

Review: *From your experience at the Cornerstone meeting last week, share something that helped build your faith.*

DAY ONE

Read Genesis 30:1-24

NOTE: This next part of the Genesis narrative concerns the six additional years Jacob worked for Laban beyond the agreed upon fourteen years and Jacob's dangerous journey back to Canaan. He was not the same self-centered, ungrateful man he was when he first arrived in Haran. He was humbled through his sufferings. He came to rely on God and to acknowledge the need for God in his life. The God of his fathers became his God. *Agape*

1. As we begin chapter 30, we learn that Rachel remained childless and grew envious of her sister, Leah. She cried out to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" (verse 1) How would you interpret the meaning of Jacob's response to her in verse 2?

2. According to verses 3-8, Rachel gave her maid, Bilhah, to Jacob. Bilhah then conceived and bore two sons. From verses 6 and 8, record below the meaning of the sons' names given to them by Rachel.

Dan

Naphtali

NOTE: It was not uncommon for barren women to obtain children by giving their maids to their husbands as we have read about before. (Refer to [Genesis 16:3](#) and the story of Sarah and Hagar.) The phrase, "bear upon my knees" (verse 3), alluded to an ancient adoption rite in which a newborn was placed in the lap of the legal parent soon after delivery.

3. Much of the value of women in ancient times was associated with childbearing. Comment briefly on how this affected their lives and how women are treated and valued differently in society today.

4a. Leah also took additional measures to encourage Jacob's affections for her. Skim verses 9-20 and record below the meaning of the names of the sons her maid, Zilpah, bore in her place and the names of the fifth and sixth sons born to Leah and Jacob.

Gad

Asher

Issachar

Zebulun

NOTE: In Hebrew the word for "mandrake" comes from the same root "love", and the ancients attributed aphrodisiacal and fertility powers to the plant. However, one can see a break in the thread of the text, for Rachel's fertility is not caused by the mandrakes; it is due to God, who "opened her womb" (v.22). We can see Jacob's preference for Rachel despite the fact that she has borne him no children, and how she does everything humanly possible to be a mother; but in the last analysis (the point the passage is making) motherhood is a gift from God. *Navarre*

b. In verse 21 what do we learn about the last child born to Jacob and Leah?

5. At last we read "God remembered Rachel," and she conceived (verse 22). At the long-awaited birth of her child, whom she named Joseph, she said, "God has taken away my reproach," and prayed for another son. (verses 23-24). Record one the following verses from Holy Scripture that tell us about the memory of God.

Genesis 8:1

Exodus 2:24

Isaiah 43:25

NOTE: At this point, Jacob had eleven sons and a daughter. His twelfth son, Benjamin, would be born in the land of Canaan (Genesis 35:16-20). His twelve sons formed the link between the patriarchs and the tribes of Israel.

6. CONNECTION: Today we read more about the mothers of the tribes of Israel. Although they include some love and joy, their stories are full of sadness, competition and jealousy. After decades of waiting, Rachel finally has a son but then prays for another. Though Leah mentions the Lord's help and her success at child-bearing, this will not change Jacob's love for her. We, too, deal with dreams lost or unfulfilled in life. What are some ways our faith helps us to overcome disappointment or rejection?

In Philippians 4:11-13, St. Paul said, "I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty... I can do all things through him who strengthens me." Let this thought lead you into prayer today.

DAY TWO

Read **Genesis 31:1-18**

7. Jacob has been in service to his uncle for twenty years and has grown "exceedingly rich" (Genesis 30:43). Laban's sons were unhappy with Jacob's wealth and success and Laban did not regard Jacob as favorably as before (verses 1-2). Then Jacob had a message from the LORD. Record what he heard (verse 3).

THINK: How long do you think Jacob thought he was going to be exiled from his homeland? Refer to Genesis 27:43-45.

8. Jacob took Rachel and Leah into the field with his flock and told them that he had God's protection. He told them of a dream he had in which the God of Bethel told him to return to the land of his birth (verses 4-13). In this patriarchal society, it seems unusual that Jacob would go to such lengths to convince his wives to cooperate with his plan. What does this tell you about his character and growth during his time in Haran?

9. In your own words, why did Rachel and Leah agree to leave with Jacob in verses 14-16.

NOTE: Laban kept the *mohar* or bride-price (Jacob's years of work) for himself instead of giving it back to his daughters and their children as custom dictated. Therefore, the two daughters accused their father of using their money.

10a. After years of rivalry and conflict, do you think it is interesting that these two sisters were united in thought and action at this time? Why do you think that might be?

b. The sisters were long remembered as respected matriarchs of the Hebrew people. Look up and record the blessing that used their names in Ruth 4:11.

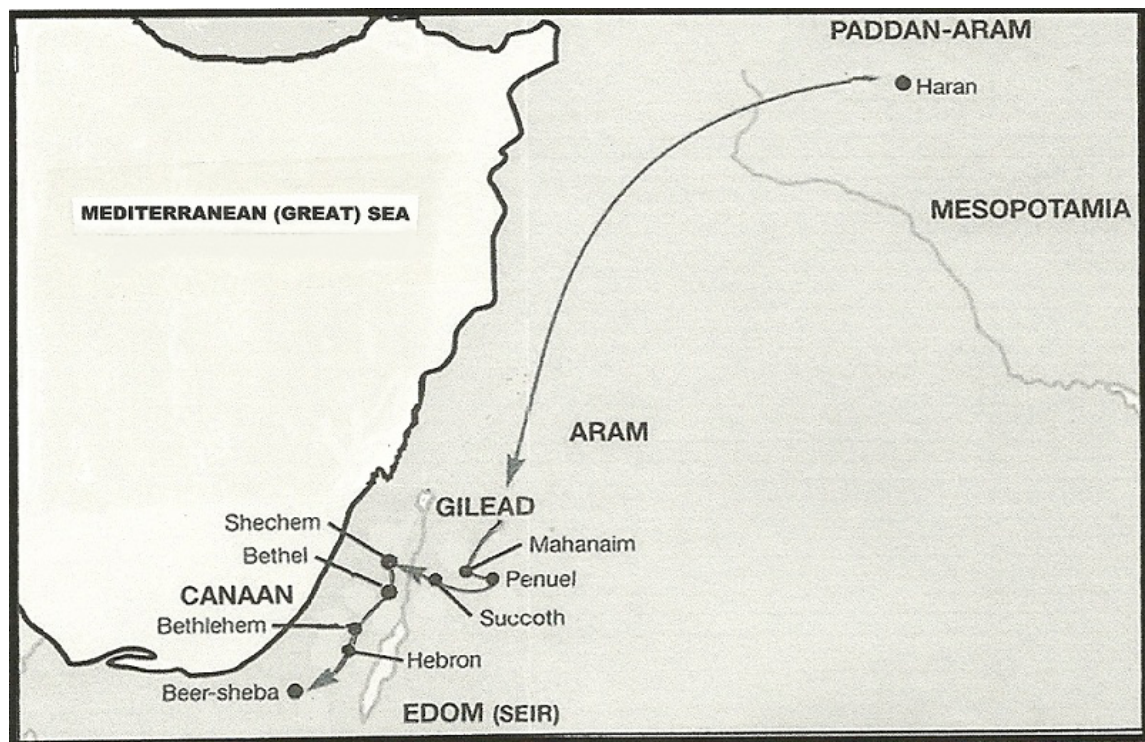
11. Summarize all that Jacob did after he gained the consent of his wives to flee from Laban and return to his father, Isaac, in the land of Canaan according to verses 17-18.

NOTE: When Laban learned that Jacob deceived him, he followed and overtook him. Jacob negotiated a covenant for peace between them and they parted amicably (verses 43-55).

12. CONNECTION: Throughout this study, we have learned that God chooses his leaders without regard to their merit or earthly status; but ultimately, they must prove themselves worthy. In his exile, Jacob has grown in heart and mind as a husband, father and leader as he consults with his wives to persuade them to leave and he deals diplomatically with Laban. He has also grown in spirit as he is once again in communication with the Lord. There are loved ones in our lives who need some time, like Jacob, to grow in faith, love or wisdom to become who they are called to be. What are some things we can do to actively support them on their spiritual journey?

Read Hebrews 10:24-25. Let thoughts helping others grow in knowledge of God be the focus of your prayer today.

DAY THREE
Read Genesis 32:1-5



JACOB'S RETURN TO CANAAN

13. As we begin a new chapter, Jacob continued his journey back to the land of Canaan after 20 years of exile. The angels of God met him on his way at a place he called God's camp (verses 1-2). On this arduous journey home, what might the appearance of God's angels hold for him?

14. As Jacob was about to reenter the Promised Land, he prepared to confront a serious situation from his past and sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom (verse 3). Recall from Genesis 27:41 how Esau felt when he last saw his twin brother, Jacob.

NOTE: Jacob and his caravan have to pass through the territory occupied by Esau before he can reach the "promised land" of Canaan. He has no choice; he has to prepare to meet the angry, estranged brother he has not seen for twenty years. *Agape*

15. Jacob instructed his servants to carry a message to his brother. Select one or two of the phrases from verse 4 below that suggest to you how the man returning home has changed.

my lord Esau

your servant Jacob

I have lived as an alien

stayed until now

NOTE: The titles (my lord...your servant) used several times in this narrative imply that Jacob is surrendering his authority to his angry older brother. In effect, this reverses the fraternal relationship set out in the blessing of Isaac, which made Jacob the "lord" over Esau (27:29,37) and the one whom Esau must "serve" (27:40). *Ignatius Study Bible*

16. In verse 5 Jacob related in his message to Esau that he had become a wealthy man. What did he say was the goal of his message according to the last part of verse 5?

17. What do you think Jacob hoped to accomplish with his message to his brother?

18. CONNECTION: As Jacob contemplates returning to his homeland, he must confront his past and the consequences of the harm he inflicted on his brother. He put aside his past acts of deceit and, with God's support, Jacob made the first move. We have all had to look back on mistakes we have made and on things we would have done differently. Have you ever asked someone for acceptance after a mistake you made? How does our faith through the grace of God give us the courage to admit a mistake?

Matthew 5:23-24 tells us to "go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift." Write a prayer today remembering someone you may have harmed and pray for the courage to reach out in reconciliation.

DAY FOUR

Read Genesis 32:6-12

19. Today we read that Jacob's messengers returned and reported that Esau was coming to meet him along with four hundred men (verse 6). Jacob was afraid and distressed that his brother might be coming to attack him. In your own words, describe the strategy he devised to protect his people (verses 7-8).

20. What do you think of Jacob's strategy to protect his family and possessions? Would you have done anything differently?

21. His defensive plans in place, Jacob turned to prayer. He began by addressing the God of Abraham and Isaac who said to him, "return to your country and kin, and I will do you good" (verse 9). After laying out his plans to God (verse 10), how did his prayer continue to reflect his concerns? Complete verses 11-12 below.

Deliver me, please,

for I am afraid of him

Yet, you have said

and make your offspring

22. This is another example of prayer from the book of Genesis. Look up one of the following verses and record a phrase that teaches us how to pray.

Psalm 145:18

Luke 11:1-4

Philippians 4:6

23. Jacob's prayer gives us insight into the patriarch's growing personal faith. How did his prayer reflect the covenantal promises God gave to him (see [Genesis 28:14-15](#))?

24. CONNECTION: Though his heart was filled with fear as he awaited the arrival of his brother, Jacob acted decisively to first prepare his camp and family, and then place his plans in God's hands. Combining prayer with hope of deliverance, he turned to God with words of faith. This is an example of good Christian leadership. God is faithful and keeps his promises, but like Jacob we should also prepare for challenges. When have you seen this same process at work when your church or faith community has come together with good religious or lay leaders to handle a crisis or project? What can you learn from Jacob's leadership in his moment of crisis? Share some thoughts with your group.

Read and record [Hebrews 13:7](#). Pray today for those in leadership during times of crisis, that the Holy Spirit will guide them.

DAY FIVE

Read Genesis 32:13-23

25a. Today's lesson begins after Jacob prayed for God's guidance to deal with what he perceived to be the unresolved hostility of his brother. Briefly summarize what actions Jacob took to appease Esau the next morning according to verses 13-16.

b. What do you think was the purpose of spacing the generous gifts of animals for Esau into five separate droves with their herders each repeating Jacob's words?

26. Jacob gave instructions to his servants in verses 17-20. He anticipated that Esau might ask questions upon meeting them and gave them specific replies to his questions. What additional comment about himself did he repeat in the first part of verse 20?

27. What do you think of the extravagant gifts Jacob sent to his brother? What other ways of approaching him or contacting him might he have considered?

28. There are many reasons for gift-giving in scripture. Look up one of the following Scripture passages and record the relevant verse relating to the sharing of God's blessings.

Proverbs 19:6

Luke 6:38

James 1:17

29. That night, as the gifts for Esau passed on ahead of him, Jacob planned to spend the night alone in the camp. What was his final action according to verses 22-23?

NOTE: This passage notes "eleven" children of Jacob. The author probably did not count Dinah because she was a female child. The Jabbok is a small inlet flowing east into the Jordan River.

30. CONNECTION: Today, we read that Jacob sent generous presents to his brother as Esau rode toward him. We continue to see new character traits emerge from Jacob. Still a master planner hoping to appease and diminish Esau's anger with gifts, he now acts without deceit and manipulation. Instead, he genuinely seeks reconciliation with the brother he so greatly harmed. Is there a reconciliation you are, or should be, seeking in your life? Sometimes a gift or selfless gesture is the best way to begin reconciliation. What are some other ways to help ease back into relationships that need to be repaired and move forward?

Read and record Hebrews 13:16. Pray today for ways to use the gifts you have been given by God to reconcile with another.

DAY SIX

Read Genesis 32:24-32

31. As we begin the lesson, Jacob's household has gone ahead, and he was left alone the night before his encounter with Esau. According to verse 24, a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he could not defeat Jacob, what did he do and what was the result (verse 25)?

NOTE: The Catechism writes of Jacob's wrestling with God and his prayer for protection of his family as preparation for his meeting with Esau: "God renews his promise to Jacob...From this account, the spiritual tradition of the Church has retained the symbol of prayer as a battle of faith and as the triumph of faith of perseverance (CCC2573)." *Agape*

32a. In the morning the man asked to be let go but Jacob would only agree if he would bless him. The man then asked for Jacob's name and he gave it (verses 26-27). What did the man say next in verse 28?

NOTE: The Prophet Hosea interpreted the events that occurred here. Read Hosea 12:3-4 to find out who he thinks "the man" was.

NOTE: A man: as with Abraham's three visitors in ch. 18, who appear sometimes as three, two and one (the latter being God), this figure is fluid; he loses the match but changes Jacob's name (v. 29), an act elsewhere done only by God. A few deft narrative touches manage to express intimate contact with Jacob while preserving the transcendence proper to divinity. *NABRE*

b. Compare the changing of Jacob's name in this verse to the changing of Abraham's name (Genesis 17:5) and state why this might have been done. See the Commentary, page 63, for one idea.

33. Though Jacob gave the man his name, he would not disclose his name in return but the man did bless him (verse 29). Jacob called the place, Peniel, saying, "For I have seen God face to face and yet my life is preserved." Record one of the following verses from Scripture about looking at the face of God.

Exodus 33:20

Judges 13:22

Revelation 22:3-4

34. This is one of the most unusual and mysterious stories in Genesis. From the following list of phrases from verses 26-32, comment on what a few of them might mean or refer to.

The man had to leave at dawn

Jacob asked the man for a blessing

The man would not reveal his identity

Jacob was left with a limp

A dietary law based on this story

35. The Commentary states, "Of all the stories about the Patriarchs that we find in Genesis, this one was probably of the greatest importance to the Jews." Record a brief comment from pages 61-62 about why Dr. DePaolo holds that view.

36. CONNECTION: Jacob emerged from a night of wrestling with the man, limping and scarred. He learned that a true blessing comes with struggle and the hard work of faithfulness, not deception. Often in our lives, we may wrestle with life's challenges and struggle in our relationship with God and end up wounded and limping. We survive and begin again as we discover that real blessings come from a life lived in a way pleasing to God. Can you share a time of struggle from your life when you "wrestled" with your beliefs and grew in spirit and faith as a result?

Read and record Hebrews 10:32. Today as you pray, thank God for those struggles that enabled you to find new meaning and purpose in your life.

Read pages 61-63 in *The Book of Genesis* by Lawrence DiPaolo, Jr., Ph.D. The Cornerstone Catholic Scripture Study acknowledges that scripture quotations in this study are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Catholic Edition. Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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