

The Meaning of Life

January 8 — *Genesis 25:1-26*

Day 8 — 357 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We didn't cover much ground, as we stayed in one chapter of *Genesis*. However, we did read about a very important event, the birth of Rebekah's twins — Esau and Jacob. The importance of these two boys, as Rebekah inquired of the Lord, is that they represented two nations, two nations that will struggle with one another.

Esau's descendants become the nation of Edom, while Jacob's descendants become the nation of Israel. God foretold of the conflict between them, as He said, "One people (Israel) will be stronger than the other (Edom), and the older (Esau) will serve the younger (Jacob)." As we proceed through the Bible, we will need to keep our eyes on these two men, to see if this prophecy is fulfilled.

The other important event that we read about today was the death of Abraham. The Scriptures commented about this incredible man, "He breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man satisfied with life..." No doubt, Abraham saw and did some amazing things; his time on earth was incredible indeed, but why was he satisfied with life? Because Abraham had discovered the meaning of life, what life is all about — **having a personal relationship with God and honoring Him on earth with faithfulness and obedience.**

Abraham didn't live for wealth or ease. He didn't live for power or prestige, and he didn't live for people or projects. **He simply sought to make God his true love, his life's focus, and to bring Him pleasure every day.** If or when we discover the meaning of life, as Abraham did, that is when we begin to see things more clearly, when our desires and ambitions are simplified and when we fall in line with the will of God. His purposes become our purposes.

Daily Reflection

Have you discovered the meaning of life, the purpose for your existence? If you were to consider your goals and ambitions, your priorities and focus, they give evidence of whom or what it is that you are living for — yourself, others, the world, the Lord. What do they tell you?

How faithful have you been to God? How obedient have you been to His direction in your life? If God is your target, then how are you aiming to please Him?

"Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (*Colossians 3:17, NASB*).

The Blessings of God

January 9 — *Genesis 25:27-28:5*

Day 9 — 356 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

The competition between Jacob and Esau, which started when Esau came out of the womb with Jacob grabbing his heel, finally came to its climax. Jacob manipulated Esau into forfeiting his birthright. In the end, **Esau traded something of great value for something of little worth.**

Then, as if that weren't enough, Jacob and his mother secretly planned a way to steal Esau's parental blessing. As a result, Jacob was made the master over Esau and his descendants, prosperous beyond measure, and the heir to the covenant which God initiated with Abraham. Of course, Esau was furious and swore to kill Jacob once their father died. In the meantime, Jacob did the smart thing, for once, and got out of town.

In the midst of all the craziness of today's story, there seemed to be a common theme — **the blessing of God**. In *Genesis 26*, we read how God blessed Isaac in a way that distinguished him from everyone else. "Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. *The Lord blessed him*, and he became rich and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy" (v. 12, 13). The Lord appeared to Isaac in the night and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. *I will bless you* and multiply your descendants..." (v. 24).

When we set aside the drama of what took place, it is clear that all of the characters in the story recognized that **God is the One who makes men prosperous**. He alone makes men healthy and wealthy. He alone holds the key to success in this life. *Though men have been given the ability to make wealth, that ability is a gift from the gracious hand of God.* We would do well to remember that.

Daily Reflection

Have you come to the place in your life where you recognize that the blessings of this world are given to you by God and are not a result of your own doing? What, then, should be your response to the Lord?

Would you consider yourself to be a good steward of the Lord's blessings? Why or why not?

God blesses you so that you can bless others. How are you giving to others in order to be a blessing to them?

"You shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you the power to make wealth" (*Deuteronomy 8:18, NASB*).

A Tangled Web

January 10 — *Genesis 28:6-30:24*

Day 10 — 355 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We began the adventures of Jacob, who was sent to his relatives to find a wife. It would be important to keep the purity of the Hebrew race by marrying inside the family, especially marrying others who believe in God. Esau was rebellious in this way and first married Canaanite women; later, he tried to make amends for his poor decision and married some of Ishmael's daughters.

The main topic of our reading today was Jacob's falling in love with Rachel and working hard for her hand in marriage. We also read how God blessed Jacob by providing him with eleven sons (so far) and a daughter; his father Isaac prayed for this in *Genesis 28:3*, "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples."

However, in the midst of God's blessing Jacob, there was a treacherous event. It was, of course, the deceitfulness of Laban, Rachel's father, to trick Jacob into first marrying Leah, his oldest daughter. The truth that I cannot ignore here is that the deception of Jacob, to trick his father Isaac and steal his brother's birthright and blessing, was returned to him by Laban. *Jacob, the trickster, was himself tricked.*

These repercussions were not coincidental either; they will be repeated throughout Jacob's life. In the stories ahead, Jacob's family return his deceitfulness a hundredfold. The truth is clear — **whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap.**

Daily Reflection

When, in your own life, have you seen this principle come true, that you reap what you sow?

Knowing that God deals with men in this way, how does that affect how you live your life?

Jacob was wronged by Laban, but what can you learn from how Jacob responded?

Take a minute to search your heart. What are you sowing there that could reap trouble in your life? What are you sowing that will benefit you?

"Oh what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive." *Sir Walter Scott, 1808*

A Secure Faith

January 11 — *Genesis 30:25-31:55*

Day 11 — 354 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We observed the struggle between Jacob and his father-in-law, Laban. Notice that the pattern of deception in Jacob's family continued from yesterday's reading? It seems that Laban tried every trick in the book to keep Jacob from succeeding, but God blessed Jacob nevertheless.

Furthermore, as Laban deceived Jacob, Jacob deceived Laban, and Rachel even got in on the action and deceived her father, by stealing his household idols. No doubt, this was a highly dysfunctional family, one of many that we will come across this year. However, the story ended on a positive note, as Jacob and Laban made a covenant of peace and laid their grievances to rest.

I want to go back and consider Laban's reaction to losing his household idols. It seemed to me, when he pursued Jacob, that he was not angry that everyone left without saying goodbye; he was angry about losing his gods. He pursued Jacob not as a beloved kinsman but as a criminal. Then, Laban gave, what I think, is an embarrassing performance, as he frantically inspected all of Jacob's belongings, in search of his most prized possessions. **He seemed to be a man who was helpless without his idols.** What a pitiful picture!

My predominant thought today was thankfulness for the fact that **our God cannot be stolen, and our faith in Him is not misplaced but very secure.**

Daily Reflection

Have you ever frantically looked for something that was misplaced or lost? What was it and how did you feel when you found it? Or how did you feel when you didn't find it? Perhaps you felt like Laban.

We must be careful that no treasure on earth becomes so important that we become hopeless or helpless without it, for then are we dangerously approaching idolatry and making that treasure a god in our lives.

Have you ever longed for or searched for God the way you did that item? He is constant and faithful. Take time to praise Him for that and declare your hopefulness and help in Him!

Be sure that your heart is free from *the love of earthly treasures*, for God has said that He will never fail you or forsake you.

Making Things Right

Today In Your Reading...

We read about some of the key events in the early life of the tribe of Israel. Jacob, whose name was changed to Israel today, finally mended his relationship with Esau. He also moved back to Canaan and settled there. In the meantime, his last son, Benjamin, was born; but, he lost his first love, Rachel, in the process.

In the midst of these events, Jacob's family had a run-in with the men of Shechem, where his daughter Dinah was sexually abused. Once again, notice the pattern of deception in Jacob's family (from Day 10). Jacob was deceived by his sons, who pretended to forgive Shechem for his sin, but who, instead, were plotting their revenge. Unfortunately, deception is a common theme in Jacob's life.

Though we read several smaller stories today, I think the big story is how, after twenty years, God restored the relationship between the twins — Jacob and Esau. Although much of the turmoil in that relationship was Jacob's fault, for defrauding his brother of his birthright, deceiving his father, and stealing the first-born blessing, Jacob does the right thing to make up for his mistakes. I was impressed most with his humility. He put away his pride and self-reliance and put his hope in the Lord.

I believe that Jacob recognized that he was wrong and approached Esau, not in a spirit of arrogance, but in a spirit of resignation and lowliness. **He was willing to do whatever it took, to give whatever it took, and to say whatever it took to make things right.** We would be wise to follow his example.

Daily Reflection

No matter how hard you try to avoid it, there are going to be times when you make a mistake in a relationship. It could be with a spouse, a

family member, a friend, or a co-worker. It's going to happen. The question is how are you going to respond when it does happen?

What is the typical way that you handle these difficult situations? Would you say that your way is godly or selfish? Explain.

What about today? Is there a relationship in your life that is strained because of a mistake that you made? Why have you not made amends? What are you hoping will happen?

Follow Jacob's example — **trust in the Lord and, then, do whatever it takes to make things right.**

"Make allowance for each other's faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others" (*Colossians 3:13*).

The Choices We Make

January 13 — *Genesis 36:1-43*

Day 13 — 352 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We were entertained by the detailed genealogy recorded in *Genesis 36*. Be honest, after trying to pronounce the first few names, you skipped over quite a bit, maybe even to the end, right? That's okay. I don't blame you!

However, it's passages like these in which some important lesson is usually lurking, and this chapter is no exception. Did you catch it? Probably not. My guess is that you can't wait for tomorrow's reading, because it can't be as big of a yawner as today's reading. Not so fast! Let's see if we can make the most of what we've got today.

We know that Esau's descendants became the nation of Edom (v.8). The Edomites lived to the south of what would later be Israel. Eventually, they will come into conflict with the Israelites. Though they were prosperous, the Edomites were nothing compared to God's chosen nation. In fact, Edom would exist in the shadow of Israel, always subservient to it, but what does that have to do with today's passage?

Esau's troubles started early in life, when "he took wives from the daughters of Canaan" (v.2). It is a true statement, but rarely believed by young people, that **the first few years after leaving home chart their course for years to come**. *Decisions made then either make or break them* — the friends they choose, the jobs they pursue, the person they marry, the place they live, their commitment to God, their habits or vices, etc. Those choices can set them on a path of misery and suffering or on a path of godliness and blessing. So often **young people make foolish decisions early in life and spend the rest of it dealing with the consequences**.

Daily Reflection

Esau made some terrible choices. He sold his birthright for a bowl of soup. He chose wives from the pagan peoples of the world; and, he moved away from God's best. He left his father and went to another land, away from his brother Jacob (v.6). **Be mindful of your future path by watching the steps that you take today.**

Are there any consequences you are dealing with today from poor decisions that you made early in life? What are they?

What decisions, if any, have you made that have led you closer to God's best for you?

The older you get, the more you should think of the long-term effects of your decisions. Who are the young people in your life that you could help by guiding them in making good choices?

"Take delight in the Lord, and He will give you your heart's desires" (*Psalms 37:4*).

Not of Your Own Doing

January 14 — *Genesis 37:1-39:23*

Day 14 — 351 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

We read two wild stories — of Judah and Tamar and of Joseph and his brothers. Both stories were scenarios in which people chose to do the wrong thing, but where God was able, in His sovereignty, to work out the problems for His good purposes.

Of course, in the case of Joseph, God allowed him to be betrayed by his brothers, deported to Egypt as a slave, and sold into the hands of an important official, all for the purpose of one day saving Egypt, His own people, and the entire Near East from a terrible famine. There's no end to God's wisdom and providence.

Aside from the primary theme of Joseph's adventure to Egypt, I want to focus on a secondary theme, that being that God prospered all that Joseph did. The Scriptures say that "the Lord was with Joseph and blessed him greatly... Potiphar noticed that the Lord was with Joseph and blessed everything he did... From the day that Joseph was put in charge, the Lord began to bless Potiphar for Joseph's sake..." (39:2-5).

Even later, when Joseph was falsely accused and imprisoned, the Bible says that "the Lord was with Joseph there too, and He granted him favor with the chief jailer. He put Joseph in charge of the prisoners and everything that happened. The chief jailer had no more trouble after that, for the Lord was with Joseph, making everything run smoothly and successfully" (39:20-23).

We must always recognize the hand of God in our successes. **Oftentimes we neglect His grace and goodness and suppose that our prosperity is the result of our own doing**, when nothing could be further from the truth. God is the One who makes men successful. He gives the ability, He grants the circumstances, and He enables our success.

Daily Reflection

Have you recognized that it is God who prospers you? Do you regularly thank Him for it?

As a follower of God, you should be the best employee or employer. You should work hard, have a good attitude, be a team player, practice integrity, and be a blessing to those who are under you or who work alongside you. What would your co-workers say? Are you a blessing or a burden to those in your workplace?

How do you handle success? How do you respond to others who compliment your work?

With success you can either **soak it in** and let it swell you with pride, **deflect it** with rudeness and ungratefulness, or wisely **reflect it** to its true source, to the Lord.

"In your pride, you say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me wealthy.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to make wealth" (*Deuteronomy 8:17, 18, NASB*).