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Genesis 29

(2019)

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Genesis 29

Topics.

- Jacob arrives in the land of the people of the east.
- Jacob sees a well in a field with a large stone over its mouth.
- Jacob sees Rachel Laban's daughter coming to water sheep at the well.
- Jacob kissed Rachel and wept and tells her that she was his kinsman.
- Jacob tells Laban he will work seven years to take Rachel for his wife.
- Laban deceives Jacob by giving him Leah to wife and not Rachel.
- Jacob completed Leah's week and then took Rachel as his wife.
- Leah gives birth to Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah.

FOR INFORMATION: concerning people, places and the meaning of words see the title: "Map Locations and People of the Bible," and the title: "Bible Dictionary" on Website Menu.

The previous chapter: in chapter twenty eight the focus was upon Isaac sending Jacob to Laban the brother of Rebekah his mother to take a wife from Laban's daughters; God promising the blessing of Abraham to Jacob and his offspring; Esau taking Ishmael's daughter Mahalath to wife, besides the wives he had; Jacob leaving Beersheba and on his way toward Haran dreaming of angels ascending and descending on a ladder to heaven; Jacob setting up a stone for a pillar and calling the name of the place Bethel and making a vow that he will give a full tenth of all he had to the LORD.

GENESIS 29:1

Jacob arrives in the Land of the People of the East.

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

During these ancient days the expression, "the east," referred to any part of land that lay toward the sunrising in this context it refers to Jacob's mother Rebekah and her brother in the land of Haran. In the previous chapter Jacob's father Isaac sent Jacob to Haran to take a wife from his own people. After Jacob's amazing dream he had with the angels ascending and descending at Beth-el. (Gen. 28:12-15) and on his journey to Haran he now comes to a field where his uncle's (Haran's) flocks were to be watered.

GENESIS 29:2-3

Jacob sees a Well in a Field with a Large Stone over its Mouth.

- **Genesis 29:2-3:** 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, ³and 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.

Jacob arrives at a well in the pasture lands some distance from the town of Haran that was used for watering flocks of sheep. In Arabia it was the general practise to put a large round flat stone over the mouth of a well for the following two reasons:

1. To prevent the shifting sands and sand from dust storms polluting the water of the well.
2. To prevent evaporation of the water from the hot climate.

If it was a very large well, they would cut a, round hole in the middle of the flat round stone big enough to draw water through and cover this hole with another large stone. The custom was to wait until the male and female shepherds had gathered the livestock around the well then remove the stone draw water for the livestock and afterwards replace the stone. It was common for some wells to have troughs dug around their base so that shepherds could draw the water and easily fill the troughs for the livestock to drink from.

NOTE: this was not the well that Rebekah drew water from to give the camels to drink since this well was in the field, (i.e., the open pasture land), whereas Rebekah's well was just outside the city (Gen. 24:11) and she obtained the water by going down the steps which led to it (Gen. 24:16).

GENESIS 29:4-8

Jacob sees Rachel coming to Water Sheep at the Well.

- **Genesis 29:4-8:** Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." ⁵He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him." ⁶He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!" ⁷He 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." ⁸But 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."

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According to the practice of the East the greeting, "My brothers," was extended to distant degrees of relationships such as uncles, cousins and nephews and to kinsmen in general. Jacob arrives at the well and after asking the shepherds who were resting there with flocks many questions, they tell him that they all belonged to Haran, that his relatives in Haran were well and that Rachel Laban's daughter (a shepherdess) (v9) is coming with her father's sheep.

Behold, it is still high day: (v7) refers to that time of day when the sun is still very high up in the sky which means that there is a great deal of the day still remaining before sunset. The shepherds are resting at the well waiting for Rachel to arrive with her sheep so they can water their sheep. In the meantime, the cattle are roaming free at the time of day when they are normally gathered together. Jacob upon seeing the shepherds doing nothing asks them "why aren't they gathering the cattle?" They respond, "We can't leave this well until we have watered the sheep." It should be mentioned here that Jacob being a shepherd himself, is not speaking to them as one with authority over them, but simply asking questions. It was very likely the custom of these shepherds to wait until all the shepherds and their flocks were gathered at the well and then remove the stone and water the sheep. This may have been common practise for the following three reasons:

1. So that the distribution of the water was fair to all the shepherds and especially to those who maybe too weak to roll away the stone.
2. So that the stone was not removed and the well uncovered for longer than it had to be to prevent dust polluting the water of the well.

3. It is also possible the well belonged to Laban and therefore no one would remove the stone until Rachael and the shepherds with her arrived.

NOTICE: Jacob calls Laban the son of Nahor (v5), even though he is actually his grandson, this is a common use of relatives' names in Scripture. In the following verse the LORD calls Jacob the son of Abraham when he is actually his grandson:

- Behold, the LORD stood above the ladder and said (to Jacob), "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. (Gen. 28:1-22).

GENESIS 29:9-12

Jacob Kissed Rachel and Tells Her that She was His Kinsman.

- **Genesis 29:9-12:** While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. ¹⁰Now 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. ¹¹Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. ¹²And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

Rachel the shepherdess: (v9) amongst these pastoral tribes it was common for women to shepherd the sheep as it was common for women to work in the fields tending to the crops. Jacob would have no doubt been pleased to see that Rachel was an industrious woman and it is certain wasted no time in volunteering his help the young shepherdess. The following words of the oracle that King Lemuel's mother taught him, beautifully adorn Rachel:

- An excellent wife who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. ¹¹The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain. ¹²She does him good, and not harm, all the days of her life. ¹³She seeks wool and flax, and works with willing hands. ¹⁴She is like the ships of the merchant; she brings her food from afar. ¹⁵She rises while it is yet night and provides food for her household and portions for her maidens. ¹⁶She considers a field and buys it; with the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard. ¹⁷She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong. ¹⁸She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp does not go out at night. ¹⁹She puts her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle. ²⁰She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy. (Proverbs 31:10-20).

Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud: after Jacob had rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered Rachel's sheep, he kissed her and wept aloud. During the time of watering Rachel's sheep Jacob would have asked Rachel many questions and they would have had much conversation together. Jacob's kiss would have been a spontaneous kiss of joyful excitement and endearing kinship upon discovering that Rachel was not only his relative and a good shepherdess, but also was very a beautiful woman (v17). Overcome with joy at the sight of the young woman so closely related to him; and who he hoped would be his wife and was the woman the LORD had led him to and that his long journey was over Jacob can no longer restrain his feelings, but bursts into tears. This outburst of emotion is the beginning of his lifelong affection for the beautiful woman who God gave him opportunely to meet. Rachel no doubt filled with great joy and excitement runs to tell her father Laban all that had happened.

GENESIS 29:13-14

Laban Hears about Jacob and Runs to Meet Him and Kisses Him.

- **Genesis 29:13-14:** 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, ¹⁴and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

After hearing all that Rachel had to say Laban runs to welcome Jacob his relative to his house. Some feel that Laban's running to him was because he believed that Jacob had brought him presents (i.e., pieces of gold, pearls and jewels, and such like precious things) as Abraham's servant had brought to him when he came for Rebekah his sister seventy-seven years ago, when she departed to marry Isaac the son of Abraham (Gen. 24:52-53). But it is far more likely Laban came out with sincere heartfelt excitement and affectionate arising from the joy of seeing his relation, especially since we are told that he embraced him and kissed him. Some may wonder how Laban now being an old man could have such young daughters, but this can be explained by the fact that they may have been the children of a wife of his old age or his granddaughters, but regarded as his own daughters because their father was dead.

Jacob told Laban all these things: (v14) things such as the reason why he departed from his father's house; how he was sent by his parents on account of the hatred of his brother Esau, because he had got the birthright and blessing from him (Gen. 27:1-29); how God had appeared to him in the vision of the angels ascending and descending while he was at Luz and the promises the LORD had made to him; (Gen. 28:10-19); how he came seeking for a wife and how he had met Rachel at the well. After hearing all these things Laban was fully satisfied with Jacob.

Bone and my flesh: (v14) the expression, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh," is a description of kinsmanship. It most likely originates from the following verse:

- Adam said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." (Gen. 2:23).

He stayed with him a month: (v14) a month here means the period from new moon to new moon, and consists of twenty-nine or thirty days.

GENESIS 29:15-20

Jacob will Work Seven Years to take Rachel for His Wife.

- **Genesis 29:15-20:** Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" ¹⁶Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. ¹⁸Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." ²⁰So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Tell me, what shall your wages be? (v16) Jacob offers to work for Laban seven years for the hand of Rachel she was the wages of his employment. This does not mean that Rachel and Jacob would have had no contact with each other during these seven years, but that he could not take her as his wife for seven years. She was Laban's daughter and he was working for Laban so they would have had much time together.

Laban had two daughters: (v16) Leah the elder and Rachael the younger. The name Leah comes from the Hebrew word (*Le'ah*) it literally means weary, to tire and figuratively to grieve, to loathe and to be or make disgusted. The expression, Leah's eyes were weak (v17), most likely carries the idea that she lacked vitality, energy and beauty. The name Rachael comes from the Hebrew word (*Rachel*) it literally means to journey as a good traveler and a ewe (i.e., sheep) (the females being the

predominant portion of a flock). In contrast to Leah Rachael was beautiful both to look at and in her figure. (v17). Both daughters were grown up and of a marriageable age, such daughters in these countries and times were of great value to their parents, because it was the custom to receive valuable presents (Gen. 24:51-53). However, Jacob had just fled from his home for fear Esau would kill him so he has nothing to offer to Rachel's parents except his labour. His love for her is so deeply overwhelming he willingly agrees to work seven years to take her hand in marriage and Laban accepts his offer.

Jacob loved Rachel: (v18) Jacob loved Rachel before he made the proposal of marriage he was struck with her beauty and godly character. His love and the joy of being close to her in home-life, service and leisure of life made the seven years almost pass as though they were but days. True love produces a joy and inner expectation that makes periods of long and hard services pass quickly.

Jacob served seven years for Rachel: (v20) a godly and active, industrious man like Jacob would have been of great value to Laban so when Jacob made known to Laban the affection he had for his daughter Rachel and that he had no worldly goods with which to offer him for the hand of his daughter, Laban would have been more than happy at his offer to serve him seven years. Jacobs love for Rachael can be likened to the love the faithful have for Christ. If we know how to value the eternal joy and happiness we will have in heaven and love God and long for Christ's appearing the sufferings of this present time and our patient waiting will pass as a few days. Concerning this principle, the apostle Paul wrote:

- I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith (Philip. 3:8-9).

GENESIS 29:21-25

Laban Deceives Jacob by Giving Him Leah to wife and not Rachel.

- **Genesis 29:21-25:** Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." ²²So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. ²³But 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.) ²⁵And in the morning, 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?"

Jacob's seven years of labour comes to an end, so he asks Laban to give him his promised wife Rachael that he may lay with her. Laban not only deceptively agrees, but gathers all the people of the place and puts on a wedding feast. Once the festivities were ended in the evening when it was dark and no doubt Jacob had by this time had a few drinks, Laban begins his deceptive plot and takes his daughter Leah to Jacob. He thinking it was Rachael lies with her and she becomes his wife. Some may wonder how such a thing could happen, but consider the following, Jacob at the end of much celebrating and some drinking would have gone into the bridal chamber which would have only had a few candles giving it light; Laban would have brought Leah covered with a veil in to him in the dim darkness of the night. After seven years of being with Rachael and not being able to sexually embrace her until married (v30), there was most likely a great deal of passion and very little conversation. Added to this, it would never enter Jacobs mind that Laban and Leah would do such a thing. On Leah's part she may have been:

- Acting in obedience to her father.

- Being the eldest daughter may have been desirous of having a husband first or believed that it was right and proper that she should since she was the firstborn.
- Being inferior in beauty to her younger sister Rachel she may have been acting from jealousy and envy and since her father was enticing her to marry Jacob she acted according to his will and according to hers.
- It is certain Laban would have told her about the promises God had made to Jacob and with this knowledge she may have believed that she could be the mother of the promised seed which was to descend from the bloodline of Jacob and therefore she acted according to her fathers will and her desire to be the mother of the promised seed.

Whatever her motivation was it is clear that Laban secretly and cunningly manipulated and persuaded her to deceive Jacob into believing that she was Rachael. There is no doubt that this fraud is almost beyond belief and it for this reason that Laban would have made the switch in the dark of night at the very end of the wedding feast. It is interesting to notice that Jacob who had not long ago cunningly deceived his father Isaac by pretending to be Esau is now cunningly deceived himself by Laban, his father-in-law.

Why have you deceived me? (v24) Jacob no doubt in shock discovers that Laban had deceived him, and asks why has he done this wicked thing to him? Laban answers this question in (v26-30) (below).

Laban gave Leah Zilpah: (v24) it was customary to give the bride a handmaid, who became her confidential servant. When Laban's sister Rebekah rode off with Abraham's servant to become a bride for Isaac she took with her nurse and a number of handmaidens.

- They sent away Rebekah their sister and her nurse, and Abraham's servant and his men. (Gen. 24:59).

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When Laban's gave his daughters to be Jacobs wives he gave Leah Zilpah to be her handmaid and to Rachael he gave Bilhah (v29).

- Rebekah and her young women arose and rode on the camels and followed the man. Thus the servant took Rebekah and went his way. (Gen. 24:61).

GENESIS 29:26-30

Jacob completed Leah's Week and then Took Rachel as His Wife.

- **Genesis 29:26-30:** Laban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." ²⁸Jacob 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.) ³⁰So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.

In answer to Jacob's question, "Why have you deceived me?" (v24) Laban tells him that in their country it must never be done to give the younger before the first-born. However, if this was the case in Haran Laban should have told Jacob this prior to him agreeing to work for seven years to take the hand of Rachel in marriage. It is very likely Laban didn't offer this information, because he saw that Jacob loved Rachael and not Leah and would never have agreed to labour for seven years for the hand of Leah. Similar deceptions and trickery to marry off an elder daughter before the younger, especially if she is plain or deformed in some manner was practised by some parents of the East where the tradition was for the firstborn to marry before the younger daughter (some say it still practised

even today). Jacob was drawn into taking the two sisters as wives. He could not refuse Rachel, for he had espoused her and loved her; still less could he refuse Leah for he has lain with her. As yet there was no express command against such a marriage. It was for the patriarchs a sin of ignorance; but such a practise will not justify such marriages now, when God's will is plainly made known by the Divine law.

- You shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive. (Lev. 18:18).

And more fully given by the apostle Paul that one man and one woman only should be joined together.

- It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." ²But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. (1 Cor. 7:1-2).

Complete the week of Leah: (v27) Laban requests Jacob to complete Leah's week (i.e., seven days) of marriage and then he will give him Rachel also. This is not a week of feasting and festivity, but Leah's week of marriage and cohabitation with her husband that the marriage with her would be confirmed. Today we would call this week the honeymoon week. To have forsaken Leah during this period would have been to insult and shame her.

Jacob completed Leah's week: (v28), rather than defend himself and quarrel with Laban and his family he submits to the wrong done to him and agrees to work another seven years to for Rachael. It should be mentioned here that this does not mean that he had to work seven years before taking Rachel as his wife. We know this because it is stated, "Jacob went in to Rachel also, but Rachel was barren (v30-31) meaning in the same way that Jacob went into Laban's daughter Leah (v23), he went into Rachel. The words, "Rachel was barren" (v31), shows that she and Jacob did lie together for the purpose of having children, but with no success. Laban gave Rachel to him immediately after he had completed Leah's week and she became his wife in the fullest sense of the meaning, but he was still committed to work another seven years for her father. It could be said that Rachael was given to Jacob to be his wife on credit. This trickery and deal that Laban inflicted upon Jacob shows the crookedness and greed of his heart. Though the marrying of a sister-in-law was not yet incestuous, because no law had yet been made on the subject, the taking of two wives was contrary to the plan and will of God, which from the beginning was purposed that one man would take one woman:

- The rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." ²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Gen. 2:22-24).

Jacob had only ever planned to marry one woman he never had any intention to take for himself two wives, but Laban to marry off his two daughters and get two periods of seven years' service out of Jacob cunningly put him in such a difficult position that he was forced into marrying them both.

GENESIS 29:31-35

Leah gives Birth to Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah.

- **Genesis 29:31-35:** When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. ³²And 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." ³³She 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. ³⁴Again 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. ³⁵And 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.

The Children of Leah.

1. **Reuben:** (Leah's first son) his name comes firstly from the Hebrew word (*Re'uwbén*) it literally means to see and joyfully look on one another and secondly, from the Hebrew word (*banah*) meaning a son (as a builder of the family name). Leah said she called him Reuben because the LORD had looked upon her affliction and now Jacob her husband will love her. He was one of Jacob's sons and the tribe that descended from him.
2. **Simeon:** (Leah's second son) his name comes firstly, from the Hebrew word (*Shim'own*) which literally means hearing and secondly from the word (*shama*) which means to hear intelligently, to give ear and listen (often with diligently, discernment, attention and obedience). Leah said she called him Simeon because the LORD had heard that she was hated by Jacob her husband so the LORD gave her this son also. He was one of Jacob's sons and the tribe that descended from him
3. **Levi:** (Leah's third son) his name comes from the Hebrew word (*lavah*) it literally means to twine and by implication to unite, to lend and to borrow (as a form of obligation) or to join self to another by lending or borrowing. Leah said now my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons. He was a son of Jacob and the tribe that descended from him.
4. **Judah:** (Leah's fourth son) his name comes firstly, from the Hebrew word (*Yehuwdah*) which literally means celebrated and secondly from the word (*yadah*) which means to physically use or hold out the hand, especially to revere or worship and praise (with extended hands). It carries the idea of making confession and casting out. Leah said, "This time I will praise the LORD," therefore she called his name Judah. It is the name of five Israelites and of the tribe descended from Leah's son Judah and of his territory.

After these four sons Leah ceased bearing children (v32-35).

NOTICE: the following two things:

1. Leah's desire to have her husband Jacob love her, this shows that she was very aware that Jacob her husband loved Rachel and that she was hated (v31) probably by both Rachel and Jacob. This highlights the fact there are always consequences for lies and deception.
2. Though Leah was hated by Jacob and Rachael God did not hate her, but showed her compassion by opening her womb and giving her four sons (v31).

However, though Leah ceased bearing children in the following chapter she takes her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife and Zilpah bore Jacob:

- Gad and Asher (Gen. 30:9-13).
- Issachar, Zebulun and a daughter named Dinah. (Gen. 30:16-213).

All these sons born to Jacob later become the twelve tribes of Israel and eventually form the nation of Israel.

- For greater information concerning Jacob's twelve sons see the following chapter.

As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.

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