

WEEK
3

Sept. 28-Oct. 4,
2026

Daily Bible readings

Genesis 27:1 - 36:42

Shaky foundation

Monday, Sept. 28

Genesis 27:1 – 28:9

If God is going to create a people who can witness to him in this world, this seems like a shaky foundation to start with.

We have Isaac, who seems to prefer his son Esau over the son God has said will be the father of a great nation, we have Rebekah, who schemes to make sure her preferred son wins out by whatever means she considers necessary, we have Jacob, who not only agrees to his mother's dishonesty but improves on it. Then we have Esau, who seems not very bright but very angry.

We like to have our heroes be larger than life—to be beyond the limitations of human failings.

But it seems as though the Bible goes out of its way to make sure we understand that the people God uses to do great things are not great people—they are people of great faith and obedience (at least some of the time).

When we get to the New Testament, Peter will be called the rock upon which Jesus builds his church—the foundation. But Peter is also portrayed as temperamental and capable of denying Jesus when it gets uncomfortable.

The mighty King David seems at times to

take the prohibitions in the Ten Commandments as a things-to-do list yet is presented as a man after God's own heart.

The apostle Paul, who shapes the Christian church to an extent exceeded only by Jesus himself, could easily have been introduced to us as model of Jewish faithfulness, but instead we first meet him as a cruel persecutor of Jesus-followers.

It's like God wants to make it clear that his kingdom isn't built on a foundation of heroic people, or even consistently good people, but rather has to depend on God alone for its strength.

So the next time you think you're not good enough to do what God is leading you to do, remember that at least you've never dressed in goatskin to steal something from your brother. It's not about being good enough; it's about trusting that God is strong enough.

As we read on through both the Old Testament, we'll see how the people of God (Israel) try to earn God's favor. Like Jacob (Israel), who schemed to get Isaac's blessing, they have to be reminded that blessing comes from God, not human effort or cleverness.

Isaac's blessing of Jacob is for the generations to come as well, "May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness—an abundance of grain and new wine....May

Daily reflections by Rev. Mark Fleming

Use the QR code or visit markfleming.info/daily-bible-readings
Subscribe or visit. New reading posted daily with booklet contents, a direct link to the passage online and a comment form for discussion.

www.markfleming.info email: mark@markfleming.info

© 2026 by Mark Fleming. All rights reserved

Scripture quotations, unless noted, are from the New International Version, © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 Biblica, Inc.



those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed.”

Monday meditation

Proverbs 3:9-10

Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine.

Prayer focus

Show me, Lord, how to use my gifts and possessions in your service, and empower me to resist the temptation to seek only my own advantage.

Stairway to heaven

Tuesday, Sept. 29

Genesis 28:10 – 29:30

Jacob’s extended family would fit well into one of Shakespeare’s plays or a prime-time soap opera. Yesterday we saw Jacob and Rebekah tricking Isaac; now Rebekah’s brother deceives Jacob.

To protect Jacob from Esau’s anger, Rebekah created an excuse to send Jacob away, saying he should go to her brother’s family to find a wife. Jacob then travels to the land of the brother, Laban.

Along the way he sees a vision of angels ascending and descending to and from heaven on a staircase or ladder (the story behind the hymn, “We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder”). In that vision God repeats the promise that Jacob will be the father of a great nation through which all peoples on earth will be blessed. “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.”

Jacob is moved by this and sets up an altar. Even so, he isn’t yet able to let go of his human nature to turn things to his own advantage. The vow he makes to God is conditional: “If God will be with me and watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father’s house, then the Lord will be my God.”

Even after having seen God and angels,

he is still not able to completely trust.

While the story about going to Laban’s land to find a wife seems to have been a pretext, it works out—though not without complications.

Jacob’s meeting with Rachel recalls Isaac’s first meeting with Rebekah. Where Rebekah had come to a spring to draw water, her niece Rachel is working as a shepherd and comes to a well to water her sheep—but in both cases they meet at a watering place for animals.

The story of Jacob marrying his cousin—actually two of his cousins—and failing to notice that one sister has been substituted for the other is foreign to us in just about every detail. It does, though, continue the theme of God being able to bring his will to bear in spite of unpromising circumstances.

Tuesday meditation

Proverbs 3:11-12

My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

Prayer focus

Lord, let me accept your leading and your correction, even when I would rather do things my own way.

Jacob gets Laban’s goat(s)

Wednesday, Sept. 30

Genesis 29:31 – 30:43

The contest between Jacob and Laban to out-cheat each other takes a weird turn when Jacob uses an improbable plot to get the best sheep and goats for himself. However questionable the biology behind the plan, it seems to have resulted in him enriching himself at Laban’s expense. Considering Laban’s history of double-crossing him, though, it’s hard to be too sympathetic.

In the meantime, Jacob’s wives and their servants were also being prolific, starting a family that would eventually grow to 12 sons and a daughter.

In spite of all the family drama, Jacob is

well on is way to seeing God's promise fulfilled. Each of his sons will be the father of one of the 12 tribes of Israel, which take their names.

Rachel, Jacob's first and greatest love, is finally able to conceive after many years of barrenness, and is the mother of the favorite son, Joseph. She will later bear one more son, Benjamin.

Jacob, though still living in the household of his father-in-law, grows in wealth. Ultimately, though, it will be his sons and his place as the father of God's people that earn him a place in history.

Now that Rachel has given birth to Joseph, it is time for the next chapter of the story to begin. Jacob says to Laban, "Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland."

Laban still wants more from Jacob, and pressures him not to leave: "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay." This is when Jacob plots to gain the advantage by taking the strongest offspring of Laban's livestock.

Laban failed to see that it was time for Joseph to move on, and was harmed by that failure. We, too, can be harmed if we fail to recognize when it is time for a new season.

—

Leah and Rachel seem to engage in the family practice of questionable dealings when Leah conspires with her son, Reuben, to follow a folk remedy and use mandrakes to bring fertility. Rachel then makes a deal to get the mandrakes from her...ironically, the mandrakes don't seem to help Rachel, but Leah conceives again.

Wednesday meditation

Proverbs 3:13-18

Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold.

She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her

fast will be blessed.

Prayer focus

God, grant me the wisdom to recognize when it is time for a new chapter of my life to begin.

Skulking away

Thursday, Oct. 1

Genesis 31:1-55

Jacob continues to look less promising as the founder of a people who will bring God's blessing to the world.

Rachel, too, shows herself to be her father's daughter, stealing and lying. Her decision to take her father's household gods (idols believed to protect the family and its property) suggests that she doesn't recognize the true God—at least not exclusively. Possession of the gods would also strengthen any claim she or Jacob might make on Laban's property after his death, so there was a practical side to the theft as well.

Laban responds with anger, and only God's intervention protects Jacob and his people from retribution. The two part, not on good terms, but with a covenant that provides protection for both.

Laban's words in verse 49 sound almost sentimental: "May the Lord keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other." Instead, they are a request for God to ensure that each stays true to the treaty they have made. This is even more explicit in verse 53, "May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us."

In sneaking away in secret, Jacob looks weak and fearful.

There will be many more stories in the Bible of weak and fearful people trying to run away: Jonah not wanting to preach and the disciples hiding behind locked doors after the crucifixion come to mind.

But as we'll read tomorrow (and many more times), God excels at using human weakness to highlight his own strength and faithfulness.

Thursday meditation

Proverbs 3:19-20

By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the watery depths were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew.

Prayer focus

Lord, grant me the humility to trust in your strength rather than in my own efforts.

Struggle of a lifetime

Friday, Oct. 2

Genesis 32:1 – 33:20

Back when we first met Jacob in Chapter 25, he was still in the womb and yet was already very much the man we read about it today's passage. When his mother, Rebekah, was pregnant, we read this: "The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, 'Why is this happening to me?' So she went to inquire of the Lord.

"The Lord said to her, 'Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.'"

Jacob's whole life is a story of struggle and conflict. Perhaps it is not surprising that the people who take his new name, Israel, would also be a people for whom conflict has been a constant reality.

In the reading yesterday we saw a resolution of sorts to the conflict between Jacob and Laban—a resolution based more on distance than on reconciliation.

Today we read about the cautious reconciliation between Jacob and Esau.

Even though God had instructed Jacob to return to his home territory and promised that he would prosper there, Jacob characteristically hedges his bets by dividing up his substantial household and property into two parts to reduce losses in case he is attacked by Esau.

Then, when he learns that Esau is on his way to meet him accompanied by 400 men,

he fears the worst. To placate his brother, he sends a series of servants with generous gifts of livestock. He had left home when Esau was threatening to kill him—if Esau is still hostile, he hopes that the gifts will buy some favor.

But as the journey continues, and Jacob knows he is on his way to meet his brother for good or ill, he experiences the defining struggle of his lifetime.

He sends his children and their mothers ahead of him, and remains alone for the night. In the night, he wrestles with a man who seems to enter the story out of nowhere. They wrestle all night; at daybreak the man asks Jacob to let him go. Jacob refuses to do so unless the man blesses him.

The man does, saying, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

That struggle changes more than Jacob's name. Along with a new identity comes new power. God calls us to submit to his leadership, but real submission comes only after we realize our own strength is not enough.

Sometimes people avoid the struggle in the name of submission, but never really learn of God's strength. Others, once the struggle begins, claim victory and turn away without working through it; they never learn their own limitations.

It's only through the struggle that we really understand where our limitations are and become able to trust God's strength.

Friday meditation

Proverbs 3:21-26

My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgment and discretion; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck.

Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble.

When you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet.

Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be at your side and will keep your foot from being snared.

Prayer focus

God, grant me the release to rely on you—and only on you—and not be afraid.

Attack and retaliation

Saturday, Oct. 3

Genesis 34:1 – 35:15

The NIV Bible I read from gives this section the bland subject heading of “Dinah and the Shechemites,” which sounds more like a band name than a violent, bloody confrontation. Traditionally the incident has been referred to as the Rape of Dinah.

Reading it from a 21st Century perspective one of the most striking features is that the story is told from just about every perspective but Dinah’s. We hear from Jacob, we hear from Dinah’s brothers, even from the rapist and his father. Dinah, though, is never given a voice.

Dinah’s brothers retaliate strongly and brutally, though it’s hard to tell if they are more angry about the harm done to their sister or the affront to their own pride and honor. “They were shocked and furious, because Shechem had done an outrageous thing in Israel by sleeping with Jacob’s daughter—a thing that should not be done.”

In the tradition of their family, their revenge comes with the help of deception.

Jacob, for his part, seems mainly concerned with the difficulties the retaliation could cause for him.

I have trouble seeing why this was included in the Bible other than to record an event, or possibly to explain hostility between two groups of people. But, probably unintentionally, it brings up the need to fill in some gaps as you’re reading.

What parts of the stories are missing? What people aren’t given voice in the record we have?

We recognize that even the greatest heroes of scripture have significant flaws. There is as much we can learn from their failings as from their strengths. In this case we can be reminded to listen to all voices—especially those most affected by violence.

Saturday meditation

Proverbs 3:27-28

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act.

Do not say to your neighbor, “Come back tomorrow and I’ll give it to you”—when you already have it with you.

Prayer focus

Let me see and hear the pain of those whose stories aren’t told well or often, and lead me in how I can help them.

Jacob’s family complete

Sunday, Oct. 4

Genesis 35:16 – 36:42

For several chapters, Genesis has been the story of Jacob. While he is still alive, the section we read today brings most of his story to its conclusion—from here on out, the focus shifts to his son Joseph.

But first, there’s an important thing that needs to happen to make his family complete: the birth of his youngest son who will be the father of the 12th tribe of Israel.

The beginning of Jacob’s family can be traced back to that moment when he met and loved Rachel. Now, as the final member of the family is born, Rachel dies in childbirth.

In her final moments, Rachel names the child Ben-Oni, meaning “son of my trouble.” Jacob changes his name to Benjamin, meaning “son of my right hand.” If there was one element of Jacob’s life that was unwavering, it was his love for Rachel.

Jacob’s life for the next few years seems to be uneventful except for Isaac’s death. “Jacob came home to his father Isaac Then [Isaac] breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.”

We can look back at the lives of the patriarchs and other heroes of the Bible and think of their lives as being in constant communion with God in a way that is beyond our own relationship with God. But here we’re reminded that they spent most of their life just living like we do—working

and worshiping; living and dying. That's where our faith is really lived out.

Chapter 36 wraps up the story of Esau.

Jacob has become Israel, and the fathers of the 12 tribes have all been born. It looks like everything's in place for the people of Israel to grow and occupy the land. What could possibly go wrong?

Sunday meditation

Proverbs 3:29-30

Do not plot harm against your neighbor, who lives trustfully near you.

Do not accuse anyone for no reason—when they have done you no harm.

Prayer focus

Keep me faithful in the quiet, uneventful times. Comfort can be a temptation as easily as fear can.

