

Lesson: Family Drama and the Promise (Gen 29:1-30:43)

Jacob left the drama of Canaan, with a brother desiring to kill him, to find a wife in his mom’s home country to find Laban. He left that drama for more drama when he married both of Laban’s daughters who would fight over his affection. In all of this, God allowed Jacob to bring forth the 12 tribes of Israel, the means through which God would bless the world.

Biblical Takeaways

1. ***Jacob meets Rachel (Gen 29:1-14)***

- a. This part of the narrative notes that Jacob met the “people of the east.” These are the same people from whence Abraham came.
- b. Jacob met Rachel in the same manner which Abraham’s servant met Rebekah in the process of watering the flocks. Upon meeting Rachel, Jacob kissed her and wept (v. 11). These actions suggest he was overwrought because he knew her to be just what had been sent there for, a beautiful wife who was from his larger family. This was his response to providence. Rachel relayed the identity of Jacob to her father, and he was accepted into Laban’s home.

2. ***Jacob serves Laban for Rachel, or so he thought (Gen 29:15-35)***

- a. Jacob would serve in Laban’s house and was asked what he wanted in payment. He wanted to marry Rachel. Though Laban had two daughters, Leah and Rachel, Jacob only wanted Rachel. The reason was because Rachel was beautiful. In describing Leah (v. 17), the Hebrew suggests her eyes were, “weak,” or “soft” or “tender.” We are not certain of what that signified about her appearance. We only know that Jacob preferred Rachel over Leah.
- b. Jacob agreed to serve Laban for seven years for Rachel’s hand and it only seemed like days (vv. 18-20). But on the day of the marriage, possibly due to his being inebriated or Leah hiding under her veil, Laban was able to get Jacob to marry Leah. Having consummated the marriage, when he saw her in the morning, Jacob was incensed and confronted Laban who informed him that local custom demanded he marry his firstborn first (v. 26). So, Jacob agreed to serve another seven years for Rachel (vv. 27-30). But his love for Rachel did not produce children. God blessed Leah with children because of Jacob’s mistreatment of Leah. She bore Reuben (see, a son!), Simeon (heard), Levi (joined to), and Judah (praise). Rachel was unable to conceive, however, like Rebekah and Sarah before her.

3. ***Drama with Rachel and Leah (Gen 30:1-24)***

- a. Childbirth was an essential part of life because maternal and infant mortality were so high. Rachel wanted to bear children to hold greater status in this society and fulfill her role as a wife. Her lack of ability to conceive troubled her so she berated Jacob who reminded her God was in charge of bringing children (v. 2).
- b. Rachel gave Jacob her servant, Bilhah, in the same way Sarah gave Abraham Hagar. Bilhah bore Dan (judgement) and Naphtali (wrestling), whom Rachel named.
- c. Leah and Rachel were in competition for Jacob’s love, as is clear from many of the names, especially Naphtali, as would be the case in most polygamous relationships in the

Bible (see 1 Sam 1). The marrying of sisters would later be outlawed (Lev 18:18). The Bible does not always standardize what it describes, as is clear from the problems arising in these relationships.

- d. Leah gave Jacob her servant, Zilpah, as Rachel had done and she bore two children Gad (troop) and Asher (happy), when she was not conceiving children.
 - e. When Reuben was bringing his mother mandrakes (considered to be an aphrodisiac), Rachel wanted them and asked Leah for “your sons” mandrakes (v. 13-14). Leah accused Rachel of taking away her husband (v. 15), which is technically true, since she was married to him first. Rachel was willing to exchange Jacob for the mandrakes so she hired out Jacob for the night to Leah. Leah was able to conceive from this interaction and bore Issachar (wages). She also bore another son Zebulun (exalted) and she had a daughter named Dinah (judgment).
 - f. After this, God blessed Rachel to have a child, Joseph (vv. 22-24), which means addition.
4. ***God’s blessings overcome deception (Gen 30:25-43)***
- a. Jacob was ready to leave with his wife and children but Laban wanted him to stay. He learned through divination (v. 27), that he was being blessed by Jacob’s presence there (vv. 26-30). Jacob’s price was the spotted, striped, and black flock. Laban agreed but took all of those colored flocks, gave them to his sons, and distanced his part of the flock from Jacob (vv. 31-36).
 - b. Jacob was not to be stopped by Laban’s deception. He cut into poplar trees (in Hebrew this word forms a pun with Laban) and the flock ended up bearing the kind of flocks he agreed to when they saw and ate from them (vv. 37-42). He did this when he saw the stronger of the flock come and they produced strong progeny.
 - c. Jacob beat Laban’s deception through God’s favor (v. 43).