

Rachel and...Whatamess – *Genesis 29:1-30*

Introduction – Remember the context: “the older shall serve the younger” (Gen 25:23), “In you, all the families of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 12:3, 29:14), “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise His heel” (Gen 3:16), and of course what the prophet Malachi taught later, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated” (Mal 1:2-3, Rom 9:13). According to the writer of this toledot, Jacob was a “blameless” man (25:27).

Jacob successfully obtained the promised blessing. He did so through warfare-deceit against the seed of the serpent, against the beast-man, Esau. He is commended by God as bearer of the same blessings promised to Abraham – and then he is sent on his next great journey – to get a wife – he thinks – but there will be providential twists and turns testing Jacob’s patience, skill, wit, and trust in the Lord. Another attempt by the serpent to deceive and trick, just as in the Garden, was about to occur.

Genesis is the book of beginnings, the beginning of the story of God’s salvation of the world, and it is a crazy story. Kind of like your story.

Overview – This chapter begins “then,” in other words, following the great blessing of God and vows of Jacob, this happened. The first phrase is literally, “Jacob lifted up his feet” suggesting Jacob had a new lease on life and fresh skip in his step (v1). He traveled to the same or similar well as his father’s servant had where he found sheep and shepherds waiting until some would roll the stone covering the well and water the sheep (vv2-3, 8). They knew Laban and announced that Rachel, his daughter was coming (vv4-6). It may be that Jacob tried to “move them along” so he could talk to Rachel alone (v7), but when he saw Rachel, he moved the stone himself, watered Laban’s flock (her father’s) and greeted Rachel with a kiss (vv9-11). Weeping with joy (God was certainly good to His promise) Jacob explained it all to Rachel who then ran and told her father (vv11-12).

Laban and the Trap Set – Laban is really the central character of this section now (vv13-30) and Jacob comes up against an evil deceiver. Laban certainly remembered the wealth that the servant of Isaac had brought. When he heard the report, he ran and embraced Jacob as family and Jacob stayed with him for a month (vv13-14). It seems after that month, Laban realized that Jacob didn’t have such wealth. Laban led Jacob into a contract where Jacob would serve Laban for seven years for Rachel (15-18), but looking closely, Laban’s words were ambiguous (v19). Rachel is the younger daughter and beautiful of form and appearance, while Leah, the older, was “weak of eyes” (vv16-17). The seven years pass like a few days, and then Jacob asks to be wed to Rachel (vv20-21). Laban held a great wedding feast (where the wine flowed freely and maybe the punch was spiked), and that evening, Laban gave Leah (under a wedding veil) to Jacob (vv22-24). In the morning, “behold! Leah!” and Jacob said to Laban, “why then have you deceived me?” (v25). Laban gives a lame excuse (v26) and offers Rachel for an additional seven years of service (v27). After the wedding week, Jacob took Rachel for a wife and then served those additional seven years (vv28-30).

What is Laban? – Rebekah was sly, but her brother was a scoundrel. Her deceit ran alongside God’s promise. His deceit was for his own personal profit. Laban was the new threat to the seed of the woman. He took advantage of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel, all for his own gain. And the evilness of his deceit shows through in his comment, “It must not be done in our country...” (v26) as though he had some moral compass. And it must have been so cutting as he finished with bitter irony, “...to give the younger before the firstborn.”

Twisted Morality – There is something to see here. Every culture has a set of morals, a final transcendent set of what you can and cannot do or say. “Think of Laban as the epitome, the perfect picture of fallen man, a lover of himself, thoughtless of others, utterly indifferent to God, but always ready to pass judgment on anyone and everyone else” – Rayburn. Christians are blamed by the culture as being too moral, but the morals of the secular world strangle our freedom and enslave us to our lusts, they demand egalitarianism while destroying (literally) the lives of the weakest among us, all the while ruining the imago dei of male and female, which in the end preys upon women. And when Christians stand up for reality and for God’s laws, we are told, “it must not be done in our country.” Every culture has a moral code, and ours would be unrecognizable to those just a couple generations ago. But if you try to criticize it, you will be charged with being immoral, hateful, intolerant, and wicked, “What you are saying is simply not said here.” What CS Lewis said about an individual is true of a culture: “...when a man is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his badness less and less...Good people know about both good and evil; bad people do not know about either.”

Parallels, Recapitulations, and “Precapitulations” – The similarities are so striking they cannot be accidental. Abraham’s servant and then Jacob both finding a bride at a well. Laban runs out to greet both men and attempts to hamper both of them from returning to their homeland. Jacob spoke with the same aggrieved tone towards Laban as Esau had to Jacob (v25, 27:36).

And there is the bitter irony of “serve.” Jacob had been promised that Esau would serve him. Isaac had told Jacob in the blessing “*let peoples serve you and nations bow down to you*” (27:28), and then to Esau he said, “*I have made him your master and all his brethren I have made his servants*” (27:37). Now he is brought into servitude to Laban (v15, 18, 20, 25, 27, 30). And this is a “precapitulation” or foreshadowing as well. Israel (the nation, not just the man) will be held in exile in Egypt, enslaved by Pharaoh, and would have to flee. So the question is – was this chapter evidence of Jacob getting his “just desserts” or was it his promotion unto greater sanctification and prominence?

Slow Sanctification through Sufferings – We need to see in these narratives how God hand crafts our traumas and times of distress and what He intends through them. In just a few chapters, Joseph will be told that his whole family will bow down to him, and then he is sold into slavery. In Exodus, Moses will rise up to avenge his people, and then has to flee as an outcast for four decades. David will be anointed king and then have to run for his life from the king. And Jesus, second Person of the Godhead, declared the Savior of the world, will Himself be humbled (Phil 2:6-8, Matt 20:28).

We are shaped by our sufferings. We are prepared for our blessings by what we suffer in faith. And this sanctifying work by God goes terribly slowly from our vantage point and life gets very, very messy. Why doesn’t God just clean us all up in a hurry and make all things right now? It appears that in our finitude, the best way to learn humility is over time and many, many experiences. Even Jesus, in his humanity, went through this (Heb 5:8-9).

Conclusion – We stopped at v30 and all we see is a mess. And our hearts go out to Leah, the “hated” wife (v31). Why did God do this? Why has He allowed the things in your life? Do you need a reason? Or do you need God? You don’t need an explanation; you need to know that God knows and that He never wastes your hurt. John Piper wrote a book, “Don’t Waste Your Life,” and then he got cancer and wrote, “Don’t Waste Your Cancer.” The answer, the reason, is found at the cross. Not one ounce of Christ’s pain was wasted. His suffering for your sins procured your eternal good.

Yeah, but what of Leah? At verse 30 we don’t know, just like you don’t know right now about that situation in your life. Stories help. Leah will become the mother of Levi through whom would come Moses and Aaron. She would become the mother of Judah through whom would come David. And from Leah and Jacob in the end would come Jesus. But you are only in verse 30 – and its only going to get messier. It’s almost like God is more concerned for our eternal holiness than our momentary happiness.