

Outline of Genesis 29

I. Jacob at the Well (1-13a)

A. Jacob's journey & arrival	1-2b
1. The land of the people of the east	1
2. <u>Behold</u> ... a well! <u>Behold</u> ... sheep!	2a-b
B. Background details on the stone, sheep, and shepherds	2c-3
C. Jacob's conversation with the shepherds	4-8
1. Jacob's questions concerning Laban	4-6a
2. <u>Behold</u> ... Rachel <i>his daughter!</i>	6b
3. Jacob's ignorance concerning the time & providence of God	7-8
D. Jacob's interaction with the shepherdess, Rachel	9-13a
1. Jacob saw Rachel "the daughter of <i>Laban his mother's brother</i> "	9-10
a) Jacob rolled the stone away	
b) Jacob watered the flock	
2. Jacob kissed Rachel, wept, revealed who he was	11-12a
3. Rachel ran to Laban, Laban ran to Jacob	12b-13a

II. Jacob at Laban's House (13b-30)

A. The first month	13b-14
1. Jacob told Laban " <i>all these things</i> "	13b
2. Laban told Jacob: " <i>surely you are my bone and my flesh!</i> "	14
B. The next seven years	15-20
1. Laban's offer concerning wages	15
2. Laban's <u>two</u> daughters, the <i>older</i> Leah, the <i>younger</i> Rachel	16-17
3. Jacob loved Rachel, the <i>younger</i> daughter	18-20
C. Jacob marries... Leah!	21-28a
1. Jacob's request for his wife after completing his time	21
2. Laban's elaborate deception of Jacob	22-25
3. Laban's explanation for deception, revision of the timeline	26-28a
D. Jacob marries (and loves) Rachel	28b-30

III. The LORD remains faithful to populate Jacob's offspring (31-35)

A. Rachel (loved and barren), Leah (hated and fertile)	31
1. The LORD opened Leah's womb, seeing that she was hated	31a
2. Rachel was barren	31b
B. Leah bears four sons	32-35a
1. Reuben The LORD has <u>looked</u> upon my affliction	32
2. Simeon The LORD has <u>heard</u> that I am hated	33
3. Levi This time my husband will be <u>attached</u> to me	34
4. Judah This time I will <u>praise</u> the LORD	35a
C. Leah ceased bearing	35b

Reflection

We return to our study of Genesis this morning, picking up in chapter 29, verse 1. Last time we saw the familiar section on Jacob's dream, where God's angels were ascending and descending on the ladder that stretched between heaven and earth (John 1:51). It was there that God reestablished with Jacob the promises he had made prior to Abraham and Isaac – Land, Offspring, and Blessing. The question we were left with, beginning in verse 13 and climaxing in verse 21 was this: will the God of *Abraham*, and the God of *Isaac*, now be known as the God of *Jacob*? We know the answer is eventually yes (Exodus 3:6). But the chapter before us today – Genesis 29 – will be the first step towards that answer.

We can divide the chapter into three sections. First, Jacob at the well in verses 1-13a; second, Jacob at Laban's house in verses 13b-30; and third, in verses 31-35, we will see that the LORD remains faithful to populate Jacob's offspring. Some commentators leave off verses 31-35 in their study on chapter 29. They believe that section is better suited for the material in chapter 30; that way, you can talk about all 12 of Jacob's sons at one time. That may be okay. However, I would rather include it in today's lesson to see how the LORD at the top of the ladder in heaven last week, is intimately involved in the mess of this family on earth.

Jacob at the Well (1-13a)

We begin in verses 1-2b: *"Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. 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."* We can label this Jacob's journey & arrival. Literally he lifted up his feet, probably with some enthusiasm after his encounter with God in chapter 28. He arrives in the land of the east, that same land out of which God had called Abraham. Twenty years will pass until God tells Jacob to leave this land in 31:3. At that time, his exile away from the Promised Land will be complete, and he will return to his father's house in peace and prosperity, having experienced the fulfillment of the dream.

As the chapter opens, we see a familiar scene – one of God's people at a well. This should remind us of Abraham's servant in chapter 24, who went looking for a wife for Isaac, and he met her at a well (maybe the same well). We will come back to that in a minute. But first, we read some background details on the stone, the sheep, and the shepherds. I would not have been surprised if the translators put verses 2c-3 in parentheses - (*"The stone on the well's mouth was large, 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."*). Apparently we will need to know this detail concerning the shepherd's routine in order to make sense of what comes next.

Next we read Jacob's conversation with the shepherds in verses 4-8. First, we see a typical greeting, where Jacob questions their home address. Learning they are from Haran (27:43; also, 11:31-32; 12:4-5), he wants to know if they know Laban, and if it is well with him. Indeed they do, and it is well with him. Oh, and by the way, behold... Rachel! In a conversation that was a bit boring, we are met with a wonderful surprise – the third "behold" in the chapter; first we had behold... the well; second we had behold.. The sheep; and now we have behold... Rachel! Allen Ross notes how these correspond to what we saw in chapter 28 (Behold the ladder, behold the angels, behold the LORD!). Just like the

ladder and the angels eventually moved our eyes to the main character – the LORD; so also now the well and the sheep turn our gaze to the main character – Rachel.

But isn't it interesting in verse 7 that Jacob seems to ignore her? You would think hearing the words, "Rachel, *his daughter*", would stun him to no end. But he seems to ignore what they said concerning Rachel. We will have to wait until verse 10 before Jacob realizes what's happening.

Commentators dispute over verses 7-8. My opinion is that Jacob's response in verse 7 is meant to emphasize his ignorance concerning the time and the providence of God. Here we can contrast Jacob to Abraham's servant in chapter 24. You'll recall that in chapter 24 we find the servant praying to the LORD at the well, asking for divine guidance in the selection of Isaac's wife. Contrast that to chapter 28, where Jacob seems to ignore the announcement of Rachel *his daughter* on her way; he seems more concerned with teaching these shepherds a thing or two in verse 7. Jacob says "it is not time"... has he forgotten his mission to get a wife? The response from the men from Haran in verse 8 lets us know why we needed those background details in 2c-3. God has ordained these typical circumstances (2c-3) in a special way this day, despite Jacob's ignorance of the time.

In the next section, verses 9-13a, we move from Jacob's conversation with the shepherds to his interaction with Rachel, the shepherdess. She comes with her father's sheep in verse 10, interrupting their conversation. And as nonchalant as Jacob had been before, he will now reverse course entirely in an amazing show of strength and service. This woman with her sheep is none other than Rachel the daughter of "*Laban his mother's brother*". Moses will repeat that phrase in verse 10 three times to make sure the reader does not miss the providence of God. Jacob, I believe, began to realize God's providence as well; and he is filled with supernatural strength to roll away that large stone (2c) all by himself. He waters Laban's flock, kisses Rachel, weeps aloud, and reveals himself to Rachel. What a scene! Rachel could do nothing else than what Rebekah had done in 24:28 – she ran to tell Laban.

Her running to Laban (12b) is matched by Laban's running to Jacob (13a). He seems overwhelmed by Jacob's arrival (and as suspicious as we might be concerning his greed, his motives, etc.), he appears genuine as he embraces Jacob, kisses him, and brings him to his house.

Jacob at Laban's House (13b-30)

The scene then shifts from the well to the house. It is worth remembering that we've moved from Isaac's house in chapter 27, to God's house in chapter 28, and now to Laban's house in chapter 29. Jacob will be here for twenty years, after which God will tell him to head home (31:3). When he arrives at Laban's house, we read that, "*Jacob told Laban all these things.*" What things? We can't know for sure. But whatever it was, it drew out of Laban a rather strange (at least to us) response – "*Surely you are my bone and my flesh!*" Maybe all he means is they are kinsmen according to the flesh (like Adam and Eve, 2:23). But if Jacob had shared enough of the story of *why* he was on the run, I suspect Laban is saying more than that – something like, *you and I have more in common than you know yet.*

A month goes by (14b), at which point Laban says, "*Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?*" We may skim over the end of verse 14, but we need to keep in mind the time references. I say this because Rebekah's instruction in 27:43-44 was for Jacob to, "Arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran, and stay with him *a few days* (

עַד־יָמַי אֶחָדָה) until your brother's furry turns away..." It appears that Jacob may again have become ignorant of the time (see verse 7). Why has he let a month go by? Here we may again contrast Jacob with the servant in chapter 24 who would not even eat (24:33) until he made his request known to Laban (24:49). Moreover, when the servant was faced with the opposition of her family retaining Rebekah for 10 days, he said, "Do not delay me, since the LORD has prospered my way" (24:56). The servant's courage, along with his recognition of the LORD's providence, is not recorded of Jacob in our chapter today. He has let a month go by, and of his own accord now offers seven more years!

But notice, before we come to Jacob's offer of seven years in verse 18, we first get some more background details on Laban's household in verses 16-17, "*Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.*" Three important details are added that we did not yet know – how many daughters, their ages, and their looks. First, there's not one, but *two* daughters; Rachel has a sister named Leah. Second, Rachel is *younger* and Leah is *older*. Third, Rachel is beautiful, and Leah... not so much. These details will prove to be important as the chapter unfolds.

Jacob seems ignorant both of the details' importance as well as any suspicious behavior on Laban's part. All he knows is how much he loves Rachel. She's the young, good looking one! After all, she's the daughter who saw his amazing feat of strength a month earlier when he rolled the stone away. So *Jacob proposes to Laban, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."* And Laban agrees, "*It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.*"

That conversation leaves countless questions in the reader's mind. Is the custom in verse 26 (older first, then younger) in Laban's mind at this point? Does he intend to deceive Jacob? What are Rachel's thoughts on this arrangement? Why does Jacob offer seven years? Didn't his mother say to just be away "a few days" (27:44)? I think this last question is surely one that we ought to ask at this point, given the wording of 28:20 – "*So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.*" Perhaps he had justified in his mind that seven years (and a month) wasn't that long really; after all, they felt like what his mom told him – just a few days.

As fast as the years passed by for Jacob, they go even faster for the reader of Genesis. The next verse picks up with Jacob saying to Laban, "*Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.*" In a chapter where Jacob has been confused, or lost track of time, here we find him announcing, "My *time* is completed!" There is one time he's sure about, and that's wedding day!

"*So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast*" (22). And so, the elaborate deception begins. It seems like a typical wedding party celebration. The people are there, the feast is prepared. Jacob's seven years of service is now to be rewarded with beautiful Rachel. Awww.. what a happy ending! Not so fast!

Verse 23 – "*But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her.*" What?! No way! Again, more questions are raised than answers are given. Where's Rachel? Does she know about this? What about Leah? Does she think this is a good idea? How long has Laban been planning this daughter-swap? I assume from Jacob's point of view, there was no way of knowing who was who – perhaps given the darkness, customary veils, or maybe a little bit too much alcohol. The text doesn't say, other than we do get a picture of the father bringing his daughter to the man to be his wife (2:23-25). And then in a way to almost slow the reader down and let the shock wear off, we read a

verse most translations put in parentheses - ("Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant"). The next chapter will fill out what Zilpah's service will entail (30:9ff).

But in the meantime, the sun begins to rise (and perhaps the alcohol begins to wear off) – *"And behold, it was Leah! 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?' Laban said, 'It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.'" Oh, now you tell me that, Laban! That would've been useful information seven years ago. But don't you imagine Jacob, if not in that moment then surely sometime later, realizing the poetic justice (as some call it). His deceptive ways have been turned around on him. He is now the recipient of what he dealt out in chapter 27. He deceived his father, but his now deceived by his father-in-law. He tricked Isaac who had dim eyes, but has now been tricked by Laban with a daughter who has weak eyes. He, the younger son, used deception to get the older son's blessing; and now, despite working honestly for the younger daughter's hand in marriage, he is deceived into getting the older daughter instead.*

We would probably be right to see in this section a fitting discipline of the Lord (Heb. 12:5-17). Or as Gal. 6:7 says, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap." We will not understand the divine retribution in many cases, and even here where so many details seem to overlap, we can only note the parallels and offer the suggestion that the Lord is disciplining Jacob in a way that corresponds to his own sin. As Hebrews 2:2 says, *"For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution..."* Of course this verse from Hebrews speaks of the Old Covenant being delivered by angels (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19), and those covenant breakers receiving the curses of the covenant; however, we could appropriate the verse's language to apply to Jacob, who had a dream of angels and then received a just retribution for his transgression against the law of God.

Back to our text today. In verse 27 we read what Laban said next, *"Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years."* In other words, finish the wedding week for Leah, after which you may also have Rachel. But it's going to cost you seven more years of service! I believe Jacob must be understanding this as divine discipline; he is the one destined to be served by his brothers (25:23), but has been and will continue to be a *servant*. He is on God's timeline.

We pick up reading in verse 28 – *"Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years."* Jacob marries Leah, completing her week. And Laban is true to his word this time and gives Rachel to Jacob after that week. And then a parallel marker in verse 29 to verse 24. Now we have the full cast of characters who are going to populate the dust of the earth.

The LORD remains faithful to populate Jacob's offspring (31-35)

We could leave verses 31-35 as material to be covered with chapter 30. On one hand, that would make for a clean presentation of all twelve sons. But on the other hand, as I said earlier, I would rather include it in today's lesson to see how the LORD at the top of the ladder in heaven last week, is intimately involved in the mess of this family on earth.

We read in verse 31, *“When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.”* The Lord has been absent from the chapter so far, at least there are no direct references to him (even by any of the characters in conversation). But here he is, right in the middle of this mess. You nor I would probably want to get involved, but he does. Again, we see the Lord in control of women’s wombs. This has been a theme on numerous occasions in the book of Genesis, even from the very beginning of the Abrahamic narrative. Just as Sarah was barren (11:30), and Rebekah was barren (25:21), so also here Rachel is barren (29:31). And it is the Lord’s doing in every case.

Leah, however, the one who is hated (probably by Jacob, and maybe Rachel) has her womb opened by the Lord. And so she, the hated one, conceives and begins bearing sons. We will not linger here other than to note the progression of what Leah says each time a son is born. First, Reuben – “The LORD has looked upon my affliction...” (32). Second, Simeon – “The LORD has heard that I am hated...” (33). Third, Levi – “This time my husband will be attached to me...” (34) Fourth, Judah – This time I will praise the LORD” (35a). The sons’ names correspond to the Hebrew sounds of the word’s emphasized.

In conclusion, the LORD has remained faithful to his promise of dust-of-the-earth offspring for Jacob (28:14). And while doing so, he is discipling Leah to redirect her focus to God and God alone. Notice how she moves from, “...now my husband will love me” (Reuben), to “...I am hated” (Simeon), to “...this time my husband will be attached to me” (Levi) to finally “This time I will praise the LORD” (Judah). It is no coincidence then that the Lord Jesus will be descended from the tribe of Judah (49:10). Leah has learned to praise the Lord, and is responsible for continuing the Lord’s family tree. What divine providence we see from beginning to end in this chapter!