

The Patriarchs | The Gospel According to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

The Brides

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Genesis 29

Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the sons of the east. ² He looked, and saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for from that well they watered the flocks. Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large. ³ When all the flocks were gathered there, they would then roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well. ⁴ Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran." ⁵ He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know him." ⁶ And he said to them, "Is it well with him?" And they said, "It is well, and here is Rachel his daughter coming with the sheep." ⁷ He said, "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them." ⁸ But they said, "We cannot, until all the flocks are gathered, and they roll the stone from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."

⁹ While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. ¹⁰ When Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted his voice and wept. ¹² Jacob told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

¹³ So when Laban heard the news of Jacob his sister's son, he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Then he related to Laban all these things. ¹⁴ Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him a month. ¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ And Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and face. ¹⁸ Now Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹ Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than to give her to another man; stay with me."

²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her. ²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her." ²² Laban gathered all the men of the place and made a feast. ²³ Now in the evening he took his daughter Leah, and brought her to him; and Jacob went in to her. ²⁴ Laban also gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. ²⁵ So it came about in the morning that, behold, it was Leah! And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? Why then have you deceived me?" ²⁶ But Laban said, "It is not the practice in our place to marry off the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷ Complete the week of

this one, and we will give you the other also for the service which you shall serve with me for another seven years." ²⁸ *Jacob did so and completed her week, and he gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife.* ²⁹ *Laban also gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maid.* ³⁰ *So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and indeed he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he served with Laban for another seven years.*

³¹ *Now the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.*

³² *Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben, for she said, "Because the LORD has seen my affliction; surely now my husband will love me."* ³³ *Then she conceived again and bore a son and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." So she named him Simeon.* ³⁴ *She conceived again and bore a son and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore he was named Levi.* ³⁵ *And she conceived again and bore a son and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.*

We're looking at the life of Jacob in Genesis. He's the *third generation of the Patriarchs*, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, *the first family of God's people*. Today, we see sons born to Jacob. One is named Judah; that's the tribe or family from which David comes AND the "Son of David", the Messiah, Lion of Judah.

We've seen that these *first families of God's holy people* are not always *very holy*... a lot of deception /deceit in these family relationships.

And I've been thinking a lot about deceit lately...and I know that YOU have thinking a lot about deceit lately... *because "'tis the season"*. It's campaign season and all these commercials and print-ads and Internet ads, signs, stickers and phone-calls.

You may have seen the YouTube clip of the 4 year old girl who bursts into tears because all she hears anymore is "Bronco Bamma and Mitt Rom-a-ney"...she weeps for US all! And some of the local campaigns are the worst!

And when we see the commercials, sometimes, back to back (this candidate and next the opponent), we realize, "these two commercials cannot both be true. How can we make any progress with all this deceit?" It's very discouraging...as a voter, a citizen. It FEELS like everything is corrupt and *meaningless*, like whichever campaign *spends* the most is going to win.

Today's passage assures us that God is not fooled and in fact that God makes a mockery of our human deceit by actually turning it to good. *God WILL fulfill His promises and human deceit will actually work to advance His plan* to bring grace into the world.

Let's see how this plays out here in – #1 A Family Left to It's Own Devices #2 – Rescued by Meaning

Jacob deceives his blind father, and steals from his twin brother, Esau, and when Esau threatened revenge, their parents said, "We have to get Jacob out of here". They sent him looking for a wife back to where his mother originated, a place in Syria called Paddan-aram.

A few days into that *month-long journey*, Jacob, the fugitive has a dream. He sees a ladder linking heaven and earth and he hears God making massive promises to him – "*I will make your descendants as numerous as the sand in the desert and I will be with you wherever you go*". And Jacob wakes up and says, "THIS is where I met God – I will think of it as the dwelling/house of God...Bethel."

And we saw, last week, that Jesus Christ, many years later, claimed to BE *the fulfillment of that dream*, the *TRUE Jacob's Ladder*, the link from heaven to earth AND the real Bethel, the dwelling of God on earth.

Now, with these promises ringing in his ears Jacob comes to the place, his mother's town. This is probably the same well where his mother Rebekah met that prayerful old servant of Abraham's who went to get a bride for Isaac and met Rebekah at this very well. And here, Jacob meets his wife and true love, Rachel. Love at first sight.

She takes him home to her dad, Laban. *Laban remembers the last time someone came from out of town looking for a bride...THAT* servant had ten camels full of treasure. So, Laban comes running out to meet this next rich relative...and behold a bum! It's Jacob the poor fugitive.

But Laban embraces him and he listens to Jacob's whole story (because Laban probably wondered, "where's all the camels and treasure?") and when he hears about the deception, Uncle Laban says, "You really are a chip off the old block – just like your dear old uncle!"

Then Laban puts Jacob to work for a month and says, "Well, I should pay you something – not take advantage of my dear nephew!...Let's make a deal."

Jacob wants Rachel, his true love. There's another, older daughter, Leah, but he's not interested in her... *He's so in love with Rachel* that he'll do anything to have her. He can't pay the traditional bride-price so he shoots really high and offers to work for *seven* years. Laban says, "Deal!" (that's twice the normal bridal price!)

So, Jacob works like a machine for seven years but it *seems* like a few days because of his love for Rachel. *And then the day comes...*but Laban has to be reminded, "Give me my wife!"...

“Oh, yeah!”, says Laban, “let’s have a party!” And they do! Then, when Jacob’s probably had a little wine...maybe a lot of wine...they blind him with wine and a dark tent and bring in his long awaited Rachel. One of the ancient rabbis wrote that when he spoke her name all through that night, “Rachel”! She said “Yes, Jacob!” (Just like when his blind father called him “Esau” and he always answered, “Yes, Father, it is I.”)

And when he awoke, “Behold, it was Leah!”

And when Jacob storms off to confront his uncle and now father-in-law, Laban *answers* with real sarcasm, “In OUR place, we don’t put the younger before the first born!” As if to say, “They evidently DO that in YOUR place but you’re not *IN* your place - you’re in OUR place!”

So he makes another deal with the deceived deceiver, “You wouldn’t want to work less for the hand of your true love, would you?...So, live out your bridal week with Leah and then you’ll marry Rachel and you’ll be my slave for another seven years.”

And so it was. And they all lived together, one big happy devious, conniving, manipulative, deceptive family...*unhappily ever after*. Jacob’s life is a wreck.

And, what we may NOT have noticed is that ...God has been apparently absent from this whole story. I mean there is no mention of God at all. *THIS* bridal story is not like the one we read about in ch. 24 when Abraham’s old servant prayed for the chosen woman for Isaac.

THIS story is more like ch. 23, that entirely secular real-estate transaction for the burial plot where Abraham negotiated for that little field from the Sons of Heth...God wasn’t even mentioned in that chapter and yet it was God making good on His promise, giving Abraham a down payment on the whole Promised Land! God used human greed and used even death to advance His plan... and so here...

Not til the last paragraph is God named...“the LORD saw that Leah was unloved and opened her womb”. She bears four sons and each becomes a head of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Leah mentions “the LORD” (i.e YHWH – the Covenant name of God) in naming the sons. Suddenly there’s meaning everywhere we look!

The first son is named “Reuben” – “See, a Son”. And Leah sees a kind of *play on words* with, “the LORD has seen on my sufferings”. But Moses may see another play on words – it was seeing...or the lack of it that Jacob used to deceive his father and seeing (or, again, *not* seeing the veiled Leah) that deceived Jacob. Jacob will always think “Reuben the son who came by seeing”.

The second son is Shimon (Simeon) meaning “has heard” and again, she ties the name to “the LORD has heard that I am unloved” but Moses may want us to see another meaning: sight and sound are the two senses by which Jacob might have been detected when he deceived his

father. Every time he said the names of his sons, there was meaning, a reminder of his deception...a reminder of his need for grace.

Then the 3rd and 4th sons: Levi, a play on the word “joined” in Hebrew and Judah meaning “let him be praised” . These would be the heads of the tribes – *Moses and Aaron (the priests) would come from Levi and David/Solomon and the Kings would come from Judah.* Eventually, the King of all kings would come from Judah, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. And He alone will fulfill the promise to Abraham and make his descendants – all those who believe the Gospel –too numerous to count, people from every tribe tongue and race singing before the throne of God.

And so, in the big story, when human deception seems to be taking center stage and God seems to be absent, He is in fact VERY present. He is not only passively allowing human sin and deceit but has actually figured it in to His plan and makes it promote His own program to save and renewed the world.

Had Jacob not deceived his father, he would not have become a fugitive and thus never met Laban and Leah and Rachel. And had he not been deceived, he would not have married and then fathered these sons who would head the Tribes of Israel out of which would come the Messiah.

In Matthew ch. 1 the genealogy includes a lot of names and a whole lot more deception leading to the birth of Jesus Christ, Judah and Tamar (Gen 38) and “the wife of Uriah” (a ref to David’s horrific deceit and murder). Those names are included in the family tree of Jesus Christ. This is God making a mockery of human evil by choreographing it into good – beating our swords into ploughshares! Our weapons will not only fail us in the end – God will turn them all into instruments for healing and re-cultivating a new earth where there is no deceit!

Of the four main characters in this story, Laban is just a selfish manipulator attached only to himself.

Rachel is silent. Her drama is only just beginning.

Jacob is a big mess. He wants to get home. His mother told him it would be only a few days (27.44) and now it’s been 14 years and it’ll be 20 before he actually gets back. He’s a miniature of the nation of Israel in slavery and it exile... He’s not in his place!

But the fourth character, the unloved Leah...she is grounded in meaning and in significance, because she sees that there aren’t really four main characters but One...**AND SHE IS STARTING TO BE SATISFIED IN HIM.**

She’s been bending over backward to get Jacob to notice her. She’s the perfect wife (has given him four sons!) and has fulfilled all the cultural expectations for her role...but she is certain that only one thing will really make her complete – Jacob has to love her!

She's wants to matter, she wants recognition and appreciation and significance. But she's convinced the only way to get complete is by a man until she finally sees, "I will only be complete in God...and in fact I AM complete in Him...*THIS TIME I WILL PRAISE THE LORD!*"

She has found real meaning. She names the Covenant God, the Promise Keeping God, and she rests in him. She's received grace and it led her to praise and to rest. She received the seed of the Tribe of Judah but WE have received the fruit of Judah.

People who are repenting and believing in Jesus Christ are coming to see that a King came, a Lion, Who labored for us... and it seemed to Him but a few days because of his love for us... He lived and died to make us His own.

We have, in Jesus Christ, the kiss that can complete us...and complete us like no earthly applause, or recognition or status or approval or person *could ever complete us*.

The key then...is to give over to this relentless Pursuer Who wants to fills us so our lives overflow with meaning and with praise... even when there's deception and nonsense all around.