

## Genesis 29 - Jacob's Marriages and Children

### A. Jacob meets Rachel.

1. (1-3) Jacob comes to a covered well.
  - a. **And came to the land of the people of the East:** Because the LORD blessed his trip, Jacob returns to the land that his mother came from, being also the land of his grandfather Abraham.
2. (4-10) Jacob meets Rachel at the well.
  - a. **My brethren, where are you from?** In an age before clearly marked roads and signs, Jacob didn't know where he was until he asked some of the locals, and he discovered he was at his destination.
  - b. **Water the sheep, and go and feed them:** Jacob definitely seems like he is trying to get rid of the shepherd boys, probably so he can be alone with Rachel.
  - c. **Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth:** Jacob also knew he had come to marry one of the daughters of Laban (Genesis 28:2), so he is more than willing to show kindness (and perhaps his strength) to Laban's daughter Rachel.
3. (11-14) Rachel arranges for her father Laban to meet Jacob.
  - a. **Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept:** Initially, Rachel must have been quite surprised when a man she never saw appears before weeping and greeting her with a kiss. Yet she heard of her relatives (Rebekah is her aunt) who lived in the Promised Land, and she understood Jacob is from this family.

### B. Laban's deal with Jacob.

1. (15-20) Jacob offers to work for seven years as a dowry to receive Rachel in marriage.
  - a. **What should your wages be:** This might sound like a nice offer, but really Laban let Jacob know if he wants to stay around, he must stay as a hired servant. Jacob was the son of a man of tremendous wealth. Certainly he was not lazy, but he wasn't used to hard work. Servants did the hard work back home. But now Jacob is the servant.
    - i. Jacob's reaction in this situation will reveal much of his character. This demonstrates the principle that you never know what kind of servant you are until others *treat* you like a servant.
  - b. **Now Jacob loved Rachel:** Not only was Rachel **beautiful of form and appearance**, but she was also the first friendly face Jacob met in the area. It is understandable why he had a "love at first sight" attachment to Rachel.
    - i. There is dispute as to exactly what the phrase "**Leah's eyes were delicate**" means. Some think it means her eyes were bad, and she couldn't see well. Others think it means her eyes were "dull," not beautiful and full of life like her sister Rachel's eyes.

c. **I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter:**

The offer to work for **seven years** was essentially a dowry. Though Jacob came from a family with great wealth, he left home penniless. Before he could take a woman in marriage he had to provide a dowry to demonstrate he was fit to support a family and to compensate for the taking of the daughter.

i. **Seven years** was a very generous offer, far above a normal dowry. Jacob didn't want to risk a refusal. When Laban saw how badly Jacob wanted Rachel, he knew he could take advantage of him.

d. **They seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her:** We notice the great **love he had for her**. The seven years of labor without pay (except for room and board) seemed to pass as quickly as a few days.

i. In this ancient culture, Jacob was not allowed to spend as much time as he wanted with Rachel. There were strict social guidelines keeping unmarried men and women apart from each other.

ii. This clearly demonstrates an important principle: true love waits. Jacob was willing to wait **seven years** for Rachel.

iii. In 1990, it was reported that in response to the excesses of the sexual revolution, some 400 concerned single adults have joined the National Chastity Association. Member Elaine Marsh, a 35-year-old legal secretary from Orange County, described her commitment to celibacy before her marriage: "It comes from my religion, but it's more than that," she says. "I just feel it's such a precious part of yourself, you don't give it to someone when you haven't made the commitment of marriage." Founder Mary Meyer says the group isn't against sex: "I love hand-holding, I love kissing, I love caressing, I love sex," she says. "But even more than I would love to experience these things right now, I want to be able to have a relationship where I can experience them forever." This is the kind of wisdom and heart Jacob had.

iv. In the 1990s there was a successful campaign among teens titled "True Love Waits." It persuaded them to take the following pledge: "Believing that true love waits, I make a commitment to God, myself, my family, those I date, my future mate and my future children to be sexually pure until the day I enter a covenant marriage relationship." One 18-year-old named Rick said he used to be one of the guys who would come into school on Monday morning and brag about his sexual exploits. His views changed when he became a Christian two years ago, and now he is happy to take the pledge. "Sex is something God made to say, 'I love you,'" he said. "If you have sex with everybody, you can't say 'I've saved this one thing to say, 'I love you.' "

2. (21-25) Laban switches Leah for Rachel on the wedding night.

a. **Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her:** These words are clear enough. Even though Jacob waited and the time went quickly because of love, when the time was done he was done waiting.

b. **He took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her:** It was possible for Jacob to be fooled because of the wedding customs of the day. According to those customs the wife was veiled until she was finally alone with her husband in the “honeymoon suite.” If it was dark by the time Jacob and his new bride were alone together (something Laban would not have difficulty arranging), it helps explain how Jacob was fooled.

c. **He took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob:** We assume that Leah was in agreement with this. She may have loved Jacob secretly. She may have considered this her one chance to get a husband. She may have thought this an unsought, and therefore justifiable, opportunity her sister’s man. (Yet even if she was not in agreement, she was under the absolute authority of her father.

i. The absolute authority of the father in the home in that culture also explains why Rachel “agreed” to this.

d. **So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah:** We can imagine how Jacob felt - and how Leah felt, and of course how poor Rachel felt. All this was because of Laban’s sin. Or, perhaps one should say it was because of *Jacob’s* sin - now the deceiver is deceived.

e. **Why then have you deceived me?** Significantly, Laban’s deception towards Jacob is similar to the deception Jacob put upon his father Isaac and his brother Esau. This is an example of Jacob reaping what he had sown. Jacob exchanged the younger for the older; Laban exchanged the older for the younger.

i. When Jacob deceived his father and cheated his brother, God did not change His plan to choose Jacob to receive the birthright. Instead, God took Jacob to the school of hard knocks to discipline him. This shows that our disobedience may not derail God’s plan for our life, but it will greatly affect how we end up experiencing it. You may spend 20 years working for someone like Laban while God teaches you a few things.

ii. Though we can see this is God’s correction upon Jacob, it in no way justifies Laban’s deception. The fact God does work all things together for good never excuses the evil acts God works for good.

3. (26-30) Laban agrees to give Rachel to Jacob in return for another seven years worth of work.

a. **It must not be done so in our country:** This excuse by Laban basically says, “Well, didn’t we tell you? We don’t do it this way around here. Thought you knew.” The only reason Jacob submits to this clever trick of Laban’s is because he had no other option. But Laban’s “reason” was really nothing more than an excuse.

b. **Serve with me still another seven years:**

c. **And he served with Laban still another seven years:** Laban is a perfect picture of a deceptive manipulator. He ends up getting exactly what he wanted (both his daughters married). Yet, this will turn out badly for both himself and his daughters. Oftentimes, God judges manipulators by giving them what they in their sinful desires and methods want and allowing it to be loss for them.

i. The problems in this family can be seen immediately. Not only has Jacob married two sisters, but he also lets everyone know one is favored and loved more than the other. Ultimately, all these problems stem from Laban's manipulative deception, and the prior sin of Jacob that brought it upon himself.

ii. Well, then, what should Jacob have done? Some say Jacob should have gone to Laban and told him to correct the whole mess, and simply be married to Rachel and let Leah be Laban's problem. Others believe that according to the standards of the culture, he could not have put Leah aside, because she was unable to marry another after having been given to Jacob. Perhaps, he should have done the best he could in the situation, which would have been to love his two wives equally.

d. **He gave him his daughter Rachel as wife also:** We don't practice polygamy, but we do practice "serial marriage." We can think of polygamy as "mass marriage" in the sense we speak about "mass murder": someone who marries more than one at the same time. But there is also "serial murder": where a murderer kills many, but one at a time. In our modern culture we multiply wives to ourselves; we just do it one at a time.

i. We can't do anything about our marriages that have broken up in the past, but we can do all we can before God to make sure that from now on, it is one partner for all time.

### C. Jacob's first four sons born through Leah.

#### 1. (31) God's gracious love for Leah.

a. **When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved:** God's compassion on Leah is touching. She is truly the innocent party in all of this mess. God can minister to a wife and meet her needs even when the husband acts in an ungodly manner.

i. "Wretched Leah sits sadly in her tent with her maid and spends her time spinning and weeping. For the rest of the household, and especially Rachel, despises her because she has been scorned by her husband, who prefers Rachel and is desperately in love with Rachel alone. Leah is not beautiful, not pleasing. No, she is odious and hated. There the poor girl sits; no one pays any attention to her. Rachel gives herself airs before; she does not deign to look at her. 'I am the lady of the house,' she thinks, 'Leah is a slave.' These are truly carnal things in the saintly fathers and mothers, like the things that usually happen in our houses." (Luther)

b. **When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb:** Isaiah 54:5 says, *For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name.* God can meet the needs a hurting wife has, needs that are neglected by the husband.

#### 2. (32) The birth of Reuben.

a. **She called his name Rueben:** The first child born to Jacob, through Leah, is named **Reuben** by Leah, meaning "behold, a son." This is her statement to Jacob and all others that the LORD had **looked upon my affliction.**

i. Reuben is the firstborn son of Jacob; he is the logical one to inherit the promise God had made to Abraham and passed on to Isaac and then to Jacob.

b. **Now therefore, my husband will love me:** Jacob, even though he did not love Leah, still would have sex with her. Unfortunately, men are much more able to detach sex from love than women are. Worse yet, Leah was painfully aware of the fact Jacob did not love her, even though he was obviously having sex with her.

3. (33) The birth of Simeon.

a. **She called his name Simeon:** The second child born to Jacob, through Leah again, is named by Leah *Simeon*, meaning “hearing.” Leah hopes all will notice the LORD has heard her.

b. **Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved:** Apparently, the birth of Reuben did not turn the heart of Jacob towards Leah. She is still aware he does not love her, though he is still having sex with her.

i. Of course, Jacob and Leah were married, so there was nothing sinful in sexual relationship. But this plainly shows that Jacob, like most any man in the flesh, was able and willing to have sex with someone he did not love.

ii. Women should never think a man loves them just because they have sex. A 1993 Los Angeles Times article interviewed young men to find out their views on sex. One man named Christian (17 years old) explained how things work between men and women: “We’re just not sentimental. That’s why we’re men ... We like girls, we don’t love them ... You see a girl and you just think, yeah, she’s really pretty and the first thing that comes to mind is you want to have sex.” He then explained how he seduced a girl: “You start kissing her and hugging her and little by little you start touching her.” After sex, he explained many boys dump the girls. “Girls get mad, but they don’t take it hard. They get over it.”

iii. This is the kind of man a woman might have sex with in the misguided effort to keep him as her boyfriend, because he has deceived her into thinking he loves her. How dangerous can this be? Consider the words of a woman who caught AIDS from a Ventura man who knew he was infected but never told her: “All I wanted is someone to love me, and now I’m going to die for that. I don’t think I should have to die for that.”

iv. A 1995 survey asked the following question: “Have you ever had sex with a woman you have actively disliked?” 58% of men answered “yes.”

4. (34) The birth of Levi.

a. **Therefore his name was called Levi:** The third child born to Jacob, again through Leah, is named **Levi**, meaning “attachment.” Leah still lives in the hope her husband Jacob will love her and become attached to her through the birth of these sons.

b. **Now this time my husband will become attached to me:** The pain in the heart of Leah is as evident as the hardness of Jacob’s heart, and as evident as his fleshly attitude towards his wife Leah.

5. (35) The birth of Judah.

a. **She called his name Judah:** The fourth son born to Jacob, again through Leah, is named **Judah** meaning, “praise.” Apparently, Leah has stopped naming her children to reflect the pain and longing in her heart. Now she focuses on God and can praise Him.

b. **Now I will praise the LORD:** To some extent, and for some period of time, Leah has allowed the LORD to meet her need, and she can now praise God! Leah knew the LORD better, driven to Him by the neglect of her husband.

i. Leah, though she was neglected by Jacob and despised by Rachel, had a great purpose in God’s plan. The two greatest tribes came from Leah, not Rachel: Levi (the priestly tribe) and Judah (the royal tribe). And most importantly, the Messiah came from Leah, the uglier sister, who was neglected and despised, but learned to look to the LORD and praise Him.

*References: The Bible, David Guzik, Martin Luther,*