

The Story

Day 11 Genesis 25-26

25.1 It's interesting that Abraham doesn't apply to himself the principle of taking a wife from the land of his fathers, although we are not told whence Keturah his new wife comes. He goes on to have six sons with her, although they are not to inherit – the estate all goes to Isaac.(25.5)

25.6 To avoid all dispute after his death, Abraham endows the sons of his concubines (non-covenanted wives, we might call them mistresses) and sends them away eastward from his heir. Concubinage was an ancient cultural custom, which is no longer practiced in civilised societies.

25.8 At 175 years old, Abraham dies. The Hebrew has a lovely expression to sum up his life *savea* (Heb עָבַר) meaning full, satisfied. Abraham had completed the work given him by God.

25.11 Isaac and Ishmael together bury Abraham in the cave at Macpelah, alongside Sarah. Isaac continues to live at the well Lahai-Roi (the Living One who sees) where Hagar encountered God with Ishmael.

25.13 'These are the generations' occurs again here, this time of Ishmael, son of Abraham by Hagar. (The next time we find this is a few verses later in 25.19, for Isaac.) Ishmael has twelve sons, as Israel will. (25.16) His descendants settle in the land of Havilah, out in the eastern deserts, later becoming assimilated into the Arab peoples.

25.19 These are the generations of Isaac, who married Rebekah at the age of forty. We find the next trace of the genealogy in 36.1, with Esau.

25.21 Rebekah, like Sarah before her is found to be barren, but God hears Isaac's prayer of intercession and gifts them with twins.

25.23 The elder shall serve the younger. There is a certain pattern which emerges in the Old Testament of God not acting always according to man's pecking order. Moses is not the eldest son, nor is Gideon in Judges, and David is the youngest of his brothers, and of course, Joseph is well down in the order of birth.

25.25 Esau's name (Heb *esav* עֵשָׂו) means rough, hairy.

25.26 Jacob's name (Heb *Ya'aqov* יַעֲקֹב) means grasper, because he was grasping his brother's heel. It also describes the way in which Jacob lives his life, always wheeling and dealing to get his way, until the day when God meets him and changes him.

25.28 It is a divisive thing in a family for parents to develop favourites. Scripture here records that Esau was the macho hunter, while Jacob was the mother's boy. (Hebrew calls him 'gentle, soft'.)

25.29 Jacob manages to get Esau to yield his birthright for a pot of stew. Perhaps Esau doesn't think it really counts. As we will see, Jacob is in deadly earnest.

26.1 Just as in the days of Abraham, his father, Isaac and his family experience famine. Note that God specifically forbids him to go to Egypt, but calls him to live in Gerar. Here, he takes the same foolish course as his father before him, with a king also named Abimelech (probably the next in line of a dynasty) and passes off his wife as his sister. When Abimelech spots Isaac behaving amorously to Rebekah (26.8) he takes Isaac to task and tells him what a fool he has been, putting his wife and the King's subjects at risk. For more on this, see notes above at 20.7.

26.15ff. Isaac, although he has grown wealthy as his father before him, having had the favour of the locals, now finds the same problems Abraham had when he arrived in Canaan at first – insufficient resources for all. The Philistines, in particular, have stopped up the wells Abraham opened, and when Isaac has them re-dug, it leads to fights.

26.22 Eventually, Isaac manages to establish a well without strife, and calls it *Rehobot* meaning space, as they have now made space to live in the land.

26.23 After all this striving in his own strength, Isaac comes back to Beer Sheba, where his father had come, and it is here that God appears to him and renews the covenant He made with Abraham. Here Isaac also opens a well, and settles there.

26.26 It is at this point, and to Isaac's surprise that Abimelech comes with some of his supporters to Isaac, to make peace. They make a treaty together. Perhaps there is something here of the sign of God's favour on Isaac that he has now stopped trying to provide for himself, and thus peace comes with his adversaries and those around him. And on the same day, Isaac's servants discover water, so necessary for life in the desert, a further sign of God's blessing.

26.34,35 The chapter ends with Esau marrying two Hittite women, which 'brought a lot of grief to his parents.'

Day 12 Gen. 27- 28

In the accounts of the Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob there is a real paradox; here are men whom God has chosen, and whom He blesses, and yet they are obviously also human, fallible characters who are capable of yielding to the darkness in their beings. Yet perhaps that makes the Bible, particularly these very ancient passages, so accessible to us and so real in their impact. These are not heroes, they are not two-dimensional plaster saints. Rather, God through the writers of the Bible is demonstrating His covenanted obligation, His *hesed* to flawed men and women, who are as likely to lie and deceive as

we are, maybe even more so. God has taken on man, unconditionally. There is no point in asking, why does God bother with such fickle characters as these? Because God bothers with men at all, He has no choice but to deal with the darkness in men, holding Himself to the promise of hope and redemption made in Eden (Gen 3.15) and settled in Abraham. (Gen 15).

What is encouraging here is that the Lord of heaven and earth will not be outdone or put into check by man and woman's selfishness. He is always a step ahead, and pursues His goals, even when people seem to wander all over the place on the journey toward them.

27.4 The place of the eldest male in a Jewish family has always been sacred. Here, Isaac intends to bestow on his firstborn the *berakhah* (Heb בְּרַכָּה) of the inheritance, but asks him to bring him a good meal of game.

The story here tells itself; an intrigue between mother and younger son, the deception of the aged father and the mistaken impartation of a blessing, which has the weight and import of a vow, so that it cannot be revoked.

27.19 Jacob asks for the blessing from his father's *nephesh* (Heb נֶפֶשׁ) meaning his father's life force – something is imparted here to the son from the very depth of his father's being.

27.20 Isaac is suspicious, but Jacob implicates God in the lie as well – God helped me get this meal to you so fast! Jacob is an operator, and he knows how to get his father onside.

27.27 Rebekah has been careful to dress Jacob in Esau's earthy, gamey clothes, (v.15) and together with the skins on his arms and neck, these convince Isaac that he has Esau before him.

Then Isaac blesses Jacob with a powerful blessing, not only for fruitfulness but also for rule and authority. Perhaps Isaac has the 'gentle' Jacob in mind when he prays that 'his mother's sons' should bow before this one he thinks is Esau. There is great irony and poignancy in this moment, then.

27.30 Enter Esau, and the plot is discovered. Isaac is shocked, and shakes with emotion, and Esau lets rip over his loss.

27.36 Jacob has been true to his name, 'Grasper', for this is the second time he has grasped what is Esau's from his hand.

27.37 The power of the words of blessing is seen here as Isaac explains that he has bestowed on his treacherous son fruitfulness and authority; he cannot revoke it.

27.38 'Do you only have one blessing, father?' asks Esau, weeping. Isaac goes on to bless Esau as much as he can, given that he cannot undo what he has done. He calls

fruitfulness on Esau also, but limits the effects of Jacob's rule over him by saying that one day he will break the yoke of Jacob off his neck.

27.41ff. Esau now has such hatred for his brother, that he intends to kill him. Rebekah, worried that the brothers may now kill each other, urges Jacob to flee to her brother Laban in Haran, 'for a few days' she says. The story turns out very differently.

27.46 She uses the wives of Esau, the Hittite women as a pretext to get Jacob officially sent away by his father. 'I am sick to death of these women', she says, 'Let's make sure Jacob marries kin.'

28.1 Isaac agrees, and sends Jacob off to Padan-Aram, over 500 miles away in Mesopotamia (*meaning, from Greek, between the rivers.*)

28.3,4 Isaac invokes the blessing of El-Shaddai, the most High God. This name of God is the one God uses of Himself to Abraham in Gen 17.1. It comes from a root meaning powerful, strong, *shadad* (Heb שִׁדְדַּד) but which also may stem from a term meaning sustainer, nourisher from the word for breast, *shad* (Heb שֵׁד)

It is in this context that Isaac recalls the blessing given to his father Abraham, which now Jacob inherits, the promise of the land in which at present they are nomads, with no possession rights as such. God is being held to his promise.

28.6-9 Esau now realises how determined his father is that Jacob shouldn't have a Canaanite wife, and so he takes a third wife from the family of his half-uncle, Ishmael, his cousin Mahalath, Ishmael's daughter. It's an interesting move, and seems to be Esau trying to win back his parents' favour, but not an action which will bring him back into the line of the promise.

28.11 Jacob now encounters God on the road north. It is as though, having done all the wheeling and dealing, he is now out on his own and vulnerable, and God can get his attention.

28.13 God declares Himself to be the God of Abraham and Isaac; through covenant, God has identified His name with the names of Jacob's father and grandfather. This El Shaddai, this El Elyon is known now as God of Abraham, Isaac and (eventually) Jacob. Here God renews to the sleeping Jacob the covenant promise of the inheritance of the land, and the promise of descendants through whom all peoples (Heb *mischpachot* מִשְׁפָּחֹת = tribes, families) of the earth will be blessed. God has a global purpose through this grasping man and his story!

28.15 God is going to stick with him, and not let go of him until His purposes are fulfilled.

28.16 Jacob awakes, afraid, confessing that he has encountered the living God in this place. He sets up his stone pillow as an altar, and calls the place Beth-El (Heb בֵּית־אֵל *beyt-El*), house of God. However, Jacob doesn't at this point fully commit himself to his father's God.

28.20 Jacob makes a kind of bargain with God, through a vow, that if God provides for him and brings him back here, then 'the Lord shall be my God.' It seems that Jacob is still being true to his human nature, and the darkness in his being. His road ahead will be long and tortuous, but God will meet him in powerful encounter and bring him back to fulfil his promise in Gen 35.6-7.

28.22 Jacob also promises God a tenth of all his increase when he returns to this place. The tenth (also called the tithe; Heb *ma'aser* מַעֲשֵׂר from root *asar* עָשָׂר = ten) is thus an ancient ordinance, first encountered as Abraham gives to Melchizedek from the spoils of battle. This predates the law of Moses, although the tithe was regulated in the Mosaic code later.

Day 13 Gen.29-30

29.3 Jacob, then, 'lifts up his feet' and goes to Padan-Aram. When he arrives, he finds himself at a well. Wells are key places in the story, since they are so necessary to life. They are gathering places, social places as well as working wells. As Abraham's servant came to, perhaps, this well, so Jacob arrives.

29.10,11 Jacob rolls the stone away from the well for Rachel, and waters her sheep. Then he kisses her (most likely as a cousin, not as a suitor at this point) and bursts into tears, for he has found his family.

29.15 Now unfolds the intrigue and deception we have come to wonder at in this family. Laban, on the surface, seems fair, choosing to employ Jacob for his labour for him. Jacob chooses to work seven years for Rachel, for whom he has fallen.

In Laban, Jacob seems to have met his match; one grasper meets another grasper. Seven years (which seem to the love-struck Jacob 'like a few days') he works to earn the hand of Rachel. On the wedding night, instead of his beloved, Laban passes off on Jacob his elder daughter Leah as his younger. There is an amazing irony here; the man who fooled his father into thinking he was someone else is now fooled into accepting a bride who is not who he thought she was!

Presumably, Jacob had had too much wine, or it was dark, or Leah was veiled. In any case, come the morning (v25) Jacob wakes up with a shock beside the 'weak-eyed' Leah.

29.26 Laban now reveals that the custom is to marry off the elder daughter before the younger, and thus in a clever deal, Laban now successfully finds a husband for both his daughters, as well as engaging Jacob for a further seven years work for him!

29.31 One may wonder where the Lord is in all of this. He is watching Jacob, and yet also sees the harm which could be done to his first wife. Therefore, Leah begins to be very fruitful, and has child after child.

Rachel, on the other hand, like Sarah and Rebekah before her, is initially unable to have children.

29.32 The ensuing account of the birth of Jacob's sons is rather comic. The names all have meanings which reflect the growing rivalry between Rachel and Leah.

Thus, the first four sons to Leah have very declarative names

29.32 Reuben, from Hebrew *reu Ben*, = look! A son!

29.33 Simeon, Hebrew *Shime'on* from *shama'* heard, listened to.

29.34 Levi, meaning attached, as Leah thought this would confirm Jacob's heart for her.

29.35 Judah, Hebrew *Yehudah* meaning praised or celebrated, praising the Lord for yet another boy!

30.1 Rachel is now angry and envious, and appeals to Jacob to give her children, which makes Jacob fall out with her, saying 'I'm not God, I can't make it happen.'

30.3 In a repetition of Sarah's desperate action with Hagar, Rachel offers her slave, Bilhah to Jacob, to have a child for her, a kind of surrogate mother.

30.6 Jacob obliges, and Bilhah produces Dan, which means in Hebrew, Judge – God has at last 'judged' in Rachel's favour.

30.7 Jacob continues the process with Bilhah, and another son is born, this time called by Rachel, Naphtali, meaning, my struggle. This is a direct reference to the competition which is being played out between the two sister-wives.

30.9 'Two can play at this game' says Leah, and gives her slave, Zilpah to Jacob, who does not seem to have been an unwilling participant in this grotesque race (!) After all, his grandfather was known to have done the same thing in producing his uncle. The son born to Zilpah is then called Gad from Hebrew *gadam* meaning to crowd, almost a taunt that Leah is producing a whole army of sons for Jacob.

30.12 A second son by Zilpah is named Asher by Leah. This is the word found most frequently in the Psalms for happy, content. Leah is over the moon about this gaining on her sister.

30.14 The story takes an even more melodramatic turn, as Reuben, Leah's firstborn, finds mandrakes in the wheat fields. Mandrakes (*mandragora officinarum*) are called in

Hebrew *duda'im*, 'love-plants', because in many ancient cultures they were believed to have aphrodisiac qualities, and to enable conception in women; hence the request of Rachel to have one of the plants Reuben has found.

In a bizarre bargain, Leah agrees on the basis that she herself will go to bed with their husband that night. What would be the look on Jacob's face as he comes in from the fields after a day's work, with wife number one telling him he has to have sex with her tonight, because she has rented him out for the price of a love-plant given to wife number two?

30.17 It is surely strange to us that God would be involved in this seemingly sordid process, and yet He listens to Leah, and she produces her fifth son, and Jacob's ninth, Issachar, which comes from two Hebrew words *yissa* he will yield, give up and *sakar* (Heb שכר) meaning wages or salary – that is, because she gave Jacob her maid, she now has a payback for her investment!

30.20 And her sixth son to Jacob is called Zebulun (Heb *z'vulun* from *zaval* meaning to enclose, or dwell with.) She now believes her husband will choose to live with her, because of her fertility.

30.21 A daughter appears, named Dinah (from Hebrew, judgement) for Leah feels she now has justice for the way she has been treated. The daughter will figure in a sad story later.

30.22 God now does what God specialises in, especially with the patriarchs. He gives Rachel the gift of son, which lifts her reproach from her, particularly in the eyes of her sister and she calls him, in hope of more sons, Joseph (Heb *yoseph*, let him continue, from *yasaph* to add to)

30.25 Now, after this breathless family growth, Jacob has done his time, and wants to return to the land which God has promised to him.

30.27 But Laban has discerned, seemingly from God, that he has been blessed because of Jacob's presence in his household. Thus he wants to hold on to him for a while more, and asks him to name his wages.

30.32 Jacob's request seems very fair; let me keep the spotted and speckled livestock, and you have the plain. Except that Jacob has become a very skilled stockman, and knows how to breed the strongest animals. Whether the plants he uses have any effect, or whether it is just the genetics involved, the outcome is that Jacob ends up with the lion's share of Laban's livestock! (Even today, there is a breed of speckled sheep known as Jacob's sheep from this story.)

30.33 This is how you'll know I'm not cheating, says Jacob, He actually says to Laban, 'thus will my righteousness (Heb צדקה *tsedaqti*) answer for me'. Jacob does not set out to defraud, but to best Laban and to claim his salary at the end of the road.

30.43 Jacob becomes ‘very, very fruitful’, says the Hebrew, by his skill and business acumen. But he has not yet returned to God, rather there is self-reliance in him, which God will face him up with in days to come.

Day 14 Gen 31-33

Gen 31.1ff Jacob has become more and more unpopular with Laban and his workers, because of the increasing wealth he is acquiring.

31.3 The Lord calls Jacob to return to the land of his fathers (that is, of Abraham and Isaac) and promises *to be with him*. This is such a key promise of Scripture, that the Lord is with us.

31.12 In case Jacob thinks it his cunning and skill which have got him this wealth, God’s messenger speaks to him in a dream and tells him that it is God’s favour which has provided him with so much speckled and ringed livestock.

31.13 God reminds Jacob of Bethel, where he made vow to come back and worship.

31.14 Rachel and Leah have no desire to stay with their father, who has little inheritance left to give them anyway. They agree to do what Jacob suggests.

31.17 They leave in a hurry, with everything, while Laban is away at the sheep-shearing.

31.19 Rachel steals the household idols (Heb *teraphim* תִּרְפִּים) which Laban would have worshipped, and which obviously she feels are of importance for their wellbeing.

31.23 Laban gets to know what has happened, and chases the party, overtaking them a week later.

31.24 The Lord warns Laban not to interfere with Jacob, who is under His direction.

31.29 Laban is angry that he has not had the chance to properly say goodbye (although he is probably more upset at the loss of his stock.) He says here, quite menacingly, that he has the power to harm Jacob, but the Lord has warned him not to touch him.

31.30 Laban accuses Jacob of stealing the idols, but Jacob, unaware of his beloved wife’s theft, is so sure they aren’t among his clan that he condemns to death anyone found with Laban’s *teraphim* on them.

31.35 In one of those moments of high drama, Laban searches for the idols, but Rachel, who has hidden them in her camel’s saddle, upon which she is sitting, excuses herself from getting up, saying it is her time of the month; she knows that her father will beat a hasty retreat from these ‘women’s things’, and she gets away with it.

31.42 After giving Laban a dressing down for treating his faithful service so shoddily, Jacob now confesses that it is the fact that the God of Abraham and the *fear of Isaac* has been with him that he has prospered as he has.

The title Jacob gives here to God, *the fear* (Heb פֶּחַד) is rather a strange one, meaning terror or alarm, but it does introduce the understanding that this God is not one to be trifled with or treated lightly. He is, after all, the maker of all things. Perhaps, also, this reflects how Jacob sees the Lord at this point, as a fearsome deity.

31.44 The two men cut a covenant, binding Jacob to treat his wives and family well, and not to trespass on Laban's territory.

31.53 They swear by the God of Nahor, Laban's father, who is Abraham's God, Jacob also promising in the name of the fear of Isaac, perhaps taking that familiar covenant oath that God would cleave then in two if they do not keep to this covenant.

31.54 They mark the covenant with a meal, and part company.

32.1 Jacob is met by angels, as if greeting his homecoming and encouraging him, thus he names the place where he encounters them *Mahanaim* (Heb מַחֲנֵיִם) meaning encampment.

32.4 Jacob the grasper must now face the music. Through his messengers, he addresses his estranged brother as Lord or Sir (Heb אֲדֹנָי *adoni*) – the same word used today in modern Hebrew for 'sir' or 'mister'. He is testing the waters to see if Esau still has murderous intentions toward him.

32.5 He hopes to find favour (Heb חֵן *chen*) in his brother's sight – this is dependent purely on his brother's mood and intention. Grace is not the best translation here, since grace, we will find, is the equivalent to *hesed*, and is an obligation of self-sacrificial covenant. Favour is less dependable than grace.

32.6 Word comes back that Esau is on way to meet them with four hundred men. The rest of the chapter is something of a manifestation of the weasel in Jacob, as he sends presents and gifts to soften up Esau, and then in v.22 sends women and family first, and stays at the rear. This does not make him look good. (However, he finally makes good in the next chapter, when he finally goes in front of his family to actually meet his brother coming to him – see 33.3)

32.9,10 However, Jacob does have hold on one thing – he prays to the God of Abraham and Isaac (who is not yet fully his God) and appeals in v.10 to his *hesed* (his covenant obligation) and his *emet* (Heb אֱמֶת) that is, God's integrity and reliability, usually translated truth or faithfulness. These two words are found side by side again and again in Scripture, *hesed* and *emet*. On this basis, Jacob calls out for deliverance from Esau.

32.24 Jacob is finally left alone, having sent all his livestock, servants and family ahead of him. Now God encounters him and ‘grasps hold of the grasper.’ He wrestles with a man all night – it’s the story of his life, in one sense, always striving – but now it is God he is grappling with. And he lasts the round, as it were, so that the figure asks to be released.

32.25 God leaves a physical weakness upon Jacob as a sign of this encounter. For the rest of his life, Jacob would limp as a result of this night.

32.26 In asking for blessing, Jacob is asking for an admission from the man that he is yielding the fight to him, that Jacob has won. God then reveals that this match will change his life, and his name. He will be called Israel (Heb יִשְׂרָאֵל *Yisra-El*) from the word *sarah* (Heb שָׂרָה) to be a prince, to have rule – like the name of Abraham’s wife. So he will be the one who has contended with God and been given power.

32.29, 30 Jacob has a terrible realisation that this time his struggle has not been against a man, but with God Himself. He has looked God in the face, and lived to tell of it. Thus he names the place on the river, *Peniel* (Heb פְּנֵי אֵל) face, or presence of God.

He crosses the river and makes for the meeting with his brother.

33.1 Tension mounts as Esau and his men come into sight – it must have been an awesome sight for Jacob. But now, instead of hiding, he goes ahead of the four groupings of his family (Bilhah and Zilpah and sons first, then Leah and sons, and finally Rachel and Joseph – worth noting how this would have seemed to the other sons, in the light of later animosity from his brothers toward this favoured son.) As he approaches, he prostrates himself seven times to the ground as a sign of subjection to him.

33.4 Jacob’s prayer is answered, and not only does he find favour with Esau, but a reconciliation with him, whom he has not seen for twenty years. It is a beautiful picture, as the brothers kiss and weep in each other’s embrace. Esau then meets the large family who are following him, his sisters-in-law, his nephews and niece.

33.8 Esau asks about the amount of animals being offered him, and Jacob is up-front, saying they are a peace-offering to his brother to gain his favour (*chen*). Esau doesn’t need this sweetening, but Jacob urges him. After all, seeing his brother’s face is for Jacob like seeing God’s face (which of course, he would know about, because he has just seen God’s face!)

33.12 Esau offers for them to journey on to his land together, but Jacob negotiates for Esau to leave them to rest, and to go ahead of them.

33.17 After the rest, they come to Succoth (Heb סֹכֶתָה) , meaning *booths*, where they build a house, and erect shelters for the livestock. And so Jacob returns to Canaan, and settles, and builds an altar to worship at.

For the first time here, Jacob-Israel links his own name to the God of his fathers in the naming of this altar; rather than calling it the altar of the God of Abraham or the of the Fear of Isaac, he names it the altar of the God, the God of Israel (Heb אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל *El Elohey Yisra'el*) Something has happened to change his relationship; God is at last fully in the picture for him.

Day 15 Gen 34-35

34.1ff This chapter recounts the sordid story of lust, lies and revenge in which Israel's sons were implicated in their treatment of the local Canaanite family of Shechem, son of Prince Hamor the Hivite.

Dinah, Leah's daughter, goes out to meet the women of the region, but ends up being raped by the local leader's son. However, he then wants her for his wife, and so gets his father to negotiate with Jacob for her as his bride. Not only that, but Hamor sees this as an opportunity for them to integrate with the Israelites.

34.10 Hamor sees an economic benefit coming from the riches which Israel and his sons have brought to the region.

34.13 Dinah's brothers plan their revenge on the Hivites. They say that will only allow Dinah to marry Shechem if all the men of the Hivite city will be circumcised.

34.19 Shechem, although he has treated Dinah badly, is actually said to be an honourable man, and he agrees to the condition, and for the sake of this woman and the alliance, convinces all the men of the city to be circumcised.

34.25 Simeon and Levi now carry out their revenge on the Hivites; on the third day, when the men are sore from their wounds, the sons of Jacob come and kill them and plunder their city, rescuing their sister in the process. They also take the livestock and enslave the women and children.

34.30 Jacob is angry with his sons over their actions. They have made his name 'a stink' to the local people, and he fears their vengeance for what is an act of treachery, for Dinah's brothers, in taking things into their own hands, pretended to be in alliance with the Hivites, then visited this terrible payback on them.

34.31 The sons protest that they were only defending the honour of their sister, who had been treated by Shechem as a prostitute.

It is of note that the name of God is not mentioned once in this chapter, nor is there any mention of his sanction on the actions of Simeon and Levi. Here is an era where law is minimal, although where agreements are to be kept to and covenant is to be honoured.

35.1 The Lord makes a welcome appearance at the beginning of this chapter, after such a baleful interlude. It is time for Jacob-Israel to fulfil his vow made in chapter 28.20, and to return to Beth-El, the house of God, where he saw the Lord at the top of the stairway of angels.

35.2ff Jacob now has his family put away all the foreign idols they have been connected with, for example, Laban's household gods, the teraphim, which are gathered with all the pagan trappings and buried under an oak tree at Shechem.

35.5 As they journey to Bethel, the surrounding Canaanites give them a wide berth, probably having heard of the slaughter upon the Hivites because of Shechem.

35.6 Jacob comes to Bethel, and builds he altar to the God of the house of God (Heb **בֵּית־אֱלֹהִים**) at the place where he first met him.

35.9 The Lord appears and renews the covenant made to Abraham and Isaac, promising the land and great blessing on his family. He also confirms the new name of Jacob as Israel.

35.16 We are not aware until this point that Rachel is pregnant again. At a place near Bethlehem-Ephrathah, a town which will appear as a key focus of God's purposes a number of times in the story to come, Rachel goes into severe labour, and in bearing a son, whom she names, son of my sorrow (*ben-oni* Heb **בֶּן־אֹנִי**) she dies in childbirth. Jacob later renames this, his twelfth son, son of my right hand (*ben-yamin* Heb **בֶּן־יָמִין**)

35.19 And so Jacob buries his beloved wife at Bethlehem, and sets up a memorial pillar to her.

35.22 Reuben, Jacob's eldest son, disgraces his father by sleeping with his concubine, Bilhah. Later, in 1 Chronicles 5.1, we read that because of this, Reuben's rights as the firstborn were forfeited to the sons of Joseph.

Now Jacob's twelve sons are complete – Leah's six, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah, two apiece.

35.27 There is poignant reunion at Mamre, where Abraham had lived at Hebron, when Jacob-Israel comes home to his ancient father Isaac, who is still living. How amazing it must have been to the old man to see this family, to see God beginning to fulfil his word, that out of the son of promise has come a dozen grandsons and a granddaughter. At this point, at the age of 180, Isaac, 'full (and satisfied) in years' dies and is buried by the reconciled brothers, Esau and Jacob at Hebron in the tomb of his father and mother.

Day 16 Gen 36

36.1 'Here are the descendants of Esau' – this continues the unfolding genealogy; the next reference is found in 37.2 with the offspring of Jacob.

Esau is also called Edom. This is important, as later Scriptures refer often to his descendants as Edom. The word comes from the same root as Adam, meaning red, earthy. (Heb אָדָם *adam* – the Hebrew word for blood is linked, דָּם *dam*) This is presumably from Esau's colouring.

36.2 The names of his Canaanite wives, Machelah and Judith, are here given as Adah and Oholibamah. His Ishmaelite wife still has the same name. It may be that they were renamed in the local language.

36.8 Esau and his clan move to Seir, to the south east of the Dead Sea, so as not to clash with Jacob and his family. In dry lands, finding pasture for so many animals would have been a challenge, and a possible source of conflict.

The chapter is mostly made up of genealogical data. Of note is the word at the end of the chapter, in v.40ff for chieftains (King James calls them dukes.) The word is *aluph* (Heb אֲלֻפִּים the same root as the first word of the Hebrew alphabet, 'aleph, from the word for ox, indicating something tamed, a gentle strength, since the ox is a strong animal under control. Occasionally used elsewhere of leaders.

Day 17 Gen. 37, 38

37.1 There is some suggestion in Jewish writings that Jacob's settling in Canaan was not a good thing. His father, Isaac, had been a nomad among the Canaanites. Jacob has built a house for himself, but still moves around, and so perhaps the word 'settle' means 'became a nomad', although it seems more likely, given the comparison with his father Isaac's nomadic lifestyle that Jacob has fixed a more permanent residence. By the end of his life, this will all have changed.

37.2 We find Joseph at age 17 with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, called his father's *women/wives*. It's interesting to note that the sons divided themselves by the mother they came from. Perhaps Leah's sons saw themselves as a cut above the rest, or because they were mainly older, they did not get involved with the flocks. However, he would not be endearing himself to them, as he fed back the mischief they got up to to Isaac.

The last time Joseph was mentioned, it was as the protected son of Rachel, bringing up the rear, for safety, while his brothers and their mothers were sent ahead. Rachel, the beloved wife, is now dead, so Joseph becomes even more precious in Israel's sight. The seeds of enmity are sown, from the mothers onward.

37.3 Joseph is declared here to be the favourite, because he is the son of Jacob's old age, and he is given a distinctive gift; a garment, not of the ordinary peasant, but a long coat with sleeves, and probably extending to the ankles, normally a sign of high or noble rank. The King James had coat of many colours, following the LXX ποικίλος (*poikilos* = motley) but the Hebrew is *ketonet passim* (כְּתוֹנֶת פַּסִּים) a coat of sleeves. This favouritism results in hatred of him by his brothers.

37.5 Perhaps the status of the coat went to Joseph's head, and he dreams of being the ruler of his brothers, and his parents. Even his father is shocked by this revelation (v10)

37.11 Despite the rebuke Israel gives his son, the old man guards (Heb שָׁמַר *shamar*) the dream in his heart, rather like later Mary ponders the events of the nativity in Luke.

37.12 The drama now unfolds, as Joseph's brothers hatred turns to active aggression towards him.

37.14 Israel sends Joseph to bring back a report of his brothers' activities. The account seems to convey to us the picture of a day-dreaming dawdler, who ends up in the wrong place, and has to be directed. ((This could be reading into the story what is not there.)

37.18 The brothers conspire to kill him.

37.19 They call him 'the dream-master' (Heb הַחֲלֹמוֹת בַּעַל *ba'al hachalomot*)

37.21 Reuben, perhaps as the eldest and feeling some responsibility, takes steps to rescue Joseph from their plot, and suggests not shedding blood but simply leaving Joseph in an empty underground desert-cistern, (Heb בּוֹר *bor*) usually used for storing water. (These were sometimes used as prisons.) Reuben's intention is to come back later and set him free to go back to his father.

37.23 They take from him the hated long-sleeved coat, which marks him out from them and put him in the well-cistern.

37.25 As they are eating, they see a caravan of Ishmaelite traders, (the clan of their great-uncle, Ishmael), en route from Gilead to Egypt, and they decide to sell Joseph to them as a slave. Apparently, Reuben is not around then this is happening.

37.27 They seem to have some mild change of heart, seeing that he is, after all, their brother.

37.28 Joseph is sold for twenty pieces of silver to the merchants, who take him to Egypt. When Reuben returns, he is distraught – this will be a terrible blow to his father. They hatch a plan to present Joseph's coat to Israel covered in animal blood to deceive him into believing that his son is dead. There is something of the old family trait of pretending to cover tracks; Israel himself deceived his own father Isaac in his youth.

37.35 Despite the efforts of his sons and daughters, this is too much for Israel, and he goes into deep depression.

37.36 The Ishmaelites (also, rather confusingly, known as Midianites) arrive in Egypt, and Joseph is sold into slavery in Captain Potiphar's household.

It is of note that in this chapter there is no mention at all of the Lord of His interaction with these events. Similarly, in the next chapter, the only mention of the Lord is of His anger with the dark acts of Er and Onan. (38.7, 10)

38.1 This is a very sordid story of Judah's being reprimanded at the hands of his daughter-in-law Tamar, trading on his lust and his waywardness.

Judah 'goes down' from his brothers, and becomes good friends with an Adullamite local, Hirah. In the process, he takes a Canaanite wife named Shuah, and they have sons Er, Onan and Shelah. They also have a daughter.

Judah arranges a marriage for Er with a woman named Tamar (her name means palm-tree.) However, Er's wickedness, which is unspecified leads to his death from the Lord.

38.8 The concept of the marriage of a childless widow to her dead husband's brother, to produce an heir for him, known as Levirate marriage (from Latin, *Levir*, husband's brother) is one unfathomable to modern Western society, but in a society where clan was important, and where inheritance was tied to offspring, and widows had no property rights, it was a frequent occurrence.

The Law of Moses provides for Levirate marriage, (Heb יָבָם *yavam*) in Deut 25.5-10. However, if a man chose not to have children to his brother (which the man in the story of Ruth does in Ruth 4.6) there was provision in the law for this. (Deut 25.10)

Here, there is no legal provision for refusal, and therefore Onan, Er's brother, is required to have a child with Tamar for his brother's sake. However, although it seems he was willing to enjoy the pleasure of sexual intercourse with Tamar, he withdrew before the crucial moment, and denied her the means of conceiving. For this, God ended his life.

This story of Onan has in the past been used as a prohibition on masturbation, which in older times was known as 'Onanism'. This is on the basis that any emission of male sperm other than in the process of procreative sex was seen as evil. This is in spite of the fact that the law of Moses has provision for men who have emissions outside of sexual intercourse, (Lev. 15.16,17) as well as during. The reality is that the Scripture is very non-prescriptive about masturbation, the whole weight of Scripture being the right relationship within which sexual union occurs. In fact, there is no direct reference to masturbation anywhere in Scripture, and it is to the individual conscience that the matter appears to be left.

The context of Onan's sin is clearly not that he is alone, but that he is lying with his late brother's wife, but using her for his own selfish ends instead of to establish his brother's progeny.

38.11 With the death of Onan, Judah tells his daughter-in-law that she is going to have wait until his third son, Shelah is grown, so that Shelah doesn't fall under the same judgement as his brothers. Tamar meantime lives with her father-in-law.

38.12 Judah's daughter, whose name we are not told, dies. There is an awful morbidity in this family. Perhaps this is what entices Tamar to take such drastic action as follows.

Judah goes away to his old friend Hirah's for some sheep-shearing to take his mind off the loss of his children. Tamar follows him to Timnath, and dresses as a prostitute – prostitution was often connected in ancient times with pagan worship – and Judah contracts her for her services.

38.18 Subtle Tamar knows she will need some proof of the provenance of her child, so she asks Judah for a deposit in kind until the payment of the goat comes to her, to pay for this encounter. So Judah gives her his ring, his bracelet and his staff, to be redeemed on payment. As a result of their intercourse, a child is conceived.

38.20 When Judah's friend Hirah goes to deliver the fee of a goat, and get Judah's deposit back, there is no sign of the prostitute. He is told there is no such trade going on in that district.

38.23 Judah says to Hirah that she can just keep his things; they are not going to make a fuss about the payment of a goat.

38.24 Tamar is found to be pregnant, and is about to be burned for being a prostitute. However, she produces Judah's things, and Judah shamefacedly admits his fault, in that he had presumably kept Shelah from her, in case of losing him as well as the result of any misdeed.

38.26 It's fascinating that in this seemingly immoral scenario, Judah describes Tamar as more righteous (Heb תְּדָאָה *tsedaqah*) than he is; she is more aware of the rights and responsibilities of the widow than her father-in-law.

38.27 As in his father's case, Judah's sons are twins, and there is something of a battle in their birthing, reminiscent of Esau and Jacob's. As Zarach's hand appears, the midwife ties a scarlet thread on it, presumably to connote the firstborn son in the case of twins. But then his hand disappears, and somehow his brother 'overtakes' him, and so he is called Perez, 'Breakout' (Heb פָּרֵץ *Parets*) while the scarlet thread re-emerges on the hand of Zarah (Heb זָרַח *Zarach*)

Perez is of particular importance, as it is through his line that Boaz, redeemer-husband of Ruth will come, and through them Jesse and David, and so on to our Lord Jesus Christ, son of Mary, wife of Joseph, of the house and lineage of David, of the tribe of Judah. (see Ruth 4.18-22.)

It is again astounding how God can take the foolishness of man, and turn it to his opportunity, and redemptive purpose. We are about to see that also in the life of Joseph, to whose story we now return.

Day 18 Gen. 39.1 – 42.5

There is a striking difference between the two preceding chapters of Genesis and the next two or three; the Lord is acknowledged and active throughout, while in the previous two, the only mention of the Lord is in his judgement of sin.

So, in 39.2,3,5 & 9, there is reference to God's blessing. Also, Joseph's chastity stands out against the activity of his brother Judah in the previous chapter.

39.1 Joseph becomes a trusted slave in the household of Captain Potiphar of Pharaoh's guard.

39.2,3 The Lord causes Joseph to succeed in what he does.

39.4 Joseph finds favour in his master's eyes (Heb עָנַן *chen*) – a better translation than 'grace' as in KJV. Favour is at the discretion of the one favouring, not an obligation.

39.5 As a result of Jacob's presence, the household is blessed – the promise of God of his people being a channel of God's touch is being worked out.

39.7 Darkness steps in as his master's wife tries to seduce him, then accuses him falsely of attempted rape. This is where we begin to ask the why question – why would God allow that to happen when Joseph is doing so well? There is something about the nature of darkness which has a certain freewill; but God is always a step ahead, although it does not stop His people going through painful experiences – perhaps the pain is part of the formation process.

39.14 Joseph is identified here as a Hebrew (Heb עִבְרִי *'ivri*) only the second time the term has been used in Scripture (first time is of Abram in Gen 14.13)

39.21 Although Joseph ends up falsely imprisoned by his angry master (a picture of the captivity yet to come for his descendants in Egypt) the covenant self-obligation of God's *hesed* is with him, and the same favour which was upon him at Potiphar's continues even here in the jail. (Notice that here *hesed* and *chen* appear side by side, but are different concepts.)

39.23 As with Potiphar, the gaoler doesn't even have to think about the administration of the prison, so much does Joseph have it all in hand.

40.1 This chapter deals with the chief cupbearer and the chief baker of Pharaoh. They both have dreams, which Joseph interprets, and which are fulfilled, one to the cupbearer's benefit, the other to the baker's destruction.

40.8 Joseph does not presume to present himself as a dream-interpreter, but says that interpretation (literally, *opening* of dreams, Heb פִּתְרוֹן *pitron* from *patar* to open up) are from God.

40.14,15 Joseph asks the cupbearer to remember him when he is restored to his position, and to *do chesed* to him, to regard this interaction as a covenant between them, which needs a response. Joseph also confides in him about the injustice he is suffering. However, the butler forgets all about Joseph, (v 23) and he spends another two years in prison. How terrible when hope is deferred.

41.1 Pharaoh has a dream, in which he is standing on the banks of the Nile. The word used here for river is *ye'or* (Heb נַיִם) meaning a canalised river, which particularly refers to the river of Egypt and its associated irrigation system.

The dream has seven fat cows coming up, only to be eaten by seven scraggy cows, then seven big ears of wheat being eaten up by seven sparse ears. Pharaoh is troubled, but it is at this moment that the cupbearer remembers his forgotten promise to Joseph, who is sent for.

41.16 Joseph again avoids making himself the centre of attention, pointing to God as the only one who can give Pharaoh a satisfactory answer (literally *answer with shalom*)

41.28 Joseph interprets the dreams for Pharaoh to mean that seven years of plenty will be followed by seven years of famine, and if Pharaoh acts wisely, he can provide from the surplus of the fat years to keep people alive in the thin ones.

41.38 Pharaoh is impressed with Joseph, and acknowledges the presence of God with him – in the same way in which Nebuchadnezzar later acknowledges God's presence with Daniel in Babylon, an interestingly parallel story of God's blessing on Gentile kings through his Hebrew servants. (see Daniel 4.8, for example)

41.41ff As with Daniel, God elevates Joseph to rulership in Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, and Joseph comes into his own as the administrator of the great famine relief plan of Egypt. Not only that, but nations come to Egypt to buy from them when they are in famine.(41.57)

41.45 The question of the meaning of Joseph's Egyptian name is a complicated one, which has not been resolved fully. But in Zapanat-Paneach there seem to be included the Egyptian words for god and for life (ankh), giving a possible meaning, 'the one God appoints to give life', which would be very appropriate. Joseph has an Egyptian noblewoman as wife, and produces two sons, Manasseh (meaning causing to forget) and Ephraim (meaning double-fruitfulness, from the same root word as the term Ephrat, fruitful, used for the town of Bethlehem.) These sons receive a later blessing from Israel, and become the heirs of Joseph, listed as half-tribes with the eleven others in place of Joseph's name.

42.1 Like their ancestor Abraham, when famine comes to Canaan, the family of Israel seek help from Egypt. The ten brothers take a long journey over the desert, but leave their youngest brother Benjamin with his father, Israel being unwilling to lose the last vestige of his beloved Rachel as he has lost Joseph.(v.4)