

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 3
Genesis 21-31

Key Concepts: We will continue to watch “the blessing” of God be bought, sold, stolen and put at risk. We will also watch God’s faithfulness to those who are part of the blessing.

Stories: The stories in these chapters include Sarah becoming pregnant and giving birth to Isaac, Abraham sending Hagar, the mother of his son Ishmael out into the desert to die, Hagar and Ismael being rescued by God, God’s promises to Hagar and Ishmael, the almost sacrifice of Isaac, the death and burial of Sarah, the sending of a servant to find a wife for Isaac, the finding and return of Rebekah, the birth of Esau and Jacob, the death and burial of Abraham, Esau selling his birthright to Jacob, Jacob receiving by deceit the blessing of this father, Esau’s plans to kill Jacob and Jacob’s escape to Laban, Jacob’s marriage to Leah and Rachael, , the birth of multiple children, Jacob’s escape from his father-in-law Laban, and his return to the land of promise.

Brief Summary of Stories: We left our story with Abraham and Sarah, the couple of the covenant, without any children through which God will bless all the families of the earth. God had continued to make promises but so far there had been no fulfillment.

In these stories we continue to watch our themes of blessings and God’s providential care continue, even in and through the deceitful actions of deceitful people. In fact the only non-deceitful person in the story is Isaac. Jacob schemes for his brother’s place from birth and eventually steals Esau’s birthright and blessing. Esau schemes to murder his brother. Rebekah schemes with Jacob to get the blessing and then helps him escape. Laban, Jacob’s father in law, schemes to get his daughter with “weak eyes” married off to Jacob and then gets Jacob to work for him for 14 years in order that Jacob get the wife he was promised in the first place. When Jacob has paid his debt, Laban attempts to take everything Jacob had earned. Jacob schemes to beat Laban at his own game, escaping at night with all of his possessions. Finally Jacob’s wife Rachael pretends that she is “in the way of women” in order to hide the fact that she has stolen the household gods. These chapters are worthy of their own soap opera.

In the midst of all of this we encounter several key concepts. First we see the importance of the land. When Abraham wants a son for his wife he refuses to allow him to marry one of the local girls. He needs to marry someone from the old country. In addition Isaac is not allowed to go with the slave because Isaac might decide to remain in the old country and not return to the land of promise. In a sense Abraham does not want to lose his (God’s) claim upon the land and so Isaac must stay. We see the theme of blessing continue. The servant who goes in search of a bride for Isaac finds the perfect match. The servant prays and God provides. Isaac is blessed with two sons...at one time; hard to do better than that. The blessing, even though it was supposed to go to Esau, is not diminished when it ends up in the hands of Jacob. Jacob then is blessed with wives, children, slaves and property; which shows that the seed of Abraham is growing with every generation

The drama of the texts is contained in the continuing risk to the blessing. Will it continue though stolen? Will Jacob be able to return to the land of promise? Will Laban slay Jacob and steal the promise for himself? Will Rachael finally have a baby and live happily ever after? We leave the dysfunctional family escaping from Laban but now heading back to meet Esau who had sworn to take his brother’s life.

1. Does the dysfunction of this family seem appropriate Biblical material? Why or why not?
2. What do we learn about God’s ability to keep the promise alive in the face of adversity?
3. What do you make of polygamy? Is it an appropriate way to live?
4. What do you think about Jacob and Rachael having “household gods”?