

Jacob Bleached Linen

Michael Heiss—January 28, 2012

Before I get into what I really want to talk about, I thought I would answer a question that has arisen. Apparently, some have questions on a translation of the phrase ‘bleached linen.’ I’ll just give you a couple of Scriptures. You’ll find this phrase throughout the book of Exodus, but just two will do: Exodus 25:4 and 26:1, 31

You’ll find them throughout the book of Exodus. The question was: Why ‘bleached’ linen. Many other translations will have ‘fine linen’; ‘twined linen’; ‘thin linen.’ So, where do we get ‘bleached’? The answer is really quite simple: If you look at the Hebrew word, which is ‘shsh’—*two sheens*—and you go to the dictionaries you’ll find the words, *fine, twine, thin, white, bleached*. These are all synonyms of the word. As scholars have put it, they say: *a name applied to it from its whiteness*.

So, back in those days when they had fine linen, they produced it with a process that made it appear white, like white fine tender, beautiful linen. Frankly, that’s all there is. If you wanted to get the full meaning, you would translate it as exquisitely fine, thin, twined, white, bleached linen. If you were to do that for every word in the Old Testament, you would have a magnum opus. You’ll find that Hebrew is a very compact language and that one Hebrew word can be enveloped into five, six or seven English words to give the full meaning. I just wanted to take a minute or two out to answer that question.

Jacob:

When I first came to Ambassador College I was told that I had to have a filing system. So, I thought to myself, okay, I’ll have a filing system. One of my folders was labeled Great Personalities, because I wanted to know what made great people *great*; be they political leaders, economic leaders, sports figures, scientists, you name it.

One of my folders was labeled Great Biblical Leaders. What made certain men or women stand out? Today I want to talk about one of them, a most intriguing individual. You don’t think of him as that important, but believe me, he was! He was not a great conquering king or hero such as David. Joshua conquering the Holy Land. Not a great prophet of ‘thus saith the Lord: Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel. He didn’t call fire down from heaven like Elijah. Did not have she-bears come out after an unruly mob was after him, taunting him in the days of Elisha.

Wasn’t a great scholar of the Law like Ezra or Moses. Didn’t build a boat to save the world like Noah.

Who was this? It was said of him that he was a plain man, dwelling in tents. It is also said of him that he struggled with God and man, and prevailed! Of course, I’m talking about the patriarch Jacob—son of Isaac, grandson of Abraham. We know more about this man and his life than any other figure in the Bible. Almost 22 chapters are devoted to his life: his birth, his marriages, his death and burial. We’re going to look at this man and see why God chose him in particular.

I began to realize that God staffs for strength, not for a lack of weakness, and that’s fundamental and I hope we can all understand it. It took me a long time to realize that. I’m going to just read a couple of quotes from this particular book I have by one of the great gurus of management and organization. He’s deceased now, but you may well remember or recognize his name: Peter Drucker, a great organizer. This is what he wrote when it comes to staffing—from *The Effective Executive* by Peter Drucker:

Whoever tries to place a man or staff an organization to avoid weakness will end up at best with mediocrity. The idea that there are “well rounded” people, people who have only strengths and no weaknesses (whether the term used is the “whole man,” the “mature personality,” the “well-adjusted personality,” or the “generalist”) is a prescription for mediocrity if not for incompetence. Strong people always have strong weaknesses, too. Where there are peaks, there are valleys. And no one is strong in many areas.

The point is, for every one of us there are peaks and there are valleys; the greater the strength, the greater the weakness. There is no such thing as a great man with all strengths and no weaknesses. I came to realize God is staffing His kingdom now, and He’s been doing it since the days of righteous Abel.

There will come a time when everybody will be called, but right now not everybody is. *He’s staffing for strength*. We’re going to see, in essence, *the gold* that He saw in Jacob but did not see in Esau. A fascinating story; a fascinating analysis. Let’s start in the book of Genesis, chapter 25, and this is what we’re going to see about Jacob.

Genesis 25:19: “And these *were* the generations of Isaac, Abraham’s son. Abraham begat Isaac. And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan Aram, the sister of Laban the Syrian. And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife because she *was* barren. And the LORD heard him, and Rebekah his wife conceived” (vs 19-21). Of course, this word ‘and’ is a connecting link.

So, it was found out that Rebekah was barren; that is nothing unusual. We know that Sarah was barren—the mother of Isaac. We know that Rachel—Jacob’s future wife—was barren. We know that Hannah, the mother of Samuel the prophet, was barren. Not to mention Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist. This happens with some degree of frequency. But it’s interesting when it says that Isaac prayed and God heard. How long did it take for God to act? *You’re talking about a period of close to 16-17 years!*

Verse 20: “And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife...”

Verse 26 says that Isaac was 60 when they came out. It’s amazing! “...And Isaac *was* sixty years old when she bore them.”

Something else that is of interest to me—I have this type of mind: It says that Rebekah inquired of God. Can any of you tell me how she did that? What did she do? Did she to Melchisedec who was operating in that area? *I don’t know!* Did she look up to heaven and ask? *I don’t know!* Did she try ‘urium and thumin’? *I don’t think that existed in those days!* And it says that God answered; how did He answer? *We don’t know!* We have to take it on faith that she talked to God and God answered her.

When she conceived there was a battle-royal going on inside her body. I’ve never experienced that, ladies, but some of you have. Rebecca is saying, ‘It’s so wonderful to be pregnant! If it’s so great, why am I like this?’ What did God say, v 23: “And the LORD said to her, ‘Two nations *are* in your womb, and two kinds of people shall be separated from your belly. And the one people shall be stronger than the other people, the older shall serve the younger.’”

What do we find here? *The firstborn shall not prevail!* The younger one shall prevail. Why choose the younger one and not the older one at that time?

Verse 25: “And the first came out red, like a hairy garment all over. And they called his name Esau.” This is interesting, because Esau was to inhabit Mt. Seir. You can read the very Scriptures where Esau is Edom and Mt. Seir. This is an

interesting pun in the Hebrew: the word for *hairy* is ‘sair’; the word for *Mt. Seir* is ‘seir’—there’s a connection there. Whenever you see the same root letters in Hebrew, those words have similar meaning; they’re synonymous. It’s not like English.

In English you can have a word such as I’ve used in the past: ‘run.’ You can run a race. And horror of horrors, I remember my grandmother throwing up her hands because there was a ‘run’ in her stocking! We could have a run on the bank. We could run a race. We could play the game of baseball and bat in some runs. In Hebrew you can never have that. When the root letters are the same, the meaning is synonymous. What you really have is, since Esau is a ‘hairy’ man and he’s going to inherit a certain land, that land took his name: the land of hairiness or Mt. Hairy for hairy Esau. It’s a pun! It’s a play on words in the Hebrew. You’ll find this throughout. Now, that’s not of great important thing, but it’s interesting.

At any rate, he comes out like that. Notice Jacob, v 26: “And after that his brother came out, and his hand took hold on Esau’s heel. And his name was called Jacob.... And the boys grew. And Esau was a skilled hunter, a man of the field. And Jacob was a quiet man...” (vs 26-27). Esau would have been in the American West a Jedediah Smith, maybe even a Daniel Boone or a Davy Crocket—a frontier man, rough. Not Jacob! Jacob was different.

Esau on the other hand was a man that lived for the moment. “Jacob was a **quiet** man, living in tents” (v 27). This word *quiet* is very, very interesting. It’s called ‘thm’ in the Hebrew. We’re going to take a look at that word ‘thm’ and see that it means more than quiet; more than peaceful. There’s a spiritual character assigned to that name.

Genesis 17:1—God is speaking to Abraham—Abram at the time: “And when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I *am* the Almighty God! Walk before Me and be... [‘thmim’; be thou ‘thm’; be thou ‘righteous’; be thou ‘blameless’] ...perfect.” God is describing Jacob as ‘thm’; there’s a certain righteousness in Jacob. It’s buried—and we’ll see how deep it’s buried—but it’s there. God doesn’t see it in Esau.

We’re going to see these things in the days of Isaac, where’s he’s told he’s not going to go down into Egypt. Genesis 26:9: And Abimelech called Isaac and said, ‘Behold, she surely *is* your wife. Why did you say, “She *is* my sister”?’ And Isaac said to him, ‘Because I said, “Lest I die on account of her.”’” *I was afraid! I didn’t know!* We find that he says to God, when he’s going to be punished:

Genesis 20:6: “And God said to him in a

dream, ‘Yes, I know that you did this in the sincerity of your heart...’”

Verse 5: “Did he not say to me, ‘She *is* my sister?’....” In the sincerity of my heart, in the innocence of my hands—the word ‘thm’—the meaning of *innocence, sincerity, a certain amount of perfection*; all this is similar. This is how God describes Jacob, but He does not describe Esau that way.

Let’s look at some incidents that happened in the life of Jacob, and we’ll see such ‘brotherly love.’

Genesis 25:27: “And the boys grew. And Esau was a skilled hunter... [v 29]: And Jacob boiled soup. And Esau came from the field, and he was faint. And Esau said to Jacob, ‘I beg you, let me eat of the red, this red *soup*, for I am faint.’....” (vs 27, 29-30). In the Hebrew it does say *red, red*—that’s true. Many English translations don’t have it. Esau was not using Marcus of Queensbury etiquette. He wouldn’t say, while sitting at the queen’s table, ‘I say, would you kindly pass that red lintel soup?’ What he’s saying is, ‘I want to chow-down on that red, red stuff; we’re going to chop vitals.’ This is Esau: he’s rough; he’s gruff!

What’s the first thing that Jacob says, v 31: “And Jacob said, ‘Sell me your birthright today.’” Brotherly love! Jacob is living up to his name Jacob, who’s grasping; who pulls himself up while pulling others down. This is the name of Jacob.

Verse 32: “And Esau said, ‘Behold, I *am* at the point of dying, and what *profit shall* this birthright be to me?’ And Jacob said, ‘Swear to me this day.’ And he swore to him, and he sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and soup of lentils. And he ate and drank, and rose up and went his way. Thus did Esau despise *his* birthright” (vs 32-34). But there’s more to that in the Hebrew. I want to read you a literal translation, which I have worked out and you will get the feel for this, the syntax changes. This is how it literally reads:

And he ate and drank and rose and went...
[then it changes; it doesn’t say he went, he did this] ...and despised the Esau, the birthright.

Not in this manner he did it; not in this way he did it; but it’s a condemnation of Esau despising the birthright. And we’ll see what the Apostle Paul had to say about this. He had a few choice words for Esau, in comparing Esau with Jacob.

Then a second incident comes. We find out in Genesis 27:1: “And it came to pass when Isaac *was* old and his eyes were dim, so that he could not

see, he called his oldest son Esau and said to him, ‘My son.’ And he said to him, ‘Behold, I *am* here.’ And he said, ‘Behold now, I am old and I do not know the day of my death. And now please take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt game for me. And make savory meat for me, such as I love, and bring it to me so that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.’ And Rebekah listened when Isaac spoke to Esau his son. And Esau went to the field to hunt venison in order to bring *it*. And Rebekah spoke to her son Jacob, saying, ‘Behold, I heard your father speak to your brother Esau, saying, “Bring me venison, and make me delicious food so that I may eat and bless you”’” (vs 1-7).

Didn’t Rebecca hear God when God said ‘the elder shall serve the younger.’ Rebecca, like Sarah before her, jumped the gun. Didn’t God promise Abraham a son? *Yes, but it’s taking God a long time to do it!* ‘I’ve got to help God out. I’ll take my maid Hagar and give her to Abraham and I’ll have a son that way.’ NO! That’s not what God had in mind.

Well, Rebecca says, ‘This is terrible, this can’t happen. I want the blessing for my son Jacob.’ Reminds me a certain mother of the sons of Zebedee who wanted her sons to sit at Jesus’ right hand and left hand. God’s in control! God doesn’t need help! He’s very capable of doing what He needs to do.

So, Jacob was worried, he says, v 12: “‘My father will perhaps feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver. And I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing.’ And his mother said to him, ‘Your curse *be* upon me, my son—only obey my voice and go bring them to me’” (vs 12-13).

We’re going to find out that in a way the curse was on Rebecca. Rebecca did pay a very heavy price, because when Esau found out he was going to kill Jacob. Isaac had to send Jacob away, and Rebecca thought ‘I’ll call him back in a few weeks or months.’ She never saw him again! The price she paid for trying to speed things up was never being able to see her beloved son again. When we read how Jacob came back to Isaac, it mentions Isaac and nothing about his mother Rebecca. She died in the meantime, and she paid a price for that.

At any rate, we find here that Jacob when near to Isaac in v 22: “And Jacob went near to Isaac his father. And he felt him and said, ‘The voice *is* Jacob’s voice, but the hands *are* the hands of Esau.’ And he did not recognize him...” (vs 22-23). Following in the next several verses is the blessing, we don’t need to go over the blessing, but Isaac did bless him.

What happened in v 30: “And it came to

pass, as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was scarcely gone from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting.”

Verse 32: “And his father Isaac said to him, ‘Who *are* you?’....Then Isaac trembled greatly, and said, ‘Who then *was* the one who has hunted deer and brought *it* to me—and I have eaten it all before you came, and have blessed him? Yea, he shall be blessed!’.... [here’s our man Esau; notice his reaction]: ...And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceedingly bitter cry, and said to his father, ‘Bless me, even me also, O my father!’ And he said, ‘Your brother came with deceit, and has taken away your blessing.’ And *Esau* said, ‘Is he not rightly called Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times—he took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.’ And he said, ‘Have you not reserved a blessing for me?’ And Isaac answered and said to Esau, ‘Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brethren...’ And Esau said to his father, ‘Have you but one blessing, my father? Bless me, even me also, my father.’ And Esau lifted up his voice and wept” (vs 32-38).

Verse 41: “And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him. And Esau said in his heart, ‘The days of mourning *for* my father are at hand—then I will kill my brother Jacob.’”

What did the Apostle Paul have to say? First, Esau said, ‘You’ve stolen my birthright.’ *Not true!* Granted, Jacob pressured Esau, took undue advantage of him, but Jacob didn’t steal it.

Hebrews 11:20—some commentary by the Apostle Paul: “By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things that were to come. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped *God, leaning* on the top of his staff” (vs 20-21). An observation: Where was it ever said of Esau that he worshiped God? *Never!* That’s not to say that Esau never recognized God or acknowledged him—I’m not saying that. But the Bible never describes Esau at anytime as worshipping God. But it does describe Jacob as worshipping God. Again, God saw something in Jacob.

Hebrews 12:14: “Pursue peace with everyone, and Holiness, without which no one will see the Lord; looking diligently, lest anyone fall from the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and through this many be defiled; lest *there* be any fornicator or godless person, as Esau, who for one meal sold his birthright; because you also know that afterwards,

when he wished to inherit the blessing, he was rejected; *and* he found no room for repentance, although he sought it earnestly with tears” (vs 14-17).

- Esau never repented!
- We have no record of any repentance!
- You see the contrast between Jacob and Esau?

The same is true of us! I don’t know why, I can’t answer that. God is now *staffing* for His kingdom and He has chosen us. I think of myself, what does God see in me? What does He see in you? *He sees something!* He know that somewhere, somehow in you is something He wants and He will develop it and He will chip away at the edges. We will see in coming weeks and months how God worked with Jacob until finally toward the end of his life, this brash, cocky, arrogant young patriarch would say before Pharaoh in Egypt, ‘Few and evil have been my years, and I have not attained to the age of my fathers.’

What a come down! And we’ll see what God has to do to bring Jacob to that point. All the tricks that Jacob foisted upon others will come back on him in order to make him a true servant of God.

Now we’re going back to Genesis and we’ll pick up the story of Jacob, and we’ll see another contrast between Jacob and Esau. It’s amazing the difference between these two.

Genesis 27:42: “And these words of her older son Esau were told to Rebekah. And she sent and called her younger son Jacob, and said to him, ‘Behold, your brother Esau is going to comfort himself concerning you—*for he is planning* to kill you. And now therefore, my son, obey my voice—arise, and flee to my brother Laban, to Haran, and stay with him a few days until your brother’s fury turns away... [that was going to be more than 20 years, although Rebecca had no concept that the time would be that long] ...until your brother’s anger turns away from you and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send *for you*... [she never could; she never did] ...and bring you from there. Why should I be bereaved of both of you *in* one day?’.... [But she’s going to be bereaved of Jacob, for she will never see him again] ...And Rebekah said to Isaac, ‘I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth. If Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these of the daughters of the land, what good is *my* life to me?’” (vs 42-46).

So, she’s using this to try to get Isaac to send Jacob away, but she’s also serious. She doesn’t want Jacob taking a wife of the daughters of the land, as Esau did.

Genesis 28:1: “Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and commanded him. And he said to him, ‘You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother’s father. And take a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother’s brother. And may God Almighty bless you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, so that you may be a multitude of people.... [You’ll notice Isaac recognized that the blessing he gave Jacob would be fulfilled—he knows it!] ...And may He give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your seed with you, so that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham’” (vs 1-4).

Verse 5: “So Isaac sent Jacob away. And he went to Padan Aram, to Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau. Now Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him away to Padan Aram in order to take a wife from there—and that as he blessed him, he gave him a command, saying, ‘You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan’—and that **Jacob obeyed his father and his mother...**” (vs 5-7). Again, a contrast. It is never said of Esau that *he obeyed his father and his mother*.

I’m not going to say that Esau never obeyed his father and his mother, never did anything his dad asked him to do, but it’s interesting that *it specifically credits Jacob with obeying his father and mother*, but never so credits Esau. There is a fundamental difference between Esau and Jacob.

Verse 9: “Esau went to Ishmael, and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael...” Why did he do that?

Verse 8: “Now when Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please Isaac his father”—he went to Ishmael. He had already married two daughters of the land, so he figures that ‘dad doesn’t like these daughters so I’ll go to Ishmael’s line. Ishmael was a son of Abraham—wasn’t he? It’s got to be better, dad’s got to approve of that.’ This is what he’s thinking.

We leave it there and we’re going to see Jacob on his journey, v 10: “And Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. And he came upon a certain place, and stayed there all night because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and placed *it* at his head. And he lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed. And behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven! And behold, the angels of God *were* ascending and descending on it! And behold, the LORD stood above it, and said...” (vs

10-13). Did God ever say anything to Esau? *Not that we know of!*

Notice what He says to Jacob: “...‘I *am* the LORD, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your seed. And your seed shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south. And in you and in your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.... [then a specific promise to Jacob]: ...And, behold, **I *am* with you, and will keep you in every *place* where you go, and will bring you again into this land, for I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken of to you**” (vs 13-15).

When you think about it, what an incredible promise! God is saying to Jacob: *Jacob, you don’t know it yet, but you’re in for a ‘tough row to hoe.’ But no matter how dark things may be, no matter how many troubles may come your way, no matter that you may be sinking, I give you my Word, I will bring you back, I will not let any irreparable harm befall you.* An absolute promise that God makes to Jacob! In fact, we will find (in future messages) a very small promise that God makes to Jacob regarding Joseph. God even kept that one; He is a promise-keeping God!

Verse 16: “And Jacob awoke from his sleep, and said, ‘Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.’ And he was afraid and said, ‘How fearful *is* this place!.... So Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone which he had put at his head, and set it *as* a memorial pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place The House of God....” (vs 16-18). Then Jacob makes an interesting vow. It’s not what it appears to be. It’s not a conditional vow.

Verse 20: “Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘Since God will be with me, and will keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, and I come again to my father’s house in peace, then shall the LORD be my God. And this stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God’s house. And of all that You shall give me, I will surely give the tenth to You.’” (vs 20-22).

Some have thought that was a conditional vow that Jacob is saying, ‘God, if You really promise to do what You say You’re going to do, and You really bless me and give me all of this, then You will be my God.’ NO! That’s not the force of the Hebrew. That’s not what Jacob is saying.

We do have it correct in v 20: “...‘Since God will be with me...’” So follow through from there, God, since you’re going to do this—You are going to be with me, You are going to bless me, You are

going to give me all that You have promised—since You are going to give me all that You have promised, then since You’re going to do this, by the act of Your doing this, You will demonstrate once for all to all the world and to me *that indeed You are my God!* Not that if You don’t do You won’t be my God. You are my God! But by doing this, You will demonstrate clearly and unequivocally that indeed You are my God!

That’s the ending of the blessing, his vow. Genesis 29:1: “Then Jacob moved on and went to the land of the sons of the east.” He meets Rachael. It’s going to be most interesting how God begins to take Jacob down through Laban—through trickery, through deceit, through 20 years of labor, changes his wages—until God blesses him by showing him genetics through the dream, the vision that he had on how to have cattle and sheep reproduce. Fascinating story of Jacob with Laban. We’ll see just what kind of a trickster Laban is. I’ll give you one thought:

Verse 12: “And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father’s **kinsman**...”—that word is ‘achi’—which literally means *brother*—that was false, that’s not real, because after all Jacob is the nephew of Laban, he’s not his brother. There is a Jewish tradition that is saying, ‘I am going to be closer to Laban; I’m going to be so close I’m going to be like his own brother. In other words, ‘I’m going to be as close to him as *stink on a skunk*; he’ll never out fox me.’ What Jacob had in store for himself he never knew. He found out, but it’s amazing!

That’s a tradition. That’s the thinking of some of the rabbis as to why Jacob said he was Laban’s brother. But Laban still out-foxed Jacob and God had that in mind. We’ll pick that up next time, and I hope you will see more of this man named Jacob and how God works with him and chips at his ego, his vanity and his grasping nature until you find a completely changed man by the time he gets to meet Pharaoh in Egypt.

Scriptural References:

Jacob:

- 1) Genesis 25:19-21, 20, 26, 23, 25-27
- 2) Genesis 17:1
- 3) Genesis 26:9
- 4) Genesis 20:6, 5
- 5) Genesis 25:27, 29-34
- 6) Genesis 27:1-7, 12-13, 22-23, 30, 32-38, 41
- 7) Hebrews 11:20-21
- 8) Hebrews 12:14-17
- 9) Genesis 27:42-46
- 10) Genesis 28:1-9, 8, 10-18, 20-22, 20
- 11) Genesis 29:1, 12

Also referenced: Book: *The Effective Executive* by Peter Drucker

Bleached Linen:

Scriptures referenced, not quoted:

- Exodus 25:4; 26:1, 31

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