

Genesis 24-29

24:2 Let us plan for and teach and plead with our children to marry in the house of the Lord. Let us reaffirm more vigorously than we have in the past that it does matter where you marry and by what authority you are pronounced man and wife (Howard W. Hunter, *Ensign*, Nov. 1994, 88).

24:22 The servant took ten camels laden with gifts for the family and bride-to-be (BD, "Marriage," for the little that is known about wedding customs). He humbly supplicated the Lord for blessings for himself and his master, needing assurance of a safe journey and of guidance in selecting the bride, and then he set off.

The help he desired was given. A practical and significant sign from the Lord identified Rebekah as the right wife for his master Abraham's son, and the servant was duly grateful. Her gracious willingness to serve him must have been impressive. The writer of the account mentions that she was fair to look upon and adds the more important fact that she was a virgin (Gen. 24:16). The servant was assured that she would be an acceptable bride.

He gave Rebekah some impressive preliminary gifts and inquired about her identity; when he learned she was indeed of Abraham's brother's family, he thanked the Lord, and she went home to report (Gen. 24:22-28). More gifts were given later (Gen. 24:53). (Ellis T. Rasmussen, *A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament*, p.53)

24:51 Respect for the feelings and desires of the maiden involved was shown as Abraham had intended, for when she was asked directly, she affirmed that she would go to become the wife of Isaac. The gifts of silver, gold, and raiment given the bride-to-be and the precious things given her mother and brother were doubtless part of the dowry, or mohar. The bride was not "purchased" thereby; she was in no sense the chattel of the husband. Her demeanor in the home, her exercise of agency and will, her initiative and effectiveness, both as an individual and as a marriage partner, illustrate that she was truly a help meet for her husband. (Ellis T. Rasmussen, *A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament*)

24:60 Given that there is so little resemblance between modern Christianity and the biblical model after which it claims to be patterned, it is not hard to imagine others coming on the scene claiming to have a divine commission to renew or restore the New Testament order of things. What seems to be universally over-looked is that the great promises of the Lord that still demanded fulfillment were made to the faithful Saints of the Old Testament. What of the promises made to the fathers-Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob-relative to their seed? (see Gen. 15:2-6; 17:1, 15-19; 22:16; 24:60; 26:1; 27:46; 28:1). These promises centered in the eternal nature of the marriage covenant and the continuation of the family unit throughout the eternities. The restoration of the Abrahamic covenant stands at the heart of this great dispensation in which all promises of the Lord must find fulfillment. The length and breadth of the labor of which we speak creates the demand for more than a prophet. It requires a seer, one who can see both past and present, to envision all that is involved. Needed here is one who can restore the testimony of the ancients and bring us the knowledge of the promises made to our faithful fathers in ages past. Only then can a system be established whereby we as their posterity can be gathered to the truths of salvation known to them and, as necessary, be restored to the lands of promise. But this is not all, for salvation is a family affair and requires the sealing, or binding, of families together from the beginning of time to the end thereof. This in turn requires the teaching of the gospel to those in the world of spirits and the performance of the ordinances of salvation for and in their behalf. No would-be prophet has pretended to such a vision except the sorrowful and unimaginative

souls who have stolen every thought they ever had from the Prophet Joseph Smith. (Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Answers: Straightforward Answers to Tough Gospel Questions*, p.41-42)

25:1 Jacob may have had many daughters for all we know, and their children would be entitled to the blessings of the gospel, the same as the children of Keturah, wife of Abraham, or the children of Ishmael. Remember that the priesthood was not confined solely to the descendants of Jacob. Moses got his priesthood from Jethro who was not a descendant of Jacob, but was a descendant of Abraham. The blessings of Abraham are to be given to the Gentiles who repent and receive the gospel, and by adoption they become of the seed of Abraham. (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3: 87.)

25:23 And the Lord said unto her, (Rebecca, Gen. 25:23) "The elder shall serve the younger." And why? Because that Isaac, the father of Esau and Jacob, the husband of Rebecca, and the son of promise to Abraham, was the heir; and as Esau was the elder son of his father Isaac, he had a legal claim to the heirship; but through unbelief, hardness of heart, and hunger, he sold his birthright to his younger brother Jacob (Gen. 25:33); and God knowing beforehand that he would do this of his own free will and choice, or acting upon that agency which God has delegated to all men, said to his mother, "The elder shall serve the younger;" for as the elder son Esau, has sold his birthright, and by that means lost all claim to the blessings promised to Abraham; those blessings and promises must have failed, if they had not descended with the purchased birthright unto the younger son, Jacob, for there was no other heir in Abraham's family; and if those blessings had failed, the purposes of God according to election must have failed in relation to the posterity of Israel, and the oath of Jehovah would have been broken, which could not be though heaven and earth were to pass away. (Rom. 9:13) "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." Where is it written? (Mal. 1:1, 2). When was it written? About 397 years before Christ, and Esau and Jacob were born about 1,773 years before Christ, (according to the computation of time in Scripture margin), so Esau and Jacob lived about 1,376 years before the Lord spoke by Malachi, saying, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated," as quoted by Paul. This text is often brought forward to prove that God loved Jacob and hated Esau before they were born, or before they had done good or evil; but if God did love one and hate the other before they had done good or evil, He has not seen fit to tell us of it, either in the Old or New Testament, or any other revelation: but this only we learn that 1,376 years after Esau and Jacob were born, God said by Malachi-"Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated;" and surely that was time sufficient to prove their works, and ascertain whether they were worthy to be loved or hated. (Joseph Smith, *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4:261-262)

25:31 The firstborn son had the first right to receive the birthright inheritance and the birthright blessing. The birthright inheritance dealt with physical property, such as flocks and herds. Unless the father had determined otherwise (see Genesis 48:5; 1 Chron. 5:1, 2) at the father's death, the physical property was to be divided into balanced portions equal to the number of sons, plus one. The eldest son received the double portion. (Deut. 21:17.) With the inheritance, he assumed responsibility for his mother and unmarried sisters. He also was to be a financial resource for his brothers in times of hardship. Basically he provided for the physical welfare of the family and usually served as the social-political leader of the family or clan. The birthright blessing was spiritual. In the patriarchal order of the priesthood, it included the keys of the priesthood and the authority to preside as the religious leader of the family or clan. Rather than automatically belonging to the eldest son, it was given to the most righteous son. In fact, for all the patriarchal families with more than one son, the birthright blessing went to a younger son: Shem, Abraham,

Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Ephraim each received the birthright blessing even though none of them was an eldest son...After the time of Moses, the inheritance automatically went to the eldest son, regardless of whether or not his mother was the first or favored wife. (See Deut. 21:15-17.) The birthright blessing was still conditional. (Victor L. Ludlow, *Unlocking the Old Testament*, 16.)

25:34 As we look at the misbehavior we see in each of us, we see both aberrations and preoccupations. Preoccupations can be a sign that some things have come to mean too much to us. Though not necessarily bad in itself, a preoccupation can exercise dominion over us. But whether obsessions, rationalizations, or preoccupations, each is a diversion. Messes of pottage (Genesis 25:29-34) respond to the 'now' in us, whereas only the submissive heart and mind sees eternity's considerations. (Neal A. Maxwell, *Not My Will, But Thine*, 60)

26:3 The Abrahamic covenant

The covenant that the Lord first made with Abraham and reaffirmed with Isaac and Jacob is of transcendent significance. It contained several promises:

- o Abraham's posterity would be numerous, entitled to eternal increase and to bear the priesthood;
- o He would become a father of many nations;
- o Christ and kings would come through Abraham's lineage;
- o Certain lands would be inherited;
- o All nations of the earth would be blessed by his seed;
- o That covenant would be everlasting-even through "a thousand generations."

Some of these promises have been accomplished; others have yet to be. I quote from a prophecy given nearly 600 years B.C.: "Our father hath not spoken of our seed alone, but also of all the house of Israel, pointing to the covenant which should be fulfilled in the latter days; which covenant the Lord made to our father Abraham." (Russell M. Nelson, *Ensign*, May 1995, 33)

26:4 These promises of gathering, both spiritual and temporal, all flow from covenants the Lord made with his people anciently. The people of Israel have always been a covenant people. The covenant stems from the promises made to Abraham that his descendants would be very great in number, that his name would be great on the earth, that "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3; 13:16). These promises were granted as well to Abraham's son, Isaac (Gen. 26:4), and to Isaac's son Jacob after him (Gen. 28:14). Jacob is the man who became known as Israel (Gen. 32:28). The covenant could be fulfilled only as Abraham's descendants received the priesthood and the gospel. (Donald W. Parry and Jay A. Parry, *Understanding the Signs of the Times*, p.50-51)

26:5 Isaac, the promised seed, was not required to rest his hope upon the promises made to his father, Abraham, but was privileged with the assurance of his approbation in the sight of heaven by the direct voice of the Lord to him. If one man can live upon the revelations given to another, might not I, with propriety, ask why the necessity then of the Lord speaking to Isaac as he did, as is recorded in the 26th chapter of Genesis. For the Lord there repeats, or rather promises again, to perform the oath which he had previously sworn unto Abraham. And why this repetition to Isaac? Why was not the first promise as sure for Isaac as it was for Abraham? Was not Isaac Abraham's son, and could he not place implicit confidence in the word of his father as being a man of God?

Perhaps you may say that he was a very peculiar man and different from men in these last days, consequently the Lord favored him with blessings peculiar and different, as he was different from men in this age. I admit that he was a peculiar man and was not only peculiarly blessed but greatly blessed. But all the peculiarity that I can discover in the man, or all the difference between him and men in this age, is that he was more holy and more perfect before God and came to him with a purer heart and more faith than men in this day. . . . Isaac obtained a renewal of the covenant made to Abraham by the direct voice of the Lord. (Joseph Smith, Letter to Silas Smith, from Kirtland, Ohio, 26 September 1833; PWJS, 298-99, 300.)

27 Whatever the explanation for the circumstances surrounding the reception of the blessing, one thing is perfectly clear. Priesthood holders are given the keys to bind and loose on earth and have that action validated in heaven (see Matthew 16:19). Once Isaac learned of the deception, he could have revoked the blessing and given it to Esau. Instead, he told Esau, "Yea, and he shall be blessed" (Genesis 27:33). Later, when Jacob was preparing to leave for Padan-aram to escape Esau's wrath, Isaac clearly gave him the blessing of Abraham (see Genesis 28:3-4), an additional proof that Jacob received the blessing meant for him and that Isaac confirmed it upon him. Thus, if the Genesis record is correct as it now is, Jacob, like others, received a call and a promise of eventual blessings because of his potential and in spite of his weaknesses. Like anyone, he had then to live worthily in order to obtain the promised blessings. (*CES Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis-2 Samuel*, 1:85)

27:4 The repeated emphasis given to the meal suggests not just a means of inducing physical well-being and the proper mood for the occasion, but also a ritual of ceremonial function closely connected with the act of blessing. (Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*, Philadelphia, 1989, 190).

27:28 "As the dews of Carmel" (D&C 128:19). Dew was of vital importance to agriculture in the ancient Holy Land during a five- to six-month period with no rain. Great humidity produces moisture during the dry season resulting in dew at night. In Hosea 14:5 the Lord says: "I will be as the dew unto Israel" (also Genesis 27:28; Deuteronomy 33:28; Zechariah 8:12). Doctrine and Covenants 128:19 contains another extraordinary illustration of how prophetic imagery used in the land of the Bible carries over even into latter-day revelation. Mount Carmel is a mountain range in the northwest of the Holy Land and is used in Old Testament writings as a symbol of richness and fruitfulness. Hebrew Kerem-El means "Garden of God" (Isaiah 33:9; 35:2; Jeremiah 50:19). The Lord uses this mountain in Israel and its unique climatic condition to voice prophecy: "As the dews of Carmel, so shall the knowledge of God descend upon [the Latter-day Saints]." The power of God's reference is realized when one learns that Mount Carmel averages 250 dew-nights a year! This fact is impressive testimonial of the divine provenance of modern scripture-the Prophet Joseph Smith certainly would not have known that geographical detail. But it was not Joseph Smith speaking in the revelation; it was the Lord drawing an image from the Old Land and dropping it into a modern revelation to teach a truth. (D. Kelly Ogden in Leon R. Hartshorn, Dennis A. Wright, and Craig J. Ostler, eds., *The Doctrine and Covenants, a Book of Answers: The 25th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, p.173)

27:34 Of course, when applied to righteous ends, these methods may be of great worth. The problem is that in most cases the search for wealth, pleasure, and power leads to a place that may seem at first glance to be desirable, but the closer you get, the more you see it for what it is. The price for worldly success too often comes at the price of your birthright. Those who make that bargain will one day feel as Esau, who after realizing what he had lost, "cried with a great and

exceeding bitter cry" (Genesis 27:34). Another trap we often fall into when we become obsessed with success is that we credit the strength of our arm and power of our thought and forget the Lord, who has blessed and prospered us. (Joseph B. Worthlin, *CES Fireside for Young Adults*, 7 November 1999)

27:40 Without mentioning that he had "despised his birthright" and traded it for food (Gen. 25:34), Esau bitterly denounced Jacob for being a "supplanter" who "took away" the birthright and then the blessing (Gen. 27:36a). He asked whether some blessing were not still available to him and received a promise of the bounties of the earth; moreover, his people were promised that they could sometimes free themselves from domination by Israel and have dominion themselves (Gen. 27:34-40). The vicissitudes of the strife between Edom and Israel are told from the book of Numbers on through the books of Kings-and that strife still goes on today. (Ellis T. Rasmussen, *A Latter-day Saint Commentary on the Old Testament*, p.59)

27:46 There is a marvelous account that concerns Jacob and his marriage, as good an illustration as we have of how a strong-minded, faithful woman can influence a righteous husband to do the proper thing. I look upon Rebekah as one of the strongest characters mentioned in the whole body of revealed writ. In the account, Rebekah said to Isaac: "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth: If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?" Esau, Jacob's twin, had just done that very thing. So Rebekah in effect said that if Jacob were to marry out of the Church as Esau did, if he were to take to wife a daughter of the land, one of these nonmembers of the Church, what is her life worth? 'What is there left for me if my other son forsakes the gospel covenant and marries a nonmember of the Church?' In this way Rebekah stirred Jacob up. The account says: "And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan." That is to say: "Thou shalt not marry out of the Church. My father, Abraham, said that in my seed and continuing in yours the blessings would come." So, in this patriarchal blessing, as it were, Isaac said: "Arise, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence the daughters of Laban, thy mother's brother." 'Stay in the family. Marry the right person.' "And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee" (Gen. 27:46; 28:1-4). (Bruce R. McConkie in Kent P. Jackson and Robert L. Millet, eds., *Studies in Scripture*, Vol. 3: Genesis to 2 Samuel, p.58-59)

28:17 Bethel, a contraction of the word Beth-Elohim, means literally "the house of the Lord." As, in his dream, Jacob saw himself on the earth at the foot of the ladder which reached to heaven where the Lord stood above it, and also beheld the angels ascending and descending thereon, he realized that the covenants he there made with the Lord were the rungs on the ladder which he himself would have to climb in order to obtain the promised blessings-blessings that would entitle him to enter heaven and associate with the Lord. It was because he had met the Lord there and entered into covenants with him there that Jacob considered the site so sacred that he named the place Bethel (the house of the Lord) and said of it: "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven" (Genesis 28:17). Jacob not only passed through the gate of heaven. By living up to every covenant he went all the way in...are to us all what Bethel was to Jacob, and more. They are also the gates to heaven for all our kindred dead. That we will do our duty in bringing our loved ones through them, I humbly pray. (Marion G. Romney, *Look to God and Live*, 240.)

28:18 While we consider the olive tree, we may also wish to examine olive oil for additional atonement meaning. In ancient Israel, the olive tree was the tree of life; olive oil was used in sacrifices and in ritual purification, rites which symbolized the restoration of God's favor and the return of joy to a man previously disgraced. It was associated with vigor and fertility. The sick were anointed with oil. Brides were anointed prior to marriage. Anointing with oil and washing and dressing symbolized a change of status throughout the Old Testament; for example, the consecration of Aaron to the priesthood included washing, donning of special garments, and anointing his head with oil (Leviticus 8:6-12). The holy anointing oil, which could not be used for any profane purpose, was made by Moses in the desert and was kept in the Holy of Holies, serving for the anointing of the Tabernacle and of all high priests and kings. Prophets were anointed with oil, as were temples and altars (Genesis 28:18). Olive oil was indispensable in the preparation of the Passover lamb. We remember that Christ is the Anointed One. (M. Catherine Thomas in Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, eds., *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, p.15)

28:18 In ancient Israel, olive oil compounded with specific spices was used for ceremonial anointing. It was forbidden to use this special "oil of holy ointment" for mundane anointings (Exodus 30:22-33; 31:11; 37:29; 39:38; 40:9-15). Moses used the oil to anoint the tabernacle and its accoutrements (Exodus 30:26-29; 40:9-11; Leviticus 8:10-11), just as his ancestor Jacob had anointed the covenant altar (KJV "pillar") he constructed at Beth-el (Genesis 28:18; 35:14). (John A. Tvedtnes in Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, eds., *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5*, p.430)

28:20 And now, O Father, as thou didst prosper our father Jacob and bless him with protection and prosperity wherever he went, from the time he made a like covenant before and with thee; and as thou didst, even the same night, open the heavens unto him and manifest great mercy and favor and give him promises-so wilt thou do by us his sons? And as his blessings prevailed above the blessings of his progenitors unto the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills, even so may our blessings prevail like his. And may thy servants be preserved from the power and influence of wicked and unrighteous men. May every weapon formed against us fall upon the head of him who shall form it. May we be blessed with a name and a place among thy Saints here, and thy sanctified when they shall rest. (Joseph Smith, Journal, 29 November 1834; PJS 2:35.)

28:22 We should not think that the payment and blessings of tithing are unique to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Tithe paying is commanded in the Bible. Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek (see Genesis 14:20). Jacob covenanted to "give the tenth" unto God (Genesis 28:22). After the children of Israel were brought out of Egypt, the prophet Moses commanded that they should give a tenth to the Lord (see Leviticus 27:30-34). (Dallin H. Oaks, *Ensign*, May 1994, 34)

29:20 If you want a little romantic relief, consider Jacob's virtual unawareness of time as he worked seven years for Rachel, as recorded in Genesis 29:20. "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her." Beautiful! We mortals are so trapped in this dimension of time. It is not our natural element. We wear it like an ill-fitting suit of clothes, and we wish to hasten its passage on occasion. We also want to hold back the dawn on other occasions. We are not at home with time because we belong to eternity. In the moments when we are true and at our best, we have the experience of timelessness which Jacob had. (Neal A. Maxwell, *An address given to CES Religious Educators*, 16 August 1979)