

For GC Discussion

- How do we respond to the remarkable grace God showed Jacob? How ought we to respond to the same grace shown to us in Christ?

- How does it help us to know that God is using everything in our lives to make us more like Jesus?

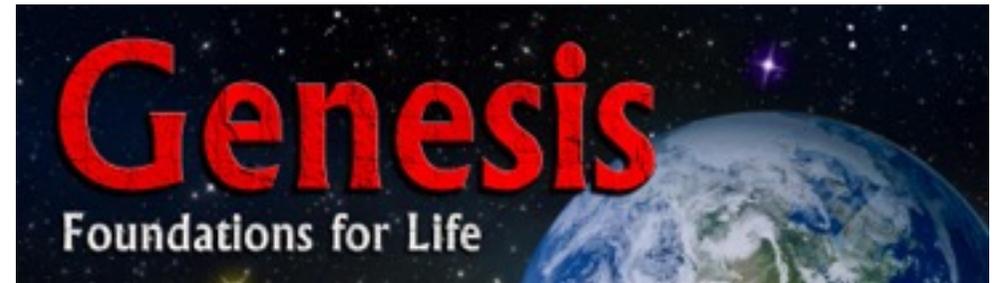
For the Kids

Did Jacob really deserve to be loved by God?
Why do you think God choose to bless Jacob?

Next Week: we will look at Jacob's return to his homeland and his preparations to meet again with his brother Esau.

Notes and Questions

For Worship: Listen to '*Who am I*' by Casting Crowns. You can find it on YouTube, or on the Hill City Church blog on the website.



Week 15: Jacob: The Schemer meets with God Chapters 28-31

This Weeks Summary

This week we continue our look at the life of Jacob as God meets him with an amazing promise of grace and favour despite Jacob's manipulation and deception to try and obtain the blessing his own way.

For Study:

This weeks text has the dual ideas of God's grace to Jacob, but also His commitment to changing Jacob into the man He wants Him to be. Below are some verses to read from both those ideas:

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| The grace of God | - Ephesians 2:1-10
- Romans 3:21-28
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-11
- 2 Corinthians 12:1-10
- John 1:1-18 |
| Sanctification | - Titus 2:1-15
- Romans 6:1-23
- 1 Peter 2:1-12
- 2 Corinthians 3:17-18
- 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 |

This week we focussed on the divine promise that Jacob receives at Bethel, but by the end of chapter 31 Jacob has worked 20 years for his uncle Laban and just as He does with all His people, God is surely using all this time to mould, shape and change the character of the one He has chosen to carry His promise. Here is a summary of where we find ourselves at this point:

Two very different brothers:

Last week we looked at the stark difference between the two sons given to Rebekah, and it wasn't just a physical difference, but a very real spiritual one. We didn't think much about Esau, but it is worth noting that he had a total disregard for things that really mattered - he was more than willing to sell his birthright off because he was thinking too much of his stomach! Esau despises his God-given birthright, whereas Jacob values these things intensely enough to listen to his mother's advice and imitate his brother to obtain the blessing of the firstborn. At the beginning of the account we see two men, neither of which is remotely deserving of the blessing of God, and yet God has clearly chosen Jacob to bear His promise, and will now begin the process of working in the heart and life of His chosen man.

Remarkable Grace:

There is nothing that makes natural sense about the episode in the second half of chapter 28. Jacob has done nothing to merit anything positive to happen in his life, in fact he's come across as a pretty rotten character, and yet, completely unprompted God chooses to turn up and make the promise of Abraham to this undeserving young man. What happens may well surprise or even offend us, but all that does is show us that we don't completely see humanity as God sees it. You see, none of us is any more worthy than Jacob is of God to be kind to us in any way. The only way any human being receives any of the blessings God loves to pour out on His world is because of His radical grace as demonstrated to Jacob here. The beautiful message of the Bible is that God chooses to lavish love, grace and mercy on people despite the fact that they fall way short of the standard that He sets by His own character. We should all be grateful today that God doesn't scan the earth looking for worthy people to bless, because He wouldn't find any. God looks over the entire face of the earth looking for sinners to whom and through whom He can display His underserved kindness, ultimately and most powerfully displayed in the death of Jesus on the cross for sinful men and women like you and me. In Jacob's life, just as in the rest of the Scriptures, the grace of God comes before he has done anything good, and then the process of changing this sinner into a saint begins.

Jacob's Test:

At this point in Jacob's life begins a period of time where God begins to work into His life the character that He wants to be there. It's fascinating that Jacob comes up against someone willing to do to him exactly what he has already done to his brother Esau. Laban promises Jacob his daughter Rachel in return for 7 years work, before deceiving him and giving his oldest daughter Leah instead of Rachel. Jacob has to agree to work for Laban for 7 more years in return for Rachel's hand in marriage, and following that he works 6 more years in return for a proportion of his flocks. At the end of his time with Laban Jacob decides that he needs to flee to get away from his uncle, and after Laban hurries after him to try and persuade him to come back, Jacob explains exactly how he's been treated:

These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. (Genesis 31:38-42)

Jacob has been mis-treated, taken advantage of, and manipulated just as he did to his father and brother. In all of this, God has surely been teaching him not to respond in vengeance as he might instinctively do, with more manipulation and deception, but to accept his treatment, and trust that the God of his father and grand-father was looking after him every step of the way.

Jacob's family is still pretty dis-functional (see the first half of chapter 20 especially) - everything isn't perfect, but as we'll see clearly, it's a changed Jacob that leaves the house of Laban and heads home to meet his brother Esau. Just as we saw in the life of Abraham, God takes Jacob through years of struggle, difficulty and relative insignificance because God is far more interested in developing Jacob's character than He is in any great things Jacob can do for Him. We too should be reminded again that everything God brings into our lives, whether it seems significant or not, and however tough it may be is all part of God's great plan to develop us into the people He wants us to be - and that is of eternal significance.