



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



GENESIS 28 - 33

Genesis 28

28:6-9 - "Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Paddan-aram to take to himself a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he charged him, 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 Paddan-aram. So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth."

Esau is now paying close attention to the interaction between Isaac and Jacob. He notices for the first time that Isaac is concerned that Jacob not marry any of the women of Canaan. This is interesting that only now does he become aware of his father's standards for marriage. This passage from an earlier time reveals there was some kind of serious communication gap between Isaac and Esau. "When Esau was forty years old he married Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite; and they brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah." (Genesis 26:34-35). The two women Esau had previously married were from the Canaanites. We are told his wives brought grief to Isaac and Rebekah, yet only now does Esau come to realize that his marriage choices have displeased Isaac. There are two possible explanations for Esau not knowing before now that his father was displeased. Either Esau was incredibly dense and just did not pay attention to his father's training, or, more likely this reveals the failure of Isaac as a father.

It was Isaac's responsibility as a godly father to teach and train his sons in the ways of the Lord. The significance of the father's role in the passing of covenant responsibilities from one generation to the next was highlighted by the Lord in His statement regarding Abraham. "For I have chosen him, so 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 upon Abraham what He has spoken about him." (Genesis 18:19). Abraham demonstrated for Isaac the importance of a fitting marriage choice when he sent his servant to find Isaac's wife. We see no such concern that Isaac showed toward Esau when it came time for him to marry. We are told that both Isaac and Rebekah are unhappy about Esau's marriages, but there is no indication that Isaac ever sat Esau down in advance and taught him and appealed to him to exercise wisdom in his choice of whom to marry. If Isaac had done so, and Esau had rejected his father's wise counsel in rebellion, then Isaac would have grounds to be grieved. But, if Esau was given no training or spiritual preparation and chose unwisely, then Isaac had only himself to blame for neglecting his responsibility as Esau's father.

28:10-13 - "Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants."

This is the first direct revelation of the Lord that Jacob had ever experienced. The Lord chose to make Himself known to Jacob differently than He did to Abraham or Isaac. The Lord revealed Himself first to Jacob in what we could call an indirect manner. God had appeared and spoken audibly to Abraham as a comparison. With Jacob, God first approached Jacob in a dream. We are meant to understand this as a spiritual, or revelatory dream. God, at times, chooses to communicate to people in dreams. One of the advantages of dream communication is that the person having the dream is the observer as a kind of captive audience. The person having the dream is in no position to argue or resist the message of the dream. God has Jacob right where He wants him here. Jacob is ripe for picking since he has just left all of his familiar surroundings and his heart is uncertain regarding his future.

The details of his dream have great spiritual weight and still speak to us today. Jacob sees a "ladder", but the Hebrew word used can also be translated as a stairway. The stairway started on the earth and reached into heaven. This was truly a "stairway to heaven." Jacob was not on the stairway, but observing those who were. The angels of God were ascending and descending on this stairway or ladder and above it, at the top in heaven Jacob saw the Lord. As he saw the Lord, the Lord spoke and confirmed to him the blessing of the Promised Land, indicating that God was confirming that he would be the covenant representative to carry on for Abraham and Isaac.

The meaning of the stairway is the part that still speaks to us today. The stairway links earth and heaven. the angels as God's servant messengers were traveling on the stairway carrying His assignments to the earth and returning to heaven for new assignments. There is a critical New Testament link to this event. Jesus referred to Jacob's dream and applied its meaning to Himself in a surprising way. And He said to him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." (John 1:51). The ladder / stairway that Jacob saw was a prophetic symbol of the special role of Christ in God's dealings with the earth. Jesus is the stairway to heaven. He is the link between earth and heaven. God's blessings travel to us through Christ, and our only hope of approaching God in heaven is through Christ.

28:14 - "Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

The Lord confirms to Jacob that through him the great blessings covenant will be established. There are two aspects of this blessing that identify the dual purpose of the Lord for Jacob and for us as believers. The two aspects of the blessing of the covenant are that he will first get the blessing of the Lord, and second he will be a blessing to all the families of the earth. The first aspect in which Jacob receives the blessing of the Lord upon his life is not the end goal of why the Lord blessed him. God's purpose is not limited to simply blessing Jacob more than others so that he would have a great life. God's purpose in blessing Jacob so greatly was so that Jacob would become the source of blessing for all the families of the earth to be blessed. This "all the families of the earth" concern of the Lord's is not a new concern just introduced to Jacob. This is a key element that was in God's heart right from the beginning of what He first spoke to Abraham. "And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Genesis 12:3). God's plan throughout history has been to chose some and cause them to represent Him to the rest. This was fulfilled in part in Israel's best moments as a covenant nation when the other nations of the world learned more about the Lord through them. Yet, Israel was a poor and inconsistent representative of the Lord to the nations.

The ultimate fulfillment of this all families purpose is realized in Christ. God sent His Son to fulfill this promise made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Through Jesus all the families of the earth are blessed with the greatest blessing of salvation. This passage describing the scene around God's throne in heaven shows this promised fulfilled. "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;" (Revelation 7:9).

28:15-22 - "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." Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it." 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." So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. He called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

Up until this point of Jacob's life story, God has always been present in the background, but never in the forefront of Jacob's awareness. Jacob certainly knew all about the Lord. He grew up in the one family on earth at this time that was in covenant relationship with the Lord. Jacob had been exposed to the things of the Lord his entire life. In all of his choices, actions and words up until this event, we never hear Jacob refer to the Lord directly or show any indication of having his own relationship with Him. In a sense we could say that Jacob's relationship with the Lord was really through his father Isaac's relationship. Up until now, Jacob is always seen leaning on himself and his own cleverness rather than on the Lord in faith. It is not so much that doesn't believe in the Lord, it is more that he has never had a personal encounter with Him as Abraham and Isaac had. If Jacob is going to be the covenant representative for the next generation following Isaac, then he is going to have to know the Lord as Abraham and Isaac did. There is a well known saying that captures the essence of this situation. The saying is that "God does not have any grandchildren." The point is that none of us can have a true relationship with the Lord through someone else. We must all come to know the Lord ourselves in a direct and personal way.

Of course, Jacob cannot initiate a relationship with the Lord any more than we can. Jacob just laid down to sleep. It was the Lord that made Himself known to Jacob. The Lord's promise to Jacob that He would not leave him until He fulfilled His promise should be interpreted as a promise of life long commitment and companionship. Jacob's response is to declare a new spiritual perspective and to make his first vow to the Lord in responsive commitment. The Lord has opened Jacob's spiritual eyes. Jacob now recognizes that the Lord was present in the a circumstance that until he went to sleep seemed to him to be empty and fearful. The next morning Jacob renames this place Bethel, which means the house of God. The principle applies to us as well. Throughout history and even today it is common to refer to church and in earlier times, the temple as the house of God. The idea being that we go to church to meet with God. For Jacob, the new

perspective that he gained, that would also reshape his life, is that wherever he was in the world he was in the house of God. Wherever God is present and chooses to reveal Himself is the house of God.

Genesis 29

29:1-6 - "Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the sons of the east. He looked, and saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for from that well they watered the flocks. Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large. When all the flocks were gathered there, they would then roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well. Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran." He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know him." And he said to them, "Is it well with him?" And they said, "It is well, and here is Rachel his daughter coming with the sheep."

Between the revelation at Bethel in the last chapter and the arrival of Jacob's first son Reuben, the Lord is silent and at first glance does not play a major role in the developments in Jacob's life. We were meant to remember though that the Lord had promised Jacob that He would be with him. The Lord goes with Jacob on this journey and is active in each development, even if His role is quiet and hidden. These events are filled with the providence of God in which He is weaving various lives and circumstances together in a way that fulfills multiple purposes. In the next important development following Bethel, Jacob arrives in the east at "a well in the field". It could easily have been anyone's well, but it just happens to be the well that Laban's family used for their flocks and most likely was the identical well that played a key role in the life of his father Isaac when Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for Isaac. Not only is this well connected to Laban's family, Jacob happens to arrive just when Rachel, his destined bride to be is arriving at the well to water her sheep. This parallels the perfect timing of his mother Rebekah arriving at the well when Abraham's servant had first come to this same place.

We can interpret these as coincidence, which acknowledges the importance of these events coming together in just the right way, but evacuates the combination of events of any spiritual significance. Or, we can identify them for what they point to behind the scenes, which is God's providence. Providence describes the sovereign work of God hidden from casual observation. At times, God providentially works in the circumstances of believers in ways they do not recognize except in hindsight. In this situation, Jacob received no audible or clear direction from the Lord to travel to this specific well. He simply traveled until he arrived where God was quietly leading him to go. Jacob probably was not even

aware of God's subtle but powerful hand directing even the literal steps of his feet that led him to this specific spot. There are many developments in my life that served the Lord's purpose for me in which I could recognize His hand only after arriving there. Learn to not overlook the significance of the providential leading of the Lord in your own life circumstances.

29:10-12 - "When Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted his voice and wept. Jacob told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father."

Jacob finds his future bride here in a "chance" meeting at a well of water. This is the second in a very interesting series of four similar well encounters in the Bible. These four meetings at a well of water are separated by time and circumstance, but they all share a common thread of spiritual significance. The four meetings all involve a man who is a stranger arriving at a well only to be met by a young marriage eligible woman. The result of each encounter is a marriage that was "meant to be". The first three encounters are all in the Old Testament. 1) Abraham's servant meets Rebekah, the future bride of Isaac. 2) Jacob meets Rachel, his own future bride. 3) Moses meets Zipporah, his own future bride (Exodus 2:16-21). The similarity of these three Bible stories may again be coincidental, or we can recognize God's design as they together point forward to a fourth and final similar meeting at a well.

The fourth meeting is between Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4:6-14). An important detail to that story is found in the name of the well. "and Jacob's well was there. So Jesus, being wearied from His journey, was sitting thus by the well. It was about the sixth hour. There came a woman of Samaria to draw water..." (John 4:6-7). Jesus met the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well. The spiritual similarity of all four stories is in the theme of a young man finding his bride at a well of water. The spiritual significance is finally revealed in the conversation between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. He uses the physical need for water as a symbol for the salvation that only He can provide from the well of God's grace. "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well, and drank of it himself and his sons and his cattle?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." (John 4:12-13). Jesus reveals Himself as the One Who is greater than the patriarch Jacob. As the Samaritan woman believes in Jesus as God's Messiah, she is saved and is spiritually identified as the future bride of Christ along with all those who believe in Him.

29:18-20 - "Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than to give her to another man; stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her."

Jacob's perspective and attitude is a strong example for young believers in the midst of today's culture. We live in a culture that permits and even promotes instant gratification in the relationship between young men and women. Jacob loved Rachel. He wanted her for his wife. Yet, in this circumstance, he was not able to provide an appropriate bride price to her father Laban. Rather than grumble about her unattainability, or attempt to circumvent the standards of her father, he offered to work for her hand in marriage, by enlisting in Laban's employ. His offer of seven years of work (not seven days, or weeks, or months), is critical because the offer is an expression of the value he sees in Rachel. Because he truly loves her, he values her. Because he values her, he volunteers to work for seven years as her bride price. Laban appreciates Jacob's offer and agrees to his terms.

Jacob then served for the full seven years. Rachel is promised to Jacob during these seven years, meaning she is not free for any other man, but at the same time she is not yet given to Jacob. This would be similar to our culture's engagement. They belong to each other for these seven years and are near each other in Laban's household, but they are not free to consummate their union until the seven years are complete. Jacob shows true character during these seven years by honoring both Rachel and her father by not crossing the line with her at any time in that seven years. His desires for her are held in check by his love for her and his commitment to righteousness. The Lord gives us a peek into Jacob's heart during these seven years so that we would honor Jacob for his righteousness and learn from his example. "...they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her." Lust can't successfully wait even a few hours or days, but love turns years into days. Lust demands while love patiently waits.

29:25 - "So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?"

The time for the reward for Jacob's godly patience has come. He has waited for seven years and now he can have what he has so strongly desired. In the morning following his wedding feast Jacob discovers the shocking truth. He has actually married Leah and not Rachel. This was all Laban's doing, as the father of both women has manipulated Jacob in order to resolve a cultural problem of not marrying off his daughters out of birth order. Laban feels justified in his actions and when Jacob confronts Laban in righteous indignation, Laban not only does not apologize to Jacob, he insists that his actions were necessary. Laban has acted on the familiar principle, "the end justifies the means."

Even though the text does not mention Jacob questioning the Lord in this development, we should ask, "Where was the Lord in this?" The Lord had promised to be with Jacob. Why doesn't the Lord step in and prevent Laban from deceiving Jacob? Our only two options are to think that the Lord did not care enough to stop it, or, as we should conclude that the Lord intended this to happen for His greater purpose in Jacob's life. The Lord's purpose even in this unwanted and extremely challenging development had both an immediate impact on Jacob and a long range benefit. The long range benefit is that the Lord will ultimately bless Jacob in this situation by giving him a full twelve sons who will become the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. The first and immediate purpose of the Lord, though, before that blessing is revealed is in the pain of the deception itself. Remember this is Jacob the deceiver. This is the Jacob that had impersonated his own brother Esau to steal his blessing from Isaac. Now he is forced to taste the same as Leah impersonates her sister Rachel in order to steal the blessing of marriage. Jacob will learn from this first hand the pain that deception always causes. The Lord designs this development as His discipline in Jacob's life. The Lord's promise to bless Jacob does not mean he can avoid the Lord's discipline. In fact, the promised blessing requires that Jacob first receive the Lord's discipline in order to prepare his heart to handle the blessing when it comes. The path of true discipleship always travels through discipline on the way to the promised land.

Genesis 30

30:1 - "Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die."

We saw at the end of chapter 29 that Leah had just given birth to her fourth son, Judah. Rachel has been closely observing her sister's fruitfulness and comparing it to her own inability to have children. She is struggling with a growing frustration born from jealousy. There is a subtle, but important distinction between jealousy and envy. The envious person strongly desires what another person has. The jealous person possesses something of value and is fearful of another person taking their possession away from them. As an example, in the Lord of the Rings story, Gollum suffered from extreme jealousy in his possessiveness over his "precious", the special ring that he valued above all else. We might expect Rachel's heart to be tempted with envy here as she sees Leah bearing children with Jacob and she cannot. If it were envy, then the focus of her heart would be to have children for herself because of her strong desire to be a mom like Leah. Instead, her issue is jealousy. Watching Leah bear children makes her fearful that Leah will take something precious away from her. What is it that Rachel becomes afraid of losing to Leah?

Rachel's fear is to lose Jacob's special affection, and her own place in this extended family. Since their wedding week years before, Leah had the privilege of being the first wife married to Jacob, but Rachel always had Jacob's heart. She was more attractive in both face and form (Genesis 29:17) than Leah, and Jacob loved her, while Leah was unloved by Jacob (Genesis 29:31). Because of the great value placed upon fruitfulness in bearing children and sons in particular, Rachel became concerned that Leah would win Jacob's heart away from her. Though Jacob had never given her any overt reason to have that concern, her jealousy had grown to dominate her perspective. The fear colored her perspective to the point where she was not able to contain it and she was driven to confront Jacob. Her communication to him was not in the form of baring her heart's struggles to her husband in hope of gaining his comfort and encouragement. Rather, she blurted out what was essentially an attack on him, in which she blamed him for her situation. In her rational mind, Rachel had to know that it was not Jacob's fault, because he had successfully fathered four sons already with Leah. Nevertheless, she demands of him that he solve her dilemma. In order to strengthen her demand, she frames it as a life or death issue. It was not life or death, but her exaggeration expressed the depth of her problem.

30:2-4 - "Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children." So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her."

In his response to Rachel, Jacob does not show mature understanding and sensitivity as a godly husband should if his wife is struggling with serious heart issues. We do not see Jacob consoling her, reaffirming his love for her and gently leading her back to the Lord in prayer. Instead, we see Jacob react in kind to Rachel's demand and accusation. He has been attacked, and he flares up in anger toward her. What Jacob says in response to Rachel is theologically accurate and true, but how he says it is not meant here as a redemptive teaching moment to help bring her heart back on track. His answer really is Jacob spitting out the truth in an inappropriate way. Jacob essentially shoots back at her that her condition is not his fault, it is God's fault, and he goes on to imply that since God is withholding children from her, that the blame is really hers. His insinuation is that this would not be happening to her unless she deserved it. There is no hint in the story that Rachel "deserved" her condition, and Jacob's answer is a classic example for husbands in how not to handle the heart struggles of their wives.

Rachel seems to be ready for Jacob's inability to satisfy her desire because she immediately proposes a roundabout solution. We do not know if she learned of this "solution" from hearing the story of Abraham and Sarah, or whether she came up with this idea on her own. She proposes using her maid Bilhah as a surrogate mother so that she would be able to adopt the child as her own. Sadly,

Jacob does not even seem to hesitate. There is no hint of resistance on his part. It is likely that his decision to follow Rachel's plan is his way of appeasing her and satisfying her frustration. His example of leadership here is as poor as his example as a husband in responding to his wife's need. Even though Rachel proposed this idea, Jacob was under no spiritual obligation to simply capitulate and allow her to take the lead in this way. He should have followed his father's example, rather than his grandfather's example in two similar circumstances. Abraham neglected to pray when Sarah was barren. But, Isaac did pray. "Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived." (Genesis 25:21). Jacob has grown in faith since the experience of seeing the Lord at Bethel, but when he needed to lean on Him here, he instead leans on natural wisdom.

30:8 - "So Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed." And she named him Naphtali."

In spite of Rachel's struggle, and Jacob's poor leadership, God is still at work in their lives and circumstances. He blesses the family with the birth of two sons through Rachel's maid. Rachel's heart is further revealed in the name she chooses for the second adopted son. She calls him Naphtali, which means "My wrestling." The wrestling in view is not playful, but describes a life and death struggle. Sadly, her perspective has not grown in the couple of years since she made her demand of Jacob in verse one. Her wrestling has not been with her own jealous tendency in which her opponent would be herself. She saw her opponent as Leah. In her mind, they are locked in a death match struggle for the affection of Jacob and the position of prominence in the family. In remaining focused on her sister for this period of time in this spiritually unhealthy way, Rachel has played into the hands of the evil one.

Like Rachel, we are engaged in a life and death struggle, but not against other people. "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places." (Ephesians 6:12). Rachel erred in wrongly identifying Leah as her enemy and rival. Her place in Jacob's heart, and her position in the family were in the hands of the Lord. She could have trusted Him with her heart's desire and with her fears and anxieties. Instead she choose the way of the flesh and attempted to resolve her problems her own way. It is worth noting that while Jacob had an eventual total of twelve sons, and each was significant as a head of one of the twelve tribes of Israel, god chose a special role and privilege for two of the twelve sons. The two most significant sons in the ensuing history of Israel as a nation were Levi and Judah. Levi would become the tribe of priests that would serve the Lord in His temple. Judah was the son God chose to establish His kingly line of David. Jesus would be born from the line of Judah. These specially honored sons were both born from Leah, the unloved and unwanted wife, but who chose to name her son in praise of the Lord (Genesis 29:35) rather than as a way to exceed her sister.

30:14-16, 37-39 - "Now 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." But she said to her, "Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son's mandrakes also?" So Rachel said, "Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he lay with her that night... Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white which was in the rods. He set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the gutters, even in the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink; and they mated when they came to drink. So the flocks mated by the rods, and the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted."

There are two circumstances in this chapter that have confused believers, and which are spiritually similar despite the difference in the events. The two similar situations had to do with Rachel acquiring the mandrakes from Reuben, and Jacob using the peeled rods of trees in breeding the flocks. The confusion for many believers is due to the way that these stories are told and whether the Bible is making the point that Rachel and Jacob are successful in their endeavors because of the mandrakes and the peeled rods. Let me be clear and say a definitive, "No!", this is not the point of these two stories. Mandrakes are a plant from that part of the world that were commonly considered to have the properties of an aphrodisiac. They are also known as "love apples" to this day for that reason. We do not know whether the peeled rods was a common practice of that culture for breeding, or whether Jacob came up with that bright idea on his own. The spiritual similarity of both stories is in this: two believers (Rachel and Jacob) use a magical approach to try to accomplish what they most desire. It's magical, not because either approach actually had any real power to change Rachel's barrenness, or Jacob's breeding of his flock, but because they believed that doing so would change their circumstance.

What they both indulged in is superstition. Here is the definition of a superstition. A belief, practice, or rite irrationally maintained by ignorance of the laws of nature or by faith in magic or chance. Rachel's mandrakes should not receive credit when she finally gives birth to her own son, Joseph. Jacob's peeled rods should not receive any of the glory for the flock producing in his favor. In both cases, the Lord caused the favorable result, and not what they superstitiously added to the situation. Even today, believers often maintain many superstitious practices in the same way. Whether it is wearing a cross (not as a witness but for extra protection), being careful not to say out loud what they don't want to see happen (for fear that their words will then cause it to happen), anointing chairs in the sanctuary before a church meeting (because then the person that sits in it will be more affected by the service), or any one of dozens of other superstitions. The

Lord intends for us to grow up out of childish and foolish superstitions and become people of mature faith whose minds are informed by His Word and whose hearts are anchored to Him and not to "magic".

Genesis 31

31:4-7 - "So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field, and said to them, "I see your father's attitude, that it is not friendly toward me as formerly, but the God of my father has been with me. You know that I have served your father with all my strength. Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; however, God did not allow him to hurt me."

Jacob has received a clear word of direction from the Lord and he is obediently moving to obey that word. His first step shows some growth on his part in the spiritual leadership of his household. As we have seen, Jacob has not always been the best leader even though he knows the Lord and is called by God into a leadership role. He has had to grow into his role as a godly leader. From my own experience as one who has been called by God into spiritual leadership, I can testify that God does not necessarily call someone into leadership that is already a perfectly formed leader before they begin to lead. Spiritual leadership requires a measure of maturity and a lot of on the job training. Here Jacob shows growth by his first move once he receives the direction from the Lord to return to the land of his fathers. Jacob does not immediately leave, but instead he calls his wives and takes the time to effectively communicate his direction. His intent is to enlist their agreement and support in this move. He shares his own heart regarding the struggles he has experienced over the last 20 years of serving their father, and then he declares to them the word from the Lord he received in a dream. God honors his communication with them by both having already prepared their hearts for this change and causing them both to see the necessity of it. This is the one time when Jacob, Leah and Rachel are all in perfect unity with God and each other.

Jacob's testimony of his 20 years of service to Laban is also a powerful testimony for us. His experience and the way he responded in it serve as a godly model for believers who must deal with difficult, unreasonable, and even deceptive employers. Jacob has been cheated by Laban. He has had his wages changed 10 times in 20 years, and he does not mean that he received 10 raises in his wages, but rather 10 adjustments that were all intended to favor the employer, not the employee. That Jacob is still very aware of all 10 changes of the last 20 years is a signal that he has not forgotten any of those incidents and that he was deeply affected by them. Yet, rather than becoming embittered and hateful toward Laban, Jacob continued to faithfully serve Laban in a way that prospered Laban. Jacob was able to continue to do the right thing and handle such a

difficult situation the right way because he believed that the Lord was greater than Laban. Jacob trusted the Lord to watch over him and the needs of his household even if Laban did not. The Lord did exactly that. God honored His covenant with Jacob and provided for him in spite of Laban's devious attempts to take advantage of Jacob.

31:8-13 - "If he spoke thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth speckled; and if he spoke thus, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth striped. Thus God has taken away your father's livestock and given them to me. And it came about at the time when the flock were mating that I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which were mating were striped, speckled, and mottled. Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.' He said, 'Lift up now your eyes and see that all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. 'I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.'"

As Jacob relates the word he received from the Lord in this dream we see that he has grown in his spiritual understanding since the events of chapter 30. At that time, we saw that Jacob used a superstitious method of peeling rods to place in front of the flocks when they mated in order to insure for himself that more striped animals would be born. At that moment, Jacob's perspective was focused on what he could do and control to take ownership of more of Laban's herd. Since then the Lord gave him the dream revealing that God was both fully aware and fully in control of how many of the goats were striped, speckled and mottled. As Jacob relates the experience to his wives, he takes none of the credit away from the Lord by telling his misadventure of placing the peeled rods.

Jacob has grown. He began as a clever, self reliant man, who was ready to manipulate, deceive, or do just about anything he saw as necessary to gain advantage for himself in relationship to others. Now, he is beginning to learn that God is really in charge, and not him. God is the One who sees everything that Laban has been doing for the past 20 years, and in that perspective, Jacob finds the grace to trust the Lord, not in himself as he had formerly done. He is not yet perfectly trusting the Lord in every situation, but he has already come a long way from where he began.

31:20-21 - "And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing. So he fled with all that he had; and he arose and crossed the Euphrates River, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead."

As much trust in the Lord as Jacob just showed in the way he handled the 20 years of mistreatment by Laban, now Jacob shows that he still has some room for growth in his faith. When it came time for Jacob to leave Laban he had a choice in how to go about leaving. Later, when Laban catches up to Jacob, he rightly rebukes Jacob for choosing an inappropriate way to leave. Jacob left in secret and fled from Laban. On a natural level, Jacob's actions could be justified. Laban has shown over the 20 years that he is a self interested man who would not be pleased to lose all the flocks Jacob was taking, not to mention the benefit of having the Lord's blessing because of Jacob's presence. Jacob anticipated Laban's unwillingness to let him go, and feared that Laban would even use force to stop him (Genesis 31:31). Jacob had a good and real reason to be concerned about Laban's reaction. The greater issue for Jacob, though, is how he would choose to handle this fear spiritually.

The Lord had spoken a clear word of direction to Jacob requiring him to leave. More than a bare word of direction, the Lord also gave Jacob a word of encouragement and comfort for the test ahead. "Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you." (Genesis 31:3). The Lord was gracious to give to Jacob just what he needed to hear to enable him to pass the test. In this case, Jacob failed this test by placing more weight on his own fear of Laban, than on his trust in the Lord to protect him. When the Lord promised that He would be with Jacob, that meant that the Lord would be there to make sure Jacob would reach the place where He was sending him safely. Jacob was not instructed by the Lord to flee in secret. He simply instructed Jacob to leave. Just like Jacob informed his wives, he could have given Laban the same respect and it would have been an opportunity to give testimony to the Lord's hand upon his life to Laban. Had Jacob told Laban about his dream, and the word of the Lord to leave, the Lord would have protected Jacob from Laban's response. Instead, Jacob's fearful choice only complicates all of their lives further.

31:24-29 - "God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night and said to him, "Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad." Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen camped in the hill country of Gilead. Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword? Why did you flee secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre; and did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Now you have done foolishly. 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 speak either good or bad to Jacob.'"

Jacob did not leave in the best, most spiritually mature way. He fled Laban moved with obedience toward the Lord mixed with fear toward Laban. We might expect the Lord to then use Laban to discipline Jacob for the wrong way in which he left. The Lord has two concerns for Jacob as he flees from Laban. The first is the Lord's priority to honor His own promise to Jacob and to protect him. So, the Lord intervenes to stop Laban from harming Jacob in his indignation. We see here the Lord setting a boundary around Laban and preventing him from crossing it. God is at work here to restrain the full expression of evil in order to protect His covenant interests in His people.

Even though the Lord restrains Laban from acting to physically harm Jacob, He does not prevent him from opening his mouth when he arrives. God had warned Laban about speaking to Jacob in this way, "Be careful not to speak either good or bad to Jacob." This did not mean he was forbidden from speaking to Jacob, only that he was not to in effect curse him. The warning is literally, "speak from good to bad." What he was allowed to do was confront Jacob and to rebuke him for the inappropriate way he had left. Laban is right to be offended that he was not even given the opportunity to say farewell to his daughters and grandchildren. Laban's rebuke is also the Lord's rebuke of Jacob's fear. The Lord is not beyond using even an unbeliever to hold a believer accountable to do the right thing. Laban's rebuke of Jacob provides Jacob the opportunity to speak openly to Laban about the issues he has held toward Laban for the last 20 years. All of the hidden things are finally brought to the light and in the process the Lord deals with both hearts as needed. The result is that true peace is established between Jacob and Laban for the first time in their relationship.

Questions from Genesis 30:

Question: 30:27 - "But Laban said to him, "If now it pleases you, stay with me; I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account." Is he using divination (Satanic) to discover that he is being prospered by Jacob being there?"

Answer: We are not given the back story details of exactly how Laban came to the right conclusion that it was really the Lord's blessing through Jacob that was the reason for his great prosperity. Laban is certainly capable of using wrong religious activity such as divination, because we discover in chapter 31 that he was the owner of a set of idols that he kept in his household. However, the word translated "divined" here has a range of possible meanings from "whisper a magic spell" to "diligently observe." In this case, since the Lord does not mention the household idols at this point, I am inclined to interpret Laban's statement here as his conclusion about the Lord's blessing from his own careful observations through the 20 years of Jacob's service.

Genesis 32

32:1-3 - "Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him. Jacob said when he saw them, "This is God's camp." So he named that place Mahanaim. Then Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom."

Jacob receives an unexpected revelation from God at time when he most needs it. The timing of the revelation comes right in between two overwhelming moments of crisis for Jacob in which he fears for his life. Jacob has just narrowly escaped from an uncertain encounter with Laban pursuing him on the journey back to the Promised Land. He is about to face an even greater test of his heart in the impending confrontation with his brother Esau, whom he has not seen for 20 years, but whom he has reason to believe is still embittered toward him. Right after one encounter with a potentially hostile force from Laban, and right before engaging Esau with an army of 400 that may be bent on his destruction, Jacob is given this unexpected encounter with a third army. Jacob does not ask for this experience, but the Lord knows that he desperately needs it, and blesses him with it. After leaving Laban, Jacob is met by "the angels of God". We are not given the detail of how many angels Jacob encounters here. We know for certain that there is more than one, because angels is plural. We are given a hint, however, which indicates that there is actually a large number of angels involved in this encounter. The hint is that after seeing the angels, Jacob declares, "This is God's camp." The term camp, used here, describes a place where an army camps at night.

God shows Jacob that the army of the angels of God is with him on this journey. Apparently, only Jacob sees the camp of the angels of God, so that this experience was designed by God just for Jacob. It is also interesting to notice that the angels who are messengers of God do not speak any message to Jacob here. Words are not needed, because their presence here is a powerful message from God for Jacob. Since God has promised to be with him, Jacob can be confident that those who are with him are far greater than any who might rise against him (II Kings 6:14-17). The meaning of this experience is significant for Jacob, and as always significant for us also. God knows Jacob's (and our) limit. He will not test him beyond what he is capable of handling by God's grace (I Corinthians 10:13). Having just had his faith tested to the limit, Jacob is about to face the greatest test of his life. Before the final great test, God strengthens Jacob for the test with this experience. We should be encouraged by seeing that God wants Jacob to pass the test, not fail, and that He not only prepares the test for Jacob, God also prepares Jacob for the test.

32:6-12 - "The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, "We came to your brother Esau, and furthermore he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him." Then Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people who were with him, and the flocks and the herds and the camels, into two companies; for he said, "If Esau comes to the one company and attacks it, then the company which is left will escape." 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 relatives, and I will prosper you,' I am unworthy of all the lovingkindness and of all the faithfulness which You have shown to Your servant; for with my staff only I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two companies. "Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children. For You said, 'I will surely prosper you and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which is too great to be numbered.'"

What we see in Jacob's response to the news of Esau coming to meet him with 400 men, is an inconsistent spiritual mixture. His response here really represents accurately Jacob's entire walk with the Lord up until this point. Jacob responds to the news with both great fear and great faith. It would have been ideal if he could have responded only with great faith, and not indulged in any fear. Certainly the awesome experience he had just had of seeing the camp of the angels of God could and should have strengthened his faith and overwhelmed his fears. Jacob shows that he not yet fully learned that God really is in charge of his life. Jacob fears for his life, but his life was actually in God's hands, not Esau's. Jacob will die when, where and how God determines, not Esau. Jacob may not yet be rock solid in his faith, but neither is he so fearful that he forgets to pray. It is also important for us to recognize that in spite of Jacob's struggle with fear, the Lord does hear and answer his prayer of faith.

Jacob's prayer shows that he does know the Lord, and he understands his true position in his relationship with the Lord. His prayer provides a good pattern for our prayers. Jacob first calls on the Name of the Lord and identifies Him as the God of Abraham and Isaac. The reason for this address is to call of the God of the covenant. We do a similar thing when we prayer to the Father in the name of Jesus. We are remembering that we only have covenant access to God through Christ. Then Jacob reminds God of His promise to Jacob. It is not that Jacob thinks God has forgotten, but his appeal is for God to now be faithful to fulfill His own Word. All effective prayers we pray today should be based upon at least one promise God has previously made in His Word. Jacob also shows his humility toward the Lord by remembering that all he has was given to him by the Lord, and that he deserved none of what he has received.

32:19-23 - "Then he commanded also the second and the third, and all those who followed the droves, saying, "After this manner you shall speak to Esau when you find him; and you shall say, 'Behold, your servant Jacob also is behind us.'" For he said, "I will appease him with the present that goes before me. Then afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me." So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp. Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had."

Jacob continues to show a mixture of faith and fear in his plan to approach Esau. Because the messengers that returned from Esau only announced his coming, with not encouraging message from Esau himself, Jacob now believes that Esau is coming to attack him. He decides to split his herds, servants and even his family into groups that will encounter Esau in stages. His plan is to buffer Esau's anger with successive generous gifts in the faint hope that Esau's anger will be progressively softened before he reaches Jacob. The gifts he marks for Esau total 550 animals which in that time would be the equivalent of a rich man's possession. Jacob is not fully trusting the Lord in this, but he is showing wisdom in his approach. "The fury of a king is like messengers of death, But a wise man will appease it." (Proverbs 16:14). The attempt to appease what he believes to be Esau's 20 year long anger by his generous gifts is wise on Jacob's part. It was taking Esau's birthright and blessing that originally caused Esau to hate him, and now Jacob is trying to heal the rift between them by showing he values Esau's acceptance and love more than he does the things that previously mattered so much to him. It is an important, but hard learned lesson for many, that people matter more than things.

However, the mixture in Jacob's plan is also displayed in his fear being greater than his leadership. Since Jacob believed that Esau was coming to attack his camp, he should have taken responsibility for placing his entire household in danger. The decision to send the animals ahead of him was a good one, but

there is no excuse for Jacob sending even his own wives and children ahead of him to face Esau before he does. Jacob should have shielded them from the possible danger, and instead uses them as a shield for himself. We see here that strong faith produces courage, while the fruit of fear is cowardice.

32:24-32 - "Then Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh; so the socket of Jacob's thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him. Then he said, "Let me go, for the dawn is breaking." But he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." So he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." He said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel; for you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed." Then Jacob asked him and said, "Please tell me your name." But he said, "Why is it that you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. So Jacob named the place Peniel, for he said, "I have seen God face to face, yet my life has been preserved." Now the sun rose upon him just as he crossed over Peniel, and he was limping on his thigh. Therefore, to this day the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip which is on the socket of the thigh, because he touched the socket of Jacob's thigh in the sinew of the hip."

As Jacob has sent all of his possessions, all of his servants, and even all of his family on ahead, he is now left alone with his fear. He is not completely alone though, because the Lord is present. At this critical moment, the Lord shows up to confront Jacob. This is a final test of faith for Jacob. Before the test, the Lord encouraged him with angels. Now, in the test, the Lord comes Himself to test Jacob in a surprising and unusual way. The Lord comes to Jacob in an initially hidden form of a man in the middle of the night. We are not told how it begins, but the next thing we see is Jacob wrestling with this man (who is actually the Lord). The word translated "wrestled" carries the meaning of "dusty", so they actually were wrestling on the ground together. The wrestling match lasted throughout the night with neither opponent prevailing. Just before daybreak, the man strikes Jacob where his thigh joins his hip and dislocates his hip. With his strength now gone, Jacob should be expected to give up. Instead Jacob clings to his opponent and refuses to let go. He has no hope of victory, but he tenaciously holds on to Him. By this time Jacob has discerned that this is more than a mere man, and he appeals for a blessing from Him.

The man asks Jacob his name, forcing him to confess that his is the "supplanter", because his name represents his entire life story of always from birth, when he had grabbed Esau's heel, grabbed everything he wanted by his own strength. Now God chooses this moment of truth to forever change Jacob's identity by changing his name from supplanter to the name Israel, which means God rules. The point of this crisis encounter with God is for Jacob to learn once for all that God rules over his life, not himself. Jacob limps away from this encounter with God as a lifelong reminder of who is really in charge. Jacob's weakness now

serves to always remind him of where victory is found. Jacob "prevailed" when wrestling with God, not by overpowering Him, but only by clinging to Him and refusing to let Him go until He was blessed by Him. Like Jacob, our strength in our relationship with God is found in clinging to Him alone.

Questions from Genesis 31:

Question: 31:55 - "...kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them." - Are we given examples in Scripture of how to bless others in this way? (Num 6:24-26?) Jesus also blessed his disciples in Luke 24:50, "...and He lifted up His hands and blessed them." How do we do that and when is it appropriate?

Answer: There does not seem to be one single method of blessing recommended in Scripture. There are a few examples given, and while there are some similarities, there is no clear pattern followed. Each person that does the blessing seems to be led by the Lord to do it in the manner they followed. The Numbers blessing you cited is a declared blessing upon the entire people of Israel. Laban's blessing was a kiss and a blessing (not specifically described). Isaac blessed Jacob with words (Genesis 27:27-30), Jacob blessed Joseph's sons by the laying on of hands and a declaration (Genesis 48:14-20), Jacob blessed his own sons with prophetic descriptions of their future (Genesis 49). One similar element in each case is that the blessing does not seem to be a daily or repeated occurrence. In other words it is not like praying daily for your children. It seems to be a single final communication of God's purpose for the blessed person's life. It also is always done by the spiritual head of the family. We don't see mother's doing the blessing, but the fathers.

Genesis 33

33:1-2 - "Then Jacob lifted 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 maids. He put the maids and their children in front, and Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last."

Jacob begins this day fresh from his awesome experience of wrestling through the night with God and holding onto Him until he receives His blessing. Jacob has no time to catch his breath from that experience, because as the day comes and he lifts his eyes he sees Esau and his 400 men approaching in the distance. Jacob proceeds to divide his family into four groups, each led by the mother of her own children. Why does Jacob do this? There is no cultural or social pattern that he follows here. This decision is fear based, and like all decisions we make based in fear, there is natural wisdom in the decision, but no spiritual wisdom from above (James 3:13-18). Jacob's fear is that Esau is coming filled with a 20 year old raging bitterness and that the 400 man army with him will

attack when they arrive. His intention in dividing the family by four groups of mothers and their children is the hope that even if Esau attacks the first group and kills them, his wrath may dissipate sometime before he reaches the final group. His hope is that at least some will be spared.

I describe this as natural wisdom because Jacob's plan makes a certain kind of sense from a practical standpoint if he were the general of an army, and his wives, maids, and children were his soldiers. However, his plan is devoid of true spiritual wisdom, because he fails to grasp that they are all his family, they are all precious, and none should be positioned for sacrifice on behalf of the rest. The impact of his arrangement on his wives, maids and sons is not described for us, but we can imagine how the ones placed in front must have felt. If they were uncertain where they stood in relationship to Jacob up until now, they now knew exactly how Jacob saw their place in the family's pecking order. Both maids with their children were the first shield for the rest. Then Leah and her children would shield the last group of Rachel and her only son Joseph who were clearly revealed as most precious to Jacob. The behavior of the other ten sons of Jacob toward his favored son, Joseph a few years later is not so shocking when we factor in the lifelong favoritism he showed to Joseph.

33:3 - "But he himself passed on ahead of them and bowed down to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother."

Jacob did not handle the dividing of his family with true wisdom, but here we see that he has changed for the better overnight. After dividing his family into the four groups, we might have expected Jacob to send them on ahead of him in four waves to meet Esau. The reason we would expect that is that the day before that was exactly what Jacob had done. "So the present passed on before him, while he himself spent that night in the camp. Now he arose that same night and took his two wives and his two maids and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. He took them and sent them across the stream. And he sent across whatever he had. Then Jacob was left alone" (Genesis 32:21-24). The day before Jacob had been willing to use even his own family to shield himself from Esau. Now, after the night of wrestling with God, we see a completely different decision from Jacob. Rather than using them to shield himself, Jacob passes on ahead of his family and approaches Esau alone, and in so doing, he becomes the shield for them.

This change of plan by Jacob is completely out of character for the man we have seen maneuver and manipulate his entire life. That man was clever, self-willed and only self-concerned. Now, overnight, he shows the character of a true leader. We should not credit this change to Jacob, as though he suddenly had a self-induced spiritual growth spurt. Instead, we should connect the overnight transformation of Jacob's character with the powerful influence remaining from the blessing of God upon him. Jacob had clung to God until he was blessed by Him. Jacob may not have known what form that blessing would take, but the first

and most important fruit of that blessing was internal in character change, not external in his circumstances. Jacob did not really need any more herds or servants. What he needed most was what God cares most about: the internal change that results from character development. Jacob stepping past his family to take the full brunt of the consequences of his own actions from years before was a powerful indication that God was changing him from a user of people around him into a true leader of people.

33:4 - "Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept."

Jacob fully anticipates the worst from Esau. He remembered well that he had cleverly gained Esau's birthright by manipulating him through his natural appetite. He also remembered taking his blessing by deception. The last time he saw Esau, he was enraged toward him and hated him. Twenty years had passed, but some offences only grow more bitter over the years, and Jacob feared this was so with Esau. When the moment he had so feared finally arrived, Jacob was amazed to receive not blows from Esau, but kisses of brotherly love and tears of joyful reunion. How was Jacob meant to understand this meeting with Esau? This was not Jacob dodging another problem with his cleverness or wits as he had so many times before in his life. The events of the previous night with God had finally broken Jacob's natural strength and reliance on himself. He had walked away from that encounter limping, but with the new heart perspective of clinging to God, rather than himself. Jacob had arrived at true faith by the grace of God and God was pleased with him (Hebrews 11:6).

The day before Jacob had prayed this prayer in anticipation of the encounter with Esau. "Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, that he will come and attack me and the mothers with the children." (Genesis 32:11). The way Esau greeted Jacob was God's answer to Jacob's prayer. God delivered Jacob from Esau's hand, not by leading Jacob in a military victory over Esau, but by changing Esau's heart and changing Jacob's heart. God intended these estranged brothers to be reconciled to each other and for the rivalry that had existed between them since birth to be once for all resolved in peace. The principle from Proverbs is displayed in this situation. "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." (Proverbs 16:7).

33:20 - "Then he erected there an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel."

When Jacob arrives in the Promised Land after his 20 year long absence, he purchases land. His first act on his new land is to build an altar and dedicate it to the Lord. The name he calls the altar holds spiritual significance in revealing what God has done in his life and the spiritual growth he has undergone as a result. The name El-Elohe-Israel means the mighty God of Israel. The name Jacob chose reflects his new perspective about God and about himself. Twenty years

before, when Jacob had fled Esau and the Promised Land to journey to Laban, he had his encounter with God at Bethel that one night when God gave him the dream of the ladder connecting earth to heaven. When he awoke from that dream he dedicated a pillar of remembrance to the Lord and made this promissory declaration to the Lord. "Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God." (Genesis 28:20-21).

Jacob's promised commitment to God twenty years before was a conditional promise. The condition was emphasized by his use of the key words, "If...then..." Jacob had promised that he would fully consider God to be his God if God would first be with him, keep him, provide for him and one day return to his father's house in the Promised Land safely. That day has now arrived. God has been 100% faithful to be with Jacob, to protect him, to provide for him and to lead him back to the Promised Land. Jacob's naming of this altar of worship reflects his remembrance of the commitment he had made to God twenty years before and his own fulfillment of what he had promised. He now declares without reservation and without any further conditions that God is his God. Additionally, Jacob does not name the altar El-Elohe-Jacob. He dedicates it to the mighty God of Israel, which is the name God had given him on the night they wrestled. It shows that Jacob has fully embraced now what God has done both for him and within him. He is a new man by God's doing and he honors God by accepting the new name that God has given him.