

Isaac Sends Jacob Away from Home to Find a Suitable Wife

Genesis 28:1-9

Genesis 28:1-9 - *"Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. ² Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother.*

³ "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of people, ⁴ and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham."

⁵ So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Padan Aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau. ⁶ Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he gave him a charge, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," ⁷ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram. ⁸ Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. ⁹ So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.

Background Notes

At the end of Genesis 27 Rebekah persuaded Isaac to send Jacob away from home so he would not marry a pagan Hittite woman. Rebekah's real reason, of course, was to get Jacob away from Esau, who was planning to kill him. Rebekah thought that Jacob would only be gone for a short while. Little did she know that it would be more than 20 years before Jacob returned to the land of Canaan, and that she would never see him again.

So Isaac sent Jacob away to Padan Aram ("the plain of Syria"), the area where Turkey and Syria meet today, about 500 miles from BeerSheba. This was the area of Haran, Rebekah's birthplace. The idea was to put a lot of miles between Jacob and Esau, and also so Jacob could find a wife from his mother's family rather than the pagan inhabitants of Canaan. So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to the home of Laban, Rebekah's brother. So the Jews and Syrians are genetically related, going all the way back to the times of the patriarchs.

Before Jacob left, Isaac blessed him once again. Isaac didn't change his mind about the patriarchal blessing of chapter 27. He realized his mistake in trying to bless Esau instead of Jacob. He accepted God's will and submitted to it. *"...I have blessed him—and indeed he shall be blessed"* (Genesis 27:33). So in chapter 28 he repeated the blessing to Jacob.

Notice that the Abrahamic Covenant is the essence of the blessing: *“May God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham”* (v3-4).

So the Abrahamic Covenant, the covenant that God first made with Abraham (Genesis 12 & 15), and then confirmed with his son Isaac (Genesis 26), was confirmed to Jacob in chapter 28.

Doctrinal Points

1. Parents should teach their children the biblical concept of marriage.

When Isaac advised Jacob not to find a wife among the Canaanites, he did the right thing. Spiritual purity should be maintained in all generations. The biblical concept of marriage is two believers joined together, becoming one. As 2 Corinthians 6:14 says, *“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”*

The command of 2 Corinthians 6:14 can refer to more areas of life than marriage, but it definitely includes marriage. God really wants the best for us, and the marriage of a believer with an unbeliever can never bring complete fulfillment and satisfaction. In fact, it may bring years of heartache. So the biblical concept of marriage is two believers joined in marriage, becoming one. But not just **any** two believers! I have to keep telling my students at Emmaus, “Slow down! Pray for God’s choice!” God can - and will - lead you to that right person if you wait for Him!

“Arise, go to Padan Aram... and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother.” Notice that Isaac’s counsel to Jacob was to take a **wife** - not **wives**. We know that Jacob didn’t follow his father’s advice, but at least Isaac gave him the proper counsel. The biblical concept of marriage is “one man and one woman.” Isaac was a good role model here. He had only one wife, unlike his father, Abraham, who had a concubine, and certainly unlike his son, Jacob, who had four wives. Isaac was a good role model for marriage.

It goes without saying that the biblical concept of marriage from Genesis 2:20-24 is the union of one man and one woman – notice: one **man** and one **woman**, not two men or two women. This doctrine must be taught to our children today. Recently the state of Hawaii took the first step in legalizing “same sex marriages.” This is the tip of the iceberg of what is coming in our culture. So, Christian parents, it is critical that you teach your children about marriage - what is biblical and what is not biblical. Parents should teach their children the biblical concept of marriage.

2. Parents should teach the biblical concept of God's might.

Besides teaching about the biblical concept of marriage, Isaac also taught Jacob about God's might and power. Where do we see that? In verse 3 Isaac referred to God as *El Shaddai*, or "God Almighty."

God has revealed Himself by a number of names. *El Shaddai*, "God Almighty," stresses God's might and power to act on behalf of his people. God revealed Himself to Abraham as *El Shaddai* in Genesis 17. Although Abraham was then 99 years old, God said that His promise to give him a son was still good. And sure enough, when Abraham was 100, and Sarah was 90 years of age, they had a son! *El Shaddai* - God Almighty - is able to do all kinds of things that are humanly impossible. God can do it because He is *El Shaddai*! As Jesus said in Mark 10:27: "*With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.*"

As Isaac communicated the biblical concept of the mighty power of God to Jacob, we parents should do the same for our children. You might say, "How should we do it?" Here's an idea. **Help your children experience answered prayer.** Where there's a need in the family, share that need with your children. Pray about it as a family. When God answers that prayer (and it may be in a dramatic way) your children will come to know and experience the power and might of *El Shaddai* - God Almighty.

When I was about thirteen years old, I delivered a newspaper, the Newark Star Ledger. There were a couple of problems about that job. First, it was hard work because it wasn't the local paper, so not everybody got it, and I had to ride my bike for miles to deliver the papers. In addition, I had to get up early on Sunday morning to deliver Sunday papers, and as a result, I was falling asleep in Sunday school and church. The local paper didn't produce a paper on Sundays, they paid better, and you didn't have to ride for miles to deliver because everybody got the local paper. So you could just ride along the street, throw the papers up at every house – a much better deal! I tried to get a job delivering that paper, but there were no openings. Some guys waited for years to get one of the local paper delivery routes, and some of them even sold their routes when they left for college! So I thought it was impossible to get the local paper job.

But my father suggested, "Why don't you pray about this?" So I did! Would you believe, the very next week a guy came out of his house, a complete stranger, and said, "How would you like a Plainfield Courier News job?" I said, "You've got to be kidding! What's the deal?" He said, "My father just got a job transfer, we have to move, and I have to get rid of this job. Do you want to take it?" Praise the Lord! God answered prayer! I experienced God as 'God Almighty' or *El Shaddai*. God was able to do things that I didn't think God could do!

I'm so glad my father taught me about God as *El Shaddai*, or "God Almighty." Parents, have you taught your children about God's mighty power? We should help them learn the concept of God's mighty power.

Practical Application

Close the barn door before the horse is gone!

We've all heard the expression, "Close the barn door before the horse is gone," and we all know what it means. Esau tried to "close the barn door" when it was too late. Verses 8-9: *"Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had."*

Didn't Isaac counsel Esau the way he counseled Jacob about marriage? If he did, Esau deliberately and totally ignored his father's counsel, because he married two pagan Hittite women (Genesis 26). When Esau realized that these women didn't please his father and mother, he tried to "correct the situation" by marrying Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael.

Well, two wrongs don't make a right! More polygamy was not going to make the problem right, no matter whom Esau married. Esau should have closed the door before the horse was out of the barn.

Some Christians think that if they make a mistake by marrying the "wrong person" that they can correct it by getting a divorce and marrying the "right person." No! That is definitely **not** biblical teaching. The biblical way is to wait on God **before** the marriage is made. More prayer! More counsel! More time should be taken **before** the marriage, not after the mistakes are made.

This expression could be applied to many areas of life, as well as marriage. It's not a biblical text, but it does capture a biblical principle. Close the barn door **before** the horse is gone!