JACOB'S MEETING WITH RACHEL: THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE Genesis 29:01–14

Introduction

Life is made up of new beginnings, fresh starts, brand new days. Every time we make a mistake, we have to begin anew and get a fresh start. This was Jacob's experience, except his mistake was not a small failure: Jacob had fallen flat upon his face. He had literally ruined and wrecked his life. He had deceived and lied to his father to steal the blessing and inheritance from his brother, Esau. Esau had threatened his life, and now Jacob was on the run. He had been forced to flee for his life to escape the wrath of Esau. He had lost home, family, friends and all his property; and now he was all alone and destitute in the world, living in fear and separation from God.

But the most marvellous thing had happened to Jacob: he had experienced an encounter with God. God had confronted Jacob and led him to make a new commitment: a vow that the Lord, the God of redemption and salvation, would always be his God. Jacob vowed that he would follow the Lord more diligently than ever before, and God gave Jacob a new life, a new beginning, a fresh start, a brand new day to live.

This experience of Jacob holds many lessons for us. As we journey through life, we often need just what Jacob needed: a new life, a new beginning, a fresh start, a brand new day. This is the subject of this great passage: *Jacob Married Leah and Rachel: The Beginning of a New Life*, 29:1-30.

- I. The joy of starting a new life: Jacob began his new life after his encounter with God (vv. 1-8).
- II. The joy of finding one's new family: Jacob met Rachel (vv.9-14).
- III. The joy of working and saving to marry a loved one: Jacob wanted to marry Rachel (vv. 15-20).
- IV. The shocking interruption to one's joy: Jacob was deceived reaped what he had sown (vv. 21-30).

I. Genesis 29:01–08 Jacob's New Life, Responsibility

There was the joy of starting a new life: Jacob began his new life after his encounter with God. The Hebrew language in verse one is very suggestive and colourful: "Then Jacob *lifted up his feet.*" The picture is that of a new found joy and bounce in Jacob's life. He sensed a new life, a new beginning, a fresh start since his new commitment to God. Jacob was like a new convert, full of joy and rejoicing as he travelled along. The distance between Bethel and Haran was about 500 miles, a long and dangerous journey for that day.

But Jacob was now sure – absolutely sure – of God's protection, love and care. He knew that God was leading and guiding him to Haran, knew beyond question. Therefore, he "lifted up his feet" and joyfully travelled along toward his destination. Finally, he arrived in the country of his relatives.

- a. Immediately, Jacob began to search for what was to become his new family, his relatives (vv. 2-6). Note what happened.
- 1) Jacob searched at the right place. As he was approaching the city of Haran, he noticed off in the distance three flocks of sheep lying close by a well. As he walked to meet the shepherds, he saw that the well had a large rock covering its mouth.
- 2) Jacob cordially introduced himself and met the shepherds. They said that they were actually from Haran (v. 4).
- 3) He then asked them if they knew his relative, Laban, the son of Nahor. They replied, yes, they knew him (v. 5).
- 4) The shepherds not only knew Laban and his family, but they watered their flocks with Laban's daughter Rachel.
- 5) Jacob then asked if Laban was well (v. 6). He, of course, needed to know this, for Laban and his family were the only people he knew anything about in the area. The shepherds answered that Laban was well. In fact, his daughter Rachel would be soon coming to the well with her flock of sheep.
- b. While waiting on Rachel, Jacob tried to be helpful and responsible (v. 8). Remember, Jacob was about 77 years old, and he had been one of the largest ranchers in Canaan, a very responsible man. The shepherds were probably somewhat younger than he, and he had noticed that the sun was still high, that there was still plenty of daylight left for feeding the sheep. Apparently, he felt that he should encourage the younger shepherds in their work, that they should go ahead and water the sheep and take them back to pasture.

They simply answered that they could not water their sheep until all the flocks had arrived to be watered. This was probably a law of the area to guarantee even distribution of the water or else to make sure there were enough shepherds around to roll the stone off the mouth of the well.

Thought 1. There is always joy when we are converted and begin a new life or when we get a fresh start or make anew commitment to God. When this happens to us, we need to do exactly what Jacob did:

1) We need to search for our new family, the family of God, the family of the church; and we need to diligently search for them. We need their fellowship, help and encouragement; and we need to join them in their study of God's Word and in their service and witness for the Lord. *Heb 10:25* Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another — and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

1 John 1:3 We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Mat 18:20 "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."

2) We need to encourage those who seem to be irresponsible. We need to arouse them in their labour and stir them to work hard so that they can contribute all they can to society and God. Every one of us needs to work as hard as we can to make the world a better place for us all to live.

Rom 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.

Eph 4:28 He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

Col 3:23 *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men.*

Gen. 2:15 *The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden [the earth] to work it and take care of it.*

Prov 13:4 A sluggard's appetite is never filled, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.

Prov 14:23 All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.

Prov 18:9 One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.

Prov 20:4 Sluggards do not plogh in season; so at harvest time they look but find nothing.

Eccl 9:10 Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

II. Genesis 29:09–14 Jacob Meets Rachel and Laban

There was the joy of finding one's new family. While Jacob was still talking with the shepherds, Rachel came up with her flock. When Jacob first saw Rachel, the excitement of having found his family (relatives) stirred his emotions to the limit.

- a. Note the excited emotions aroused in him (vv. 10-12).
- => There were the thoughts rolling in his mind over and over: this is "my mother's brother." The Hebrew really brings this out. He referred to "his mother's brother" three different times (v. 10).

- => There was the unusual behaviour of not walking over to speak to Rachel. What did he do? He was so excited, he walked over and single-handedly rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the sheep for her. Obviously, his excitement did what it often does for us: gave him a burst of strength (v. 10).
- => There was an astonishing kiss and burst of tears (v. 11). It was the custom of that day for family members to greet one another with a kiss, but note: Jacob had not yet *identified himself*. He was still a complete stranger to Rachel. She did not know he was a family member, yet he walked over and kissed her.
- => There was the identification of himself: he was a relative of her father and Rebekah's son. Rachel had, of course, heard her father speak of his sister, Rebekah, who was her aunt (v. 12).
- => As soon as Jacob identified himself, Rachcl ran to tell her father, Laban (v. 12).
- b. Now, note the excited welcome extended to Jacob and his month long stay (vv. 13-14).
- Laban rushed out to meet Jacob, embraced and kissed him repeatedly. The Hebrew brings out the repeated kissing. Laban was naturally thrilled to see a son of his sister, a sister who had left home almost one hundred years ago when they were only children. Laban then took Jacob to his house.
- 2) Eventually, Jacob had to share and tell why he was there (v, 13). How much did Jacob share? Certainly, he shared how he found Laban and his family and that he had come to find a wife from among his mother's people. But did he share about the whole sordid mess back home and accept personal responsibility for his own sin and deception? Did he share that he had to flee for his life? Several factors seem to indicate that Jacob did share all with Laban.
- => He came alone, with no servant or attendants with him. Laban knew that the family was wealthy and that Abraham had sent a whole caravan of servants to seek a bride for Isaac. How could Jacob explain his being alone with no servants?
- => Jacob had no gifts, no dowry with which to secure a bride. How could he explain this?
- => Jacob had not come for just a few days visit. He had apparently come for a long time and showed no desire to leave, even after a month (v. 14).
- => Jacob had just had a deep experience with God, repented and committed his life anew to the Lord. This alone would have stirred Jacob to share his testimony, how God had saved him and strengthened him at Bethel. H.C. Leupold says this:

It behooves him to give an account of himself. So "he reported to Laban all these matters." How much is to be included in…"all these things"…..if Jacob came as a godly man and one repentant of his recent deceit…then he could not do otherwise than relate the direct and the more remote reasons of his coming. (Genesis Vol. 2, p. 790)

3) Laban accepted Jacob: he received Jacob as his own flesh and blood. And he invited Jacob to stay and work for him. This Jacob did for a whole month (v.14).

Thought 1. Think of the excitement of a new believer! Of a repentant believer who makes a new commitment to the Lord!

- => How many churches welcome him as excitedly as Laban welcomed Jacob?
- => How many believers open their hearts and homes to those who have sinned but have repented?
- => How many repentant believers are welcomed when they are trying to be restored back into the church and family of God?

Gal 6:1-2 Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Eph 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Acts 20:35 In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

Rom 15:1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

1 Pet 4:9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.