

Introduction

Seemingly coincidental events with Phoebe that led to marrying Amy (Samoyed on porch in college, waiting to purchase a house, two months to find a breeder, Holy Spirit prompting me not to get the first dog, pet store for gold fish, friend through the glass at pet store, random young child petting dog, Lauri telling me God wanted me to get the dog, being asked to bring the dog to CCF events, seeing Amy but not wanting to approach her, inviting Crystal to watch dog not knowing she was friends with Amy...

1. We often don't realize the interesting ways that God works "behind the scenes" in our lives to lead and direct us, or to bring about certain situations, events or outcomes
2. We have an example of this in our passage today with Jacob
 - a. Back in chapter 27 Jacob deceived Isaac in order to receive the familial blessing instead of Esau
 - b. Esau was so enraged, he sought to kill Jacob
 - c. This pretty much put Rebekah over the top because she already loathed her life due to Esau's two Hittite wives who were bitterness to her and Isaac's soul, and the thought of Jacob marrying Canaanite women was too much
 - d. So, in chapter 28, partly to protect Jacob from Esau, and partly for him to find a wife among the daughters of Rebekah's brother's daughters, they sent him on a journey to Haran where Rebekah's family lived
3. Then, soon after starting his journey, the LORD appeared to him for what appeared to be Jacob's first encounter with God:
 - a. The event was transformational, and Jacob responded by acknowledging God's presence, expressing fear and reverence, memorializing the encounter with a stone pillar, and promising to make Yahweh His God
 - b. It was at this time that God made a series of promises to Jacob that related to the covenant He made with Abraham (READ 28:12-15)
4. Now, before we dive into our passage today, I want to begin by saying that much of what we'll see in our passage today will sound rather familiar:
 - a. You may remember back in Genesis 24, Abraham sent his most trusted and faithful servant to the same location to find a wife for Isaac among his relatives
 - b. And, we saw throughout that passage reminder after reminder of God's sovereign hand guiding and directing the servant
 - 1) When the servant first arrived at the well near the city of Nahor, he prayed a very specific prayer asking God to send out the exact woman Isaac was to marry, and He sent Rebekah
 - 2) He even prayed for Rebekah to act in a very specific way so that he would know it was her, and she acted exactly that way

- 3) Then, once the servant arrived at Rebekah's home, her father, mother, brother, and even Rebekah all recognized God's hand in directing the servant to them, and that it was God's will for Rebekah to return with him and marry Isaac
5. While these two events are similar, one of the main differences with today's passage is that God's hand in the event is not so blatant or obvious:
 - a. Jacob never prays to God like the servant did, asking God to direct him to the very woman he was supposed to marry
 - b. Jacob never declares that God led him straight to Laban's home as Abraham's servant did
 - c. Jacob doesn't praise God and bow down to worship as Abraham's servant did
 - d. And there's no outright confirmation by Laban and his family that it was God's will for Jacob to marry one of his daughters
 - e. However, the absence of such things does not mean that God was any less involved with Jacob's journey to find a wife than Abraham's servant's journey to find a wife for Isaac
6. Sometimes, God's hand is more subtle and less obvious, and I believe that's what we see today:
 - a. God promised that he would be with Jacob, would keep him wherever he went, and would bring him back to the land of Canaan
 - b. This implies that God would be actively and sovereignly involved with Jacob's life, guiding and directing his steps
 - c. And that began with doing this on his journey to find a wife

<p>A. We see God's hand at work when Jacob arrives in Mesopotamia (READ 29:1-6)</p>

1. Verse 1 begins with an unusual phrase that some translators think indicates a new lease on life or "pep in his step" for Jacob: lit. **"Then Jacob lifted up his feet to walk..."**:
 - a. God had just promised him descendants, that He would be with him wherever he went, bring him back to the land, and wouldn't forsake him until He had done everything He had promised
 - b. Maybe Jacob had a renewed sense of optimism in his journey to find a wife
2. As Jacob entered the land of Mesopotamia, he arrived at a well much like Abraham's servant did:
 - a. They didn't have google Maps back then <grin>, so this would have been a reasonable place to stop and ask directions
 - b. When Jacob arrived, there was a group of shepherds there with their flocks waiting for someone to roll the heavy stone away from the well so they could water their sheep
 - c. Remarkably, when he asked where they were from, he discovered they were not only from Laban's hometown of Haran but they knew Laban and his family

- d. In addition to this seemingly random event, one of Laban's own daughters, Rachel, was also approaching the well at the same time
3. I'm not sure what to make of vs. 7-8:
 - a. Jacob's statement that it was "**still high day**" and that it was "**not time for the livestock to be gathered**" indicates it was the middle of the afternoon
 - b. Some suggest that his charge for them to water the sheep and take them back out to the pasture was a form of rebuke suggesting they were lazy and simply socializing around the well instead of pasturing the flocks; but v. 2-3 indicate that coming to the well was a custom so this is unlikely
 - c. Others suggest that when he saw Rachel coming and was informed that it was Laban's daughter, he simply tried to shoo them away because he wanted to be alone when he introduced himself to her
 4. Like the story of Abraham's servant, I believe we are to see God's hand all over this:
 - a. Jacob could have arrived at any well, in any field, at any time, and met any old shepherds, and he likely would have ultimately found his way to Haran...eventually
 - b. But instead, he arrived at the right well, in the right field, at the right time, with the right shepherds, AND Laban's daughter shows up as a bonus!

<p>B. We see God's hand at work when Jacob meets Rachel (READ 29:7-12)</p>
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1. We have been told in the passage that the stone covering the well was large (2) and that it normally took multiple people, "**they**", to remove it (3, 8)
 - a. However, when Rachel arrived at the well and Jacob saw her, he somehow mustered up the strength to remove the stone all by himself and water her flocks
 - b. That's a pretty impressive feat and some have suggested that God gave him supernatural strength
2. However, the most important thing about this encounter is the repetition of the phrase "**Laban, his mother's brother**":
 - a) We've already been told that Rachel is Laban's daughter in the previous verses (twice), so we don't need to be reminded of it again
 - b) However, notice that Isaac used an almost identical phrase back in 28:2 (READ)
 - c) So, I believe the repetition of the phrase, "**Laban, his mother's brother**" when Jacob meets Rachel has a three-fold purpose:
 - 1) It reminds us of the original purpose of the mission—to find a wife from among the daughters of Laban, his mother's brother
 - 2) It foreshadows success in that mission
 - 3) Finally, it subtly points to God's providence in guiding Jacob in his mission
3. Unlike Abraham's servant who was absolutely convinced God directed every aspect of his search for a wife for Isaac, it's not clear whether Jacob recognized God's hand in meeting Rachel (at least not yet)

4. However, he certainly recognized its significance because he was overcome with emotion (RE-READ 11)

C. We see God's hand at work when Jacob meets Laban (READ 29:13-20)

1. It's no surprise that Laban received Jacob enthusiastically and with open arms because Jacob was his nephew, and presumably someone he was meeting for the very first time
2. He was apparently so fond of Jacob that he not only allowed him to stay with him for a month (how many of us could take that with our relatives <grin>), but offered him a job caring for his flocks
3. At this point we learn some important information:
 - a) Rachel wasn't Laban's only daughter; she had an older sister, Leah (this will become important later)
 - b) It also appears that Rachel may have been the more attractive of the two: Leah had "**weak**" (or could be "**tender**" or "**delicate**" eyes as some translations), but Rachel was "**beautiful of form and face**"—the contrast suggests Rachel was the more attractive of the two
 - c) She must have been something because it only took Jacob 30 days to decide that he "**loved Rachel**" (18) and wanted to marry her
 - d) The last bit of important information is that Jacob apparently didn't have enough money to cover the dowry (bride price):
 - 1) In the ANE, it was customary for the groom or the groom's family to pay the family of the bride a dowry, or something called the bride-price
 - 2) We saw this when Abraham's servant went to Abraham's family to find a wife for Isaac; he took "**ten camels from the camels of his master, and he went with all kinds of good things of his master's in his hand**" (24:10)
 - 3) It appears Jacob arrived empty handed, but fortunately for Jacob Laban accepted his offer to work seven years in exchange for marrying Rachel, which for Jacob seemed like little more than "**a few days because of his love for her**" (20)

D. Takeaway

1. Sometimes God's work in guiding us is obvious like it was with Abraham's servant, but at other times it's a bit more subtle, like it was in Jacob's journey
2. Sometimes we attribute what God does quietly "behind the scenes" to mere chance or happenstance and fail to see what role He may have played in it
3. But, the Bible makes it clear that God is at work in the events and situations of our lives, guiding and directing our steps (whether we recognize it or not):
 - a. Psalm 37:23: "**The footsteps of a man are established by Yahweh, and He delights in his way.**"
 - b. Proverbs 16:9: "**The heart of a man plans his way, but Yahweh directs his steps**"
 - c. Proverbs 19:21: "**Many plans are in a man's heart, but the counsel of the LORD will stand.**"

- d. Proverbs 20:24: **“The steps of a man are from Yahweh, how then can man understand his way?”**
 - e. In fact, this is actually where our assurance of salvation comes from: God’s ability to work all the events and situations in our life together for good according to His purpose for us (Romans 8:28): **“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”**
4. Watching God work in Kimberly’s Ark experience:
- a. Began with an internship—but no full-time jobs available so returned home
 - b. Applied for two full-time jobs early last year, but wasn’t considered
 - c. So, she applied for Summer work but was offered 9 month temporary job instead—AND got the very last spot in housing (necessary)
 - d. Kept hoping for something full-time, but nothing came up
 - e. Then, needed temporary place to stay for two months to finish out her 9 month job and God provided right on time...and at the same cost
 - f. As she neared the end of her 9 month job, a full-time spot opened up and they offered it to her...but, in order to do it she’d need to find additional housing she could afford and higher hourly wage
 - g. God provided both—an extra \$1 per hour and more temporary housing...at the same cost she was paying
 - h. Most recently, God provided a temporary place to ride out the storm