

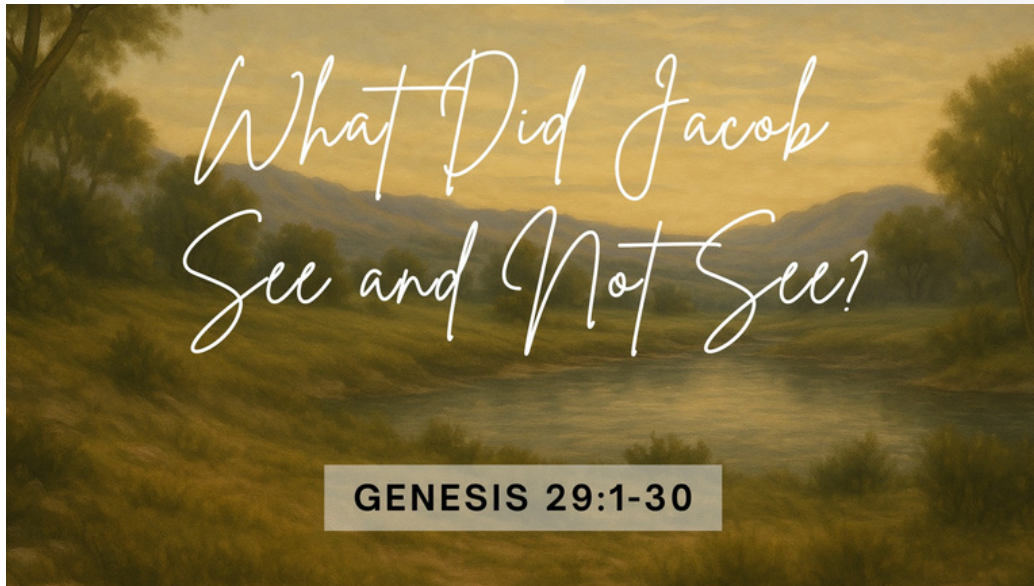
CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY NOVEMBER 9, 2025
GENESIS 29:1-30

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WHAT DID JACOB SEE AND NOT SEE?



Sometimes we see beauty in life and sometimes we see snakes. And sometimes we only see what is beautiful and don't see the snakes. For those of you who are struggling with my contrast of beauty and snakes, I'm clearly not a snake lover. I differ from people that think snakes are beautiful.

I get anxious around snakes. I am not in the "the only good snake is a dead snake" camp. I don't go quite that far. However I'm really ok letting everyone else deal with the snakes, and if-a-snake-ends-up-dead-"oh well".

Growing up in Brazil I have been up close with unfriendly snakes. In the giant swamps in Brazil my dad pointed out a large python that had eaten a huge capybara, as a kid I wasn't that much bigger than that capybara. Another time, while out in a lava field, I almost stepped on a rattlesnake. I never saw the snake till it rattled and its mouth came open.



Another time we were swimming in a river at our church camp and a huge pink boa constrictor jumped off the cliff into the water where we were swimming. I never saw the snake on the cliff or saw it in the water near us, but my friends yelled till we got out of the water, and then I could see it. Another time I was clearing brush at our church camp and I had unknowingly cornered a poisonous brush snake that was coiled ready to strike. I never saw that snake either till another friend rushed up and happened to scare it off. Sometimes snakes are hard to see.

Yet what I did see in Brazil was so much beauty. (SL beauty) Brilliant starry nights that included the southern cross. Beautiful waterfalls untouched by civilization. Beautiful animals, like parrots, Toucans, and giant anteaters. Beautiful fruit trees, beautiful food, and of course the beautiful Brazilian people.



Sometimes we only see what is beautiful and don't see the snakes. In our passage today - Jacob sees the beautiful, and doesn't see the snake till it's too late.

In last week's study Jacob, the younger son of Isaac and Rebekah, was fleeing as an exile to Haran. Jacob was fleeing from his older brother Esau because Jacob and his mother had deceived Esau out of the firstborn blessing. Esau, as would be expected, was filled with murderous hate. So in order to protect Jacob from Esau, Rebekah came up with a reason to send Jacob away that Isaac the father and patriarch would support. Rebekah said she couldn't stand the thought of unmarried Jacob marrying a local Canaanite woman (**27:46**), which she knew would prompt Isaac to send Jacob to her family to find a wife for Jacob. Jacob was sent to the home of his maternal grandfather "Bethuel". "Bethuel" from last week's chapter means "dwelling place with God". Sounds like a pretty safe place to go, "a dwelling place" with God. What Jacob didn't know was that he was going into a snake's den.

Chapter 29:1 immediately follows Jacob's conditional vow to the LORD **chapter 28:20-21**. God personally spoke to Jacob in a dream, stairway to heaven scene - Jacob was moved by that and then he makes this vow.

So this journey Jacob's starts in **verse 1**, in Hebrew it literally states, Jacob "lifted his feet" as in "one foot after the other". This is a faith journey - one foot after the other, where the LORD is going to teach Jacob to trust so that Jacob's faith in the LORD is not conditional. Let's pause there for perspective.

Unconditional Faith

Is your faith in the LORD conditional? Does the LORD have you on a journey learning to trust so your faith is not conditional?

In **verse 2** Jacob arrives. No more details about the long trip are given other than Jacob simply arrives. God had told Jacob **28:15** "I will be with you , and protect you wherever you go". And it is safe to assume that is what happens because Jacob simply arrives.

And what does Jacob see when he arrives? A well. There is a rich history in Genesis with wells so far. Abraham dug wells and named them, and a peace agreement was made at well Beersheba.

Hagar met the LORD in the wilderness twice at wells. That was about the LORD hearing Hagar's cry, the LORD seeing her, and the LORD saving her. Abraham's servant finds Isaac a wife, Rebekah, at the well in Haran. The Lord provided well after well for Isaac, and gave him a superior well, a well of living flowing water. The LORD led Isaac as well to the well of Beersheba again where another peace agreement was made.

And now the Lord leads Jacob to a well in Haran. With that rich history of wells, what do you think is going to happen with Jacob here at this well? Covenant faithful God, who sees Jacob, who is living water, is going to miraculously provide Jacob a wife, at the well. It's as if previous well stories of Genesis were writing the current story of Jacob in **chapter 29**..

So in **verse 2** Jacob saw the well, and Jacob also sees three flocks near the well. And he sees that the well has a large round stone over it. Verse three gives us the purpose of the large stone. **Genesis 29:3 NASB**

So apparently the stone well cover is so large that the shepherds only move it once all the flocks are assembled and ready most likely because it takes several people to move the heavy stone and note it by "rolling it away".



Notice the language here used of "roll the stone from the mouth". The "Septuagint" is the 200 BC Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Septuagint uses the same Greek verb family and noun here in **Genesis 29:3 NASB** as the apostle Mark uses in his gospel account in **Mark 16:3** re: Jesus' tomb stone being rolled away. So there is a lot going on here in this **Genesis 29**.

So Jacob then greets the shepherds (**verses 4-6**), asks them about his uncle Laban, they tell him Laban is well. And more importantly they point out that Laban's daughter Rachel is coming to the well at that exact moment with Laban's sheep.

Now Rachel showing up at that moment with sheep tells us several things.

FIRST

God's supernatural timing is involved (again). Just like with Rebekah.

SECOND

The Lord has brought the younger daughter, Rachel, to Jacob at the well. Not Leah, the older. This is God's ordaining and choosing. So once again, the LORD is choosing the younger over the older – a Genesis theme.

THIRD

Laban is not wealthy enough to have paid shepherds and uses his unmarried daughters as shepherds.

So Rachel is a shepherd, she is the younger sister, and she is chosen by the LORD for Jacob. We also know what her name means. Rachel means “ewe” as in “female sheep” – having to do with fertility, nurturing, fruitfulness. “Rachel” means the power of birthing life that becomes flocks, and in her case tribes. And we know and from **verse 17** that Rachel “had a beautiful figure and a lovely face”.

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Rachel has an older sister named “Leah” who we learn from **verse 17** had no sparkle in her eyes. Leah’s name in Hebrew means “weary”, “tired”, perhaps reflective of her life trying to earn love from her negligent husband. However in the Akkadian language of the region, Leah’s name means “wild cow” – also having to do with fertility like Rachel’s name, but perhaps emphasizing the nature of her personality – wild and strong.



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Laban also has an interesting name. Laban (lavan) means “white” or “to make white” – implying “purity and innocence”. The opposite of what we see in this story. The same root word in Laban (lavan) is in the Hebrew word for Frankincense (levonah)– which is an expensive aromatic white resin from expensive gum trees. Frankincense is used in many Levitical cleansing and sacrificial ceremonies. And of course levonah is one of the gifts from the Magi, which is an appropriate gift for Jesus who is the only one pure and innocent). Also, the root verb means to bake bricks until they are white or pale.

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And just for fun the name Laban shares the same root word, white to make white, as our town Lebanon, “levanon” and it means “the place of whiteness”. Spiritually Oh that LORD would continue doing a work here in Lebanon of purifying Lebanon through Jesus!

Back to Jacob and Laban. It seems to me - that Jacob the deceiver is about to get baked (levoneh) by Laban (lavan) in attempt by the Lord to purify Jacob of his deceiving ways.

Enough with names... In **(verse 9-10)** Rachel approaches the well with her sheep and the text says “Jacob saw Rachel” (beautiful figure and a lovely face Rachel) and then Jacob saw her “sheep”. If you are comparing the story of Abraham’s servant meeting Rebekah at a well in Haran with Jacob meeting Rachel at a well in Haran then you notice that in the first story Rebekah the bride to be watered the servants ten camels. A very hard task of carrying water for camels, perhaps 50+ trips down the well and back up to the trough. And you will notice in our chapter today the story flips who is doing the watering. Now Jacob the potential groom, waters Rachel, the potential bride’s sheep.

And Jacob watering the sheep isn’t as hard as Rebekah watering camels, except that the text in **verse 2** states that the stone that covers the well was very heavy, and they – plural usually shepherds together to move the stone. Here Jacob moves the stone by himself. This would have been a very impressive feat to all the young shepherds and probably to Rachel.

Interesting, this is the 2nd heavy stone that Jacob lifted. The first one was the memorial stone he had near his head that he erected and poured oil over in **28:18**. Those stones were usually between 3-5 feet tall – quite heavy.

So what is Jacob up to here beside being a nice guy? The text says he “saw Rachel”, then he moved the heavy well stone lid and watered the sheep. Then **verse 11** says he “kissed Rachel” (yes kissing cousins), and “wept aloud”.

The phrase “wept aloud” here in the Hebrew is not usually used for “weeping with joy or relief”. Rather it is used in situations of “unrevocable loss”. For ex: this is the same phrase that described Esau weeping aloud in **27:38 NIV**. So what was Jacob “weeping” for?

Context here matters – so let’s back up to see why Jacob is weeping. Jacob flees from Esau who wants him dead. This is Jacob on the run, by himself going to Haran.

And in **Genesis 32:10 NIV** Jacob tells us himself that he went with only his staff.. meaning that was the extent of his possessions.

So when Jacob arrived in Haran at the well, and saw beautiful Rachel he came with only his staff. Abraham's servant came with ten camels and camel drivers, and the camels loaded with a sampling of Abraham's wealth. Jacob came with only his staff. Abraham's servant in **(24:22)** gave gifts to Rebekah – gold rings and gold bracelets. Jacob came with only his staff.

Abraham's servant gave gifts to the family of Rebekah **(24:53)**. More gold silver and special clothing and other precious things. Jacob came with only his staff.

So when Jacob with just his staff in hand saw beautiful Rachel he had nothing to offer to convince her that he was a worthy prospect, no gifts to offer to her family to convince them, nothing to offer as a dowry. I wonder if perhaps this weeping was a breaking moment where Jacob now saw where his deceiving ways led him. His deceiving ways led him to be on the run, away from his parents and their God, and their wealth. And now Jacob stood before beautiful Rachel, and wept at his empty hand. This moment could have been so different. Jacob standing before the wife of his dreams with nothing offer, I can only imagine him asking... What have I done? **Haggai 1:5b** "Consider your ways". Consider your ways Jacob!

But what Jacob did have he used to impress Rachel. Jacob was a strong man so he rolled the stone off the well. That would have been impressive and maybe important as Rachel was probably considerably younger than him. And then Jacob watered her sheep. That was also impressive act, watering the sheep for a shepherd girl – watering sheep was her job. And Jacob watered her sheep before the other shepherds and flocks that had been there waiting.

We see in **(verse 12-13)** that Jacob told Rachel who he was and where he was from, meaning "I'm an eligible bachelor cousin of the wealthy house of Isaac, son of Abraham". Which of course prompted Rachel to run and tell her father Laban. And Laban comes running to Jacob.



"I'm an eligible
bachelor cousin
of the wealthy
house of Isaac,
son of Abraham"

Now other teachers have suggested that Laban's motivation for running was not to just to meet Jacob his nephew, but to see if Jacob came to Haran with the same wealth that Abraham's servant had come to Haran with. So Jacob and Laban meet, Jacob tells Laban his story. And in response to Jacob's story, Laban responds in **(verse 14)** "you really are my own flesh and blood".

Now I suspect that Laban's statement of "you really are my own flesh and blood" is more than just a recognition of Jacob being his nephew. I wonder if after Laban hears Jacob's story, Laban sees something familiar in Jacob. Ever hear the line "it takes one to know one"? Laban is a "player" in the sense that he lies, manipulates, and strategizes to get what he wants. The circle of people a player cares about is usually one person, themselves. Someone who is a veteran player will more readily recognize when someone else is also a player. And a veteran player will also recognize when the other player has no resources, thus no play. Following me? The veteran player Laban is about to play the younger player.

Let me give you another image here adding to the player idea of what I see playing out between Laban and Jacob. This is the beginning of the dance of two cobras. An older wiser cobra, and a younger less experienced upcoming cobra, swaying and dancing with each other before a fight. And the younger cobra Jacob, has no resources, and is mesmerized and swaying to a love song – thus vulnerable. Jacob the younger cobra is easy pickings for a veteran cobra.

Well we know how the cobra dance plays out. Empty handed Jacob is smitten by Rachel and bargains for her with labor. And he offers way more than what is custom. Jacob offers seven years of work as a bride price for Rachel. The Nuzi text tells us that the normal bride price was 30-40 shekels of silver. The average annual wage for a shepherd was 10 shekels. Which means an average dowry was worth three years of shepherding. So Jacob offered double the average dowry.

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Pastor Thom's take is that people that bargain always start low and go up from there. But Jacob went straight to the top – seven years! Was that love? Was that insecurity? Fear? Pastor Dan's take is that falling in love can make you dumb!

In the story Laban was offered by Jacob what he couldn't refuse, and Laban accepts. And Jacob works for seven years for Rachel, and the text tells us in (**verse 20**) because of his strong love for Rachel it only seems like a few days.

So in the first part of the chapter What did Jacob see and not see? Jacob saw a well near Haran, his destination, – and Jacob knows from his family history what wells mean God's covenant faithfulness and provision, including a wife. And Jacob saw the sheep. And Jacob also saw lovely Rachel, the girl of his dreams. What Jacob didn't see was the... snake.

What did Jacob see and not see?

In **verses 21-30** Jacob sees the snake. Here is how it plays out. **Verse 21-25.**

Jacob's ready to be married to Rachel. He has dreamt of her for seven years, and now he is ready to be married. So let's look at ancient weddings. Ancient weddings of this region involved a "mohar" – a bride price. Typically the two fathers would agree on the bride price, or the agreement is made between the groom and father of the bride. For Rachel the bride price is seven years. In **verse 21** we see the bride price is paid.

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Ancient weddings then would have a wedding feast what we see in **verse 22**. “Feast” here means “drinking banquet”. “Drinking” referred to wine, as in the wine at the wedding in Cana. Wine was culturally a symbol of community “joy and celebration”. Drinking wine at a feast, whatever the feast, was about the community coming together to celebrate and be joyful – not drunkenness. The wedding feast for the community also served the purpose of the community recognizing and celebrating the union as witnesses.

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Also in ancient weddings, through-out the wedding feast the bride would be covered and veiled while the groom celebrates with his family and friends. This fits into **verse 23**. The evening being dark following a wedding feast including drinking in **verse 23** and their being a veiled bride is the perfect setting for Laban’s great deception.

Well the next morning (**verse 25**) Jacob wakes up next to Leah not Rachel, and of course Jacob is mad that now he is on the receiving end of a great deception. And Jacob asks Laban the same question in Hebrew that the LORD ask Eve in the Garden of Eden (**Genesis 3:13**), “What is this you have done?” This is also the same question the LORD asked Cain after he killed Abel. The same question Pharaoh asked Abraham after Abraham deceived Pharaoh in Egypt, the same question Abimelech asked both Abraham and Isaac after they both deceived him.

And Laban’s reply to Jacob’s question makes us realize that Laban is well aware of Jacob’s treachery with his brother Esau and uses that to his advantage.. think veteran player, veteran cobra. Laban replies in **verse 26**. Essentially Laban is saying to Jacob “In our place one does not have the younger before the firstborn”. The deception Jacob did to Esau, resulting in the younger getting what was rightfully the older’s, is now reversed by Laban on to Jacob. Jacob getting the older when he rightfully should have had the younger. So Jacob gets what he dished out.

In **verses 27-30** we see Laban the player, Laban the veteran cobra is still holding all the cards all the power and Laban tells Jacob exactly what Jacob has to do for Laban in order to have Rachel.

Note.. no response noted by Leah or Rachel... imagine living with a dad who uses you in his schemes. That's awful.

The first seven years that Jacob worked for Laban were love, the second seven years Jacob worked for Laban was Jacob getting baked -levenah - by the LORD. As in bake the brick until it's white.

So what did Jacob see and not see in the second half of the chapter? Well the obvious one is that Jacob didn't see who he was sleeping with, that's not good. But when Jacob woke up he saw that he had slept with the wrong sister, he then saw that Laban was a snake. And perhaps, just perhaps, he also began to see that he himself was a snake as well.

What did Jacob see and not see?

Thoughts for meditation and application:

1. Through this story of Jacob going to Haran empty handed and then meeting the girl of his dreams and having nothing to offer her, I think Jacob begin to see where his deceiving ways had led him. Again the prophet Haggai says "Consider your ways..". If your ways have not brought you to where God wants you to be then perhaps it's time to let God change your ways. Stand before God empty, like Jacob with only his staff, and let God thru Jesus, the only one who is sinless, transform your thinking **Romans 12:1-2**.

2. It's amazing how God balanced the equation isn't it? Yet God balanced the equation infused with grace.. why? Jacob still got Rachel, that's the grace part. But why did God show grace? Because God was working on Jacob's character.. Jacob was a lying conniving player..a cobra. And God wanted to bake it out of him. This was an individualized character transformation plan written by God for Jacob.

Will you allow God with his grace to transform you?

SUPPLEMENTAL

NOTES:

1. **Haran.** Haran is the same place Abraham had sent his servant to find a wife for Isaac. And for the same reason as Isaac sending Jacob, so their sons wouldn't marry local Canaanite women.
2. There are a lot of "sevens and threes in this story". Three's are often references to third day of creation or third day resurrection. Here the three flocks may be a nod to that. Seven is usually a subtle connection to seven days of creation, meaning completeness.
3. **Reappearing themes:** It appears that the themes of previous stories in Genesis keep reappearing in later stories in Genesis. It is as if the previous stories are writing the current story, and many other stories in bible. Which means that Genesis is the foundation for understanding the rest of the bible.
4. Both names Leah and Rachel are well respected in the Old Testament. **Ruth 4:11**
5. **"A few days" (27:44 NASB)** is exactly what his mom had said told Jacob his time in Haran would be.