

Genesis 29: Jacob in Haran

Forestgate Presbyterian Church ~ October 21, 2012

This chapter begins after Jacob's vision and concludes with the birth of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah—approximately **11** years.

About **170** years have passed since God's promises to Abram in Genesis 12.

God's promises at Bethel provide **comfort** to Jacob for the long journey to Haran, and also for the **trials** he will encounter during the next twenty years.

We will see once again that in spite of the **evil intentions** of man, God's will prevails.

The strife that we saw in Isaac's household is about to be **multiplied** in Jacob's household.

- between Leah and Rachel
- between Zilpah and Bilhah
- between Jacob and Laban
- between Jacob and Laban's sons
- between Laban and his daughters

Favoritism once again plays a significant role in the family's strife—first with Jacob's wives, and later with his **children**.

There is a parallel between the servant's encounter with Rebekah at the well and Jacob's encounter with Rachel—but the latter meeting is noticeably lacking in **prayer**.

As a stranger in a strange land, Jacob greets the shepherds at the well **courteously**.

God's providence is evident in the shepherds' **acquaintance** with Laban, which was immediately followed by Rachel's appearance at the well.

Jacob evidently displayed a feat of strength by **moving** the stone from the well.

Rachel's name means **sheep/ewe**. Leah's name means wild **cow** or **ox**.

As Rebekah watered Abraham's camels, now Jacob waters Laban's sheep.

Jacob's service in watering Laban's sheep at the first is an indication of how he **served** in the weeks that followed.

Laban's greeting ("Surely you are my bone and my flesh") is telling when we realize how eager Laban was to deceive Jacob. Laban has no scruples about cheating his own family.

Laban and Jacob had a very clear agreement: seven years of service in exchange for **Rachel**.

Although Laban frequently schemes to defraud Jacob, he will nevertheless receive the fruit of Jacob's blessing—**material prosperity**.

As time goes by, Jacob is able to discern God's **providence** in overriding Laban's deception.

The deception of Isaac by Jacob occurred when Isaac was **blind**; Laban's deception of Jacob occurs in the **dark**. Both men were in for a big surprise.

In order for Laban to deceive Jacob, his daughters had to be part of the plot. They were both **defrauded** along with Jacob.

"This was Laban's sin; he wronged both Jacob and Rachel, whose affections, doubtless, were engaged to each other, and, if (as some say) Leah was herein no better than an adulteress, it was no small wrong to her too." —Matthew Henry

The unfolding narrative suggests that Leah loved Jacob. Just as the unloved son was brought to his father in place of his brother, so the unloved woman was brought in place of her sister.

Another parallel we might notice is that the **parents** were leading their children into sin.

Leah's affection for Jacob may have made her more willing to deceive him, yet she was grieved that Jacob did not return her affection—except for the short time that Jacob believed she was Rachel.

Laban's appeal to tradition was **disingenuous** even if it was accurate. Along with the week-long feast, the end result was to **ridicule** Jacob.

"We have reason to think there was no such custom of his country as he pretends; only he banters Jacob with it, and laughs at his mistake." —Matthew Henry

Giving Leah away by deception may have been a convenient way for Laban to marry off an **unwanted** daughter.

Laban's treatment of his daughters suggests that he was eager to get rid of them. He evidently had no intention of providing them an **inheritance**.

The accounts of Leah, Rachel, Bilhah, and Zilpah show God's sovereignty in **childbearing**.

Leah's womb was **thrown open** (*pathach*) while Rachel was **sterile** (*aqar*).

Leah's fertility and Rachel's sterility seem to be a form of divine **compensation**.

Reuben = "a son"
Simeon = "heard"
Levi = "attached"
Judah = "praise"

Here is the drama: Leah bearing sons and hoping to win Jacob's favor; Rachel becoming envious and bearing sons through Bilhah to get back at Leah; Leah striking back by giving Zilpah to Jacob; Leah trading her mandrakes to Rachel for a night with Jacob . . . and the drama only deepens with the next generation . . .