



Genesis – 29:1-35 You Reap What You Sow! (Lesson #38)

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Outline for this week:

- Jacob journeys and arrives at a well outside the city of Haran (29:1-4)
- Jacob inquires about Laban (29:5-8)
- Jacob meets Rachel (one of Laban's daughters) (29:9-12)
- Jacob meets Laban (29:13-14)
- Jacob strikes a deal to marry Rachel (29:15-20)
- Laban deceives Jacob and he ends up marrying Leah (29:21-26)
- Laban strikes another deal with Jacob and this time Jacob marries Rachel (29:27-30)
- Rachel is barren while Leah bears four male children to Jacob (29:31-35)

29:1 Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. 2 As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it, for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, 3 and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well. 4 Jacob said to them, “My brothers, where do you come from?” They said, “We are from Haran.”

29:1 - Jacob continues his journey towards Haran, seemingly uneventful from here and he arrives outside the city of Haran (you will see that clearly in a moment).

He comes to the “people of the east.” This is an interesting name for the people from Mesopotamia.

The ESV Study Bible states: *that the “east” is often associated with those who are expelled from the presence of God (3:23-24; 4:16; 21:14; 25:6). It goes on to say: “this brief comment possibly signals that Jacob’s relatives do not worship the Lord.”*

Vs 2-3 - Here he is, outside the city of Haran (again we will see that in a second) and here he sees a well.

Some believe this is the same well that we read about in Genesis 24, that is possible, but it seems to me to be a different well whose function was the watering of animals. Of course, this could have changed over time.

In Genesis 24 the well was outside the town, here the well is in a field. In Genesis 24 women were coming with their water jars, here shepherds are coming with their flocks.

He sees here at this well, **three flocks of sheep**, no doubt with their shepherds, and they are waiting to water the sheep.

Moses provides us with some additional commentary that the stone on the well's mouth was **large**. He goes on to tell us that apparently, they had a custom at this well, that they would not roll the stone away until all the flocks were gathered.

These three flocks (with their shepherds) are out here waiting until all the flocks are gathered and then they **roll the stone away and water the animals**.

Vs 4 - Jacob then pops the first major question: *My brothers, where do you come from.* They reply: *“we are from Haran!”*

We can suspect that this was music to Jacob’s ears. He has finally **arrived**; he is outside the city of Haran. He is outside the city where Rebekah’s brother Laban lives.

5 He said to them, “Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?” They said, “We know him.” 6 He said to them, “Is it well with him?” They said, “It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!” 7 He said, “Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go, pasture them.” 8 But they said, “We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep.”

Vs 5 - Knowing he is outside the correct city he now shifts his inquiries to look for the correct person, namely Laban who is his mom (Rebekah’s) brother.

Notice he refers to Laban as the son of Nahor. This shows us how this Hebrew word **בן (ben)** is used. It can refer to son, grandson or any male descendant. This use of son in this manner is true of both the Hebrew and the Greek.

Thus, Jesus is called:

“The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Mt 1:1 ESV)

Laban is actually the son of (Bethuel) and the grandson of Nahor, who was Abraham’s brother. But linguistically the word son can and is used this way, in both the Greek and Hebrew.

But here, Jacob is inquiring of Laban. The response from the shepherds, **yes, we know him.**

Vs 6 - At this point, Jacob further inquires: **Is it well with him?**

The shepherds respond yes, it is well with him and in fact **the craziest thing, here comes his daughter Rachel.**

The **timing is of course divine.** This reminds us of **Abraham’s servant Eliezer**, who possibly at this very well prayed for God to lead him to the right woman, opened his eyes and then **BANG**, there she was, remember:

15 Before he (Eliezer) had finished speaking, behold, Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. (Gen 24:15, ESV)

Jacob traveled **450 miles** and it took anywhere from **18-30 days** and landed at the well just as one of Laban’s daughters was bringing the flock to be watered.

What are the odds? This is our God! Odds and statistical probabilities mean nothing to Him. He operates outside time and can bring situations and circumstances into time that boggle our ability to comprehend.

We will see in Genesis 31 that Laban has at least two sons.

Vs 7 - As Jacob is watching this develop, he says: It is still **“high day”** the middle of the day, it is not time for the larger herds to gather, you should **go ahead and water the sheep and pasture them.**

It is clear from this interaction that Jacob is an **experienced shepherd.**

Vs 8 - The shepherds who have gathered respond: *“We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep.”*

It seems they have a **custom**, and that **custom is to wait for all the herdsman** to be gathered and then roll the stone away from the mouth of the well and commence watering the flocks.

Jacob is no doubt thinking this is a silly custom and one they should abandon.

9 While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. 10 Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. 12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

Vs 9 - As Jacob was speaking to the shepherds, Rachel arrives at the well with her father's sheep.

In my mind I picture Jacob interacting with the shepherds, who had told him here comes Laban's daughter Rachel, and as he is talking and she proceeds closer, he simply glances over at her...

Vs 10 - As soon as **Jacob saw Rachel** and the seemingly large number of sheep that she was tending, he **immediately, ignoring their custom** went and **rolled the stone away from the well's mouth** and it appears he began to **water the flock of Laban, that was being tending by Rachel**.

It appears he **completely broke protocol** first by rolling the stone prior to all the flocks being gathered and second by watering the sheep that Rachel was tending for **she had just arrived at the well**.

As we read this it feels like a **story of love at first sight**. Jacob saw Rachel, he knew something was special about her, and he **loved her**. We will see this **clearly in a few verses**.

Vs 11 - Having completed watering the sheep, Jacob comes and kisses Rachel and **begins to weep “aloud.”**

It is a kiss of greeting, but it is also likely, at least from Jacob's perspective, something more.

Then Jacob begins to tell Rachel who he is. At this, **she “runs”** to tell her father **Laban** all that has happened.

This running is also funny, for when Eliezer was at this or a similar well, we saw everyone running around.

13 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.

Vs 13 - As soon as Rachel made it home, she told Laban all the news about Jacob (Rebekah's son) how she had met him at the well and Laban, **runs** to meet Jacob. He embraces him, he kisses him, and he brings him into this house.

What a beautiful picture of coming home.

Then Jacob tells Laban everything. We wonder by everything does it mean everything, or a filtered everything.

Vs 14 - Laban responds, surely you are **my bone and my flesh**. **Of course this is a very pre-scientific and possibly unintentional recognition of the genetics involved here, but it is scientific and true none the less**. This boy Jacob has DNA markers that connect him to Laban's mom and dad!

We see that Jacob stays with Laban a month. We can imagine that Jacob began to work in the field, he is after all an **experienced rancher**, his dad was a rancher, and his grandfather was a rancher.

15 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.”

Vs 15 - Laban tells Jacob, you are family it is not right for you to simply work for free, you should not serve me for nothing. **I will pay you**, tell me what shall your wages be?

Maybe Laban already recognized that young Jacob had taking a liking to his younger daughter Rachel, we do not know.

Vs 16-17 - Here Moses provides a **little commentary**. Laban had **two daughters**. The oldest daughter was named Leah, the youngest daughter was named Rachel. **Leah's** eyes were weak, she likely had **very poor vision**.

Rachel on the other hand was beautiful in form (shape, figure, or outline) and appearance. It seems Moses is casting the idea that she was **attractive in figure** and in **facial appearance**.

Also, so you know, Leah's name means **“wild cow”** or **“antelope.”** Rachel's name means **“ewe lamb.”**

Vs 18 - Here Moses tells us plainly that **Jacob loved Rachel**. Because he had no money to pay the dowry, Jacob offered Laban a deal: **“I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.”**

In the ancient near east this was referred to as the **bride's price** and here Jacob is willing to **pay seven years of service for Rachel**.

Men - Can you imagine working seven years for your wife's hand? Clearly **Jacob loved Rachel**.

APPLICATION: This is the difference between love and lust. Love is willing to wait, lust cannot wait:

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (1Co 13:4-7 ESV)

Lust demands fulfillment now. But love on the other hand is patient, kind, it bears, it believes, and it gives.

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.

Vs 19 - Laban no doubt likes this deal and he states: It is better that I give her to you than one of these local boys, plus seven years free labor is nothing to balk at. Stay with me, it is a deal, I will do it!

Vs 20 - **Jacob served seven years** for Rachel, the years passed by like days, because of the **great love with which Jacob loved Rachel**.

This is a love story (as we will see) like very few. Here is a love that is patient, giving, and selfless.

This **young man** set aside **seven years of his life**, labored for free to marry this woman.

APPLICATION: Ready for this, as best we can tell, he never complained a single time, about what this woman was costing him. Love is giving, selfless, and patient! It doesn't even keep a record.

21 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.) 25 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?"

Vs 21 - In the **middle east** it was common to have a **seven day marital feast**.

We can imagine that Jacob was keeping a countdown calendar in his room. The moment seven years of labor were completed Jacob goes to Laban and says give me my wife, it is time to **consummate the marriage**, it is time for her to be mine.

Vs 22 - Laban then throws a **bridal party**, he gathers together people of Haran, a one week festive event!

After all he is getting a great hardworking son-in-law who is a worshipper of Yahweh, this seems (on the face) like a win for everyone involved. Thus, a party is fitting, and a great feast is in order.

Feasting was an important element of Near Eastern weddings.

Vs 23 - That evening, Laban traded Rachel for Leah. According to Dr Fruchtenbaum, it is likely that the bride would have been veiled until day after the consummation of the marriage, so that evening, when Jacob went in to consummate the marriage, in a world without electricity, in the tent it would have been the low light of a candle at best and Leah may have been veiled (Gen 24:65) and Jacob had no idea.

We wonder why Leah did not say something. We wonder where Rachel was at this time. We have many questions about the details of what happened on that night. It is unlikely we will get them answered!

Laban has deceived Jacob. Of course we cannot help but think back to that day when Jacob deceived Isaac.

Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum comments on how this is **divine retribution** for what Jacob did to Isaac. He lists **four ways** he believes this is divine retribution:

- 1) Isaac's blindness equals the darkness of Jacob's wedding night.
- 2) Jacob is deceived by being presented the elder instead of the younger, the reversal of what was presented to Isaac (the younger instead of the elder).
- 3) Isaac thought Jacob was Esau, Jacob thought Leah was Rachel.
- 4) Jacob pretended to be the older brother while Leah pretended to be the younger sister.

But here the one **who deceived**, himself falls victim to **deception**. The irony here is noteworthy Jacob deceived his father by pretending to be the firstborn of two sons, and he is now deceived by Laban into marrying the firstborn of his two daughters.

APPLICATION: You and I need to take great care for we can be deceived as well (Eph 5:6; II Thes 2:3; Rom 12:1-2)!

Vs 24 - Here Moses provides a little side commentary that seems **irrelevant at the moment**, but will become **extremely important in the future**.

Laban also gave his female servant Zilpah to Leah to be her servant as a wedding gift. The name **Zilpah** means “nearness” or “intimacy.”

By the way the practice of giving a female servant as part of the wedding gift, this practice is in keeping with the customs we find in the Nuzi Tablets.

By the way, Zilpah will play a key role in the overall story.

Vs 25 - Then morning came and **behold it was Leah. Light has a way of exposing the truth**. We can imagine **Jacob’s shock, his anger, and his frustration!**

Jacob goes to Laban and asks there **rapid-fire questions**:

- 1) **What** have you done to me?
- 2) **Did I not** serve you for Rachel?
- 3) **Why** 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.) 30 So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.

Vs 26 - Laban responds, ohhh I thought you understood, in our country, in our land, we have a custom and I cannot give the younger in marriage prior to the older.

Of course, Laban is likely lying, Laban, has deceived one who just executed a masterful deception. Laban knew what Jacob wanted and could have easily explained this custom or tradition, but he rather takes advantage of Jacob! Now if this was indeed a custom of the land it seems after living seven years in the land Jacob would have heard about it.

But, here we are, what will Jacob do? Laban makes a proposal; he offers another deal to Jacob.

Vs 27 - Laban has a **counter-offer**.

Go ahead and complete the week for this one. In the Near East wedding celebrations typically lasted seven days. So go ahead and **finish the marriage ceremony** with Leah, do not back out, and **I will give you Rachel also**.

Laban encourages Jacob to **complete the wedding process for Leah** and he will give him Rachel also, **at a cost** of an **additional seven years!** But in return for Rachel, Jacob **will owe an additional seven years** (her bride’s price).

It has been **seven years** since he has been home, and he is about to commit to a second marriage and a second **additional seven years!** Thus his total service will now be 14 years.

One more point, Laban’s deception creates chaos in Jacob’s life between these two sisters. Maybe, we should see this as Jacob’s sin has created chaos in Jacob’s life.

Vs 28 - Thus, Jacob did, what I suppose is the honorable thing. At this point, I wonder what choice he had. But he completed the week for Leah, then Laban gave his daughter Rachel to Jacob to be his wife.

Here, for the first time that I am aware of **polygamy** is brought into the lineage of the promised one who will bless the nations.

It is worth noting that marrying a sister will become forbidden in the Mosaic Law (Lev 18:18):

“Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her life time.” (Le 18:18 AV)

We are **roughly 500 years** away from the **law of Moses**. But at this stage it was **allowed by God** and clearly allowed by the culture. We might add in **passing this was not Jacob’s plan or desire**. From the jump he has loved Rachel.

Vs 29 - Here is Laban’s wedding gift to Rachel. Along with Rachel, Laban also provides a female servant for Rachel, this servants name is Bilhah, here name means “terror” or “troubled”.

Also, **Bilhah** will become **significant** in the story of the **establishment of the nation of Israel**.

Vs 30 - Then we read that Jacob went in and **consummated the marriage with Rachel**. So this was one week later, and he now marries a second wife.

We are also told that he **loved Rachel more than Leah**. We should suspect that this may become a problem.

Then we are told that after marrying Rachel, Jacob kept his word 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.

Vs 31 - When Yahweh saw that Leah was **hated**. So let’s be honest, Jacob did not want to marry Leah.

Scholars agree, that it is not that Leah was actually hated, but **Jacob’s feelings for Rachel** were so **much different** that it **made it look like hatred**.

Jesus used this same **type of language**, this same **analogy**:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” (Lu 14:26 ESV)

The way Leah was treated, likely by Jacob and Rachel, resulted in God showing mercy and kindness to her. When Yahweh saw that Jacob and likely Rachel, **essentially hated Leah, He opened Leah’s womb**.

Then we have just a simple statement, a simple contrast, but **Rachel was barren**. Like Rebekah before her, Rachel is barren, like Saria before Rebekah, Rachel is barren.

Vs 32 - So that you see it upfront. Leah is about to bear four male children. Each child will be named based on a wordplay from the comment that Leah will make. You will see this play out in each of these four male children.

Leah conceived and bore a son, the elder son, and she named him **Reuben**. **ראובן (R^e’uwben)** in the Hebrew literally means **“See Ye a son!”**

Because Yahweh looked upon my affliction, provided me a son, and now her hope is that **“my husband will love me.”**

At this point our heart really goes out to Leah. We do not know her full involvement in that evening of deception, but we sense her pain of being married to someone who she does not believe loves her, at least like he loves her sister. Equally, she has this inner-family competition with her sister.

She hopes, this man child (Reuben) will **bend Jacob’s love towards her.**

It seems she is a believer, notice what she says - Yahweh has looked upon my affliction. But there is a possible flaw and I want us to see it. Leah is in some sense attaching her value to how her husband feels about her.

Vs 33 - She gets **pregnant again**, and she bears another son. She says, at least in her heart if not out loud, Yahweh has **heard** that I am **hated**, there is that word again, and He has given me this son also!

She declares Yahweh has heard, the Hebrew word is שמע (shama‘). Yahweh has (shama‘). So she names him שמעון (Shim‘own).

She called this son: **(Shim-one’)** or Simeon which means **“heard”** for Yahweh has **heard** that she is hated and having heard, **Yahweh has responded.**

Vs 34 - Then we read she **conceives again** and bears a **third son**. Here she says, if not out loud, at least to herself: **“This time, my husband will be “attached” to me, because I have borne him now three sons.”**

The word translated attached is to **cleave** or be **joined** to me is ליה (lavah). Therefore, she names this **third son, לוי (Levi), Levi** which means **“to be joined to.”**

The hopeful outcome continues to stay focused on her husband. That he would become attached to me!

Vs 35 - We end **chapter 29** learning that Leah conceives yet a **fourth time** and bears another son, **a forth son** to Jacob.

She says, if not out loud, at least in her own mind, **this time I will praise the Lord.** Again, as we look at Leah, she clearly appears to be a **follower of Yahweh!** This time, her focus is between **her and God** and she says I will **“praise” Yahweh.**

The word **praise** is ידה (yadah), so she names the boy יהודה (Y^huwdah), which means **praised!**

In closing a few things should be **coming into focus: First**, Leah seems to be a **godly woman** who spent a great deal of time praying to Yahweh. **Second**, this **dual sister family** is going to be loaded with **competition and strife. Third**, and more significantly theologically, Leah has birthed:

- 1) The **eldest son** of Jacob (Reuben).
- 2) The son who will become the line of the priests (Levi).
- 3) The son who will trace to the **promised seed**, the **coming Messiah** (Judah).
- 4) These four sons will become tribes of Israel. But in Leah we have the eldest son, the priestly tribe, and the kingly (and thus Messianic) line of Judah.
- 5) The whole Abrahamic promise is becoming clearer with each passing generation.