

Genesis 27-35: The covenant continues

By Bernard Gabbott

Memory verse:

*Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.
I will bring you back to this land,
for I will not leave you
until I have done what I have promised you.*

Genesis 28:15

This is our fourth year in Genesis.

We have seen the creation of the world, the breaking of the world (as humans sinned), and the commitment of God to the world that he made.

We have seen the covenant made with Abraham—a man God chose whilst he was worshipping idols. Through this man's family God committed to reversing the curse of sin, and bringing blessing to the world. Abraham was promised a land, a nation, and to be a blessing to the rest of the world.

We have seen Abraham grow into understanding of this covenant, a man who was declared right with God as he trusted God to do as he promised.

We have seen Abraham have a son, Isaac. Isaac married Rebekah. And they had two sons: Esau and Jacob. In God's grace—a consistent and central theme—Jacob was chosen to carry on the covenant. This was not because he was more worthy, nor because he earned it, but because God himself would bring about the reversal of human brokenness.

Last time we were in Genesis, Jacob and his mother had schemed to grab what God had already promised (another consistent theme!). The result was a looming split in the family of promise...

Study 1: Genesis 27:41-28:22

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 27:41-28:22
2. What is the family situation in Isaac's family? (27:41)
3. How does Rebekah respond, and what is her hope? (27:42-46)
4. What does Isaac do? (28:1-5)

How does this 'improve' the family situation? (28:6-9)
5. Jacob travels, as 'instructed'. On the way, he spends the night in the desert—what happens? Why is this significant? (28:10-15)

How does Jacob respond? (28:16-22)

Consider

1. What do you make of Rebekah's consistent response to the situation in her family? What could you surmise about her, and her relationship with God, in this?
2. How does Esau respond to his situation? What does this tell you about sin and its impact?
3. What impression do you have of Isaac in this drama?
4. What does God's 'dream-dealing' with Jacob tell you about God, and his methods? (cf. 25:23)
5. What do you make of Jacob's response to God's commitment?

Contact

1. What do we learn/are reminded of about the nature of God and his promises in this passage?
2. What do we learn/are reminded of about the nature of humans, who receive the promises of God, in this passage?
3. How does this passage help you look at other people—through what you have learned of God and people here?

Prayer

- Give thanks to God for his grace, and the gracious nature of his promises.
- Give thanks to God for the way in which he persists with sinful humans.
- Pray that God might give you the same grace that he has, towards other people.

Study 2: Genesis 29:1-30

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 29:1-30
2. Jacob is travelling 'east'. What does he see, who does he meet, and why is this important? (vs.1-12; cf, 28:2-5)

What do you make of Jacob's behaviour?

3. Jacob meets Laban—they are 'my own flesh-and-blood'. They come to an 'employment' agreement—what is it? (vs.13-20)

Who else do we meet in this situation? What do we learn of them?

4. How does this 'employment' agreement pan out? (vs.21-30)

What do we learn of Laban? Do you see any notion of 'own medicine' in this for Jacob?

5. By the time we reach verse 30, what type of family is hinted at emerging?

Consider

1. What aspects of Jacob's character do we start to see here?
2. How is Jacob meted out some form of judgement, and character development?
3. Where is God in all this? Can you see his hand? Where, and how?

Contact

1. Whilst we wouldn't want to be trite with Jacob's experience, what do we learn about the way God's commitment to his people (see 28:15) is played out in judgement, discipline, and character-development?
2. How might we experience the God of grace doing the same in us as his people, perhaps even doling out doses of our own 'medicine'? (see, for example, Hebrews 12:3-12)

Prayer

- Give thanks for the commitment of God who is with his people of grace 'wherever they are'.
- Give thanks for the fatherly discipline of God on his children.
- Pray for a growth in holiness and character as we submit to any discipline our Father might bring us.

Study 3: Genesis 29:31-30:24

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 29:31-30:24
2. What has the LORD seen, and how does he intervene? (vs.31)
3. What emerges is, as R. Kent Hughes calls them, a 'birth war'. Who has the first four sons, and who are they? (vs.31-34)
4. How does Rachel deal with the situation? Does this raise any questions for you? (30:1-8)
5. How does Leah respond? (vs.9-13)
6. What sorrowful scenario then emerges? (vs.14-21)
7. How does it all end? (vs.22-24)

Consider

1. How would you summarise this whole 'affair'?
2. Who is the key actor here?

What does this affirm about his character? (cf. Ps.113)
3. What does this 'birth war' reveal about humans?

Contact

1. What encouragement is there here, from the character of God and the nature of humans?

2. What rebuke is there here, from the character of God and the nature of humans?
3. What do you make of verses 22-24? How do they reveal the author's intent and purpose?

Prayer

- Give thanks for the gracious, merciful and all-encompassing concern of God.
- Pray that God reveal our dependence upon him, and guard our hearts from sin as we try to take matters into our own hands.

Study 4: Genesis 30:25-43

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 30:25-43
2. What does Jacob desire, and how does the 'negotiation' go? (vs.25-30)

What do we learn about Laban here?
3. What does Jacob ask for? (vs.31-34)

How does Laban conduct himself? (vs.35-36)
4. What does Jacob do? (vs.37-42)

What is the outcome? (vs.43)

Consider

1. What impressions are we given of Jacob and Laban here?
2. What explanation does Jacob later give of these events? (31:4-3a)

How are we seeing the fulfilment of God's commitment to Jacob here? (cf. 28:13-15)
3. What is revealed of the nature of God here?

Contact

1. What questions does an episode like this raise for you?

What problems does an episode like this raise for you?

What encouragement does an episode like this give you?

Prayer

- Give thanks that our God keeps his promises.
- Give thanks that our God works in ordinary life.
- Pray for a greater appreciation of the promises of God, and how they shape daily living.

Study 5: Genesis 31:1-55

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 31:1-55
2. What are the warning signs in Jacob's life? (vs.1-2)
3. What is God's command? (vs.3)
4. What does Jacob recognise, as he talks with his wives? (vs.4-13)

By now, Jacob has the family, and the wealth, that is part of the promise God made to Abraham and Isaac—he lacks the land.

5. What statement do Leah and Rebekah make? And what is the course of action? (vs.14-21)

What character trait continues to run through Jacob's family?

6. Laban chases after Jacob, and catches up with him. What happens? (vs.22-35)

What do we see of God's consistency in this episode?

What do we see of Jacob's family trait here?

7. Jacob is rightly offended, and speaks his mind. What does he say? And what does this reveal about Jacob's growth? (vs.36-42)

8. What emerges from this confrontation? (vs.43-55)

Consider

1. Do you see any change in Jacob's character here? If so, what? If not, why?

2. As Jacob flees from 'slavery', who is with him, and who has made this possible?

How is this seen?

Contact

1. What encouragement is given here for us as God's people today?
2. What, if any, pattern(s) are shown here as we look forward to Jesus?
3. What 'advice' could you glean from this episode about living as God's people in this world?

Prayer

- Give thanks for the patience and perseverance and faithfulness of God.
- Give thanks that God's consistency brings changes in we inconsistent humans.
- Pray for God to work in your character, to bring you to greater trust in him, greater obedience to him.

Study 6: Genesis 32:1-32

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 32:1-32
2. As Jacob leaves Laban, his heart was surely light. Now, as he continues to move, what happens? (vs.1-2)
3. Jacob initiates contact with Esau—why do you think this is the case? (vs.3-5)
4. The result is fearsome. What does Jacob do? (vs.6-12)

What do we learn of Jacob here?
5. What did Jacob do that night? (vs.13-20)

What did Jacob do for himself? (vs.21-23)
6. What happens that night? (vs.24-32)

What is the outcome of this?

Consider

1. As Jacob continues the journey home, what strikes you about him? What impresses you, what worries you?
2. What do you make of Jacob's actions in initiating contact with Esau, and then how he responds? (cf. Matt.5:23-25)
3. In what sense is Jacob's wrestle with the divine man a metaphor for his life? And how does the name change—and naming of the place—reflect this?

Contact

1. What encouragement do you find in Jacob here?

What rebuke do you find from Jacob here?

2. What do we learn of God in this episode?

How is this different/similar to how many of God's people view God?

Prayer

- Give thanks that God wrestles with us—and wins.
- Ask for God to work 'wrestling lessons' in you.
- Ask God to work a heart and action of reconciliation in you, in any relationship that needs to be reconciled.

Study 7: Genesis 33:1-20

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 33:1-20
2. What does Jacob see in the morning? (vs.1)
What is his response? (vs.2-3)
3. Describe the meeting between Esau and Jacob (vs.4-15)
Is there anything surprising, or familiar, or strange?
4. What do you make of the 'disengagement' from Esau in verses 12-17?

Why is this significant? (perhaps look at a map of the Promised Land...)
5. When does Jacob really enter the land? (vs.18-20)

In what way is this 'partial obedience'?

Consider

1. What is impressive about Esau here?

What is encouraging about Israel here?

In what way do we see a partial mixing of Jacob AND Israel in the behaviour of this man?
2. How is God central here—and recognised?

Comprehend

1. How might this be a model of reconciliation for us?

2. How might this whole episode show us the struggle of life as one of God's people?
3. What do we see of the character of God here?

Prayer

- Give thanks for the persistent work of God with his people.
- Ask for forgiveness for 'partial obedience' as one of God's people.

Study 8: Genesis 34:1-31

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 34:1-31.
2. Describe the three scenes here:
 - (i) 1-7:
 - (ii) 8-24:
 - (iii) 25-31:
3. What is your response to all this? What do you think of Jacob?

Consider

1. Looking back at Genesis 31:13, where did Jacob move to (32:18)?

Is this the Jacob who wrestles with God, or the Jacob who does his own thing? And what eventuates?
2. Is there anything in this account that seems redeeming, or encouraging?

Contact

1. What truth is revealed in this episode?
2. What strife is revealed in this episode?
3. What hope is there revealed in this episode?

Prayer

- Confess to God your 'half-hearted, almost obedience'.
- Mourn the state of the human heart.
- Give thanks that God himself never turns his back on his image-bearers.

Study 9: Genesis 35:1-29

Comprehend

1. Read Genesis 35:1-29
2. What is God's clear command, and how does Jacob respond? (vs.1-3)
3. How does God protect Jacob? And how does Jacob respond to God? (vs.4-7)
4. What emerges from God, between God and Jacob/Israel? (vs.9-15)
5. There are a series of 'tragic' events, all of which seem to have the stain of Jacob's consistent weakness... what are they? (vs.16-29)

Consider

1. What significance does God's call, and commitment, play here?

How does Jacob respond? What does this reveal?
2. Jacob cannot escape the 'residuals' - the baggage left by his sin. How does this play a role in this episode?

Comprehend

1. How is this episode a reassurance of the sovereign grace of God?
2. How is this episode a reminder of the wisdom, and necessity, of obedience?
3. How is this episode a solemn warning about sin?

Prayer

- Give thanks for the grace of God, which calls and commits and promises and changes and provides.
- Pray for the obedience that responds rightly to God's grace, in your life.
- Confess the nature of sin, and acknowledge the role its residual presence plays in your discipline (cf. Rom.1:18ff)