

JACOB MARRIED LEAH AND RACHEL: THE BEGINNING OF A NEW LIFE GENESIS 29:15–30

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*, Genesis 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 29:15–20 The Joy of Working and Saving to Marry a Loved One*

There was the joy of working and saving to marry a loved one. Note, this passage is not dealing with Jacob purchasing Rachel; it concerns the dowry money that a young man gave to the father of the bride. A dowry was not purchase money but rather the proof that a young man was financially secure and could take care of his bride. (H.C. Leupold. *Genesis*, Vol. 2, p. 794).

1. Note how the subject of work came up. During Jacob's month long stay with Laban, he had not been sitting around doing nothing, imposing and taking advantage of the hospitality of the family. On the contrary, Jacob had been working hard. He had
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proven himself to be very capable and worthy of wages. So one day Laban asked Jacob what he thought his wages should be.

2. This opened the door for Jacob to discuss a subject that had obviously been stirring within his heart: the subject of his love and desire to marry Rachel (vv. 16-19).
 - a. Laban had two daughters, the older was Leah and the younger was Rachel (v. 16). Leah had weak eyes. This could mean that she was cross-eyed or else had very bad eyesight. Or it could mean that her eyes were just not attractive, that they lacked a gleam, a sparkle, a lustre that is so appealing. In contrast, Rachel was beautiful in both looks and form (v. 17).
 - b. Jacob loved Rachel (v. 18). It was that simple. So Jacob stated his desire: he wanted to marry Rachel, but he had no dowry. So he made an offer that would meet Jacob's need for a place to live and meet Laban's need for good, competent workers. What was the offer? He would work seven years for Rachel if Laban agreed.
 - c. Laban accepted Jacob's proposal, as any reasonable business man would. He simply stated that he would rather have Rachel marry Jacob than some other man (v. 19).

The question sometimes arises, was Laban entirely sincere in his dealings with Jacob at this point of their relationship?

- => Did he have an eye on Jacob's inheritance in the future? This seems most unlikely, for Jacob had to stay away from his father's estate as long as Esau was living. Moreover, what good would Jacob's estate be to Laban? The estate, the ranch and business holdings, were over 500 miles away.
- => When Laban made this agreement, was he already scheming to give Leah to Jacob instead of Rachel? This, too, is most unlikely, for Jacob had to work for seven long years before the marriage could take place. Leah's future over a seven year period would be totally unknown: she could die, become seriously ill or be married by then. It is doubtful the thought even crossed Laban's mind.

The evidence seems to be that Laban was sincere. He and Jacob obviously had an excellent relationship at this point, both of them being perfectly satisfied with the agreement. And keep this in mind: Laban was offering Jacob both a home and employment when Jacob desperately needed both.

3. Note the subject of reward: Jacob's strong love stirred both faithful labour and unmarked time (v. 20). He worked seven long, hard years for Rachel, but they were joyful years. The years seemed to be only a few days because of the great love he had for her.

Thought 1. There are three strong lessons here on love and marriage.

- (1) A couple should not rush into marriage just as Jacob did not rush into marriage. They must...
 - make absolutely sure that they love each other.

- make absolutely sure that they are responsible and can provide for themselves financially.
- (2) Both the man and woman must be capable and hard workers. Jacob and Rachel are excellent examples of diligent workers. Remember, Rachel was a shepherd girl. Such examples are desperately needed when so many people are...
 - lazy
 - living off welfare
 - non-productive
 - focused on retirement
 - clock-watchers
 - gripers and grumblers
 - trouble-makers
 - abusive of work time
 - work absentees
 - recreation and sports minded, not work-minded
- (3) True love recognizes this fact: there is a time to marry and a time not to marry. True love is willing to remain sexually pure and to wait until the time is right for marriage.

Heb 13:4 Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.

Mark 10:9 “Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

Mat 5:32 But “I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.”

1 Cor 7:10-11 To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.

1 Tim 5:14 So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander.

Eph 5:28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

Col 3:19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

II. Genesis 29:21–30 Laban’s Deception

There was the shocking interruption to his joy: Jacob was — deceived. He reaped exactly what he had sown back home among his father and brother. Jacob completed his seven years’ Labour for Rachel. As noted above, Jacob had worked hard and faithfully for Laban, but the seven years seemed to be only a few days because of his great love for Rachel (v. 20).

1. Jacob now expected to be given the right to marry Rachel (v. 21). Note that Jacob was the one who brought the subject up to Laban. He was probably so excited over the wedding date’s finally arriving that he was just bursting at the seams to discuss the preparations with Laban. There is also the possibility that Laban was hesitant to bring

the subject up because he was fearful that Jacob might leave, and he just hated the thought of losing such a capable and hard worker.

2. Laban gave a large wedding feast in honour of the couple (v. 22). This was the custom of the day: the father of the bride would hold a week-long feast to which family, friends and neighbours were invited. The marriage was consummated — the couple came together — at the end of the week after the celebration.

Note that Laban invited all the men — all the people — of the community to the celebration.

3. Laban was plotting a cruel hoax and deception on Jacob (v. 23). He was planning to push Leah off on Jacob, tricking him into marrying Leah as well as Rachel. How did Laban pull off such a scheme? On the wedding night, he simply substituted Leah for Rachel. How was this possible? How could Jacob not know?

=> Because Leah was veiled.

=> Because it was dark and the cover of darkness hid Leah.

=> Because Leah and Rachel were similar — obviously very similar — in stature, shape and size. They differed only in facial features, and Leah's face was completely hid by the veil at the wedding and by the cover of darkness at night.

=> Because Rachel and Leah's voices were apparently also similar. Moreover, conversation on the wedding night is usually little and whispered in a quiet spirit of love.

=> Because Leah probably wore Rachel's clothing and perfume.

=> Because Jacob was unsuspecting; the thought never even crossed his mind that the bride lying beside him was not Rachel.

Considering all these factors, the scheme was probably easy to pull off. But why? Why would Laban wish to pull such a mean hoax on Jacob?

=> This was a sure way to secure another seven years service and work from Jacob. Jacob would have to commit himself to work seven more years for Rachel.

=> This was also a sure way to see that Leah got a husband.

Note that the plot worked: Jacob consummated the marriage: he and Leah had sex on their wedding night (v. 23c). Note also that Laban gave Leah a maid-servant named Zilpah (v. 24). This fact will later become important (see Gen 30:9f).

4. When morning came, Jacob made the rude discovery and was utterly shocked. He rushed madly to Laban and flew into a confused outrage, a perfectly understandable outrage:

=> What have you done to me?

=> I worked for you — completed my agreement — didn't I?

=> Why have you deceived and tricked me?

Laban responded by declaring that the local community had an *ironclad law*: the older daughter of a family had to be the first to marry (v. 26). The younger daughter could not be given in marriage until the older sister was first married.

Was this true? Most likely, for Jacob could have easily checked out the law with neighbours and city officials. But why did Laban not tell Jacob this earlier? No doubt, for the reasons mentioned above: he wanted Jacob to remain working for him, and it was a chance to get a husband for Leah.

What part did Rachel and Leah have in the plot and deception? Where was Rachel during the wedding? She obviously loved Jacob, so she would not have been willing to cooperate in the plot. Apparently her father, Laban, kept her quiet by referring to the law of the community and assuring her that he would give her to Jacob after Jacob married Leah. Or else, he forcefully had her held captive until after the wedding night. The first possibility seems far more likely.

What about Leah: How guilty was she in the deception? Very guilty! She should have warned Jacob of the scheme long before it happened, and she could have at any time along the way. This would have been the decent and right thing to do, but she didn't. Why?

=> Was it because she feared her father?

=> Did she feel that this was her best, perhaps last, chance to marry?

=> Had she grown in love with Jacob?

Scripture does not tell us why she went along with the scheme. But she did, and it was a cruel thing to do. Imagine how she felt on the wedding night as she shared love with Jacob, knowing that Jacob was thinking of Rachel. She also knew that Jacob would be very angry with her as well as her father. She also knew that there was a chance that Jacob might reject her. On and on the possible reactions from Jacob could be listed. All this shows how much she wanted to marry Jacob. The best guess as to her reason is that she truly loved Jacob.

5. Laban suggested a solution: that Jacob labour another seven years for Rachel (v. 27). Jacob could have exploded in anger against Laban at this point. What kept him from exploding? Note that Scripture is silent, saying nothing about Jacob's response. In fact, the scene pictures Jacob as quiet and subdued after his first outburst at Laban (v. 25). Why? Most likely, the trick and deception pulled on him reminded him of his own deception against his father and Esau. Henry Morris states the case well:

Isaac had thought Jacob was Esau, and so gave him the blessing. Now Jacob had thought Leah was Rachel, and had taken her to wife. In both cases, the deception had been commanded by a parent and in both cases the purpose of the deception was to acquire something desperately desired. Jacob had been sure the end justified the means in his case, but perhaps Leah and Laban also felt the same way in their case.

Such considerations no doubt contributed to the lessening of Jacob's anger. He may even have recognized his situation as providential, in view of the remarkably similar circumstances. Accordingly, so far as the record goes, at least, he did not

berate Leah for her part in the affair. It is not unlikely that his experience with her during the night had engendered a certain amount of love for her, in spite of her deception, especially as he suddenly realized that she had, herself been in love with him all along. At any rate, though he still wanted Rachel, he could not bring himself to hurt Leah any more. (Henry Morris. The Genesis Record, pp. 462-463).

Gal 6:7-8 *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

Job 4:8 *As I have observed, those who plough evil, and those who sow trouble reap it.*

Prov 19:5 *A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free.*

Prov 22:8 *Whoever sows injustice reaps calamity, and the rod they wield in fury will be broken.*

Jer 9:5 *Friend deceives friend, and no one speaks the truth. They have taught their tongues to lie; they weary themselves with sinning.*

Jer 17:9 *The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?*

6. Jacob accepted the solution offered by Laban, and married Rachel (v. 28). The week spoken about is the bridal week, the first week of marriage, a time when the bride and bridegroom are actually called *the king and queen*. (H.C. Leupold, *Genesis*, Vol. 2, p. 798). When Jacob finished his week with Leah, he was then given Rachel to be his wife. Note that Laban also gave Rachel a maid-servant named Bilhah who later became very important (v. 29; see Gen 30:3f).

7. Jacob consummated the marriage: he married and shared his love with Rachel. Note that he was given Rachel at the beginning of the seven years work, not after. He married Rachel and then fulfilled his agreement to work seven years for Laban.

Now, why did Jacob commit bigamy? Note what Scripture says: he loved Rachel more than Leah. Why did he not refuse to keep Leah as his wife? He did not willingly marry her. Jacob was somewhat in a dilemma and forced to face the issue by being tricked into marrying Leah. However, Jacob had several ways that he could have handled the situation. He was at fault for marrying two women.

1. He did not have to keep Leah. True, it was the custom of the day that the older daughter be given away in marriage first, but Jacob could have given Leah back to her father. Of course, Laban could have reacted and kicked Jacob out, leaving him without home or family. Nevertheless, many believers down through the centuries have been rejected by family and still stood fast for God and righteousness.
2. The whole community knew about the scheme, but Jacob could have borne the embarrassment and rejected Leah. The problem was, of course, he had slept with her;

and she could have conceived from that one sexual experience. He had no way of knowing. This was a dilemma that preyed upon his mind.

3. Leah would, of course, have been crushed if Jacob had rejected her. But Jacob could have eased the pain by talking with her and giving her whatever support he could. He could have explained God's will of *one wife for one man*.
4. If the law that the older daughter had to be married first was set in concrete, then Jacob had two choices.
 - => He could have kept Leah and learned to love her. This would have been the practical choice if he was burning with desire and had to have a wife.
 - => He could have returned Leah to her father and waited until she married. He would then have been free to marry Rachel.

However in all honesty, Jacob faced two problems if he had made the decision to reject Leah. It was doubtful that Laban would have ever given Rachel to him. Also, remember that Jacob was about 84 years old at this time. This suggests that Leah was already an older woman who had never been spoken for by a man. The likelihood was that she would never marry, which meant that Jacob might never be allowed to marry Rachel.

Now, did Jacob have to stay married to Leah in order to please God? Would he be guilty of adultery if he had rejected her and married Rachel? H.C. Leupold says this:

"Were Jacob and Leah guilty of adultery, or would their union have to be classed as adulterous if Jacob had refused further to consort with her?" Luther was right when he said, No. Their union was not marriage at first, because there was no free consent between these two. It was not adultery, for Jacob consorted with one whom he certainly did not desire. Consequently, Jacob could on ethical grounds have rejected Leah and would still have been guiltless. (H.C. Leupold. Genesis, Vol. 2, p. 798).

Henry M. Morris adds this:

He therefore fulfilled Leah's week, and then Laban finally gave Rachel to him. Jacob was thus more or less forced to become a bigamist. In light of the times, however, this was not as serious a corruption of the marriage relation as it would be in the Christian dispensation. Polygamy was quite common; Jacob's own brother had two wives, and his grandfather had taken Hagar as well as Sarah as his wife. Nevertheless, many problems did develop later in Jacob's home and family because of it, thus showing again that monogamy is the better way. Even today, although 'parallel' polygamy is illegal in Western nations, a 'serial' type of polygamy is commonly practiced as a result of frequent divorces. Today, however, as well as in Jacob's time, such multiple marriages normally involve much heartache and serious family problems. (Henry M. Morris. The Genesis Record, p. 463).

J. Vernon McGee, in very simple and practical terms, says this:

*You may be thinking, Well, since this is in the Bible, God must approve of polygamy. No, God does not approve of everything that is in the Bible — that may startle you. For instance, God didn't approve of the devil's lie. God didn't approve of David's sin, and He judged him for it. But the record of both events is inspired — literally, God-breathed. In other words, God said through the writer, Moses, exactly what He wanted to say. The thing that is inspired is the record of the words God gave to Moses to write down in this Book we call the Bible. In Genesis 29 God gave an accurate record: Jacob did have two wives, and it tells us the way it came about. That is where inspiration comes in. It does not mean that God approved of everything that is recorded in the Bible. Certainly God disapproved of Jacob's having more than one wife. (J. Vernon McGee. *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1, p. 123).*

Mat 19:4-6 “Haven't you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

1 Tim 3:2 Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife.

Titus 1:6 An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient.

Deut 17:17 He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray.

Mala 2:14-15 You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. ■

GENESIS 29:23 JACOB SOWING AND REAPING DECEPTION

*But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. **Genesis 29:23***

Jacob was reaping what he had sown, reaping the same kind of deception he had schemed against his father and Esau. Jacob faced several crises in his life that show a life of unusual spiritual weakness.

1. Acting self-sufficient and conniving to secure the birthright from Esau (Gen 25:27-34). Jacob just did not trust God to bring about the promised blessings in his life.

2. Acting self-sufficient and following his mother's suggestion to deceive his father into blessing him instead of Esau (Gen 27:1-29). Again, he failed to trust God and to act courageously in standing up to his mother. And remember, he was about seventy-seven years old at this time.
3. Failing to stand up to Laban and his daughter Leah when Laban gave him Leah instead of Rachel as payment for his Labour (Gen 29:15-28). He should have acted courageously and rebuked Laban, and he should have rejected Leah and refused to practice bigamy.
4. Showing partiality to Rachel and neglecting Leah, and tolerating a disruptive household because of jealousy and rivalry (Gen 29:31-30:24). He should have been courageous and stopped the jealousy and disruption. But again, he demonstrated both spiritual immaturity and a lack of courage.
5. Trying to scheme and influence the breeding process of Laban's stock for himself instead of really trusting God to bless him with wealth (Gen 30:31-43). (Note: this probably is not what happened, but it is included here because some commentators hold to this position. See notes, Gen 30:35-43.)
6. Acting self-sufficient and trying to sneak away from Laban. He failed to courageously stand up to Laban and failed to trust God to work matters out (Gen 31:1-55).
7. Living a life that relapsed time and again into a state of distrust after indicating a great trust in God.

One thread runs through all these experiences of Jacob. He had a besetting sin, the sin of deception, of conniving to secure the blessings God had promised. Each crisis was a lapse of faith revealing at least two weaknesses.

1. Sometimes Jacob lacked faith: he just did not believe God would handle the situation. Why? Perhaps he just did not meditate enough upon God's faithfulness, or else he was just so spiritually immature that he did not trust God enough. His distrust often led him to act self-sufficient, completely independent of God. He sometimes took things into his own hands.
2. At other times Jacob lacked the courage to stand up for what was right. □