

Triennial Torah Study – 5th Year 29/03/2014

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Gen 31 1	Sam 18-19	Ps 65-67	Mark 9
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Jacob Departs from Laban (Genesis 31)

Jacob prospered with God's blessing and his own clever management of the flocks. But as Jacob increased, Laban decreased. This irritated Laban, especially since he thought his deal with Jacob to be overwhelmingly to his advantage. It also appears that Laban had gotten into the habit of living high while God blessed him because of Jacob, and the decrease in revenue meant an uncomfortable tightening of the belt. Indeed, Laban had wasted the bridal price of 14 years' labor Jacob had paid for his two wives (verses 15-16). In those days the bridal price was kept by the father in behalf of the daughters as a trust, but Laban had improperly consumed the money. Finally, seeing their father's fortune decline, Laban's sons became concerned that they would inherit nothing if something was not done soon.

With increasing hostility between Laban and Jacob and the possibility that Laban's sons might take some action against Jacob and his family, it was time to leave. Jacob's speech to his wives prior to departure reveals the duplicity of Laban, the faith of Jacob and the providence of God. During the six years that Jacob tended Laban's flocks (verse 41), Laban changed the terms of the deal between himself and Jacob many times. But with each change Jacob faithfully relied on God for continued blessing. And with each change, God provided that blessing. Finally, God commanded Jacob to leave. So Jacob left, but without telling Laban, attempting to avoid a confrontation.

Before he left, though, Rachel stole Laban's household idols. It is possible that she took the idols because it was commonly believed that the possessor of the idols would enjoy the blessing of the gods; Rachel, according to the paganism in which she was raised, may have attempted to "secure" her husband's good fortune. Yet she and Leah had apparently both come to worship the true God, seeing Him as the one who had blessed them with children and wealth and the one from whom to seek direction (see 29:32; 30:22-23; 31:16). Why, then, did Rachel take the idols? A number of commentators point out that the most likely explanation is that she stole them because they represented ownership of Laban's possessions. The one who had the idols could thereby prove

himself or herself to be the legitimate owner or heir to the property. For instance, the Broadman Bible Commentary states: “The possession of household gods was legal proof of the right to inheritance. Since Rachel believed that the property should be theirs, she ‘appropriated’ what she considered to be hers by right. This did not make the act any less wrong” (vol. 1, p. 220).

Laban, of course, pursued, angered not only by Jacob’s fortune, but also Jacob’s sudden departure and the disappearance of Laban’s household idols. However, God warned him in a dream not to speak “good or bad” to Jacob. Nevertheless, Laban upbraided Jacob for leaving, feigning that he would have sent them away with a great feast. Since he could not compel Jacob’s return, Laban turned his attention to the household idols. After an unsuccessful search of Jacob’s goods—Rachel having hidden the idols—Jacob upbraided Laban. Take note of how Jacob attributes his success to God and portrays God as having judged Jacob’s cause as righteous. Again, this is more evidence of the character development of Jacob.

In parting, Jacob and Laban erected a pillar stone. This stone, however, was different from the stone that Jacob erected in Bethel. This stone was not a sacred stone, but a memorial stone. It stood in that place as a reminder to all who passed by of the covenant made there between Laban and Jacob.

It should perhaps be mentioned that in spite of Laban’s chicanery and double-dealing, he may have been expressing genuine fatherly concern in the end (see 31:49-50, 53, 55). He didn’t have to make it part of the agreement that Jacob take no other wives. (It is interesting in verse 50 that Laban does not regard the maidservants as wives, as these concubines were looked upon as “surrogate mothers” for his daughters). And it is interesting to note his repeated references to the true God. While he was shaken by his dream to be sure, there would seem to be more to it than that. God had used Laban to bring about a dramatic change in Jacob’s character over the course of 20 years. Yet in all that time, Jacob had in turn served as quite a witness to Laban—there were certainly lessons in it for him too. Perhaps here at the end—broke, losing his family and seeing everything he had plotted and schemed after for so long now slipping away—Laban had finally gotten the point.

Saul Resents David (1 Samuel 18)

Jonathan, the son of Saul, immediately recognized in David the qualities he most admired. For, indeed, Jonathan was as courageous as David was. (It would be helpful to go back and review the exploits of Jonathan in chapter 14, and compare them to the exploits of David, to better grasp the tremendous camaraderie that developed between them). Jonathan and David were “kindred spirits.” They made a covenant pledge to always be loyal to one another (verse 3). Later, under adverse conditions, we will see them renew this friendship covenant.

David’s victory over Goliath and his newfound popularity, especially with the women, would soon inflame Saul’s immature jealousy. David’s ongoing successes will further expose the deteriorating

character of Saul (verses 6-9). The more Saul gives vent to his rage, the more unstable his mental state becomes—and the more susceptible he is to the evil spirit troubling him (16:14). Indeed, we open ourselves up to satanic influence if we do not control our anger (Ephesians 4:26-27). Saul becomes homicidal and twice tries to run David through with his spear, but David evades him. Realizing God was with David and not with him, Saul has a pathological fear of David. Not able to kill David, he gives him a responsibility that will keep him away (verses 12-13).

Samuel had anointed David to be king, but had not given David any kind of timetable. David knows to bide his time, conduct himself properly and wait on God. Even David's quiet conduct enrages Saul and causes him to fear David even more (verse 15). Saul then hatches a plot to have David killed. He stoops to using his daughter as bait to trap David, never expecting David to survive the seemingly impossible ordeal proposed to him (verse 21).

In his own eyes David considers himself to be "lightly esteemed" (verses 18-23). Though he is destined to be king of Israel, in his innate meekness David cannot see himself in Saul's royal circle. (Here is another lesson for us to emulate—to remain humble despite the awesome divine kingship to which God has destined us.)

Saul's plot fails with David surviving and succeeding twice over. Amazingly, though Saul acknowledges that God is with David, he becomes even more the enemy of David! (verses 28-30). We will continue to see how God works out every situation to fulfill His plan for David.

Assassination Attempt (1 Samuel 19; Psalm 59)

As we study through the historical stories contained in these Bible readings, let's remember to look for the guidance to make our present lives more Christ-like. All of these passages of Scripture were given under inspiration of God's Holy Spirit for our edification, to teach us lessons and provide examples.

In the same foolish way that Satan tries to remove God from his throne, Saul, knowing that God is with David, launches an open conspiracy to destroy David. God has provided an ally in Jonathan, which affords David some needed protection. Jonathan gives his father some very sound advice, which is actually heeded by the easily persuaded Saul (verses 4-6). A good relationship between Saul and David is restored when Jonathan points out that what David had done was good for the whole country. But as soon as David wins another battle against the Philistines, Saul's jealous nature reappears. God allowed a willing evil spirit to agitate Saul's already volatile envy.

Michal, Saul's daughter, loves David and is protective of him (18:20; 19:11-17). David escapes and goes to Ramah to seek counsel of Samuel, whom we haven't read about for a while.

Samuel presides over a group of prophets (verse 20). Recall that when Saul was first anointed, he fell in with a group of prophets, who were also musicians, as Samuel said he would (10:511). In both cases, the original King James has “company of the prophets.” Samuel had judged Israel in a circuit—from the towns of Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah yet always returning to Ramah (7:15-17). As noted in the highlights for 1 Samuel 10, the prophet Elijah later presides over an association known as “the sons of the prophets,” located in Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho (see 2 Kings 2). These are often referred to by commentators as the schools of the prophets, training centers of prophetic ministry. It seems likely, as the commentators also surmise, that Samuel founded these schools and that his circuit was connected with them.

This is evidence that God’s desire has always been that His ministry be well educated. While Christ’s original 12 apostles were “uneducated and untrained men” according to the standards of the day (Acts 4:13), they were in fact educated through the instruction they received from Christ, the role model of His life, constant study of Scripture, their Spirit-guided discussions and regular thoughtful meditation.

With David in Samuel’s care, God intervened in the situation so that all those who were sent against David were overcome and, surprisingly, began to do something completely incongruous to their intention—prophesy. Even Saul, when he came to see for himself, began to prophesy—provoking a similar reaction to the one he received when he prophesied when first anointed (1 Samuel 19:24; compare 10:11). “Naked,” says Barnes’ Notes, means without his robe and other outer robes, leaving only his shirt (1997, note on 19:24).

The superscription of Psalm 59 says that it was written upon the occasion of Saul sending assassins to stake out David’s house and kill him—the event recorded in 1 Samuel 19. There are times in an individual’s life when emotionally and psychologically he is “on top of the world,” and there are times when a person is in “survival mode,” just trying to keep it all together. Both emotional states afford opportunities to draw closer to God. When times are wonderful and prosperous, we draw nearer in our relationship to God by giving Him the credit and thanks for all He has done in our lives. But when the days are dark and our strength fails and it seems as though we won’t make it, we cry out to Almighty God for sorely needed help.

In Psalm 59, David is in “survival” mode. He isn’t thinking, “God will make me king.” Instead, he is wondering how he will survive another day. When David flees for his life, his prayer is for deliverance from his enemies. He remembers that God is our Savior and he prays in Psalm 59 to be saved. He knows the vast mercy and power of God.

When times seem darkest, believers can be confident that God is yet working through circumstances for their good (Romans 8:28).

“By Awesome Deeds in Righteousness You Will Answer Us” (Psalms 65-66)

The Zondervan NIV Study Bible says in its introductory note to Psalms 65-68 that these are

“four psalms dominated by the theme of praise and linked by the shared recognition that God’s ‘awesome’ deeds evoke the wonder of ‘all the earth’ to join Israel in singing the praise of her God.... In these four psalms, the occasions-and reasons-for this universal praise include (1) God’s mighty acts in maintaining the creation order and making it fruitful so that humans are richly blessed, and (2) God’s saving acts in behalf of his people. These are significantly brought together here by alternating the focus; Ps 65 and 67 speak of the former, and Ps 66 and 68 speak of the latter. Thus, in this short series all of God’s benevolent acts are brought into purview, and the whole human race is encompassed in the community of praise.”

The framing psalms of this section, 65 and 68, are attributed to David. The interior psalms, 66 and 67 are anonymous. These are two of only four anonymous psalms in Book II. Yet since the first, Psalm 43 (attributed to David in the Septuagint), was most likely part of Psalm 42, there are probably only three anonymous psalms in Book II-66, 67 and 71. However, given their placement and the fact that Book II ends a few chapters later by referring to previous psalms as “prayers of David” (Psalm 72:20), it seems likely that these are all Davidic psalms-or at least ones he collected and used. The Septuagint attributes Psalm 71 to David.

Psalm 65, as The Nelson Study Bible says, “is a wisdom psalm and more particularly a creation psalm (as Ps. 19). It celebrates rainfall, sharing the mood of Ps. 104 in this regard. But this is also a prophetic psalm, although it is not always regarded as such. The prophetic element is signaled in the first verse, the vow of praise yet to be paid-that is, all creation is waiting to praise the Lord when He finally appears in glory (see Rom. 14:10, 11; Rev. 19:5).

[See also the next psalm, 66:1-4.]....

“In the background of this psalm [65] is an idea not far from that of Paul in Rom. 8:22, the groaning of creation for its release from the curse brought on it by humanity’s [sin in the Garden of Eden] (Gen. 3:17). The point of the psalm is twofold: (1) Every good rain and every full harvest is a blessing from God, showing His delight in His creation. (2) A day of God’s goodness is coming in which good rains and harvests will be greater than ever before” (introductory note on Psalm 65 and note on verse 1).

Yet there is more to it still. For in juxtaposing atonement for sin (verse 3), entry into God’s temple courts (verse 4) and the abundance of rain and harvest to crown the year (verses 9-13), David seems to picture here the observance of the fall festival season in thanksgiving for the late summer and fall harvest as figurative of the future coming of God’s Kingdom and the great spiritual harvest of humanity at that time. In Jewish interpretation, the crowning of the year (verse 11) refers to the civil new year, Rosh Hashanah or the Feast of Trumpets. As ancient Israelite coronations were accompanied by the blowing of the shofar or ram’s horn, the blowing of the ram’s horn at the Feast of Trumpets was seen as the crowning the year-and indeed this festival begins the sacred year’s seventh month, which celebrates the fall harvest and pictures the culmination of God’s plan for humanity’s redemption and salvation.

Verses 2-3 refer to God providing atonement for all flesh-all people. The Nelson Study Bible notes on these verses: "David speaks of a coming day when sin will be dealt with fully, when redemption will be completely paid. This took place in the death and resurrection of Yeshua Messiah (see Eph. 1:7)." However, Christ's sacrifice will not be generally applied to all mankind until the world at large repents, commencing after Yeshua's return as symbolized in the Day of Atonement, which comes just nine days after the Feast of Trumpets. And Atonement itself serves as a prelude to the Feast of Tabernacles beginning five days later-also known as the Feast of Ingathering to emphasize its harvest theme (and to prefigure the ingathering of all humanity into a relationship with God, into His temple courts to dwell with Him forever).

When Yeshua Messiah returns, God will truly be "the confidence of all the ends of the earth" (verse 5). All mankind will understand His plan and His awesome and righteous deeds to save all people.

Even now God's power as displayed through nature elicits awe: "Those living far away fear your wonders" (verse 8, NIV). Yet this may also foretell the humbling of mankind at Christ's return through a series of global natural catastrophes He will bring. But even these will be to produce a harvest-a harvest of repentant people.

In verses 9-13 David cites God's comprehensive care for the earth-the rain (verses 9-10), the blessings on the pastures, hills, meadows and valleys. "Your paths drip with abundance" (verse 11b). The NIV translation replaces "paths" here with "carts." Green's Literal Translation says "tracks." The Nelson Study Bible says, "The picture is of wagon tracks across the heavens, where the 'cart' of God's mercies sloshes abundance on the earth below" (note on verses 11-13).

God's marvelous outpouring of material and spiritual blessings through the year were celebrated with great rejoicing during His annual festivals-particularly during the fall festivals. But those blessings and celebration are only a small foretaste of what awaits in the wonderful Kingdom of God to come.

As already mentioned, the author of Psalm 66 is not given in the title, though David seems rather likely. The perspective in the first part of the song (verses 1-12) is from the plurality of God's people (using the pronouns "us" and "we"), while the latter part (verses 13-20) is from a singular perspective (using "I" and "me").

In the spirit of the previous psalm, the psalmist calls on the whole earth to praise God and acknowledge His awesome works (verses 1-3a) and then, to God, prophetically says that in the future "all the earth shall worship You" and "submit themselves to You" (verses 3b-4).

The psalm calls on all to come and see the great things God has done and is doing for people (verse 5)-to witness and experience it firsthand or to look into what is recorded in Scripture. God delivered Israel from Egypt by parting the Red Sea and making a dry-land passage to freedom (verse 6). God also dried up the Jordan River so that "all Israel crossed over on dry ground, until all the people had crossed completely over the Jordan" (Joshua 3:17). Yet in declaring this message to the world at the time of Christ's return, the wording here could also refer to the parallel

crossings over water on dry land that will occur at that time-when “the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt...[and] shake His fist over the River [Euphrates]...and make men cross over dry-shod” (Isaiah 11:15).

God’s people are able to declare that He “has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping” (verse 9, NIV) even though He has tested them (verse 10). The tests are likened to the refining of silver, to being captured (perhaps imprisoned), to being afflicted on the back (perhaps through the lash or in bearing burdens) and to suffering oppression-in summary, “We went through fire and water, but You brought us out to a place [or state] of abundance” (verse 12, NIV). As God says through Isaiah of His intention to preserve His people: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (Isaiah 43:2-3).

On the occasions of personal deliverance, the psalmist promises to bring thank offerings (verses 13-15). And he will talk about the wonderful things God “has done for me” (verse 16, NIV). Whereas verse 5 called on all to “come and see” God’s works toward humanity, the psalmist now directs those who have been stirred to fear and honor God to “come and hear” his individual witness (verse 16)-what God has done for one, for him, and will also do, it is implied, for each of them.

Then notice the realization of verse 18, which is an implicit warning to others hearing this witness: “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.” This is in a present or continuing sense. The NIV renders this verse in the past tense, as expressive of what had occurred in this episode: “If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened.” Either way, we are told here that the harboring of sin, failing to confess it and forsake it, and the nurturing of sinful thoughts will thwart effective prayer. We find this important message in other passages of Scripture as well (see Proverbs 15:29; 28:9; Isaiah 1:15; 59:1-2).

Conversely, the apostle John tells us: “Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:21-22). Psalm 66 expresses this very confidence, the psalmist stating in verses 19-20 that God on this occasion has certainly listened to his prayer and has not rejected it nor withheld His hesed-His steadfast love and mercy.

“Let All the Peoples Praise You” (Psalms 67-68)

Neginoth in the superscription of Psalm 67 likely means, as the NKJV translates it here and in other places, “stringed instruments.”

George Knight’s Daily Study Bible Series commentary Psalms says: “Obviously this psalm was composed for public worship. Perhaps it belonged particularly to the autumn harvest festival [i.e.,

the Feast of Tabernacles or Ingathering] (see verse 6)” (comments on verses 1-7). This he takes from the RSV, which renders verse 6 as “The earth has yielded its increase,” whereas other translations understand the verb here as future tense—”shall yield.” Of course, the annual harvest does portray a future harvest, as was pointed out with respect to Psalm 65, which begins the current grouping of psalms—and that is certainly a major theme here as well. The song opens with a prayer for God’s mercy and blessing and that His face would shine— smile in favor—on His people (67:1). As previously pointed out in regard to Psalm 31:16, the language here is taken from the priestly blessing of Numbers 6:25 (see also Psalm 4:6; 44:3; 80:3, 7, 19; 119:135). The Zondervan NIV Study Bible says that this song’s “content, form and brevity suggest that it served as a liturgical [i.e., worship service] prayer of the people at the conclusion of worship, perhaps just prior to (or immediately after) the priestly benediction” (note on Psalm 67).

“God’s blessing on his people (as well as his saving acts in their behalf) will catch the attention of the nations and move them to praise (65:2)” (same note). Indeed, this is a rather exciting thought within the psalm. Note the repetition in the refrain of 67:3 and verse 5. The excitement here is not just for the increased praise for God, but for the fact that all peoples will be able to rejoice when they experience the establishment of His righteous government over all nations. In their happiness over this certain hope, God’s people are expressing love for all mankind.

Given all this, the focus of verse 6 is clearly future. The earth yielding its increase speaks not only of God’s great agricultural provision in the world to come, but of the great harvest of humanity that will then take place—to the “ends of the earth” (verse 7), as the nation’s learn to properly fear and respect Him and His people are vastly blessed as never before.

Mark Chapter 9

Mount of Transfiguration

After six days, Yeshua took Kepha, Ya’aqob, and Yohanan and led them up on a high mountain alone by themselves. And He was transformed before them. Eliyahu and Mosheh appeared there too and they were talking with Yeshua.

Peter wanted to stay there and build three booths. This may very well be a reference to the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, it is hard to say.

YHWH spoke from heaven and said, “This is My Son, the Beloved. Hear Him!” After the event, Yeshua ordered them not to speak of the event with anyone until after He was risen from the dead. They discussed together the coming of Elijah.

After these things, they again were greeted by the large crowd and a man also who brought Him a son who was filled with an unclean spirit. He entreated Yeshua to heal his son, and Yeshua did – by casting out and ordering out the unclean spirit and the young man was healed.

After this, Yeshua was teaching His disciples more on how He was about to suffer at the hands of men and that they should kill Him but that He would be raised on the third day.

As they continued traveling to Kepharnahum, the disciples began disputing which one of them was the greatest. Yeshua told them, “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all.” He brought forth a child and used the child as an example of how we are to come to Him and understand His teachings. The disciples were also bothered by others who were casting out demons in THE NAME but who were not part of their small group. Yeshua advised them not to be bothered by this, for whoever is not against them is with them and they should permit good.

Yeshua teaches that whatever it is that is part of us that causes us to offend or transgress the perfect instructions for life, we should get rid of it. Better to lose only part of ourselves than to lose all of ourselves in destruction.