

GENESIS

Chapter 29

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

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." 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." 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. 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. 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,[a] 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. 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[h] 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?" 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.

25:1 *went on his journey* – The Bible is silent about the long, lonely miles Jacob traveled to the home of his relatives. If he traveled on foot, the trip probably took him the better part of a month. After his experience at Bethel, though, there was a song in his heart. The Savior God had miraculously appeared to him and promised to protect him and to provide for him. (PBC)

land of the people of the east – Nomads residing on the eastern part of Canaan and across the Jordan, known for prosperity in flocks and herds, and camels. (Cf. Job 1:3). (TLSB)

This refers to the territory north and east of Damascus, in present-day Syria. Haran had always been special for Jacob. It was the childhood home of his mother Rebekah. It was the city where his great-grandfather Terah and his grandfather Abraham had lived. Haran was to become important to Jacob for another reason. In a way that reminds us of how God had once guided Abraham’s servant to find a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24). God now led Jacob to the relatives he was seeking. Even more, he led Jacob to a well where he met the lovely young woman who would be his wife. (PBC)

29:2 *stone on the well’s mouth* – Although the sun was still high in the sky, several herdsmen had led their flocks to a well which was capped by a large stone, heavy enough to discourage passers-by from removing it. (PBC)

29:3 *when all...were gathered* – Apparently by common consent the herdsmen of Haran waited before opening the well until all herds had been assembled. (PBC)

29:5 *Laban, Nahor’s son*. See 24:15, 29. The Hebrew word here for “grandson” is lit. “son,” which can refer to any male descendant. (CSB)

29:9 *shepherdess*. The task of caring for sheep and goats in the Middle East was shared by men and women. (CSB)

29:10 *rolled the stone away*. A feat of unusual strength for one man, because the stone was large (see v. 2). (CSB)

Jacob must have had amazing strength. (TLSB)

29:11 *wept aloud*. For joy. (CSB)

Jacob saw the hand of God in this event. (TLSB)

29:14 *bone and my flesh*. The English equivalent of a Hebrew phrase that means lit. “bone and flesh” and that stresses blood kinship (see, e.g., 2:23). (CSB)

29:15-21 Up to now Jacob’s mission to Haran had been remarkably trouble-free. God had led him without delay to his destination and had prepared a warm welcome in his uncle’s home. Things would soon change, however. A new session in the Lord’s training school was about to begin for Jacob. (PBC)

29:15 Jacob had been in Haran only a month, but that was long enough for Laban to recognize what an unusually capable herdsman he was, a valuable man to have around. When Laban offered Jacob a job he seemed to have Jacob’s interest at heart. (PBC)

Throughout all his dealings with Jacob, however, Laban showed himself to be not only greedy, but willing to take advantage of another person. (PBC)

29:16 *Leah ... Rachel.*† The names mean “cow” and “ewe” respectively, appropriate in a herdsman’s family. Modern parents prefer to give girls the names of flowers such as Rose and Lily. (CSB)

Laban had noticed that Jacob’s heart was drawn to the beautiful cousin he had met at the well asked himself: “Could I perhaps use Jacob’s love for her to my advantage?” (PBC)

When he permitted Jacob to name his wages, Laban recognized that Jacob was bargaining from a point of weakness. The very reason he had come to Hara was to find a wife, and he had found one – Laban’s daughter. Laban knew, furthermore, that although Jacob was the son of very wealthy father he had no money to offer a prospective father-in-law as bride-price, and so he would have to earn it. Jacob was at a distinct disadvantage in these salary negotiations. (PBC)

29:17 *Leah’s eyes were weak* – In a culture where bright, flashing eyes were considered a mark of beauty in a woman, Leah’s weak eyes were a handicap, especially when she was compared to her sister, a young woman of lovely face and figure. (PBC)

Hebrew expression is unclear. Leah’s eyes were apparently dull and lacking luster in comparison to Rachel’s beautiful eyes. (TLSB)

This according to the oriental standard did not imply defective vision but merely the absence of that clear-cut brilliance and luster that the Oriental’s love. “Tender” is in a sense even more correct than “weak.” (Leupold)

29:18 *I will serve you seven years* – One would ratify the betrothal through a bride price. Jacob could not ask his immediate family to pay this price, and he had no other means, so he offered his labor. Seven years would equal an extravagant amount of money and thus indicated his deep love for Rachel. (TLSB)

29:20 *Jacob served seven years* – Jacob’s response to Laban’s offer strikes one as extremely generous. In return for the privilege of marrying Rachel he would offer Laban seven years of his labor as the bride-price. Laban knew Jacob couldn’t afford to set the terms of his employment too low. That could be interpreted either as “I can’t afford any more” or “She isn’t worth more to me.” Jacob would also want to be sure his offer would be one Laban couldn’t refuse. By accepting the bride-price offered Laban got the benefit, for the next seven years Jacob’s skill in handling cattle. (PBC)

29:21 *my wife.* If Jacob had said “Rachel,” Laban would have had no excuse for giving him Leah. (CSB)

Jacob had paid the bride-price of labor to have Rachel as his wife. (TLSB)

I may go in to her – To consummate the marriage. (TLSB)

29:22 *feast.* A wedding feast was usually seven days long (see vv. 27–28; Jdg 14:10, 12). (CSB)

29:23 *in the evening...went in to her.* The darkness, or perhaps a veil (see 24:65), may have concealed Leah’s identity. (CSB)

Luther: “Without consent, agreements, and discussion the daughter is seized by the father and placed on the nuptial bed of Jacob...If these were the customs of those people, they certainly were very bad” (AE 5:301). (TLSB)

Laban, greedy man that he was, wanted another seven years of free labor from his new son-in-law, and he devise a mean way to get it. Jacob, the “heel-grabber,” the one who usually managed to get ahead of the other person by fair means or foul, met his match in Laban. (PBC)

How can a man as intelligent as Jacob have let this happen to him? The answer usually given is that Leah was in on the deception, that she was veiled, and in the fragrant darkness of the wedding night spoke softly so her voice would not be recognized. In addition Jacob was caught completely off guard; he had no reason to suspect foul play. (PBC)

The real answer to the question, however, goes deeper. God permitted this unhappiness to enter Jacob’s life. God had been displeased with Jacob when, to make sure he would receive the birthright, he had deceived his own father. God recognized as flaws in Jacob’s character his willingness to compromise his principles for the sake of personal gain, and his reliance on his own cleverness to outwit an adversary and get ahead of him. A loving Father also knew that these impurities in Jacob’s spiritual makeup could only hinder the great plans he had for this man. (PBC)

God therefore had to help Jacob learn to despair of his own cleverness. For the next seven years Jacob had plenty of time to ask himself: “You’re really quite clever, aren’t you – clever enough to get yourself married to a woman you didn’t want!” Seven years also offered plenty of opportunity to reflect on the irony of his situation. Leah, at her father’s direction, had deceived him, just as he, at Rebekah’s suggestion, had deceived his father. (PBC)

As part of Jacob’s training program, God was teaching him that dishonesty and self-trust are repugnant to God. This is not say that God still held Jacob’s sin against him. As believers we know that our sin has been forgiven, and that God’s forgiveness is complete. Christ’s substitutionary work on our behalf has intercepted God’s judgment, and we know we are at peace with him. Jacob knew that, too. But the results of the sin we have committed may remain to plague us, to serve as a necessary reminder that yielding to the promptings of our sinful nature can only frustrate the grace of God. God’s chastisement also reminds us that we need the help God has promised to put down the evil nature that opposes His good will for us. (PBC)

29:24 See v. 29; a wedding custom documented in Old Babylonian marriage contracts. (CSB)

Customarily, the bride’s father would give a dowry to the bride. Although Laban did not give the usual clothing, money, or furniture, he gave the important gift of a maidservant. (TLSB)

29:25 *you deceived me.* Jacob, the deceiver in name as well as in behavior (see 27:36), had himself been deceived. The one who had tried everything to obtain the benefits of the firstborn had now, against his will, received the firstborn (vv. 16, 26). (CSB)

29:26 *it is not so done in our country* – Laban offered a halfhearted explanation which smacks of further deception. If it was unthinkable in Haran for a father to give his younger daughter in marriage before her older sister, why hadn’t Laban mentioned that to Jacob when he first asked to marry Rachel? (PBC)

29:28 *Jacob did so* – We marvel at the patience of Jacob. Was God’s chastening already having an effect? Luther remarked: “I wouldn’t have put up with this. I’d have taken Laban to court and demanded that he be ordered to give me the bride for whom I had served him under contract.” Perhaps mindful of how he had taken advantage of his brother and his aged father, Jacob submitted meekly to the dreadful disappointment God had permitted to enter his life. He declined to humiliate Leah by demanding that the marriage be annulled. Instead, as Laban suggested, he spent the bridal week with Leah and then married Rachel. For the rest of his life he had to live in a divided family, the husband of two wives, one of whom he loved more, the other less. (PBC)

then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel. Before Jacob worked another seven years (see v. 30). (CSB)

After the week was over, Jacob married Rachel. He did not have to wait another seven years, but he was now obligated to serve Laban 14 years. (TLSB)

29:30 *Jacob ... loved Rachel more than Leah.* Not only because Rachel had been his choice from the beginning but also, no doubt, because Laban had tricked Jacob into marrying Leah. (CSB)

29:1–30 Jacob’s sin falls back upon him. Just as he deceived his brother Esau, the firstborn, so also Laban deceives Jacob regarding a firstborn. When people are engaged and married, falsehood and deceit leads to great harm, though the love of husband and wife can make hard work light. Thanks be to God, the Church’s Bridegroom deals faithfully. He covers our debt with the sacrifice of His life and love so that we may be His. • Lord Jesus, we praise You for Your extravagant love. Amen. (TLSB)

Jacob’s Children

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,[c] 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.

29:31–35† Leah became the mother of Jacob’s first four sons, including Levi (ancestor of the Aaronic priestly line) and Judah (ancestor of David and his royal line, and ultimately of Jesus). (CSB)

29:31 *hated* – Rejected. Jacob did not show as much love to her as he did to Rachel. (TLSB)

29:32 *named him Reuben ... because the LORD has looked upon my affliction.* Ishmael had received his name in similar circumstances (see 16:11). (CSB)

Leah explained the name as a double word play. The two Hebrew words making up the name mean “Look! A son!” Now her husband’s line would be carried on for at least another generation. Leah explained, however, that the Hebrew components of the name sound very much like “He has seen my misery.” (PBC)

29:33 *Simeon* – Means “one who hears” because “The Lord heard that I am not loved.” (PBC)

29:34 *Levi* – Means “attached.” This name expressed her hope that her marriage could be a true union of two hearts, a hope that was never realized. (PBC)

29:35 *Judah* – Means “praise.” This was not just a fond wish: Leah was expressing her determination: “I will praise the Lord!” Leah’s fourth son is noteworthy, for two reasons. It was from his name that the Jewish people got their name. More important, it was through this fourth son that Leah, the less loved wife, became an ancestress of King David and of Jesus Christ. God used even a shabby case of deception to bring Leah into the Savior’s family line. (PBC)

Romans 11:33, “Oh, the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond tracing out!”