

Bethel Bible-Presbyterian Church
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DHW

LESSON 22

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 29

INTRODUCTION

Life is filled with joy and sadness, victories and failures, fulfilment and disappointments. But the people of God in Christ Jesus know that whatever the circumstances and consequences in life, Paul, the Apostle, clearly declared that the LORD, who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him for us all, will freely give us all things.¹ This goodness and greatness of the LORD God are evident in Genesis 29. In the previous chapter, God promised Jacob the very things that he needed for his journey to Padan-aram, where he hoped to meet his uncle, Laban. We shall see that God was faithful to His promises to Jacob, who arrived at his destination not only safely but also providentially blessed. Although he was the LORD'S chosen vessel in line with His covenant with Abraham, Jacob was still

¹ **Romans 8:32** *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

Psalm 84:11 *For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.*

young in his faith in the LORD. There were many rough edges in his character and conduct which needed to be smoothed, and the LORD would begin his transformation of His servant to be a fit vessel for His use. Jacob would learn the hard way that whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap. God cares for those who are being despised and downcast because of the unjust treatment by others. God's goodness towards Leah is a case in point for she was unfairly treated by Jacob. She received mercy, compassion and blessings from the LORD.

Some theological considerations should catch our attention. God's providential hand working in the lives of His people reveals His tender mercies and loving kindness. Jacob's lack of spiritual alertness and prayer, especially in his dealings with his shrewd uncle Laban, had brought much unhappiness to him in his sojourn there.

This chapter has many practical hints for us as we purpose to live out the faith that we profess before the world. The following is an outline to help us to have a reasonable grasp of the chapter:

- 1) Jacob arrived at Haran (29:1-8);
- 2) Jacob met Rachel (29:9-14);
- 3) Jacob worked for Laban (29:15-20);
- 4) Jacob was deceived by Laban (29:21-30); and
- 5) The LORD Blessed Leah (29:31-35).

STUDY THE WORD

Jacob Arrives At Haran

As the LORD had promised him, He protected Jacob on his journey to Padan-aram. His journey, which we could safely assume, was uneventful though the long trek could have been rough and tough for him. Jacob actually travelled no less than four hundred miles. However, the important thing is that he finally arrived at his destination. Jacob looked around when he arrived at the place and providentially he found a well in the field. He found that there were already three flocks of sheep lying there. Their shepherds were resting nearby instead of watering their sheep and moving on. Jacob came to the right well. Undoubtedly there were other wells but he came to this particular well which happened to be the right one. Nothing happens by chance to the people of God.

Jacob became friendly and inquired about Laban from the shepherds, who were gathered at the well. When one is in a strange country, there is nothing to lose by being friendly and asking the people around there. Seek and you will find; ask and it shall be given. This is a great biblical virtue. Jacob had a favourable reply. The shepherds not only told him that they knew Laban but also pointed out to him that Laban's daughter, Rachel, was approaching the well with her sheep.

We learn that in those days, the cattle would be watered nearing noon time after the sheep had been watered. Jacob told the shepherds to water their sheep at that time and then to lead the sheep away to pasture. Probably Jacob was trying to

get the shepherds to remove the slab of stone which covered the well, and when they had finished watering their sheep, he could be alone with Rachel; and help her to water her sheep. That was quick thinking on Jacob's part. But the shepherds would not barge. They expected other shepherds to come and roll the stone away for them.

Jacob Meets Rachel

By then Rachel had reached the well. It was not unusual for daughters to tend their father's flock. Laban had sons (31:1) and they were probably looking after Laban's other flocks. Jacob's ploy to get the shepherds to remove the slab of stone which covered the well failed. Because of Rachel and the sheep of his mother's brother, he single-handedly removed the stone cover. Jacob displayed incredible strength which was unexpected of him. Nevertheless he did remove the stone-cover. The sight of a beautiful woman, who was his cousin, and the thought that his mission was accomplished, must have boosted his strength for that moment. Furthermore, he drew the water from the well and watered Rachel's sheep. Imagine Rachel's surprise and her thoughts of meeting Jacob. Jacob was so charged with emotions that he did another shocking thing. He kissed Rachel the customary way of greeting one's flesh and blood. He wept and identified himself as the son of her father's sister, Rebekah. He was overwhelmed by the thought of being with his mother's kindred after having travelled alone for some time. How good is the LORD!

Rachel was elated. She ran home for the well was not far away. She broke the news to her father Laban. On hearing the news, Laban too was thrilled and ran to him, kissed him, and warmly welcomed Jacob into his home. Jacob told Laban *all these things* (v. 13b). Jacob might have told him many things and one of them would certainly be about his mother Rebekah, Laban's sister. Laban had not met her for many years. It was unlikely that Jacob talked about the schemes and deception which happened back home in Beersheba.

Laban then said to Jacob (v.14a): *Surely thou art my bone and my flesh.* These words imply that Jacob should stay with them. He stayed in Laban's home for a month. One wonders whether Laban was thinking that here was a man whom he could use to work for him.

Jacob Works for Laban

Jacob stayed a month in Laban's house. He must have helped in looking after Laban's flocks of sheep and proved himself as a skilful herdsman. It was possible that he could have gone with Rachel to the well daily to water the sheep. Jacob seemed happy to work for Laban because his uncle had kindly and graciously extended his hospitality to him. One day Laban popped the question of how he could compensate Jacob for his work and services. Laban remarked that Jacob should not work for nothing for him. Laban asked Jacob how much he should be paid. This could mean that Laban had the intention of keeping Jacob for as long as he could, because he was a good

herdsman. Now Laban had two marriageable daughters. Leah was the elder and Rachel the younger. We are told that Leah was *tendered eyed* (v.17a) and it could be understood as having *weak eyes*. But what it actually means is not known. Some commentators suggest that she had no sparkle or glow in her eyes which the men admired in a woman. Another commented that she was not *a pretty senorita with fire in her eyes*. Whatever it might mean, a woman's eyes do enhance her physical beauty and attraction. Rachel, on the other hand, was a beautiful and attractive woman. Jacob loved Rachel and the reason was quite obvious. In fact it was love at first sight. Jacob did not ask for monetary or material wages. He asked for the hand of Rachel in marriage. He offered to serve Laban for seven years for the hand of Rachel. This custom seemed to be practised among the ancient people at that time. Even today, the nomadic Bedouins continue to have this practice. Laban without hesitation agreed saying that it was better to give Rachel to him than to give to another man. For seven years Jacob worked for Laban but to Jacob the seven years passed by like *a few days* (v. 20). The divine writer commented that the reason was because of the love, which Jacob had for Rachel. How love can change a person's perspective of things! But Jacob was unaware of the sinister scheme in the mind of his uncle Laban. He was about to know the character of his uncle. Just as Jacob had deceived Esau and his father Isaac, similarly he would be deceived by Laban.

Jacob Is Deceived by Laban

Seven years breezed by and the time had come for Laban to give Rachel in marriage to Jacob. Accordingly, Jacob asked Laban to fulfil his part of the agreement. Laban threw a wedding feast and invited his friends. There was much drinking and eating, and the celebration went on through the night. Under the cloak of darkness of the night, Laban brought Leah instead of Rachel to Jacob. Laban also gave Zilpah his maid as a handmaid for Leah. That night the marriage was consummated.

When the first light of day broke out, Jacob discovered to his horror that his newly-wedded wife was not Rachel but Leah. Jacob felt cheated. Jacob quite politely and reasonably confronted Laban with a few questions (v. 25b): *What is this thou hast done unto me? Did not I serve with thee for Rachel? Wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?*

Laban excused himself by saying that it was not the custom of their country to marry the younger sister off before the elder. Laban immediately proposed that Jacob *fulfil her week* and served him for another seven more years for Rachel. The phrase *fulfil her week* means that Jacob should let the wedding celebration continue for a week. If Jacob were to openly expose Laban for his deception, it would have caused shame to him and the family. And after the end of the celebration, Laban would let Jacob have Rachel on the condition that he would serve him for another seven years. Jacob did not lose his cool. He showed some good sense and self-control. Jacob

complied. Laban kept his word and at the end of the week gave Rachel to Jacob. He also gave Bilhah, his maid, to Rachel as her handmaid. Rachel came to Jacob as his wife. He loved Rachel more than Leah. Jacob kept his bargain by serving Laban for another seven years.

The LORD Blesses Leah

Jacob now had two wives, who were sisters, Leah and Rachel. Jacob played favourite – he loved Rachel more than Leah. The text states that Leah was hated (v.31). The word “hate” is not used in its absolute sense. It is used comparatively. In other words Jacob’s love for Rachel was so great that his affection for Leah could be viewed as “as he hated her.” This is seen in the light of verse 30 where it is stated that Jacob loved Leah less (v.30).

The LORD sees, hears and acts. The LORD saw that Jacob was bias and unfair to Leah. Jacob’s conduct and treatment of Leah was displeasing in His sight. The LORD then had compassion on Leah. He blessed Leah and *opened her womb* (31). Leah conceived. She named her firstborn son, Reuben, which means “see, a son.” It lifted up Leah’s feelings and she praised the Lord for knowing her distress. She hoped that Jacob would turn his love towards her. Leah conceived again and gave birth to Simeon. The name means, “to hear;” and Leah acknowledged that the LORD had heard her cry. Again, Leah conceived and gave birth to a third son, whom she named Levi. The name means “attached;” and Leah believed that Jacob would now be attached to her

because she had given him three sons. Leah gave birth to a fourth son, whom she named Judah, which means, "praise." The names given by Leah were significant in that they tell us about her thoughts and feelings. After the birth of Judah, she did not bear any more children.

PRACTICAL VALUE

One clear truth which we seldom understand is that the LORD our God is a Person who sees us, hears our cries and prayers, knows and understands our sorrows and sufferings. And not only does He know, He also cares and acts to strengthen and save us. His care for Leah illustrates this wonderful truth. Let us not be weary of increasing our knowledge of Him by reading and studying His Word and praying to Him always. We ought to learn to keep in close contact and communication with the LORD. It is to our loss if we do not appropriate this door which is open only to Christians.

Jacob was cheated! Did he remember how he shrewdly cheated his elder brother of his firstborn blessing? Now he was cheated by Laban. This is a good illustration of God's law of retribution. For whatsoever a man sows that he shall also reap. What a man does against others, the same will happen to him.² This teaches us that we should treat

² Isaiah 33:1 *Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou wast not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; and when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee.*

Galatians 6:7 *Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.* Other examples: Pharaoh, King of

others kindly and charitably. Our Lord Jesus puts it succinctly (Matthew 7:12): *Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.*

Jacob treated Rachel graciously at the well, and see how he was being rewarded. The late Rev. Timothy Tow exhorted his students, "Every day do one good thing unto Jesus." AMEN.

Egypt, gave orders that every son of the Hebrews should be DROWNED (Exod 1:22) and so in the end HE was himself drowned (Exod 14:28). Korah caused a cleft in the Congregation of Israel (Num 16:2,3) and so God made a cleft in the earth to swallow him (Num 16:30). Adoni-bezek (Judges 1:6,7). Ahab caused Naboth to be slain and dogs came to lick his blood (1 Kings 21:19); accordingly when he died, and the dogs licked up his blood (1 Kings 22:38). Haman prepared a gallow for Mordecai, but he was hanged from it (Esther 7:10). Saul of Tarsus stood by and consented to the stoning of Stephen, and later we read that at Lystra the Jews stoned Paul (Acts 14:19): this is more noticeable because Barnabas, who was with him, escaped.