

February 21-27, 2022

Genesis 24-27

“THE COVENANT IS RENEWED”

Summary: *Genesis 24. Abraham commands that Isaac shall not marry a Canaanite—The Lord guides Abraham’s servant in choosing Rebekah as a wife for Isaac—Rebekah is blessed to be the mother of thousands of millions—She marries Isaac.*

Genesis 25. Abraham marries, has descendants, dies, and is buried in the cave of Machpelah—His descendants through Ishmael are listed—Rebekah conceives, and Jacob and Esau struggle in her womb—The Lord reveals their destiny to Rebekah—Esau sells his birthright for a mess of pottage.

Genesis 26. The Lord promises Isaac posterity as the stars of heaven in number—In his seed, all nations will be blessed—The Lord prospers Isaac, temporally and spiritually, for Abraham’s sake—Isaac offers sacrifices—Esau marries Hittite wives to the sorrow of his parents.

Genesis 27. Rebekah guides Jacob in seeking blessings—Jacob is blessed to have dominion and rule over peoples and nations—Esau hates Jacob and plans to slay him—Rebekah fears that Jacob may marry one of the daughters of Heth.

Supplemental Jewish and Holy Land Insights

What is known about Haran, Abraham’s temporary home?

The Biblical area of Haran may have been discovered in

modern Iraq. Writings found in an ancient town of Nuzi give some insight to the culture of Biblical times: “NUZI is an ancient city in northeastern Iraq. Between 1925 and 1931, a team of archaeologists from several American universities undertook a series of very successful excavations at the site of ancient Nuzi. They discovered thousands of tablet-documents dating from the 15th-14th centuries B.C.E., the period in which Nuzi was one of the major cities of the Hurrian empire. These tablets, when deciphered, turned out to be extremely valuable, not only shedding light on the lives and customs of the ancient Hurrians, but also for studies of the Bible. The 15th to 14th centuries was also the period of the biblical patriarchs and the city of Nuzi was

part of the same social and cultural area as the city of Harran, the home of the patriarchs. On the assumption that the socio-legal features of life in Nuzi were also current in Harran, it became possible to evaluate many of the biblical tales against the background of the information gleaned from the tablets. During the last few decades, biblical scholars have undertaken just such a comparative evaluation, and have discovered that many puzzling aspects of the narratives concerning the patriarchs are, in fact, revealed to be accurate representations of legal and social features of Hurrian life of that time.”

What will I do about my birthright?

“Esau’s selling of his birthright to Jacob also has been confirmed as a legally permissible, though not common, procedure in Hurrian law.” (**Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.**) “The rich traditions and explanations of rabbinic literature fill in some gaps in this sparsely worded story and address the obvious question of why

the birthright was so important to Jacob, while Esau thought so little of it that he sold it for a pot of lentils.” (Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105) (known as Rashi) Torah commentary) Jacob may have wanted the birthright because of the attendant privilege of serving in the Temple. “Under the patriarchal order, the right or inheritance of the firstborn is known as *birthright*. This generally included a land inheritance as well as the authority to preside. The firstborn of flocks and of human families was considered as belonging to the Lord and was expected to be dedicated to Him. This dedication could be either literal or by the payment of redemption money (Exodus. 13:11–16). From time-to-time certain prerogatives, opportunities, and blessings have attended those who were born of a particular lineage. Thus, the office of high priest (of the Aaronic order) and the office of the patriarch to the Church (in the Melchizedek Priesthood) are hereditary in nature. Lineage alone does not guarantee the blessings or spiritual power of the office, but the opportunities are offered to the firstborn of the selected lineage. There are several instances in the scriptures of the one who was the firstborn losing his birthright because of unrighteousness and his office being given to another; such is the case with Esau (Genesis 25:24–34; 27) and Reuben (1 Chronicles 5:1–2; Jeremiah 31:9). (Topical Guide <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bd/birthright?lang=eng>)

Who else supposes that marriage is “forever?”

Marriage in Jewish custom has always been regarded as forever. It may be considered that the ring is used as a symbol of “eternity.” In any case, words such as “Until death do you part” are not part of Jewish wedding ceremonies. The ring is examined by a Rabbi and is considered “*kosher*” only if it is unblemished and with no pits. A “*huppah*”

or canopy is used, probably to symbolize the Temple. A glass is shattered symbolizing the destruction of the Temple. Both the bride and groom are addressed by their Hebrew “special” or “new” names.” The “*tallit*” (prayer shawl) is used. To some it is customary to drape the “*tallit*” over the couple. It may be considered symbolic that the “*tallit*” is the remaining remnant of garments used in the ancient temples. Their first intimacy life is under the “*tallit*” with a kiss. “By law, the ring must belong to the bridegroom, and can be constructed of any material, as long as it is free of precious stones . . . it was customary for the groom to cover the bride's head with his *tallit* as a symbol of sheltering her; and in modern-day Israel, for weddings of soldiers on active duty, it is not unusual to see a huppah constructed of a *tallit* supported by four rifles held by friends of the bride and groom . . . among Orthodox Jews, the preferred custom is to erect the *huppah* outside, or at least in a spot open to the sky, underneath the stars . . . ” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

Who are some outstanding women in the Bible?

Few women are mentioned in the Bible by name and responsibility. Those include the Biblical Matriarchs Sarah, a wife of Abraham; Rebecca, wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau; Rachel, and Leah, first and second wife of Jacob; Miriam the prophetess, sister of Aaron and Moses; Deborah the Judge, probably a temple priestess; Huldah the prophetess, probably a temple priestess; Abigail, who married King David; Rahab, who saved the spies of Israel and became the fore-mother of Boaz who married Ruth , an important link in the royal Davidic line producing the Messiah; and the Persian Jewish queen Esther. A common experience in the Bible is the important role that women take in disrupting man-made power structures. The result is often a more just outcome than what would have taken place under conventional circumstances. Today, many of

them are considered foundational by feminists because of the perceptions they provide into the lives of Biblical women of those times. Notable examples are of women who broke the male dominance of the time compared to the scant documentation of most women's lives.

How are women part of the covenant?

“According to Jewish tradition, a covenant was formed between the Israelites and the God of Abraham at Mount Sinai. The *Torah* relates that both Israelite men and Israelite women were present at Sinai; however, the covenant was worded in such a way that it bound men to act upon its requirements and to ensure that the members of their household (wives, children, and slaves) met these requirements as well. In this sense, the covenant bound women as well, though indirectly.” (Judith Hauptman, “Women” *Etz Hayim: Torah and Commentary*. Ed. David L. Lieber. The Jewish Publication Society, 2001. 1356-1359.)

Women also had a role in ritual life. Women (as well as men) were expected to make a journey to the Temple in Jerusalem every year (men would be expected to attend each of the three main Biblical festivals if they could) and, of course, to offer the Passover sacrifice in the Spring. They would also do so on special occasions in their lives such as giving a special *todah* (thanksgiving) offering after childbirth. Thus, they participated in many of the major religious roles that non-Levites could, although less often and on a smaller and generally more discreet extent.

What might “Jacob’s ladder” mean to me?

Possibly connecting to the Bible Jacob’s ladder account, there is a legend of a Rabbi, Pinehas Ben Yair, who is buried in Safed, north of the Galilee, in Israel “He constructed the famous “ladder of saintliness” in which Caution (against evil) leads through Eagerness (for good), Cleanliness, Purity, Asceticism, Holiness, Humility, Fear of God, Attainment of the Holy Spirit (divine inspiration), (and)

ultimately to the Resurrection of the Dead.” (Encyclopedia Judaica Jr.)

How significant to the Arabs and Jews is Abraham’s and his family’s burial place?

Repeating information from the last lesson, the Cave of the Patriarchs also known as the Tomb of the Patriarchs, is known to Jews as the Cave of *Machpelah* (multiple caves). It is a sacred place for Moslems identified as the Sanctuary of Abraham. These multiple caves are situated about 19 miles south of Jerusalem in the heart of the Old City of Hebron, now in the West Bank. According to the Abrahamic religions of Judaism and Islam, the place and adjoining field were purchased by Abraham as a burial plot. (Genesis 23:9, 16-20) Over the cave is a large rectangular Herodian (37 BCE–73 CE) enclosure. Later, the Byzantines (395 CE) built a Christian Basilica on the site; the structure was converted into the Ibrahimi Mosque following the Muslim conquest (634 CE). It was retaken by Crusaders (1099-1187 CE), and in (1188 CE) it was regained by the Ayyubid sultan, Saladin, who again changed it into a mosque. During the Six-Day War of 1967, the entire Jordanian-ruled West Bank (west side of the Jordan River) was retaken by the State of Israel, and the structure was divided into a synagogue as well as a mosque. The Cave of *Machpelah* is considered to be the second-holiest place in Judaism, after “Temple Square” in the Old City of Jerusalem. Jewish tradition states that in addition to the tombs of Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah, the tombs of Adam and Eve are at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, one of the oldest cities in the world. The sacredness of burial and respect for the dead is a common tradition among most religions.