

Genesis 28 (the Schocken Bible)

28:1 So Yitzhak called for Yaakov, he blessed him and commanded him, saying to him: You are not to take a wife from the women of Canaan;

2 arise, go to the country of Aram, to the house of Betuel, your mother's father, and take yourself a wife from there, from the daughters of Lavan, your mother's brother.

3 May God Shaddai bless you, may he make you bear fruit and make you many, so that you become a host of peoples.

4 And may he give you the blessing of Avraham, to you and to your seed with you, for you to inherit the land of your sojournings, which God gave to Avraham.

5 So Yitzhak sent Yaakov off; he went to the country of Aram, to Lavan son of Betue! the Aramean, the brother of Rivka, the mother of Yaakov and Esav.

6 Now Esav saw that Yitzhak had given Yaakov farewell-blessing and had sent to the country of Aram, to take himself a wife from there, (and that) when he had given him blessing, he had commanded him, saying: You are not to take a wife from the women of Canaan!

7 And Yaakov had listened to his father and his mother and had gone to the country of Aram.

8 And Esav saw that the women of Canaan were bad in the eyes of Yitzhak, his father,

9 so Esav went to Yishmael and took Mahalat daughter of son of Avraham, sister of Nevayot, in addition to his wives as wife.

10 Yaakov went out from Be' er-Sheva and went toward Harran,

11 and encountered a certain place. He had to spend the night there, for the sun had come in. Now he took one of the stones of the place and set it at his head and lay down in that place.

12 And he dreamt: Here, a ladder was set up on the earth, its top reaching the heavens, and here: messengers of God were going up and down on it.

13 And here: YHWH was standing over against him.

He said: I am YHWH, the God of Avraham your father and the God of Yitzhak.

The land on which you lie I give to you and to your seed.

14 Your seed will be like the dust of the earth; you will burst forth, to the Sea, to the east, to the north, to the Negev. All the clans of the soil will find blessing through you and through your seed!

15 Here, I am with you, I will watch over you wherever you go and will bring you back to this soil; indeed, I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.

16 Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said:

Why, YHWH is in this place, and I, I did not know it!

17 He was awestruck and said: How awe-inspiring is this place!

This is none other than a house of God, and that is the gate of heaven!

18 Yaakov started-early in the morning, he took the stone that he had set at his head and set it up as a standing-pillar and poured oil on top of it.

19 And he called the name of the place: Bethel -House of God

20 And Yaakov vowed a vow, saying:

If God will be with me and will watch over me on this way that I go and will give me food to eat and a garment to wear,

21 and if I come back in peace to my father's house

YHWH shall be God to me,

22 and this stone that I have set up as a standing-pillar shall become a house of God, and everything that you give me I shall tithe, tithe it to you.

Isaiah 44:6-8 New International Version

The LORD, Not Idols

⁶“This is what the LORD says—

Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty:

I am the first and I am the last;

apart from me there is no God.

⁷Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it.

Let him declare and lay out before me

what has happened since I established my ancient people,

and what is yet to come—

yes, let them foretell what will come.

⁸Do not tremble, do not be afraid.

Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago?

You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me?

No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.”

Romans 8:12-25 New International Version

¹²Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Matthew 13:24-30 New International Version

The Parable of the Weeds

²⁴ Jesus told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. ²⁵ But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. ²⁶ When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

²⁷ “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

²⁸ “‘An enemy did this,’ he replied.

“The servants asked him, ‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

²⁹ “‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. ³⁰ Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

Sermon. This week we continue with our Jacob stories, broadening the text to include some background that helps our understanding.

Jacob continues his manipulative behavior, with the guidance of Rebecca, and they have tricked Isaac into giving the firstborn blessing to Jacob, rather than Esau. Esau learns of this immediately and decides to kill Jacob. Rebecca, hearing of Esau’s threat, bundles Jacob off.

With today’s text, Jacob has been collecting family endorsements and now receives God’s blessing. This trip he is on has the dual purposes of visiting the home village of Abraham and Sarah for the purpose of finding a wife there, as well as avoiding Esau’s anger. He is running for his life and the only place to sleep is in the open with a rock as his pillow. His dream is famous and became the spiritual “Jacob’s Ladder”. The point of the text today is that God is keeping his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Rebecca – establishing a lineage for the people who are to witness of Him so that the world will know of God.

Today’s text reveals a few things to us. The most obvious is how flawed Jacob is. Certainly his conniving and deceitful behavior at home is wrong. In today’s text we see him trying to make a deal with God that if God is with him then he will give a tenth of all that he has to God. Let’s be very certain about this. We do not play let’s make deal with God. Abraham did and Jacob is now and we try to in times of difficulties, but we need to remember always that God does not need the deals we would make with Him. Indeed, such deals are blasphemous since they infer that we are equals with God. We work in God’s Creation and tithe what we earn not because we are making a deal with God as if He is a celestial slot machine, but because that is what we, His created, are supposed to do. It is, literally, our God given role. God blesses us because of Himself and his grace,

not because we make a deal or are otherwise worthy. Grace is not a Divine response to some task we undertake or some offering.

The other thing the Jacob text teaches us is that it is God's plan that Jacob be the source of the Divine legacy. That Jacob would normally have been relegated to second class status as the younger son is surmounted not because Jacob is a manipulator, but because it is God's intent. Indeed, given the nature of the culture back then, Isaac would never have agreed to give a preferential blessing to Jacob rather than Esau, so the trickery would seem God's way of getting past that. We'll come back to these points in a moment.

The Gospel lesson is similar to last week's. Then we had the parable of the seeds falling on various soils. This time the seed is sown and then the enemy of the sower sows weeds in the garden. Predictably, the weeds start and then we can relate to what happens next. The workers ask if they should pull weeds and the sower says no, that they will not risk uprooting the sown seeds for the sake of pulling the weeds. The weeds will be allowed to remain until harvest and then be dealt with.

This may be Jesus' clearest statement about why we see such injustice, in the Biblical sense, around us. Jesus is telling us that God will not risk all of Creation – we'll read mankind here – in the effort to remove the weeds. God allows the weeds to do their thing until harvest time. Indeed, perhaps it is not too much a stretch to say that by leaving the weeds there they are given an opportunity to display something worthwhile and become a contributor to the Divine farm. Thistles come to mind. They are prickly and can take over. But, when mature not only are they beautiful but they also provide a treatment for long list of ailments. So, perhaps God's grace is not just to keep the sown plants from being pulled inadvertently, but to also see the true benefits of the other plants – perhaps redeeming them in the process.

These stories are about God, not the people. The text from Isaiah is a straight forward statement of the uniqueness of God – that the manmade constructs that abound are worthless imposters. The Jacob and Gospel texts are all about God's plan and power to accomplish that plan. The plants are given the opportunity to grow. Jacob is shepherded through difficult circumstances – some of his own making. All this is by God's plan – something we call the sovereignty of God.

We can close with Paul's letter to the Romans – this is the tail end of the section known as the Gospel according to Paul, so it serves as something of a summary. Through Christ, we are heirs of what God provides in sonship. This is by God's grace alone. Jacob has proceeded by God's grace alone. The plants in the parable are given their space without weeding by God's grace. God suffers mankind to conjure up other messiahs and gods with the full knowledge that there are, in fact, none to be had.

We are the people to whom the Isaiah text is addressed. We are the people who conjure up our own messiahs, even though we know full well that there is only one God. We are the people who, like Jacob, seek our own ends. We are the people who may be either weeds or sown seeds in the parable. These are not old, arcane stories, they are truths that apply to us and we would do well to be humble and acknowledge that. That we are not pulled out by the roots, that we are, instead, blessed as was Jacob, is by God's grace alone. We need to think first of what God would have of us. Seek Him and His will.

Ring the bells that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack, a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in

By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, by Scripture alone so that we may give all glory to God alone.