

## **Jacob Arrives**

Reading: Genesis 29, Exodus 2

H/N 4/01/04pm

Study: Genesis 29:1-14

Psalms: 95:1-7, 31:1-5, 23, 5:1-4

*Jacob lifted up his feet and came to the people of the east.* This is the literal reading of the opening words of this chapter. He went on from Bethel with confidence, with assurance in the promise of the Lord – *I am with you and will keep you wherever you go.*

The journey to Bethel had been one of fear. Fear not only of what was behind but of what lay ahead. Fear of the uncertainty, the unknown. Fear of loneliness. But now that fear seems to have evaporated. He lifted up his feet and pressed on. There had been no outward change in his circumstances – he was still alone, he was still destitute. But having met the Lord, having worshipped the Lord and taken a vow there at Bethel he is a changed man inside.

He arrived at this land of the east – a fairly general description but as we will see he was not far from Haran. There he saw a well in the field up ahead. He was heading for Haran you will remember to find a wife in the house of Nahor.

There are many parallels here to the earlier journey of Abraham's servant – who went to the same place for the same purpose (chapter 24). He went however with camels and carrying lavish gifts for a dowry. He arrived at the well outside the city of Nahor in the evening. There he prayed. Jacob did not stop to pray but boldly approached the shepherds gathered there to ask where they were from – and also to give some advice about looking after their animals.

### **Providence**

In the providence of God they actually knew Laban his uncle. In this vast country the Lord had led him to men who knew his own relatives. How amazing. How true is the promise that God works all things together for good to those who love him, who are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28). Is it not wonderful to know that the Lord is powerful to work, indeed overrule in our lives for our good and for his purposes.

Jacob – or his mother anyway – had a plan worked out whereby he would get the birthright of the firstborn. But like so many of the plans of men they failed to extend beyond immediate success. They did not see to the longer term consequences. Jacob was now experiencing those consequences. But thankfully he was also experiencing the grace of God and the providence of God.

Proverbs 14:12 *There is a way that seems right to man  
But its end is the way of death*

Proverbs 16:1 *The plans of the heart belong to man  
But the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.*

Jacob might well have pondered such wisdom, as indeed we also might do. We have

entered a new year; we may have drawn up plans, and listed what we hope to achieve. But is the Lord in those plans – have you consulted him. For some it is life as usual – no change. They think that is the safe way. But this year will not be the same as the last. The Lord may have new things for you to do, he may call you to step out of the old and do new things for him. We must seek **his** plans and purposes as he leads us on in our pilgrimage in this world.

The Lord in his grace came to Jacob at Bethel. He has come to us in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Will we press on his grace and his strength – or will we get bogged down in our own plans, in worries and fears, in sin? Jacob was humbled by the awesome presence of the Lord. He continued on his journey in faith and obedience. We likewise must be humbled by the presence of the Lord. We must press on in faith and obedience to the promises of God.

### **At the Well**

Let us go back to the well here in this narrative and reflect on the situation there. We are told there were three flocks of sheep lying by the well waiting to be watered. The water it would seem had to be drawn out and poured into troughs for the animals to drink. The well was sealed with a large stone. Not until all the flocks had gathered – more than the three that were already there – would they would roll the stone away and water the flocks.

When Rachel came with Laban's flock Jacob stepped forward to move the stone and watered the flock she brought. He ignored protocol, weakness, tradition or whatever it was that stopped them from moving the stone.

It is interesting that the sign Abrahams servant prayed for was related to the well. Rebekah drew water for his camels in fulfillment of his prayer-sign. In Exodus 2 we read that Moses stood up to defend the daughters of Jethro – including the one he would marry – and water their flock. Things happened at the well in the Scriptures. The well was not only a meeting place but a place of blessing. It was a place used by God to bring about his purposes.

There is another well scene in the Bible – where is that. It is in the New Testament – in the gospel of John chapter 4. Jesus met a woman at a well – actually called Jacob's well. He asked her for a drink – and so ensued that dialogue about water by which she came to find living water – the water of everlasting life. She believed in Jesus Christ, she came to the well of living water. Yes – Jesus is the well, the giver of water such that we will never thirst again. *He who comes to me shall never thirst* he said (John 6:35).

Returning to the question of why they could not remove the stone we ask why are we given this detail and why could they not remove the stone and water their flocks as Jacob suggested. Was it that Jacob was stronger than these three men? Certainly his strength and chivalry are highlighted in this passage – as with Moses. We have seen him as a 'home body' before – we get a somewhat different picture of him here. These shepherds may have been only boys though he addresses them as brothers.

Remember Jacob came into this situation as an outsider – though he was also a shepherd who used to look after his fathers flocks. He in effect said to these shepherds

that it was silly to be hanging around this well when the animals could be out grazing. *Water the sheep and go and feed them.* But they said we cannot until all the flocks are gathered and they have rolled the stone away. There seems to be something more than mere physical strength preventing them from moving the stone over the mouth of the well.

It may have been a security issue, a matter of who owned the well. Or it may simply have been tradition; a rule laid down by someone at sometime and accepted by everyone for all time. Whatever the reason Jacob saw it as a hindrance to the husbandry of the sheep. He was not bound by their tradition or rules. He acted to roll the stone away and water the flock of his uncle so they could go back to pasture.

It can be helpful to us to have people from the outside bring a different perspective on aspects of our life. In many workplaces such reviews are regularly undertaken. And so in our family life and church life we can benefit from advice given by people who look with a different perspective on our life and situation. The word of God does this of course, and there are helpful books we can read. But this is also a function of the fellowship of God's people – sharing with one another – speaking the truth in love.

Indeed it is the practice we have in the Presbyterian Church. We have Presbyterian visitations where people from the outside come in Christian love to offer advice to a congregation in regard to their church life. Oh that we would have the grace to listen and that the flock of God might be enabled to go out and find pasture.

### **Rachel Enters**

*Then Jacob kissed Rachel and lifted up his voice and wept.* Jacob was overwhelmed with emotion, with joy and with gladness at having found a relative in this far off place. Rachel was probably surprised at this outburst of emotion – *she ran and told her father* we read but this was not because of Jacobs's outburst!

Can you imagine the joyous relief Jacob felt? The Lord had watched over him as he promised at Bethel. Jacob was thankful. He was not afraid to show his emotion – to weep, even sob loudly with joy. When was the last time you wept with joy before the Lord? We should not be afraid to do so. Jesus himself wept – not with joy but with sorrow and compassion for the bereaved sisters of Lazarus.

Jacob kissed Rachel his cousin in the context of her being his relative. There is no mention of her being *beautiful in form and appearance* at this stage.

This episode, which one writer has described as 'one of the sunniest in the life of Jacob', comes to a close with Laban running to meet Jacob at the well. He embraced him and kissed him. The parallel with chapter 24 is again obvious but this time Laban finds just one man, a destitute man at that, rather than a caravan of camels laden with treasure. Was Laban disappointed – mercenary man that he was? It is hard to judge. At least outwardly he welcomed Jacob as *my bone and my flesh* – my long lost blood relative. Jacob went to *stay with him a month and he told Laban all these things.*

So we have seen the wonderful providence of God in this 'sunny' episode in Jacob's life. God over ruled in the affairs of men and the events of life to fulfill his purposes in the life

of his servant. He is still doing just that today – right? May we be able to look back over the past year and remember Gods great providence in our lives but may we also look ahead with assurance that he will continue to be bring us through all the ups and downs of this life – all to his glory.

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