

Genesis 29:15-35 and 30:1-25

It had been years since Laban heard from Rebekah. Indeed, it almost seemed that he had never had a sister.

Then one day his daughter burst through the door with the exciting news that Rebekah's son was down at the well!

Genesis 29:13-14 **"And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things.**

14: And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him the space of a month."

But Jacob wasn't the kind of person to
accept free hospitality very long.

No, he soon found ways to make himself
useful, and his uncle wasn't long in
noticing his special abilities.

Not only was he very industrious and skilled
in the management of livestock, but he
seemed to be lucky.

Yes, everything he touched prospered.

Laban just couldn't figure it out, but we
can, can't we?

Certainly it wasn't luck, for actually there
isn't any such thing.

The fact of the matter was God was blessing
Jacob as He had blessed his father and
grandfather before him.

Remember the part in Isaac's blessing about
material wealth?

In Genesis 27:28 Isaac had said, "**Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine.**"

So even in that relatively short period of a month, Laban's business was growing.

Yes, God was *blessing* Jacob, but the profits were going into Laban's pockets.

And Laban wasn't the kind of man to let a winner get away.

V 15 "**And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?**"

I don't think Laban's offer was based so much on generosity as it was an attempt to get cheap labour.

Or possibly Laban had already noticed
Jacob's interest in his daughter, and
had anticipated his answer.

V 16-19 **"And Laban had two daughters: the
name of the elder was Leah, and the
name of the younger was Rachel.
17: Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel
was beautiful and well favoured.
18: And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I
will serve thee seven years for Rachel
thy younger daughter."**

Oh, this was the deal of a lifetime!

Laban already knew what Jacob could do in a
month, so what would his business look
like in seven years?

V 19 **"And Laban said, It is better that I
give her to thee, than that I should
give her to another man: abide with
me."**

Oh, yes, it certainly was better.

Seven years of free labour from the best man in the business was even a better deal than he could have dreamed up!

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And it wasn't such a bad idea to have his daughter married into a rich family either.

In the case of his sister, nothing had come of it, but this time it might work.

Yes, Laban fairly *jumped* at Jacob's offer. And Jacob was very pleased also.

"Rachel was beautiful and well favoured,"

and he loved her with all his heart.

So with stars in his eyes, Jacob completely forgot that his mother was expecting him to be home in **"a few days."**

And I think he had also forgotten that Canaan was God's place of blessing.

So with Rachel filling his heart and mind,
and with no thought of what the Lord's
will might be, he bargained away the
next seven years of his life.

Yes, Jacob was running his own show now, and
launching himself on a very long
detour.

I'm sure God could have given him the girl
of his dreams on much easier terms, but
Jacob was doing it *his* way.

**"And Jacob served seven years for Rachel;
and they seemed unto him but a few
days, for the love he had to her."**

As he sat under the stars guarding Laban's
sheep, the nights didn't seem too long
or lonely.

In those dark hours, he would imagine his
Rachel sitting beside him, and the
loneliness would flee away.

Yes, the years of labour seemed like nothing because he knew that Rachel would be his some day.

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But Laban hadn't been completely honest when he accepted Jacob's offer.

As he would explain later, in fact, much later, **"It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn."**

So if this was true, and you couldn't be sure with Laban, then he wasn't bargaining in good faith.

No, he shouldn't have accepted Jacob's offer if Rachel wasn't available yet.

However, Laban just couldn't pass up Jacob's deal, so he promised what he wasn't sure he could deliver.

After all, seven years is a long time.

Things might change for the better by then.

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Also, if this custom was as binding as he said it was, then Laban already had a big problem even before Jacob arrived. His oldest daughter, Leah, who apparently wasn't too attractive, had not been spoken for in marriage.

And this was only part of the problem.

Because Leah must be married first, then her problem became her younger sister's problem.

Yes, in spite of her beauty, Rachel was unavailable, and might remain so until she was too old to get married.

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And the next seven years didn't improve Leah's situation. In fact, it made it worse.

She was still unmarried, and, of course, seven years older.

And any day now Jacob would be asking Laban to fulfill his part of the bargain, which, of course, he couldn't, because Rachel was still unavailable.

Yes, Laban had played a long shot, and he was now about to get caught.

However, for a man like Laban, problems could become opportunities, that is, if you play your cards right, and, of course, didn't have any principles.

Laban qualified in both these areas.

V 21-22 **"And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her.**

22: And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast."

Apparently it was the custom that a bride remained veiled during the wedding, and that was Laban's big opportunity.

V 23-24 **"And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her.**

24: And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid."

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Many years ago Jacob had obeyed his mother's command and deceived his poor blind father.

And although it had been a bit tense at times, it had actually been relatively easy.

The goatskins and the clothing had fooled
his father completely.

And obeying her father's command, Leah also
found that it was quite easy to take
her sister's place.

No doubt they were about the same height and
build, so in the darkness of their
room, it really wasn't a problem for
Leah to become Jacob's beloved Rachel.

However, just as the light had dawned upon
Isaac when Esau cried **"Let my father
arise, and eat of his son's venison,"**
so the first beams of sunlight
dissolved Jacob's beautiful Rachel!

V 25 **"----and he said to Laban, What is this
thou hast done unto me? did not I serve
with thee for Rachel? wherefore then
hast thou beguiled me?"**

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Galatians 6:7 says, "**Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.**"

Having successfully fled the consequences of his deception, this was the first time in Jacob's life that the chickens had come home to roost.

Seeing his brother's weakness, and with no thought for his welfare, he had simply taken what he wanted.

Now Laban had done the same thing to him.

With no thought for Jacob's welfare, and indeed for his own daughters' welfare, Laban had deceived him.

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Jacob must have had murder in his eyes when he yelled, "**wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?**"

But he had met his match.

V 26-27 **"And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.**

27: Fulfill her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years."

No, Laban wasn't intimidated by the fire in Jacob's eyes.

With a look of complete surprise, he said,
Didn't you know that I had to marry off my oldest daughter first?

Why, it's the absolute custom in our country.

But don't worry, my boy. Old Uncle Laban will take care of you.

You already have Leah.

Just fulfill her seven years and I will give you Rachel right now.

Well, actually, Laban didn't say it exactly that way, but I think that was pretty much the gist of it.

So Jacob ended up with two wives, one of which he didn't want, while Laban solved his unmarried daughter's problem and got seven more years of free labour into the bargain.

And who knows, with another seven years of Jacob's hard work and God's blessing flowing into his pockets, he would be a rich man.

Oh, Jacob!!

Maybe you shouldn't have done it your way.

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And besides the financial loss, Jacob had been more or less forced into polygamy. Yes, it was two wives or no Rachel.

And given his background, this really wasn't
a major step.

His brother had married two wives, and by
now had three.

And his grandfather had taken Hagar as his
concubine at the suggestion of his
grandmother.

Nevertheless, I don't think Jacob would have
ever considered such a marriage had not
Laban beguiled him.

He truly loved Rachel, and would have never
wanted anyone else.

But now he was to have two wives, and their
rivalry would turn his home into a
battlefield.

V 28-30 **"And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her
week: and he gave him Rachel his
daughter to wife also.**

29: And Laban gave to Rachel his

daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid.

30: And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years."

Leah's honeymoon was short-lived.

As soon as her sister arrived, it was painfully evident that she was playing second fiddle.

Thus began a very tumultuous and troubled time.

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Normally I like to make a verse-by-verse study of God's word.

And certainly every word in scripture deserves our closest attention.

However, rather than making a detailed study of Jacob's family in those early years,

I will concentrate on the basic principles that motivated them.

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First of all, let's look at the setting for these events.

In Jacob's day, and certainly later on in the nation of Israel, society valued their children as a gift from God.

Psalms makes this clear-- Psalm 128:1-4

"Blessed is every one that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways.

2: For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.

3: Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.

4: Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD."

However, even in a society that valued their children, there seems to have been a double standard.

Somewhere along the way childbirth had become more of a human achievement than a gift from God.

As a result, women who could bear children were unduly honoured, while those who could not were unjustly judged.

We only have to read about Samuel's mother Hannah to understand the social stigma that was attached to barrenness.

1 Samuel 1:6 **"And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb."**

We see two principles set forth in the scriptures before us.

Psalm 128 tells us that children are a blessing given to the man "**that feareth the LORD; that walketh in his ways.**"

However, that is not always the case.

For instance, Abraham, and also the godly mother and father of John the Baptist were denied children for most of their lives.

And although 1 Samuel 1:6 says that "**the LORD had shut up**" Hannah's womb, her barrenness was not the result of God's displeasure.

In that case, it was the Lord's way of encouraging Hannah to dedicate Samuel to the Lord.

And we all know what a blessing that was in Israel.

So there are exceptions, but the truth still
remains, only God can give life.

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At first Jacob's wives definitely equated
fruitfulness with the Lord's blessing.
But as time went on, this ability was simply
considered a personal achievement.

Yes, in the end, this whole situation
degenerated into a contest between two
warring sisters.

And, as we will see, their attitude was
reflected in the names they gave their
children.

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In the early stages of the marriage, God
favoured Leah as a means of offsetting
the pain of being Jacob's second
choice.

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

The fact that the Lord did this seems to indicate that He didn't really blame Leah for her part in Laban's deception. No doubt she was being obedient to her father, and under a great deal of pressure to comply.

In those days, daughters were very much under the authority of their father.

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Leah named her first son Reuben, which means "behold a son!"

At this point she definitely attributed her child to the Lord's goodness, and V 32 gives us her expectation for the future.

**"Surely the LORD hath looked upon my
affliction; now therefore my husband
will love me."**

Poor Leah. With each son, she tried to win her husband's love by outdoing her sister.

Her second son was named Simeon, which means "hearing," for as she said in V 33,
"Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated."

Her third son was called Levi, which means "attachment."

V 34 **"Now this time will my husband be
joined unto me, because I have born him
three sons."**

And finally her fourth son was called Judah, which means "praise."

V 35 **"Now will I praise the LORD."**

Yes, Leah still had her priorities straight.

She recognized the fact that her sons were
from the Lord.

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Genesis 30:1-2 **"And when Rachel saw that she
bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied
her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give
me children, or else I die.**

**2: And Jacob's anger was kindled
against Rachel: and he said, Am I in
God's stead, who hath withheld from
thee the fruit of the womb?"**

In her dilemma, Rachel unjustly blamed her
husband rather than bringing her
burdens to the Lord.

However, her absence of prayer was not her
real problem.

The scripture says--**"If I regard iniquity in
my heart, the Lord will not hear me."**

And since we already know that--"**Leah was hated**" and "**Rachel was barren**," it's not too hard to figure out where the real problem was.

The bottom line was--Rachel hated her sister.

And certainly Leah's inability to attract a husband had contributed to the lateness of Rachel's marriage.

And her part in her father's scheme had turned her sister's marriage into a disaster.

So it is not hard to imagine why Rachel held bitter feelings against her sister.

But was it really Leah's fault?

I don't think so.

If it was, God wouldn't have blessed her with children.

However, the fact remained that "**Leah was hated,**" and Rachel was unwilling to forgive her.

So rather than recognizing her barrenness as her own fault, she blamed her husband. Her criticism was completely unjust, and Jacob resented it.

Obviously, with four sons in his quiver already, it wasn't his problem. Probably this was their first serious argument.

Jacob's was completely logical: "**Am I in God's stead**"?

Men often have the annoying habit of doing that.

But there was more in his answer than logic. "**Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?**"

That little word "**withheld**" must have cut Rachel to the heart.

And although Jacob's words were said in anger with no thought of kindness in them, actually they were true.

Rachel needed to confess her sin of hatred and call upon the Giver of life to deliver her from her barrenness.

But, unfortunately, this was not the course she took.

V 3 **"And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees that I may also have children by her."**

This was when things began to go wrong.

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Someone has said "Those who do not study history are destined to repeat it."

Whether she knew it or not, she was going down the same old path that Jacob's grandmother had.

Yes, Abraham and Sarah had already proven the folly of running ahead of God, but Rachel's plan was even worse.

Having been told that God **"hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb,"** she hit upon a plan to bypass God.

Now Rachel might never have admitted it herself, but for all intents and purposes, that was exactly what she was doing.

She was trying to bypass God.

V 4-5 **"And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her. 5: And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son."**

At this point, Jacob's family had started down a very devious path.

No doubt, as in Abraham's case, it was not uncommon to use female servants as surrogate mothers, but it was the world's way.

And the fact that Rachel named her maid's child shows that she considered it to be hers.

And not only did she adopt the practice of the world, but she put a religious spin on it.

V 6 **"And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan."**

She named Bilhah's son Dan, meaning "justice," because she was convinced that **"God hath judged me, and hath also**

**heard my voice, and hath given me a
son."**

No, Rachel wasn't living in the real world anymore.

Then she triumphantly named Bilhah's second son Naphtali, which means "wrestling."

In V 8 she boasted, **"With great wrestlings
have I wrestled with my sister, and I
have prevailed."**

By this time, God was right out of the picture.

It was **"I wrestled"** and **"I have prevailed."**

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By now, Rachel had set the tone for the rest of the competition, for, indeed, that's what it was.

Thinking that she had left bearing, Leah started playing by Rachel's rules. She gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob.

So by this devious means, two more sons were born, and claiming them as her own as her sister had, Leah called them Gad and Asher.

Gad means "fortunate," and Asher means "happy," for she said in V 13, "**Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed.**"

Happy, but at what cost?

She had used the ways of the world to gain happiness, and had lost the joy of the Lord.

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However, despite this worldly competition, God saw fit to bless Leah with children once more.

V 17-18 "**And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son.**"

18: And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband: and she called his name Issachar, "which, of course, means "hire" or "reward."

Isn't it amazing what God gets credit for? It's almost as ridiculous as the things He doesn't get credit for.

But God continued to bless Leah, and gave her another son, whom she called "Zebulun."

Zebulun means "dwelling," for she said in V 20 **"God hath endued me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons."**

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What a sad situation this plurality of wives had created.

Jacob's home was a battlefield.

Rachel had Jacob's love, but no children.

Leah had children but not Jacob's love.

And I think Leah must have loved Jacob all along, but Jacob never loved her.

No, Rachel was his true love, and nothing could change that.

His love for Rachel would remain unwavering to the day of her death, and her sons would be his favourites.

However, Jacob, like any man of that day, wanted sons.

He needed sons to help him in his business, and to give him a good standing in the community.

But his marriage had not turned out the way he had expected.

His beloved Rachel could not provide him with a family.

Genesis 29:31 says "-- **when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.**"

Wouldn't you think that Rachel would have gotten the message? But she hadn't.

Jacob remained torn between his love for Rachel, and his desire for sons.

He loved the one and needed the other, and no one was really happy.

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But, finally, after all the years of turmoil and competition, God blessed the marriage that should have been.

V 22-24 **"And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.**

23: And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach:

24: And she called his name Joseph; and

said, The LORD shall add to me another son."

I think God "**remembered Rachel**" because

Rachel finally remembered God.

There was no more talk of having children by her maid.

And V 22 says, "**God hearkened to her,**" which indicates two things: She was praying to God about her problem, and since God heard and answered her prayer, she must have confessed her sin.

And not only did God give her Joseph, and we all know what a man of God he became, but she had faith to believe that God would give her another son.

She expressed that faith in the name she gave her first son.

She called him Joseph, which means "adding,"
for she said, **"The LORD shall add to me
another son."**

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It's not usually a good idea to dwell upon
the "what ifs" of life.

It is far better to be like Paul and say "--
-- **forgetting those things which are
behind, and reaching forth unto those
things which are before,**
**14: I press toward the mark for the
prize of the high calling of God in
Christ Jesus."**

However, for our lesson today, it might be
instructive to ask ourselves, *What if
Jacob had relied upon the Lord rather
than his bargains with Laban?*

He had arrived in this new land with his
life before him.

God had given him a new start, and a good start.

His father, although deceived at the time, had given him the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Then God had appeared to him in a dream, and promised to guide his steps and prosper his way.

Genesis 28:15 **"And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."**

And immediately upon arriving in this new land, Jacob met the very woman who would be the love of his life.

Yes, God was preparing his way before him.

But despite God's complete provision, Jacob made his own bargains.

They were bargains that would tie up his life for more than 20 years.

And God didn't need four women to give Jacob 12 sons.

And Jacob didn't need four women to turn his house into a battlefield.

So we have to ask the question, *What if Jacob had relied completely upon the Lord?*

Certainly, with God's blessing, Jacob and Rachel could have had the 12 sons required to produce the 12 tribes of Israel.

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But, in spite of Rebekah's meddling and Jacob's bargains, God accomplished His Divine Will.

For three generations, the Abrahamic
Covenant had been passed down to a
single man.

Abraham blessed Isaac, and Isaac blessed
Jacob.

But now for the first time, God's blessing
was to flow out to 12 men, and through
them, to 12 tribes.

**"O the depth of the riches both of the
wisdom and knowledge of God! how
unsearchable are his judgments, and his
ways past finding out!"**

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In our next lesson, Jacob begins to think
about the course of his life.

His 14 years of service had robbed him of
God's material blessings and put them
in Laban's pocket.

His father had said, **"Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine."** But so far, he was a poor man.

And I'm sure God's words that he had heard in Bethel kept coming back to him---"**I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land.**"

Like the prodigal son, he must have said to himself, *What am I doing here in this strange land? I need to go back to Canaan.*

So Jacob took steps to return to the place of blessing.

Genesis 30:25 **"And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go**

**unto mine own place, and to my
country."**

But Laban was too smart to let him get away
that easy, and Jacob was too willing to
outsmart his uncle.

So in our next lesson, we will find Jacob
making another deal.