!

Genesis 27:30

30 And it came to pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was yet scarce gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting.

Upon realizing he has given the blessing to Jacob, not his son, Esau, Isaac's responds to his error, but he does not nullify his blessing to Jacob.

Genesis 27:33

33 And Isaac trembled very exceedingly,... [and I] have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.

Why doesn't he rescind the birthright blessing from Jacob? While we do not know the precise reason, the truth is while you may be able to deceive an elderly man, even the Lord's prophet, you cannot deceive the Lord! It was the Lord's desire that Jacob, not Esau, receive the birthright blessing, and, therefore, the blessing which Isaac gave to Jacob is not revoked in spite of the deceit which Rebekah perpetrated. We must, however, reserve our judgment even regarding Rebekah until all the facts are known.

Esau is clearly upset and expresses his concern to his father, Isaac.

Genesis 27:36, 38, 41

36 And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me?

38 And Esau lifted up his voice, and wept.

41 And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him; and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.

Ellis T. Rasmussen observes,

"Esau [now] realized that the preeminence of the birthright-bearer was lost to him, and, like everyone who sees the value of a lost treasure only too late, regretted the loss. Also in common with too many men, he tended to see most prominently the blameworthiness of others for his loss, and plotted blood revenge on his brother." (Patriarchs of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1964, 96).

Ellis T. Rasmussen adds,

"The alert and resourceful Rebekah averted a double tragedy (loss of both sons—one by murder and one by execution, as the law of Genesis 9:6 would require) by proposing to Isaac that they send Jacob away to find a proper wife in her homeland. The proposition that he be sent to obtain a proper wife apparently was approved by Isaac, for doubtless he knew that it was true, as Rebekah said, that their life's mission would be frustrated if Jacob married as Esau had [i.e. outside the covenant]." (An Introduction to the Old Testament and Its Teachings, Part I. Provo: Brigham Young University Printing Service, 1972, [Second Edition], 47).

Prior to Jacob's departure, Isaac gives his son a blessing.

Genesis 28:3-5

**3 And God Almighty bless thee and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people;
4 And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.
5 And Isaac sent away Jacob:...**

You will note in Isaac's blessing to Jacob, he reaffirms the patriarchal blessings of the Abraham covenant.

[1.3. Jacob Leaves Home](#)

Jacob leaves for Haran, a journey of approximately 450 miles, to obtain a wife among God's covenant people. While resting for the night, he has a dream.

Genesis 28:12-15

12 And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

13 And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring them again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

Upon awaking, Jacob states, “this is none other but the house of God...And he called the name of that place Bethel (Genesis 28:17, 19).

Were there any doubts about who should receive the birthright blessing, the matter is now confirmed by the Lord himself. Those elements of the Abrahamic covenant are again confirmed upon Jacob. These include the blessings of land, posterity, and divine direction.

Joseph Smith commenting on Paul vision stated,

“Paul ascended into the third heavens [2 Corinthians 12:2], and he could understand the three principal rounds of Jacob’s ladder—the telestial, the terrestrial, and the celestial glories or kingdoms.” (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. Compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976, 304-305).

Marion G. Romney stated regarding Jacob’s dream,

“Jacob realized that the covenants he made with the Lord there were the rungs on the ladder that he himself would have to climb in order to obtain the promised blessings—blessings that would entitle him to enter heaven and associate with the Lord...Temples are to us all what Bethel was to Jacob. Even more, they are also the gates to heaven for all of our unendowed kindred dead. We should all do our duty in bringing our loved ones through them.” (“Temples—The Gates of Heaven,” in Ensign, March, 1971, 16).

Jacob expresses gratitude for the special blessings he has received from the Lord,

Genesis 28:22

22 ...and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

Just as Abraham before him, Jacob will pay a tithe on his increase,

Genesis 14:20

20 And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he [Abraham] gave him tithes of all.

This scripture refers to the meeting Abraham had with Melchizedek king of Salem whom Abraham recognized as one of the Lord’s designated servants.

Ellis T. Rasmussen states,

“...Tithing might well be paid by any of us for the same reasons that Jacob resolved to pay, that is out of gratitude for the promises of the Lord and for His ever present blessings already enjoyed.” (Patriarchs of the Old Testament. Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1964, 100).

2. Jacob and Rachel

Under direction from the Lord, Jacob goes to the well at Padan-aram. He speaks to others at the well and ask if they know “Laban the son of Nahor?” (Gen.29:5) They tell him that Rachel, his daughter comes to the well to water her father’s sheep. At that moment, Rachel arrived at the well. Jacob is not hesitant as he seizes the opportunity, and possibly in an effort to make a good impression, rolls away the stone from the well and waters Rachel’s flocks; then he kissed her and identifies himself as her father’s brother’s son [nephew] (see Gen. 29:9-14). Rachel runs and tells her father about her encounter with Jacob at the well. Her father, Laban invites “his sister’s son...to abode with [his family] the space of a month” (Genesis 29:13-14). After a month of living at Laban’s house, Laban offers Jacob reimbursement for his labor.

Genesis 29:15

15...Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?”

We may assume during the month Jacob has been living in Laban’s home, and getting to know his daughter Rachel, Laban concludes that Jacob is going to be there for some time and so he offers him payment for the chores he has already been performing.

2.1. Seven Plus Seven

The agreement that Laban and Jacob make is that Jacob will work for Laban for the next seven years on the condition that he might have the blessing of marrying his daughter, Rachel.

Genesis 29:20

20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

Seven years pass, the night arrives. The girls as sisters may have been similar in height, weight, and general appearance; also the women of Haran sometimes veiled themselves; the inside of the tents are often dark, and Laban may have instructed Leah to speak as little as possible. Whatever the circumstances, Laban deceives Jacob!

Genesis 29:25

25 And it came to pass that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he [Jacob] said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?

Laban's only excuse for his action is that the oldest must be married before the youngest (see Gen 29:26). Beguile means, "to lead by deception; to deceive: cheat." (Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary. Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster Inc., 1991, 141).

One might think Jacob would feel that Laban cannot be trusted and so he would look elsewhere for his bride. That is not Jacob's response. He instead agrees to work another seven years for Rachel! The one concession that Jacob does obtain and it is important for him is that he and Rachel are married the following week. Jacob now has two wives, Leah and Rachel!

Genesis 29:30

30 ...and he loved also Rachel more than Leah,...

The feelings Jacob had for Rachel were strong and unfortunately obvious not only to Leah, but also to the Lord.

Genesis 29:31

31 And when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"When the Lord saw that Leah was hated," (Gen. 29:31), [The Hebrew word sahnay does not mean "hate" as the term is used today, but rather conveys the idea of "loving less." A better translation would be, "when the Lord saw that Leah was loved less or was not as favored,"], he opened her womb." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 87).

Laban makes the gift of a handmaiden to each daughter. Leah's handmaiden is named Zilpah and Rachel's is named Bilhah.

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

"The gift of the handmaiden to each daughter made the servants the direct property of each wife, not of Jacob. Thus, later when the handmaidens had children, the children were viewed legally as the children of Leah and Rachel." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 87).

2.2. Baby Contest?

Now begins a "baby contest" between Leah and Rachel. It was a great honor for the wife to be able to bear a male child for their husband. However, the process takes on a competitive nature as Leah strives with each delivery to win Jacob's favor.

The following children are born:

Mother¹	Name	Meaning	Reason for Naming
Leah	Reuben	See a son	Joy for having a son (Genesis 29:32)
Leah	Simeon	Hearing	Because the Lord heard that she was hated (Genesis 29:33)
Leah	Levi	Joined	This time will my husband be joined with me (Genesis 29:34)
Leah	Judah	Praise	Now I will praise the Lord (Genesis 29:35)
Bilhah	Dan	Judging	God hath judged me (Genesis 30:6)
Bilhah	Naphtali	Wrestling	With great wrestling have I wrestled my

			sister (Genesis 30:8)
Zilpah	Gad	Troop	Leah said, A troop cometh (Genesis 30:11)
Zilpah	Asher	My happiness	Leah said, Happy am I (Genesis 30:13)
Leah	Issachar	A reward	God hath given me my reward (Genesis 30:18)
Leah	Zebulun	Dwelling	Now will my husband dwell with me (Genesis 30:20)
Rachel	Joseph	Adding	The Lord shall add to me another son (Genesis 30:24)
Rachel	Benjamin	Son of my right hand	You are the son of my right hand (Genesis 35:18)

1. Chart Reference: *The Old Testament Student manual Genesis—2 Samuel*. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981, Revised Edition, 87).

At one point (Gen. 30:14-16), Rachel in her frustration to conceive children, attempts to obtain from her sister a fruit referred to as “mandrake.” The purpose of this fruit was supposed to ensure conception. By partaking of this fruit, Rachel hoped, at last, to be able to bear children. Rachel, in exchange for the fruit, agrees to encourage Jacob to go to Leah that night. This offer has led some Biblical scholars to believe that Jacob actually lived in Rachel’s tent rather than in Leah’s tent. “Although not specifically stated, the record implies that the mandrakes did nothing for Rachel. Finally, Rachel did conceive, but it was not because of the mandrakes, rather “God hearkened to her, and opened her womb (Gen. 30:22).” (see Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised. 1981], 88)

The result of the contest is that Leah will bear six sons, and her handmaiden, Zilpah, will bear two sons for a total of eight. Rachel will bear only two sons, Joseph and Benjamin. Sadly, she will lose her own life in giving birth to Benjamin. Her handmaiden, Bilhah will bear her two sons for a total of four sons. Based on numbers only, Leah would be the winner. In this contest, however, if the winner is determined by which son receives the birthright blessing, it will not go to any of the sons of Leah, or her handmaiden! We will later discuss who does get the birthright blessing and why.

2.3. Jacob Gains Flocks

Jacob worked for Laban for a total of fourteen years, in order to marry Rachel. He now enters into an agreement to work for Laban in order to obtain flocks of his own. Jacob makes the following agreement with his father-in-law which he accepts.

Genesis 30:32

32 I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire.

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

According to Genesis 30:37, Jacob believes a common superstition is that “the conception of offspring is influenced by what the female experiences or sees at the time of conception. Nothing is known by modern science to explain... what happened in the hereditary patterns of the animals.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 88).

Genesis 30:43

43 And the man [Jacob] increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.

The assumption is the Lord intervened in Jacob’s life, as he had promised, and blessed him greatly.

All, however, was not well with Laban’s sons toward Jacob’s success. Laban also was not pleased with the results.

Genesis 31:1-2

1 Also he [Jacob] heard the words of Laban’s sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father’s; and of that which was our father’s hath he gotten all this glory.

2 And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before.

2.4. Jacob Returns Home

Jacob is prompted by the Lord that it is now time for he and his family to leave Laban's household.

Genesis 31:3

3 And the Lord said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.

It has now been twenty years since Jacob first came to Haran. He now consults with his wives regarding leaving Laban's home. He reviews with them the manner in which their father has dealt with him during this time.

Genesis 31:6-7

6 And ye know that with all my power I have served your father.

7 And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times, but God suffered him not to hurt me.

Laban has also not been honest in his dealings with his daughters.

Genesis 31:14-15

14 And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?

15 Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money.

Custom dictates when a daughter is married, her father would provide a dowry to assist the couple in getting established. Laban's daughters are indicating that not only did he not provide a dowry for them, but he spent the money for their dowry for himself. He had treated them as if they were not related and acted as if he had no financial obligation towards them. As they now prepare to leave, Rachel takes an act of revenge against her father.

Genesis 31:19

19 And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's.

Old Testament Institute Student Manual notes,

"There is much debate among scholars about what the images were that were stolen by Rachel and what they represented. The Hebrew word which is sometimes used for small images of false gods is teraphim. Some translators render the word as 'household gods.' Was Laban an idolator? If so, we must ask, why was Jacob sent to Haran to find a wife if the family were idolaters like the neighboring Canaanites?...One scholar theorized that these images were somehow tied in with the legal rights of inheritance (see Guthrie, New Bible Commentary, p.104). If this theory is correct, the possessor of the teraphim had the right to inherit the father's property upon his death. This circumstance would explain why Rachel stole the images since her father had 'stolen' her inheritance (see Genesis 31:14-16). It would also explain Laban's extreme agitation over their loss and Jacob's severe penalty offered against the guilty party (see Genesis 31:31)." (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 89).

Laban was away when Jacob and his family leave. Upon learning of Jacob's departure, and the loss of his images, he comes after him. He searches for the lost images, however, Rachel is sitting on them (Gen. 31:34) and he does not find them. Jacob, obviously unaware of his wife's actions, is insulted that his father-in-law does not trust him,

Genesis 31:41-42

41 Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle; and thou hast changed my wages ten times.

42 Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight.

Laban knows within himself he has treated Jacob unfairly over these many years and as a gesture of good faith toward Jacob and his own daughters and grandchildren enters into a covenant of friendship. Father-in-law and son-in-law depart on friendly terms (Gen. 31:55).

2.5. Jacob and Esau Meet

As Jacob continues his journey to Caanan, he now turns his attention to how he can make peace with his brother, Esau. He sends messengers ahead and they return with the report that Esau is heading toward them with 400 hundred men. Jacob is "greatly afraid and distressed" (Gen. 32:7). Jacob prepares his camp and then turns to the Lord in prayer.

Genesis 32:11-12

**11 Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, and the mother with the children.
12 And thou saidst, I will surely do thee good, and make thy seed as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.**

Jacob devises a plan meant to soften Esau's feelings toward him. He sends a large advanced caravan of animals divided into three separate groups. When the servant meets Esau he is instructed to tell him that the droves are gifts for Esau.

Prior to meeting Esau, Jacob crosses over the brook by himself to again commune with the Lord.

Genesis 32:24-26

**24 And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.
25 And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.
26 And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.**

As a result of the wrestling experience: (1) Jacob receives a physical injury in his hip; (2) He will also receives a new name-Israel (vs.28), and (3) He receives a blessing.

We may ask, "What was the purpose of Jacob's experience?"

Joseph Fielding Smith states,

"Who wrestled with Jacob on Mount Peniel? The scripture say it was a man. The Bible interpreters say it was an angel. More than likely it was a messenger sent to Jacob to give him a blessing. To think he wrestled and held an angel who couldn't get away, is out of the question." (Doctrine of Salvation, Vol. 1. Compiled by Bruce R. McConkie. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954, 17).

If we accept Joseph Fielding Smith's explanation that Jacob "wrestled a man," means something different than a physical match where the strength and endurance of one individual is pitted against another, then what alternative option can we consider? May I offer for your consideration the following option in which the experience described by "wrestling" involves intense emotions and feelings rather than physical stamina.

Here is an experience that Spencer W. Kimball had following his call to fill a vacancy in the Quorum of Twelve Apostles.

Spencer W. Kimball shared,

"I believe the brethren were very kind to me in announcing my appointment when they did so that I might make the necessary adjustments in my business affairs, but perhaps they were more inspired to give me the time that I needed of a long period of purification, for in those long days and weeks I did a great deal of thinking and praying, and fasting and praying. There were conflicting thoughts that surged through my mind--seeming voices saying: 'You can't do the work. You are not worthy. You have not the ability--and always finally came the triumphant thought: 'You must do the work assigned--you must make yourself able, worthy and qualified.' and the battle raged on.

"I remember reading that Jacob wrestled all night, 'until the breaking of the day,' for a blessing; and I want to tell you that for eighty-five nights I have gone through that experience, wrestling for a blessing. Eighty-five times, the breaking of day has found me on my knees praying to the Lord to help me and strengthen me and make me equal to this great responsibility that has come to me." ("The Breaking of the Day Has Found Me on My Knees," in Conference Report, October, 1943, 15-19; see also Ensign, February, 2004, 51-52).

Further support for an intense spiritual encounter is that Jacob receive from the individual a change in his name similar to the change in name that Abraham had receive from spiritual messengers. He also provided the following witness himself,

Genesis 32:27-28, 30

27 And he said unto him, What is thy name? and he said, Jacob.

28 And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

30 And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

What does it mean for an individual to see “God face to face?” For some this would be impossible or the result of a visual hallucination. For others who believe God is a spirit, everywhere present, yet can dwell in your heart, this witness is at best questionable. For those, however, who believe that God has a body and we are created in his image, this only adds further witness to their belief and faith.

Following this period of spiritual preparation, Jacob, now Israel, emerges to meet with his brother, Esau. Their meeting is not the dreaded experience which Jacob had anticipated. Possibly the twenty years of separation had a positive effect upon each brother for their meeting was one of rejoicing and celebration.

Genesis 33:4

4 And Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept.

Esau then questioned his brother about the animals that he had sent ahead.

Genesis 33:8-9

8 ...And he [Jacob] said, These are to find grace in the sight of my lord.

9 And Esau said, I have enough, my brother; keep that thou hast unto thyself.

They depart to go their separate ways now as reconciled brothers, rather than as enemies.

3. Jacob Remains Righteous

Jacob will purchase land near the city of Shalem, a city of Shechem (see Genesis 33:18). It is here that a very unfortunate incident occurs. Dinah, the daughter born of Leah, went out to meet with others her age. A prince of the country, Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, sees Dinah and sexually attacks her.

Genesis 34:2

2 And when Shechem... saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her.

Adam Clarke states,

“3. Spake kindly unto the damsel. Literally, he spake to the heart of the damsel—endeavoured to gain her affections, and to reconcile her to her disgrace. It appears sufficiently evident from this and the preceding verse that there had been no consent on the part of Dinah, that the whole was an act of violence, and that she was now detained by force in the house of Shechem. Here she was found when Simeon and Levi sacked the city, verse 26.” (Adam Clarke’s Commentary on the Bible. Abridged by Ralph Earle. Grand Rapids, Michigan.: Baker Book House, [Nineteenth Printing, March, 1991], 66).

Old Testament Institute Student Manual states,

“The outrage of Simeon and Levi is understandable in response to the action taken toward this their sister. The deceitful destruction of an entire city on the pretext of bringing them into the covenant was not acceptable either to their father or the Lord. Jacob’s blessing to these two sons just prior to his death (Gen. 49:5-7) shows that neither he nor the Lord condoned this act.” (Old Testament Institute Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel. Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 1980, [Second Edition, Revised, 1981], 89).

Jacob following this incident, is commanded by the Lord to return to Bethel,

Genesis 35:1

1 And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother.

Prior to their departure, Jacob collects from his family members all the booty they had taken from the city they had sacked.

Genesis 35:4

4 And they gave unto Jacob all the strange gods which were in their hand, and all the earrings which were in

their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.

Why would they be required to give up the spoils they had taken? Their action had been unrighteous and they were not to benefit in any manner from their actions. Also the village consisted of non-covenant people and thus they would have been idol worshippers. Any images retained would be an affront unto God and would need to be destroyed.

3.1. Jacob's Name Changed

While at Bethel, God appears to Jacob again. He will reiterate all the blessings he had previously given to his grandfather Abraham and his father, Isaac. He also confirms the change of Jacob's name to Israel.

Genesis 35:10-12

**10 And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel.
11 And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins;
12 And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.**

After leaving Bethel, the family will move to Ephrath which we know today as Bethlehem. Rachel is pregnant with what will be her last son. Initially, Rachel desires him to be named Ben-oni meaning "Son of my sorrow or distress," however Jacob/Israel will name him, Benjamin, meaning "Son at the right (hand)" (see Genesis 35:18-19, footnote b and c). Tragically, Rachel will die giving him birth. Jacob is now left to deal with the loss of his beloved Rachel.

3.2. Which Son Gets the Birthright?

According to the covenant of the birthright blessing, it is given to the oldest son. In Jacob's family, it would go to the oldest son of Leah, who is Reuben. Reuben, however, will not receive the blessing due to a specific reason.

Genesis 35:22

22 And it came to pass when Israel dwelt in that land [beyond the tower of Edar] that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it..

One must not only be the oldest son, but he must also be obedient to the commandments, including moral chastity. By Ruben's actions with Bilhah, he lost the blessings that would have been his. The blessings now go to Rachel's oldest son, Joseph, not to the second oldest son of Leah. Joseph, the eleventh son born in the family, now becomes the birthright son.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, the writer of Genesis (Moses) has told us about the everyday challenges that occur in individual and family lives, all about the challenges of life, the devaluing of something special—the birthright, deceit, the lack of trust in the Lord, the need for patience, the reconciliation of two brothers, the angry retaliation of two brothers when their sister is defiled, and the immorality of a righteous son. These challenges may also be found in our own lives. The question is not do challenges come into our lives, for the answer for all, is a resounding "Yes." The question each of us must answer is "How are we going to respond to them?" Will they be "stumbling stones" or "stepping stones" in life's journey? It is true that we will, like those whom we have studied and will yet study, also be tried. Hopefully, we will learn the lessons they have tried to teach us in their sacred record.

We learn from modern revelation the final blessings that will be ours if we are also obedient to the commandments.

Doctrine and Covenants 132:37

37 ...and Jacob did none other things than that which they were commanded; and because they did none other things than that which they were commanded, they [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob], have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels, but are gods.

May we all be so faithful that someday the Lord will also say of each of us, "they did none other things than that which they were commanded..."

