

Scripture Reading: Hosea 12:

“1 "Ephraim feeds on the wind, And pursues the east wind; He daily increases lies and desolation. Also they make a covenant with the Assyrians, And oil is carried to Egypt. 2 "Jehovah also brings a charge against Judah, And will punish Jacob according to his ways; According to his deeds He will recompense him. 3 He took his brother by the heel in the womb, And in his strength he struggled with God. 4 Yes, he struggled with the Angel and prevailed; He wept, and sought favor from Him. He found Him in Bethel, And there He spoke to us-- 5 That is, Jehovah God of hosts. Jehovah is His memorable name. 6 So you, by the help of your God, return; Observe mercy and justice, And wait on your God continually. 7 "A cunning Canaanite! Deceitful scales are in his hand; He loves to oppress. 8 And Ephraim said, 'Surely I have become rich, I have found wealth for myself; In all my labors They shall find in me no iniquity that is sin.' 9 "But I am Jehovah your God, Ever since the land of Egypt; I will again make you dwell in tents, As in the days of the appointed feast. 10 I have also spoken by the prophets, And have multiplied visions; I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets." 11 Though Gilead has idols-- Surely they are vanity-- Though they sacrifice bulls in Gilgal, Indeed their altars shall be heaps in the furrows of the field. 12 Jacob fled to the country of Syria; Israel served for a spouse, And for a wife he tended sheep. 13 By a prophet Jehovah brought Israel out of Egypt, And by a prophet he was preserved. 14 Ephraim provoked Him to anger most bitterly; Therefore his Lord will leave the guilt of his bloodshed upon him, And return his reproach upon him.”

"The Supplanter is Confounded"

Drawing straight lines with a crooked stick

The second half of this Book of Beginnings has been an interesting journey for your pastor and perhaps it is a good thing that I will have a bit more time to prepare for the final messages next year! It seems that you come to portions where there is just too much to cover and where Jesus is very present: Like the sacrifice of Isaac. Or like my last message where we had sheep and shepherds : Wells & water.

But these are interspersed with very difficult portions where you struggle to see the good guys and sometimes even the point! This morning I am going to take us back through the text in the early portion of Genesis 29 and move on to Jacob's interaction with Laban. Of course we have a new character introduced in the person of Laban's oldest daughter Leah... Now with our own Leah sitting right up front here, I am going to have to tread carefully, but I trust she will be pleased with how I see her as a strong character in God's story:

- She is after all the mother in the Line of Christ with the birth of her son Judah.

So let me read out text for this morning from Genesis with some comments and then return to the Prophet Hosea for our applications...

Genesis 29: ““1 So Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the East.”

- As I mentioned last week most of our English translations miss the force of the original here which has Jacob rising up to journey with a new spring in his step: He is a new man at this point, which is something the Prophet Hosea references in saying that Jacob met God at Bethel.

2 “And he looked, and saw a well in the field; and behold, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks.

A large stone was on the well's mouth.”

- Now I covered much of this in my last message, but truly there could be an entire series of sermons here: There is a stone which Jesus was for Israel. And there are flocks feeding in a field we should think of the call Jesus gave to look up and see the fields ripe for harvest in His ministry!
- I would like to share a stunning point about there being three flocks, but alas I am not sure how we are to take that and the commentators simply passed over it!
- Of course we know that numbers are seldom just numbers, so it might be something for future generations to ponder and expound upon.

3 “Now all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone from the well's mouth, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the well's mouth. 4 And Jacob said to them, "My brethren, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran." 5 Then he said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know him." 6 So he said to them, "Is he well?" And they said, "He is well. And look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep." 7 Then he said, "Look, it is still high day; it is not time for the cattle to be gathered together. Water the sheep, & go and feed them."

- We gain a bit more insight to the person and work of Jacob. It is easy to see him as a momma's boy in contrast to Esau the great hunter in the early portions of these accounts, but here we see that he was in fact a skilled shepherd: Something that will play an important part in his later interactions with Laban.

8 “But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep." 9 “Now while he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess.”

- Now before we move on in our text I want to pause and share an interesting insight that John Calvin had here that perhaps can help us relate to much of what we now come to in this portion of God's story of redemption...
- It is often difficult for us to relate what we read here to our modern world: For example it would be easy to see “love at first sight” here with Jacob and Rachael, of course with the violins coming up in the background and that look almost in slow motion as they interact on screen as we come to realize that they were made for each other!
- In that sense we have a Hollywood moment and story, but how do we then relate that to Jacob's patience in waiting seven long years to marry his love!

As an example of how our cultures can vary, John Calvin took note of important details in our text about how we see customs and courtesies and hard work in this scene there at the well... He was alarmed at the lack of some of those things in his day, and I can only imagine how he would react today.

“The great frankness of that age appears in this manner of meeting together; for, though the fraternal name is often abused by dishonest and wicked men, it is yet not to be doubted that friendly intercourse was then more faithfully cultivated than it is now. [now of course being the 1500's!] This was the reason why Jacob salutes unknown men as brethren, undoubtedly according to received custom. [in other words they had manners back then ☺]

Frugality also is apparent, in that Rachel sometimes pays attention to the flock; for, since Laban abounds with servants, how does it happen that he employs his own daughter in a vile and sordid service, except that it was deemed disgraceful to educate children in idleness, softness, and indulgence? Whereas, on the contrary, at this day, since ambition, pride, and refinement, have rendered manners effeminate, the care of domestic concerns is held in such contempt, that women, for the most part, are ashamed of their proper office. It followed, from the same purity of manners which has been mentioned, that Jacob

ventured so unceremoniously to kiss his cousin; for much greater liberty was allowed in their chaste and modest mode of living. [in other words proper chastity and modest living produces a freedom in relationships!]

In our times, [again the 1500's] impurity and ungovernable lusts are the cause why not only kisses are suspected, but even looks are dreaded; and not unjustly, since the world is filled with every kind of corruption, and such perfidy prevails, that the intercourse between men and women is seldom conducted with modesty:⁶⁴ wherefore, that ancient simplicity ought to cause us deeply to mourn; so that this vile corruption into which the world has fallen may be distasteful to us, and that the contagion of it may not affect us and our families.

- A much better solution than sensitivity training don't you think?
- These are important things for us to ponder in these accounts, and of course we also come to things that give us pause as we shall see...

10 And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept. 12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's relative and that he was Rebekah's son. So she ran and told her father. 13 Then it came to pass, when Laban heard the report about Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. So he told Laban all these things. 14 And Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him for a month." 15 Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?"

- Remember that Jacob is both looking for a wife and avoiding his brother, so his journey will have to be extended...

16 "Now Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah's eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance."

Here is another famous passage that has the commentators divided...

All are agreed that Rachel was a beautiful woman, but what are we to think of Leah?

Her eyes are called delicate here in the New King James, but no one is certain just what the Hebrew means here: In other translations her eyes are weak, tender, clouded, beautiful and lovely.

Personally I think it refers to how the eye reflects the character of a person, just as Jesus pointed out with the whole body being full of light if the eyes are light. As we move forward in our accounts I think we will see Leah as a quiet and strong woman while Rachel is the attractive one on the outside who clings to her father's idols.

- But obviously we see Jacob going for the outward beauty:

18 Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter." 19 And Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me."

- Now of course we come here again to customs that seem strange in our times, but were common in that day. Jacob had no wealth to offer the father for his daughter as would have been common and thus Jacob agrees to a time of labor.

20 "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her."

- Again we must be careful to not confuse the love and commitment that Jacob is showing to Rachael here for the lust that we would see in Hollywood.
- Jacob was doing what he thought was right and thus the time passed quickly, not because they were short but because he was content!
- Mention our home & move...
- However now that his service is complete Jacob is ready to ask for what was his, but not ready to taste a bit of his own medicine...

21 "Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her." 22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast. 23 Now it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. 24 And Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid."

- Again it is difficult for us to imagine in our modern context just how such a deception could be made, but in that time a wedding was a solemn occasion where the wife would be brought veiled to the new husband.
- And of course this brings us to one of the oft quoted passages in Genesis:

25 "So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah. And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?"

Jacob does not take kindly to being treated in much the same way he did his brother Esau on at least two occasions... Jacob whose name meant supplanter has now been confounded... Seven years of labor for a woman he loved and now he has been married to her sister. And of course we see a bit of Laban's character as he makes his excuses for not being honest with Jacob:

26 "And Laban said, "It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn."

Jacob would certainly have been justified in pointing out that Laban COULD have told him about this little problem at the beginning of the seven years! I think it is pretty obvious that Laban was simply taking advantage of the situation so that he could marry off his daughters and get a good deal of Jacob's labor in return. He is now willing to give Jacob his second daughter for more work!

27 "Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years."

So as we move forward here in Genesis we will be dealing with multiple wives and each with their own concubine...

- And yet in the end we see the Twelve Tribes of Israel produced as part of the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob!

Tribes that according to the Apostle Paul played no small part in the story of redemption as he addresses them in Romans 9: "my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh,

4 who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; 5 of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen."

- The nation of Israel in the end did bring forth the promised Son, but to say that their history had its ups and downs and a bit of a rocky beginning is an understatement!

It reminds me of how Pastor Wilson likes to say that God often draws straight lines with crooked people.

That phrase is not original with Pastor Wilson and has been used and attributed down through Church history...

- * "God can strike a straight stroke by a crooked stick." -- Thomas Watson, English Puritan**
- * "God can draw a straight line with a crooked stick." -- Martin Luther, German Reformer**
- * "God uses crooked sticks to draw straight lines." -- Ignatius Loyola, Founder of the Jesuit Order**
- * "God writes straight with crooked lines." -- Spanish/Portuguese proverb**

So as we consider the fact that we are playing a part in the grand story that God is telling, it is good to reflect at times on just how we are doing, and more importantly how we are being viewed by others.

Just as we see with most of these character in the Book of Beginnings seldom are we always good or always bad. We have our ups and downs!

Even with incredible ups we are capable of big downs...

I am reading the account of King Asa in my morning devotions and it is truly shocking to see a man who trusted God when Ethiopia attacked with a million men and saw a great victory, can just a few years later run to Syria for comfort because he is afraid of a much smaller army from Israel!

If you think back to the reading from the Prophet Hosea we saw two portions of the nation of Israel, Ephraim and Judah being contrasted as faithful and rebellious people. And of course the Lord refers back to very familiar accounts from the life of Jacob where he supplanted his brother even in the womb and where he met God at Bethel.

The lesson we must learn well is that we are not lost when we fall into sin because there is always a way of escape through repentance and restoration.

We must also remember that we have NOT arrived when we see prosperity and right living because we can so easily succumb to the sin of pride.

We should be greatly comforted by the words of God given through the prophet Hosea to His people...

“So you, by the help of your God, return; Observe mercy and justice, And wait on your God continually.”

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 22

“1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.

2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.

3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- The sure mercies of David.

4 Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people, A leader and commander for the people.