

Genesis 28:1-22 – Jacob Travels to Haran

1928 BC, Jacob is 77 years old

Esau Marries Again (v6-9)

⁶ Now Esau saw that **Isaac had blessed Jacob** and sent him away to Paddan-aram, to take to himself a wife from there, *and that* when **he blessed him** he charged him, saying, “**You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan,**” ⁷ and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Paddan-aram. ⁸ So Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan displeased his father Isaac; ⁹ and Esau went to Ishmael, and married, besides the wives that he had, Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebaioth.

= stringed instrument
= God will hear
= heights

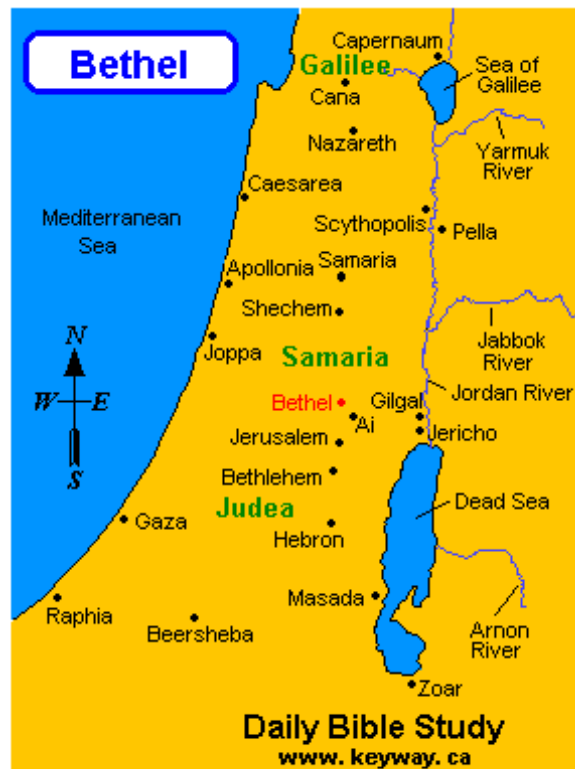


The Covenant Confirmed to Jacob (v10-22)

v10-19 Jacob's Dream

¹⁰ Then Jacob departed from Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he came to a certain place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; and he took one of the stones of the place and put it under his head, and lay down in that place. ¹² And he had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.

¹³ And behold, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. ¹⁴ Your descendants shall also be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵ And behold, I am with you, and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."



The Covenant Confirmed to Jacob (v10-22)



v10-19 Jacob's Dream

¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.” ¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” ¹⁸ So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on its top. ¹⁹ And he called the name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had been Luz.

v20-22 Jacob's Vow

²⁰ Then Jacob made a vow, saying, “If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, ²¹ and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. ²² And this stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house; and of all that Thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee.”



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob's_Ladder_\(Bible\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob's_Ladder_(Bible))

The angels climb Jacob's Ladder on the west front of Bath Abbey.



The classic [Jewish](#) commentaries offer several interpretations of Jacob's ladder:

According to the [Midrash](#), the ladder signified the exiles which the Jewish people would suffer before the coming of the [Messiah](#). First the angel representing the 70-year exile of Babylonia climbed "up" 70 rungs, and then fell "down". Then the angel representing the exile of Persia went up a number of steps, and fell, as did the angel representing the exile of Greece. Only the fourth angel, which represented the final exile of [Rome/Edom](#) (whose guardian angel was [Esau](#) himself), kept climbing higher and higher into the clouds. Jacob feared that his children would never be free of Esau's domination, but God assured him that at the End of Days, Edom too would come falling down.

Another interpretation of the ladder keys into the fact that the angels first "ascended" and then "descended." Since angels originate in Heaven, the text should have described them as descending first.



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob's_Ladder_\(Bible\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob's_Ladder_(Bible))

The angels climb Jacob's Ladder on the west front of Bath Abbey.



The Midrash explains that Jacob, as a holy man, was always accompanied by angels. When he reached the border of the land of [Canaan](#) (the future land of [Israel](#)), the angels who were assigned to the Holy Land went back up to Heaven and the angels assigned to other lands came down to meet Jacob. When Jacob returned to Canaan (Genesis 32:2-3), he was greeted by the angels who were assigned to the Holy Land.

The place at which Jacob stopped for the night was in reality [Mount Moriah](#), the future home of the [Beit HaMikdash](#) (Holy Temple). The ladder therefore signifies the "bridge" between Heaven and earth, as prayers and sacrifices offered in the Holy Temple soldered a connection between God and the Jewish people. Moreover, the ladder alludes to the Giving of the [Torah](#) as another connection between Heaven and earth. The [Hebrew](#) word for ladder, *sulam* - סולם - and the name for the mountain on which the Torah was given, [Sinai](#) - סיני - have the same [gematria](#) (numerical value of the letters).



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob's_Ladder_\(Bible\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob's_Ladder_(Bible))

The angels climb [Jacob's Ladder](#) on the west front of [Bath Abbey](#).



The Christian interpretation of this passage is based heavily on [Jesus's](#) words in [Book of John](#) 1:51. In this view, Jesus is seen as being the ladder, bridging the gap between Heaven and Earth, being both the Son of God and the Son of Man, tying into his mediatorial role. [Adam Clarke](#), a Methodist theologian and Bible scholar, elaborates:

"That by the angels of God ascending and descending, is to be understood, that a perpetual intercourse should now be opened between heaven and earth, through the medium of Christ, who was God manifested in the flesh. Our blessed Lord is represented in his mediatorial capacity as the ambassador of God to men; and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man, is a metaphor taken from the custom of despatching couriers or messengers from the prince to his ambassador in a foreign court, and from the ambassador back to the prince."



John 1:43-51 – Jesus Chooses Philip and Nathanael

43 The next day He purposed to go forth into Galilee, and He found Philip. And Jesus said to him, **“Follow Me.”** 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, **“We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”** 46 And Nathanael said to him, **“Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”** Philip said to him, **“Come and see.”** 47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, **“Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”** 48 Nathanael said to Him, **“How do You know me?”** Jesus answered and said to him, **“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”** 49 Nathanael answered Him, **“Rabbi, You are the Son of God; You are the King of Israel.”** 50 Jesus answered and said to him, **“Because I said to you that I saw you under the fig tree, do you believe? You shall see greater things than these.”** 51 And He said to him, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, you shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”**



Genesis 29:1-30:43 – Jacob’s Life in Haran

Jacob’s Safe Arrival in Haran (29:1-8)

¹ Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the sons of the east. ² And 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 And Jacob said to them, “**My brothers, where are you from?**” And they said, “We are from Haran.” ⁵ And 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 behold**, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep.” ⁷ And 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.”



<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4870.html> - Scott Grant

The mirror of Haran

After leaving the land of Canaan with Jacob, we enter into the land of Haran. This is the dark period of Jacob's life, bracketed in the narrative by a sunset and a sunrise (Genesis 28:11, 32:31). He expects to spend a few days in Haran, but it will be 20 years before he extricates himself. These are the hardest years of his life. Yet the Lord promised to be with him through it all. These, then, are years of spiritual formation for Jacob.

In Haran, the Lord holds up a mirror so that Jacob might see himself. What Jacob has done to others is now done to him; he reaps what he has sowed. And, likewise, he now does to others what has been done to him; he sows what he has reaped. Perhaps Jacob will feel and see something of the pain he has inflicted and is inflicting on others. Perhaps he will understand that his monumental conflicts with others are symptomatic of his conflict with God. Perhaps, then, he will be ready to encounter the Lord on the banks of the Jabbok. In Haran, Jacob encounters relational and occupational heartache. His dreams of marriage and career turn into nightmares.

It seems sometimes as if we are living in Haran, the land of relational and occupational heartache. Our biggest dreams often gather around marriage and career, but sometimes those dreams turn into nightmares. Yet the Lord remains with us and forms us in the land of broken dreams. In this land, we look into the mirror and see ourselves—what we have done to others and what we're doing to others. It is the place where our conflicts with others show us something of our conflict with God. It is the place where the Lord prepares us for himself.



<http://www.pbc.org/library/files/html/4870.html> - Scott Grant

Jacob meets the shepherds

Evidently buoyed by his encounter with the Lord on the northeastern edge of the promised land, Jacob literally “lifted his feet,” heading east in search of a wife. He comes to “the land of the sons of the east,” a description that alerts attentive readers that he may be in danger (Genesis 2:3, 3:24, 4:16; Judges 6:3, 33). His journey echoes that of Abraham’s servant, who headed east in search of a wife for Isaac (Genesis 24).

The word “behold” signifies that the sight of three flocks of sheep next to a well would be considered strange. What’s strange is that they were lying beside the well but not drinking from it. The narrator further offers that the stone covering the well was large. Such descriptions in verse 2 set the stage for Rachel’s entrance.

Stones were used as coverings to keep wells clean and to restrict their use. Therefore, the stone is a key motif in the Jacob narrative. In Genesis 28:11, a stone signified that Jacob had come to a hard place. But when the Lord revealed himself to Jacob in that place, the stone became to him a symbol of God’s presence (Genesis 28:18-19). Here, the stone covering the well poses as an obstacle in that the water Jacob will want is, at least for now, inaccessible. Also, since a stone signifies difficulty, yet the well is a symbol of fruitfulness, this stone also foreshadows both Rachel, who would be inaccessible to Jacob for many years, and Rachel’s womb, which would also be blocked (Genesis 29:31).

In verse 3, the narrator explains the custom of this place. The shepherds would not water their sheep until all the flocks that had a right to be at the well had gathered there.



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The shepherds' answer to Jacob's question about their home tells him that he has arrived at his destination. He had set out for Haran in hopes of making one of Laban's daughters his wife (Genesis 28:2, 10).

Therefore, in order, Jacob is looking for Haran, Laban, and a daughter of Laban. Not surprisingly, his next question for the shepherds is whether they know Laban. They answer yes. Jacob then poses his next question, concerning Laban's welfare, in order to get information about his daughters. The shepherds, no doubt irritated with the nosiness of this foreigner, are brisk with their answers and finally say, in so many words, "If you want to know about Laban, ask his daughter; here she comes." This is more than Jacob could have hoped for. He has come looking for a wife from among Laban's daughters, and Rachel, one of Laban's daughters, is coming toward him.

As Rachel approaches, Jacob notes that midday is not the time for gathering the sheep but for pasturing them, and he admonishes the shepherds to water the sheep and leave. He wants to be alone with Rachel. Jacob finds out what the narrator has already told us—that the shepherds would wait until all the flocks were gathered. In this way, the narrator gives us the opportunity to anticipate Jacob's response. The shepherds are somewhat more expansive in their response to Jacob this time, but only to put him in his place. Jacob's comment to the shepherds, that "it is not time" for the livestock to be gathered, hovers over the story of his romance with Rachel. By all appearances she is the right woman. But Jacob tries to do with time the same thing he would do to the stone: push it out of the way. As a result, time would push back: It would be many years before he would marry Rachel and many years after that before they would leave together.



Genesis 29:1-30:43 – Jacob's Life in Haran

Jacob Meets Rachel (29:9-12)

⁹ While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, **for** she was a shepherdess. ¹⁰ And it came about, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that 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 And 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.



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Jacob meets Rachel

During this exchange between Jacob and the shepherds, Rachel comes into view. Jacob sees the sheep with her and understands that she has a need. One look at Rachel, whom the narrator will later describe as “beautiful of form and face,” prompts Jacob to spring into action (Genesis 29:17). He seizes the opportunity to impress her and her family.

The narrator identifies Rachel as the daughter of Laban, the brother of Jacob’s mother, possibly because of Jacob’s strong attachment to his mother (Genesis 25:28). The stone is very large, but Jacob, demonstrating extraordinary strength, rolls it away by himself and waters the sheep that Rachel is shepherding. **The narrator, for emphasis, three times identifies Rachel as the daughter of “Laban his mother’s brother,” which causes us to look both backward and forward in the story. In Genesis 24, Rebekah, Jacob’s mother, met a man at a well who would introduce her to her future husband. Laban appeared in that chapter as well. In Genesis 29-31, Laban will be Jacob’s nemesis. These are “the sheep of Laban,” and Jacob will be shepherding Laban’s flock.**



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Isaac and Esau, Jacob's father and brother, each had violent emotional reactions in Genesis 27. Up to this point in Genesis, Jacob is seen as calculating and emotionless. Jacob, unloved by his father and envious of his brother; Jacob, who fled for his life and made the journey to another land in search of a wife; Jacob, who through it all is never once depicted as showing any emotion, who keeps it all inside with the suppressant of calculating logic, can hold it in no longer. Jacob kisses Rachel, though she does not yet know who he is.

When Esau found out that Jacob had stolen his blessing, he “lifted his voice and wept” (Genesis 27:38). **Jacob now lifts up his voice and weeps. He senses that his long and lonely journey has come to an end. For now, he weeps with joy, but if he knew that his treatment of Esau and Isaac was about to be visited upon him in Laban's treatment of him, his tears would be like those of his brother.** The word “lifted,” near the end of this scene, forms a frame with the same word at the beginning of the scene, when Jacob literally “lifted” his feet.

Upon being informed of Jacob's familial connection, Rachel no doubt remembers the Genesis 24 story, which culminated in Rebekah's departure to meet her future husband.



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Echoes from another story

This story is similar to, but at the same time different from, the “woman-at-the well” scene in Genesis 24. The differences illustrate Jacob’s failures. For Abraham’s servant, the search for a wife for Isaac was a thoroughly spiritual enterprise, bathed in prayer. Rebekah was beautiful, but that wasn’t enough for the servant. He wanted to know her character....In contrast to Abraham’s servant, Jacob doesn’t pray. He eagerly engages the shepherds but not the Lord. Unlike Abraham’s servant, Jacob’s thoughts and actions are those of a schemer, not a man of prayer. For Jacob, a little background information (she’s from the right family) and one look at her (she’s beautiful) are all he needs to conclude that Rachel is the one.

The servant thoroughly investigated Rebekah’s character, but Jacob has no interest in such matters. The servant was able to see Rebekah’s heart. Jacob springs into action before Rachel’s character emerges. Jacob wants to impress the woman, not find out who she is. Whereas Rebekah was impressive in the earlier scene, running to and fro, Jacob, with his mighty feat, takes center stage now. We don’t know whether Jacob’s strength impressed Rachel, but we know that it impressed Laban, who sees Jacob as a potential worker and schemes to keep him in Haran.

The servant, at the end of a thoroughly spiritual investigation, worshiped and thanked God. Having short-circuited the process, Jacob, who is all emotion and no worship, kisses Rachel, lifts his voice (but not to God) and weeps. Like Rebekah, Rachel runs to tell her family, but Jacob never gets to see whether she, like Rebekah, would run to care for him or her animals. The servant left with Rebekah; it would be 20 years before Jacob would leave with Rachel.



Jacob and Laban (29:13-20)

= white

¹³ **So** it came about, when Laban heard the news of Jacob his sister's son, that 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 And Laban said to him, **“Surely you are my bone and my flesh.”** And he stayed with him a month.

Jacob arrives in Haran c.1928BC

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.

Jacob and Laban (29:13-20)

¹⁸ **Now Jacob loved Rachel, so** he said, **“I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.”** ¹⁹ And Laban said, **“It is better that I give her to you than that I should 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.**



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Laban, having acknowledged Jacob as “my bone and my flesh,” now calls him, literally, “my brother.” But he doesn’t treat Jacob as a relative. In using the words “serve” and “wages,” Laban reveals his true perception of Jacob. He views him not as a relative but as a potential slave. As such, in the absence of any such agreement between the two men, Laban has provided Jacob with nothing more than lodging. Unlike Abraham, who sent his servant to this land with provisions and gifts, Isaac sent Jacob there with nothing (Genesis 24:10), so Jacob’s bargaining position is weak.

Laban knows that Jacob is at his mercy. He waits a month before approaching Jacob about provisions beyond lodging, because he knows that his victim’s need—and desire for Rachel—will be more acute. Apparently, Jacob has been serving Laban all along, but without pay. Now Laban, no doubt observing Jacob’s desire for Rachel, asks him to name his wages. Life in Haran, in the world that Laban inhabits, is all about earning one’s “wages” (Genesis 30:18, 28, 32, 33; 31:7, 8, 41). **In his world, family relationships are equated with economic arrangements. This outlook is seen in the names of his daughters: Leah, meaning “cow,” and Rachel, which means “ewe.” Laban is a herder. He sees his daughters as nothing more than livestock. As such, they are commodities to be traded away for the right price. His daughters understood this (Genesis 31:14-15).**



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The narrator's description of one as older and the other as younger is information that will be vital to understanding the story as it unfolds. In verses 16 and 17, the narrator gives us background information that will help us understand Jacob's answer, in verse 18, to Laban's questions. Rachel was the beautiful one. Perhaps Jacob thinks Rachel's beauty will decorate his ugly life. **"Now Jacob loved Rachel..."** Sound familiar? We heard in Genesis 25:28, **"Now Isaac loved Esau."** We're not given the immediate impression that Jacob's preference poses any problem, because he intends to marry Rachel and Rachel alone. But in the years to come, Jacob, who was wounded by the favoritism of his father, will wound Leah with his preference for Rachel.

So Jacob names his wages: Rachel. And, he offers to work seven years for her. He's familiar with working for love. He cooked stew like his brother and dressed up like his brother in the hope that his father would love him as he loved his brother. Jacob's offer must have been an exceptional one, for Laban, a shrewd bargainer, accepts it on the spot without making a counter offer. Laban's response, however, leaves him with plenty of wiggle room. He says, "It is better that I give her to you than to give her to another man." He doesn't actually say that he will give Rachel to Jacob. And his use of a pronoun instead of a name could enable him to later say that he wasn't speaking specifically of Rachel.



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Jacob had “stayed” with Laban for a month; now Laban invites Jacob to “stay” with him for seven years under the terms of their agreement. The “few days” that Jacob thought he would be gone from the promised land look as if they’re turning into several years (Genesis 27:44). He is now in the clutches of Laban. But, Jacob fulfills his end of the bargain. Because of his love for Rachel, seven years of labor seemed like only “a few days.” The narrator, representing Jacob’s assessment of those years, skips over them as if they never happened. Jacob, although he expected to return to the promised land much sooner, still thinks everything is on schedule. In the end, seven years seems like only a few days when the prize is Rachel.

In fact, we are told that literally, the seven years seemed “in his eyes” but a few days. Because Isaac’s “eyes were too dim to see,” Jacob was able to take advantage of him (Genesis 27:1). Jacob’s eyes for Rachel, on the other hand, enabled Laban to take advantage of him. And, as we read on, we learn that Jacob will end up with a woman whose “eyes were [also] weak.”



Jacob's Marriages (29:21-30)

Jacob marries
at 84 years old

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her.” ²² And Laban gathered all the men of the place, and made a feast. ²³ Now it came about in the evening that 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.

= a trickling

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 first-born. 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 And Jacob did so and completed her week, and he gave her 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.

= troubled



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After Jacob has fulfilled his end of the bargain, Laban apparently is none too eager to pay up as Jacob has to come to him. Having been reduced to a slave who has to beg for his wages, Jacob speaks briskly and coarsely of Rachel as payment for services rendered. He says to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her." He sounds very much like his brother Esau, who came to him with the words, "Please, let me have a swallow that red stuff there, for I am famished" (Genesis 25:30). Jacob loved Rachel, but where is love in this scene? Laban offers up his daughter as a steer at the fair, and Jacob enters the bidding.

Laban responds to Jacob by gathering the men of the place and making a feast. This was likely a weeklong wedding feast (Judges 14:12-18). **The narrator used identical phrasing in Genesis 26, where Isaac, having arrived at Gerar, feared the "men of the place" but later "made them a feast" and blessed them (Genesis 26:7, 30).** The men of that place turned out to be peaceful, and Isaac entered into a covenant with them, which was consummated by a feast. In this story, before arriving in Haran, Jacob came to a "place" that was dark and difficult, but God revealed himself to Jacob so that he could later say, "How awesome is this place!" (Genesis 28:10-17).

On the one hand, **by repetition of such language, the narrator lets us know that it would be natural to expect something good to come of this feast with the men of this place. It looks as if Laban wants to bless Jacob. On the other hand, the narrator has already shown us enough of Laban to make us think that all is not as it seems. When Isaac made a feast, the Lord was at the center of it (Genesis 26:29), but in this scene, however, the Lord is nowhere to be found.**



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True to form, Laban substitutes Leah for Rachel. It was dark, and Leah was veiled. Jacob, who probably had filled up on food and wine during the feast, may be feeling no pain. That is Laban's hope, anyway. Jacob unknowingly consummates the marriage with the wrong woman. In this act of "love," Jacob doesn't even know whom he's with. If he cared for this woman's heart, he would know who she is, but he cares only for relieving his pent-up passion. Earlier, in Genesis 27, Jacob's father didn't know him. Isaac's ignorance was such that Jacob was able to masquerade as his brother and get away with it. In similar fashion, Jacob, the son who was unknown by his father, now becomes the lover who doesn't even know his supposed beloved.

In the morning, Jacob wakes up with Leah, not Rachel, and asks Laban, "What is this you have done to me?" His words echo those of the Lord, Pharaoh and Abimelech when they confronted injustice (Genesis 3:13, 12:18, 26:10). This is a nightmare! As the shepherds before him, who told Jacob the way things are done in this part of the world, Laban informs the newcomer of the "practice in our place" (Genesis 29:8). This "place," like the "certain place" Jacob came to in Genesis 28:11, is also turning out to be hard. Laban does not say that it is not the custom to marry off the younger before the older; he says it is not the custom to marry off the younger before the "firstborn."



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With that word, Jacob's past crashes in on him. Jacob wants to know: Why did Laban deceive him? **The narrator would have us believe that divine—and poetic—justice is being served.** Jacob came to his father Isaac "deceitfully" by pretending he was the "firstborn" and stealing the patriarchal blessing (Genesis 27:19, 35). Laban switches sisters the way Jacob switched brothers. Isaac, whose eyes were dim, was blind to Jacob's identity. Now Jacob is blind to Leah's identity. Laban takes advantage of Jacob's "blindness" the way Jacob took advantage of Isaac's blindness, and Laban did to Jacob in this place what Jacob did to Isaac in another place. Laban is saying to Jacob, "You may get away with the old switcheroo in your place, but not here."

Laban's defense, of course, is groundless and hypocritical. If such was the practice of this place, he should have informed Jacob about it. And if it is not the custom to marry off the younger before the older, does custom dictate the practice of deceiving a relative? But Laban, ever the bargainer, makes Jacob another offer. He proposes to give Rachel to Jacob after the weeklong wedding celebration involving Leah. However, Jacob will have to work for him for seven more years. Notice that Laban doesn't even use his daughters' names; he calls Leah "this one" and Rachel "the other." Jacob knows that Laban holds all the cards and agrees to the terms.

He consummates his marriage with Rachel. We were told that Rachel was beautiful and that Jacob loved her, in contrast to what we were told about Leah's



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eyes being weak, a description of her less-than-exciting appearance. Up to this point, we have not been told of Jacob's feelings toward Leah, although the narrator has dropped us enough clues along the way to make us think that they are less than inspired. Now, he tells us that "indeed" Jacob "loved Rachel more than Leah." Jacob, the victim of parental favoritism, has somehow ended up like is father—favoring one over the other. **The Lord, however, has plans for Leah** (Genesis 29:31).

Again, Jacob serves Laban for another seven years, but this time there is no comment that they "seemed to him but a few days." It will be a long time before he sees home again. Jacob and his descendants were destined to be rulers, but in Haran he's nothing more than a slave (Genesis 25:23, 27:29, 37, and 40). Jacob the negotiator has met his match. Laban has beaten him at his own game.

Interestingly, **the passage begins and ends with the verb "to serve"** (Genesis 29:15, 30). Jacob is serving Laban in Haran, away from the promised land, just as his descendants, the Israelites, would serve Pharaoh in Egypt. And, in doing so, Jacob ends up with two wives. In the following passage, he has sex with two maids. From the beginning, the scriptures define marriage as a lifelong commitment between one man and one woman. Yet, stories abound, of course, of multiple wives, not to mention multiple concubines, but they usually include regrettable consequences. In this way, the biblical narrators frown on such arrangements. The story of Jacob, Rachel, Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah, also includes regrettable consequences.



Leah's Sons (29:31-35)

³¹ Now the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. ³² And Leah conceived and bore a son and named him Reuben, ^{= behold, a son} 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 ^{= heard} therefore given me this son also.” So she named him Simeon. ³⁴ And 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.” ^{= joined to} Therefore he was named Levi. ³⁵ And she conceived again and bore a son and said, “This time I will praise the LORD.” ^{= praised} Therefore she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing.



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When a biblical narrator tells us that the Lord “sees” or “hears” people in oppressed conditions, it usually means that the Lord is acting on their behalf. Jacob, Leah’s husband, “saw” her sister Rachel (Genesis 29:10). It is never reported that he saw Leah. Jacob loved Rachel for her beauty, but we’re told that Leah was “unloved”—unloved by Jacob, that is. This is what the Lord “sees.” The Lord loves Leah, and he wants her to know that so he opens her womb. Leah, who was invisible to her father and her husband and had no voice with them, is seen by the Lord—he sees her plight and hears her cry. Knowing that the Lord has heard her, gives Leah a voice to express her feelings to a world that has heretofore barely acknowledged her existence. She wanted her world to know—she wanted her husband to know—that she ached for his love. Her husband needed to know this. Rachel, on the other hand, was barren. Notice that the narrator does not tell us the Lord’s disposition toward Rachel’s condition. Rachel must be wondering, “What about me?”

The names given to the boys in this passage are connected by word play with some observation made by either Leah or Rachel. For example, Leah names her first son Reuben, which means “See, a son,” because the Lord has “seen” her affliction. She names her first two sons in acknowledgment of the Lord’s perception of her plight. After the birth of her first son, Leah expresses confidence that her husband will love her. “Surely,” she says, the gift of a son will turn his heart toward her.



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However, no response on Jacob's part is reported. Leah's observation after the birth of her second son—"the Lord has heard that I am unloved"—is an indication that Jacob's heart was still cold toward Leah.

She expresses no hope that the birth of her second son will change Jacob, but implicit in her observation that she was "unloved" is the hope that Jacob will now love her. Perhaps she is afraid to express it, afraid to get her hopes up. After the birth of her third son, she expresses her hope again, but in a muted way. She doesn't use the word "surely," and her hope is simply that her husband will become attached to her, not that he will love her. She doesn't think that the third son by himself will change Jacob's heart, but she hopes that the total of three sons will elicit a response. But once again, Jacob is missing from the story. He neither sees nor hears Leah, who is crying out for his love. Leah has let this man inside her. These three precious gifts have grown inside her. She has nurtured them with her very life and endured the agony of childbirth to bring them into the world. What more could she offer him than the love and pain represented in these precious gifts that have come forth from her womb?

After the birth of her third son, Leah said, "This time my husband will become attached to me." Notice though that after the birth of her fourth son, she says, "This time I will praise the Lord." For the moment, at least, Leah orients herself toward the Lord.



Bilhah's Sons (30:1-8)

= ewe

¹ Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or else I die.” ² Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?” ³ And she said, “Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her, that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children.” ⁴ So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. ⁵ And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. ⁶ Then Rachel said, “God has vindicated me, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son.” Therefore she named him Dan. ⁷ And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸ So Rachel said, “With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed.” And she named him Naphtali.



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Rachel Sees Herself

Leah's plight was recognized by the Lord in that he "saw" that she was unloved. After the Lord blessed Leah and she gave birth to four sons, Rachel "saw" that she bore Jacob no children. Rachel must feel that the Lord doesn't see her, and that she must take action. Moved by jealousy, Rachel says to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die." Her cry echoes that of Rebekah when the twins were wrestling each other in her womb (Genesis 25:22). Rachel's plight, however, is not nearly so desperate.

In the face of her sister's fertility, one child isn't enough for Rachel. She demands not a child but "children." Eventually, she will give birth to children—two, in fact. Her words, "Give me children, or else I die," will hang over the birth of her second child, which will result in her death (Genesis 35:16-19).

Rachel overstates her plight, much as Esau, who demanded stew from Jacob with the words, "Please let me have a swallow of that red stuff there," and, "I am about to die" (Genesis 25:30, 32). Jacob hears the voice of his brother in the words of his wife. Jacob had something to gain when his brother came to him, but when his wife comes to him, he sees himself as having nothing to gain and nothing to give. His response to Rachel, therefore, is entirely different.



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He now, ironically, finds himself in the position of his father, whose two sons fought with each other for his favor. Now Jacob has two wives who are fighting with each other for his favor. First two brothers, and now two sisters, find themselves in conflict with each other.

Jacob also hears his own voice in the words of his wife. Jacob demanded that Laban hand over Rachel with the words, “Give me my wife, for my time is completed, that I may go in to her” (Genesis 29:21). Jacob demanded that Laban deliver the goods: a wife. Now his wife demands that Jacob deliver the goods: children.

Leah, whose appearance was weak, wanted children because her husband didn't love her. And the Lord gives her children. The Lord had already given Rachel beauty, and her husband loves her. But now Rachel wants children because she's jealous of Leah, and Leah wants what Rachel has: Jacob's love. Each sister is jealous of the gifts God has given to the other and each covets those gifts.



Zilpah's Sons (30:9-13)

⁹ When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah ^{= weary} and gave her to Jacob as a wife. ^{= a trickling} ¹⁰ And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹ Then Leah said, “How fortunate!” So she named him Gad. ^{= troop} ¹² And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. ¹³ Then Leah said, “Happy ^{= happy} am I! For women will call me happy.” So she named him Asher.



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Jacob caves in

Jacob, in so many words, tells Rachel that he isn't God. In this story, as in the rest of scripture, it is clear that God gives children (Genesis 29:33, 30:6). Jacob may have been strong enough to open a well, but he knows he's not strong enough to open a womb (Genesis 29:10). In one sense, Jacob responds properly; he can't play the role of God. In another sense, he responds insensitively, along the lines of Elkanah's response to Hannah (1 Samuel 1:8). He communicates no sympathy for his wife's pain. On the contrary, his anger burned against her. Instead, he should have prayed. His father's prayer in the face of his mother's barrenness led to his own birth (Genesis 25:21), but at this point in his life, Jacob is not a man of prayer.

Rachel proposes to solve her problem by offering her maid Bilhah to Jacob that she may "bear on my knees." This expression means that Rachel will adopt the children (Genesis 50:23). She resorts to surrogate maternity, a practice that the narrator frowned on when Sarah employed it (Genesis 16:1-6). In other words, Rachel doesn't choose to wait on God. Likewise, Jacob, who a moment ago contended that he was not in the place of God, nonetheless also takes matters into his own hands. Rachel then sees the birth of a son through Bilhah as the Lord's vindication of her over Leah. The Lord has "heard" her voice, she says. The narrator said that the Lord "saw" that Leah was unloved before she conceived. Upon giving birth, Leah said that the Lord had "seen" her affliction and "heard" that she was unloved. The narrator, however, does not tell us that the Lord perceived Rachel in any way. The Lord, of course, has heard Rachel's voice, but not in the way that Rachel supposes. The hearing of the Lord that means the gift of a son will come later in the narrative. Rachel, though, supposes that the Lord has taken her side.



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The birth of Bilhah's second son prompts Rachel to say, literally, "With the wrestlings of God I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed." Rachel, once again, sees God as taking her side. Even though the score is now 4 to 2 in favor of Leah, Rachel has beauty and a loving husband on her side, so she thinks she's in the lead.

There was another time when two siblings had squared off against each other, in the manner of Jacob and Esau. Rachel and Leah also use their children as weapons against each other in the same manner Isaac and Rebekah did (Genesis 27). The sisters treat their children as pawns, just as their father treated them, and their competitiveness will be sown among their children and the 12 tribes of Israel that proceed from the children.

Further on into the Jacob narrative, Jacob will wrestle with a strange visitor, who will tell him that "you have striven with God and with men and have prevailed" (Genesis 32:28). The match in Genesis 32 will be representative of his conflicts with Esau and Laban and, ultimately, his conflict with God. Here, in Genesis 30, Jacob once again sees his life mirrored in the lives of his wives. If he were to look in the mirror long enough, he would see his conflict with God.



Leah's Other Children (30:14-21)

14 Now in the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, **“Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.”**
duwday, 7x, p. 1) mandrake, love-apple 1a) as exciting sexual desire, and favouring procreation

15 But she said to her, **“Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son's mandrakes also?”** So Rachel said, **“Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes.”**

16 When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then Leah went out to meet him and said, **“You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes.”** So he lay with her that night. **17** And God = there is recompense gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. **18** Then Leah said, **“God has given me my wages, because I gave my maid to my husband.”** So she named him = exalted Issachar. **19** And Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. **20** Then Leah said, **“God has = judgment endowed me with a good gift: now my husband will dwell with me**

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Leah strikes back

Leah says in essence, “Two can play at that game.” Earlier, the Lord “saw” Leah’s condition and acted in her behalf. Now, it is reported that she, not the Lord, “saw” her condition. She has stooped to Rachel’s level. Rachel “saw” her own condition and refused to wait on the Lord.

Now Leah gives her maid Zilpah to Jacob and responds to Rachel’s two sons with two of her own. She attributed her first two births to the Lord. However, she attributes neither birth through Zilpah to the Lord. In fact, she attributes the birth of Gad to good luck.

After the birth of her fourth son, Leah expressed no hope that her childbearing would kindle Jacob’s affections. She simply said, “This time I will praise the Lord.” With the births of two sons through Zilpah, once again she does not express hope that Jacob will respond. Neither, however, does she praise the Lord. Instead, after the birth of Asher, she says, “Happy am I! For women will call me happy.” The reason for her happiness is the disposition of other women toward her. Her orientation shifted from her husband to the Lord, but now it has shifted from the Lord to other women. It appears that she is looking neither for her husband’s love nor the Lord’s love, but for acknowledgment from other women. She sees herself in competition with a woman, and she looks to other women to vindicate her cause. **Competitiveness has evacuated her life of spiritual content.**



Leah's Other Children (30:14-21)

¹⁴ Now in the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." ¹⁵ **But** she said to her, "Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son's mandrakes also?" **So** Rachel said, "Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." duwday, 7x, ꝛ 1) mandrake, love-apple 1a) as exciting sexual desire, and favouring procreation

¹⁶ When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." **So** he lay with her that night. ¹⁷ And God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ Then Leah said, "God has given me my wages, because I gave my maid to my husband." **So** she named him Issachar. ¹⁹ And Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. ²⁰ Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good gift; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." **So** she named him Zebulun. ²¹ And afterward she bore a daughter and named her Dinah.



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Let's make a deal

Reuben's discovery of mandrakes ushers in the next chapter of the saga. Mandrakes were considered an aphrodisiac and something of a fertility drug (Song of Solomon 7:13). The sisters speak to each other for the first time in the narrative. Now, their conflict comes out into the open. **Later, Leah and Rachel will find themselves in agreement with one another (Genesis 31:14-16). In fact, their openness about their conflict may have been a step toward reconciliation.**

Leah sees Rachel as a taker, just as Esau had viewed Jacob (Genesis 27:36). She notes that Rachel has taken her husband. In light of Rachel's response, Leah not only means that Rachel has become a second—and favored—wife to Jacob but that only Rachel shares a bed with him. Rachel makes Leah an offer. She wants the mandrakes (and children); Leah wants Jacob (and love), so Rachel proposes a deal: Mandrakes for a night with Jacob. The two sisters bargain over a plant product in the manner of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:33-34).



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God gives heed to Leah

Once again, the narrator tells us that God perceived Leah in some way and that as a result she conceived. In this case, he “gave heed” to her. But notice that the Lord gives heed to Leah, not to the mandrakes. Rachel, who bargained for the mandrakes in the hope that she would conceive, continues in barrenness. **The narrator would not have us believe, however, that the Lord smiles on Leah’s tactics. The Lord blesses her, not her tactics, just as he blessed Jacob, not his tactics.**

Leah thinks that God has rewarded her for giving her maid Zilpah to Jacob. Leah was denied access to Jacob and thought that the only way to compete with her sister for the affections of Jacob was to give her maid to her husband. We now find out that this was by no means an easy decision for Leah. It represented a painful recourse in the face of distance from her husband. She sees herself as having paid dearly in offering Zilpah to Jacob. Now she sees the Lord as paying her “wages” for her sacrifice.

God, again, has clearly recognized her plight with the birth of Issachar, but he is not paying Leah her wages. Laban pays wages. **God sees; God hears; God gives heed; God blesses. He doesn’t pay wages.** What does Leah hope this son will do for her? She doesn’t say, at least for now.



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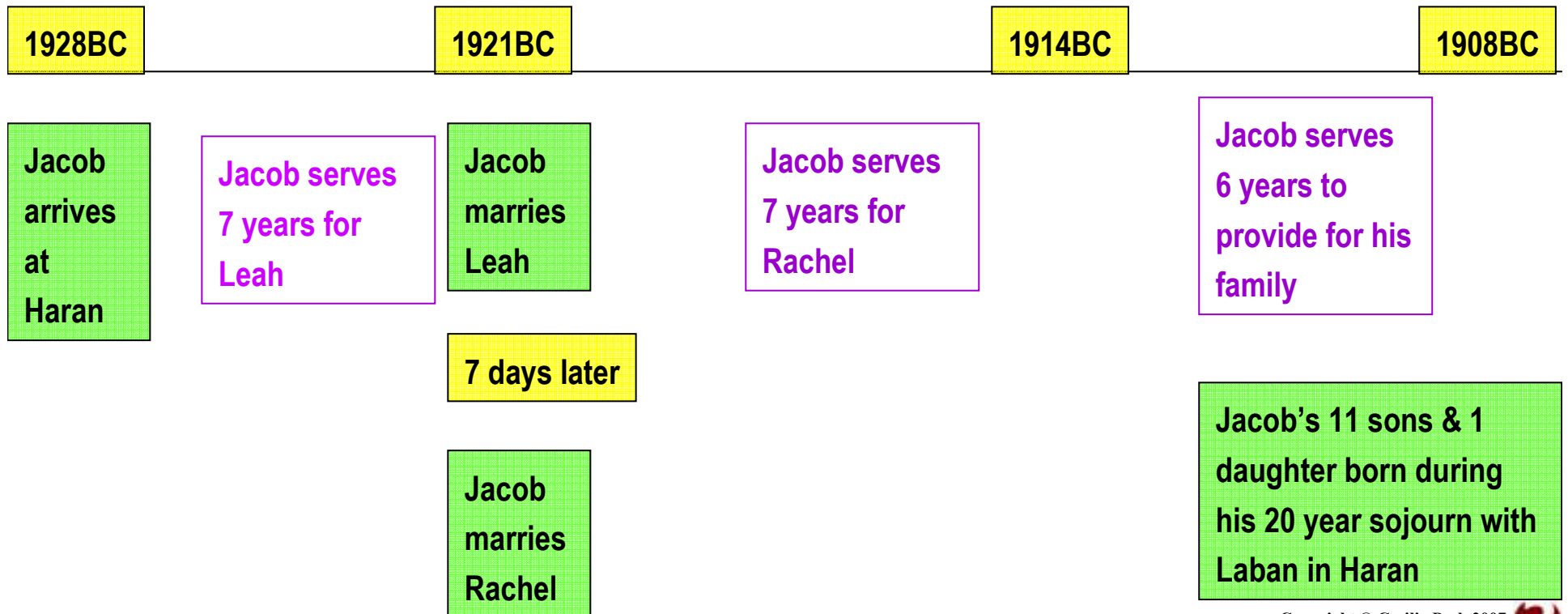
Leah has found her way back to the marriage bed, for she bears yet another son. She's now up to six, half the number of the sons of Israel. She correctly sees this son not as wages from God but as a gift from God. And she expresses the hope, one last time, that Jacob will respond to her. The word translated “**dwell with**” in this case probably means “**to acknowledge as one's lawful wife.**” Six sons give Leah hope, but the gift of half the sons of Israel is still not enough for Jacob. Even so, Leah seems to be moving toward the Lord once again. Evidently, luck, the recognition she sought from other women, and her belief that God pays wages have let her down.

Finally, Leah gives birth to a girl. The Hebrew scriptures seldom mention the birth of a girl. The exception here, with the birth of Dinah, sets the stage for her role in Genesis 35. **Leah has now given birth to seven children. Seven is the number of perfection. God has entered into Leah's loneliness and transformed her, in a sense, into a mother of perfection.**



Rachel's Son, Joseph (30:22-24)

22 Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb. **23** So she conceived and bore a son and said, **“God has taken away my reproach.”** **24** And she named him **Joseph**, saying, **“May the LORD give me another son.”**
= Jehovah has added



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God remembers Rachel

Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb. So she conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." She named him Joseph, saying, "May the LORD give me another son." (Genesis 30:22-24)

Finally, after all this birthing and warring, the narrator tells us that God "remembered" and "gave heed to" Rachel and opened her womb. The Lord perceived Leah. Finally, he perceives Rachel. **Rachel pleaded with her husband, resorted to surrogate maternity and employed mandrakes in the quest for children, but only God can open Rachel's womb, and he does so, it seems, in his own sweet time.** The Lord makes Rachel, in her barrenness, wait and watch as 11 children emerge from wombs other than hers. Although she announced that she had prevailed over Leah in the war of the wombs, we now find out that her barrenness caused her great shame. Earlier, when she credited God with acting on her behalf, she did so incorrectly, presuming that he was favoring her through the birth of surrogate children. **Now she rightly attributes the birth of her own son to the Lord, employing God's covenant name, Yahweh. The Lord, she says, has taken away her reproach.**

Earlier, Rachel demanded that Jacob give her children. Here, she invokes the Lord in her hopes for another son. She finally acknowledges that only God can open a womb.



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Identifying with Leah

Like Leah, some of us feel that important people, perhaps even our spouses, don't listen to us. It's as if we're invisible, or as if we can't communicate. We're unseen and unheard, without a presence and without a voice. All of us ache to be heard and seen and understood. More often than not we'll be happy if someone at least tries to understand us.

For those of us who feel unseen and unheard, we need to know this: God sees us and hears us. We have an audience with him, and he hears our voice—and the heart behind it. He wants to see us; he wants to hear us. In this, God is not only seeing and hearing, he's also speaking and his seeing and hearing say something. They say that he loves us.

God's love for us, then, gives us a voice with others. When God sees and hears Leah, she speaks up, and she speaks from her heart. God's love, then, has the ability to unlock hearts and loosen tongues. God wants us to speak from our hearts. We have a voice with him. He wants us to know that and find that we can speak to our world. **Some of you, knowing that God hears you, may be compelled to tell your spouse that you ache for his or her love.**

Still, your world may not listen. Leah, after God gave her a voice, cried out for her husband's love. She brought forth magnificent gifts: seven children. But Jacob still didn't see or hear her.



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Some of us, like Leah, feel trapped in a marriage, or in a family or even in a community that knows little of love. It is a good thing to want love. For this we cannot fault Leah and we should not fault ourselves. If you don't want the love of your spouse, you've killed something in your heart that is part of your humanity.

It is a world of imperfect love. Sometimes, it seems completely loveless. But God asks us to live in it and in challenging relationships, believing that he sees, that he hears, that he loves—and that one day he will make everything right.

All of us start out wanting the love of our world. Then many of us, like Leah, discover the love of God and we become his worshipers. But from there it's never a steady climb up the spiritual mountain. Someone takes what we have or gets what we want. Competition draws us away from the Lord and we look elsewhere—to luck, recognition, the hope that God will pay off for good behavior. Then maybe, when everything else has ravaged our hearts, we begin to rebuild a worldview based more securely on God's sure—though wildly unpredictable—love for us.

In a world of imperfect love, God is doing his perfect work in us. We want a little love. Leah wanted a little love; instead, she got a lot of God's love, and gave birth to a little nation—a little nation that gave birth to the Savior. We want something that comes from us to get a little recognition, to get a little love. God wants to enter our loneliness, form us and transform us. What comes from us may be achieving far more than we know. We want the world to give us something. But we may be giving something to the world. God may be using a troubled marriage to form us. And he may be using a troubled marriage to give something to the world.



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Identifying with Rachel

Some of us, like Rachel, sit back and watch others get what we want. God acts for others, it seems, but not for us. It seems as if God doesn't see us or our plight. At times we wonder, "Does he care?" For couples unable to have children, for example, the disappointment can be excruciating, and it can challenge their faith at the deepest level.

When God doesn't give us what we want, we may be inclined to expect others to get it for us. We may, in a sense, expect others to give us what only God can give. We may expect them to be God. Nothing can frustrate relationships like expecting people to do and be what is impossible for them. No one is up to the task of fulfilling the role of God and we shouldn't be surprised, then, when our impossibly high expectations provoke angry responses.

Through force of will and intimidation, sometimes we're able to get people to cooperate with us. When they do, and when they come through, it's easy for us to assume, as Rachel did, that God has answered us when, in fact, he had nothing to do with it. Sometimes, it takes a legitimate blessing from God, somewhere down the line, for us to see that our prior understanding of his involvement was incorrect and for us to acknowledge his proper place.



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Identifying with the sisters

Like both Leah and Rachel, we want and we do not have and we become jealous of those who have what we want, be it love, children or something else. We must be aware, however, that our attitudes and actions have impact. We sow the seeds of jealousy and competitiveness among our children and others who know us.

When we find ourselves in competition with someone else, it is better to bring it out in the open than to wage war in silence. **A wordless war is not the stage for reconciliation. But when combatants come out in the open and face each other, as Leah and Rachel did, reconciliation becomes possible.**



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Identifying with Jacob

Jacob's story impresses upon us the importance of seeing and hearing the people God has placed in our lives. Closed off to the world around us, we're often oblivious to the pain of even those who are closest to us, particularly if we don't see any way in which they advance our cause. But God isn't oblivious. He hears those who are crying out, even if no one else does, and he will answer those cries in his perfect time. When he does, those of us who refused to listen may have to answer for ourselves.

Our fast-paced world, and the many causes we embrace in it, doesn't lend itself to listening to someone's heart. We fail to pick up the signs of pain in someone else. Indeed, we may not be even looking for them. We're so oblivious that we don't even know we're not listening. **This story should move us to care, to open our ears, to take the time.** Of course, you can't listen to everyone. But we must listen to those who are closest to us—certainly to our spouses, to our children and, if we're in a position of spiritual leadership, to those placed in our care.

The story also challenges us to appreciate the deep and beautiful qualities in each other, even if the surface-level qualities don't immediately catch our eye. We crush those who love us when we don't appreciate the good gifts that they offer us as coming from the center of their hearts.



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Some of us, like Jacob, are theologically correct but relationally insensitive. We know what's right, and what's right is important to us. In fact, being right is most important to us. Winning becomes more important than someone's heart. We allow power to triumph over love and love loses; hearts sink.

What do you do when someone has impossible expectations for you, when you feel, in a sense, that someone is asking you to fulfill the role of God? Jacob's anger burned; then he caved in and usurped the role of God. Such may be our tendency as well. Jacob's story, considered in light of Rebekah's barrenness, tells us this: **Don't get angry; get on your knees. If someone expects you to do what it seems like only God can do, go to God. Perhaps God will act on that person's behalf, or perhaps they'll seek God instead of us.** If we're always trying to meet all of someone's needs, we're neither doing them nor ourselves any favors. We're trying to be God, an impossible burden, and we're keeping someone else from seeking God. To use a modern word, we're co-dependent.

If we find ourselves responding—or not responding—as Jacob did, it may mean that our relationship with the Lord needs some attention. The Lord, through his relationship with us, would give us both the spiritual sensitivity and weight to respond—or not respond—appropriately.

Finally, we learn from Jacob that **marriage is a mirror.** Having to relate to another person day in and day out, year in and year out can show you something about yourself. **Marriage tends to be a relationship in which you reap what you have sowed and you sow what you have reaped.** You see the pain that you have caused, and you see the pain that you're causing. It shows you, as it showed Jacob, that you need to meet with God.



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Happily ever after?

We tend to think it's our God-given right to live happily ever after. **God is by no means opposed to happiness, but he is in favor of a kind of happiness that is better than our version.** He can do something with our messy marriages without making them everything we want them to be. He doesn't straighten out the marriages in this story, but he does form the marriage partners. He forms Leah in a loveless marriage and Rachel in a childless marriage. He forms Jacob in two marriages in which he reaps what he has sowed and sows what he has reaped.

In this messy story, God gives birth to his people: the nation of Israel. We may not like the way Israel begins. A perfect beginning is what we might prefer: One woman, one man, and children from one marriage. We may want something like Adam and Eve. That was a perfect beginning. Then again, that didn't work out so well, either. They made a mess of things in no time. Yet, God gave birth to humanity.

Don't ever sell short what God can do in and through a messy marriage.

