

JACOB WITH LABAN

Genesis 29 - 30

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Jacob, Laban, Leah, and Rachel

Key-location: Haran

Key-repetitions:

- Seven years: Jacob offered to work seven years for Laban to marry his daughter Rachel (Gen 29:18); Jacob served Laban seven years to get Rachel, but Laban gave him Leah (Gen 29:20-23); Laban said he'd give Rachel to Jacob if he would work another seven years (Gen 29:27); Jacob worked for Laban another seven years (Gen 29:30).
- Conflict between Leah and Rachel: Leah was older and had weak eyes while Rachel was younger and beautiful (Gen 29:16-17); Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah (Gen 29:30); Leah had children but Rachel didn't and Rachel was jealous of Leah (Gen 29:1); Rachel gave Jacob her slave girl as a concubine (Gen 30:3) and Leah gave Jacob her slave girl as a concubine (Gen 30:9); Leah accused Rachel of taking her husband and of wanting to take her son's mandrakes (Gen 30:15).
- Deceit: Laban deceived Jacob by giving him Leah when Jacob had worked for Rachel (Gen 29:23); Jacob used selective breeding so weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones went to himself (Gen 30:37-43).

Key-attitudes:

- Deception of both Laban and Jacob.
- Conflict between Laban and Jacob, Leah and Rachel, Jacob and brothers-in-law .
- Jacob's love for Rachel and dislike for Leah.
- Laban's sons' anger at their brother-in-law Jacob for getting their father's wealth.

Initial-situation:

Jacob deceived his blind father into giving to him the blessing that his father thought he was giving to his oldest son Esau. Esau made plans to kill Jacob. Jacob fled to his Uncle Laban's home. The first night of Jacob's journey, God appeared to Jacob in a dream.

Initial-problem:

Jacob traveled to the land of the eastern people and found his Uncle Laban. Laban hugged and kissed Jacob, brought Jacob to his home and said, "You're my own flesh and blood."

Final-situation:

Laban's sons made the accusation against their brother-in-law, "Jacob took everything our father owned and gained all his wealth from what belonged to our father."

BIBLE STORY

Jacob traveled to the land of the eastern people and found his Uncle Laban, his mother's brother. Laban hugged and kissed Jacob, brought Jacob to his home and said, "You're my own flesh and blood."

Jacob stayed with Laban for a whole month. Laban told Jacob "You're a relative of mine, but it's not right for you to work for me without pay. What should I pay you?"

Laban had two daughters: Leah was the older and she had weak eyes. Rachel was the younger and she was beautiful. Jacob loved Rachel and said, "I'll work seven years in exchange for marrying your younger daughter Rachel."

Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me" (Gen 29:1-18).

Jacob worked seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because he loved her. Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. I want to consummate my marriage."

Laban gave a feast. Evening came and Laban took his oldest daughter Leah and brought her to the marriage bed, and Jacob slept with her. Laban gave Leah a servant girl Zilpah as her maid.

Morning came; Leah was in the marriage bed! Jacob accused Laban, "What have you done to me? I worked for you so I could marry Rachel! Why did you deceive me?"

Laban replied, "In our country we don't marry the younger daughter before the older daughter. Finish your honeymoon week; then I'll give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."

Jacob completed the honeymoon week with Leah, and then Laban gave Jacob Rachel to be his wife. Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to Rachel as her maid. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. Jacob worked for Laban another seven years (Gen 29:19-31).

The Lord saw that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. The Lord enabled Leah to have children, but Rachel could never get pregnant. Leah became pregnant four times and each time gave birth to a son. Then Leah stopped having children (Gen 29:32-35).

Rachel realized she was not giving Jacob any children. Rachel was jealous of her sister Leah and told Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

Jacob angrily answered, "I can't do what only God can do? God kept you from having children!"

Rachel said, "Here is Bilhah, my slave girl. Sleep with her so that she can give birth to a child for me. I can build a family through her."

Jacob slept with Bilhah, who became pregnant two different times and each time gave birth to a son. After Bilhah's second son, Rachel said, "I struggled hard with my sister, and I've won" (Gen 30:1-8).

Leah stopped having children, so she gave her slave girl Zilpah to Jacob as a wife. Zilpah bore Jacob two sons (Gen 30:9-13).

During wheat harvest, Reuben, Leah's oldest son, went into the fields, found some mandrake plants, and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel asked Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."

Leah replied, "You already took away my husband. Will you take my son's mandrakes too?"

Rachel said, "Give me your son's mandrakes and in return you can sleep with Jacob tonight."

Jacob came in from the fields that evening and Leah met him and said, "I bartered my son's mandrakes for a night with you." That night Leah became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. Leah said, "Now my husband will treat me with honor, because I've given him six sons." Later Leah gave birth to a daughter (Gen 30:14-21).

Then God answered Rachel's prayer and enabled her to have children. Rachel gave birth to a son and said, "God took away my disgrace." Rachel named her son Joseph (Gen 30:22-24).

After Joseph was born, Jacob told Laban, "Let me return to my own home and country. Give me my wives and children. I've earned them by working for you."

Laban replied, "Please stay. I've learned by divination that the Lord blessed me because of you. Name your wages, and I'll pay them."

Jacob said to Laban, "I've worked for you and your livestock increased under my care. The little you had before I came has increased greatly. The Lord blessed you wherever I've been. But when can I do something for my own family?"

Laban asked, "What shall I pay you?"

Jacob replied, "I'll go on tending your flocks and watching over them. Go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every black lamb, and every spotted or speckled goat. They'll be my wages."

Laban answered, "Agreed! We'll do what you asked."

That day Jacob removed all the streaked or spotted goats and sheep and all the black sheep. Jacob placed them in his sons' care. Jacob continued to care for Laban's flocks. Jacob used selective breeding so the weak animals went to Laban, and the strong ones to himself. In this way Jacob grew very rich. He had large flocks, male and female servants, camels and donkeys (Gen 30:25-43).

Laban's sons made the accusation, "Jacob took everything our father owned and gained all his wealth from what belonged to our father" (Gen 31:1).

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?

8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did Laban deceive Jacob on his wedding night?
2. How did Jacob obtain his four wives?
3. What was the source of disharmony in Jacob's family?
4. How did Jacob obtain the wealth of his father-in-law?
5. What are some reasons for jealousy and competition in families today?
6. What are the results of jealousy and competition in families today?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **The deceiver will be deceived.** Jacob, the deceiver of Esau, (Gen 25:29-34; 27:17-29) was deceived by Laban (Gen 25:29-34; 27:17-29), who took advantage of Jacob by giving him Leah as a wife instead of Rachel (Gen 29:21-27). Years later, Jacob, who had deceived his own father, was deceived by his own sons after they sold Joseph into slavery (Gen 37).
2. **The most important goals are worth working and waiting for patiently.** Jacob worked seven years to marry Rachel. After being deceived and given Leah, Jacob agreed to work seven more years for Rachel.
3. **The fact that a custom is socially acceptable does not mean it is right or wise.** Rachel and Leah were locked in a contest to win Jacob's love and have more children. Both gave their maids to Jacob as concubines. It was the custom of the day, but Jacob would have been wise to decline.
4. **It is difficult to trust God when nothing happens. It's more difficult to live with the consequences of taking matters into one's own hands.** God eventually answered Rachel's prayers and gave her children; however, in the meantime, Rachel had given her maid to Jacob as a concubine (Gen 30:22-24).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Interactive Sharing:

Jacob worked seven years to marry Rachel. After being deceived and given Leah, Jacob agreed to work seven more years for Rachel.

Invite listeners to share an experience where they needed to work hard for a long time in order to achieve a goal.