

Genesis Lesson 18: Genesis 29-31

Lecture

- The story of Jacob and Laban might easily be titled “A Deceiver is Deceived.”
 - Laban’s double dealing with Jacob is only 1 theme running through this week’s lesson.
 - Other themes might be:
 - How Jacob builds an inheritance in Paddan-Aram.
 - What role Leah and Rachel played in their father’s deception.
 - Rachel’s and Leah’s ability to produce children, or a lack thereof, colored their relationships.
 - Family disharmony.
- 2 major incidents tell of Laban’s double-dealing with Jacob.
 - The first incidence involves Jacob’s marriage to Leah and Rachel, from the section of Genesis 29 in verses 15-30.
 - After Jacob had been with Laban and his family for a month, Laban says to Jacob in Genesis 29: 15, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?”
 - This is our first clue that Laban does not view Jacob’s position in the family on equal footing with his sons.
 - Like everyone else in the family, Jacob was expected to pull his weight with the family’s herding chores.
 - Nevertheless, Jacob is not Laban’s son, so he does not stand to inherit anything from Laban.
 - Laban views Jacob as nothing more than a hired servant.

- Jacob really wanted to marry Rachel, who is described as beautiful in form and appearance.
- Unfortunately, Jacob left Canaan with nothing. He may have cheated Esau out of his birthright, but he has nothing to show for it in Paddan-Aram.
- Jacob cannot pay the bride price for Rachel. Therefore, he rather foolishly proposes working for Laban for seven years, presumably without wages, although he later states in Genesis 31:6 that Laban has changed his wages 10 times.
- We might ask, “Why 7 years?” It could be that in Jacob’s mind, Rachel’s bride price was worth 7 years of servant’s wages. Alternatively, he might have wanted to delay returning to Canaan, hoping that Esau will have forgotten his threat to kill Jacob or Esau will have died in the interim.
- Jacob specifically asks for Rachel. Laban replies, “It is better that I give *her* to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.”
- Most commentators agree that, by not specifically mentioning Rachel by name, Laban is laying the groundwork for his future substitution of Rachel with Leah.
- When Jacob says to Laban in Genesis 29:21, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed,” notice that Jacob does not specifically name Rachel and Laban does not reply.
- Laban just gathers people together for the wedding feast and presents Leah to Jacob later that evening.
- Leah was probably veiled, the tent was dark, and Jacob may have had too much to drink.
- Regardless, the next morning he realizes that he has bedded Leah instead of Rachel and he now accuses Laban of deceiving him.
- Laban then casually replies, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷ Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” Genesis 29:26-27

- Laban has casually cheated Jacob out of his preferred bride, stuck him with the unwanted Leah, and forced him into another 7 years of servitude.
- Laban's next incidence of cheating Jacob is related in Genesis 30:25-36.
 - After Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob was ready to take his large family and move back to Canaan. It is time to claim the promises of God from his dream in Genesis 28 and God's command in Genesis 31:3.
 - Laban, on the other hand, does not want to let Jacob leave for multiple reasons.
 - He does not want to see his 2 daughters and his grandchildren move to Canaan where he will likely never see them again.
 - Laban does not want to lose Jacob's labor and also the labor of Leah, Rachel, and his older grandsons. Laban has benefited greatly during Jacob's tenure as his servant.
 - Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. ³⁰ For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned." Genesis 30:29-30
 - Laban again proposes paying Jacob wages for his work. Jacob refuses the offer stating that he will just build his own herd from Laban's spotted and speckled sheep and goats and black lambs, whose hides and wool would have customarily been viewed as inferior. (In the Mediterranean world, the sheep are normally white, and the goats are black.)
 - Laban cheats Jacob by removing all the spotted and speckled sheep and goats and the black lambs from Laban's flocks and pastures them 3 days away from the flock that Jacob must pasture.
 - Nevertheless, God prospers Jacob.

- The next theme is how Jacob built an inheritance while in Paddan-Aram.
 - Jacob earned only meager wages working for Laban.
 - He is clearly concerned about supporting his large family when he says in Genesis 30:30b, “But now when shall I provide for my own household also?”
 - Jacob must have quickly realized that Laban had cheated him out of the spotted and speckled sheep and goats and the black lambs.
 - Therefore, he attempts some selective breeding techniques.
 - Jacob is successful in producing his desired flocks, per his agreement with Laban.
 - Genesis 30:43 states, “Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.”
 - We have already said that Jacob’s faith in God needed maturing.
 - We do not see anywhere in Genesis 30 that Jacob is giving God the credit for his prosperity.
 - However, in Genesis 31, Jacob tells Rachel and Leah that their father has cheated him, but it was God who made his flocks bear spotted, striped, and mottled sheep and goats.
 - “But the God of my father has been with me. ⁶ You know that I have served your father with all my strength, ⁷ yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. But God did not permit him to harm me. ⁸ If he said, The spotted shall be your wages,’ then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, ‘The striped shall be your wages,’ then all the flock bore striped. ⁹ Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me. ¹⁰ In the breeding season of the flock I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled. ¹¹ Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob,’ and I said, ‘Here I am!’ ¹² And he said, ‘Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.” Genesis 31:5-12

- What role did Leah and Rachel play in their father's marriage deception?
 - We have no way of knowing because scripture is silent on this.
 - Typically, daughters had no say in marriage negotiations. The parents controlled everything.
 - We get a small clue from the passage in Genesis 31:14-15.
 - Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? ¹⁵ Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money."
 - Rachel and Leah may be reiterating that there was no bride price paid for them, other than Jacob's manual labor and now they have no inheritance.
 - The women would have expected some portion of a bride price would be theirs, much as Rebekah received gold and silver jewelry and garments from Abraham's servant.
- Rachel's barrenness and Leah's period of infertility colored their relationship with each other and with Jacob.
 - Rachel's barrenness continues a theme that began with Sarai.
 - In Genesis, the barrenness of these women is used to demonstrate God's sovereignty and his power, as he used both to fulfill his covenantal promises.
 - In their barrenness, these women also had to learn lessons of faith in God and patience on his timing.
 - A biological reason may have also played a part here. All 3 women came from endogamous communities where intermarriage with close relatives was practiced (Abraham with his half-sister Sarah; Isaac and Jacob with 1st cousins.)
 - Endogamy can restrict genetic variation, leading over time to genetic disorders and even infertility.
 - Leah was not initially infertile. Her later period of infertility may be due to the cessation of marital relations with Jacob, as she later bore Issachar and Zebulun.

- When each was infertile, both women resorted to the practice of giving their maids as slave-wives to Jacob.
- Rachel blamed Jacob for her infertility, even though he was not the cause since Leah had already produced 4 sons.
- Remember that culturally, infertility was a cause of shame and failure. When Rachel finally conceives, she says in Genesis 30: 23, “God has taken away my reproach.”
- It is ironic that Rachel lets Leah lie with Jacob in exchange for the mandrakes that Leah’s son Reuben had dug. Mandrakes were assumed to enhance fertility or virility. Rachel wants to conceive but it is Leah who conceived.
- “And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.” Genesis 30:17
- Family Disharmony
 - The family disharmony started with Jacob’s relationship with his wives.
 - Leah is characterized as someone with “weak eyes” or “light eyes,” according to one’s translation.
 - Most commentators suggest this means her eyes had no fire or sparkle, a characteristic which was prized in the Middle East.
 - Nevertheless, Jacob clearly preferred Rachel over her. He was willing to work 14 years at servant’s wages for Rachel.
 - Even though Genesis 29:30 says that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, Leah clearly did not feel that love.
 - Leah states that Jacob hated her, did not feel attached to her, and did not honor her.
 - Leah accused her sister of stealing Jacob from her.
 - When Rachel accused Jacob of being the cause of her infertility, Jacob was angry with Rachel.

- Lastly, we should consider the 2 maids Zilpah and Bilhah. Their names are never mentioned again after Genesis 35.
- Bilhah is further shamed when Reuben, Jacob and Leah's son, had intercourse with her. (Genesis 35:22) This was a power play on Reuben's part.
- The only consolation Zilpah and Bilhah would have is that they produced 4 sons. These sons would have descendants from whom 4 of the 12 tribes of Israel would come after the exile in Egypt.
- Another piece of family disharmony is the relationship Jacob had with Laban and Laban's sons.
- "Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth." ² And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before." Genesis 31:1-2
- Laban feared both Jacob's increase wealth and power and he feared for his daughters.
- This fear resulted in the covenant between the 2 men as outlined in Genesis 31:45-54.
- "So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. ⁴⁶ And Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. ⁴⁷ Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸ Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." Therefore he named it Galeed, ⁴⁹ and Mizpah, for he said, "The LORD watch between you and me, when we are out of one another's sight. ⁵⁰ If you oppress my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me." ⁵¹ Then Laban said to Jacob, "See this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me. ⁵² This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm. ⁵³ The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, ⁵⁴ and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country."

- As we have already noted, the family disharmony bled over into Rachel's and Leah's relationship with their father.
- "Are we not regarded by him as foreigners?" Genesis 31:15
- Rachel was willing to brave her father's anger when she stole the family's household gods.

The righteous hate what is false, but the wicked make themselves a stench and bring shame on themselves. Proverbs 13:5

1. Read Genesis 29:1-14a.

a. Where had Jacob traveled?

Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east.
Genesis 29:1

b. What did he find upon his arrival according to verses 2-3?

As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it, for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, ³ and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well. Genesis 29:2-3

c. What is Jacob's conversation with the shepherds?

Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." ⁵ He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him." ⁶ He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!" ⁷ He said, "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go, pasture them." ⁸ But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep." Genesis 29:4-8

d. Who is Rachel and what was her occupation?

Rachel was a shepherdess. She was the daughter of Laban, his mother Rebekah's brother.

e. What did Jacob do for Rachel?

Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother.
Genesis 29:10

- f. What was Jacob's reaction to Rachel and what did he tell her?
Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. ¹² And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father. Genesis 29:11-12
- g. What did Rachel do?
She ran and told her father about Jacob.
- h. What was Laban's response?
As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, ¹⁴ and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month. Genesis 29:13-14
- i. Can you figure out the genetic relationship between Jacob and Rachel?
They were 1st cousins.

2. Read Genesis 29:14b-30.

- a. What did Laban tell Jacob?
Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" Genesis 29:15
- b. How are Laban's 2 daughters described?
Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel. Genesis 29:16-18
- c. Which daughter did Jacob prefer?
Rachel
- d. What was Jacob's response to Laban's question in verse 15?
And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Genesis 29:18
- e. What does Laban say?
Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." Genesis 29:19

- f. What does Jacob do next?

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

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” Genesis 29:20-21

- g. How does Laban fulfill his commitment to Jacob?

So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. ²³ But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. ²⁴ (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) ²⁵ And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! Genesis 29:22-25

- h. What was Jacob’s response?

And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” Genesis 29:25

- i. What was Laban’s reply?

Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷ Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” Genesis 29:26-27

- j. What did Jacob do?

Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. ²⁹ (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) ³⁰ So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. Genesis 29:28-30

- k. Which wife did Jacob prefer?

Rachel

3. Read Genesis 29:31-35.

- a. What did the Lord do for Leah?

When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Genesis 29:31

- b. What does the passage say about Rachel?

Rachel was barren.

- c. What were the names of Leah's children?
Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah
- d. What did she say after the birth of each child?
And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, **"Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me."** ³³ She conceived again and bore a son, and said, **"Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also."** And she called his name Simeon. ³⁴ Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, **"Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons."** Therefore his name was called Levi. ³⁵ **And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the LORD."** Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing. Genesis 29:32-35
- e. Why do you think Leah's comment about the 4th son is different?
I think that Leah had become reconciled to the fact that Jacob did not love her. She chose to praise the Lord for giving her 4 sons.

4. Read Genesis 30:1-22.

- a. What was Rachel's reaction to Leah's many children?
When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, **"Give me children, or I shall die!"** Genesis 30:1
- b. What was Jacob's response?
Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, **"Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"** Genesis 30:2
- c. What was Rachel's solution?
Then she said, **"Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her."** ⁴ So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. Genesis 30:3-4

- d. What were the names of the next 2 sons and what did Rachel say after each birth?
- Dan and Naphtali
 - And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. ⁶ Then Rachel said, “**God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son.**” Therefore she called his name Dan. ⁷ Rachel’s servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸ Then Rachel said, “**With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed.**” So she called his name Naphtali. Genesis 30:5-8
- e. What did Leah do next?
- When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Genesis 30:9
- f. What were the names of the next 2 sons and what did Leah say after each birth?
- Gad and Asher
 - Then Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹ And Leah said, “**Good fortune has come!**” so she called his name Gad. ¹² Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. ¹³ And Leah said, “**Happy am I! For women have called me happy.**” So she called his name Asher. Genesis 30:10-13
- g. What do you think Bilhah and Zilpah thought about the arrangements?
- Their station of life had certainly improved as they moved from maids to wives.
 - They probably did not like being surrogates for Rachel and Leah.
- h. What does the story of the mandrakes suggest about their use?
- Their suggested use was a means to increase female fertility.
- i. What do you notice about the relationship between Leah and Rachel at this point?
- Then Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.” ¹⁵ But she said to her, “Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Genesis 30:14-15
 - The jealousy and bitterness between the 2 women continued and their relationship was openly hostile.

- j. What does God do for Leah?
And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Genesis 30:17
- k. What are the names of the next 3 children and what did Leah say after the birth of the son?
- Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah
 - Leah said, “**God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband.**” So she called his name Issachar. ¹⁹ And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. ²⁰ Then Leah said, “**God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons.**” So she called his name Zebulun. ²¹ Afterward she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah. Genesis 30:18-21
- l. Why do you think Leah didn’t comment after the birth of her daughter?
Sons were prized in the culture and only sons could inherit.
- m. What did God do for Rachel?
Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. Genesis 30:22
- n. What was this child’s name and what was Rachel’s response?
She conceived and bore a son and said, “**God has taken away my reproach.**” ²⁴ And she called his name Joseph, saying, “**May the LORD add to me another son!**” Genesis 30:23-24
5. Read Genesis 30:25-43.
- a. What does Jacob want to do?
As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. ²⁶ Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you.” Genesis 30:25-26
- b. What was Laban’s response?
But Laban said to him, “If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you. ²⁸ Name your wages, and I will give it.” Genesis 30:27-28

- c. What does verse 27 suggest about Laban's religious practices?

He was a pagan who practiced superstitious religious practices.

- d. What does Jacob want for his wages?

Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. ³⁰ For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?" ³¹ He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "**You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it: ³² let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages.**" ³³ So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen." ³⁴ Laban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said." Genesis 30:29-34

- e. What does Laban do next?

But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge of his sons. ³⁶ And he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock. Genesis 30:35-36

- f. How does Jacob deal with the situation?

Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. ³⁸ He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, ³⁹ the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. ⁴⁰ And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban's flock. ⁴¹ Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks, ⁴² but for the feebler of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feebler would be Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. ⁴³ Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys. Genesis 30:37-43

- g. Which animals did Jacob keep for himself and which animals went to Laban?
So the feebler would be Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. Genesis 30:42
 - h. How successful did Jacob become?
Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys. Genesis 30:43
6. Read Genesis 31:1-21.
- a. What was Jacob's relationship with Laban and his sons at this point?
Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth."² And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before. Genesis 31:1-2
 - b. What did the Lord tell Jacob?
Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you." Genesis 31:3
 - c. What did Jacob tell Rachel and Leah?
So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was⁵ and said to them, "I see that your father does not regard me with favor as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me."⁶ You know that I have served your father with all my strength,⁷ yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. But God did not permit him to harm me.⁸ If he said, 'The spotted shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped.⁹ Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me. Genesis 31:4-9
 - d. Describe Jacob's dream.
In the breeding season of the flock I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled.¹¹ Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!'¹² And he said, 'Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.'¹³ I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred.'" Genesis 31:10-13

- e. What was Rachel and Leah's response?

Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? ¹⁵ Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money. ¹⁶ All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do." Genesis 31:14-16

- f. What did Jacob do next?

So Jacob arose and set his sons and his wives on camels. ¹⁸ He drove away all his livestock, all his property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. Genesis 31:17-18

- g. How did Jacob and Rachel deceive Laban?

Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods. ²⁰ And Jacob tricked Laban the Aramean, by not telling him that he intended to flee. ²¹ He fled with all that he had and arose and crossed the Euphrates, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead. Genesis 31:19-21

- h. What does verse 19 tell you about Laban's religious practices and about Rachel's beliefs?

They were pagan polytheists.

7. Read Genesis 31:22-55.

- a. What did Laban do next?

When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, ²³ he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him for seven days and followed close after him into the hill country of Gilead. Genesis 31:22-23

- b. What did God say to Laban?

But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad." Genesis 31:24

- c. What did Laban have to say to Jacob when he found him?
And Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen pitched tents in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁶ And Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? ²⁷ Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? ²⁸ And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly. ²⁹ It is in my power to do you harm. But the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, ‘Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.’ ³⁰ And now you have gone away because you longed greatly for your father’s house, but why did you steal my gods?” Genesis 31:25-30
- d. Why did Laban ignore God’s words?
Laban was enraged that Jacob fled away secretly with his flocks, Laban’s daughters, his grandchildren, and his household gods.
- e. What was Jacob’s response?
Jacob answered and said to Laban, “Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. ³² Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours, and take it.” Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. Genesis 31:31-32
- f. How did Rachel deceive her father again?
So Laban went into Jacob’s tent and into Leah’s tent and into the tent of the two female servants, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah’s tent and entered Rachel’s. ³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel’s saddle and sat on them. Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them. ³⁵ And she said to her father, “Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me.” So he searched but did not find the household gods. Genesis 31:33-35

- g. What statements does Jacob make to Laban about his years in Haran?

Then Jacob became angry and berated Laban. Jacob said to Laban, “What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? ³⁷ For you have felt through all my goods; what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two.

³⁸ **These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. ³⁹ What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. ⁴⁰**

There I was: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. ⁴¹ **These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. ⁴² If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed.** God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night.” Genesis 31:36-42

- h. What solution does Laban suggest?

Then Laban answered and said to Jacob, “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day for these my daughters or for their children whom they have borne? ⁴⁴ Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I. And let it be a witness between you and me.” ⁴⁵ So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. ⁴⁶ And Jacob said to his kinsmen, “Gather stones.” And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. ⁴⁷ Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸ Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today.” Therefore he named it Galeed, ⁴⁹ and Mizpah, for he said, “The LORD watch between you and me, when we are out of one another’s sight. ⁵⁰ If you oppress my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me.”

⁵¹ Then Laban said to Jacob, “See this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me. ⁵² This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm. ⁵³ The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.” So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, ⁵⁴ and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country. Genesis 31:43-54

- i. What names were given the place and how was it marked?
- Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed (and Mizpah).
Genesis 31:47 and 48
 - So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. Genesis 31:45
 - And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap.
Genesis 31:46
- j. What were the terms of the covenant?
- Jacob could not oppress Laban's daughters or take other wives.
 - Neither man would cross past the heap and pillar to do the other harm.
- k. What did Jacob do to solemnize his agreement?
- So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac, ⁵⁴ and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country. Genesis 31:53-54

Genesis Lesson 18

Genesis 29 - 31

A Deceiver Is Deceived

- Themes:

- Laban's Double-Dealing with Jacob
- How Jacob Builds an Inheritance in Paddan-Aram
- What Role Rachel and Leah Played in Their Father's Deception
- Rachel's and Leah's Infertility/Fertility Colored Their Relationships
- Family Disharmony

Jacob Meets Rachel and Leah



Jacob's Encounter with Rachel (and Leah); Raphael;
1518-1519; Raphael Loggia, Vatican Apostolic Palace,
Vatican City, Italy

Laban's Double-Dealing with Jacob

- Genesis 29: 15-30: Jacob's Marriages
 - Genesis 29:15 Gives Us a Clue that Jacob Does Not View Jacob's Position in the Family on Equal Footing with His Sons
 - Jacob Was Expected to Pull His Weight
 - Jacob Does Not Stand to Inherit Anything from Laban
 - Laban Views Jacob as a Hired Servant
 - Jacob Really Wanted to Marry Rachel

Laban's Double-Dealing with Jacob

- Genesis 29: 15-30: Jacob's Marriages
 - Jacob Left Canaan with Nothing, So He Cannot Pay the Bride Price for Rachel
 - He Foolishly Proposes Working for 7 Years for Rachel; Later Genesis 31:6 States that Laban Has Paid Him Some Wages
 - Why 7 Years?
 - Rachel Was Worth It
 - Maybe He Wanted to Put Time and Distance Between Himself and Esau

Laban's Double-Dealing with Jacob

- Genesis 29: 15-30: Jacob's Marriages
 - Jacob Specifically Asks for Rachel, but Laban's Reply Only Mentions "Her"
 - Laban Is Laying the Groundwork for His Future Substitution of Rachel with Leah
 - Genesis 29:21: "Give Me My Wife" Does Not Name Rachel and Laban Does Not Reply
 - Laban Gathers People for the Wedding Feast and Presents Leah to Jacob Later
 - Leah Was Probably Veiled, the Tent Was Dark, and Jacob May Have Had Too Much to Drink

Laban's Double-Dealing with Jacob

- Genesis 29: 15-30: Jacob's Marriages
 - Next Morning, Jacob Accuses Laban of Deceiving Him
 - Laban's Reply: Genesis 29:26-27; "Not Our Custom"
 - Laban Has Casually Cheated Jacob
 - Out of His Preferred Bride
 - Stuck Him with the Unwanted Leah
 - Forced Him Into Another 7 Years of Servitude

Laban's Double-Dealing with Jacob

- Genesis 30:25-36: The Flocks
 - After Joseph's Birth, Jacob Is Ready to Move Back to Canaan
 - To Claim the Promises of His Dream (Genesis 28)
 - To Follow God's Command (Genesis 31:3)
 - Laban Does Not Want Jacob to Leave
 - Does Not Want to See His 2 Daughters and Grandchildren Move to Canaan Forever
 - Does Not Want to Lose the Labor of Jacob, Rachel, Leah, and the Older Grandsons; He's Benefited Greatly from Jacob
 - Genesis 30:29-30

Laban's Double-Dealing with Jacob

- Genesis 30:25-36: The Flocks
 - Laban Proposes Paying Jacob Wages for His Work
 - Jacob Refuses, Saying He Will Build His Own Herd from the Inferior Goats and Lambs
 - Laban Cheats Jacob by Removing All the Spotted and Speckled Sheep and Goats and the Black Laban's from Laban's Flocks
 - Laban Pastures These Animals 3 Days Away from the Flock Jacob Pastures
 - Nevertheless, God Prospers Jacob

Jacob and Laban Divide the Flock



Jacob and Laban Divide the Flock; 5th Century Mosaic; Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome, Italy

How Jacob Built an Inheritance

- Jacob Earned Only Meager Wages Working for Laban
- Genesis 30:30b: Jacob Is Concerned about Supporting His Large Family
- Jacob Must Have Quickly Realized That Laban Had Cheated Him out of the Spotted and Speckled Sheep and Goats and the Black Lambs
- Jacob Attempts Some Selective Breeding Techniques; He Is Successful in Producing His Desired Flocks, Per His Agreement with Laban; Genesis 30:43

Leah and Rachel's Role in the Marriage Deception

- Scripture Is Silent on This
- Daughters Had No Say in Marriage Negotiations; Parents Controlled Everything
- A Small Clue in Genesis 31:14-15
- Rachel and Leah May Be Reiterating That No Bride Price Was Paid for Them Other Than Jacob's Manual Labor; Now They Have No Inheritance
- Women Would Have Expected to Keep Some of the Bride Price (See Rebekah and Abraham's Servant)

Rachel's Barrenness; Leah's Infertility

- Rachel's Barrenness and Leah's Period of Infertility Colored Their Relationship with Each Other and with Jacob
- Rachel's Barrenness Continues a Theme that Began with Sarai
- In Genesis, Barrenness Is Used to Demonstrate God's Sovereignty and Power; He Used Both to Fulfill His Covenantal Promises
- Barren Women Also Had to Learn Lessons of Faith in God and Patience on His Timing
- A Biological Reason for Their Barrenness: Endogamy
- Endogamy Can Restrict Genetic Variation, Leading to Genetic Disorders and Even Infertility

Rachel's Barrenness; Leah's Infertility

- Leah Was Not Initially Infertile; Her Later Period of Infertility May Be Due to Cessation of Marital Relations with Jacob
- Leah Later Bore Issachar and Zebulun
- When Each Woman Was Infertile, She Resorted to Giving Her Maid as a Slave-wife to Jacob
- Rachel Blamed Jacob for Infertility, Even Though Leah Had 4 Sons
- Culturally, Infertility Was a Cause of Shame and Failure; Genesis 30:23
- It Is Ironical That Rachel Lets Leah Lie with Jacob in Exchange for Mandrakes
- Mandrakes Were Assumed to Enhance Fertility or Virility
- Rachel Wants to Conceive But It Is Leah Who Conceived; Genesis 30:17

Family Disharmony

- The Family Disharmony Started with Jacob's Relationship with His Wives
- Leah Had "Weak Eyes" or "Light Eyes"; Eyes with No Fire or Sparkle, a Prized Characteristic
- Jacob Preferred Rachel over Leah and Worked 14 Years for Rachel
- Genesis 29:30: "Jacob Loved Rachel More than Leah"
- Leah Clearly Did Not Feel that Love

Family Disharmony

- Leah States: Jacob Hated Her; Jacob Did Not Feel Attached to Her; Jacob Did Not Honor Her
- Leah Accused Her Sister of Stealing Jacob from Her
- When Rachel Accused Jacob of Being the Cause of Her Infertility, Jacob Became Angry
- Consider the Maids Zilpah and Bilhah; Never Mentioned after Genesis 35
- Bilhah Is Further Shamed when Reuben, Jacob and Leah's Son, Had Intercourse with Her (Genesis 35:22); a Power Play on Reuben's Part
- These 2 Women's Only Consolation: 4 Sons Whose Descendants Will Produce 4 of the 12 Tribes of Israel

Family Disharmony

- A Final Piece: Jacob's Relationship with Laban and Laban's Sons; Genesis 31:1-2
- Laban Feared Jacob's Increase in Wealth and Power and He Feared for His Daughters
- This Resulted in the Covenant of Genesis 31:45-54
- The Family Disharmony Bled Over Into Rachel's and Leah's Relationship with Their Father; Genesis 31:15
- Rachel Was Willing to Brave Her Father's Anger When She Stole the Household gods

Jacob Wants to Flee to Canaan



Jacob Persuades Leah and Rachel to Flee from Laban; Peter Symonsz Potter; circa 1597; Catherine Convent Museum, Utrecht, The Netherlands; copyright: [www. Wikimedia.org](http://www.Wikimedia.org)

Laban Wants His Household gods



Laban Searching for His Stolen Household Gods; Bartolome Esteban Murillo; circa 1665-1670; copyright: Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Jacob and Laban Make a Covenant



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