

# ARE YOU GONNA GO MY WAY?

GENESIS 27:46-28:22    JUNE 1, 2022

I was not interested in my gen-ed, Intro To Sociology class. So, when I had to report on a classic essay titled *Body Ritual Among the Nacirema*,<sup>1</sup> I paid very little attention to what I was reading. The essay was about a strange tribe's disturbing customs concerning things like medicine men, holy waters, and oral health. I was annoyed by the essay and, as I recall, I made it a point to scoff at the absurdity and unbelievability of the article.

Imagine my surprise when my professor returned my graded report - quite low if memory serves - with a curt note at the top: "Nacirema is 'American' spelled backwards."

*Body Ritual Among the Nacirema* was written to give a different perspective on *our own* (American) behaviors and rituals. In my haste and indifference I had missed the point completely.

In our text tonight we see some people missing the point. The family of faith continues to crumble, after the birthright meltdown of chapter 27. We watch these characters grope around to find solutions, but none of them stops to seek the Lord. None of them pause to consider God's ways. The results are predictably disappointing. In the midst of human failure we again see Divine faithfulness. The Lord will never cut and run - not with the patriarchs, not with us. No, He stays just as present, just as tender, just as gracious, showing us the way forward. The question is whether we'll listen and follow or whether we're hoping He will just sign off on the plans we make ourselves.

**Genesis 27:46 - "So Rebekah said to Isaac, 'I'm sick of my life because of these Hethite girls. If Jacob marries someone from around here, like these Hethite girls, what good is my life?'"**

Esau's wives were trouble, but that's not *really* the problem. Just above, you see that Rebekah is trying to find a way to get Jacob out of town until his brother's murderous rage cools off. She uses the family tension in order to manipulate Isaac into sending Jacob somewhere far away.

Christians are not to manipulate, even if we think the goal is good. Not in ministry, not in family, not not in friendship, not in business. God has commanded us to be defined by truthfulness and to think of others as more important than ourselves.<sup>2</sup> The selfish deceptiveness of manipulation is not consistent with new life in Christ.

There is an irony here: Rebekah uses the wife-strife as a pretext to get Jacob away. Where does he end up? In a situation where there are not *two* but *four* wives who become rivals, making family life very hard for a very long time. Meanwhile, Rebekah is worried about losing her son, but her plan to save him will cost her dearly: She wouldn't live long enough to see Jacob ever again.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sfu.ca/~palys/Miner-1956-BodyRitualAmongTheNacirema.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 2:3

**Genesis 28:1-2 - So Isaac summoned Jacob, blessed him, and commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite girl. <sup>2</sup>Go at once to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother's father. Marry one of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother.**

We sense a coldness in Isaac's demeanor. He "summons" Jacob. When he sends him away, he sends him alone. No servants or attendants to help him on his journey.

Why hadn't Isaac provided a wife for Jacob yet? Back when Abraham was nearing the end of his life he had an urgent concern that his son find the wife the Lord intended for him. But Isaac demonstrates a physical and spiritual apathy toward this issue. He doesn't say, "Find the wife the Lord has consecrated for you." He says "Go marry one of Laban's daughters." Were they monotheists? Were they women of Godly character? That didn't seem to matter to Isaac. They were boiler-plate acceptable - just *not* Hethites. *Not* Canaanites. Good enough.

Isaac of all people knew that God has a providential concern for who we marry. That had been very clearly revealed by the way Isaac ended up with Rebekah. But Isaac has slipped into a manly mindset, rather than a Godly one. Good enough, rather than God abundant.

**Genesis 28:3-5- <sup>3</sup>May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you so that you become an assembly of peoples. <sup>4</sup>May God give you and your offspring the blessing of Abraham so that you may possess the land where you live as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham." <sup>5</sup>So Isaac sent Jacob to Paddan-aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.**

It's significant that the promise of blessing is repeated, this time in full view, no one wearing any costume.<sup>3</sup> No one could suggest that the covenant didn't really, truly belong to Jacob.

We notice that Isaac did not *seek* the Lord in this scene. No offering or worship. Instead, he falls back on what had already been said. *We should* remind ourselves of what God has already spoken, but, even in his spiritual lethargy, a problem is revealed. "God wants you in this land. So go ahead and *leave* this land." These are bad solutions. Often, Christians make decisions and say God is leading them, but when you stop and evaluate what they're doing, it isn't consistent with what God has said. Rather than *leading*, it's that we *want* something or we're trying to solve some problem and we assume that as long as we think it's a good idea then God must think it's a good idea. God had told Abraham, "Stay in the land." Abraham had told his servant, "Don't let Isaac leave the land." God had told Isaac, "Stay in the land, don't go to Egypt." So, now what does Isaac say? "Leave the land." Not only did Isaac send Jacob with no retinue, he sent him with no warning about what sort of trouble he might encounter in Laban's house. We may have some sort of Esau problem right in front of us, causing us stress, but remember: There are dangers other than Esau out there.

**Genesis 28:6-9 - <sup>6</sup>Esau noticed that Isaac blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan-aram to get a wife there. When he blessed him, Isaac commanded Jacob, "Do not marry a Canaanite**

---

<sup>3</sup>John Calvin *Genesis*

**girl.”<sup>7</sup> And Jacob listened to his father and mother and went to Paddan-aram.<sup>8</sup> Esau realized that his father Isaac disapproved of the Canaanite women,<sup>9</sup> so Esau went to Ishmael and married, in addition to his other wives, Mahalath daughter of Ishmael, Abraham’s son. She was the sister of Nebaioth.**

Oh, Esau. He *wants* approval. He *wants* to enjoy the benefits of God’s blessing in his life. And yet, he consistently refuses to do what God *actually* requires. He doesn’t humble himself or repent. He just thinks, “Oh, you want us to marry a cousin? That earns a blessing? Ok, I’ll marry a cousin.”

Derek Kidner points out that Esau’s attempt to gain favor through marriage to an uncle’s daughter is *exactly* like every religious effort.<sup>4</sup> “I will go and do something that I think will *earn* me a blessing. I will perform an action to purchase my place. I won’t actually listen to what God says and I won’t put away my sin and my selfishness, but I jumped through this hoop, so now God owes me.”

But religion, like Esau’s marriage here, is counterfeit currency. It is worthless. Jacob goes to Laban, so Esau goes to Ishmael - the AntiUncle. Ishmael had already been driven out, disqualified in God’s eyes. But Esau thought it was the act of marrying within the “family” that mattered. It wasn’t.

**Genesis 28:10-11 -<sup>10</sup> Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran.<sup>11</sup> He reached a certain place and spent the night there because the sun had set. He took one of the stones from the place, put it there at his head, and lay down in that place.**

Jacob would travel 500 miles alone.<sup>5</sup> He’s pretty oblivious as he goes. He knows the danger behind him but doesn’t know what sort of trouble waits ahead. Bruce Waltke notes that he’s between a “death camp and a labor camp.”<sup>6</sup> He doesn’t know that the Lord is going with him - he’ll make that very clear in a moment. And he doesn’t even seem to realize that he’s camping in a place that was very significant to his grandfather, Abraham.<sup>7</sup> He stops near Bethel, not because of its history but because he was out of daylight. And there he sets up a makeshift camp.

We’re fond of saying that Jacob used this stone as a pillow, but that might not be it. After all, he was a “civilized” man who stayed in the comfort of the tents.<sup>8</sup> Are we to think he set out on a 500 mile trip and didn’t pack a pillow? In fact, it’s possible that Jacob wasn’t using this stone as a pillow, but as some sort of pagan rabbit’s foot to keep him safe.<sup>9</sup>

**Genesis 28:12 -<sup>12</sup> And he dreamed: A stairway was set on the ground with its top reaching the sky, and God’s angels were going up and down on it.**

---

<sup>4</sup> Derek Kidner *Genesis*

<sup>5</sup> *CSB Study Bible Notes*

<sup>6</sup> Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 12:8, 13:3-4

<sup>8</sup> *NET Study Bible Notes*

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

Translators struggle with the word translated as “stairway” (or your version may say “ladder”). It’s a unique Hebrew word, only used here.<sup>10</sup> Some call it a ramp, others believe it’s meant to be a ziggurat. What it looked like isn’t the point. The point is the function. It was sent from Heaven to earth as a way that God might accomplish a great deal of work through the efforts of angels and, we’ll see, through God Himself.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus would specifically say that *He* is the stairway.<sup>11</sup> So, put together, this vision reveals important truths to us about how humans can relate to God. We cannot build a ladder or a ziggurat of our own (like the Babylonians tried to do in Genesis 11). No, God has established a way and He has sent it down from heaven. That Way is Christ Himself - the Way, the Truth, and the Life and no one comes to the Father but by Him. By Christ heaven is opened. There is no other avenue, no back alley, no secret port through which a person can access eternal life.

God is exclusive, but He is *a/ways* willing to add you to the guest list. At Babel we watched as men tried to bypass God. At Bethel, we watch as God works to join men.

**Genesis 28:13-15 - <sup>13</sup>The Lord was standing there beside him, saying, “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your offspring the land on which you are lying. <sup>14</sup>Your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out toward the west, the east, the north, and the south. All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. <sup>15</sup>Look, I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”**

God’s grace is incredible. As far as the record of Genesis goes, Jacob had never pledged himself to God, never built Him an altar or brought Him a sacrifice. But God loved Jacob and kept reaching out to him. God included him and revealed Himself to Jacob.

In His speech, the Lord shows how different He is than the pagan gods men loved to worship. It was believed they were limited by geography.<sup>12</sup> Think of Poseidon, the god of the sea. In 1 Kings 20 there’s a funny moment where the enemies of Israel say, “Their God is a God of the hills, so let’s fight them in the valley and we’ll win.”<sup>13</sup> When the battle was over, 100,000 Aramean foot soldiers had been cut down in a single day.

Our God is with us *wherever* we go. That doesn’t mean every place is equally good for us. Jonah can testify to that fact. But there is nowhere we can go where the Lord cannot reach us with His presence.

---

<sup>10</sup> See *Alter, Waltke*

<sup>11</sup> John 1:51

<sup>12</sup> *Waltke*

<sup>13</sup> 1 Kings 20:23-29

**Genesis 28:16-17** - <sup>16</sup>When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." <sup>17</sup>He was afraid and said, "What an awesome place this is! This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven."

Some commentators feel this is a great prayer of praise. I have a hard time getting there. God's revelation was about Himself - His presence and *witness* - Jacob just keeps talking about the *place*. Bethel wasn't the house of God. It wasn't the gate of heaven. The point was that God was *with* Jacob, not that God was *in* Bethel. J. Vernon McGee reminds us that Jacob is not a man on pilgrimage here, he's on the run: On the run from his brother and, frankly, on the run from God.

When we think about what God was trying to communicate to Jacob, we have to conclude that Jacob missed the point. Perhaps that's why he was afraid, rather than comforted.

**Genesis 28:18-19** - <sup>18</sup>Early in the morning Jacob took the stone that was near his head and set it up as a marker. He poured oil on top of it <sup>19</sup>and named the place Bethel, though previously the city was named Luz.

Now here we start to see embers of belief. Had the stone been a good luck charm the night before, now he's setting it up as a reminder that the God of his fathers was real and alive and present. By pouring oil, he was consecrating that place.<sup>14</sup> But notice: Jacob says: "God revealed Himself to me. This is God's house. This is the very gate of heaven." But then he packs his bags and hits the road. But not before he makes a little speech.

**Genesis 28:20-22** - <sup>20</sup>Then Jacob made a vow: "If God will be with me and watch over me during this journey I'm making, if he provides me with food to eat and clothing to wear, <sup>21</sup>and if I return safely to my father's family, then the Lord will be my God. <sup>22</sup>This stone that I have set up as a marker will be God's house, and I will give to you a tenth of all that you give me."

God, in His grace, had said, "I will, I will, I will," to Jacob. Jacob responds back, "If You, if You, if You." *If* You keep me safe *and* bring me back *AND* give me food and clothing, *then* You can be my God. And I'll offer something back to You, as long as You first give more to me. Wow.

God spoke in a profound way to this man and it seems like his response was, "We'll see. Now I'll be on my way." Compare his reaction to those of Abraham when God spoke. Abraham wasn't perfect, but he had faith and he believed God and he submitted himself to God's revelation. When God spoke to him in Genesis 17, Abraham fell facedown in worship. When God made promises Abraham didn't understand, he sometimes would ask a question like, "How can I know?" But then would move in obedience. When God spoke, Abraham listened and oriented his life around those words.

---

<sup>14</sup> Kidner

But Jacob? He's not following the Lord yet. He's going his own way. And it's going to be a bumpy ride.

When we miss the point of what God has said to us it leads, invariably, to mistakes, disappointment, even disaster. God speaks with purpose and He also has specific purposes for your life. A major theme of Genesis so far has been that when we go our own way, making decisions that we think are good but do not include God, the results are terrible. Going God's way is the way that leads to life. Adam and Eve went another way, the result was ruin. Noah went God's way, the result was life. Whether it's Cain or Abel, Shem or Ham, Abraham or Lot.

God is not just along for the ride we want to go on. He is Master and Maker and King and *Friend* and Helper and the source of all wisdom. Wouldn't you rather be Abraham in Genesis 22 than Jacob in Genesis 28? What's the difference? Not God. Not His grace. The difference is between the people. One who trusts God enough to follow, the other who thinks he's got a handle on how to navigate life. Let's walk with God instead of wrestle with him.