

THE PROMISES OF GOD: JACOB TO ISRAEL

Genesis 32:22–31 • Brian Brodersen

Introduction: As we have seen looking at the overarching history of redemption, God chose a man who will father a family that will become a nation, from which will come the Savior, who will crush the serpent's head and restore creation to God's original intent.

That man, of course, is Abraham.

"The LORD said to Abram ... 'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing, I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you; and in you all the peoples of the earth will be blessed ... through your seed all the nations on earth will be blessed.'"

—Genesis 12:1–3, 22:18

Abraham had two sons (Ishmael and Isaac), but the covenant promise was passed to only one, Isaac:

"Then God said, Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him ... my covenant I will establish with Isaac."

—Genesis 17:19, 21

Isaac marries Rebekah, and they have two sons, twins:

"Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, 'why is this happening to me?' So she went to inquire of the LORD. The LORD said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.'"

The older is named Esau and the younger is named Jacob. Jacob becomes Israel, and from his 12 sons comes the nation through which Messiah, the Savior will come to bring blessing to all nations as God promised to Abraham (Gen 25:21–23).

Jacob then directly receives the promise while in a place that he will afterward name, Bethel—The House of God. In a dream, he saw a ladder or stairway coming down from heaven to earth and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. Above stood the LORD, who said:

"I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.

"I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.

"Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All people on earth will be blessed through you and your seed."

—Genesis 28:13–14

In our effort to take a "big picture" view of the Story of God, we must not lose sight of the "details." The "big picture," or the macro-view, is telling us **what** God is doing, the "details," or the micro-view, is telling us **how**

God is doing it. And as we have seen, God is doing it through people like Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob, Leah and Rachel, and you and me and all his people. But we can never forget that his work is not only through us, but most importantly, in us, as we see with Jacob. Especially, in his wrestling with a man who turns out to be God himself.

Here we see God purposely inflicting and permanently crippling Jacob. But why would God afflict Jacob like that? After all, wasn't Jacob God's chosen instrument? Yes he was, but he was also a shrewd, resourceful, self-sufficient, and self-reliant man. We see that in his dealings with his brother Esau over the birthright, in his deception of his father to obtain the blessing of Abraham, in his dealings with his uncle Laban, whom he outsmarts regarding the flocks, right to his plan to buy off his brother's wrath in the story we read. Those very traits that would have seemed to some to be his greatest strengths were, from the divine point of view, his greatest weaknesses and the very things that must be dealt with in his life before he can go any further into the plan and purposes of God. This wrestling was an endeavor on God's part to break down Jacob's resistance, to bring him to an end of himself, to take from him all self-trust, all confidence in his own cleverness and resourcefulness, to make him know that opposition is to be overcome, and blessings obtained, not by craft or cunning, but by divine power and grace.

These are lessons that all of us have to learn to some degree because of our inherent tendency to trust in ourselves. That tendency must be broken if we are going to experience the fulfill God's purposes and experience his blessing in our lives.

The lesson Jacob will finally learn is that it's not only about the will of God, it's just as much about the ways of God.

Make no mistake, Jacob was from the beginning a man committed to the will of God; he wanted the birthright his brother cared nothing about; he wanted the blessings of the covenant; but he sought to obtain those things his way rather than God's way. This tendency of self-reliance that was so ingrained in Jacob by nature is the very thing that God must deal with lest Jacob go on and on frustrating and hindering the purposes of God.

If we have those same tendencies, God will deal with us as well. How? He wrestles with us.

1. He wrestles with our hearts.
 - A. Unsettled, restless, agitated; David after cutting Saul's robe.
2. He frustrates and foils our plans.
 - A. Jacob prayed but then concocted a backup plan.

God dislocated Jacob's hip, bringing all his plans to nothing and reducing him to utter dependence on him.

3. He cripples if need be.

Jacob is unwilling to surrender.

"So marvelous was the human opposition that nothing short of a manifestation of divine power would suffice to break it down. God could have done this earlier in the struggle, but He would not because He wanted Jacob to willingly surrender. Yet, at length as He could not obtain this, there was nothing else to be done but to deal with him in severity."

Severity is always God's last resort, but if we force him to deal severely, although reluctant to do so, yet for our sakes and the sake of his purpose, he will.

In all this, we see three things:

- A. God not only has a will, he has a way for his will to be accomplished.

- B. The flesh is never God's way. With the Lord, it's not "by any and all means" or "the end justifies the means." He has a way, and it's always the way of faith.

Such hours come to most of us, when it almost seems as if necessity obliged and holy wisdom prompted us to accomplish, in our own strength, that which, nevertheless, we should leave in God's hand. If once we enter on such a course, it will probably not be long before we cast to the winds any scruples about the means to be employed, so that we secure the object desired, and which possibly may seem to us in accordance with the will of God. Here also faith is the only true remedy: faith, which leaves God to carry out His own purposes, content to trust Him absolutely, and to follow Him wheresoever He leads. And God's way is never through the thicket of human cunning and devices. "They that believes shall not make haste;" nor need they, for God will do it all for them."

—Edersheim

- C. Israel, God prevails. One way or another, God is working to bring us all to the place where he prevails over our wills, where we are governed by him rather than by self. He is in the process of transforming us from Jacob to Israel, and we can count on him to be faithful to do it, even if it hurts.

Close

With one final word from Jacob at the end of his life as he is pronouncing a blessing over the lives of Joseph's sons. Joseph, his son whom he thought was long dead, but is alive and well and ruling over Egypt, sent there, by his envious brothers from the human standpoint, but from the divine standpoint, sovereignly placed there by God to save his family from perishing in the famine and to form them into the nation through which God's promise of redemption will be fulfilled.

"Then Jacob blessed Joseph and said, 'May the God before whom my Fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm—may he bless these boys.'"

"Here at the end of Jacob's life he makes this incredible statement about the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day ..."

"Now the thing to note about the story of Jacob is that there were times where it did not appear that the Lord was with him, he experienced hardship, he's cheated and deceived, he's chased down and hunted, he faces multiple life and death situations, he experienced famine, hunger, scarcity and yes there are times where the Lord shows up in the middle of all of this and revealed his presence but the fact of the matter is, God was always with Jacob, he never left him, he always guarded him and kept him ..."

—Bauckham

And with hindsight, Jacob knew it and proclaimed it. And what was true of him is true of us too.

"For whatever things were written before were written for our instruction, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."

—Romans 15:4

"The LORD of hosts (heavens armies) is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

—Psalm 46:7, 11

The God who made the universe and who is working all things according to the counsel of his will is also the God of Jacob. He is our God by covenant.