

Reading Schedule for February 6-12, 2017

Jacob will be the focal point of our reading this week. He plays a very important role in the history of God's people. His sons would be the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob's name would be changed to Israel as well. The last reading for this week is the one that means the most to me. It is the shortest reading as well, about Jacob wrestling with God.

February 6 – Genesis 29:1-35: “So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.” (v.20) From the moment Jacob met Rachel, he loved her deeply. He shows his love by being willing to work for seven years so that he could marry her. It was the custom of the day for a man to present a dowry to the family for his future wife. These seven years were such a payment. Some of these customs are confusing to us. Nonetheless, the theme of the story is Jacob following through with his promise. But there is another aspect of this story that I want you to realize; Laban deceived Jacob, and Jacob would be familiar with deception. That is how he got the blessing for the firstborn. Even when our sins are forgiven, sometimes the consequences live on. What do you notice in this reading that gets your attention? Why?

February 7 – Genesis 30:1-24: “When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, ‘Give me children, or I’ll die!’” (v.1) I think of this as the introduction and so I wanted to use it as the launch into my thoughts about this reading today. I think that Jacob settled for something that was socially acceptable but not God's best. Rachel struggled to trust God as well. She gave her maidservant to Jacob and would eventually be blessed by God. I think that the blessing of God's provision was not as joyous because she had taken things into her own hands. Sarah did the same thing with Abraham, as she gave him Hagar who bore Ishmael, as we have previously read. This lack of trust in God and the unhealthy competition with multiple wives made the family dysfunctional at best. They would experience less than God wanted for them because they had not trusted him. Do you agree? How do you respond to this reading today?

February 8 – Genesis 30:25-43: “In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.” (v.43) The bottom line is that God blessed Jacob. This is grace found in the Old Testament. Jacob did not deserve the goodness of God, but he experienced it. God led him to do the right things, even when Laban worked very hard at deceiving him. This morning as I was praying I spent most of my time in prayer expressing my thanks to God for his goodness to me and my family. Too often we take for granted the things we enjoy. The Lord has been so good to us as he has chosen for us to be born in the United States of America, and we have abundant provision for all our needs. We are as wealthy as Jacob. What are you grateful for; please spend some time in prayer thanking God!

February 9 – Genesis 31:1-21: “Then Rachel and Leah replied, ‘Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us.’” (vv. 14 & 15) Rachel and Leah were ready to leave home. They did not have a deep affection for their father. I would suggest that they both experienced the wound that a father can bring when he doesn't esteem his children properly. The father did not give them what was rightly theirs; they knew they would never inherit anything from their father. Thus, they wholeheartedly approved of Jacob's

plan to take the wealth he had gained and leave. The role of parents is so crucial. As a father, I realize that I have amazing potential to bless my children and grandchildren, and point the way through my love, instruction and discipline. I want them to know how special they are to me. I want to do the opposite of what Laban did with his daughters. Do you understand? How are you blessing your children?

February 10 – Genesis 31:22-58: “I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks.” (v.38) Jacob defends himself against his father-in-law. Jacob was nothing less than loyal and diligent in his service to Laban. He did more than what was expected. Laban is the kind of person who never admits he is wrong, tries to manipulate the situation and is only thinking of himself. It would be very hard to honor a man like him. But Jacob did anyway because he was his father-in-law. God saw what Jacob did and honored his loyalty. These are hopeful qualities in Jacob that would be important as the founder of the Jewish nation. I want you to compare Jacob and Laban. What qualities in Laban do you want to avoid? What qualities in Jacob do you want to possess? Why?

February 11 – Genesis 32:1-21: “Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, ‘This is the camp of God!’ So he named that place Mahanaim.” (vv. 1 & 2) Even though these verses are not explained, we don't know why the angels appeared to Jacob, but it is still encouraging to me. I think it has to do with God assuring Jacob that he was with him. The hurtful experience with Laban, and the uncertainty of how Esau would respond had to tempt Jacob to worry. As the angels appear to Jacob, it gives you a sense that they are going to “camp” with Jacob and his family as they make their way back to Canaan. This leads into the remarkable interaction Jacob has with God in tomorrow's reading. I believe that there are more angels around us than we recognize and acknowledge. I like Hebrews definition of an angel, “God's ministering agent on our behalf.” These angels would do that with Jacob, and I want you to have spiritual eyes to sense that God is watching over you and protecting you with his heavenly hosts. Do you agree? How do you respond to the reality of angels?

February 12 – Genesis 32:22-32: “So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, ‘It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared.’” (v.30) There is no doubt that this encounter is with God himself. Jacob would be changed internally, and also acknowledged with the name Israel, which means “struggles with God,” or “strives with God.” This is a profound experience and would forever affect Jacob's life. The limp would remind him of his encounter and God's presence all around him. We are learning that Jacob is persistent. This is a good quality. God encourages persistence in many areas of our life, but especially spiritually. Strong character develops as you struggle through tough conditions. I want Jacob's experience to shape your mind and heart as you might from time to time wrestle with God. If you have questions, heartfelt concerns, intense situations ... bring it to God and wrestle through it with him. Jacob was about to meet his brother who had promised to kill him. Something happened in Jacob's heart because of God's deep work in his life. How does this event inspire you?

Prayers: Please pray for those you know who are wandering from God and at the same time call New Harvest their church home. Pray specifically for their struggle in their commitment to the Lord.