

So what was going on here with Jacob? His story can be viewed at more than one level.

1. He experienced God's discipline under what is called the government of God. He reaped what he had sowed.

*Galatians 6:7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.*

Yet God promised him, as he entered into this difficult period of reaping, He would be with him and bring him through it. He experienced the grace and mercies of God in ways he otherwise would not have known. The hard times of our lives are for blessed results too. And God is with us and overseeing all as we go through it.

*1Corinthians 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

*Hebrews 12:5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. 9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. 11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

For much of his life Jacob seemed to endure God's chastening with an inborn persistence, using his inborn independent survival instinct to surmount the obstacles he faced using his own wits and resourcefulness. But in the end he would submit and eventually worship on his staff. As an old man he would spiritually and intelligently bless his sons and the sons of Joseph (whom he adopted giving Joseph the firstborn's double blessing). Watch it happen as we go through Genesis.

*James 1:4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.*

2. As the last of the three founding Patriarchs of the nation of Israel, Jacob's experiences are prophetic of the nation's history that is the focus of scripture, some of it yet unfulfilled. (After all, didn't Israel reflect his character? God calls them "Jacob" in the prophets.) We saw God's discipline in the carrying away to Babylon, B. C. 600. We saw it in the scattering worldwide of the Jews upon the

destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem by the Romans after they crucified and rejected their Messiah (A. D. 70). We see some of it unfolding in the Middle East today as they are gathering back to their land, but still in unbelief. God's casting aside of His chosen people was anticipated in the lonely flight of Jacob to Haran and subsequent return. As Jacob ultimately returned home in God's blessing, they will as well.

Several questions arise regarding Jacob's flight to Haran. Was he really all alone, destitute, with no servants or body guard or even a beast to ride, vulnerable to a possibly pursuing Esau, bandits and hardships of travel? Wasn't Isaac wealthy? and wasn't Jacob possessor of the blessing as well as the birthright? This reminds me a little of One Who left his home in glory to become a Man with no place to lay his head. Though the circumstances surrounding their departures from home are extremely different, the Lord's vulnerability and mission are reflected in Jacob's. Both came, though vulnerable, to seek a bride.

Later, God intervened with Leah, who was hated by her bamboozled husband. Despite "hating" her Jacob seems to have had no hesitation in giving her her due as a wife.

*1Corinthians 7:3 Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. 4 The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. 5 Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.*

Here was an unloving physical union with an unwanted wife, yet a wife apparently willing to love and to be loved. She pays the price of willingly complying with (if not suggesting) Laban's scheme to marry her off to Jacob by impersonating her sister in the dark. Despite being tricked Jacob did maintain a conjugal relationship with her, even though he soon had the beautiful Rachel in his arms. But was his "love" for Rachel less superficial than his relationship with Leah? (In the dark he couldn't tell the difference.) Was he a true soul companion to either of the sisters competing for his affections?

*Proverbs 31:30 Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised.*

God, in His wisdom and compassion soon gives Jacob, by Leah, the first four of twelve sons that would form the core of the great nation and multitudes he had been promised. Does God actually take note of favoritism or rejection in our treatment of one another? Does He actually support the "underdog"? He did with Leah.

Why does God devote so much space in His inspired scriptures to seemingly mundane details and incidents in the everyday lives of the people involved? Other parts of scripture give just the bare facts of genealogies covering

centuries.

In this part of Genesis we learn about the cultures, customs and attitudes of some of the peoples of that part of the world and of that time in man's history. There are cultural examples of courtesy and respect paid to age, to relatives, to visitors as guests and to various individuals encountered in public situations. Negotiations and business transactions were handled with some measure of order and dignity before witnesses and with one's word his bond. Yet God "zooms in on" certain individuals of interest in striking detail. He makes clear Laban's greed and deceptiveness which were never far below the surface. This trait was apparently handed down though Rebekah to Jacob, his nephew as well, handed down both through his genome and his upbringing. What are we handing down to our children?

We also gain some insight into Jacob's character and his previous life at home. While he was said to be a man abiding in tents, a kind of domesticated man compared to Esau the hunter, his immediate interaction with the shepherds at the well shows his experience with managing his father's flocks and shepherds. He spent the next twenty years managing flocks, first Laban's then his own. He continued in that occupation, as did his sons, most of his life.

The attitude and behavior of men toward women, married and before marriage is notably male dominant. Relationships of fathers and daughters, suitors and eligible ladies, husbands and wives all are outwardly male dominated. Yet behind the scene, within marriages and

families, the women did have more influence and received more respect and protection than might seem apparent. Rebekah and Rachel, the shepherdesses, remained virgins until married despite their vulnerability out there alone. The strong men that were their fathers assured their safety. The men were influenced by their wives, and heeded them, some times toward good, sometimes not so good. For example,

Sarah, Abraham and Hagar;

Isaac and Rebekah;

Bethuel, Milcah, Laban, Rebekah;

Isaac and Esau, vs Rebekah and Jacob;

Jacob, Leah, Rachel, and the handmaids.

And later;

Jacob and his ten sons and Joseph.

These people and the stories about them entertain both children and adults. But more than that they teach deep insights into our sinful human nature and the holy God who sees and watches all we do. His interactions with them and His interventions in their every day lives and adventures are recorded for our learning and well being. Have you received His Son as your Saviour? If so, welcome Him into your life via daily prayer and reading His word.

*Romans 15:4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

By Ronald Canner, September 29, 2010