

**International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
January 3, 2015**

**Lesson Text: Genesis 29:15-30
Lesson Title: A Bride Worth Waiting For**

Introduction

The book of Genesis begins with the words, “*In the beginning God...*” (Genesis 1:1). In the beginning there were no people, only the presence of the Creator. On the first day of creation, God spoke light into existence. God created the atmosphere on the second day and seed-bearing plants on the third day. On day four God brought the sun and moon into existence, followed by fish and birds on day five. Then came day six. God created animal wildlife, reptiles and the crown of His creation, man.

God spoke everything into existence except men and women. When He created man, He formed him from the dust and breathed into him the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). Anything God breathes into is designed to speak of God to others. It was for that purpose man was created.

When God speaks to someone, all of history is affected. In Genesis 1-10, God spoke to Adam, Eve, Cain, Noah and others. At the end of Genesis 11, God spoke to Abram (Abraham) and invited him to a new life of faith and trust. Abraham obeyed the voice of God and became the friend of God and the father of a great nation. On his way to parenthood, Abraham made many foolish mistakes. Yet in God’s timing, Isaac was born.

Isaac, the miracle child of Abraham and his wife Sarah, would himself marry a woman named Rebekah. Isaac and Rebekah were the parents of twin sons, Jacob and Esau. Esau’s life was marked by carelessness and Jacob’s by scheming. Jacob seemed to have picked up on his mother’s trait when it came to trickery. He would soon be on the receiving end of his mother’s deceitful tendencies.

Jacob, under Rebekah’s influence, deceived his father in order to steal the family birthright and blessing that rightfully belonged to his brother Esau. On discovery, Esau’s threatened to kill Jacob. Jacob eventually had to leave home. His mother Rebekah, thought the tension would be relieved if Jacob would go to her brother Laban in Haran and stay with him for a while (Genesis 27:43-44).

An Agreement Negotiated (Genesis 29:15-20)

Between Genesis 28 and Genesis 32, Jacob spends twenty years with his uncle Laban in Haran. Although Jacob left home fleeing for his life, he also left home hoping to find a wife (Genesis 28:1-2). He probably did not expect to find her his first day in Haran (Genesis 29:9-14). When Jacob arrived in Haran, he stopped by a well and inquired about his uncle Laban from some shepherds (Genesis 29:1-8). While he was speaking to the shepherds, Laban's daughter Rachel came to water the sheep. It was "love-at-first-sight" for Jacob, and the beginning of one of the most intriguing stories in the Bible. The story is also a reminder that God's plan moves forward because of His will, not because of the character of the people involved. All of us should be thankful for that truth.

Verse 15

"And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?"

After meeting Jacob at the well, Rachel returned home to tell her father about the meeting. Laban ran to meet Jacob and welcomed him into his home. In that culture, a relative or stranger was welcomed into a home, but was required to earn his keep. According to Genesis 29:14, Jacob had been with Laban "...*the space of a month*" when Laban asked Jacob about his "wages."

"Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?" The introduction of the subject of "wages" by Laban may seem honorable, even admirable on the surface. But an attentive reading indicates the reason behind Laban's question came from a fraudulent and manipulative heart.

Verse 16-17

"And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured."

Laban's introduction of "wages" is followed by a suggestive statement about his "two daughters." His oldest daughter "was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel." Apparently Laban had no sons since "Rachel" was doing the shepherding duties usually designated to a son (Genesis 29:6).

"Leah" and "Rachel" were both daughters of Laban, but that seems to be the only thing they had in common. "Leah" was the oldest and "was tender eyed." "Tender eyed" means her eyes were delicate, they were beautiful to look on. But they were probably the only outstanding physical feature. "Rachel" on the other hand, was beautiful and well favoured" meaning she was a strong and attractive woman. You can define these words anyway you like. What matters is Jacob was attracted to what he saw in "Rachel."

Verse 18

“And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.”

“And Jacob loved Rachel” is the heart of this story. The word “loved” means “deep affection.” He wanted to marry “Rachel.” Jacob agreed to work “seven years” for her hand in marriage. Seven years in biblical times is 2555 days. In our day it is still 2555 days! If most men had to work for their father-in-law for seven years they would probably be a bachelor the rest of their lives! Jacob “loved Rachel” so much, he was willing to work “seven years” just to receive the blessing of her father “Laban.”

Verse 19

“And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me.”

Laban believes it is better for “Rachel” to stay within the family than to marry an outsider, so he encourages Jacob to “abide” or stay there and work. While this is a love story on the part of Jacob and Rachel, dollar signs are dancing in Laban’s head. In Laban’s mind, he is getting a bargain! As far as God’s part in all of this, God’s work of discipline in Jacob’s life is being administered through this negotiation and agreement of terms between Laban and Jacob.

Verse 20

“And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.”

Because of the love Jacob had for Rachel, “serving seven years seemed unto him but a few days.” You can see this man working and enjoying every minute of it because of the reward. Through the rain, the cold, and the heat he worked. But, he always thought of the beautiful girl waiting to be with him at the end of “seven years.” If Jacob’s attraction to “Rachel” was merely sexual or physical, he surely would have never fulfilled his promised. Say what you will about Jacob, he truly loved Rachel!

An Agreement Modified (Genesis 29:21-28)

Verse 21

“And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her.”

The day finally came for Jacob to receive Rachel as his wife. After seven years, “Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go unto her.” The words “Give me my wife” suggests the possibility Laban might have been holding out on Jacob or dragging this process out as long as possible. But Jacob had the days marked on his calendar and he demands his bride.

The words “that I may go in unto her” means Jacob was ready to consummate the marriage. Although Jacob loved Rachel dearly, he had not touched her sexually during the seven years he worked for Laban.

Verse 22-24

“And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her. And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid.”

The night of their wedding, when Jacob says his vows to Rachel, there is “a feast” provided by Laban for “all the men of the place.” It would be similar to a wedding reception today where there would be food, dancing, and fellowship into the late night hours. This is the setting in which Laban pulls the old switcheroo!

In the days of Laban and in that culture it was customary the bride would be veiled, then her husband would go into the tent to consummate their wedding. It would be dark so the husband would not see his brides face until morning. Jacob did not know he was being deceived by his uncle Laban.

“We are also given another detail that explains some later events: Leah comes with a handmaid named Zilpah. Leah is probably into her 20s by now, and Zilpah is her personal slave, whose ownership is being transferred from Laban to Leah. Zilpah is likely only 10 or 12 years old. She figures into the story later when Leah uses her as a proxy wife to provide more sons for Jacob (Genesis 30:9-13).” *Standard Lesson Commentary 2015-2016 (KJV)*.

Verse 25

“And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?”

Rachel is the better-looking daughter of Laban. Rachel is the one Jacob loves. Rachel is the one Jacob has worked seven years for. Rachel is the one Jacob thinks is in his tent. But when the “morning” came, “behold, it was Leah.”

Jacob asked Laban, “What is this thou has done unto me?” He feels “beguiled” which means “betrayed.” He feels that he has not received what he deserved. Isn’t that interesting? He wants to marry the younger sister, but instead he marries and receives the older sister. That must have reminded him how he himself took the place of the older brother in his deception of Isaac when he pretended to be Esau (Genesis 27:6-29). He is reaping exactly what he gave to his brother, Esau. God must have a sense of humor in the irony of these stories!

Jacob has fallen into the hands of someone who is dealing with him the way he has dealt with others. That is a principle each of us should think about. God loved Jacob in spite of who he was and He proved that loved by allowing him to reap what he sowed. If we never allow our children to face the consequences of their sins, who knows where they will end up in life. The same is true for each of us as believers. We must stop minimizing sin and defending the sinful actions of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Of course there are times when mercy is in order. Of course forgiveness is always demanded. However, we are God’s children and when we sin we must be disciplined and corrected. It is the only way Jacobs become Israel (Genesis 35:10; Hebrews 12:4-11).

An Agreement Finalized (Genesis 29:26-30)

Verse 26-27

“And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.”

Laban invoked the “oldest must marry first” principle in an attempt to explain to Jacob what had just happened. That may be true in Laban’s culture, but what Laban did was just wrong. It is interesting that God is going to make Jacob taste the exact corresponding fruits of his own deception in his own life. This is the first taste Jacob gets of this bitter fruit, but it will not be the last.

“Fulfill her week” means “finish the wedding celebrations” then Laban promises to give him “Rachel” for another “seven years” of service.

Verse 28-29

“And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also. And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid.”

Jacob “fulfilled” his obligation and commitment to Leah, and Laban “gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also.” Laban also “gave to Rachel his daughter

Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid.” As with Leah, Rachel comes with a servant named “Bilhah.” Both “Zilpah” and “Bilhah” will bear children to Jacob who will be part of the descendants of Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel.

Verse 30

“And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.”

Seven years after entering Laban’s house, Jacob received two wives, two female handmaids with his wives, and a contract for seven more years of service. Though “Rachel” was the love of his life, her sister Leah, Jacob’s first wife, began bearing sons for Jacob due to the barrenness of Rachel. This caused a great deal of strife in Jacob’s home and family. By the time Jacob left Laban, he had eleven sons by four different women.

Conclusion

In spite of all the deception and questionable choices, our lesson is a love story which highlights the grace and sovereignty of God among His chosen people. The human decisions in this one episode of Jacob’s life alone are too many to count. Our choices do matter, but they do not derail God’s plans.

God has placed Jacob in a home setting where he has two wives. He will be in a polygamous relationship against the divine plan of God. Not only will he have two wives, he has one wife that he does not care for and did not seek; yet she loves him and wants to be loved by him. God will make Leah fruitful. She's will bear Jacob children. Rachel, the love of his life, is barren. So the Lord puts Jacob in a household where he is going to have two women at each other's throats all the time in competition for him and against him. The Lord has given Jacob consequences that he will never get away from. Jacob’s choices were his choices, right or wrong. But through his choices, God crafts his character and makes a great nation out of him and his sons.

As you pray today, focus on the fact that God will give you wisdom if you ask; he will also bring you to the places and people where He wants you to serve Him (James 1:5).

Amen.