

JACOB IN PADAN-ARAM

TEXT: GENESIS 29:1-35

INTRODUCTION:

1. Jacob met God at Bethel (28:16, 17). His experiences there at Bethel began a new life for Jacob. After he had built a memorial to God, "Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east" (29:1).
2. The phrase "Jacob went on his journey" is literally "Jacob lifted up his feet." We see that there was a new spring in the step of Jacob after his experience at Bethel. After his dream and his encounter with God, Jacob was a new man.
3. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "A new hope had dawned in his breast, and now he starts on his way from Bethel with alacrity. The revelation of God and the assurance of God's presence and blessing had brought light and cheer to his heart...The long journey (450 miles from Beersheba) was at length accomplished, and he arrived in the country of his kinsfolk, 'the people of the East'" (*Genesis*).

I. JACOB ARRIVED AT PADAN-ARAM

II. JACOB WAS DECEIVED AT PADAN-ARAM

III. JACOB STARTED HIS FAMILY AT PADAN-ARAM

I. JACOB ARRIVED AT PADAN-ARAM

1. In Padan-aram, Jacob came upon a well, by which lay three flocks of sheep (29:1, 2).
2. This is not the same well where Abraham's servant met Rebekah. This well is in the pasture grounds outside of the town. On its mouth was a large stone, indicating that in that desert area water was precious, and that the well was the common property of the people in that vicinity.
3. The custom was to gather the flocks, roll away the stone, which was too great to be moved by a young boy or a female, water the flocks, and then replace the stone (29:3).
4. Jacob asked the shepherds where they were from, and they said they were from Haran (29:4).

5. Furthermore, the men knew Laban, Rebekah's brother, and they told Jacob that Laban was doing well, and that his daughter Rachel was coming along with her father's sheep (29:5, 6).
6. When Jacob arrived in Padan-aram, he was a total stranger, and yet he immediately started telling the shepherds how they ought to water and feed their sheep. That tells us much about Jacob's pushy personality (29:7). Jacob was very cocky and over-confident.
7. Jacob's suggestion may have been a ploy to get rid of the shepherds so he could talk to Rachel alone. He was in a rush to marry Rachel.
8. But the shepherds disagreed with Jacob, explaining that they could not water the sheep until all the flocks were gathered together, and the stone was rolled from the mouth of the well (29:8, 9).
9. With courtesy Jacob went and rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, and then revealed himself to Rachel, telling her who he was and whence he had come (29:10-12).
10. Jacob was immediately impressed with Rachel (cf. 29:11). Some have called this infatuation. Some call it "love at first sight." Whatever we call it, it seems that Jacob was so enchanted by Rachel's beauty, that he failed to recognize her shortcomings.
11. Later on we learn that Rachel was very petulant (30:1). And we learn that she was an idolater, a liar, and a thief (cf. 31:30-35).
12. But it seems that Jacob was so enamored with Rachel that he failed to consider the will of God in his relationship with her.
13. In the providence of God, Jacob moved to Padan-aram, and God put him there because God was working in his life and Jacob had many lessons to learn.
14. Though God certainly directed Jacob to Padan-aram, I do not think God directed Jacob to marry Rachel. While Genesis 24 is very clear that it was God's will for Isaac to marry Rebekah, it is not at all clear in Genesis 29 that it was God's will for Jacob to marry Rachel.
15. When Abraham's servant went to get a wife for Isaac, he prayed often for God's direction (cf. 24:12-15, 26, 27, 48, 52).
16. But we do not see Jacob praying for God's guidance here in Genesis 29. Jacob was so full of self-confidence that he didn't even think to pray. Jacob was totally disinterested in God's will.

*Ere you left your room this morning,
Did you think to pray?
In the name of Christ our Savior,*

*Did you sue for loving favor,
As a shield today?* – Mary A. Kidder

17. It should be remembered that a big part of the Abrahamic Covenant was that it was through Abraham's seed that the Messiah would come, and that through Him all the nations of the earth would be blessed.
18. But the seed came through Judah, the son of Leah, not Rachel.
19. Furthermore, Jacob married Leah first. Rachel was his second wife and nowhere in the Bible does God approve of polygamy.
20. Some would object at this point and say that Jacob only married Leah because he was deceived by Laban. This is true but God allowed it to happen to teach him a lesson. The deceiver was now being deceived.
21. Jacob received his father's blessing by deception but God allowed that to happen because it was always God's plan for Jacob to receive the blessing. And it is quite possible that it was always God's intention for Leah to be Jacob's wife.
22. Right from the beginning, there were warning signs about Rachel. Relationships that are based primarily on physical attraction seldom work out. This is why most Hollywood marriages do not last very long.
23. There has to be more to marriage than just physical attraction. But Jacob was a headstrong man, and he was enamored with Rachel, and apparently he did not consider that. Jacob was determined to have Rachel, and nothing else seem to matter.
24. After meeting Jacob, Rachel went and told the news to her father Laban, and Laban at once came out to meet Jacob, and he gave him a warm welcome (29:12, 13).
25. Laban seemed genuinely delighted to welcome his nephew Jacob into his home. It was about one month after Jacob arrived in Haran that Laban approached him to see if they could work out a mutually acceptable wage arrangement (29:14, 15).
26. Genesis 29:18 says that Jacob loved Rachel and offered to serve Laban seven years for her hand in marriage. One month is hardly enough time for a man and a woman to get to know each other well enough to make a lifelong commitment.
27. Richard Strauss said, "True love requires thorough knowledge. To profess to love someone we do not know intimately is merely to love our mental image of that person. And if he does not measure up to our mental image, then our so-called 'love' turns to disillusionment and resentment, and sometimes to hatred."

II. JACOB WAS DECEIVED AT PADAN-ARAM

1. Though Laban was very friendly and hospitable, he was a deceiver, and he deceived Jacob many times. In Padan-aram, the tables were turned on Jacob, and he was hoodwinked by his father-in-law Laban.
2. Jacob deceived his brother Esau, and he deceived his father Isaac. Now Jacob was about to be deceived repeatedly by his crafty father-in-law Laban – he would suffer for over twenty years!
3. Jacob told Laban that he would serve him seven years for Rachel, Laban's younger daughter, and to this Laban agreed, saying that he would much prefer giving Rachel to him than to a stranger (29:16-19).
4. For seven long years Jacob worked hard for Laban, and verse 20 says “they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.”
5. When the seven years were finally over, Jacob asked Laban for the fulfilment of his promise, and Laban made a wedding feast (29:21, 22). Back in those days, wedding feasts usually lasted about a week.
6. But that evening, Laban pulled a fast one on Jacob. The deceiver was deceived (29:23-25).
7. According to Eastern custom, Laban brought his daughter veiled to the wedding ceremony. Jacob thought he was marrying Rachel, but “it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah” (29:25).
8. When we think of Jacob's predicament, we are reminded of Galatians 6:7, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” Jacob deceived his father, and now his father-in-law deceived him.
9. Jacob was reaping what he had sown, or as they say down on the farm, “The chickens were coming home to roost.”
10. When I was a boy, they'd say, “He's getting a taste of his own medicine!”
11. Jacob went to his father and pretended to be the elder. Now he thought he was getting the younger but he got the elder! He tricked his father, and now his father-in-law tricked him. This is referred to as “poetic justice.”

12. The Bible says, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Numbers 32:23).
13. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, “Laban is seen to be the equal of his clever sister Rebekah, and Jacob is being paid back with the family coin” (*Genesis*).
14. Back in 1885, Andrew Murray wrote a wonderful book called, *With Christ in the School of Prayer*. Jacob did not attend that school until Genesis chapter 32. But first, Jacob had to learn from his uncle Laban in “the school of deceit.” God wanted to show Jacob just how rotten, and just how wicked, and just how awful it is to deceive people.
15. Regarding Jacob’s sufferings in Padan-aram, they were not punitive, but disciplinary. Jacob had to learn the hard way. His old carnal tendencies needed to be corrected; his old weaknesses had to be made strong; and his old faults needed to be removed (Thomas, *Genesis*).
16. Later on, Jacob complained to his sons, “All these things are against me” (42:36), but actually God was working for Jacob.
17. After working for Laban for twenty years, Jacob seems to have had his fill of trickery and deceit. He said to Rachel and Leah, “Your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me” (31:7). Jacob learned how terrible it is to deceive people! And Jacob finally acknowledged God’s providence.
18. Leah apparently went along with her father’s deception since she had no real power to resist his will. Furthermore, she herself may have had strong feelings for Jacob and may have been happy to replace Rachel.
19. Laban told Jacob that it was not customary in their country that the younger daughter should be married before the first-born (29:26). Laban is like a crooked businessman who pulls out the contract and says, “Didn’t you read that little clause in the small print?”
20. Of course, Jacob should have been told about this local custom at the very beginning, before he agreed to work seven years for Rachel.
21. To add to the confusion, Laban proposed that Jacob agree to serve him an additional seven years for Rachel (29:27-30).

22. Jacob loved Rachel so much that he accepted Laban's offer, but Jacob was wrong to have two wives. And when you add in the two handmaidens, Bilhah and Zilpah, Jacob actually had four wives (cf. 30:4, 9).
23. But the Bible does not approve of polygamy. Polygamy was tolerated, but never accepted in the Old Testament. We do not see it practiced at all in the New Testament.
24. Polygamy was never sanctioned by God. Leviticus 18:18 says, "Neither shalt thou take a wife to her sister, to vex her, to uncover her nakedness, beside the other in her life time (while the other is alive)."
25. Many commentators, such as Matthew Poole and Albert Barnes, have pointed out that marrying two sisters is not only contrary to the law of God, but is also contrary to the law of nature.
26. By the way, homosexuality is also contrary to the law of God, as well as contrary to the law of nature. Romans 1:26 says, "for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature."
27. Our Lord said, "But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain (two, not three or four, etc.) shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh"(Mark 10:6-8).
28. Anything else (polygamy, adultery, fornication, homosexuality, etc.) is a sinful in the eyes of God.
29. Those who violate God's principles of marriage suffer the consequences. Regarding polygamy, David and his son Solomon are two notable examples of men who suffered because of multiple wives.
30. Another example would be Elkanah and his two wives, recorded in I Samuel 1. Hannah, Samuel's mother, was taunted by her husband Elkanah's other wife Peninnah (cf. I Sam. 1:1-6).
31. And of course, Jacob suffered greatly because of his two wives (cf. Genesis 30:1, 2). Polygamy always brings heartache and trouble.
32. I believe Jacob should have accepted his marriage to Leah as the will of God for his life and learned to love her, and her alone.

33. Jacob's father, Isaac, accepted the consequences of his deceit when Jacob impersonated his brother Esau and stole the family blessing.
34. In like manner, Jacob should have accepted what happened as coming from the sovereign hand of God. But Jacob was not willing to believe that God was in control of these circumstances.
35. Jacob had to keep Leah because he was married to her and had consummated the marriage (cf. 29:21b, 23).
36. But Jacob did not have to marry Rachel. Though he considered Rachel his "wife" (29:21) because they were engaged, their engagement was broken by Laban's deception.
37. But Jacob was determined to have what he wanted in spite of God's will. "Rachel was beautiful and well favoured" (29:17), and verses 18 and 20 refer to Jacob's passionate feelings for Rachel, which he would not let go.

III. JACOB STARTED HIS FAMILY AT PADAN-ARAM

1. Being married to two wives soon brought its inevitable results. Jacob preferred Rachel and he resented Leah (29:30, 31).
2. But even in this unhappy home we can see the overruling hand of God. Like most men, Jacob wanted a son. But when God saw Jacob's partiality for Rachel, He deliberately closed up her womb and opened Leah's womb (29:31).
3. The LORD compensated Leah for the lack of her husband's affections by giving her four sons, while Rachel was barren.
4. Leah's son Judah and his descendants became the kingly tribe and the head tribe.
5. The descendants of Leah's son Levi became the priestly tribe.
6. The LORD taught Jacob and his wives some important lessons in connection with the birth of their children. Leah may have been a willing accomplice in her father's deceitful scheme, but apparently she knew the LORD (29:32-35).
7. She gave her sons names that honored God –

- (1) Reuben – “See, a son” (29:32). “Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me.”
- (2) Simeon – “Hearing” (29:33). “Because the LORD hath heard I was hated.”
- (3) Levi – “Joined” (29:34). “Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons.”
- (4) Judah – “Praise” (29:35). “Now will I praise the LORD.”

8. Leah realized that the hand of God was being put forth on her behalf, and she trusted that through the birth of her sons Jacob's feelings towards her would be changed (29:32-35).
9. It is noteworthy that it was Leah, not Rachel, who was the mother of the promised seed (29:35). The Lord Jesus Christ is descended from the tribe of Judah. In Revelation 5:5, the Lord Jesus is called “the Lion of the tribe of Juda.”
10. “Judah” means “praise.” Albert Barnes said, “Well may she praise the LORD; for this is the ancestor of the promised seed. It is remarkable that the wife of priority, but not of preference, is the mother of the seed in whom all nations are to be blessed.”
11. In the pressure of that improper relationship, Rachel’s carnal character began to surface. She was jealous that her sister Leah was bearing Jacob children and she was not, and she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or else I die” (Genesis 30:1, 2).
12. Rachel was basically saying, “If I can’t have my own way, I’d rather be dead.” Rachel was carnal, envious, selfish, peevish, discontented, and demanding. Sadly, many wives are like that!
13. But having children in the home did not necessarily mean having peace in the home, as we see with the continual envy and jealousy of the two sisters, Rachel and Leah (cf. 30:1).
14. These bitter family feuds had a terrible influence upon the temperaments of the children, and we see this very clearly later on when they grew into maturity.
15. “Reuben, thou art...unstable as water, thou shalt not excel” (Genesis 49:4).
16. Simeon and Levi are...instruments of cruelty...self-willed, angry, fierce, wrathful, cruel (Genesis 49:5-7).

17. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "There could not be righteousness, holiness, and peace amid such untoward surroundings. When there is trouble between parents, the children must necessarily suffer...As we review the whole story we are impressed more and more with the sadness of it all. It started with Laban's deception combined with Leah's co-operation; and although perhaps it would have been impossible for Jacob to have sustained any protest against this action, we can see the result of it in the years of sorrow and chastening that came to him and all the actors in this unhappy domestic tragedy. Where the home life is not full of love and peace, there can be no true witness for God or genuine helpfulness to one another" (*Genesis*).

CONCLUSION:

1. There is an old proverb:

Though the mills of God grind slowly; Yet they grind exceeding small;

Though with patience He stands waiting, With exactness grinds He all.

2. Jacob deceived his brother Esau, and his father Isaac, and then he wound up being deceived by his father-in-law Laban in Padan-aram.
3. W.H. Griffith Thomas calls this, "the harmonious and beneficent combination of circumstances guided and overruled by the wisdom and will of God."
4. God put Jacob through many difficult trials while he was in Padan-aram. And after twenty years, the LORD told Jacob it was time to return to the land of Abraham and Isaac – the promised land.
5. God puts us through trials and testings but they eventually end.
6. If God is putting you through one now, do not fret –God is in control.
7. James 1:2 says, "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (trials)."
8. Just make sure you are saved, because none of the trials and troubles in this world can be compared to eternity in hell!