

GENESIS

DAILY SCRIPTURE READING GUIDE

Part II: Chapters 12-36

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

or

FAMILY IS HOW WE FIGHT



To my fellow readers of Genesis,

The Israelites called the first five books of their Bibles “Torah,” which means teaching. And the first book of the Torah—the book we call *Genesis*—has a lot to teach us about the world and who made it and why and what we’ve done with the place.

In Part 1, we read Genesis chapters 1-11, which are a prologue not only to the rest of the book, but to the entire Bible. It begins with Creation and ends with the Tower of Babel, recounting humanity’s slide into dark rebellion.

This Daily Scripture Reading Guide covers what I am calling Part 2, which consists of Genesis chapters 12-36 and will recount the history of the patriarchs of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Genesis Part 2 begins to tell of God’s plan to rescue humanity and restore Eden. It is the story of the formation of the family that will carry on the covenant promise—in fact, it’s all about family, which is why I also like to say **Family is How We Fight**.

How to Read the Bible:

Start with the assumption that every word matters and that no detail is insignificant or extraneous. In this reader, I’ve portioned out readings for weekdays only, in what I hope is a manageable schedule. I strongly recommend forming the habit of The First15, i.e., spending the first 15 minutes of each day in silence, prayer, and scripture.

Consistency is more important than intensity.

So:

If you miss today, don’t miss tomorrow.

I’ve written brief commentary to go with each day’s reading in an attempt to help you understand and appreciate what you read. If my commentary is helpful to that end, great. If it isn’t, skip it and just focus on the words of the scripture instead!

Let’s go.



✝ Andrew Forrest
Asbury Church
Late Summer 2022

MORNING PRAYER ORDER FOR GROUPS & MEETINGS

Have a group or class that meets in the morning?
Feel free to use the order below to provide some structure.

1. GREETING

This is the day that the Lord has made!
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Psalm 118:24

2. THE INVITATORY

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
O God, make speed to save us;
O Lord, make haste to help us;
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

3. OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires
known, and from you, no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of
our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly
love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our
Lord. Amen.

4. SCRIPTURE LESSON

The day's scripture is read and briefly expounded.

5. PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory
For ever and ever. Amen

6. CLOSING PRAYER

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night
and turns the shadow of death into the morning: you have brought us
safely to the beginning of this day, and we ask that you drive far from

us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide
our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheer-
fulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you
thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

7. CLOSING BLESSING:

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace;
And now may the blessing of God Almighty,
The Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
Be with us and remain with us now and forever. Amen.

OCCASIONAL PRAYERS

I have included below some occasional prayers that you may find
helpful. Often at a birth or a death I find myself fumbling for the right
words to say, and these occasional prayers have been a help to me.
(I'd suggest copying to your phone the ones that seem most useful to
you, so you can easily text them to others when the need arises.)

A GRACE BEFORE MEALS

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive
from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

or

Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the Universe, for you give us
food to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad; through Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.

EVENING PRAYER

O God, the life of all who live, the light of the faithful, the strength
of those who labor, and the repose of the dead: We thank you for
the blessings of the day that is past, and humbly ask for your pro-
tection through the coming night and so thereby bring us in safety
to the morning hours. Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work,
or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those
who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the
dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and
all this we pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the
Holy Spirit. Amen.

FOR JOY IN GOD'S CREATION

O heavenly Father, you have filled the world with beauty: Open our
eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works; that, rejoicing
in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness; for
the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus
Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR OUR NATION

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure conduct. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom, in thy Name, we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all of which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A BIRTHDAY

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servant *N.* as he begins another year. Grant that *he* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *his* trust in your goodness all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A CHILD, OR FOR A BIRTHDAY

Watch over your child *N.*, O Lord, as *his* days increase; bless *him* and guide *him*, and keep *him* unspotted from the world. Strengthen *him* when *he* stands; comfort *him* when discouraged or sorrowful; raise *him* up if *he* falls; and in *his* heart may your peace which passes understanding abide all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A MARRIAGE OR ANNIVERSARY

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send your blessing upon these your servants [as they begin another year], that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

ON SUNDAYS

O God, you make us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Give us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week to come may be spent in your favor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side. We thank you for setting us at tasks that demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments that satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying, through which he conquered death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom. Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen.

FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE EARTH

We give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of earth and sky and sea; for the richness of mountains, plains, and rivers; for the wonder of your creatures, large and small; and for all the loveliness that surrounds us. We praise you for these good gifts, and pray that we may safeguard them for our posterity. Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation, to the honor and glory of your Name, now and for ever. Amen.

FOR OUR ENEMIES

O God, the Creator of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead them and us from prejudice to truth; deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable us all to stand reconciled before you in Jesus Christ; in whose Name we pray. Amen.

FOR THE RECOVERY OF A SICK PERSON

O God, the strength of the weak and the comfort of sufferers: Mercifully accept our prayers, and grant to your servant *N.* the help of your power, that his sickness may be turned into health, and our sorrow into joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

AT THE TIME OF DEATH

Rest eternal grant to *N.*, O Lord; and may *his* soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection. Amen.

FOR DESIRING GOD

O God, grant that we may desire you, and desiring you seek you, and seeking you find you, and finding you be satisfied in you forever. Amen.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 26
GENESIS 12:1-20

THE CALL OF ABRAM

I2 Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother’s son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

ABRAM AND SARAI IN EGYPT

¹⁰ Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. ¹¹ When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to Sarai his wife, “I know that you are a woman beautiful in appearance, ¹² and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then they will kill me, but they will let you live. ¹³ Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake.” ¹⁴ When Abram entered Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

¹⁵ And when the princes of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. ¹⁶ And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and camels.

¹⁷ But the Lord afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife. ¹⁸ So Pharaoh called Abram and said, “What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? ¹⁹ Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her

for my wife? Now then, here is your wife; take her, and go.” ²⁰ And Pharaoh gave men orders concerning him, and they sent him away with his wife and all that he had.

Today we begin Genesis Part 2, which consists of chapters 12-36 and will recount the history of the patriarchs of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Genesis chapters 1-11 is a prologue of sorts, not just to the rest of the Book of Genesis, but also to the entire Bible. It begins with Creation and ends with the Tower of Babel, recounting humanity’s slide into dark rebellion. Genesis Part 2 begins to recount God’s plan to rescue humanity and restore Eden. And it begins with the calling of one man—Abram—with one word—“Go.”

Were there other men whom the Lord called and commanded to leave their homes and families who refused to go? Were there others with whom the Lord wanted to make a covenant, if only they would obey? Were there other hypothetical Abrahams? If so, then certainly part of Abraham’s greatness—just like the Virgin Mary’s, millennia later—was his unique willingness to say, “Yes.”

You have no idea what hinges on your obedience today. Abraham said “Yes,” and history changed forever.

P.S. As we will see, the stories of the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—are primarily concerned with their education about family; family is what God will use to pass on the covenant, so it’s important that Abraham and the others learn how to make family work. (It doesn’t come naturally!) So, in this strange story about Sarah and Pharaoh, Abraham is learning that a “wife” is not the same thing as a “sister”, and that he must trust the Lord to provide.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27
GENESIS 13:1-24

ABRAM AND LOT SEPARATE

I3 So Abram went up from Egypt, he and his wife and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the Negeb.

² Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. ³ And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, ⁴ to the

place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the Lord.⁵ And Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents,⁶ so that the land could not support both of them dwelling together; for their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together,⁷ and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock. At that time the Canaanites and the Perizzites were dwelling in the land.

⁸ Then Abram said to Lot, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen.⁹ Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left."¹⁰ And Lot lifted up his eyes and saw that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, in the direction of Zoar. (This was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.)¹¹ So Lot chose for himself all the Jordan Valley, and Lot journeyed east. Thus they separated from each other.¹² Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the valley and moved his tent as far as Sodom.¹³ Now the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.

¹⁴ The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward,¹⁵ for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever.¹⁶ I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted.¹⁷ Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."¹⁸ So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord.

ABRAM RESCUES LOT

I⁴ In the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of Goiim,² these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).³ And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea).⁴ Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled.⁵ In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came and defeated the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emim in Shaveh-kiriat-haim,⁶ and the Horites in their hill country of Seir as far as El-paran

on the border of the wilderness.⁷ Then they turned back and came to En-mishpat (that is, Kadesh) and defeated all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites who were dwelling in Hazazon-tamar.

⁸ Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out, and they joined battle in the Valley of Siddim⁹ with Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar, four kings against five.¹⁰ Now the Valley of Siddim was full of bitumen pits, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them, and the rest fled to the hill country.¹¹ So the enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way.¹² They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who was dwelling in Sodom, and his possessions, and went their way.

¹³ Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner. These were allies of Abram.¹⁴ When Abram heard that his kinsman had been taken captive, he led forth his trained men, born in his house, 318 of them, and went in pursuit as far as Dan.¹⁵ And he divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus.¹⁶ Then he brought back all the possessions, and also brought back his kinsman Lot with his possessions, and the women and the people.

ABRAM BLESSED BY MELCHIZEDEK

¹⁷ After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).¹⁸ And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)¹⁹ And he blessed him and said,

"Blessed be Abram by God Most High,
Possessor of heaven and earth;
²⁰ and blessed be God Most High,
who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.²¹ And the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself."²² But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth,²³ that I would

not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.'²⁴ I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me. Let Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre take their share.”

This is what the Lord said to Abraham in his initial command:

*“Go from your country, your people **and your father’s household** to the land I will show you.” [Genesis 12:1]*

Here’s what happens next:

*“So Abram went, as the Lord had told him; **and Lot went with him.**” [Genesis 12:4]*

I think it’s possible that Abram wasn’t willing to completely break from his father’s household, which is why he brought his orphaned nephew along with him. But, Lot isn’t the heir the Lord has in mind, and it’s no surprise that they eventually have to part. No doubt the parting was painful, but it opens the door for Abram’s own son to (eventually!) be born.

The surest way to delay God’s blessings for your life is to be only partially obedient to God’s command. God’s purposes will be realized no matter what; the problem with partial obedience is that it hurts us by delaying what God wants to give us.

P.S. Lest you think that I’m being too hard on Abraham here, let me make up for it by pointing out that Abraham’s greatness is shown in the episode that immediately follows his parting with Lot. 1. Abraham initially avoids entanglement in this war of the kings; 2. But when Lot is in danger, Abraham risks his own life to rescue him; 3. Abraham devises a cunning plan whereby his inferior force routs a superior one; 4. Abraham blesses Melchizedek, proving that those who bless Abraham will be blessed; 5. Abraham refuses the spoils of war offered to him from the King of Sodom; 6. but he graciously speaks up for his fighting men and allows them to be rewarded. Not a bad business!

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 28 GENESIS 15:1-20

THE LORD’S COVENANT WITH ABRAM

I⁵ After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”

² But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” ³ And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” ⁴ And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” ⁵ And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ⁶ And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

⁷ And he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” ⁸ But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” ⁹ He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” ¹⁰ And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. ¹¹ And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹² As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. ¹⁵ As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. ¹⁶ And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

¹⁷ When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸ On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,¹⁹ the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,²⁰ the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,²¹ the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites.”

In the Ancient Near East, when two parties made an agreement the weaker party would cut animals in half and walk through the halves, in essence saying: “May this be done to me if I don’t uphold my side of the covenant.” Ancient Hebrew reflects this understanding because in Hebrew you don’t “make” a covenant, you “cut” a covenant.

What’s amazing about the covenant the Lord makes with Abraham in Genesis 15 is that only the Lord passes between the animals, not Abraham.

CHRISTIAN READER, DO YOU UNDERSTAND?!

The Lord says to Abraham, I will uphold both my side and your side of the covenant, even if it takes my life.

WOW WOW WOW WOW WOW WOW.

(Jesus was crucified.)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son....”

P.S. Note that 15:16 implies that the Canaanites won’t be kicked out of the land until they deserve it; that time finally comes when Joshua leads the Israelites to conquer Canaan, several hundred years later.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

GENESIS 16:1-16

SARAI AND HAGAR

16 Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. She had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. ² And Sarai said to Abram, “Behold now, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Go in to my servant; it may be that I shall obtain children by her.” And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai. ³ So, after Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Sarai, Abram’s wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her servant, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. ⁴ And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. ⁵ And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my servant to your embrace, and when she saw that she had

conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the Lord judge between you and me!” ⁶ But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your servant is in your power; do to her as you please.” Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her.

⁷ The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. ⁸ And he said, “Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She said, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai.” ⁹ The angel of the Lord said to her, “Return to your mistress and submit to her.” ¹⁰ The angel of the Lord also said to her, “I will surely multiply your offspring so that they cannot be numbered for multitude.” ¹¹ And the angel of the Lord said to her,

“Behold, you are pregnant
and shall bear a son.
You shall call his name Ishmael,
because the Lord has listened to your affliction.
¹² He shall be a wild donkey of a man,
his hand against everyone
and everyone’s hand against him,
and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen.”

¹³ So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, “You are a God of seeing,” for she said, “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.” ¹⁴ Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵ And Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.

The key to understanding Genesis 12-36 is to see it as a story about the education of the patriarchs as patriarchs, that is as the founders of a family that will be able to successfully pass on the covenant, generation to generation.

Or, to put it more succinctly:

One of the lessons of Genesis 12-36 is about what it takes to make family work.

In Egypt, Abraham gives his wife to Pharaoh. But, the Lord rescues her and Pharaoh sends them on their way. The lesson for Abraham: a wife is not the same thing as a sister. When they leave, they bring Egyptian slaves with them.

Now, it's as if the roles are reversed: Sarah gives Abraham her Egyptian slave Hagar. ["Hagar" is Hebrew for "The Immigrant".] The Lord permits Abraham and Sarah to make a mess of things, but then steps in and blesses Hagar's son with Abraham, Ishmael. Abraham will subsequently learn that a wife is not the same thing as a concubine.

In each episode, Abraham is learning what the Lord requires of him to be the founding patriarch of a people.

For us, I think the lesson is clear: you can't have God's ends apart from God's means. Trusting in God's promises means trusting that God will bring them about without your having to force them to happen.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 30 GENESIS 17:1-27

ABRAHAM AND THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION

I7 When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, ² that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly." ³ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ⁴ "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God."

⁹ And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰ This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your

offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. ¹² He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised. Every male throughout your generations, whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring, ¹³ both he who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

ISAAC'S BIRTH PROMISED

¹⁵ And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." ¹⁷ Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, "Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?" ¹⁸ And Abraham said to God, "Oh that Ishmael might live before you!" ¹⁹ God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him. ²⁰ As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I have blessed him and will make him fruitful and multiply him greatly. He shall father twelve princes, and I will make him into a great nation. ²¹ But I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this time next year."

²² When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. ²³ Then Abraham took Ishmael his son and all those born in his house or bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and he circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. ²⁴ Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁵ And Ishmael his son was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin. ²⁶ That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. ²⁷ And all the men of his house, those born in the house and those bought with money from a foreigner, were circumcised with him.

Let me say it again: the story of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) in Genesis 12-36 is a story of their education and formation into what family life will need to be like if the covenant will need to be passed down generation to generation. An important part of that covenant is circumcision, but what does it really mean?

I found this comment from Leon Kass to be helpful:

“Male circumcision was, of course, a custom already widely practiced in the ancient world. In pagan societies, circumcision, performed at the time of puberty, was part of a male rite of passage (it may also have served symbolically as an act of human sacrifice to the gods). A mark on his maleness, circumcision was a sign not only of the youth’s new sexual potency but also of his initiation into the male role and male society (putting an end to his primary attachment to his mother and the household, to the society of women and children). But in the new way of ancient Israel, the special obligation of the covenant gives the practice of circumcision a new and nearly opposite meaning. An initiation rite of passage of young males into adult masculinity is transformed into a paternal duty regarding the male newborn. Israel’s covenant with God begins by transforming the meaning of male sexuality and manliness altogether.”

I find that really interesting: the Lord is teaching Abraham and his descendants that true masculinity is not a conquering masculinity but a masculinity that is dedicated to something greater than itself, namely toward others.

Note also that Abraham’s body is marked in the exact place where abused the Egyptian slave Hagar. The Lord is teaching Abraham to commit all parts of himself to the Lord, and not to be wise in his own eyes.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 3 **GENESIS 18:1-15**

THE THREE VISITORS

18 And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. ² He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth ³ and said, “O Lord, if I have found favor in your sight,

do not pass by your servant. ⁴ Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree, ⁵ while I bring a morsel of bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant.” So they said, “Do as you have said.” ⁶ And Abraham went quickly into the tent to Sarah and said, “Quick! Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes.” ⁷ And Abraham ran to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it quickly. ⁸ Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them. And he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

⁹ They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” ¹⁰ The Lord said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. ¹¹ Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. ¹² So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” ¹³ The Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ ¹⁴ Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” ¹⁵ But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

When strangers visit Abraham, he runs (not walks) to welcome them into his house. His hospitality is extraordinary and instructive: One of the characteristics of the people of God will be their lavish hospitality to outsiders.

How can you show hospitality and kindness toward a stranger today?

And as the writer of Hebrews puts it (reflecting on this story of Abraham), you never know with whom you might come in contact:

“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” [Hebrews 13:2]

P.S. Did you catch how the Lord appears to Abraham? **“The Lord** appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw **three** men standing nearby.” (Genesis 18:1-2). It’s ONE LORD, but THREE PERSONS. Interesting....

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 4
GENESIS 18:16-33

ABRAHAM PLEADS FOR SODOM

¹⁶ Then the men set out from there, and they looked down toward Sodom. And Abraham went with them to set them on their way. ¹⁷ The Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, ¹⁸ seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? ¹⁹ For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”

²⁰ Then the Lord said, “Because the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is great and their sin is very grave, ²¹ I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me. And if not, I will know.”

²² So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, but Abraham still stood before the Lord. ²³ Then Abraham drew near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?”

²⁴ Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? ²⁵ Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?”

²⁶ And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.”

²⁷ Abraham answered and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. ²⁸ Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.”

²⁹ Again he spoke to him and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.”

³⁰ Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.”

³¹ He said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord. Suppose

twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.”

³² Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.”

³³ And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham, and Abraham returned to his place.

Because it is immediately followed by the dramatic dialogue between the Lord and Abraham about the destruction of Sodom, it's easy to overlook the Lord's introductory comments as the episode begins:

“Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him. For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham what he has promised him.” [Genesis 18:17-19]

Did you catch that?

“For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just.”

The whole story is about family. It's about the founding of a family and what it will take to pass on the covenant generation to generation.

Or, to put it another way: family is how we fight.

How can you build for the next generation today?

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 5
GENESIS 19:1-38

SODOM AND GOMORRAH DESTROYED

I⁹ The two angels came to Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth ² and said, “My lords, please

turn aside to your servant's house and spend the night and wash your feet. Then you may rise up early and go on your way." They said, "No; we will spend the night in the town square."³ But he pressed them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house. And he made them a feast and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

⁴ But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. ⁵ And they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know them." ⁶ Lot went out to the men at the entrance, shut the door after him, ⁷ and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. ⁸ Behold, I have two daughters who have not known any man. Let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please. Only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." ⁹ But they said, "Stand back!" And they said, "This fellow came to sojourn, and he has become the judge! Now we will deal worse with you than with them." Then they pressed hard against the man Lot, and drew near to break the door down. ¹⁰ But the men reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them and shut the door. ¹¹ And they struck with blindness the men who were at the entrance of the house, both small and great, so that they wore themselves out groping for the door.

¹² Then the men said to Lot, "Have you anyone else here? Sons-in-law, sons, daughters, or anyone you have in the city, bring them out of the place. ¹³ For we are about to destroy this place, because the outcry against its people has become great before the Lord, and the Lord has sent us to destroy it." ¹⁴ So Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters, "Up! Get out of this place, for the Lord is about to destroy the city." But he seemed to his sons-in-law to be jesting.

¹⁵ As morning dawned, the angels urged Lot, saying, "Up! Take your wife and your two daughters who are here, lest you be swept away in the punishment of the city." ¹⁶ But he lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the Lord being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city. ¹⁷ And as they brought them out, one said, "Escape for your life. Do not look back or stop anywhere in the valley. Escape to the hills, lest you be swept away." ¹⁸ And Lot said to them, "Oh, no, my lords. ¹⁹ Behold, your servant has found favor in your sight, and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot escape to the hills, lest the disaster overtake me and I die. ²⁰ Behold, this city is near enough

to flee to, and it is a little one. Let me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!" ²¹ He said to him, "Behold, I grant you this favor also, that I will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken. ²² Escape there quickly, for I can do nothing till you arrive there." Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

²³ The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar. ²⁴ Then the Lord rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the Lord out of heaven. ²⁵ And he overthrew those cities, and all the valley, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground. ²⁶ But Lot's wife, behind him, looked back, and she became a pillar of salt.

²⁷ And Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord. ²⁸ And he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward all the land of the valley, and he looked and, behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace.

²⁹ So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.

LOT AND HIS DAUGHTERS

³⁰ Now Lot went up out of Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, for he was afraid to live in Zoar. So he lived in a cave with his two daughters. ³¹ And the firstborn said to the younger, "Our father is old, and there is not a man on earth to come in to us after the manner of all the earth. ³² Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father." ³³ So they made their father drink wine that night. And the firstborn went in and lay with her father. He did not know when she lay down or when she arose.

³⁴ The next day, the firstborn said to the younger, "Behold, I lay last night with my father. Let us make him drink wine tonight also. Then you go in and lie with him, that we may preserve offspring from our father." ³⁵ So they made their father drink wine that night also. And the younger arose and lay with him, and he did not know when she lay down or when she arose. ³⁶ Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. ³⁷ The firstborn bore a son and called his name Moab. He is the father of the Moabites to this day. ³⁸ The younger also bore a son and called his name Ben-ammi. He is the father of the Ammonites to this day.

Why is incest wrong? We know that inbreeding increases the chances of harmful genetic mutations, and most people cite the harmful genetic consequences of inbreeding as the reason why incest is wrong. That answer isn't acceptable, however, and here's why:

It implies that incest is acceptable if pregnancy will not result from the incestuous activity.

So, in that line of thinking, incest would be fine if the consenting participants use birth control, for example.

The taboo against incest, however, does not derive from fear of inbreeding. The taboo against incest derives from an understanding of the purpose of sex itself.

I have a theory—stronger than a theory, really; more like an abiding conviction—that ongoing sexual sin retards emotional maturity. Why?

God's blessing to humanity in Genesis 1 is to be fruitful and multiply. That blessing requires that humanity move forward and mature; parents have children who then take the parents' place and raise their own children, and so it goes. To be a husband and a father or a wife and a mother forces a person to grow up and mature. But, sexual sin is the refusal to accept those responsibilities, which is why I believe sexual sin retards emotional maturity.

Imagine a 48 year-old playboy—maybe he's been married previously and maybe he even has kids from a previous relationship, but he doesn't live as a husband or a father: he lives as a 48 year-old playboy, a serial monogamist. He's with this woman for a while, and then with that woman for a while, etc. What he doesn't do is take on the responsibilities that come with marriage and fatherhood, responsibilities that tie one down and restrict freedom; or, to put it another way, the responsibilities that make one grow up.

How does this relate to incest?

Adulthood is about leaving one's father and mother and making one's own way in the world. The entire human project depends on this

pattern: parents raise children who then move forward on their own and become parents themselves. **Incest, however, is a turning inward. Rather than moving out into the world, incest is a refusal to leave home, so to speak. It is a sexual narcissism, a seeking of the same.**

The stories of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the incest of Lot's daughters are nobody's favorite Bible stories. But, I think it is important that we understand why the Bible is giving us these stories; Genesis 12-36 is about the education of the patriarchs (and by extension, us) as to what it will take to make family work, so that the covenant can be passed down to the next generation.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 6 GENESIS 20:1-18

ABRAHAM AND ABIMELEK

20 From there Abraham journeyed toward the territory of the Negeb and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he sojourned in Gerar. ² And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister." And Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah. ³ But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." ⁴ Now Abimelech had not approached her. So he said, "Lord, will you kill an innocent people? ⁵ Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." ⁶ Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. ⁷ Now then, return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, so that he will pray for you, and you shall live. But if you do not return her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

⁸ So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his servants and told them all these things. And the men were very much afraid. ⁹ Then Abimelech called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? And how have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done." ¹⁰ And Abimelech said to Abraham, "What did you see, that you did this thing?" ¹¹ Abraham said, "I did it because I thought, 'There is no fear of God at all in this place, and they will

kill me because of my wife.’¹² Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father though not the daughter of my mother, and she became my wife.¹³ And when God caused me to wander from my father’s house, I said to her, ‘This is the kindness you must do me: at every place to which we come, say of me, “He is my brother.”’”

¹⁴ Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male servants and female servants, and gave them to Abraham, and returned Sarah his wife to him.¹⁵ And Abimelech said, “Behold, my land is before you; dwell where it pleases you.”¹⁶ To Sarah he said, “Behold, I have given your brother a thousand pieces of silver. It is a sign of your innocence in the eyes of all who are with you, and before everyone you are vindicated.”¹⁷ Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his wife and female slaves so that they bore children.¹⁸ For the Lord had closed all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

Remember, the key to understanding Genesis 12-36 is to see it as the education of the patriarchs about the way to make family work.

Here we go again.

The Abraham story began with Abraham passing off his wife as his sister when they sojourned in Egypt. A lot has happened since then, and Abraham and Sarah have grown old and very wealthy. But still, Abraham hasn’t learned his lesson: a “wife” is not the same thing as a “sister” or a “mistress” or a “concubine”; a wife is a partner in the raising and the shaping of the next generation.

And so, here Abraham tries the same trick with Abimelech, and just as before, the Lord intervenes.

What happens next is important. As we’ll see in tomorrow’s reading, Sarah finally becomes pregnant with the child of the covenant—Isaac—but *only after Abraham finally learns his lesson*.

“Only when Abraham acknowledges that a wife is something absolutely other than a sister does Sarah become pregnant; and only then is she a wife in the full sense”.

—Leon Kass

For the covenant to be passed down, both husbands and wives, fathers and mothers will be necessary. As we’ll continue to see, this lesson is not one the children of Abraham learn easily!

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 7 GENESIS 21:1-18

THE BIRTH OF ISAAC

21 The Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did to Sarah as he had promised.² And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him.³ Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac.⁴ And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.⁵ Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.⁶ And Sarah said, “God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.”⁷ And she said, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

GOD PROTECTS HAGAR AND ISHMAEL

⁸ And the child grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.⁹ But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, laughing.¹⁰ So she said to Abraham, “Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir with my son Isaac.”¹¹ And the thing was very displeasing to Abraham on account of his son.¹² But God said to Abraham, “Be not displeased because of the boy and because of your slave woman. Whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”¹³ And I will make a nation of the son of the slave woman also, because he is your offspring.”¹⁴ So Abraham rose early in the morning and took bread and a skin of water and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed and wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba.

¹⁵ When the water in the skin was gone, she put the child under one of the bushes.¹⁶ Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot, for she said, “Let me not look on the death of the child.” And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept.¹⁷ And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is.”¹⁸ Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”¹⁹ Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.²⁰ And God was with the boy, and he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became an expert with the bow.²¹ He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

A TREATY WITH ABIMELECH

²² At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army said to Abraham, “God is with you in all that you do.” ²³ Now therefore swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my descendants or with my posterity, but as I have dealt kindly with you, so you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned.” ²⁴ And Abraham said, “I will swear.”

²⁵ When Abraham reproved Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech’s servants had seized, ²⁶ Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this thing; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today.” ²⁷ So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. ²⁸ Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock apart. ²⁹ And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?” ³⁰ He said, “These seven ewe lambs you will take from my hand, that this may be a witness for me that I dug this well.” ³¹ Therefore that place was called Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath. ³² So they made a covenant at Beersheba. Then Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his army rose up and returned to the land of the Philistines. ³³ Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God. ³⁴ And Abraham sojourned many days in the land of the Philistines.

The Lord promised Abraham that through him all the peoples of the earth will be blessed. When Abraham lives into the Covenant, that’s exactly what happens.

Abraham has a dispute over water and property rights (specifically over a well, which can make the difference between life and death in the arid Middle East) with Abimelech, who has shown up to talk to Abraham with his military commander. You’d think the episode might end in bloodshed, but instead Abraham responds with generosity and grace and he and Abimelech make peace with one another.

The people of God are meant to be peacemakers wherever they go. How can you be a peacemaker today?

MONDAY, OCTOBER 10

GENESIS 22:1-20

THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

22 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ² He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” ⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. ⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” ⁸ Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹² He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

¹⁵ And the angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven ¹⁶ and said, “By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And

your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies,¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba. And Abraham lived at Beersheba.

²⁰ Now after these things it was told to Abraham, “Behold, Milcah also has borne children to your brother Nahor: ²¹ Uz his firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, ²² Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.”²³ (Bethuel fathered Rebekah.) These eight Milcah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. ²⁴ Moreover, his concubine, whose name was Reumah, bore Tebah, Gaham, Tahash, and Maacah.

SARAH’S DEATH AND BURIAL

23 Sarah lived 127 years; these were the years of the life of Sarah.
² And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her. ³ And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, ⁴ “I am a sojourner and foreigner among you; give me property among you for a burying place, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.” ⁵ The Hittites answered Abraham, ⁶ “Hear us, my lord; you are a prince of God among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will withhold from you his tomb to hinder you from burying your dead.” ⁷ Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. ⁸ And he said to them, “If you are willing that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me and entreat for me Ephron the son of Zohar, ⁹ that he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he owns; it is at the end of his field. For the full price let him give it to me in your presence as property for a burying place.”

¹⁰ Now Ephron was sitting among the Hittites, and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the hearing of the Hittites, of all who went in at the gate of his city, ¹¹ “No, my lord, hear me: I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. In the sight of the sons of my people I give it to you. Bury your dead.” ¹² Then Abraham bowed down before the people of the land. ¹³ And he said to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, “But if you will, hear me: I give the price of the field. Accept it from me, that I may bury my dead there.” ¹⁴ Ephron answered Abraham, ¹⁵ “My lord, listen to me: a piece of land worth four hundred shekels of silver, what is that between you and me? Bury your dead.” ¹⁶ Abraham listened to Ephron, and Abraham weighed out for Ephron the silver that he had named in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred shekels of silver, according to the weights current among the merchants.

¹⁷ So the field of Ephron in Machpelah, which was to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave that was in it and all the trees that were in the field, throughout its whole area, was made over ¹⁸ to Abraham as a possession in the presence of the Hittites, before all who went in at the gate of his city. ¹⁹ After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah east of Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. ²⁰ The field and the cave that is in it were made over to Abraham as property for a burying place by the Hittites.

The binding of Isaac is the greatest and most terrible story in the Bible. The terror and the awe and the horror of Abraham’s slow journey up the mountain are unlike anything else in scripture, or out of it.

It resists easy interpretation and neat categorization; it is a mystery in the deepest sense of the word. The only way to make sense of it is to connect it with Jesus on the Cross. Remember what he cries out? “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

“He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”

— Paul the Apostle [Romans 8:32]



"The Sacrifice of Isaac". Rembrandt. 1635. Hermitage Museum.

P.S. One quick note on Genesis 23: the cave that Abraham purchases through his shrewd bargaining as a burial place for Sarah will be the Children of Israel's sole legal foothold to the Promised Land during their long centuries of slavery in Egypt. Abraham is a great man, not only because of his faith but also because of his far-sighted shrewdness as the patriarch of a people.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 11
GENESIS 24:1-25:18

ISAAC AND REBEKAH

24 Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years. And the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things. ² And Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his household, who had charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh, ³ that I may make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell, ⁴ but will go to my country and to my kindred, and take a wife for my son Isaac." ⁵ The servant said to him, "Perhaps the woman may not be willing to follow me to this land. Must I then take your son back to the land from which you came?" ⁶ Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. ⁷ The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' he will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there. ⁸ But if the woman is not willing to follow you, then you will be free from this oath of mine; only you must not take my son back there." ⁹ So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

¹⁰ Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and departed, taking all sorts of choice gifts from his master; and he arose and went to Mesopotamia to the city of Nahor. ¹¹ And he made the camels kneel down outside the city by the well of water at the time of evening, the time when women go out to draw water. ¹² And he said, "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. ¹³ Behold, I am standing by the spring of water, and the daughters of the men of the city are coming out to draw water. ¹⁴ Let the young woman to whom I shall say, 'Please let down your jar that I may drink,' and who shall say, 'Drink, and I will water your camels'—let her be the one whom you have appointed for your servant Isaac. By this I shall know that you have shown steadfast love to my master."

¹⁵ Before he had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milchah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. ¹⁶ The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. ¹⁷ Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to

drink from your jar.”¹⁸ She said, “Drink, my lord.” And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink.¹⁹ When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, “I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking.”²⁰ So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw water, and she drew for all his camels.²¹ The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord had prospered his journey or not.

²² When the camels had finished drinking, the man took a gold ring weighing a half shekel, and two bracelets for her arms weighing ten gold shekels,²³ and said, “Please tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?”²⁴ She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor.”²⁵ She added, “We have plenty of both straw and fodder, and room to spend the night.”²⁶ The man bowed his head and worshiped the Lord²⁷ and said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken his steadfast love and his faithfulness toward my master. As for me, the Lord has led me in the way to the house of my master’s kinsmen.”²⁸ Then the young woman ran and told her mother’s household about these things.

²⁹ Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban. Laban ran out toward the man, to the spring.³⁰ As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister’s arms, and heard the words of Rebekah his sister, “Thus the man spoke to me,” he went to the man. And behold, he was standing by the camels at the spring.³¹ He said, “Come in, O blessed of the Lord. Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.”³² So the man came to the house and unharnessed the camels, and gave straw and fodder to the camels, and there was water to wash his feet and the feet of the men who were with him.³³ Then food was set before him to eat. But he said, “I will not eat until I have said what I have to say.” He said, “Speak on.”

³⁴ So he said, “I am Abraham’s servant.³⁵ The Lord has greatly blessed my master, and he has become great. He has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, male servants and female servants, camels and donkeys.³⁶ And Sarah my master’s wife bore a son to my master when she was old, and to him he has given all that he has.³⁷ My master made me swear, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell,³⁸ but you shall go to my father’s house and to my clan and take a wife for my son.’³⁹ I said to my master, ‘Perhaps the woman will not follow me.’⁴⁰ But he said to me, ‘The Lord, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and prosper your way. You shall take a wife for my son from

my clan and from my father’s house.⁴¹ Then you will be free from my oath, when you come to my clan. And if they will not give her to you, you will be free from my oath.’

⁴² “I came today to the spring and said, ‘O Lord, the God of my master Abraham, if now you are prospering the way that I go,⁴³ behold, I am standing by the spring of water. Let the virgin who comes out to draw water, to whom I shall say, ‘Please give me a little water from your jar to drink,’⁴⁴ and who will say to me, ‘Drink, and I will draw for your camels also,’ let her be the woman whom the Lord has appointed for my master’s son.’

⁴⁵ “Before I had finished speaking in my heart, behold, Rebekah came out with her water jar on her shoulder, and she went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, ‘Please let me drink.’⁴⁶ She quickly let down her jar from her shoulder and said, ‘Drink, and I will give your camels drink also.’ So I drank, and she gave the camels drink also.⁴⁷ Then I asked her, ‘Whose daughter are you?’ She said, ‘The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor’s son, whom Milcah bore to him.’ So I put the ring on her nose and the bracelets on her arms.⁴⁸ Then I bowed my head and worshiped the Lord and blessed the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me by the right way to take the daughter of my master’s kinsman for his son.⁴⁹ Now then, if you are going to show steadfast love and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, that I may turn to the right hand or to the left.”

⁵⁰ Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, “The thing has come from the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good.⁵¹ Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master’s son, as the Lord has spoken.”

⁵² When Abraham’s servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the earth before the Lord.⁵³ And the servant brought out jewelry of silver and of gold, and garments, and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave to her brother and to her mother costly ornaments.⁵⁴ And he and the men who were with him ate and drank, and they spent the night there. When they arose in the morning, he said, “Send me away to my master.”⁵⁵ Her brother and her mother said, “Let the young woman remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go.”⁵⁶ But he said to them, “Do not delay me, since the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away that I may go to my master.”⁵⁷ They said, “Let us call the young woman and ask her.”⁵⁸ And they called Rebekah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will go.”⁵⁹ So they

sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. ⁶⁰ And they blessed Rebekah and said to her,

“Our sister, may you become
thousands of ten thousands,
and may your offspring possess
the gate of those who hate him!”

⁶¹ Then Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way.

⁶² Now Isaac had returned from Beer-lahai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb. ⁶³ And Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening. And he lifted up his eyes and saw, and behold, there were camels coming. ⁶⁴ And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she dismounted from the camel ⁶⁵ and said to the servant, “Who is that man, walking in the field to meet us?” The servant said, “It is my master.” So she took her veil and covered herself. ⁶⁶ And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. ⁶⁷ Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her. So Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM

25 Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. ² She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. ³ Jokshan fathered Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. ⁴ The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoah, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. ⁵ Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. ⁶ But to the sons of his concubines Abraham gave gifts, and while he was still living he sent them away from his son Isaac, eastward to the east country.

⁷ These are the days of the years of Abraham's life, 175 years. ⁸ Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. ⁹ Isaac and Ishmael his sons buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, east of Mamre, ¹⁰ the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with Sarah his wife.

¹¹ After the death of Abraham, God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

¹² These are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar

the Egyptian, Sarah's servant, bore to Abraham. ¹³ These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, ¹⁴ Mishma, Dumah, Massa, ¹⁵ Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. ¹⁶ These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes. ¹⁷ (These are the years of the life of Ishmael: 137 years. He breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people.) ¹⁸ They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria. He settled over against all his kinsmen.

A good principle: everything is in the Bible for a reason. The problem is that it's not always clear what the reason is!

After Sarah dies, Abraham remarries and fathers a bunch more sons. Why? And, why does the Bible tell us?

I thought this was a good a guess as any:

“Whether he intends it or not, Abraham's marriage to Keturah and the sons he produces with her alters the constellation of nations in the region. In addition to the Mesopotamians from whom he came, the Egyptians from whom he escaped, and the Canaanites among whom he lives, Abraham now fathers a host of nations that are closer kin to the children of the covenant.... The descendants of these sons become the nomadic peoples of the Arabian Peninsula and the region east of the Jordan. Many of them crop up in later stories, both for good and for ill. Perhaps most important are the Midianites, who figure prominently in the life of Israel. It will be Midianites who rescue Joseph from the pit where his murderous brothers had placed him and sell him into Egypt (37:28); it will be a priest of Midian, Reuel, who takes in the fugitives Moses, escaped from Egypt, and gives him his daughter as a wife (Exodus 2:16ff); it will be the same Midianite, now called Jethro, who tells Moses to establish a law for his emancipated nation of slaves (Exodus 18:1 ff.)... [I]t looks as if Abraham, in his last act, has made the world a little more hospitable for the future of the covenant, blurring somewhat the distinctions between kin and stranger, friend and foe.”

—Leon Kass

Abraham has secured a great wife for his son in Rebekah, and then his final acts are about making the world a bit less hostile to his descendants. Truly he is a great patriarch.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 12
GENESIS 25:19-26:33

THE BIRTH OF ESAU AND JACOB

¹⁹ These are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham fathered Isaac, ²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean, to be his wife. ²¹ And Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, because she was barren. And the Lord granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. ²² The children struggled together within her, and she said, "If it is thus, why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord. ²³ And the Lord said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you shall be divided;
the one shall be stronger than the other,
the older shall serve the younger."

²⁴ When her days to give birth were completed, behold, there were twins in her womb. ²⁵ The first came out red, all his body like a hairy cloak, so they called his name Esau. ²⁶ Afterward his brother came out with his hand holding Esau's heel, so his name was called Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

²⁷ When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, dwelling in tents. ²⁸ Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

ESAU SELLS HIS BIRTHRIGHT

²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was exhausted. ³⁰ And Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stew, for I am exhausted!" (Therefore his name was called Edom.) ³¹ Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright now." ³² Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?" ³³ Jacob said, "Swear to me now." So he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. ³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank and rose and went his way. Thus Esau despised his birthright.

GOD'S PROMISE TO ISAAC

26 Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar to Abimelech king of the Philistines. ² And the Lord appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³ Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to

you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. ⁴ I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, ⁵ because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws."

ISAAC AND ABIMELECH

⁶ So Isaac settled in Gerar. ⁷ When the men of the place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," for he feared to say, "My wife," thinking, "lest the men of the place should kill me because of Rebekah," because she was attractive in appearance. ⁸ When he had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out of a window and saw Isaac laughing with Rebekah his wife. ⁹ So Abimelech called Isaac and said, "Behold, she is your wife. How then could you say, 'She is my sister'?" Isaac said to him, "Because I thought, 'Lest I die because of her.'" ¹⁰ Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the people might easily have lain with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us." ¹¹ So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, "Whoever touches this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."

¹² And Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him, ¹³ and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. ¹⁴ He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him. ¹⁵ (Now the Philistines had stopped and filled with earth all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father.) ¹⁶ And Abimelech said to Isaac, "Go away from us, for you are much mightier than we."

¹⁷ So Isaac departed from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. ¹⁸ And Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of Abraham his father, which the Philistines had stopped after the death of Abraham. And he gave them the names that his father had given them. ¹⁹ But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, ²⁰ the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, "The water is ours." So he called the name of the well Esek, because they contended with him. ²¹ Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that also, so he called its name Sitnah. ²² And he moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. So he called its name Rehoboth, saying, "For now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

²³ From there he went up to Beersheba. ²⁴ And the Lord appeared to him the same night and said, “I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you and will bless you and multiply your offspring for my servant Abraham’s sake.” ²⁵ So he built an altar there and called upon the name of the Lord and pitched his tent there. And there Isaac’s servants dug a well.

²⁶ When Abimelech went to him from Gerar with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army, ²⁷ Isaac said to them, “Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?” ²⁸ They said, “We see plainly that the Lord has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, ²⁹ that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the Lord.” ³⁰ So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. ³¹ In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace. ³² That same day Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well that they had dug and said to him, “We have found water.” ³³ He called it Shibah; therefore the name of the city is Beersheba to this day.

Remember, the central question of Genesis 12-36 is about family: what will it take to raise the next generation so that the Covenant can be successfully passed down?

Alarming, it is unclear at first whether Isaac will be an adequate link in the chain. Compared to Abraham’s activity and far-sightedness, Isaac seems weak and is literally blind in his old age. And he certainly doesn’t seem capable of making wise decisions with regard to his sons. Esau, as the story about the stew and the birthright shows, does not have what it takes to be the next carrier of the Covenant.

Though Isaac is not the great man his father was, nevertheless he is still his father’s son and therefore highly favored by the Lord. What the stories of Isaac and Abimelech tell us is that even for those who are not as naturally great as Abraham, the Lord’s favor is powerful for those who are part of Abraham’s family!

I take comfort in this fact. What about you?

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 13 GENESIS 26:34-28:9

JACOB TAKES ESAU’S BLESSING

³⁴ When Esau was forty years old, he took Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite to be his wife, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite, ³⁵ and they made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.

27 When Isaac was old and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau his older son and said to him, “My son”; and he answered, “Here I am.” ² He said, “Behold, I am old; I do not know the day of my death. ³ Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me, ⁴ and prepare for me delicious food, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.”

⁵ Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. So when Esau went to the field to hunt for game and bring it, ⁶ Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, ⁷ ‘Bring me game and prepare for me delicious food, that I may eat it and bless you before the Lord before I die.’ ⁸ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice as I command you. ⁹ Go to the flock and bring me two good young goats, so that I may prepare from them delicious food for your father, such as he loves. ¹⁰ And you shall bring it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.” ¹¹ But Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “Behold, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. ¹² Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him and bring a curse upon myself and not a blessing.” ¹³ His mother said to him, “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, bring them to me.”

¹⁴ So he went and took them and brought them to his mother, and his mother prepared delicious food, such as his father loved. ¹⁵ Then Rebekah took the best garments of Esau her older son, which were with her in the house, and put them on Jacob her younger son. ¹⁶ And the skins of the young goats she put on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck. ¹⁷ And she put the delicious food and the bread, which she had prepared, into the hand of her son Jacob.

¹⁸ So he went in to his father and said, “My father.” And he said, “Here I am. Who are you, my son?” ¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me.” ²⁰ But Isaac said to his son, “How

is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?" He answered, "Because the Lord your God granted me success."²¹ Then Isaac said to Jacob, "Please come near, that I may feel you, my son, to know whether you are really my son Esau or not."²² So Jacob went near to Isaac his father, who felt him and said, "The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau."²³ And he did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau's hands. So he blessed him.²⁴ He said, "Are you really my son Esau?" He answered, "I am."²⁵ Then he said, "Bring it near to me, that I may eat of my son's game and bless you." So he brought it near to him, and he ate; and he brought him wine, and he drank.

²⁶ Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son."

²⁷ So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him and said,

"See, the smell of my son
is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed!

²⁸ May God give you of the dew of heaven
and of the fatness of the earth
and plenty of grain and wine.

²⁹ Let peoples serve you,
and nations bow down to you.

Be lord over your brothers,
and may your mother's sons bow down to you.
Cursed be everyone who curses you,
and blessed be everyone who blesses you!"

³⁰ As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, Esau his brother came in from his hunting.³¹ He also prepared delicious food and brought it to his father. And he said to his father, "Let my father arise and eat of his son's game, that you may bless me."³² His father Isaac said to him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am your son, your firstborn, Esau."³³ Then Isaac trembled very violently and said, "Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all before you came, and I have blessed him? Yes, and he shall be blessed."

³⁴ As soon as Esau heard the words of his father, he cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me, even me also, O my father!"³⁵ But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully,

and he has taken away your blessing."³⁶ Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has cheated me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"³⁷ Isaac answered and said to Esau, "Behold, I have made him lord over you, and all his brothers I have given to him for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. What then can I do for you, my son?"³⁸ Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, O my father." And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

³⁹ Then Isaac his father answered and said to him:

"Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be,
and away from the dew of heaven on high.

⁴⁰ By your sword you shall live,
and you shall serve your brother;
but when you grow restless
you shall break his yoke from your neck."

⁴¹ Now Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him, and Esau said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are approaching; then I will kill my brother Jacob."⁴² But the words of Esau her older son were told to Rebekah. So she sent and called Jacob her younger son and said to him, "Behold, your brother Esau comforts himself about you by planning to kill you."⁴³ Now therefore, my son, obey my voice. Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran⁴⁴ and stay with him a while, until your brother's fury turns away—⁴⁵ until your brother's anger turns away from you, and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send and bring you from there. Why should I be bereft of you both in one day?"

⁴⁶ Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I loathe my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries one of the Hittite women like these, one of the women of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

28 Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him and directed him, "You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women.² Arise, go to Paddan-aram to the house of Bethuel your mother's father, and take as your wife from there one of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother.³ God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples.⁴ May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you

may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham!”⁵ Thus Isaac sent Jacob away. And he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban, the son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob’s and Esau’s mother.

⁶ Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he directed him, “You must not take a wife from the Canaanite women,”⁷ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram.⁸ So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please Isaac his father,⁹ Esau went to Ishmael and took as his wife, besides the wives he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son, the sister of Nebaioth.

Jacob—the “deceiver”—steals the blessing Isaac intends for Esau, the firstborn, by pretending to be Esau in the presence of their blind father. When Esau finds out about the deception, his response is one of the most heart-rending in scripture:

³⁰ After Isaac finished blessing him, and Jacob had scarcely left his father’s presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting.³¹ He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. Then he said to him, “My father, please sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing.”

³² His father Isaac asked him, “Who are you?”

“I am your son,” he answered, “your firstborn, Esau.”

³³ Isaac trembled violently and said, “Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him—and indeed he will be blessed!”

³⁴ When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, “Bless me—me too, my father!”

³⁵ But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.”

³⁶ Esau said, “Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: He took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!” Then he asked, “Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?”

³⁷ Isaac answered Esau, “I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?”

³⁸ Esau said to his father, “Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!” Then Esau wept aloud. [Genesis 27:30-38]

Here’s what I’ve wondered: **Why can’t Isaac just bless Esau and renounce the blessing he pronounced over Jacob?**

I think the answer lies in that strange detail about Isaac’s response when he realizes he has been deceived:

“Isaac trembled violently”.

Why does Isaac tremble?

When she was pregnant with the twins, Rebekah received a word from the Lord that it would be the younger son who would have preeminence over the elder. Isaac has favored the elder son, Esau, even though Esau is clearly not fit to receive and pass on the Covenant. Here, however, Isaac is confronted with the fact that, in spite of his sinful passivity with regard to his elder son, the Lord’s purposes are still realized in the blessing of the younger son, Jacob. I think Isaac trembles because he is struck in that moment of realization that God has been at work in spite of Isaac’s sin.

The reason Isaac cannot just retract the blessing he gave Jacob and give it again to Esau is because Isaac realizes that God intended for Jacob to receive the blessing. Isaac now “sees” (despite his blindness) that he blessed the correct son, even though he was tricked into doing so.

The point: God’s purposes will be achieved. All things opposing God will be defeated.

How can you work with the purposes of God today?

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14
GENESIS 28:10-29:30

JACOB'S DREAM AT BETHEL

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³ And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." ¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

¹⁸ So early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹ He called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of the city was Luz at the first. ²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, ²¹ so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, ²² and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."

JACOB ARRIVES IN PADDAN ARAM

29 Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. ² As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it, for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, ³ and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well.

⁴ Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." ⁵ He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him." ⁶ He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!" ⁷ He said, "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go, pasture them." ⁸ But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."

⁹ While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. ¹⁰ Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. ¹² And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

¹³ As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things,

¹⁴ and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

JACOB MARRIES LEAH AND RACHEL

¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹ Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." ²² So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. ²³ But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. ²⁴ (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her

servant.)²⁵ And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?”²⁶ Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.²⁷ Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.”²⁸ Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.²⁹ (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.)³⁰ So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.

Jacob is a clever, ambitious man, but his twenty-year sojourn away from home will humble him and make him into the man he needs to be if he will successfully pass the Covenant on to the next generation. A recurring theme during much of Jacob’s journey will be about the limits of sight. After his amazing dream with the ladder that goes to heaven, he wakes up and says, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it!” [Genesis 28:16]. Jacob, the clever man, learns that there are things he doesn’t understand and “see” properly.

That lesson about the limits of sight is made more clear in the 20 years he lives with Laban and in all his troubles with women. For example, Jacob literally sleeps with the wrong woman on his wedding night!

Part of Jacob’s humbling and his formation is for him to admit that there are limits to what he can see.

The same lesson applies to us:

What if you aren’t seeing the events of your life correctly, either?

The way to see clearly is to see through Christ. Use his life, death, and resurrection as the lens through which you look at your life, and you’ll be seeing correctly.

**MONDAY, OCTOBER 17
GENESIS 29:31-30:43**

JACOB’S CHILDREN

³¹ When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.³² And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, “Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.”

³³ She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also.” And she called his name Simeon.

³⁴ Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, “Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” Therefore his name was called Levi.

³⁵ And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, “This time I will praise the Lord.” Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

30 When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I shall die!”

² Jacob’s anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?”

³ Then she said, “Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her.”

⁴ So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her.⁵ And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.⁶ Then Rachel said, “God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son.” Therefore she called his name Dan.

⁷ Rachel’s servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.

⁸ Then Rachel said, “With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed.” So she called his name Naphtali.

⁹ When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.¹⁰ Then Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son.¹¹ And Leah said, “Good fortune has come!” so

she called his name Gad.

¹² Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. ¹³ And Leah said, "Happy am I! For women have called me happy." So she called his name Asher.

¹⁴ In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."¹⁵ But she said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" Rachel said, "Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes."

¹⁶ When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he lay with her that night.

¹⁷ And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ Leah said, "God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband." So she called his name Issachar.

¹⁹ And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. ²⁰ Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons." So she called his name Zebulun. ²¹ Afterward she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah.

²² Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. ²³ She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." ²⁴ And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the Lord add to me another son!"

JACOB'S PROSPERITY

²⁵ As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. ²⁶ Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you." ²⁷ But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you. ²⁸ Name your wages, and I will give it." ²⁹ Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. ³⁰ For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?" ³¹ He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again

pasture your flock and keep it: ³² let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages. ³³ So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen." ³⁴ Laban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said." ³⁵ But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge of his sons. ³⁶ And he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock.

³⁷ Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks.

³⁸ He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, ³⁹ the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. ⁴⁰ And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban's flock.

⁴¹ Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks, ⁴² but for the feebler of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feebler would be Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. ⁴³ Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

That thing that Jacob does by peeling the bark of branches in strips and placing them in front of the watering troughs of the sheep? I don't get it either. Must be some kind of ancient genetic engineering trick that's lost to us. Who knows?

Don't get too hung up on those details—just keep reading!

P.S. In case you haven't figured it out yet, the Bible does not look favorably on polygamy. In fact, all the examples of polygamous relationships in Genesis are examples of what NOT to do! Can you imagine the mess that is Jacob's household, with 12 sons (and 1 daughter) by 4 different mothers *all of whom live under the same roof!*

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18
GENESIS 31:1-55

JACOB FLEES FROM LABAN

3Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, “Jacob has taken all that was our father’s, and from what was our father’s he has gained all this wealth.”² And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before.³ Then the Lord said to Jacob, “Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.”

⁴ So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was⁵ and said to them, “I see that your father does not regard me with favor as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me.⁶ You know that I have served your father with all my strength,⁷ yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. But God did not permit him to harm me.⁸ If he said, ‘The spotted shall be your wages,’ then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, ‘The striped shall be your wages,’ then all the flock bore striped.⁹ Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.¹⁰ In the breeding season of the flock I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled.¹¹ Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob,’ and I said, ‘Here I am!’¹² And he said, ‘Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.¹³ I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred.’”¹⁴ Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, “Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father’s house?¹⁵ Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money.¹⁶ All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do.”

¹⁷ So Jacob arose and set his sons and his wives on camels.¹⁸ He drove away all his livestock, all his property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac.¹⁹ Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father’s household gods.²⁰ And Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he intended to flee.²¹ He fled with all that he had and arose and crossed the Euphrates, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.

²² When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled,²³

he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him for seven days and followed close after him into the hill country of Gilead.²⁴ But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.”

²⁵ And Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen pitched tents in the hill country of Gilead.²⁶ And Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword?²⁷ Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre?²⁸ And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly.²⁹ It is in my power to do you harm. But the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, ‘Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.’³⁰ And now you have gone away because you longed greatly for your father’s house, but why did you steal my gods?”³¹ Jacob answered and said to Laban, “Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force.³² Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours, and take it.” Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

³³ So Laban went into Jacob’s tent and into Leah’s tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah’s tent and entered Rachel’s.³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel’s saddle and sat on them. Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them.³⁵ And she said to her father, “Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me.” So he searched but did not find the household gods.

³⁶ Then Jacob became angry and berated Laban. Jacob said to Laban, “What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me?³⁷ For you have felt through all my goods; what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two.³⁸ These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks.³⁹ What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night.⁴⁰ There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes.⁴¹ These twenty years I have been in

your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times.

⁴² If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.”

⁴³ Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day for these my daughters or for their children whom they have borne? ⁴⁴ Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I. And let it be a witness between you and me.” ⁴⁵ So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. ⁴⁶ And Jacob said to his kinsmen, “Gather stones.” And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. ⁴⁷ Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸ Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today.” Therefore he named it Galeed, ⁴⁹ and Mizpah, for he said, “The Lord watch between you and me, when we are out of one another’s sight. ⁵⁰ If you oppress my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me.”

⁵¹ Then Laban said to Jacob, “See this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me. ⁵² This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm. ⁵³ The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.” So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, ⁵⁴ and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country.

⁵⁵ Early in the morning Laban arose and kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned home.

“The twenty years of exile are ended. Jacob is returning as a patriarch of his own clan, prosperous, independent, and more confident than ever that God is with him. His trials at Uncle Laban’s have not broken his spirit; on the contrary, adversity has made a man out of him. He has acquired enough children to become a tribe, enough possessions with which to provide for his family, sufficient dignity and courage to declare his independence, sufficient clout and standing to establish political agreements with other clans and

nations, a newfound desire to return to the land of his father (and to Isaac himself), and perhaps most important, a growing awareness of his dependence on God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and now also the God of Jacob. None of this would have happened had he stayed home. He has struggled, he has suffered, he has endured, and he has come out much the stronger and better for it.”

—Leon Kass

How might your present difficulties be preparing you for future possibilities?

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 19 **GENESIS 32:1-33:20**

JACOB PREPARES TO MEET ESAU

32 Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. ² And when Jacob saw them he said, “This is God’s camp!” So he called the name of that place Mahanaim.

³ And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau his brother in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, ⁴ instructing them, “Thus you shall say to my lord Esau: Thus says your servant Jacob, ‘I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now. ⁵ I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, male servants, and female servants. I have sent to tell my lord, in order that I may find favor in your sight.’”

⁶ And the messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau, and he is coming to meet you, and there are four hundred men with him.” ⁷ Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed. He divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, ⁸ thinking, “If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, then the camp that is left will escape.”

⁹ And Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O Lord who said to me, ‘Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,’ ¹⁰ I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. ¹¹ Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. ¹² But you said, ‘I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which

cannot be numbered for multitude.”

¹³ So he stayed there that night, and from what he had with him he took a present for his brother Esau, ¹⁴ two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, ¹⁵ thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. ¹⁶ These he handed over to his servants, every drove by itself, and said to his servants, “Pass on ahead of me and put a space between drove and drove.” ¹⁷ He instructed the first, “When Esau my brother meets you and asks you, ‘To whom do you belong? Where are you going? And whose are these ahead of you?’ ¹⁸ then you shall say, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a present sent to my lord Esau. And moreover, he is behind us.’” ¹⁹ He likewise instructed the second and the third and all who followed the droves, “You shall say the same thing to Esau when you find him, ²⁰ and you shall say, ‘Moreover, your servant Jacob is behind us.’” For he thought, “I may appease him with the present that goes ahead of me, and afterward I shall see his face. Perhaps he will accept me.” ²¹ So the present passed on ahead of him, and he himself stayed that night in the camp.

JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD

²² The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. ²⁴ And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob’s hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, “Let me go, for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” ²⁷ And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” ²⁸ Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.” ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip. ³² Therefore to this day the people of Israel do not eat the sinew of the thigh that is on the hip socket, because he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip on the sinew of the thigh.

JACOB MEETS ESAU

33 And Jacob lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, Esau was coming, and four hundred men with him. So he divided the children among Leah and Rachel and the two female servants. ² And he put the servants with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all. ³ He himself went on before them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother.

⁴ But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept. ⁵ And when Esau lifted up his eyes and saw the women and children, he said, “Who are these with you?” Jacob said, “The children whom God has graciously given your servant.” ⁶ Then the servants drew near, they and their children, and bowed down. ⁷ Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down. And last Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down. ⁸ Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company that I met?” Jacob answered, “To find favor in the sight of my lord.” ⁹ But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.” ¹⁰ Jacob said, “No, please, if I have found favor in your sight, then accept my present from my hand. For I have seen your face, which is like seeing the face of God, and you have accepted me. ¹¹ Please accept my blessing that is brought to you, because God has dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” Thus he urged him, and he took it.

¹² Then Esau said, “Let us journey on our way, and I will go ahead of you.” ¹³ But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail, and that the nursing flocks and herds are a care to me. If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die. ¹⁴ Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, and I will lead on slowly, at the pace of the livestock that are ahead of me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.”

¹⁵ So Esau said, “Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.” But he said, “What need is there? Let me find favor in the sight of my lord.” ¹⁶ So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. ¹⁷ But Jacob journeyed to Succoth, and built himself a house and made booths for his livestock. Therefore the name of the place is called Succoth.

¹⁸ And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan, on his way from Paddan-aram, and he camped before the city. ¹⁹ And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, he bought for a hundred pieces of money the piece of land on which he had pitched his tent. ²⁰ There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.

Jacob has never prayed before.

But the fear he has in seeing his brother Esau again for the first time in 20 years (an Esau who is approaching with 400 armed men) has overwhelmed him, and he cries out to the Lord in prayer:

“Then Jacob prayed, ‘O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’”
[Genesis 32:9-12]

Receiving no answer to his prayer, he sends his flocks and herds and his wives and children across the river ahead of him and is left alone as night falls.

Alone, but not alone:

“So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, ‘Let me go, for it is daybreak.’”

But Jacob replied, ‘I will not let you go unless you bless me.’”

The man asked him, ‘What is your name?’”

“Jacob,” he answered.

Then the man said, ‘Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because

you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.”

Jacob said, ‘Please tell me your name.’”

But he replied, ‘Why do you ask my name?’ Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.’”

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.” [Genesis 32:24-32]

The mysterious man proves to be more than a man. It's as if all of Jacob's previous struggles with men have really been struggles with God. Jacob is a trickster and a liar, but he's also stubborn and persevering, and here he refuses to give in. Finally, as dawn is breaking, the opponent touches him in the thigh (the groin?) and disappears, after giving Jacob the new name, "Israel," which means something like "He wrestles with God" or perhaps "God prevails".

From now on, Jacob will be Israel, and he will walk with a limp.

The deceiver now has a new identity. Now, limping, he's ready to walk before the Lord in the new Way.

To be a bearer of the Covenant, Jacob will need to seek righteousness, but he will also need to be bold and persevering.

He is now the man the Lord needs.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20 GENESIS 34:1-31

THE DEFILING OF DINAH

34 Now Dinah the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Jacob, went out to see the women of the land. ² And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of the land, saw her, he seized her and lay with her and humiliated her. ³ And his soul was drawn to Dinah the daughter of Jacob. He loved the young woman and spoke tenderly to her. ⁴ So Shechem spoke to his father Hamor,

saying, “Get me this girl for my wife.”

⁵ Now Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah. But his sons were with his livestock in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. ⁶ And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. ⁷ The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and very angry, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter, for such a thing must not be done.

⁸ But Hamor spoke with them, saying, “The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him to be his wife. ⁹ Make marriages with us. Give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. ¹⁰ You shall dwell with us, and the land shall be open to you. Dwell and trade in it, and get property in it.” ¹¹ Shechem also said to her father and to her brothers, “Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. ¹² Ask me for as great a bride-price and gift as you will, and I will give whatever you say to me. Only give me the young woman to be my wife.”

¹³ The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. ¹⁴ They said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised, for that would be a disgrace to us. ¹⁵ Only on this condition will we agree with you—that you will become as we are by every male among you being circumcised. ¹⁶ Then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters to ourselves, and we will dwell with you and become one people. ¹⁷ But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter, and we will be gone.”

¹⁸ Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor’s son Shechem. ¹⁹ And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he delighted in Jacob’s daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his father’s house. ²⁰ So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, ²¹ “These men are at peace with us; let them dwell in the land and trade in it, for behold, the land is large enough for them. Let us take their daughters as wives, and let us give them our daughters. ²² Only on this condition will the men agree to dwell with us to become one people—when every male among us is circumcised as they are circumcised. ²³ Will not their livestock, their property and all their beasts be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will dwell with us.” ²⁴ And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised,

all who went out of the gate of his city.

²⁵ On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males. ²⁶ They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem’s house and went away. ²⁷ The sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the city, because they had defiled their sister. ²⁸ They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. ²⁹ All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered.

³⁰ Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. My numbers are few, and if they gather themselves against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, both I and my household.” ³¹ But they said, “Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?”

Dinah is probably around 13 years old. (Her eldest brother, Reuben, is probably around 20, which means Simeon and Levi—the brothers who lead the attack against the Shechemites—are in their late teens.)

Where was Jacob? Where were her brothers? Why was this girl left to wander into a strange city? Why isn’t the innocent protected?

The truth is that Jacob should never have settled anywhere near the city of Shechem to begin with, but rather returned to Bethel, as he had previously promised the Lord he would do. (See Genesis 28:20-22 and 31:13.)

But after the violation occurs, how do you make it right?

Doing nothing is tacitly accepting it. But doing what the sons of Israel actually do cannot be right either, as not only do they kill all the men of the city, *but they carry off all the women and children as property as well.*

Already, the new Way of righteousness towards which the Lord is leading the children of Israel is under threat.

An awful story.

As usual, Leon Kass sums it up well:

“Jacob, who had settled in the wrong place and who was now grown com-

fortable among the Canaanites, compounds the error by allowing his one daughter to wander off towards the ways of Shechem. This mistake sets in motion the entire ugly chain of events: once Dinah 'goes out,' everything that follows takes on a tragic inevitability. The failure to protect the purity of innocent Dinah (whose name means 'judgment') brings on her unjust defilement (the rape), in a horribly parody of the proper union of man and woman. There follows grim parodies of (1) a marriage proposal (asking for the hand of a woman already seized and violated); (2) proper fatherhood and rulership (fathers serving rather than ruling the passions of their sons; a ruler leading his city into ruin for the sake of satisfying his son's erotic wishes); and (3) the practice of just retribution by means that appear to be anything but just (the brothers' slaughter and spoiling of the entire city), involving (4) what appears to be a parody of the sacred rite of circumcision. The entire order of justice falls apart from the neglect of the purity and dignity of woman." [my emphasis]

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21
GENESIS 35:1-36:43

GOD BLESSES AND RENAMES JACOB

35 God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there. Make an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau."² So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you and purify yourselves and change your garments."³ Then let us arise and go up to Bethel, so that I may make there an altar to the God who answers me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone."⁴ So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem.

⁵ And as they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.⁶ And Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him,⁷ and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, because there God had revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother.⁸ And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So he called its name Allon-bacuth.

⁹ God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Paddan-aram, and blessed him.¹⁰ And God said to him, "Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he

called his name Israel.¹¹ And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body."¹² The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you."¹³ Then God went up from him in the place where he had spoken with him.¹⁴ And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he had spoken with him, a pillar of stone. He poured out a drink offering on it and poured oil on it.¹⁵ So Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

THE DEATHS OF RACHEL AND ISAAC

¹⁶ Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor.¹⁷ And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for you have another son."¹⁸ And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin.¹⁹ So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem),²⁰ and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day.²¹ Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

²² While Israel lived in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine. And Israel heard of it.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve.²³ The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.²⁴ The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.²⁵ The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's servant: Dan and Naphtali.²⁶ The sons of Zilpah, Leah's servant: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

²⁷ And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned.²⁸ Now the days of Isaac were 180 years.²⁹ And Isaac breathed his last, and he died and was gathered to his people, old and full of days. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

ESAU'S DESCENDANTS

36 These are the generations of Esau (that is, Edom).² Esau took his wives from the Canaanites: Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, Oholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite,³ and Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, the sister of Nebaioth.⁴ And

Adah bore to Esau, Eliphaz; Basemath bore Reuel;⁵ and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

⁶ Then Esau took his wives, his sons, his daughters, and all the members of his household, his livestock, all his beasts, and all his property that he had acquired in the land of Canaan. He went into a land away from his brother Jacob. ⁷ For their possessions were too great for them to dwell together. The land of their sojournings could not support them because of their livestock. ⁸ So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir. (Esau is Edom.)

⁹ These are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country of Seir. ¹⁰ These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Basemath the wife of Esau. ¹¹ The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. ¹² (Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz.) These are the sons of Adah, Esau's wife. ¹³ These are the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These are the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife. ¹⁴ These are the sons of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon, Esau's wife: she bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

¹⁵ These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz the firstborn of Esau: the chiefs Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, ¹⁶ Korah, Gatam, and Amalek; these are the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Adah. ¹⁷ These are the sons of Reuel, Esau's son: the chiefs Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah; these are the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife. ¹⁸ These are the sons of Oholibamah, Esau's wife: the chiefs Jeush, Jalam, and Korah; these are the chiefs born of Oholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau's wife. ¹⁹ These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their chiefs.

²⁰ These are the sons of Seir the Horite, the inhabitants of the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, ²¹ Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan; these are the chiefs of the Horites, the sons of Seir in the land of Edom. ²² The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. ²³ These are the sons of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. ²⁴ These are the sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah; he is the Anah who found the hot springs in the wilderness, as he pastured the donkeys of Zibeon his father. ²⁵ These are the children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah. ²⁶ These are the sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. ²⁷ These are the sons

of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan. ²⁸ These are the sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran. ²⁹ These are the chiefs of the Horites: the chiefs Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, ³⁰ Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan; these are the chiefs of the Horites, chief by chief in the land of Seir.

³¹ These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites. ³² Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom, the name of his city being Dinhabah. ³³ Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his place. ³⁴ Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites reigned in his place. ³⁵ Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab, reigned in his place, the name of his city being Avith. ³⁶ Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his place. ³⁷ Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth on the Euphrates reigned in his place. ³⁸ Shaul died, and Baal-hanan the son of Achbor reigned in his place. ³⁹ Baal-hanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his place, the name of his city being Pau; his wife's name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, daughter of Mezahab.

⁴⁰ These are the names of the chiefs of Esau, according to their clans and their dwelling places, by their names: the chiefs Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, ⁴¹ Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, ⁴² Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, ⁴³ Magdiel, and Iram; these are the chiefs of Edom (that is, Esau, the father of Edom), according to their dwelling places in the land of their possession.

Once Jacob is renamed Israel, why does the narrator still frequently refer to him as Jacob?

I think it's because, unlike with Abraham, who once he gets his new name keeps moving forward in the direction the Lord wants, with Jacob and his family, it's always two steps forward and one step back.

For example, after the awful story of the rape of Dinah, Jacob does what he should have done before and moves the family to Bethel, commanding that they rid themselves of foreign idols. Good. But, then later we get the ugly news that Reuben, the eldest son (whose mother is Leah) sleeps with Bilhah, who is the mother of two of his other brothers and is one of his father's wives/concubines.

This family is still not ready to be Israel, the people of God.

How they become so is the story told in part 3 of Genesis: Joseph in Egypt.

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