

THE GOD OF PADDAN ARAM

Genesis 29:1-31:55

Key Verse; 31:13

1. Skim through 29:1-20 and describe Jacob's meeting with Rachel.

They met at the well during the morning when Rachel came to water the flocks of sheep. Jacob rejoiced with tears when he met a relative of his mother's brother—his journey was now complete. He had made it safely as God had promised and heard his oath.

Also at this time we see Jacob and Rachel fall instantly in love. Very romantic.

What were the wages he asked of Laban when he agreed to work for him?

Verse 18, ¹⁸ *Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."*

Jacob shows his character. If there is something Jacob wants he will do whatever he needs to do to get that thing.

How did he carry out his part of the bargain?

Jacob worked hard for seven years in exchange for Rachel, but to him because of his love for her it seemed like only a few days.

What does this passage show us about Jacob?

Jacob was a determined man. Just like when he got the birthright and the blessing, now he also made a plan to work hard and win a wife for himself. When Jacob wanted something he would work hard for it and never lose sight. He had a never say die attitude. Jacob also showed that his love was not emotional or a crush on Rachel. Most men when they find they have to wait seven years for a woman, will decide to find another girl. Jacob was different in that he diligently worked to get Rachel.

2. Read verses 22-30 and describe how Jacob came to have two wives.

Verse 23, ²³ *But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her."*

His uncle Laban tricked him by changing brides on him during the night. Laban tried to say that this was the custom to have the older sister married first. Jacob slept with Leah not knowing who it was. But in truth Laban benefitted greatly from Jacob's hard work and used his daughters in order to get seven more years of free labor out of Jacob. Jacob loved Rachel, so he worked for seven more years to fulfill his bargain with Laban.

3. Skim through 29:31-30:24,35:16-18). Describe the struggle between Leah and Rachel.

Verses 29:31-30:24 recounts the struggle to have children and to gain favor and be loved. Leah was not loved as Rachel had a monopoly on Jacob's affection and desire, but God opened her womb to give her honor and win her husband's affection. Rachel was loved but had no children and was jealous of her sister's offspring. This was a bitter struggle between the women to gain the one thing the other has. In this situation we can learn that we need to turn to God not bitterness when we are unloved or childless like this situation.

How did Leah name her first three sons?

She named her first three sons in the hopes that it would bring her human glory and her husband's praise, honor, and love—but it did not.

Verse 31-34 " *When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.* ³² *Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, [b] for she said, "It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."* ³³ *She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too."* *So she named him Simeon. [c]* ³⁴ *Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi. [d]*

First son Reuben - "see a son," or "he has seen my misery"

Second son Simeon - "one who hears"

Third son Levi - "Attached"

4. Read 29:35. What was her 4th son's name?

35 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." So she named him Judah. [e] Then she stopped having children.

This time Leah praised God and turned her attention to praising God and not seeking her husband's approval. Judah means "praise." Here we see her attitude changing from trying to win Jacob's love to that of praising God for giving her 4 sons. All young sisters want to be loved like Rachel - but instead they should be like Leah and give praise to God and gain God's favor first. Brothers as well.

5. Read 30:1-13. In the meantime, what was Rachel's problem?

Verse 30:1, "When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!""

She blamed Jacob for not having children with her and only with Leah. She said, "Give me children or I'll die!"

Why and how did Jacob rebuke her (1,2)?

Verse 2, "Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?""

Jacob responded in the same way his grandfather did, "Am I God?" Jacob should have prayed for his wife for 20 years like Isaac did, but instead he got mad at her and they argued. Then they compromised God's plan for marriage.

What does this show about her?

Rachel had Jacob's full love but was not satisfied with this. Rachel wasn't very spiritual as instead of going to God, she gave her maid servant Bilhah to Jacob to have a family vicariously through her—like Sarah and Hagar. This was a bad idea bound to only bring trouble. It also shows how she was focused on gaining her husband's love and his affection and having children to gain honor among people.

How did she name the sons born by her maidservant?

Verse 4-6, "So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her,⁵ and she became pregnant and bore him a son.⁶ Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him Dan.^[f]"

Rachel was not thankful to God for this opportunity, but instead she named her son after the fact that she was vindicated! How selfish. We now see children being born into this environment of competition and affection seeking, but no praying to the Lord.

Verse 7-8, "Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.⁸ Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." So she named him Naphtali.^[g]"

The second son she named out of pride. She still only had two sons by her maid servant, but Leah had 4 sons from her own body. Leah was more fruitful but almost out of spite or arrogance, she claimed victory over her sister.

6. Read verses 9-13. What did Leah name the sons born to her by her maidservant?

Leah also made the same mistake and gave her maid servant to Jacob, who bore two sons to him. Verse 10-13, "¹⁰ Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son.¹¹ Then Leah said, "What good fortune!"^[h] So she named him Gad.^[i]"

¹² Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.¹³ Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.^[j] "

Leah gave thanks to God and named the first son, "fortune," and the second son, "happy." Leah was satisfied and happy where as Rachel was vindictive.

How did she name two another sons?

Leah bore two more sons to Jacob. Verse 18, says, ¹⁸ *Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him Issachar.* Issachar means reward.

Verse 20, ²⁰ *Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun.* ^[1]

Leah was positive during this time and named her last son Zebulun—a precious gift from God. No longer begging for her husband's respect, but worthy of husband's respect.

How was she honored?

She gave birth to six sons and a daughter - seven children in all. Leah conducted herself in a way that deserved honor and praise of Jacob and of all people. Also her fourth son Judah became the line of God's covenant blessing in which Jesus came from.

7. Read verses 22-24. When Rachel finally had a son, what did she name him?

Verse 23, ²³ *She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace."* ²⁴ *She named him Joseph, ^[m] and said, "May the LORD add to me another son."*

Rachel finally had her own son, but instead of thanking God, she asked for more sons - not being content with just one son.

When did she have another son (35:16-18)?

Not until on her way back to Isaac's house, in the desert did she give birth to Benjamin. But Rachel died during child birth and named the son Ben-Oni, meaning son of my trouble. But Jacob renamed him Benjamin—son of my right hand.

Who do you think was truly blessed and happy between Rachel and Leah?

Leah was the spiritual wife who called on God when she was unloved and gave thanks to God for the blessing of 7 children even though she was unloved. Rachel was mad and cursed Jacob and introduced concubines and died bitterly in the desert—naming her children "May God add another to me," and "Son of my trouble." Rachel also stole the household idols of her father as well later in this passage.

Describe the atmosphere in Jacob's home. How did God use these struggles to accomplish his own purpose?

Jacob's family must have been like a TV drama. 4 wives with their sons and daughters all competing against each other for their father and husband's attention. Jacob loved Rachel,

but Leah was unloved. Now throw in some concubines and there is a whole bunch of trouble. But God used this dysfunctional family in order to produce the 12 tribes of Israel and nation of Israel. Also from the tribe of Judah came Jesus Christ. Also God trained Jacob through this situation. There was no one he could turn to. No one else had had experience dealing with this type of family situation and he was too far from home to ask for his parents advice. Laban was no help either. Jacob learned here that he could only rely on God. This was training to make Jacob the father of the Israeli people and the 12 tribes.

8. After establishing his own family, what did Jacob begin to be concerned about (30)?

Jacob realized in verse 30, that he could not live with his large family forever on his uncle's land. Jacob needed to establish his own household and his own source of income.

What new contract did he make with Laban (31-34)?

He made a deal that in exchange for continuing to shepherd Laban's flocks he would receive all the *"...speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. (32)"* The idea that these were the weak or sicker animals made this deal appealing to Laban. Jacob had hope that God would be with him and honor Jacob's vow he made at Bethel and strengthen these animals and he could build his personal flock through this agreement.

How did Laban try to trick him (35,36)?

Even when Laban agreed to this deal, Laban removed all the speckled and spotted sheep and lambs and sent them three days away before Jacob could come and claim any sheep or before they could reproduce and speckled or spotted offspring. Laban was now doing to Jacob what Jacob had done to Esau and his father Isaac. Jacob was getting the royal deception treatment.

But how did Jacob overcome his trick (37-42)?

Jacob appeared to know a trick of his own in order to make the skin color of the lambs and sheep change color from white to spotted or speckled. By placing peeled branches in the water when the strong ones came to drink. Whether this actually worked as some kind of genetic engineering or this was a herdsman's superstition, God honored his effort. Here we learned that God kept his promise to Jacob to provide for him and honored his effort to do something instead of giving up. This and God's promise to bless him helped him turn all the clean animals into speckled and spotted ones.

With what result (43)?

Jacob became a wealthy man because of this and slowly took possession of all of Laban's herds of animals.

9. Skim through 31:1-21. When Jacob noticed the change of Laban and his sons toward him, what new direction did God give him (3)?

Verse 3, "³ Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.""

Why?

This was the answer to Jacob's vow made at Bethel in the desert. God reminded him that he must return to the Promise Land to fully inherit the covenant from his father Isaac.

Read verses 4-13 and describe how Jacob acknowledged God's help in the matter of his wages?

Jacob had a dream in which he saw all the mating animals as streaked, speckled, or spotted—with an angel their—symbolic of God seeing Jacob's suffering and God giving him all of Laban's wealth. "for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you." God protected him and when he was provided for he called Jacob to leave and go back to his native land.

What was the conclusion of their family meeting (14-21)?

Everyone else in the family realized that Laban was mad and jealous of Jacob. Even his two daughters realized the Laban had used them in order to get free work service from Jacob—Laban had used up all of their inheritance—and now Jacob possessed all that Laban had owned. They realized they had to leave and follow the God of Jacob back to the Promised Land.

10. When Laban caught up with Jacob, why did he not harm him?

Laban was fully intending to harm Jacob and take all his animals and his two daughters back from Jacob. But God appeared in a dream and warned Laban not to touch Jacob - "*Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.*"

What can you learn here about God's faithfulness?

Jacob had deceived Laban by running away from him, but God protected Jacob from Laban. Verse 42, "*...But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you.*" God even protected Jacob from Rachel's mistake of stealing household God's which Laban was looking for. God justified his man Jacob and rebuked Laban for mistreating him. Also God fulfilled his end of the vow made by Jacob by providing for him everything necessary and providing a way to return home. We can learn then that God had been with Jacob the whole entire time—even when Jacob did not see it.

Who is the God of Paddan Aram?

He is the *God of Abraham, Isaac, and now Jacob. Who sees those he makes promises to and remembers his people and protects them. The God of Bethel is the God of Paddan Aram. When we are lonely and unloved like Leah, God sees us. When we are being cheated and mistreated like Jacob, God sees us. When we are struggling amongst family members, God sees us.*