

(God is Great,)

God is Good

worshipweekly.com/God-is-Good.html

There was good reason for the ditty sung at the dinner table. Repetition and remembering are important. One can argue good is better than love. Love is a feeling. Whether love is good or evil depends on who or what you love and how you express it. Good, is good. "God is love" is not in the Hebrew Bible. "I will make all my goodness pass before you" (God says to Moses when Moses asks to behold His presence), Exodus 33:19. Let that be a teaser...

Isaac Jacob

Genesis 12-20

Sources

**Rational Bible: Genesis, Dennis Prager
Dennis acknowledges all his sources in
the book**

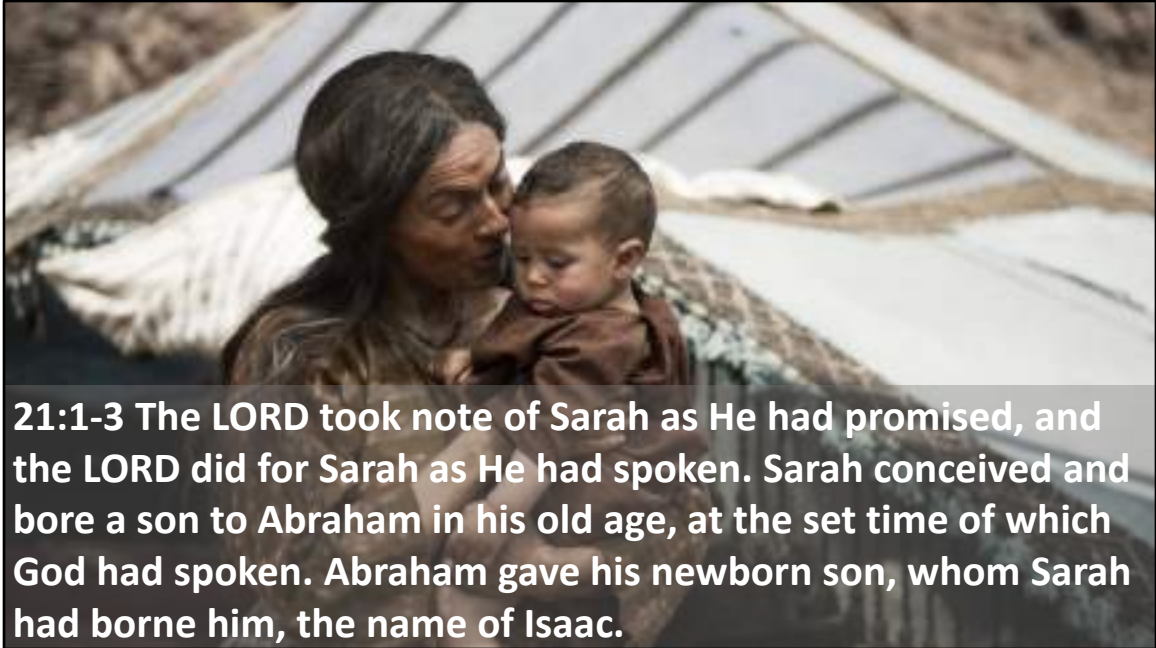
Sefaria.org (Bible translation used here)

Only 2 volumes out so far. Exodus was published first because of the Ten Commandments, which, if everyone followed, we'd be practically devoid of human-caused suffering.

Pragertopia.com, \$10/mth, all five books lecture series verse by verse, from some years ago, very different on the details but the big picture remains the same. 241 hours, 199 lectures. Or \$5-600/book CD, USB, download.

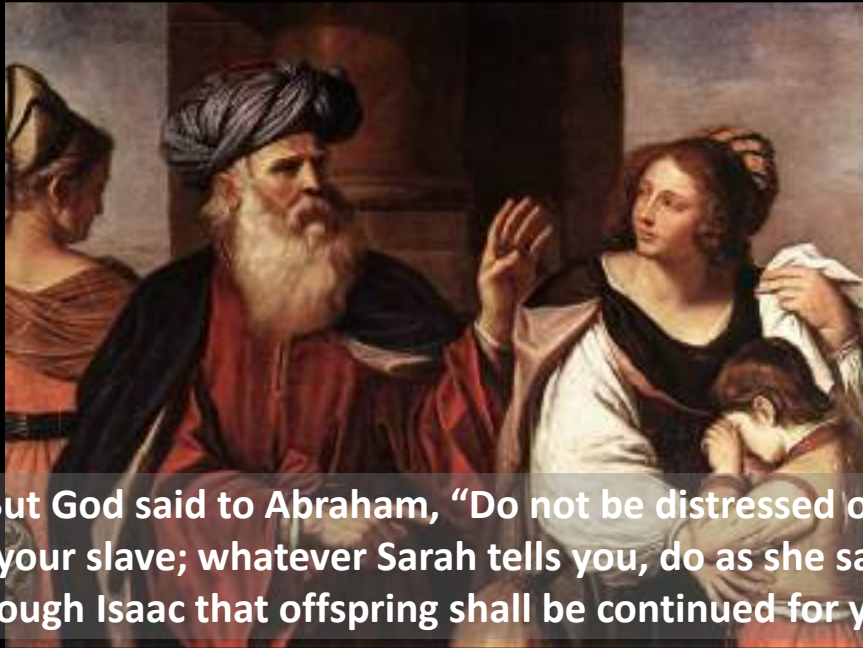


Family's are messy. Full of drama, deceit, lying, feelings, etc.
The Torah is very real about that. Dysfunctional families abound.
Even so, marriage and family are still the best way to go.



21:1-3 The LORD took note of Sarah as He had promised, and the LORD did for Sarah as He had spoken. Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken. Abraham gave his newborn son, whom Sarah had borne him, the name of Isaac.

Abraham is not mentioned. The Bible is not particularly sexist, otherwise Abraham would be the only one noted. Woman ultimate creation. Honor father and mother. Isaac means "laugh." Remember Abraham's and Sarah's first reaction to the promise of a son.



21:12 But God said to Abraham, “Do not be distressed over the boy or your slave; whatever Sarah tells you, do as she says, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be continued for you.

Isaac is about 2 and Ishmael about 16. Sarah sees them at play, gets upset, and tells Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. Few things distress a marriage more than childrearing, especially when one is a step-child. Abraham was understandably distressed, but God tells Abraham the above. God sides with Sarah, despite the nastiness, because Isaac was part of God’s plan.



21:15 When the water was gone from the skin, she left the child under one of the bushes,

Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael out, with meager provisions. Why? Didn't want to upset Sarah? God told him he would care for them?

Why did Hagar leave Ishmael to die?

God hears their cry and saves the two in the wilderness, at Beer-sheba.



22:1 Some time afterward, God put Abraham to the test. He said to him, “Abraham,” and he answered, “Here I am.”

Here begins the story of Abraham’s test, the Binding of Isaac. That’s a better name than Sacrifice of Isaac, as it was clear at the very outset it was test. God does not want any human sacrifice.

“Here I am” could better be translated as “yes, sir”, ready to fulfill a calling.



22:2 And He said, “Take your son, your favored one, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you.”

God says please. The text includes a Hebrew word “na” which occurs 60 times in Genesis and only 5 other times in the Old Testament. When used, God expresses that he knows the request is staggering.

Why didn't he just say “take Isaac”? Certainly makes the request all the harder.

The “Go” command here is the same when he told Abraham to leave his father.

Ishmael could have met any of the descriptions (son, favored, loved).



22:3 So early next morning,

Eager to perform God's commands. Eager to get it over with. Maybe he couldn't sleep. Maybe simply best to not waste daylight. Was likely a dream. Only Moses had "face-to-face."

Why no argument from Abraham (like with Sodom)? Particularly with the promise of forming a Great Nation seemingly going away?

Maybe A. was convinced his God is just and knows what's best.

Sacrificing kids was not unusual to the ancients.

In not fully understanding, A. represents every believer who comes after him.



Why sacrifice as the test. To teach another lesson. Human sacrifice was prevalent. God is asking A. will you do for me what other's do for their gods. Also, another radical difference in the Torah from other histories, human sacrifice is a no-no. Good people must be prepared to sacrifice. E.g. sending children off to fight a just war.

Will the good be as committed to good as the evil are to evil?
Human sacrifice was as prevalent as slavery, and both still exist.

**22:4 On
the third
day
Abraham
looked
up and
saw the
place
from
afar.**



No record of any talking during this period. You get the impression of silent resignation, automaton.

Did they really travel 3 days? More likely “3rd day” is an expression in the Torah to mean something is extremely significant.

Or, maybe God wanted to give Abraham time to regret compliance, see if he stick to it. And way too much time to think about what he will tell Sarah.

If here he looked up, maybe he’d been looking down the whole time, depressed.



22:7 Then Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he answered, “Yes, my son.” And he said, “Here are the firestone and the wood; but where is the sheep for the burnt offering?”

This (plus next couple verses) is the only dialogue in the Torah between A. and I. Isaac’s age is not stated, but he must be old enough to carry a load and understand what’s needed for this ritual.

A. spoke gently and affectionately, believing these were last moments together. Next, A. binds Isaac and puts him on the alter. Isaac apparently puts up no fight. He, too, is obedient.

Isaac carried the wood, Jesus carried the wood (cross). Sacrifice of the Son.

22:11-12 Then an angel of the LORD called to him from heaven:
“Abraham! Abraham!” And he answered, **“Here I am.”** And he said, **“Do not raise your hand against the boy, or do anything to him.”**



It took God to convince A. to do this, it took only an angel to stop him. The angel calls out to A. twice – it's urgent!

Nearly identical calling to Hagar when Ishmael is saved. Both A.'s sons were threatened with death, one by A. and one by Hagar. "Hold the hand" image is present in both.

The last part is the biggy. Human sacrifice is morally unacceptable. Another unique Torah contribution. Human and child sacrifice was common. This is the most dramatic teaching of human sacrifice, but it does occur elsewhere in the Torah.

22:12 ... For now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your favored one, from Me.”



So why the test? Did God not know what A. would do anyway? (not necessarily). Was it to teach Abraham something? Seems unnecessary. Maybe to teach readers something...

Faith demands sacrifice. Not human sacrifice as depicted here, but sacrifice. Rituals of deprivation (Lent, Mormons coffee/alcohol, etc.) to remind us of God requiring sacrifice.

Given the Jews history of persecution, every parent who raises a child in Judaism must realize the potential for that child to die prematurely.

The question of child sacrifice comes down to its moral necessity (e.g. off to a just war).

**22:17 I will bestow
My blessing upon
you and make your
descendants as
numerous as the
stars of heaven
and the sands on
the seashore; and
your descendants
shall seize the
gates of their foes.**



Abraham is blessed. Before, promised descendants that number the stars. Now sand grains on the beach. To the ancients, this 2nd accounting would have been far more impressive. Studies suggest about 108B humans have been born in all time. 7.5B alive today, 7%.

1 x 10²⁴ (+/-) stars. 1 x 10¹⁸ (+/-) grains of sand.

That many atoms would be in a dust mite!

22:19

Abraham then returned to his servants, and they departed together for Beer-sheba; and Abraham stayed in Beer-sheba.



What isn't there? Where's Isaac? Why not to where Sarah is? Ishmael also not in the picture.

End of Abraham's family. Isaac does not go with him. And does not go back to Sarah.

23:4 “I am a resident alien among you; sell me a burial site among you, that I may remove my dead for burial.”



Earlier, Sarah dies at 127. 120 (max lifespan) + 7 (Creation).

This verse and the rest:

At this, A. might have well questioned God for promising land in Canaan but not giving him so much as a burial plot. Instead, Abraham bought the land for Sarah's burial site.

Lesson: God makes promises that man might have to help make happen.

And in doing so, you must act decently (not just charge in doing what you think is God's will)

Chapter 24 – Finding a wife, Rebecca, for Isaac

- Longest chapter in Genesis, by far. More important to get married than to know how the world was created.
- How potential spouse treats strangers.
- Behavior, not intentions.
- Many people believe they are good because they assess their intentions, not the results.
- 3 mirrors:
 - Regular mirror, we see our face
 - Our writing, we see our mind
 - Our friends, see see our own character by those we attract.

24:67 Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebekah as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death.



LOVE

First reference to love was in Genesis 22:2 where God describes Abraham's love for Isaac. This is the second. First parent-son. Second spouse-spouse. The two greatest loves of life, in chronological order.

Isaac married Rebecca first, loved her later. Like Tevye and Golda in Fiddler.

25:8 And Abraham breathed his last, dying at a good ripe age, old and contented; and he was gathered to his kin.



Fulfillment of God's promise.

He and Isaac only two to die peacefully. Even Moses does not. It is rare.

"Gathered to his kin" – only the existence of an afterlife makes sense here.

Didn't mean buried next to (numerous negative examples).

Like with Xians, some Jews don't believe in an afterlife, some do.

Torah doesn't talk about it much, why? So we focus on life!

If God is just, and promises justice, then all the worlds suffering must be settled after life.

We don't live on through good works and the memories of loved ones. Meaningless, cruel. Children, etc, too will die? No children? Bad works usually live on much longer than good works.

It's either dust or afterlife.

25:23 and the LORD answered her, “Two nations are in your womb, Two separate peoples shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, And the older shall serve the younger.”



Her = Rebecca about to have Jacob and Esau.

God has not yet spoken to Isaac.

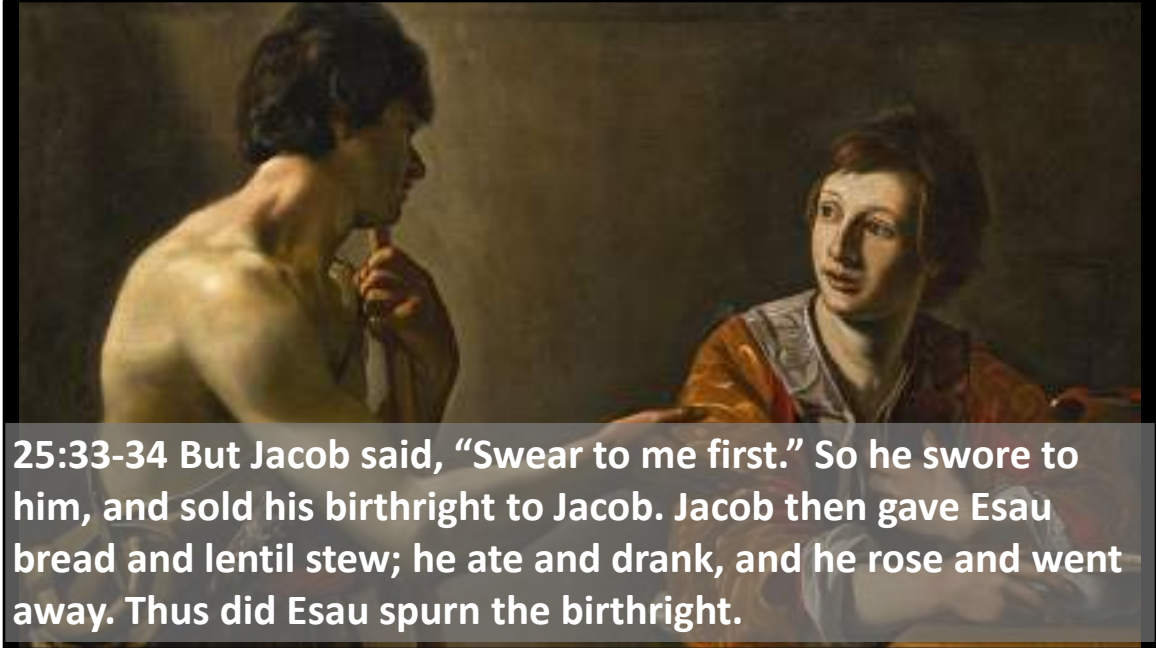
Rebecca is made privy to God’s plan to make the younger twin (Jacob) the conduit of Abraham’s and Isaac’s God-based monotheism. She will use this information later when she helps Jacob trick Isaac into giving him the “innermost blessing.” In the Bible, the younger is often depicted as more worthy or chosen.

25:27-28 When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who stayed in camp. Isaac favored Esau because he had a taste for game; but Rebekah favored Jacob.



Hunting is not outlawed in the Bible. Animal suffering is. So as long as you don't make the animal suffer needlessly, and you use it for food, skins, etc., it's probably OK. The Torah certainly doesn't prefer hunters.

"taste for game" led Isaac to prefer Esau. Rebecca knew Jacob was to carry on Abraham's/God's vision.



25:33-34 But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Jacob then gave Esau bread and lentil stew; he ate and drank, and he rose and went away. Thus did Esau spurn the birthright.

Esau comes back home very hungry and asked Jacob for food. Jacob says sure if you sell me your birthright. Esau said he was near death (of starvation, quite the exaggeration), but still agreed.

Jacob has often been criticized. But... He neither tricked nor threatened his brother. He simply saw an opening. Esau accepted willingly, and “spurned” his birthright. He didn’t ask for it back. The word spurned would be more accurately translated despised.

26:2 The LORD had appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land which I point out to you.



There was a famine and Isaac was headed to Egypt for food.

God says no, stay here in the land of Israel.

Another test. Will Isaac trust in God, have faith in God, not just believe in God. In the Torah, “belief” in the existence of God is assumed. Trusting in God is the issue.

26:4 I will make your heirs as numerous as the stars of heaven, and assign to your heirs all these lands, so that all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your heirs—



The Jews purpose is to be a vehicle for God's blessing on the entire world. This is stated 5x in Genesis. That God wants a people to bless all mankind is another Torah first.

26:11
Abimelech
then charged
all the
people,
saying,
“Anyone who
molests this
man or his
wife shall be
put to death.”



This promise was needed as strangers were often treated harshly, even killed. Rarely treated well.

One of life's puzzles is to know when to trust a stranger.

In decent societies, you can approach strangers optimistically unless they exhibit some bad characteristic (thru speech, dress, attitude, behavior, etc.). In indecent societies, best to be wary.

One of the evils of immoral governments and crime-ridden societies is that people learn to trust no one.

26:15 And the Philistines stopped up all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of his father Abraham, filling them with earth.



Isaac was a successful farmer/agriculture (only patriarch). He grew wealthy. The Philistines grew jealous and stopped up his wells.

Lesson here: envy or emulate.

American started out emulating. Nearing today, it seems envy and resentment are more rampant.

Envy of Jewish accomplishments has similarly led to hatred of the Jews.

In this case, they could have learned from Isaac how to better dig their own wells and raise crops.

26:34-35 When Esau was forty years old, he took to wife Judith daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; and they were a source of bitterness to Isaac and Rebekah.



Esau confirms his unworthiness by taking wives from pagan tribes.

27:8 Now,
my son,
listen
carefully as
I instruct
you.



Chapter 27 opens with Isaac being near death and sending Esau out for some game. He tells Esau to bring him the game meat and he will give him his innermost blessing (deep from my soul).

We might have expected substance from a patriarch, but this is the Torah telling it like it was.

Rebecca overhears this and plots with Jacob to fix things.

Big Truth: Sometimes human intervention is required to execute God's will. In the Torah, humans are not allowed to do nothing and wait for God to act.

Many Jews stood by while others tried to re-establish Jews in Israel (Zionism). Those same Jews, if still alive, saw the error of their ways in 1948 when Israel statehood occurred.

The women in this family is the strongest.

27:24 He asked, “Are you really my son Esau?” And when he said, “I am,”



This should be disturbing, except...

First, we have plenty of reason to believe this was God’s will.

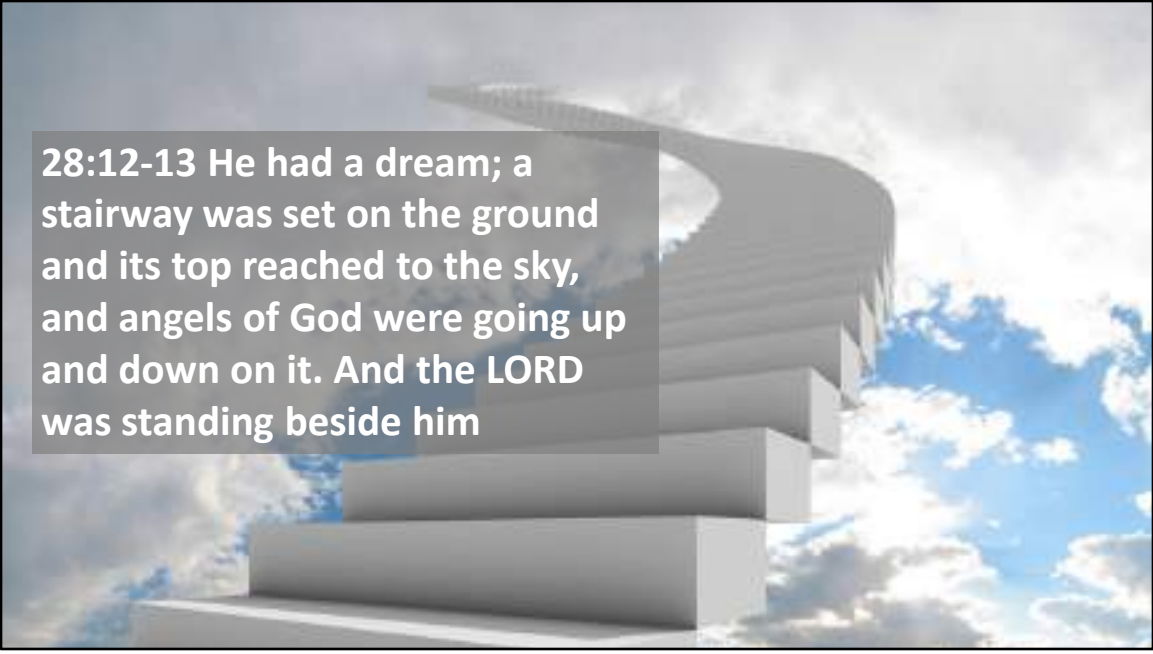
Jacob had bought the birthright from Esau.

Esau despised the birthright.

Jacob was in a no-win situation: disappoint his mother or his father.

Those who wish to do good in this world often have to get their hands dirty.

Rebecca was willing to be judged (verse 13).



28:12-13 He had a dream; a stairway was set on the ground and its top reached to the sky, and angels of God were going up and down on it. And the LORD was standing beside him

The word used for “stairway” here is used no where else in the Bible. Can mean “ladder.”

Angels do not live in heaven. The Torah describes angels as going up and down (not down and up), living on earth, messengers.

Sometimes “standing beside him” is translated as “standing at the top.” God was close to Jacob, not far.

Possibilities for perceiving God:

- Directly and unmistakably
- We call out can perceive His presence
- We recognize God has acted in our life
- We believe, but are not sure, God has acted in our life
- God has acted, but we are unaware
- We believe God has acted in others’ lives, but we’re not aware He has in our own life
- We believe God knows us but does not necessarily intervene.

All consistent with the Torah.

28:15

Remember, I am with you: I will protect you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”



But, this does not mean we can expect God to protect us all the time. Even Jacob could not expect that. And in fact Jacob suffers a lot.

Probably referring to protecting us from our greatest fears.

Many people think God will protect them from tragedy, then when he doesn't are disappointed or leave the faith. It is a dangerous belief to have.

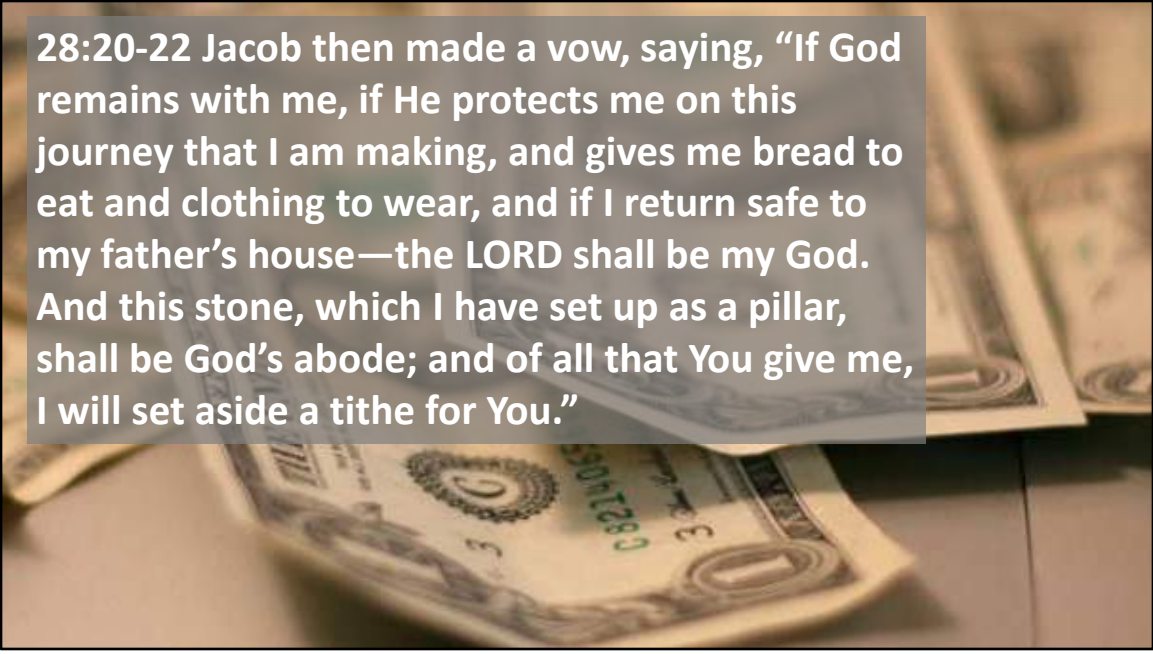
God, in the Bible, protects people until the mission is accomplished. That's it.

Protecting us all the time would be robbing us of freedom, consequences, etc.

If one decent person should be protected, all should. But now we're back to removing free will.

The path Adam and Eve chose had its consequences.

What can we expect? God will honor his promises and will provide ultimate justice.



28:20-22 Jacob then made a vow, saying, “If God remains with me, if He protects me on this journey that I am making, and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and if I return safe to my father’s house—the LORD shall be my God. And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, shall be God’s abode; and of all that You give me, I will set aside a tithe for You.”

Deals with God?

God does then I do; I do then God does.

Not a sound idea. Expecting to be rewarded with health for observing the Sabbath, for instance.

The reward for keeping a commandment is the keeping of the commandment.

People who make deals with God usually end up disappointed, unhappy.

Unhappiness in a person may be a sign of problems with their religion or how they live it.

It’s clear that very good people have terrible issues to deal with and very bad people live apparently lavish, luxurious lives.

29:11
Then
Jacob
kissed
Rachel,
and
broke
into
tears.



Jacob is journeying to find a wife. He stops at a well, a common meeting place of the day. Finds out Laban (his uncle) is well. And meets Laban's daughter, Rachel. Love at first sight. This is the only instance in the Torah of a man kissing someone other than his mother or wife. The tears probably came from a combination of ending a lengthy journey and meeting the love of his life.

29:17
Leah had
weak
eyes;
Rachel
was
shapely
and
beautiful.



Leah was Laban's other daughter.

"weak" word more often means "soft." Also could have been poor vision. The Torah could be comparing the beauty of both, or contrasting their attractiveness. Either way, Rachel seems to win the beauty score.

The Torah is not prudish. It deals directly with human sexuality.

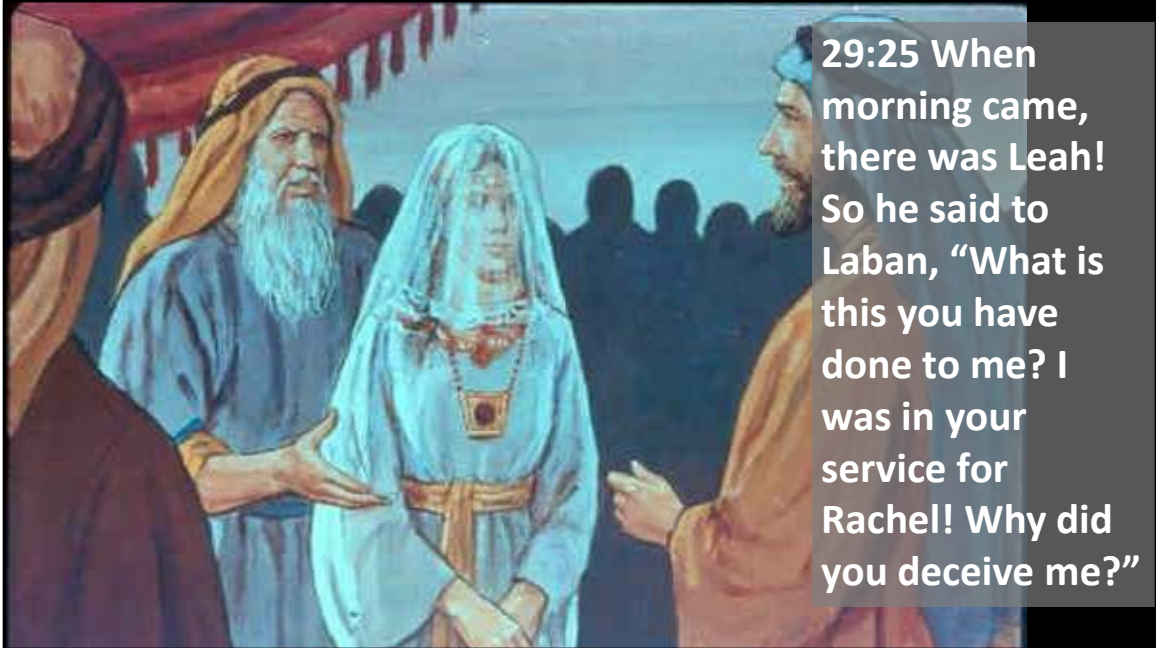
The (ugly) truth: female beauty matters. It's a painful and unfair fact of life.

Male looks matter, too, to some degree, but unlike in the animal world, it is the human female that attracts the male. Physical beauty is the first thing a man notices, and so too other women.

But, a man who loves a woman for her beauty doesn't love *her*.

But, parents and society do no favors by telling young women looks don't matter.

The power of the visual in male wiring is great.



How could Jacob be fooled? Primitive time and place, etc.

Maybe he was inebriated from the feast.

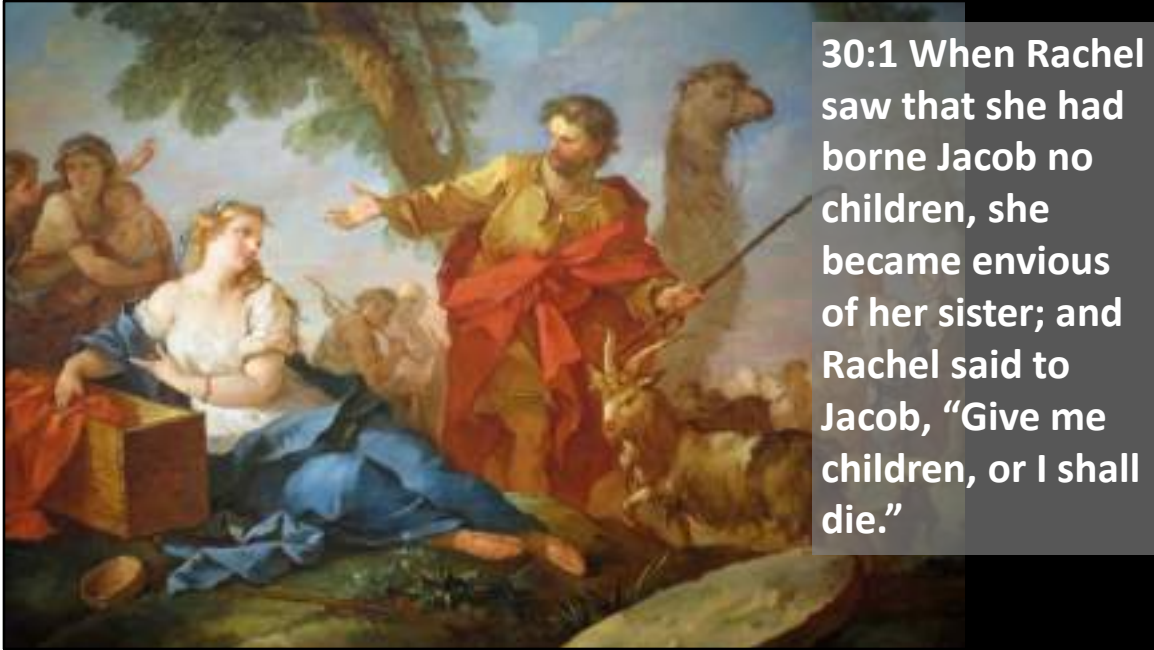
Many people sleep with – work for – illusions...

Arthur Koestler worked for the Communists for 7 years, eventually realizing he had been sucked in by “beauty” that did not materialize.

Something of a what goes around comes around thing harkening back to when Jacob deceived Isaac with blindness.

Jacob “buys” Rachel as well for another 7 years labor.

As we leave Chapter 29, Leah has had several children and Rachel none.



30:1 When Rachel saw that she had borne Jacob no children, she became envious of her sister; and Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die."

Abraham expressed similarly.

A sentiment of most women in most societies throughout history.

Two words in Hebrew for woman:

Isha, taken from man, can advance in anything a man can do.

Chava, mother of all things, which men cannot do.

Under Isha, a barren woman is capable of any achievement a man can do, including having a meaningful childless life.

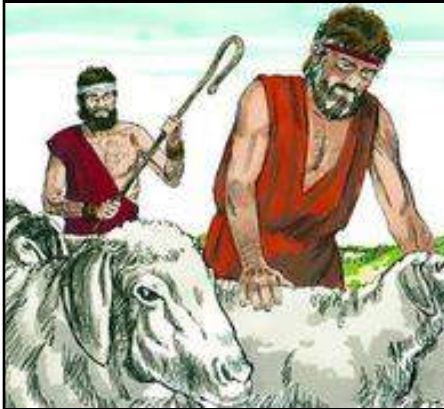
Still plenty of opportunity to do good.

Ironically, Rachel dies giving birth to her 2nd child.



30:24 So she named him Joseph, which is to say, “May the LORD add another son for me.”

This is a mandrake plant. The balance of Chapter 30 is all about Leah and Rachel wanting children, having them through concubines, “buying” rights to lie with another with mandrakes, which supposedly have power to enhance sexual pleasure and induce pregnancy. God shows the foolishness of nature gods and idols when it is the one with the mandrake who does NOT get pregnant and the other does.



30:37-39 Jacob then got fresh shoots of poplar, and of almond and plane, and peeled white stripes in them, laying bare the white of the shoots. The rods that he had peeled he set up in front of the goats in the troughs, the water receptacles, that the goats came to drink from. Their mating occurred when they came to drink, and since the goats mated by the rods, the goats brought forth streaked, speckled, and spotted young.

By the end of the chapter, Rachel has Joseph, meaning “he will add” – Rachel wanted another.

Jacob wants to leave Laban’s land. Laban acknowledges what Jacob did for him and offers to pay, but Jacob says no. Ultimately Jacob says OK, I’ll take the spotted animals (rare, few). Laban agrees, but then at night removes/hides as many spotted animals as he could. Interesting animal husbandry techniques back then that ended up giving Jacob the choicest animals. Jacob prospered.



31:19 Meanwhile Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household idols.

Chapter 31. Jacob leaves after explaining to his family how Laban and sons have turned against them.

Laban has received all the fruits of Jacobs 14 years, the daughters nothing, and they lament.

While Laban was out shearing sheep, Rachel steals his idols.

One theory is that she did so to wean her father from idol worship. But if so, why did she not bury or dispose of them rather than bring them with her?

She also might well have still believed in the pagan gods. Syncretism: merging pagan beliefs with one true God beliefs. Neils Bohr, famous physicist, was asked why he kept a rabbit's foot on his desk, you don't believe in that, do you. He said, "Of course not, but they say it works whether you believe in it or not."

Next session: September 15th, 6pm PDT

Joseph

Genesis 37-50

Will finish up a few Jacob slides next time before jumping into Joseph...