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Genesis 28:1 - 29:30



Genesis - Steve Gregg

In Genesis 28:1-29:30, Rebecca advises Jacob to find a wife and sends him away to distance him from Esau's threats. Isaac blesses Jacob and instructs him to choose a wife from his mother's family. Jacob has a prophetic dream of a ladder reaching heaven, and this passage alludes to God's plan for Gentiles to partake in his kingdom. Jacob eventually marries Laban's two daughters and becomes the father of 12 sons, including Judah, from whom the Messiah will come - all evidence of God's plan for Jacob's life, even if it involves deceit and difficult circumstances.

Transcript

Last time, the story was interrupted a little unnaturally as we reached the end of Genesis 27, because really it ends with Rebecca coming to Isaac and saying that she desired that Isaac would send Jacob away. She doesn't actually say it in that many words, but that's what it amounts to. Send him to Padnerim to find a wife.

Her actual words are a complaint about the wives that Esau has taken, who are Canaanite, and we had been told earlier that when Esau took these wives, they were a grief to both of his parents. And so here, Rebecca knows that although she and her husband have some differences over the matter of Jacob and Esau, nonetheless, they have one thing in common. They both dislike their daughters-in-law, and they would not like to have more of the same type.

And so she's suggesting that Jacob needs to find a wife, and apparently the idea of sending away for one, as happened when Abraham sent away for Rebecca to be brought to Isaac, has not occurred to them, and they actually, I'm sure both are thinking in terms of Jacob being sent away. Now, Rebecca may or may not have suggested sending him away, but we can be quite sure that's what she wanted to happen, because she was concerned about Esau's threats of Jacob, and her idea was to put some distance between those two brothers for the time being until Esau's anger could cool. And then she said, I'll send for you again.

Now, unfortunately, we don't read of her ever sending for him again, nor of him ever

seeing his mother again, although apparently we do find Esau's anger cooling. We don't know how quickly it cooled. He had 20 years to cool as it turned out, because that's how long Jacob was gone before he met Esau again.

And so she has come to Isaac with this suggestion that it's time for Jacob to find a wife after all, he's 77 years old. You know, he's middle-aged. And so Isaac called Jacob in chapter 28 and verse 1, and blessed him and charged him and said to him, you shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.

Arise and go to Paddan Aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father, and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you that you may be an assembly of people and give you the blessing of Abraham to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham. Now, I'd like to just point out something about the content of this blessing.

It seems that Isaac is now on board with Jacob being the heir, but he has no choice. He recognizes now that in the providence of God, notwithstanding his own attempts to bring about a different result, Jacob has received the blessing. He now understands, no doubt, that the birth oracle had named Jacob as the one who would be the one who would be served by his brother.

If, as I think likely, Isaac already knew about the sale of the birthright many years earlier, of course, he can see that he has been in the wrong all this time. And so he's now supportive of Jacob's role. He's acquiesced to it.

But notice something here, and that is that in when he was blessing Jacob earlier, when he thought it was Esau in chapter 27, verses 27 through 29, we have the blessing there that he gave to Jacob, but he thought he was giving it to Esau at that time. And notice the blessing was essentially in verse 28 of chapter 27. Therefore, may God give you of the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine, physical, material prosperity.

And verse 29, let people serve you and nations bow down to you, be master over your brethren, etc. So he gave him, as it were, political power and prosperity. But there's nothing said there necessarily about the specifics of Abraham.

Now, he does repeat what God said to Abraham, cursed be everyone who curses you and blessed be those who bless you there in chapter 27, verse 29. But he doesn't mention Abraham or the Abrahamic Covenant specifically. And it may be because Isaac, though he favored Esau, knew that Esau was not really a man of character.

Such as would deserve or could be trusted with the responsibility of bringing forth the promise seed or that he perhaps did not see Esau as a worthy conduit. He does not

specifically mention the promise made to Abraham there being applied. And now that he's blessing Jacob again, knowing it's Jacob, knowing it's not Esau, he does.

There's a sense in which he repeats some of the things that are in the earlier blessing, but mostly it's things that are directly from the Abrahamic Covenant. He says, May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you that you may be an assembly of peoples. Now, that's that could be uttered to anybody.

And, you know, not specifically one of Abraham's descendants, but verse forces and give you the blessing of Abraham to you and your descendants with you or your seed with you. So he mentions the seed of Abraham, the blessing that God promised Abraham would be coming through Jacob, something that he had omitted from mentioning back when he thought he was blessing Esau. Verse five.

So Isaac sent Jacob away and he went to Pad and Aram, which I believe means the plane of Aram and to live in the son of Bethuel, the Syrian, the brother of Rebecca, the mother of Jacob and Esau. Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Pad and Aram to take himself a wife from there and that as he blessed him, he gave him a charge saying, you shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Pad and Aram. Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac.

So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahala, the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son and sister of Nebuchadnezzar to be his wife, in addition to the wives he had. Now, commentators often kind of make this out to be Esau digging his pit even deeper, although I see this is more or less Esau's desire to please his parents, which is fairly commendable. He had taken some wives that he now realized his parents were not happy about, and so he seeks to give them probably grandchildren by wives that they could approve of.

Now, commentators often because they're always trying to find everything bad about Esau and everything good about the good guys. They say, well, here he made another mistake and went to the children of Ishmael, the rejected seed. Well, he couldn't go to the children of Isaac.

That was his own family. Ishmael was about as closely related to them as they could possibly find anyone. After all, the concern was that Jacob and previously Isaac marry somebody who's closely related.

That's why they, that's why Isaac was the bride in the land of his father's brother. But, you know, here Esau finds wives from his father's brother. What's the problem here? I don't really see that Esau's making an additional problem, unless, of course, we think that taking a third and fourth wife is an immoral thing, but he already had two, and they were a grief to his parents.

So perhaps he thought, well, let's go back to square one. I can't really ditch these two wives that are my responsibility. I have, but I could take some more that are of a better sort.

Some that are more closely related to us and who might give children to me and grandchildren to my parents that they won't have to feel uncomfortable about. So I personally think this is a move of, if anything, a positive move for Esau to make, just because he wanted to please his father and mother. And, you know, I mean, I don't think it's a good idea to take three or four wives, but I don't think it's a good idea to take two either.

He'd already done that. And once you've got two, I don't suppose you're preaching too much by taking 10 more. You know, I mean, you've already kind of ruined the whole monogamy ideal.

So I don't really see this as critically of Esau as some do. Now, Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night because the sun had set and he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head and he lay down in the place to sleep.

Now, this place that he stopped was called Luz, although we know he renamed it Bethel before the story is over. But Luz was a city already and it had probably walls like most cities did and gates. And he got there after sundown, which means the gates would have been shut and he couldn't find lodging inside.

He perhaps had intended to make Luz by nightfall and find lodging there, but he didn't. And therefore, and I think this was 40 something miles. I don't remember the number.

Maybe Frank has that number that he's gone. I believe it was 40 something miles he traveled in that one day, if I'm not mistaken, which would have been pretty fast moving, even if it was 40 miles. Perhaps it was not the first night.

I don't know that we are. I don't know if we're told that this is the first night of his journey. It might be the second night.

But he finding the gates shut, the sun being down, he just took a stone to put his head on. Now, I've always, when I was a kid reading this, I always thought he just slept on a rock, which I thought, well, that guy's a tough character. And he was a soft man who lived indoors and now he's sleeping on rocks instead of pillows.

But in all likelihood, he folded up his garment and put it on, you know, a folded garment on the rock. The rock was for elevation, but not for, you know, I'm sure he had something cushioning it since that would not be an impossible thing for him to do. I don't think he was trying to be like a Hindu ascetic or sleep on a bed of nails or anything like that.

And that rock is mentioned only because it becomes a matter of mention later on in the story. Then he dreamed and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth and its top reached to heaven. And there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

And behold, Yahweh stood above it and said, I am Yahweh, God of Abraham, your father and the God of Isaac, the land on which you lie. I will give to you and your descendants or your seed. Also, your seed shall be as the dust of the earth and shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south.

And in you and in your seed, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and I 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 spoken to you. Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, surely Yahweh is in this place, and I did not know it.

And he was afraid and said, how awesome is this place? This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. Now, we'll read in a moment about how he responded to that and the vow he made, but I'd like to look for a moment at the things that God said to him.

Of course, much of what God said to him initially was just what he had said to Abraham and Isaac. You know, I'm I'm your God. I mean, I'm with you like I was with your parents.

You're going to your descendants, your seed are going to inherit this land here, Canaan. But he said in verse 14, also your descendants or your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, which does definitely speak of plural descendants and you shall spread abroad. That is, your family, your seed will spread abroad to the West and the East and the North and the South.

And in your seed, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. So the the East and the West and North and South really is a way of speaking of regions far beyond the small land of Canaan. He says, I'm going to give your descendants this land that you're lying in, which is the land of Canaan.

And then I'm going to give you more. You go east of there and West and North and South of you go every direction around the world. And I'm going to and your seed will be there, too.

And of course, this anticipates what only the New Testament makes clear. And that is that those from all nations who come into the Messiah Jacob seed Abraham seed. They become Abraham seed.

Those who are of the faith of Abraham are the children of Abraham, Paul said. And Jesus made a similar sounding prediction. We find in Matthew chapter eight when this centurion, who was a Gentile, came seeking aid from Jesus because the man's servant was sick and dying.

And Jesus said, I will come and heal him. And the man said, I'm not worthy to have you come under my roof. And then he explained how he knew that Jesus had the sufficient authority just to give the command from there and the servant would be healed.

This is tremendous faith, really, when you think about it, because. I mean, it's hard enough to believe that some incurable illness would be healed, even if the healer is present to put a hand on it. But some might say, well, yeah, that happens all the time, because, I mean, there are psychosomatic illnesses and so forth.

The presence of the healer sometimes encourages the victim and so forth. And he might even have tricks up his sleeve that are not visible to the average person. But when it's a matter, just give the command and a sick person far away will get well, he's obviously saying that Jesus has powers that transcends human powers all together and that are, as it were, omnipresent.

And that he is almost recognizing the deity of Christ, or at least the divine authority of Christ. And Jesus is amazed at this man. In Matthew 8:10, when Jesus heard that, he marveled and said to those who followed, surely I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel.

He means among the Jews. He has not found the kind of faith that he's found in this Gentile Roman centurion. But then Jesus makes this prediction in verse 11.

And I say to you that many will come from the east and the west and sit down with Abram, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness and they'll be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Now, don't let the word kingdom of heaven confuse you.

He means the kingdom of God. He's not talking about heaven. He's talking about the kingdom which he has announced is at hand.

The kingdom that he was establishing, he says, this kingdom will be inhabited by God. Inhabited by people who are not the natural children of the kingdom. Now, the natural sons of the kingdom are the Jews.

They were the ones who originally had the promise of the kingdom given to them in the old covenant. They were the children of that kingdom. But he says those children, because of their unbelief, because I have not found faith like this man's faith in Israel.

Those in Israel who don't have this faith, they're going to be cast out into outer darkness. They're not going to be part of my kingdom. They're not going to be part of my movement.

They're not going to come into the church, in other words. They're going to reject Christ because they don't have faith in him. And they are, ironically, the natural heirs of the

kingdom.

Remember Jesus said to the Jews in Matthew 21 and verse 43, I believe it is, he said, therefore, the kingdom of God is taken from you and given to a nation who will bring forth the fruits of it. And that's what Jesus is referring to here. He says, many will come from the east and the west.

He means outside of Israel, Gentiles from other lands will come and be part of the kingdom while the natural heirs will be, ironically, excluded. In Luke 13, 29, which is the parallel to this, Luke 13, 29, we find that this statement is a little more sweeping because in verses 28 and 29, Luke 13, 28, 29, it says there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God and yourselves thrust out. They will come from the east and the west and from the north and the south.

You see, in Matthew's version, it just says the east and west part doesn't mention the north and the south and will sit down in the kingdom of God. So people from all different lands outside of Israel will come to be part and partakers of God's kingdom. But he says you yourself, speaking to his Jewish neighbors and so forth, are going to be thrust out.

This is the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy besides the one we just saw in Genesis and Isaiah, Chapter 43, verses five and six. Isaiah 43, five and six. God says, Fear not, for I am with you.

I will bring your seed from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, give them up and to the south. Do not keep them back.

Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth. Now, many people, especially of the dispensational camp, believe this is a prophecy about the gathering of Israel in the last days back into the land of Israel. The Jews, the diaspora who are scattered throughout the world, that he says he's going to bring them back from the east and the west and the north and south.

However, Jesus borrowed this language and applied it to not that, but to Gentiles coming into the kingdom, even even as he was speaking, that some were coming in like that centurion. There were those among the Gentiles who had faith such as was not found among Israel. And so I believe Jesus is actually alluding to this particular passage in Isaiah.

I will bring your seed, Abraham's seed, Israel's seed, Jacob's seed from the north and the south and east and the west, my sons, my daughters from the ends of the earth. That expression from the ends of the earth is echoed in Jesus' command to the disciples in Acts 1 8, where he said, you will receive power when all these things come upon you and you'll be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

You'll be gathering my sons and my daughters through your evangelistic efforts.

You'll be gathering my sons, my daughters into the kingdom through preaching the gospel of the kingdom to the ends of the earth. And so Isaiah says, bring my sons from afar, my daughters from the ends of the earth. This is a passage about the church age.

And Jesus had predicted using the same language, the north, the south, the east, the west are all going to come in the Gentiles and the children of the kingdom thrust out. But the first place we have this kind of language is in our passage in Genesis 28, where God says in verse 14 to Jacob, who is Israel, not yet Israel, but that's what he's later named. Also, your descendants, your seed shall be as the dust of the earth.

You'll spread abroad to the west and the east, the north and the south. And in you and in your seed, all the families, all the Gentiles, as well as the Jews of the earth will be blessed. Now, in verse 15, God said, I'm going to be with you and keep you wherever you go and bring you back to this land.

Jacob is not 100% sure of God about this because Jacob is not a man of faith at this point. He's impressed with the dream. It's a startling dream.

He knows it's from God. It's not just a strange dream. It's one that he recognizes as a revelation from God.

And by the way, there are numerous dreams in the Bible, several of them in Genesis even. Pharaoh's dreams, you know, the butcher's dream, the baker's dream, so forth, Joseph's dreams. There's a lot of prophetic dreams in Genesis and in the rest of the Bible.

Daniel and Zechariah especially have a bunch of them. And there are others. And so it raises questions about dreams.

You know, what are dreams? Dreams are very mysterious things, you know. You know, I had a dream last night, as a matter of fact, which I was puzzling over today. It was not prophetic.

It was not from the Lord, I'm sure. But I was just puzzling over it because in the dream I was deceived by somebody. And then I found out that I was deceived.

I thought, did my mind concoct my own deception? Where did that plot come from? You know, and it's just puzzling. Dreams are mysterious things. And I know my poor ex-wife used to be tormented by bad dreams every night when we first got married.

And she'd have dreams that were not characteristic of her. At least, she did not think so. And I didn't think so.

She had dreams that tormented her every night. And they torment her because they

depicted her or me as persons that we were not. And she'd either wake up angry at me or feeling guilty about her role in a dream or something.

And we were trying to figure out where these dreams come from. We assumed that those particular dreams that were tormenting her were from the devil. Some people, Freud and others, would say they come from the subconscious.

I don't really know where dreams come from. Sometimes our dreams actually reflect things that have happened during the day, conversations we've had kind of are echoed in the dreams. And it seems perhaps that those dreams are merely the regurgitation of the days past events into our mind as we sleep.

But others are not easily explained that way. And I myself have had, I think, four, if not five, in the last 40 years, dreams which I awoke from knowing that they were from the Lord. And later confirmation came proving to me that this was indeed God speaking to me.

There are dreams by which God speaks to us, but we need to be careful about assuming that all dreams are prophecies from God. I believe they have a variety of sources. A friend of mine, now deceased and since repented, had led a Christian community in Oregon which was a cult.

And he and his wife were there with like two other couples and some single women. And he ran that community by dreams, his dreams. Sometimes the other brothers had dreams too, but every dream he had he assumed was prophetic.

And eventually these dreams led him into sleeping with all the women in the community because he's having dreams about it. And that's an excellent example of somebody who perhaps overgeneralizes the source of dreams. Because some of his dreams, especially early ones, were truly inspiring, edifying, and arguably prophetic.

When I first met him, some of the dreams he shared basically struck me as profoundly prophetic dreams. That's why he became my friend. It was much later it came out that his dreams were leading him astray.

And I'm willing to believe that some of his dreams were from God. But he couldn't distinguish between those that were and those that weren't. And so either the devil or his own flesh led him through many of his dreams in the wrong direction, into sin.

By the way, he later did repent and he served God purely and faithfully after the cult was disbanded and he since died of cancer. But I believe he's with the Lord. But he was really misled for a season there by his dreams.

And in my experience, which is limited with dreams, I mean, I have lots of dreams, I suppose. I don't remember most of them when I wake up. Sometimes I do.

But the times I would say that I felt that God really gave me a dream that was prophetic. In every case, I woke up alarmed. I woke up in a cold sweat.

I woke up with a strong sense that God has revealed something to me that I needed to know. And later exploration confirmed that this was in fact true. In many cases, information that I could never have guessed, that my mind would never have generated.

I had no suspicions about it whatsoever previous to the dream. And often it was a revelation of something I definitely had to know. And I thought, well, how do I know when these dreams are from God when they're not? And yet it was distinctly a subjective thing that I woke up with a subjective conviction this was from God.

And I was right in each of those cases. And likewise, in the Bible, when people have dreams that are from God, it seems like they wake up knowing that it was from God. Certainly these people have other dreams besides the ones recorded in Scripture.

The Scripture has no reason to record the dreams that weren't from God. But I'm sure Jacob had dreams probably most nights. But this dream, he woke up alarmed and startled.

Remember both Pharaoh later on in Joseph's story and Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel's story had these strange dreams and they woke up perturbed. Their sleep left them. They couldn't rest until they found out what it was about.

And I suspect that that's usually the case when someone has a dream that is from God. It's more than just the ordinary memory of a dream when you wake up. It's like there's some strong conviction and sense that God has spoken.

And that certainly was Jacob's reaction. Jacob awoke from his sleep in verse 16. Surely Yahweh is in this place.

I did not know it. 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.

Now, what was it he had seen? He had seen in his dream a ladder or a staircase. The word in the Hebrew can refer to either one. And it was obviously an access to heaven.

Its foot was on the earth. Its top was in heaven. Yahweh sat at the top.

Angels of God ascended and descended on this this ladder. And apparently the information that was conveyed is that God in heaven is superintending the events of earth from this spot. He sends his angels out to do his will.

They come back bringing reports and so forth. They ascend and descend from this spot where Jacob is lying. This is the spot that heaven is accessed from.

This is the gate of heaven, he said. And it really made a profound impression on him. And you may be aware that Jesus made reference to this in John chapter one, when he met Nathanael.

Nathanael almost certainly is the same man who's later called Bartholomew and one of the twelve. When Jesus met Nathanael in verse 47, John 147, Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said to him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile. No guile means no hypocrisy or no duplicity, no deceit.

Nathanael said to him, How do you know me? And Jesus answered and said to him, Before Philip called you when you were under the fig tree, I saw you. Nathanael answered and said to him, Rabbi, you are the son of God. You are the king of Israel.

And Jesus answered and said to him, Because I said to you, I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You will see greater things than these. And he said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, Hereafter, you shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man, meaning upon himself. Now, this reference to seeing the angels of God ascending and descending, this phrase is found only once elsewhere in Scripture, and it's clearly an echo of that earlier place, which is the story of Jacob's dream.

So that in Jacob's dream, he saw at the gate of heaven a ladder upon which angels of God were ascending and descending from earth to heaven and vice versa. And Jesus said, The time will come, Nathanael, when you'll see me in that position. You'll see me as the ladder.

You'll see me as the access, the gate of heaven. You'll see me as the way, as the door, as the one through whom the angel descend and descend at the command of God. That in other words, you'll find it as Jacob found himself surprised to know that he was in the presence of the gate of heaven.

You will come to the place where you experience a similar surprise. Only it'll be the Son of Man. It'll be me that you will recognize as the gate of heaven.

And so that is how Jesus applies this. We could actually suggest, I suppose, that this ladder that Jacob saw is Jesus, although it's not necessary to say quite like that. It's possible that the ladder is simply what Jacob said it was a gate of heaven.

And Jesus is saying to Nathaniel later, that's what I am, too. That's that's what you will come to understand about me as you follow along and get to know me better. Now, Genesis 28, 18 says, Then Jacob rose early in the morning and took the stone that he had at his head set up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it.

And he called the name of the place Bethel, which means the house of God. But the name of that city had been Luz previously. Then Jacob made a vow saying, if God now

notice at this point, he doesn't use the word Yahweh, though he does later.

He says, if God will be with me and keep me in this way that I'm going and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then Yahweh shall be my God. And this stone, which I have set as a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me, I will surely give a tenth to you.

So, you know, Jacob is already bargaining with God, saying, I'll do this if you do that. And he's not coming to God on, you know, like full surrender unconditionally. God, I see that you're in this place.

I see that you've got a claim on me and on my ancestors and on my future seed. And I am your man. He could have said that, but he said, well, I'll give you I'll give you a test, God.

I'm going away for a while. I don't know what the future holds, but you said you'll be with me. You said you'll bless me.

You said you'll bring me safely back. If you do all that and if you prosper me and do all the things I want and bring safely to my father's house, then I'll do you a huge favor. I will let you be my God.

And I'll give you this rock to be your house. And I'll give you 10% of all the wealth you give me. Now, that is obviously a deal God could never refuse.

How could how could God pass up a great deal like that? A rock for a house, 10% of the wealth that he himself provides. And Jacob as one of his men. You'll be my God, Jacob says.

Now, this statement makes it very clear that Jacob is saying you are not currently my God. If all these things transpire, as I suggest, then the Lord will be my God. I'll wait and see.

Now, of course, God did do all that Jacob requested, which is the incredible humility of God to stoop to accommodate such a selfish individual who acts as if he's in the bargaining position with God. God doesn't even say, Jacob, you're not in the bargaining position, but because I want to do these things, I'm going to do it. And I don't want you to think that I'm somehow your servant, that you can just snap your fingers and tell me what to do.

God doesn't refuse at all. God just accommodates him. God's humble enough not to even have to defend his own dignity in a situation where some wimpy little jerk is acting like he's on God's level or above God's level.

God's just God's secure. He doesn't have to prove himself. And so Jacob, you know, he

claims he makes the conditions and makes this magnanimous offer to God.

And yet God actually takes him up on it. Now, and by the way, when he does, when God does meet those conditions, Jacob does fulfill his vow, as we shall see. But that's going to be in 20 years from the time he made it.

20 years or possibly even a little more. Now, I might just comment before we pass this chapter to the next, that this is the second time we read in the Bible of somebody giving a tenth of their stuff to God. The first time was obviously back when Abraham met Melchizedek back in Genesis 14.

Among the other things that are described as being transacted in that scene, Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of the spoils of the battle. And now this is the second time that someone offers God a tenth. These two incidents in the life of Abraham and Jacob often are given as proof that tithing was a primitive obligation that was known by the patriarchs and perhaps even before the patriarchs, maybe in the days of Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel, that God made it clear to man that he expects a tithe of all his produce.

This point is usually made because there are those like myself who do not believe that tithing is an obligation taught in the New Testament. Now, I want to make it very clear what I mean by tithing, because some people actually mistake the word tithing for giving. I've heard many people use the word tithe and it's clear from what they say that they really mean just giving.

And so if they think when I say I don't believe tithing is taught in the New Testament, that they think I'm saying I don't believe giving is a New Testament obligation. There's hardly anything that's a greater obligation in the New Testament than to give, because that's what love is. Love gives.

The word tithing specifically refers to taking 10% of your increase and giving that in lieu of other obligations to give. Now, many churches teach that Christians are obliged to, are obligated to give 10% to their local church, but they often say after you've done that, then of course there's other giving you may wish to do to other organizations and so forth. But the 10% goes to the local church.

Where they get that is a tremendous stretch. They go to Malachi 3, where God castigates Israel for neglecting the tithe which he had commanded them to bring. And he urges them to reform and to bring their tithe into the storehouse.

Now, the storehouse, of course, is in the temple. The storehouses were where the grain and produce were stored in the temple for the Levites to eat at their leisure. It was their support.

But the teaching goes like this. It's called storehouse tithing, and they say, the

storehouse is where you go to be fed. And therefore, your local church is the storehouse.

And therefore, God says bring the tithe into the storehouse. That means to give your 10% to the local church. Whatever you give beyond that is your business, but the 10% belongs to the local church.

Well, this particular teaching is flawed in virtually every statement that it makes. First of all, the local church today does not correspond to the storehouse in Malachi. For one thing, the local church as we know it today does not exist in the Bible times, neither the Old or the New Testament knew of the thing that like what we call the local church.

In the New Testament times, the local church would be all the Christians in a town, not one of many independent organizations in a town. Calling themselves each a local church and each having some kind of claim on members of the body of Christ exclusively in that town. These people are our members.

I mean, to illustrate what I mean is if you start attending a church and they say, would you like to join our church? Suggest sometimes say, well, this is a Baptist church. Yeah, I would like to join this church. But do you mind if I also join the four square church, the Assembly of God, the Methodist and the Presbyterian church? Is that OK with you? It's not going to be OK with them.

But these are all churches in the same town where all the same where the body of Christ in the town. Well, yeah, but but you can't be loyal to other churches. That's like polygamy.

They really they actually talk that way. They talk like your relationship to a local organization that they call a church is like marriage. If someone hops around from church to church, they compare that to someone who's got mistresses in addition to their legitimate wife, as if there's something in the New Testament that resembles what they're calling a local church, a group of people living in a town separate and independent from the other Christians in the same town.

It's a phenomenon that rose only after the Reformation and has no parallel in the New Testament. So clearly the New Testament, if it doesn't even mention this kind of a local church, does not ever teach that you should tie to that kind of a local church. It doesn't even it's not even in their mind what that kind of an organization exists.

But more than that, whatever church you join, you go to, it may be where you are fed or not. Some churches don't feed much and people get their feeding elsewhere a lot of times. But even if the church is where you get fed, it's not corresponding to the storehouse in Malachi.

The storehouse is not where the worshippers went to get fed. It's where they came to give so the Levites could be fed. What they gave and put in the storehouse of the temple

was the temple.

The temple storehouse was not where the average Jew went to get his food. That's where the food he gave to the Levites was stored. Where the Levites got their food.

There's no correspondence here. The entire doctrine of storehouse tithing is a fabrication from day one and square one. And every there's not one thing about it that that's biblically valid.

The truth is that there's nothing in the Bible that says that Christians should give 10 percent to God. And the reason is because the Bible actually tells something else that kind of is in conflict with that. And that is that 100 percent belongs to God.

In the Old Testament, 10 percent belongs to God. The other 90 percent was permitted to do what you want to. In the New Testament, Jesus says in Luke 14, 33, whoever does not forsake all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Everything belongs to God in the New Testament, not 10 percent. To say that 10 percent belongs to God and the other 90 is at your discretion instead makes a distinction that the Bible would not support. The entire 100 percent of what God provides to you is at your discretion, but it's His.

And it is your discretion to steward what belongs to Him. In the Old Testament, that was not the concept. In the New Testament, it is.

We're stewards of God's things and it all belongs to Him. Do I believe in giving? Absolutely. Do I believe in giving 10 percent? No, that's much too little.

I would be ashamed if I gave 10 percent. I've been giving twice that since I was a teenager and more than that since. And to me, 10 percent is such a compromise.

For American Christians, who have so much more than the rest of the world has, even if they would live on 50 percent. Of course, most people can't live on 50 percent at the standard of living they have, but even if we reduced our standard of living to live on 50 percent, we'd be much wealthier than, what, 70 percent, at least 65 percent of the Christians the world over. And for churches to say, oh, you owe God 10 percent.

I do not understand that reasoning at all. It certainly isn't in the Bible. Now, of course, tithing was commanded in the Law of Moses, but Christians understand that the Law of Moses was for the old covenant people and there's a new covenant now with different provisions.

But those who say we must pay 10 percent to the church today say, well, wait a minute, you can't say it's part of the law because Abraham and Jacob paid tithe, that was before the law. Therefore, tithing is a principle that transcends the law. It's before, in and after

the law.

That's what they argue. But again, they're not thinking very clearly, as apparently Christians generally don't. And I personally think that non-Christians think even less clearly.

I think human beings are not clear thinkers and that is one of the biggest frustrations to me because it's not that hard to think clearly if you really want to. Ask yourself, OK, if tithing was indeed practiced before the law, does that mean it's necessarily required after the law? Well, you could ask yourself a similar question. Animal sacrifices were practiced before the law.

Are they still required in the new covenant? Circumcision was required before the law. Is it still required? Does it follow that because some people before the law did certain things or even were required to, that they are the same things that were required to do when Jesus has come and brought the new order. No, Jesus' own teachings define what the requirements are of the new order.

But while I would say that even if Abraham and Jacob did practice tithing, and I don't believe they did, but if they practiced it, then so what? They also offered animal sacrifices and circumcision. The question is not, did Abraham and Isaac have to do these things? The question is, do Christians, are Christians told to do these things or are Christians told to do more than that? You see, the desire to put Christians under the obligation to tithe is a desire for the church to get some kind of predictable income because there's a budget, there's salaries, there's a mortgage it may be to pay off. And it's always nice to know that the church is going to get about 10% of whatever the combined income is of the people.

Of course, it never really happens because most people don't tithe. I hear that Christians in America they don't give 10%. For the most part, if you average it all, I think about 3% if that, of the income of Christians in America actually gets given to the churches.

So no wonder the churches are whining about wanting their 10%. But by doing so, the churches are looking after their own financial interests rather than teaching Christians to be disciples as Jesus taught. The church would be satisfied if they could just get 10% that'd be an abundance for their needs.

I mean, they have only this many salaried staff and this much building. And if all those people were given 10%, the church would be flushed. That's good enough.

So teach people they have to get 10%. Or you could teach people what Jesus said, and that is, unless you forsake all that you have, you can't be a disciple. And we don't care whether you give it to our church or another church or the missionaries or to the poor.

Just give it to God, just like Jesus said. It's God's. It doesn't belong to an organization.

And it belongs to God. And you give to God in many ways. And giving to the poor, by the way, is one of the principal ways the Bible says.

He that shows mercy on the poor lends to the Lord, the Bible says. And Jesus told the rich young ruler, sell what you have and give it to the poor. He didn't say give it to my movement, give it to my organization.

He said give it to the poor and then you come follow me. Interesting, you know, Jesus was not the normal pastor. Most pastors wouldn't tell a rich man, sell everything you have and give it to someone else, not us.

That's what Jesus did. Anyway, the point is, I don't believe that Abraham or Jacob even practiced tithing. I do believe that Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils of that battle to Melchizedek.

That's a one-time deal. We do not read that Abraham made regular visits to Melchizedek if that were even possible. I believe Melchizedek was an appearance of Christ on the earth.

Where would Abraham find him at other times? Abraham had a long life of serving God. And we read of only one time that he gave a tenth not of his income, but of spoils of battle to this man Melchizedek to honor him. We don't read anywhere that Abraham practiced tithing in his ordinary economic life, nor that God commanded him to do it on any occasion, including the one time he did it.

And Jacob here seems to be coming up with the idea on his own. And he's not making a magnanimous offer. He's a cheapskate.

He's saying, God, you make me prosperous and rich, I'll give you 10%. Jacob's a bargainer. He's starting out low.

If God had said, make that 50, Jacob would have said, how about 15? And God said, 45. He said, 20. And I mean, that's sort of like Abraham is his grandfather bargaining with God.

But Jacob did apparently fulfill this vow later, 20 years later. But we don't know that he spent the rest of his life giving 10% of everything that came to him. He might have, but there's no record of it.

And therefore, we can't just assume that it's true, just because we might, if we were church leaders, we might wish to assume that it's true. There is no command prior to the law requiring godly people to give a 10th. There is no command of God after the passing of the law that commands godly people to give a 10th.

There is a command in the law for the godly people to give 10th because approximately

that percentage of the population needed to be supported. The Levites were one of the 12 tribes. They needed to be fully supported and there were the poor together.

It is almost certain that the needy needed to be supported by, you know, perhaps the population in that percentage. At least God felt it would be enough to cover all their needs. Our giving is not limited to 10%.

I mean, it could be if God leaves, because, you know, I want to make something clear. Stewardship isn't only about giving. Stewardship is about spending.

It is about giving. It is about, in some cases, saving. The idea is it is management of God's money.

It may be that there's times when God wants you to save up some of his money for something that he's going to need it for later on. It may be that he wants you to spend some of his money on your own and your family's housing and your family's transportation and other things that are necessary. The issue is not all about giving.

It's about managing what is God's. But the point is, if you are God's manager, you have to think of what are God's priorities. I've got God's possessions in my control with the responsibility to manage them as he would want them managed.

So the first thing I have to ask is, what are God's priorities? And helping the poor is always mentioned as one of God's priorities. Certainly the promotion of the gospel is another. Certainly supporting your family is a priority.

And whatever other special obligations accrue to you as a member of society, some of which may cost money, are there. Nobody is really in the position to judge another Christian about how they are stewarding, unless it is, of course, absolutely irresponsible. But there are no doubt, some Christians were called to sell everything and give to the poor and go off on the mission field.

And if they don't do it, they're wrong. But there are others who aren't called to do that. They're called to live in society and maybe even to have a lifestyle that approximates the norm of that society, for whatever reason.

God knows. It's nobody's business how somebody else stewards God's money. But it certainly is your concern how you steward God's money.

And so that is, I think, the biblical teaching about stewardship. And it does not include an obligation to tithe. Though I will tell you this, I have on occasion been a member of a church that did expect its members to tithe.

And so I gave a tithe to the church. I just didn't consider that that was a biblical obligation. I considered that was a condition that the church wanted me to meet as a

member.

So I gave a tithe to them, but I gave a lot more to other places. If the church had not asked for tithes, they might have gotten a lot more out of me. But they only asked for 10 percent, so that's all they got.

But anyway, the point is, there may be that God would lead you to tithe to a church. But if he does, it would be a mistake to think, and that discharges my full obligation of stewardship. That would only be a small part of it, probably.

Now, chapter 29, So Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east, that'd be in Syria or Padnerim. And he looked and saw a well in the field, and behold, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it. For out of that well they watered the flocks, a large stone was on the well's mouth.

I wonder if this is the same well where Abram's servant had met Rebekah, Jacob's mother. And it does seem like meeting women at the well, or the watering hole, we might say today. That's where men and women meet who are looking for the watering hole, I guess.

Well, they had a watering hole back then, too. It's the place where the sheep and the camels drank. And so he went there to meet the ladies.

And he looked and he saw this well, and it says, Now there was a large stone was on the well's mouth. Now all the flocks would be gathered there, and they would roll the stone from the well's mouth, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the well's mouth. That is, apparently they didn't want the water to evaporate there in the heat of the desert, so they covered the well.

And they wouldn't open it each time someone wanted water, because then it would spend too much of the time open. So they would just open it when all the shepherds gathered, and they'd all get the water at once and then cover it again. So that was the idea.

They didn't want to lose water unnecessarily. And Jacob said to them, I'm sorry, I guess there were shepherds already gathered there, but not all of them had gathered. Jacob said to them, My brethren, where are you from? And they said, We're from Haran.

Then he said to them, Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor? They said, We know him. So he said to them, Is he well? And they said, He is well. And look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep.

And he said, Look, as Jacob said to them, it is still high day. It is not time for the cattle to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go and feed them.

But they said, We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth. Then we water the sheep. Now these guys must have been kind of lazy.

He said, It's not time for all the sheep to gather together. So why don't you go graze the sheep? They didn't say, Well, our sheep are thirsty and need to be fed now because they're not going to open the well until the others get there. But it's not time yet.

So they're just going to hang around until it is time. You know, they're taking a short workday, apparently, while others are taking a longer day and therefore they have to wait for them to bring their sheep in. And now, while he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess.

And it came to pass when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, breaking the local custom, of course, and watered the flock of Laban, his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, not in a romantic way, but a greeting kiss on the cheek was a typical Middle Eastern greeting to a friend or someone you respected or felt affection toward, and lifted up his voice and wept. Now, she didn't know what this was about.

This strange old man came up, watered her sheep against the customs, kissed her and wept. So Jacob told her that he was her father's relative and that he was Rebekah's son. So she ran and told her father, just as Rebekah had done in the story where Abram's servant had told her who he was, and she ran home and told her family.

Then it came to pass when Laban heard the report about Jacob's sister's son, that he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. So he told Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, surely you are my bone and my flesh.

And he stayed with him for a month. Then Laban said to Jacob, because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Apparently, during that month, Jacob served him for nothing or maybe not for nothing, but served him. And there had been no defined wages.

And so Laban says, I think I want you to serve me longer, but not for nothing. Let's come up with some wage contract here. Should you serve me for nothing? Tell me what should your wages be? Now Laban had two daughters.

The name of the elder was Leah and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were delicate. Now it's not clear what that really means.

That word delicate is sometimes thought to mean weak. Some people think it means pale, maybe blue. In the Middle East, dark black eyes is an attractive and normal trait.

And a person with blue eyes, it's kind of ghostly. It's almost like it probably doesn't look normal to them. We who have European background are pretty accustomed to blue eyes, but that was very unusual there.

And it's possible this is a reference to her eyes being blue. In any case, her eyes, there was something about her eyes that was a defect as far as Jacob was concerned. It says, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance.

So that the eyes of Leah, the problem seems to be not that she was nearsighted, but that she was not beautiful in her eyes. Now it's possible that Jacob had never seen anything but the eyes of either woman. It's possible that in that culture they were wrapped all up.

He could tell in general what the form of Rachel was as her figure. But as far as her beauty is concerned, that might have been judged entirely by her eyes. It would appear that Leah's lack of beauty was assessed almost entirely by her eyes.

So, you know, we may not be dealing here with a full awareness of each other's looks here. He liked the eyes of Rachel, but apparently not Leah's. Now Jacob loved Rachel and he said, I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter.

And Laban said, it's better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me. So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seem but a few days to him because of the love he had for her.

Then Jacob said to Laban, give me my wife for my days are fulfilled that I may go into her and Laban gathered together all the men of that place and made a feast. Now it came to pass in the evening that he took Leah, his daughter, and brought her to Jacob and he went into her. Obviously, these women were very much covered up.

Apparently, even their eyes were covered at the wedding. Probably with a translucent veil. And so Jacob couldn't even tell who he was marrying.

And so after the wedding, he went into the wedding bed, the marriage bed, and slept with her. Apparently an unlit tent and did not know who he was with until the sun came up. Laban gave his maid, Zilpah, to his daughter Leah as a maid.

So it came to pass in the morning that behold, it was Leah. And Jacob said to Laban, what is this you've done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me? And Laban said, it must not be done so in our country to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfill her week and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years.

Then Jacob did so and fulfilled her week. So he gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife also. And Laban gave his maid, Dilhah, to his daughter Rachel as a maid.

Then Jacob also went into Rachel and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served with Laban still another seven years. Now, once we talk about the birth of these children from these mothers, which will be mostly in the next chapter, but there's a few of them at the end of this chapter.

We'll see that in the time that Jacob spent in Paddan Aram, he had eleven sons and one daughter. And he was there for twenty years. The question is, when did he begin having children? Now, it looks like he didn't get Leah until after he'd served for seven years.

So that cuts it back a whole twenty years. He was in there is cut back to fourteen in which he would be married to Leah. And then if he married Rachel a week later with the agreement that he work another seven years, then he'd have Rachel and Leah for those fourteen years to have these eleven children.

Now, the problem, there's many problems with this because the children then would still be very, very young. At the time, at the end of this twenty year period and when they go back to the land of Canaan and yet later stories about them, particularly about Benjamin and Judah, would suggest that they were older than they could have been on this scenario because they seem to have married shortly after coming into Canaan. But if Jacob had married Leah, let's say seven years after his visit, then there would only be thirteen years.

The oldest child would be twelve years old coming into the land of Canaan. But Judah was not the oldest child, but the third child. That would make him no older than ten years old.

And yet he must have married when he came into Canaan and he was too young. Benjamin, on the other hand, would be only maybe about six years old and yet thirty three years later he had ten sons. And so there are issues here.

Some people believe that Jacob married Leah and Rachel at the beginning of his stay and worked off the seven years afterward for each woman. But it's difficult because the wording doesn't sound that way. To see it that way, you pretty much would have to say in verse twenty.

So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed but a few days to him because of the love he had for her. It would seem that that would simply be a summary of what happened later after the marriage that we read about. And it's possible, but awkward.

So there is some dispute as to exactly when these women came to be his wife. But the main thing here is that he was deceived by his uncle Laban and he was not content with the outcome. This is ironic because he had deceived his own father and certainly expected his father to be content with the outcome.

He'd gotten a blessing that his father had intended for Esau and Jacob never thought of

giving it back or sharing it with Esau. He just figured, you know, snooze you lose. I got I was the wittier one.

I'm the one who made the deal that works for me. Well, Laban made a deal that worked for him and Jacob ends up with Leah. Just like Isaac ends up blessing the son he doesn't want to bless.

And Jacob was the deceiver in the first case and Laban the deceiver in the second. But when Jacob was on the receiving end of the deception, he was indignant and not not pleased to live with the result. In other words, he wasn't pleased just to have Leah.

He was in love with Rachel. He wanted her too. Now this, I think, was a mistake on his part.

It is true that some good came from the marriage to Rachel and that Joseph and Benjamin both came from there. But it's hard to say if there had been no Rachel that God wouldn't have brought about the same result from Leah alone. God's model is his ideal is certainly monogamy.

And Jacob probably should have done what Isaac did when Isaac realized that he had blessed Jacob. Well, the Lord's will is done. He'll be blessed.

Jacob should have said, well, I was fooled. But God's will has been done. I've got Leah.

That's the one God wanted me to have. There's much reason to believe that God did want him to have Leah rather than Rachel. Leah, for example, is the only one of these women who got buried in Machpelah with the rest of the family and him.

Just in the providence of God, Rachel happened to die elsewhere and be buried elsewhere. Leah is with Rebecca and Sarah as the wives of their husbands who were buried together in Machpelah. Also, Leah gave him six sons, fully half of the sons that he got from four women.

The other three women gave him two each. But God opened her womb and blessed her, gave her six and could have given her all 12 if the other women hadn't been involved, perhaps. What's more, when Leah names her children, more often than not, she refers to Yahweh in the reason she gives for naming her children.

She says, I will praise Yahweh or Yahweh has blessed me. She seems to be a person of Yahweh. Rachel only uses the generic word God.

And she names her children often seemingly with reference to her competition with her sister. And so Rachel doesn't seem to be such a godly woman and Leah seems more so. Leah seems to be the innocent victim of this deal.

Her father gives her to a man who didn't want her and then she has to share him with

her sister. And there's this competition and it's an ugly picture. But Leah seems nonetheless to be the one who has character, who has some measure of loyalty to Yahweh, who is a peaceable person and whom God blesses with six of the 12 children, not least of which is Judah, through whom the Messiah came.

The fact that God brought the Messiah through Leah's children, not through Rachel's, is no doubt significant also. So there's a good reason to believe that Jacob probably should have just been content to find himself deceived and with Leah. I mean, it wouldn't be easy to be content.

You'd be indignant that someone deceived you and the woman you wanted, you didn't get. But just seeing it from God's point of view, it looks like God made this happen to him, just like God made Jacob get the blessing through a deception that Jacob had perpetrated. It's like he has received, he has been Jacobed by his uncle Laban.

And we need to take a break there and we'll come back to the end of this chapter in chapter 30, where the children begin to be born. And that begins to be a turning point, of course, in the story. So here we will take our break.