

GENESIS 29:1-31:55

JACOB THE DECEIVER IS DECEIVED

Twenty years. That's how long Jacob will be away from home and we will cover it all this morning. When we left off last time Jacob was heading north toward Haran. At Bethel – out in the middle of nowhere – Jacob had a life-changing encounter with God. At that time God reaffirmed to him the covenant He had made previously with Abraham and Isaac. To mark this sacred spot, Jacob set up a pillar, a memorial, and then he made a vow to follow God. We left off wondering if this experience would really change Jacob for good. Up to this point Jacob hasn't shown much in the way of godly character. As we discussed last week the LORD used his and Rebekah's deceit of Isaac as the catalyst by which he moved Jacob far away from home to where God could teach Jacob some valuable life lessons. We have a lot of ground to cover, so let's jump right into our passage...

READ Genesis 29:1

As he makes his long journey north to Haran to his Uncle Laban's house, Jacob is probably wondering about his uncertain future. He's contemplating what God told him at Bethel. He's mulling over the situation with Esau back home. He has a lot on his mind. After several weeks of traveling Jacob nears the end of his 1000-mile journey.

READ Genesis 29:2-4

Jacob knows he must be getting close to his final destination. He sees this well and approaches it. He's thirsty from the journey. There are no signs telling him where he is. So, he stops at the well and asks a group of shepherds. Their response confirms that he is, in fact, near Haran, which is welcome news for this weary traveler!

READ Genesis 29:5

As we learn more about Laban later in this lesson, we'll understand why these shepherds give such a short response. Laban doesn't have a very good reputation. "Yeah, we know him alright!"

READ Genesis 29:6-8

Jacob inquires as to why this well has not been uncovered yet. He's probably thirsty. The reason the shepherds give him is that not all of the local shepherds have arrived with their flocks. They don't explain the reason behind the practice of waiting, but Jacob doesn't really care. He's not going to wait. He takes matters into his own hands.

READ Genesis 29:9

The hopeless romantic within me believes that, when Jacob sees Rachel, it is love at first sight. Notice what he does next...

READ Genesis 29:10

The author is driving home the point that Rachel is the daughter of his mother's brother, his Uncle Laban's daughter. And these flocks that she is tending also belong to his Uncle Laban. There is a strong family connection here. Well, Jacob is smitten with love and is eager to make a good first impression on Rachel. So, he goes over and uncovers the well all by himself and waters her flocks. This is the story of Rebekah at the well in reverse. Rachel is undoubtedly surprised at the attention she is receiving from this total stranger. None of these other guys standing nearby, her fellow shepherds, ever did that for her.

READ Genesis 29:11-12

Jacob greets Rachel with a kiss. This is not a romantic kiss but a customary way of greeting. Then he informs her that he is her distant relative, her Aunt Rebekah's son, her cousin. Hearing this, Rachel is unable to contain her excitement. She leaves her sheep and runs home to tell her father. You figure that Rachel's home couldn't have been far from the well because...

READ Genesis 29:13-14

Things start out pretty good for Jacob. He's found his Uncle Laban and seems to have hit it off pretty well with his family, especially Rachel. You could say that Laban lays out the red carpet for Jacob and makes him feel right at home. Well a month passes.

READ Genesis 29:15

Laban approaches Jacob and asks him what payment he wants in return for his help running his sheep business.

READ Genesis 29:16-17

Leah the oldest daughter may have been a nice girl, but apparently there is something wrong with her eyes. The text simply says that "her eyes were weak." Maybe she squinted or was near-sighted. The point is that it was Rachel and not Leah who Jacob was physically attracted to.

READ Genesis 29:18-19

Laban agrees to Jacob's terms. His reasoning is that he would rather that Rachel marry Jacob, who Laban knows comes from a good family, than some of the other guys around there. Well, as we are about to see, old Laban is a sneaky snake!

READ Genesis 29:20

Isn't that romantic? That's so sweet!

READ Genesis 29:21

Jacob says, "I've fulfilled my end of the bargain. Give me Rachel."

READ Genesis 29:22

Now comes the big wedding celebration. What a great love story, right? But Laban pulls a fast one on Jacob. The deceiver is himself deceived. Jacob finally meets his match.

READ Genesis 29:23-24

It's dark in the tent. His bride has a veil covering her face (tradition). Jacob thinks that he's making love to Rachel when in fact it's Leah. How do you suppose Jacob reacts when he realizes that he's been deceived?

READ Genesis 29:25-26

Laban defends his actions saying, "Hey that's just the way we do things around here!" Laban could have disclosed this little detail to Jacob seven years before. But instead he waits until now to tell him. What a great guy this Laban is! Laban continues...

READ Genesis 29:27-30

So now Jacob has two wives and their two servants, but Rachel is Jacob's true love.

READ Genesis 29:31-35

The LORD allows Leah to get pregnant. It says that "He opened her womb." Leah bears Jacob four sons – Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. Meanwhile, the same problem that befell Sarah and Rebekah previously, happens to Rachel. She is barren, unable to have children. And that's how Genesis Chapter 29 ends.

READ Genesis 30:1-2

Jacob has been doing everything he can to have children by Rachel, but it's been to no avail. For some reason Rachel lashes out at Jacob as though it's his fault that she's childless. So, we see a little tension, some animosity beginning to develop in this family.

John Phillips in his commentary says, "Jacob's home became a battlefield where two embittered women fought and struggled for Jacob's affection." In desperation Rachel does what Sarah had done years before when she couldn't bear children. She takes matters into her own hands. She has her servant girl act as a surrogate mother. It works. Bilhah her servant winds up bearing Jacob two sons – Dan and then later Naphtali.

Meanwhile Leah has stopped bearing children. She sees what Rachel did and she too offers Jacob her servant girl as a surrogate. Leah's servant Zilpah bears Jacob two sons as well – Gad and then later Asher. But the animosity between Rachel and Leah continues for years to come.

Eventually Leah is able to get pregnant. She bears Jacob a fifth son named Issachar. Then she gets pregnant again and bears Jacob a sixth son named Zebulun. Jacob now has a total of 10 sons – 6 by Leah and 2 each by the two servant girls.

You may be asking, "What about daughters?" Well, we know from later in Genesis Chapter 37 that Jacob has both sons and daughters. But only one daughter is mentioned by name in the Genesis account. Her name is Dinah. And it's at this point that Leah gives birth to Dinah. Why is Dinah mentioned and not any of the other daughters? In that ancient Middle East society, much like it is today, men were prominent. Males were the ones who received the family inheritance. The reason Dinah gets mentioned is that she will become an important character later in the story, in Genesis Chapter 34.

Poor Rachel. All these years she's painfully watched every other woman in Jacob's household get pregnant. She's been married to Jacob now for 14 years. One can only imagine how Rachel must feel – shame, inferiority, guilt, loneliness, heartache, and so forth. But finally the LORD intervenes...

READ Genesis 30:22-24

You can understand why Jacob favored Joseph, why Joseph was treated as extra special. He was Rachel's one and only son for years until she had Benjamin 16 years later. The birth of Joseph was a very happy occasion.

Jacob feels like his family is complete. He has now fulfilled his 14-year work obligation for Laban. Jacob is getting homesick. He's planning to return with his new family to the land of Canaan. Jacob goes to Laban and tells him of his intention to take his family and leave...

READ Genesis 30:25-28

Laban doesn't want Jacob to go. He doesn't want to part with his daughters and grandsons. You can understand where Laban is coming from and he knows how to speak Jacob's language – money. He tells Jacob, "Name your price." Even Laban, an idol-worshipping unbeliever that only cares about himself, recognizes that it is the LORD who has blessed Jacob and that blessing has trickled down to him.

Well, Jacob who has felt cheated by Laban through the years works out an agreement with Laban. All the current flocks belong to Laban. Jacob starts out with nothing. Here's the deal: All future brown sheep born of white sheep would be Jacob's. All of the spotted and speckled goats born of black goats would be Jacob's. In other words those genetic rarities that went against the odds would belong to Jacob. Laban understands this and has no problem with this arrangement. He knows the chances of what Jacob is proposing are slim. "Sure, that's OK with me, Jacob!" Laban was probably thinking to himself that Jacob must be crazy.

Jacob trusts God to work it all out. But Jacob is still Jacob and he uses some "tricks of the trade" he learned from his father back home with their own flocks years before. What Jacob applies here in the Genesis account will later in science thousands of years from now come to be known in genetic research as Mendel's Law which deals with dominant and recessive traits. This is scientific knowledge that God gives Jacob years ahead of its time. You can guess what the results are. As Laban's flocks and herds bred, the types of sheep and goat Jacob wanted began to show up in large numbers. He separated them out of Laban's flocks into his own flock and began breeding them. At the end of Chapter 30 we read...

READ Genesis 30:43

The LORD blessed Jacob abundantly! Jacob flourishes even though we find out that Laban has been stealing many of the lambs and baby goats that belong to Jacob based on their agreement. Laban is a snake! Well, old

Uncle Laban is not happy about Jacob's prosperity. Jacob has gotten the best of him!

READ Genesis 31:1-2

Trouble is a-brewin'! Time for God to intervene.

READ Genesis 31:3-7

Jacob then proceeds to explain to them in the verses that follow how he was able to achieve such success in breeding the flocks. It was not cheating nor was it luck. God, through His angel, directed Jacob what to do step by step. The last thing God told Jacob was to go back home. Jacob relates all of this information to his family.

READ Genesis 31:14-15

It is obvious from these verses that Laban's daughters don't think very highly of their father. They feel as much cheated by their dear old dad as Jacob does.

READ Genesis 31:16

His wives fully support Jacob's plan to leave.

READ Genesis 31:17-18

They quickly load up all their belongings and head south toward the land of Canaan.

READ Genesis 31:19

Let me make a comment about Laban's possession of these household idols. It says that Rachel stole them. She felt some sort of a family attachment to them. Laban and his family were idol worshippers and it had been a part of their culture for years. But Laban was also aware of God even though I doubt that he was real a follower of God. This idea of tolerance for a multitude of religious beliefs is very common in the Far East where it's an integral part of the Asian culture, embracing one's ancestral gods. It's also common in India where Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam are

as commonplace as Christianity. The idea can be summed up by this statement: "I'm not sure what to believe. I just don't want to make anybody mad!" So Laban embraces the gods of his ancestors while at the same time paying lip service to the God of Isaac and Jacob.

READ Genesis 31:20-23

Laban is now in hot pursuit of Jacob who had a three-day head start on him.

One night God comes to Laban in a dream and basically warns him not to harm Jacob. God's hand of protection is upon Jacob and those with him. Well, Laban continues his pursuit. Eventually he catches up with Jacob and his group in the hill country near Gilead. This is to the east of the Jordan River in the northern part of the land of Canaan. It's probably somewhere around the Golan Heights area of Israel or the southern part of Syria today. So Jacob is three-quarters of the way home by the time Laban catches him. Laban's traveled quite a long distance. Now for the confrontation...

READ Genesis 31:26-29

So, what's Laban so upset about? It sounds like Laban is just resentful that Jacob didn't tell him good-bye. To me Laban is just a man full of himself. The truth is that God had told Jacob to leave. It was Laban, through his own deceitful actions, who had alienated himself from Jacob and his daughters. Laban has only himself to blame. But is THIS the reason why Laban pursued Jacob for hundreds of miles? Just to scold him? No. Now we find out the real reason...

READ Genesis 31:30

His precious gods – so that's what Laban is really upset about. Well, Jacob has no idea that Rachel has stolen Laban's household gods. He tells Laban, "Go ahead and search for yourself."

READ Genesis 31:33-35

One commentary said that Rachel is claiming to be on her menstrual period. That was her excuse for not getting up.

Jacob and Laban trade accusations back and forth. Jacob chides Laban for falsely accusing him of stealing his gods. He reminds Laban how for 20 years he had labored hard for him and done what he asked. Despite all of this Laban had cheated him out of his wages. Laban then points to all that were with Jacob, his flocks, his tents, his possessions, his daughters and grandchildren and his servants and said, "These are all mine!" In so many ways these two guys – Jacob and Laban – deserved each other. But to their credit they calm down and make a peace treaty of sorts. Laban tells Jacob...

READ Genesis 31:44-55

And so it is that a much older, wiser and humbler Jacob returns home to land of promise filled with fear and anxiety. What an interesting story! It was quite a 20-year period for Jacob.

Application for Genesis Chapters 29 thru 31

- You reap what you sow (see Galatians 6:7). Jacob the liar and deceiver was himself lied to and deceived by his Uncle Laban.
- If we remain out of communion with God, we can sure make a mess of things. God blessed Jacob during his years in Laban's household, but Jacob and his family were in constant turmoil. It is no surprise that while Jacob lived in Haran, it never recorded once that he worshipped God. It never says that he offering Him sacrifices. We are also never told that Jacob prayed for Rachel while she was barren (as Isaac had done for Rebekah).
- No matter how we try and manipulate things for own benefit, we are better off trusting God and giving Him full control of our situation.
- Often the lessons that God wants us to learn take a long time.

- We are better off agreeing to disagree than to wage war. We will not resolve all of our disagreements. But is that worth ruining relationships over? I think not.