

Genesis Chapter 29 - Commentary By Mike Wells

Chapter 29 Overview:

In Chapter 29 Jacob starts to acquire wives and starts having children with those wives. The chapter can be divided into three sections: (1) Jacob comes to the well of Haran in verses 1-8. (2) He meets Rachel and Laban is found in verses 9-14. (3) Jacob's covenant for Rachel and Laban's deceit in verses 15-30. And then (4) Leah's sons are recorded in verses 31-35.

Genesis 29 : 1-6 – *1 Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east. 2 And he looked, and behold a well in the field, and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks: and a great stone was upon the well's mouth. 3 And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place. 4 And Jacob said unto them, My brethren, whence be ye? And they said, Of Haran are we. 5 And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? And they said, We know him. 6 And he said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep.*

- Jacob left home and arrived in Syria in “*the land of the people of the east.*”
- He happened to arrive specifically at the place where his relatives lived.
- When he arrived there were three flocks of sheep laying near a well waiting to be watered.
- He asked the shepards that were there at the well where he way.
- They told him that he was at Haran.
- He then asked if they knew Laban the son of Nahor.
- Not only did they know him, they pointed out that Laban's daughter was arriving right at that moment with her sheep.
- Remember the story of Isaac's servant arriving at the well when he was looking for a bride for Issac and he met Rebekah at the well that offered him and his horse water?
- This story is almost a parallel with that one with Jacob meeting his future wife at the well
- I think it is safe to assume that God had arranged this meeting at the well also.

Genesis 29 : 7-12 – *7 And he said, Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together: water ye the sheep, and go and feed them. 8 And they said, We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep. 9 And while he yet spake with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep: for she kept them. 10 And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. 11 And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. 12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father.*

- Jacob urged the waiting shepherds to water their sheep.

- The word translated as **cattle** {hnqm *miq-neh*} refers to livestock in general and not necessarily steers or cows as modern English might imply.
- The custom evidently was to wait for all herds to arrive before the well was uncovered, so the moving herds wouldn't dirty up or foul up the well.
- Once all the herds arrived and were made to lie down, then the well was uncovered.
- Meanwhile, Rachel had arrived with her father's herd of sheep.
- So, Jacob went ahead anyway and uncovered the well for Rachel.
- Rachel was the daughter of Laban, Jacob's mother Rebekah's brother
- So, Jacob was the cousin of Rachel.
- Jacob was so excited to see his family that he kissed Rachel, shouted, and wept.
- His weeping was for joy in finding his close relatives.
- He informed her who he was.
- The reference to him being her '*father's brother*' was an expression of the day, referring to how he was a son of her father's sister.
- It essentially meant a close relative.
- She ran and told her father Laban

Genesis 29 : 13-14 – *13 And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things. 14 And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him the space of a month.*

- Laban rejoiced upon hearing his sister's son had arrived.
- As oriental custom was and still is "*he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house.*"
- And Jacob stayed with Laban for a month.

Genesis 29 : 15-20 – *15 And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be? 16 And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. 18 And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. 19 And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. 20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.*

- Laban then sat down and discussed with Jacob about him going to work for him.
- He noted since he was a brother (i.e., relative), he should **not** work for free.
- So, he asked Jacob how much he could pay him.
- Laban had two daughters which Jacob had already noticed.
- The older girl, Leah, "*was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured.*"
- The description of Leah being "*tendered eyed*" means she was not very attractive.
- Her sister Rachel, on the other hand, was beautiful in appearance.
- Rachel had caught Jacob's eye.

- Jacob named his price – he said ***“I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.”***
- Laban thought that it would be better to give Rachel to Jacob than to another man, so he agreed.
- So, Jacob went to work for Laban for the following seven years. ***“And they seemed unto him but a few days, for he love he had to her.”***
- Though they were not intimate during that time, it was most likely a seven year courtship.

Genesis 29 : 21-29 – 21 And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her. 22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. 23 And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her. 24 And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid. 25 And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? 26 And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27 Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. 28 And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also. 29 And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid.

- Jacob began to reap some of what he had sown in his life.
- Remember, how he had through devious means defrauded his brother, Esau.
- Now, Laban is going to pull a fast one on Jacob.
- Upon fulfillment of the seven years, Jacob requested his wife as had been agreed.
- So, Laban prepared a great wedding feast.
- However, when night came, Laban sent Leah and not Rachel in unto Jacob.
- In the darkness, Jacob did not realize who he was sleeping with. ***“And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah.”***
- In his frustration, he confronted Laban and demanded to know what was going on.
- Laban then slyly informed him that the custom of that region was to give the firstborn daughter in marriage first.
- This indeed was a custom in that area at that time.
- However, Laban had certainly deceived Jacob.
- He was getting some of his own medicine.
- Indeed, ***“whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap”***
- Laban told Jacob to ***“fulfill her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.”***
- The week referred to likely was a customary ‘honeymoon’ type of week.
- Then, he could have Rachel.
- Laban had deviously accomplished two apparent objectives. First, he had secured a husband for both of his daughters, even his less desirable one Leah. Second, he had secured what evidently was a good employee for essentially no wages.
- He apparently only provided room and board for Jacob no money.
- Laban also gave to each of his daughters a maid servant in Zilpah for Leah and Bilhah for Rachel.

Genesis 29 : 30-31 – 30 *And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years. 31 And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.*

- Jacob then ‘*married*’ Rachel.
- It is no surprise, “*he loved also Rachel more than Leah.*”
- His ‘love’ had been Rachel for the past seven years, and he was not happy in having a second wife forced upon him without his consent.
- However, Rachel turned out to be infertile.

Genesis 29 : 32-35 – 32 *And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me. 33 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon. 34 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi. 35 And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing.*

- Leah, however, “*conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben.*”
- This name of this first born of Jacob has the sense, ‘*see a son,*’ or ‘*behold, a son.*’
- Leah was knew that she was not her husband’s first choice.
- So, she said, “*Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction, now therefore my husband will love me.*”
- In naming her son Reuben, (**behold, a son**), she may have also have meant to gloat over her sister man and now rival, Rachel.
- Leah conceived again and named her next son *Simeon* which means ‘**heard,**’ or ‘**God heard.**’
- The bitterness of her soul was still evident.
- She noted that “*the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also.*”
- The idea of hatred here is relative, and really it has the idea of not being loved.
- Leah conceived again and bore another son whom she named *Levi*.
- **Levi** has the sense of being ‘**joined.**’
- Her heart is evident as she noted, “*Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons.*”
- Leah then named her fourth son, *Judah* because she said, “*Now will I praise the LORD.*”
- The name Judah means ‘**praise,**’ or ‘**praised.**’
- Then, Leah evidently became temporarily infertile.