

The Story of Jacob
Heroes of Faith Series
Week 8: Jacob Gets Two Wives

Scripture

Genesis 29:13-35

Motivation

Genesis 27

- Jacob deceives his father and cheats his brother out of the blessing
- It blows up his whole life and now his brother, Esau, wants to kill him
- Jacob's mother says to Jacob, "Run to your uncle - just get out of here"

Genesis 28

- Jacob is sleeping alone in the wilderness when God gives him a dream
- God meets him in the night...not with a sword—but with a ladder. Not with punishment—but with a promise: "*I am with you... I will not leave you.*"
- God's grace is the kind that doesn't wait until you "repent right" but finds you right where you are

Genesis 29

- He leaves with nothing but fear and a mother's advice to run
- Jacob arrives after 2 or 3 months of wandering and traveling

Information

Ground Rules for Bible Reading:

1. **Don't Judge but Seek to Understand** - We cannot judge ancient men and women or God on 21st-century American ethics, values, and expectations. We must seek to understand the cultural context of the Bible. Nothing about American culture is like ancient Bedouin culture, where people lived a pastoral lifestyle following their flocks around and living in tents. Context is key.
Literary - What is going on in the chapters and verses around the passage in question?

Historical - When was this written? (What we were reading happened before God gave the law to Moses - 430 years before.) Where was it written? Why and to whom was it written?

Theological - How does this fit into God's redemptive story?

2. **The Bible is Descriptive more than Prescriptive** - We cannot assume that because the Bible reports it, then God must approve of it. The Bible shows the darker side of humanity and does not whitewash: polygamy, genocide, rape, deception, betrayal, tyranny, murder, and much more. The Bible does not condone these things but exposes humanity's brokenness and the greatness of God.
3. **Ancient Biblical Culture is Foreign, Not Inferior** - Because these people were ancient and did not have smartphones, mass transit, modern medical knowledge, and more, does not make them barbaric. CS Lewis called this Chronological Snobbery.
4. **Read the Bible with Humility, Not Superiority** - You and I are not the heroes as we look at these poor, awful people's lives. The only Good One in the Bible is God/Jesus. As you and I look at these people's lives, we should see ourselves in their sin, struggles, stumbles, brokenness, and failures. Their lives should humble us and draw us to the mercy and grace of our God.

Jacob's Arrival

Genesis 29:13-14 (ESV) As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, 14 and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

Laban ran to meet Jacob. It is not because he is interested in building a relationship with his nephew. Remember back in Genesis 24. This is the second time someone from Abraham's family returned to their home to find a wife. The first time when the servant came for Rebekah he came with camels, gold, silver, clothing, precious ornaments and more. Rebekah and Laban's family benefited from Abraham's wealth. Now, here is his sister's son. From that same wealthy family. Perhaps he also is looking for a wife. So when Laban acknowledges, "you are my bone and my

flesh.” Yes, Jacob has found his uncle but they are way more alike than Jacob knows. And boy is he about to find out. To Jacob, he is safe with kin. To Laban, money has arrived. This nephew might be looking for a wife and boy oh boy he has two! Jacob is running from one problem straight into another.

There is an additional problem...

Jacob is Empty-Handed

Genesis 29:15-20 (ESV) Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?” **16** Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. **17** Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. **18** Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” **19** Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.” **20** So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Now remember, Jacob has just performed a feat of strength (by removing the stone from the well, which would have taken several shepherd boys together to move). He kissed Rachel (nothing sexual, but a warm greeting from a long-lost relative) cried out, and spilled the beans. Rachel runs home and tells her father, who immediately remembers his sister's situation.

In verse 14 we see ancient hospitality with a little Laban twist. Ancient hospitality is still very similar today. If someone needs food or a place to stay, you would welcome them in for several days and feed them. They are your guest. You can be sure if Jacob stayed for a month, the good uncle Laban was getting the low-down and watching Jacob's every move. Laban gives his nephew a generous month. And now it was time to get down to business. Let's make a deal, Jacob. Can't stay here indefinitely, and I could use some help.

This is where we find out about Laban's daughters. As I was studying, I became obsessed with what was wrong with Leah. Did she have bad eyesight? Did her eyes not sparkle? Was she ugly? I could not come up with a conclusive answer, but the

answer I received really made sense to me. Look at Verses 18 & 20. We see here that Jacob might be suffering from Love at First Sight. He is smitten. Yes, Rachel was beautiful, but he was drawn to her and in love. And Jacob wanted to lock her down in marriage. Typically, in this type of situation, a work dowry (dowry is what is paid to the woman's parents because they are losing an important worker and part of their home) would be two to three years. Jacob doubled and added an additional year. As you can imagine, Laban is completely on board. He is not losing his daughter as a shepherdess, and he is gaining additional help. And if Laban plays his cards right, it will really benefit Laban.

At the end of that passage, we have a very romantic verse: 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her. Jacob was head over heels in love with Rachel. He had worked hard and now it was time for his big payday.

Jacob's Marriage

Genesis 29:21-24 (ESV) Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." **22** So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. **23** But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. **24** (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.)

The wedding day had come. A wedding feast was a huge week-long affair. The first night was a fantastic celebration and feast (followed by more celebration and feast). At the end of the first night of celebrating, the bride, who is completely veiled, and the groom would retire to the marriage tent to consummate the marriage. The partying would continue the rest of the week. But the consummation was not what Jacob thought. You see, Laban was counting on three things working in his favor. A heavy veil, Jacob's inebriation, and a dark tent. All worked together perfectly in concert. The deceiver, Jacob, had been deceived in the same way he had deceived.

The Deceiver Is Deceived

Genesis 29:25-29 (ESV) And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” 26 Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27 Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” 28 Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. 29 (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.)

Do you think this brought back memories of what Jacob did to his Father and Brother 7 years earlier? Jacob just got jacobed! The Hebrew name Jacob or Yaakov means to supplant or to deceive. Jacob now knows which side of the family the deceitful streak comes from. Honestly, in light of Dad and Grandpa’s stories, it comes from both sides. The difference is that Abraham and Isaac deceived people out of self-preservation, and Laban deceived for his self-interest. He does not care about his daughters or Jacob, only about what he can gain personally and financially. Consider the parallels:

- Jacob dressed up and relied on his father’s bad eyesight to lie and deceive his father for the family blessing.

- Laban relied on Leah dressing up, the cover of darkness, and likely inebriation to deceive Jacob to benefit himself.

God is allowing Jacob to face the same awful deception so that Jacob can experience the consequences that he was actually running from. God often uses mirrors (people like us) to get our attention and discipline us.

As we are about to explore the tragedy of these sisters (more specifically, Leah) so let’s briefly talk about how these families ran. In this culture, at this time, the family unit was very patriarchal. The father ruled the family, and you did not speak up against him or dare oppose him. This is why Leah and Rachel did not speak up or warn Jacob about the marriage. And as the story unfolds, we will see that there was likely a lot of strife (perhaps more parental favoritism) between these sisters before Jacob came along. So, after Jacob’s marriage celebration week to Leah, he began his marriage to Rachel. Was it a whole other week? Because he didn’t have

to wait seven more years, but married Rachel directly after his week with Leah. How would you like to end your honeymoon like that!?

Polygamy was never God's design (one husband for one wife is God's plan and design). This ugly warping of God's plan for marriage can only lead to jealousy, heartbreak, and bitter rivalry. Last week, a missionary to Mormons introduced me to how ugly and gross polygamy is by suggesting I watch: **Keep Sweet, Pray and Obey on Netflix**. It is not easy to stomach and is heartbreaking to see the deception and lives ruined by such warped cultish lies.

What a mess: Laban does not care about his daughters or their feelings, and this was his plan all along. Good free labor for a long time. He is now tethered to his girls and afraid to go home. Perfect for Laban. Oh, Jacob, did I forget to tell you that in our culture here in Haran (we are not in Canaan), we marry off the firstborn daughter first. The heartache and tragedy that come to these women cannot be understated. Let's look at this final section.

Man's Sin Complicates God's Design

Genesis 29:30-35 (ESV) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. **31** When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. **32** And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me." **33** She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon. **34** Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore, his name was called Levi. **35** And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the Lord." Therefore, she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

Rereading this passage over and over broke my heart for Leah. Perhaps she cared for and even loved Jacob and wanted to see if her love for him would be reciprocated. Think of the tragedy of the morning after as she watched her husband freak out, seeing her face, realizing what had happened. Watching her husband, who should love and cherish her, wait out their wedding week, while also expecting

her to fulfill the conjugal duties. Then to have her husband marry her sister and cherish and adore her. What was heartbreaking was that Jacob still pursued intimacy with Leah even though he did not love her or want to be married to her.

Jacob, even though he did not love Leah, he was still willing to have sex with her. This demonstrates a principle that is still true, that a man will often be willing to have sex completely apart from love, and only a foolish woman regards the willingness to have sex as proof of love. Leah was not the first, nor the last, to live under this problem of male nature. - David Guzik

The sadness I have in my heart for Leah is profound. Here is the encouragement from her story. And it should ring somewhat familiar to us. A bit Hagarish if you will. Leah, yes, was unloved by her husband, but she is not unloved and unseen by God.

The names of her sons speak to her heartbreak and tragedy.

-Reuben - Behold, a son. (Now my husband will love me.)

-Simeon - Hearing (The Lord has heard that I am unloved)

-Levi - Attachment (Hope that her husband would not just use her but become attached to her)

-Judah - Praise (Leah stopped basking in her profound pain and turned her eyes to praise God, who blessed her with these boys)

Here we have the first instance of someone praising God in the Bible. It is found in the broken life of a heartbroken woman. She was the first to praise God in the Bible.

These four names are very important. From two of these boys will come the two greatest tribes in Israel. And from one the Messiah would rise. From Leah!

Application

-God Sees All, Including the Unloved, the Broken, and the Afflicted.

-God's Sovereign Plan is Bigger Than Our Sin

-God's Plan Will Always Include Broken, Sinful People