

Genesis 29

The theme of the Bible is: The salvation of man through Jesus Christ to the glory of God. In Genesis 12, God separated Abraham to be the forefather of the family through whom Jesus will come into the world. Abraham received a son named Isaac (chapter 22) through whom Jesus will come. Isaac had twin sons, Jacob being the one through whom Jesus will come (chapter 28). Now we see Jacob receiving a family after marrying two wives. We will later learn through which son Jesus will come into the world.

TRANSLATION - 29:1-14:

1 Now Jacob lifted his legs and he went to the land of the sons of the east. **2** And he saw and behold the well in the field and behold there three flocks of sheep lying down on it because from that well they were watered, the flocks, and the large stone on the lip of the well. **3** And they were gathered there all the flocks and they rolled away the stone from on the lip of the well and they watered the flocks and they moved back the stone on the lip of the well at its place.

4 So Jacob said to them, "My brothers, from where are you?" And they said, "From Haran we [are]." **5** So he said to them, "Do you know Laban, son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know [him]." **6** And he said to them, "Peace to him." And they said, "Peace and behold, Rachel, his daughter, is coming with the sheep."

7 And he said, "Behold, still the day is great, [it is] not the time to gather livestock. You water the flock? Go and shepherd!"

8 And they said, "We are not able until which they arrive all the flocks and they roll the stone from on the lip of the well and then the flock will drink."

9 While speaking with them, even Rachel was coming with the flock which [was] her father's because a shepherdess she [was]. **10** Then it was just as Jacob saw Rachel, daughter of Laban, brother of his mother, and the flock of Laban, brother of his mother, that Jacob approached and rolled away the stone from on the lip of the well and watered the flock of Laban, brother of his mother. **11** Then Jacob kissed Rachel and raised his voice and wept. **12** And Jacob announced to Rachel that the brother of her father he was, the son of Rebekah, he [was] and she ran and announced to her father.

13 Then it was when Laban heard the report of Jacob, the son of his sister, that he ran to meet them and he embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house and he related to Laban all these words. **14** So Laban said to him, "Surely my bone and my flesh you [are]." And he stayed with him a month of days.

WORDS:

"Rolled away" (verses 3 & 8; 18 times) can be translated "dragged, fall on, wallow."
"Heard" and "report" (verse 13) are related words. The first is the verb; the second is the *result* of the verb, or a "report." "Embraced" (verse 13; 13 times) can also mean to fold one's hands in idleness. The verb "related" (107 times) is related to the noun "book or scroll" (191 times), which is something "related."

GRAMMAR:

"Lifted his legs" (verse 1) is an idiom to indicate immediate and decisive action.

COMMENTS:

Jacob immediately and decisively continued his journey with this new divine encouragement in his ears and heart. He went east, toward the land of his forefathers in order to do as his mother had commanded (27:43-44). As his grandfather's servant had done earlier (chapter 24), Jacob meets his future wife at a well. We are informed there were already some

shepherds there with their flocks. They were waiting until more flocks arrived before they removed the stone that was covering and protecting the mouth (“lip”) of the well.

Jacob addressed them with a generic “brother” (verse 4; the word is used again with a more narrow meaning in verse 12 as “relative”). He learns they are from Laban’s family and, in fact, his daughter Rachel was immediately on her way to the well.

Jacob, being one who takes the initiative, called on the shepherds to go ahead and water their flocks. Apparently, Jacob was unaware of their local custom of waiting for all the flocks to arrive. But, the shepherds will quickly inform him of their local custom! The stone on the well was large but we don’t know how large. We do not know (although many scholars presume to know!) whether it could be moved by one man or more. We have to recognize that “we” could be used generically when, in fact, one man may have been able to move the stone but only did so when others were present. Also, just because the text says Jacob moved the stone, it does not necessarily mean he moved it alone; he could have simply taken the initiative but had others help.

Jacob was most interested in watering the flocks of Laban, with Laban’s daughter, Rachel, being present. Jacob gave Rachel a kiss of greeting and wept with joy that he had found his mother’s family. After Jacob announced their relationship, Rachel ran to tell her father.

Laban ran to meet and greet Jacob, heard the story, and then invited Jacob to remain with Laban for a month.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Jacob did not enter Haran with the same support and gifts which Abraham’s servant had done back in chapter 24. Jacob does not pray for success as Abraham’s servant had done. Yet, surely, Jacob desired God to make his way prosper, based on God’s promise in 28:13-15. In that promise, God had indicated Jacob would have a family (verse 14). Jacob surely hoped that he would find a wife among his mother’s family.

Contemporaries of Moses - Rachel will become one of the ancestresses of Israel. She will be mentioned in Genesis 43 times. By contrast, Rebekah was only mentioned 30 times and Sarah, the “mother” of Israel, 37 times.

Later Hebrew writers - We have earlier mentioned that Sarah is only mentioned once outside of Genesis: Isaiah. 51:2. Rachel will be mentioned three times: Ruth 4:11; 1 Sam. 10:2; Jer. 31:15. Rebekah, not once.

NT writers - The NT writers will mention Rebekah once (Rom. 9:10), Sarah, four times (Rom. 4:19; 9:9; Heb. 11:11; 1 Peter 3:6); Rachel, only once (Matt. 2:18, who is quoting Jer. 31:15).

TRANSLATION - 29:15-30:

15 Now Laban said to Jacob, “Because, my brother [are] you, now you will serve me freely. Report to me, what [are] your wages?” **16** And to Laban [were] two daughters. The name of the oldest [was] Leah. The name of the smallest [was] Rachel. **17** Now the eyes of Leah [were] tender and Rachel was beautiful in form and beautiful in appearance. **18** So Jacob loved Rachel and said, “I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your smallest daughter.”

19 So Laban said, “Good! I will give her to you. To give her for a wife, after seven years with me.” **20** So Jacob served for Rachel seven years and they were in his eyes like a few days for his love for her.

21 Then Jacob said to Laban, “Hand over my wife because they are fulfilled the days and let me come to her.”

22 Then Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a banquet. **23** And it was in the evening that he took Leah, his daughter, and brought her to him and he came to her. **24** So Laban gave to her Zilpah her maid and to Leah, his daughter, a maid.

25 Then it was in the morning and behold she [was] Leah! And he said to Laban, “What [is] this you did to me!? Was it not for Rachel I served with you? And why have you deceived me?”

26 So Laban said, “It is not done thus in our place, to give the smallest before the firstborn. **27** Fulfill this week and I will give her to you, even this one, for service which with me until seven other years.”

28 So Jacob did thus and he fulfilled this week and he gave to him Rachel, his daughter, to him for a wife. **29** And Laban gave to Rachel, his daughter, Bilhah, her maid, to her for a maid. **30** And he came also to Rachel and he loved even Rachel more than Leah and he served with him until seven other years.

WORDS:

“Wages” (verse 15; 28 times) is related to the verb “to hire” (20 times) and “day-laborer” (18 times). “Tender” (verse 17; 16 times) was used in Genesis 18:7 to refer to the young calf, which was prepared by Abraham for his visitors. It will be used in Genesis 33:13 to refer to children who are “frail.” The word can mean “tender, weak, soft, timid.” We are not sure if the text is referring to Leah’s eyes in a positive way or a negative way. “Hand over” (verse 21) is used 33 times; here, it suggests the idea of giving over from Laban’s care to Jacob’s care. “Banquet” (verse 22) was seen back in 19:3; 21:8; 26:30. “Deceived” (verse 25) is only used eight times and only here in Genesis. It can mean to “leave someone in a lurch, deceive, or betray.” It is related to the noun for “deceit” in 27:35, which deals with Jacob and Esau. Thus, we have Jacob “reaping what he sowed.”

COMMENTS:

Jacob arrived in Haran with empty hands; that is, he had no dowry to give to Laban. So, Laban arranges for Jacob to work off his “debt” and so receive Rachel’s hand in marriage. Laban graciously allows Jacob to begin the negotiations. Laban had two daughters. We are not sure what Moses meant by Leah’s eyes being “tender” or “weak;” but it seems that there is a contrast with Rachel, who is identified as being beautiful in form and appearance.

Jacob had no dowry when he arrived in Haran, unlike Abraham’s servant who came for Rebekah (chapter 24). According to the documents from Nuzi, a typical bridal dowry would be between 30-40 shekels of silver. As a day-laborer, Jacob would earn about one shekel a month. This suggests that Jacob is offering twice as much dowry, in labor, as was normal (at least by Nuzi standards).

Jacob began working for Rachel and those seven years flew by because of his affections for her. Once the agreement was fulfilled, Jacob asked for Rachel’s hand in marriage. Laban threw a wedding banquet. Such a celebration could last a week (cf. Judges 14:10-20). The night of the honeymoon came and in the dark of night, with her face veiled, Leah went into Jacob’s tent and, in effect, became his wife. For future reference, Moses tells us that Leah had a maid named Zilpah whom Laban had given to her.

Verse 25 emphasizes the surprise Jacob felt when he awoke the next morning and discovered he had slept with Leah, the oldest. Now, the deceiver had been deceived! Laban was prepared with an explanation: it was not the custom to give the youngest in marriage before the oldest. Why didn’t Laban explain that point earlier? We are not told and are left to wonder. There is no evidence from other ANE documents of such a custom. So, Laban offered Rachel to Jacob if he would promise to serve another seven years.

Jacob agreed, because he loved and really desired Rachel, and worked for Laban another seven years. The text emphasizes Jacob’s love for Rachel because it will serve the story in the next verse.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - There is a biblical principle that we will reap what we sow. While Jacob has not been deceitful with Laban, he was deceitful with Esau and Isaac. Now

Jacob receives deception from his father-in-law relative to the wife he desired, yet God will use the whole scenario to bring about the twelve sons of Jacob who will serve as the forefathers of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Contemporaries of Moses - The Law will forbid marrying sisters (Lev. 18:18). The Law will also limit a bride price (dowry) to fifty shekels (Deut. 22:29).

TRANSLATION - 29:31-35:

31 And Jehovah saw that Leah was hated and He opened her womb and Rachel [was] barren. **32** Then Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son and she called his name "Reuben" because she said, "That Jehovah saw my misery. Because now my husband will love me."

33 And she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son and she said, "Because Jehovah has heard that I, myself, am hated, and He gave to me even this one." And she called his name Simeon.

34 And she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son and she said, "Now this time my husband will join to me because I have born to him three sons." Therefore she called his name "Levi."

35 And she became pregnant again and gave birth to a son and she said, "Now I will praise Jehovah. Therefore she called his name "Judah." And she ceased getting pregnant.

WORDS:

"Hated" (verse 31; 148 times) is used twice in this context (verse 33). It means to "hate" and can mean "to be an enemy." It also has a weaker denotation in the sense of "love less," since the text here says that Jacob loved Rachel "more than" Leah (verse 30). "Join" (verse 34; 12 times) is only used here in Genesis. Since the sexual act is found in the text in other words, this term must refer to more emotional "joining." Its most significant usage theologically refers to non-Jews who "join" themselves to God or convert to belief in Jehovah God. "Praise" (verse 35; 111 times) means to "thank, praise, or confess." Its basic meaning is confessing or acknowledging a fact, such as one's sins, the nature of God, or man's character.

COMMENTS:

Jehovah God knows what is going on from heaven. He sees that Leah is not loved by her husband so He acts. He closes the womb of Rachel and makes her barren. This forces the loving making toward Leah.

And Leah is fertile. Her firstborn is named "Reuben," which is a play on the words "see" and "misery:" "Jehovah sees my misery." Notice two things in this verse (32): Leah's thoughts are on Jehovah God and she believes that since she has now had Jacob's firstborn, a son no less, then he will love her.

Leah's second born is named "Simeon," which is a play on the words "hear" and perhaps "hated:" "Jehovah heard that I am hated." Notice the same two matters in verse 33: Leah's thoughts are on Jehovah God and she is reflecting on the lack of love she feels from Jacob.

Leah's third son is named "Levi." His name is a play on the verb "to join." Jehovah God does not enter the picture this time, but Jacob is still in her thoughts, for she believes that with the birth of three sons Jacob will "join" himself to her. Since he has been having sexual relations with her and she still imagines he will "join" himself to her, we believe she has in mind something more psychological and emotional than physical.

Leah's fourth son is named "Judah." With this son, Jacob does not enter the picture. Perhaps after four sons and roughly 40 months of pregnancies, she has given up hope that she will ever have Jacob's affections. So in his place, Leah directs her thoughts to Jehovah God and says she will "praise" Jehovah. Making a play on the verb "to praise," Leah names her fourth son, Judah. None of the names of the sons, except Judah, have anything to do with their future, which argues for the antiquity of the names and the account.

At this point, Leah will stop getting pregnant. By the end of chapter 29, fourteen years will have elapsed by the time we move into 30:22 (29:20, 27; 30:22, 25).

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Reuben will lose his right of firstborn when he sleeps with his father's concubine, Bilhah (35:22; 49:3-4). He will, however, play a significant role in the descent into Egypt in the days of his brother, Joseph (chapters 37, 42).

Simeon and Levi also lose their right of firstborn, after Reuben loses his, because they murdered the Shechemites (34:25-31; 49:5-7). He will serve in the story of Joseph as well (42:24, 36; 43:23).

Working with Simeon, Levi will lose his birthright (34:25, 30; 49:5), but God will choose to make the family of Levi the priests under the Law of Moses.

The fourth son will be Judah. Judah is found in Genesis 28 times; the whole 38th chapter of Genesis is dedicated to an event in his life. When the brothers want to kill Joseph, Judah saves his life (37:26). He will also serve an important role in the descent into Egypt during the famine (43:3, 8; 44:14, 16, 18; 46:12, 28). Jacob, in giving his blessing to his sons, will prophesy royalty in the future for Judah (49:8-10). All peoples will obey Judah, or his descendant. At that point, we see that the promise coming through the seed will be concentrated into one person and he will be royalty.

Contemporaries of Moses - Reuben will be mentioned in the rest of the Law of Moses 27 times. Simeon is found in the Law 14 times. Moses will be born into the family of Levi through Levi's son, Kohath (Exo. 6:16, 18, 20). He is found in the Law 37 times. The "Levites" will be found 85 times. Judah will be mentioned in the law 21 times.

Later Hebrew writers - Reuben will be mentioned in the rest of the OT 33 times, of which 22 times are in Joshua. Simeon is found 19 times through the rest of the NT. Levi is found through the rest of the OT 35 times, with 15 of those being in 1 Chronicles which indicates part of the purpose of that book. The Levites are found from Joshua-Malachi, 204 times. Through the rest of the OT Judah will be mentioned 782 times, showing how important and significant is this son of Jacob. The most significant descendant of Judah in the OT will be King David, through Ruth (Ruth 4:12-14, 17, 22).

NT writers - Since the nation of Israel, as a whole, will not serve a major role in the NT, the sons of Jacob will not serve an important role except Judah. Jesus is from the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5), through King David (Matt. 1:1). Judah is also mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:2-3; Luke 3:30, 33) and twice in Hebrews (7:14; 8:8). The other three brothers will be mentioned in a listing of the tribes of Israel in Revelation 7:5-7, 8. Levi will be mentioned in Hebrews 7:7, as the head of the family of priests.