

Jacob's Loves, Labors, and Lessons

Scripture Reading: Genesis 29:1-30

We studied the beginning of Jacob's life and saw some very dramatic turbulence in the family. A struggle for power and authority left Jacob fleeing his home to escape the wrath of his brother Esau. As Jacob fled, he encountered the grace of God. At a place called Bethel the Lord revealed Himself to Jacob. Jacob was now a changed man, but he had more changing to do. God was planning to cause growth and development of this patriarch through the experiences he would have at the home of Uncle Laban.

Genesis 29:1-30 – Laban the Supplanter (Deceiver) & Jacob's Labors of Love

More than once a well has been the place to find a wife or to have some other important encounter (Genesis 21:14-19; 24:1-7; 29:1-12; Exodus 2:11-21; John 4:1-15, etc.). At a well where livestock were watered, Jacob came into contact with Rachel, a daughter of his Uncle Laban. The deception which Rebekah and Jacob previously sowed in their lives (Genesis 27:5-29) would now be reaped through the dealings of Rebekah's brother, Laban. Through the deceptive dealings of Laban, Jacob would work for him many years. Those years of labor would keep Rebekah from ever seeing her son Jacob again. Jacob met his match when it came to shrewd and deceptive business dealings. Instead of working seven years for Rachel to be his wife. Jacob ended up working fourteen years – seven years for Leah first, then seven more years for Rachel, second. Was God punishing Jacob? No, He was teaching Jacob. Jacob needed to see what it felt like to be treated insincerely and deceptively. The golden rule seems more important when we experience people in our life who do not practice it (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31 cp. Matthew 6:12,14-15). Though Laban was deceitful, God was using Laban, his sons, his daughters, and their handmaids to make Jacob's character more mature and godly. God also was using Laban's family to bring forth the Messianic lineage.

Genesis 29:1-14 – Jacob found the right family.

Genesis 29:15-20 – Jacob made an honorable agreement.

Genesis 29:21-30 – Jacob was longsuffering with Laban's dishonorable treatment of him.

- Jacob was deceived, yet he did not dishonor Laban or Leah.
- Jacob loved Rachel so much that he labored double the time for her that he had promised.
- Jacob was honorable towards Leah, but his true love was for Rachel. He had propriety for Leah, but passion for Rachel. This would be the start of sadness and rivalry in Jacob's growing family.

- Custom and culture certainly put pressure on Jacob. Nevertheless, Jacob showed grace, unlike the reaction of Esau seven years earlier (Genesis 27:30-45).

Genesis 29:31 – 30:24 – War of the Wombs – The Love Hunger Games.

The first thing we notice in this portion of Scripture is that God was dealing with Jacob's disfavor of Leah. She was clearly wife number two. Leah's heart was sad and she prayed (Note the meaning of her son's names – Genesis 29:31-35; 30:20). It wasn't fair that Laban tricked him, but she was still his wife. God cared for Leah. Her physical appearance did not have anything to do with God's love for her and His desire to use her in His heavenly plans. This disfavor includes the attitudes of the rest of the family. What father would pass his daughter off to be married through such deception? So, God would demonstrate His love for Leah by giving her lots of children.

Producing children should be a blessing (Psalm 127:3-5). But this became a war for Jacob's affection, between Leah and Rachel. The wives extended their baby inventory to the use of concubines (Zilpah & Bilhah). In Genesis 30:14-16, there is the flavor of prostitution within the marriage, as Leah sold mandrakes to Rachel for bedroom privileges with Jacob [mandrakes were considered an aphrodisiac and an enhancement for fertility – Song of Solomon 7:10-13]. This reminds us of how Jacob coerced Esau to sell his birth right for some lentil stew (Genesis 25:29-34).

Genesis 30:25 – 31:55 – Time to move on and go forward with God

We must summarize this large portion of Scripture. The relationship between Laban and Jacob came to a head. Working for Laban for twenty years had been tedious (Genesis 31:38,41). Laban had continually been self-seeking and deceptive. His sons also shared similar attitudes towards Jacob. God prospered the flocks of Laban for Jacob's sake (Genesis 30:27). But Laban did not want to give Jacob much for his labors. He was always changing the terms of service and wages. **God called Jacob to gather up his family and things and get back home to where his future would be.** Jacob had skill in managing animals, but he gave God the credit for his success. See Genesis 31:1-12. **God identified Himself to Jacob as “The God of Bethel”** (Genesis 31:13). A covenant that was made between God and Jacob over twenty years ago was still in effect.

The daughters of Laban also felt cheated by their father. Rachel (the beautiful and favored one) stole the idols of her father Laban. This added to the tension between Jacob and Laban. God protected Jacob from the wrath of Laban and his sons. See Genesis 31:4-7,14-20. God directly warned Laban to not stop Jacob from going back to his homeland (Genesis 31:24,29 – note “*The God of your father*” cp. “*My gods*” in Genesis 31:29-30). In the end they parted peacefully (Genesis 31:43-55). **What are some of the lessons that Jacob learned?... 1)** God forgives us, blesses us, and uses us, despite our weaknesses and failures (Psalm 103:1-14; II Corinthians 12:7-10). **2)** God uses ungodly people / bad situations to teach us and prepare us for serving Him (Romans 8:28-39). **3)** Our labors are not in vain in the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58). **4)** Charm and beauty are deceptive things. The fear of the Lord is the greatest virtue (Proverbs 31:30). **5)** God is faithful / dependable. (Proverbs 3:5-7; Philippians 1:6; II Timothy 4:18; Hebrews 13:5-6).