



Lesson 10 “Birthright Blessings; Marriage in the Covenant”

Genesis 24-29

Purpose: To strengthen class members’ desires to live worthy of their birthright blessings and of eternal marriage.

In “The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles proclaim that “marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator's plan for the eternal destiny of His children.” When a man and woman are married in the temple, their family can be together forever. This is a common goal of Latter-day Saints. “Marriage is and should be a sacrament. The word sacrament is variously defined, but among Christian people it signifies a religious act or ceremony, solemnized by one having proper authority. It is a pledge, or solemn covenant, a spiritual sign or bond between the contracting parties themselves and between them and God.” (Hugh B. Brown, “The Latter-day Saint Concept of Marriage,” *Liahona*, June 2011)

The Book of Genesis

See Supplement Lesson 6.

Commentary:

Genesis 24

1 And Abraham was old, and well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.

“The scriptures say, ‘Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him’ (Genesis 21:5) and ‘Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife’ (Genesis 25:20). Thus, Abraham was 140 years old at this time. But he was far from being on his deathbed. He died when he was 175 (Genesis 25:7-8), and in the meantime had another wife and six children (Genesis 25:1-2).” (Feasting upon the Word [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981], 66)

2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh:

“In preparation for his departure to Haran, the servant made a formal vow to Abraham in an unusual manner: He placed his hand under Abraham’s thigh (Genesis 24:2-3,9). The most generally accepted explanation for the custom is derived by considering the proximity of the thigh to the organ of procreation reflecting that the oath was important as it pertained to Abraham’s posterity and the continuation of the covenant. But the Joseph Smith Translation changes thigh to hand, rendering the oath “put, I pray thee thy hand under my hand in both references in Genesis 24. In this context, then, the description of my making an oath by placing one’s hand under

another's hand may be suggesting the modern-day equivalent of shaking hands to seal an agreement.” (Camille Fronk Olson, Women of the Old Testament, [SLC: Deseret Book, 2009], 50)

3 And I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell:

If someone wants to marry you outside the temple, whom will you strive to please—God or a mortal? If you insist on a temple marriage, you will be pleasing the Lord and blessing the other party. Why? Because that person will either become worthy to go to the temple—which would be a blessing—or will leave—which could also be a blessing—because neither of you should want to be unequally yoked (see 2 Cor. 6:14).

You should qualify for the temple. Then you will know that there is no one good enough for you to marry outside the temple. If such individuals are that good, they will get themselves in a condition so that they too can be married in the temple.

We bless our fellowmen the most when we put the first commandment first. (Ezra Taft Benson, Ensign, May 1988, 6)

12 And he said O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham.

13 Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water:

14 And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that thou hast appointed for thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.

These verses show that the servant, like Abraham, was a man of great faith. Abraham had told him that his errand was a commandment of the Lord (v. 7). So when faced with a tremendously challenging task, the servant turned to the Lord for help. Instead of just asking the Lord to solve his problem, he presented a plan for the Lord to confirm.

16 And the damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up.

The King James Version suggests that Rebekah was very beautiful, but the Joseph Smith Translation says that she was the most beautiful woman the servant had ever seen. The Joseph Smith Translation reads, “And the damsel being a virgin, very fair to look upon, such as the servant of Abraham had not seen, neither had any man known the like unto her ...” (JST, Genesis 24:16).

19 And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking.

Considering the capacity of a thirsty camel, one can well imagine how much effort it took for Rebekah to draw water by hand for ten camels. Not only was she beautiful but she was a willing worker and was quick to serve.

58 And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.

This verse gives a great insight into the faith of Rebekah. For a young woman to leave her home, travel to a new country completely foreign to her, and marry a man she had never met would present a tremendous challenge. One would expect that she would have wanted to stay with her family as long as possible, but when given her choice, she said simply, “I will go.”

67 And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

When one contemplates the faith and beauty of Rebekah and how the servant of Abraham was led to her by the hand of the Lord, the comment "and he loved her" is not surprising.

Genesis 25

6 But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

"The earliest Arabians, according to the Bible, were the descendants of Joktan (or Joksban), who lived five generations after the flood. The Joktanites lived in the fertile regions of southern Arabia, and were the 'Arabians that were near the Ethiopians.' They were traders, some of whom in later years actually crossed the Red Sea to settle in Ethiopia. One of the sons of Joktan was Sheba, ancestor of the Queen of Sheba who visited Solomon.

"The northern Arabian tribes were, for the most part, descended from Abraham through Ishmael, son of his Egyptian wife, Hagar. His descendants inhabited the coastal area of western Arabia.

"By his third wife, Keturah, Abraham had six sons, whom he sent to dwell in the east so that Isaac could inherit Canaan. Because they lived in an essentially desert land, they were nomads, and hence we read of the 'travelling companies of Dedanim,' and of 'the Arabian in the wilderness.' Some of them pitched their tents as far away as Babylon, it would seem.

"Perhaps the best-known tribe was the Midianite tribe. Moses' father-in-law Jethro was a Midianite, and his descendants, the Kenites, settled in Palestine with the Israelites under Joshua.

"The Edomites, located in the mountainous region southeast of the Dead Sea, were descendants of Abraham and Isaac through Esau or Edom. They mingled with the Horites or children of Seir, but acknowledged their close relationship to Israel as descendants of Jacob's brother. They often warred with Israel, and were never included within the Israelite borders. In Maccabean times, their land was called Idumea, and hence, King Herod the Great, an Idumean convert to Judaism, was a descendant of Esau." (John Tvedtnes, "Who Is an Arab?" Ensign, Apr. 1974, 27-28)

8 Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.

The early patriarchs had a clear knowledge of gospel principles taught to them from Adam down to Abraham. The phrase "gathered to his people" is one more evidence of their gospel knowledge. Two Bible scholars commented on the significance of that phrase: "This expression ... denotes the reunion in Sheol with friends who have gone before, and therefore presupposes faith in the personal continuance of a man after death, as a presentiment which the promises of God had exalted in the case of the patriarchs into a firm assurance of faith [see Hebrews 11:13]" (Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary, 1:1:263). Sheol is the Hebrew word for the world of spirits where one goes when one dies, the equivalent of the spirit world. The Hebrews had not only a concept of life after death but also a correct concept of the intermediate place between death and the Resurrection.

16 These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, by their towns, and by their castles; twelve princes according to their nations.

The twelve tribes who eventually descended from Jacob are much discussed, but it should be remembered that another twelve tribes also came from Ishmael.

21 And Isaac intreated the Lord for his wife, because she was barren: and the Lord was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

The brevity of the historical account in Genesis tends to compress the time it covers. The simple statement about Rebekah's barrenness is more poignant when one remembers the great value people placed on childbearing in those times and that Isaac and Rebekah went childless for twenty years (see vv. 20, 26).

27 And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents.

In contrast to Esau, who is described as a "cunning hunter," Jacob is called a "plain man" (v. 27). The Hebrew word used there means "whole, complete, or perfect," so it is a very positive adjective.

28 And Isaac loved Esau, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

The loved of verse 28 is used in the sense of "favored" or "preferred." Thus, Isaac favored Esau and Rebekah favored Jacob.

29 And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint:

30 And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom.

Edom means "red." The Edomites (descendants of Esau) played a significant role in the Old Testament, usually as antagonists to the Israelites. They inhabited the territory in and about Mount Seir between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea (see Genesis 36). Esau's descendants today are also found among the Arab nations.

31 And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright.

32 And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me?

This rationalization seems to reflect more scorn than hunger. Jacob would almost certainly have succored Esau freely if his life were in jeopardy. The point of this account seems to be primarily to show how little value Esau placed on the birthright. His immediate bodily needs were more important to him than the rights of the covenant. Additional evidence of this attitude is Esau's marriages to Canaanite women, which broke the covenant line (see Genesis 26:34–35).

The birthright itself should have been a treasured thing. The highly desirable birthright blessing is the right to the presidency, or keys, of the priesthood. Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

"It appears that anciently under the Patriarchal Order certain special blessings, rights, powers, and privileges—collectively called the birthright—passed from the father to his firstborn son. (Gen. 43:33.) In later ages special blessings and prerogatives have been poured out upon all the worthy descendants of some who gained special blessings and birthrights anciently. (3 Ne. 20:25–27.) Justification for this system, in large part, lies in the pre-existent preparation and training of those born in the lines destined to inherit preferential endowments." (Mormon Doctrine, p. 87.)

In the patriarchal order this birthright was passed from father to son, who was often, but not always, the eldest son. Righteousness was a more important factor than being the firstborn.

Genesis 26

1 And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar.

“[The area] is among the most uninviting deserts on earth; though some observers think the area enjoyed a little more rainfall in antiquity than it does today, all are agreed that the change of climate has not been considerable since prehistoric times—it was at best almost as bad then as it is now.” (Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites, 56)

4 And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;

Russel M. Nelson

The covenant that the Lord first made to Abraham and reaffirmed to Isaac and Jacob is of transcendent significance. It contained several promises:

Abraham’s posterity would be numerous, entitled to eternal increase and to bear the priesthood;

He would become a father of many nations;

Christ and kings would come through Abraham’s lineage;

Certain lands would be inherited;

All nations of the earth would be blessed by his seed;

That covenant would be everlasting—even through “a thousand generations.” (1 Chron. 15:16)

Some of these promises have been accomplished; others have yet to be. I quote from a prophecy given nearly 600 years B.C.: “Our father hath not spoken of our seed alone, but also of all the house of Israel, pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days; which covenant the Lord made to our father Abraham.” (1 Ne. 15:18)

Precisely as promised, the Master appeared in these latter days to renew the Abrahamic covenant. To the Prophet Joseph Smith the Lord declared: “Abraham received promises concerning his seed, and of the fruit of his loins—from whose loins ye are, ... my servant Joseph. ... This promise is yours also, because ye are of Abraham.” (D&C 132:30-31)

We are also children of the covenant. We have received, as did they of old, the holy priesthood and the everlasting gospel. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are our ancestors. We are of Israel. We have the right to receive the gospel, blessings of the priesthood, and eternal life. Nations of the earth will be blessed by our efforts and by the labors of our posterity. The literal seed of Abraham and those who are gathered into his family by adoption receive these promised blessings—predicated upon acceptance of the Lord and obedience to his commandments. (“Children of the Covenant,” Ensign, May 1995, 33)

5 Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

6 And Isaac dwelt in Gerar:

7 And the men of the place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon.

This is the third time in Genesis that a patriarch has been misleading about his relationship with his wife. Abraham did it twice (Gen. 12:10-13; 20:2). At least the first time, it was the Lord who commanded Abraham to do it. Perhaps Isaac felt this gave him license to do the same thing. The deceitfulness is hard to explain but it does underscore the problem that both Abraham and Isaac had—that to travel amidst a famine placed the women at risk. They obviously felt that preserving the honor of their wives was of greatest import.

8 And it came to pass, when he had been there a long time, that Abimelech king of the Philistines looked out at a window, and saw, and, behold, Isaac was sporting with Rebekah his wife.

“Sexual intimacy in marriage—it need not be a forbidden subject. Many can’t even say the word sex without a flood of suspicion or negative connotations sweeping over them... Elder Parley P. Pratt addressed this notions, saying, ‘Some persons have supposed that our natural affections were the results of a fallen and corrupt nature, and that they are carnal, sensual, and devilish, and therefore ought to be

resisted, subdued, or overcome as so many evils which prevent our perfection, or progress in the spiritual life... Our natural affections are planted in us by the Spirit of God, for a wise purpose...'

"President Kimball promised, 'Marriage can be more an exultant ecstasy than the human mind can conceive. This is within the reach of every couple, every person.' Elder Pratt revealed the divine purposes and potential of sexual intimacy within marriage;

Our natural affections are planted in us by the Spirit of God, for a wise purpose; and they are the very main-springs of life and happiness—they are the cement of all virtuous and heavenly society—they are the essence of charity, or love... There is not a more pure and holy principle in existence than the affection which glows in the bosom of a virtuous man for his companion... The fact is, God made man, male and female; he planted in their bosoms those affections which are calculated to promote their happiness and union.

"God designed sexual relations to be a divine privilege and a glorious experience between husband and wife. Fulfilling sexual relations can ignite and enliven a marriage in a way nothing else can." (And They Were Not Ashamed, LM Brotherson, [Boise: Inspire Book, 2013], xviii-xxii)

20 And the herdmen of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdmen, saying, The water is ours: and he called the name of the well Esek; because they strove with him.

21 And they digged another well, and strove for that also: and he called the name of it Sitnah.

22 And he removed from thence, and digged another well; and for that they strove not: and he called the name of it Rehoboth; and he said, For now the Lord hath made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.

There were two ranchers living side by side in southwestern Montana. They bickered and fought because each thought a rusty barbed wire fence that separated their ranches was not the true property line. Each felt the other was encroaching upon his land. The real estate records were unclear at the county courthouse.

They forbade their children to play with one another. The conflict became worse. Finally, after years of exchanging words and threats, one of the ranchers said to himself, "Enough of this." He drove down the lane from his place onto the county road and then down the long driveway to his neighbor's place.

"What do you want?" his adversary asked.

"Look, you take your hired men and your sons, and I'll take mine; and we'll put the fence wherever you'd like it. I've had enough of this. I want us to be friends."

His raw-boned neighbor softened, and tears ran down both of their faces. The neighbor responded, "Hey, let's drive to Virginia City and record that the present fence is where both of us want the property line to be."

They did and the problem was solved. (Hugh W. Pinock, "The Blessing of Being Unified," Ensign, April 1987)

24 And the Lord appeared unto him the same night, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father: fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.

25 And he builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the Lord, and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well.

Altar, tent, and well. Isaac did not become an Abraham or a Jacob. He did not reach the heights of Abraham, called the "father of the faithful." Nor was he as impressive as his son Israel, father of the twelve tribes. Yet Isaac is loved and revered. He worshiped God, cared for his home, and pursued his work. He is remembered simply as a man of peace. The eloquent simplicity of his life and his unique ability to lend importance to the commonplace made him great.

Altar, tent, and well: his worship, his home, his work. These basic things of life signified his relationship to God, his family, and his fellowmen. Every person on earth is touched by these three.

Isaac worshiped at an altar of stone. He sought there answers to life's questions: Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?

These questions every man asks. These questions continue with us...

To know the word and works of God, Isaac knelt in his day at his altar. His tent, a home for himself and family, was sacred to him, as our homes are to us.

To Latter-day Saints, the home is a holy place, patterned after the celestial home whence we came. The priesthood-led home is the loftiest spiritual unit we know.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a family church. In its missionary work we seek to bring families into the Church. We teach the principles and perform ordinances that unite the family for eternity. Indeed, we may say that a prime purpose of this church is to perfect and exalt the family...

Kneeling at his altar, mindful of his family in his tent, Isaac found most of his working hours consumed in watching over wells he had caused to be digged. His flocks were nourished by them. His simple dependence upon the water and the soil and the forage that grew is little different in our day, for man must work.

The revelations say that "every man who is obliged to provide for his own family, let him provide. ..." (D&C 75:28.)

In the beginning the Lord decreed, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread. ..." (Gen. 3:19.)

Ever since the restoration in 1830, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has encouraged thrift and fostered work as the ruling principle among its members...

How little things have changed since Isaac's day—the things that really matter. There is the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the same family roles to fill, the same need to work.

Altar, tent, and well: these things are essential. Placed in proper perspective by God's revealed word, they provide at once our greatest challenge and achievement. (A. Theodore Tuttle, Conference Report, October 1972, 66-69)

34 And Esau was forty years old when he took to wife Judith the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite:

35 Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah.

When "Esau was forty years old, ... he took to wife Judith, the daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Bashemath, the daughter of Elon the Hittite: Which were a grief of mind unto Isaac and to Rebekah." (Gen. 26:34-35)

That is to say, Esau married out of the Church; Esau did not marry in the everlasting covenant revealed to Abraham; Esau chose to live after the manner of the world, rather than to keep the standards of righteousness which the Lord had given them. In the light of all this, the account says:

"And Rebekah said to Isaac, I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: if Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?" (Gen. 27:46)

In effect she is saying, "If Jacob marries out of the Church as Esau has done, what good is there left for me in life?" (Bruce R. McConkie, "Our Sisters from the Beginning," Ensign, Jan. 1979, 62)

Genesis 27

Verses 1-40

"The story of how Jacob obtained the birthright blessing from Isaac with the help of his mother is a troubling one in many respects. Typically, commentators who do not have access to latter-day scriptures come to one of two conclusions: either they emphasize Esau's unworthiness for the birthright and therefore justify the deception, or else they criticize Jacob's shrewd and crafty nature.

A more complete knowledge of gospel principles, however, may pose some additional problems. Can a person deceive a patriarch and get a blessing that belongs to someone else? Was Jacob a deceitful and crafty man? Was Isaac blindly favorable to certain children? Can one be dishonest and still get a valid patriarchal blessing? The following points should be carefully considered:

- 1. As the record in Genesis now reads, there is little option but to conclude that Rebekah and Jacob deliberately deceived Isaac and that Jacob explicitly lied to his father (see v. 24). Rebekah and Jacob believed the deception was necessary because Isaac obviously favored Esau. Joseph Smith, however, taught that certain errors had crept into the Bible through "ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests" (Teachings, p. 327). For example, a comparison of the early chapters of Genesis with the fuller accounts revealed to the Prophet (now found in the books of Moses and Abraham) shows how much has been lost. It is possible that the story of Jacob's obtaining the birthright has also lost much or been changed by unbelievers. These changes could then explain the contradictions.*
- 2. Rebekah knew by personal revelation that Jacob was to be the son of the covenant (see Genesis 25:22–23). Jacob reluctantly gave in to his mother's wishes after she told him that she would take the responsibility for what they were about to do.*
- 3. Although the early patriarchs and their wives were great and righteous men and women who eventually were exalted and perfected (see D&C 132:37), this fact does not mean that they were perfect in every respect while in mortality. If the story is correct as found in Genesis, Isaac may have been temporarily shortsighted in favoring Esau. Or Rebekah may have had insufficient faith in the Lord to let Him work His will and therefore undertook a plan of her own to ensure that the promised blessings would come to pass. These shortcomings do not lessen their later greatness and their eventual perfection.*
- 4. Whatever the explanation for the circumstances surrounding the reception of the blessing, one thing is perfectly clear. Priesthood holders are given the keys to bind and loose on earth and have that action validated in heaven (see Matthew 16:19). Once Isaac learned of the deception, he could have revoked the blessing and given it to Esau. Instead, he told Esau, "Yea, and he shall be blessed" (Genesis 27:33). Later, when Jacob was preparing to leave for Padan-aram to escape Esau's wrath, Isaac clearly gave him the blessing of Abraham (see Genesis 28:3–4), an additional proof that Jacob received the blessing meant for him and that Isaac confirmed it upon him. Thus, if the Genesis record is correct as it now is, Jacob, like others, received a call and a promise of eventual blessings because of his potential and in spite of his weaknesses. Like anyone, he had then to live worthily in order to obtain the promised blessings." LDS Institute Manual*

Verses 34-46

"Esau was also blessed—with the bounties of the earth, and with the potential to cast off the yoke of oppression; but like most of us he valued what he had lost after it was gone and rued the day he had traded the birthright off to Jacob. He bitterly resolved to get revenge by fratricide when he saw the blessing of transmittal of the birthright actually confirmed upon the head of him to whom he had bartered the right to it. The alert and resourceful Rebekah averted a double tragedy (loss of both sons—one by murder and one by execution, as the law of Genesis 9:6 would require) by proposing to Isaac that they send Jacob away to find a proper wife in her home land. Thus she would remove him from harm proposed by Esau until feelings could cool. The proposition that he be sent for a proper wife apparently was

approved immediately by Isaac, for doubtless he saw that it was true, as Rebekah said, that their life's mission would be frustrated if Jacob married as Esau had." (Rasmussen, Introduction to the Old Testament, 1:47.)

Genesis 28

1 And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan.

"The Old Testament records many instances in Israel's struggle to choose between the true, living God and the usurpers of the claim to deity. Isaac commanded his son Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman (see Gen. 28:1) because of the Canaanites' idolatry. (See Ps. 106:38.) Jacob's posterity, when freed from Egyptian bondage, soon turned to the worship of an Egyptian idol. (See Ex. 32:1–6.) Later, the Israelites were enticed in the promised land by the idol worship that had been the region's religion before they arrived." (David H. Madsen, "No Other Gods before Me," Ensign, Jan. 1990, 48)

10 And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran.

11 And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.

12 And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.

13 And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;

14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

15 And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.

16 And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.

17 And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.

18 And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.

19 And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first.

Two comments by latter-day prophets give a greater understanding of the significance and meaning of Jacob's experience at Bethel. The Prophet Joseph Smith said, speaking of Paul's comment about one who was caught up to the third kingdom (see 2 Corinthians 12:2), "Paul ascended into the third heavens, and he could understand the three principal rounds of Jacob's ladder—the telestial, the terrestrial, and the celestial glories or kingdoms" (Teachings, pp. 304–5).

President Marion G. Romney explained why this vision of heaven was shown in the form of a ladder and why the name of the place where it happened was called Bethel:

"When Jacob traveled from Beersheba toward Haran, he had a dream in which he saw himself on the earth at the foot of a ladder that reached to heaven where the Lord stood above it. He beheld angels ascending and descending thereon, and Jacob realized that the covenants he made with the Lord there were the rungs on the ladder that he himself would have to climb in order to obtain the promised blessings—blessings that would entitle him to enter heaven and associate with the Lord.

"Because he had met the Lord and entered into covenants with him there, Jacob considered the site so sacred that he named the place Bethel, a contraction of Beth-Elohim, which means literally 'the House of the Lord.' He said of it: '... this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.' (Gen. 28:17.)

“Jacob not only passed through the gate of heaven, but by living up to every covenant he also went all the way in. Of him and his forebears Abraham and Isaac, the Lord has said: ‘... because they did none other things than that which they were commanded, they have entered into their exaltation, according to the promises, and sit upon thrones, and are not angels but are gods.’ (D&C 132:37.)

“Temples are to us all what Bethel was to Jacob. Even more, they are also the gates to heaven for all of our unendowed kindred dead. We should all do our duty in bringing our loved ones through them.” (“Temples—The Gates to Heaven,” Ensign, Mar. 1971, p. 16.)

Genesis 29

1 Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east.

Now, I want to speak frankly to you young men and young women of the Church. When you marry, your decision not only affects you, but your future children and generations after you. Every child born to Latter-day Saint parents deserves to be born under the covenant of temple blessings.

May I now tell you about something most sacred? Picture in your mind a small room beautifully adorned—something akin to a lovely living room. In the center is an altar, covered with velvet and lace. Chairs line the walls of the room, where just family and closest friends may observe. With family observing, and a priesthood man of God officiating, you will be asked to kneel at the altar opposite your companion. You will be given instructions, and a benediction will be pronounced upon you. Then you will be sealed together as husband and wife for time and all eternity. You are given the same promise that Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob received. Let me read it to you from the Doctrine and Covenants. Essentially you will receive, as the Lord said:

“Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; ... and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers ... ; [Ye] shall pass by the angels, and the gods, ... to [your] exaltation ... , which glory shall be a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever” (D&C 132:19). Temple marriage is a gospel ordinance for exaltation.

Don’t trifle away your happiness by an involvement with someone who cannot take you worthily to the temple. Make a decision now that this is the place where you will marry. To leave that decision until a romantic involvement develops is to take a risk, the importance of which you can’t calculate now. (Ezra Taft Benson, “This Is a Day of Sacrifice,” Ensign, May 1979, 33)

2 And he looked, and behold a well in the field, and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks: and a great stone was upon the well's mouth.

3 And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place.

4 And Jacob said unto them, My brethren, whence be ye? And they said, Of Haran are we.

5 And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? And they said, We know him.

6 And he said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep.

7 And he said, Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together: water ye the sheep, and go and feed them.

8 And they said, We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep.

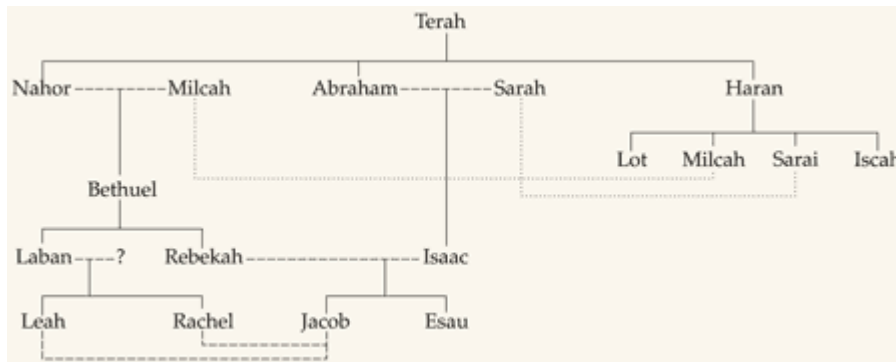
9 And while he yet spake with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them.

10 And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother.

11 And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept.

12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father.

The following genealogy lines show clearly that each of the three great patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—married relatives. (The broken lines show marriages, and the dotted lines show individuals who are the same.)



Abraham married Sarah, who was his niece; Isaac married Rebekah, who was his first cousin once removed; and Jacob married Leah and Rachel, who were his first cousins.

17 Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured.

The Hebrew word translated as “tender” means “soft, delicate, or lovely.” The fact that this trait is emphasized for Leah, while Rachel is described as “beautiful and well-favoured,” that is, beautiful in every respect, seems to suggest that Leah’s eyes were her most attractive feature.

20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

21 And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her.

22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast.

23 And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her.

24 And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid.

25 And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?

26 And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.

27 Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.

28 And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also.

29 And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid.

30 And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

Here is given the first glimpse of Laban’s crafty nature. After promising Rachel to Jacob for seven years of service, Laban sent Leah to Jacob’s tent to consummate the marriage. The modern reader may find it hard to believe that Jacob did not discover the switch until it was morning; however, the following possibilities could explain the success of Laban’s ruse. As sisters, Rachel and Leah may have been quite similar in height, weight, and general appearance. Second, the women of Haran sometimes veiled themselves (see Genesis 24:65). Third, Laban was a shepherd. If he was a typical shepherd of ancient times, he dwelt in tents instead of in permanent dwellings. The inside of a tent at night can be very dark. And finally, knowing what the reaction of Jacob would be if he discovered the substitution early, Laban may have told Leah to speak as little as possible so as not to give the deception away before it was too late to change it.

Though Laban demanded another seven years for Rachel's hand, he allowed Jacob to marry her once the seven days of wedding feasts for Leah were finished and to fulfill his indebtedness after the marriage. The gift of the handmaidens to each daughter made the servants the direct property of each wife, not of Jacob. Thus, later, when the handmaids had children, the children were viewed legally as the children of Rachel and Leah.

31 And when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.

The Hebrew word *sabnay* does not mean "hate" as the term is used today, but rather conveys the idea of "loving less." A better translation would be, "when the Lord saw that Leah was loved less or was not as favored," he opened her womb.

32 And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me.

33 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the Lord hath heard I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon.

34 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi.

35 And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the Lord: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing.

<i>Mother</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Reason for Name</i>
<i>Leah</i>	<i>Reuben</i>	<i>See a son</i>	<i>Joy for having a son (see Genesis 29:32).</i>
<i>Leah</i>	<i>Simeon</i>	<i>Hearing</i>	<i>Because the Lord heard that she was hated (see Genesis 29:33).</i>
<i>Leah</i>	<i>Levi</i>	<i>Joined</i>	<i>"This time will my husband be joined unto me" (Genesis 29:34).</i>
<i>Leah</i>	<i>Judah</i>	<i>Praise</i>	<i>"Now I will praise the Lord" (Genesis 29:35).</i>
<i>Bilhab</i>	<i>Dan</i>	<i>Judging</i>	<i>"God hath judged me" (Genesis 30:6).</i>
<i>Bilhab</i>	<i>Naphtali</i>	<i>Wrestling</i>	<i>"With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister" (Genesis 30:8).</i>
<i>Zilpah</i>	<i>Gad</i>	<i>Troop</i>	<i>"Leah said, A troop cometh" (Genesis 30:11).</i>
<i>Zilpah</i>	<i>Asber</i>	<i>My happiness</i>	<i>"Leah said, Happy am I" (Genesis 30:13).</i>

<i>Leah</i>	<i>Issachar</i>	<i>A reward</i>	<i>God hath given me my reward (Genesis 30:18).</i>
<i>Leah</i>	<i>Zebulun</i>	<i>Dwelling</i>	<i>“Now will my husband dwell with me” (Genesis 30:20).</i>
<i>Rachel</i>	<i>Joseph</i>	<i>Adding</i>	<i>“The Lord shall add to me another son” (Genesis 30:24).</i>
<i>Rachel</i>	<i>Benjamin</i>	<i>Son of my right hand</i>	<i>“You are the son of my right hand” (see Genesis 35:18).</i>

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