



# *Finer Grounds Bible Study*

## *Genesis (Part 2)*

### *Lesson 3: Genesis 29:1-30:43*

We left off last time with Jacob on his way to Haran to avoid Esau's wrath and to procure a wife. I pray your time in this study so far has been beneficial and ever pushing you toward a greater understanding of our great God. As we start this lesson, I again suggest some time in prayer and some time in meditation upon chapters 29 and 30 before beginning the lesson. If you've done both of those things, let's begin.

#### **Read Genesis 29:1-30**

In verse one of chapter 29, you may have the words that Jacob "lifted up his feet" or a foot note with that wording. That rendering is the more literal translation and seems to imply that, perhaps after his encounter with God the night before in chapter 28, he had a bit more spirit of readiness to make the journey. God's promises and presence can certainly give us more determination and strength for the tasks ahead.

Jacob has made the long journey to his destination. His trip is estimated to have been about 500 miles and the text seems to imply that he made the long trek alone and on foot. Well, not alone. As we know from the end of chapter 28, God was going to be there with him the whole way, which is why he finally arrives safe and sound. He is obviously near Haran in a field when he comes upon the three flocks of sheep and their shepherds. He asks where they are from and upon hearing Haran as the answer, then proceeds to ask if they know his uncle. What relief and joy he must have felt when they

declared they were from Haran and knew his relatives! If he traveled 25 miles a day every day, it would have taken him about 20 days to arrive at his destination. I'm not sure how fast he traveled, but we can probably assume that the journey took at least about a month. A month without contact with any familiar place. No phone calls, FaceTime, or any other form of communication with those he loved. Only occasional interaction with strangers. It had to be a difficult time for him, but at last he has found family.

It is speculated by some that perhaps Jacob was trying to hurry and get the shepherds out of the area from verses 6 and 7 so that he could interact privately with Rachel. This would make some sense as he would surely want a little privacy to reveal who he was to his family and to deal with his emotions. However, the shepherds will not open the well until everyone has arrived.

Verse 10 may shed some light on Jacob's thoughts as it refers to his mother three times. He probably missed his mother a great deal and seeing her niece approaching must have spurred a lot of emotion for him. When she arrives, he rolls the stone away from the well to water the flocks. We had already been explicitly told this was a large stone in verse 2 and the others were waiting to move it. These facts lend evidence that Jacob was either very strong or God granted him special strength in this moment. He then proceeds to greet Rachel with a kiss and weeps rather loudly. The familial bond is strong and Jacob has to be



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exhausted from his travels. All of this would explain his overwhelmed reaction.

Rachel then runs and tells her father about Jacob and he comes welcoming Jacob with open arms. The text then tells us that Jacob was with them for about a month when Laban offers to pay him for all the work he is doing for him. At this point in the story, we find out Laban has two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Leah is the oldest and the text reads that her eyes were weak. The Hebrew word for weak in verse 17 is *rak*, which can mean weak, tender, delicate, or soft. The writer may have actually been saying that Leah had soft or tender eyes, which would have been a compliment, or he could have meant they were weak and had some sort of problem. The point in the end is that, even if she had nice eyes, Rachel was much more pleasant to look at because she was “beautiful of form and face”. Rachel was the girl who had it all in the looks department.

We are not told how old Leah and Rachel are, but from other passages we can ascertain that Jacob was a man in his late seventies at this point in time. I often think how different life was for men and women in this era. How differently marriage was looked at compared to us today. We have to remember that fact when we study this text. It was a very different time. Cultures and customs come and go, but God never changes. Yet another reason to follow Him and not society.

Jacob has fallen in love with Rachel in the course of his month long stay and, as a result, makes the deal with Laban that he will work seven years for him in exchange for her. Verse 20 contains a sentiment that every woman dreams of

her husband saying about her. It says that Jacob’s years of service “seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her”. Even amidst some marital issues that would be very foreign and even offensive to us, the love of one man for one woman shines through and is relatable to all nations and generations.

We ladies love a good romantic story, but Jacob starts reaping some of the deception that he sowed in the past. Laban tricks him by giving him Leah instead of Rachel. It probably was not hard for him to do as women at this time were usually quite veiled for the marriage ceremony and it would have been dark when they consummated their marriage that evening. I find it intriguing that Rachel would have to be hidden during the ceremony for the deception to be complete and Leah would have to be in on it as well. Can you imagine Jacob’s surprise and disappointment when he sees Leah the next morning?

As upsetting as it must have been, Jacob could take heart at the fact that he just had to complete the marriage week and could then finally be with the one he loved. I wonder if Jacob saw the irony of having to uphold the rights of Laban’s first born when he had stolen the rights of the first born in his family (Esau). Of course, Laban gained another seven years of labor from him which may well have been his motive in the first place. Although this section ends with joy for Jacob finally gaining Rachel, it also leaves us with a sad note that Leah was not loved by her husband in the way that a woman desires to be loved.



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List some emotions you think Jacob felt when he finally sees his relative?

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Can you relate to those emotions and, if so, why?

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Do you think that Jacob got what he deserved by being deceived? Why or why not?

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How do you think Leah felt the morning after her wedding?

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What similarities do you see between Jacob's former deception with Esau and Laban's deception here in chapter 29?

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Read Gen. 29:31-30:24

Chapter 30 begins with God blessing Leah because she was “unloved”. The text seems to imply that Leah was not completely unloved, but rather loved less than Leah (vs 30). Any woman could attest that being second place to another woman in your husband's eyes would leave you feeling unloved. God had compassion on her situation. He is the God who sees and hears.

There is so much to learn about life, relationships, and God being our fulfillment that we can learn from the life of Leah.

God blesses her by opening her womb to bear sons for Jacob. Her first one is Reuben, whose name means, “behold, a son”. She names him this hoping that Jacob will love her over Rachel now. I believe women can often fall victim to thinking that if they do all the things that a man wants, they will gain his love. I am not opposed at all to being the help meet that God called us to be, but when our focus is centered solely on gaining our value through our husbands, we have lost our focus. God is the one we need to center ourselves on pleasing above all else and He is the one we should seek our value from.

Leah bears another son and names him Simeon, which means “heard”. She acknowledges God's faithfulness in hearing her and blessing her again. When she bears the third son, she names him Levi, meaning “joined to”. She gets her hopes up again thinking that Jacob will now be attached to her because of the three sons she has given him. Guess what? Jacob still loves Rachel more. Leah will never bear enough sons to change Jacob. That seems like a harsh reality, but one I think is healthy for all of us to come to terms with. I think sometimes women marry men thinking they will be able to change them. Perhaps she thought she would be able to win Jacob over eventually when she went along with the deception of replacing Rachel at the wedding. If so, she was in for a rude awakening.

When Leah bears her fourth son, Judah, she seems to go back to focusing on God. His name means “praised” and she names him that because she is finally praising God for her sons. Although



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Leah will never gain the love she longs for from Jacob, she will gain a whole lot more from God. Think about it. Leah is the mother of Levi, who will become the priests of God's people, and the mother of Judah, the son who will lead to the Messiah! She is in the lineage of those who will fulfill God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. She is truly blessed! What another great lesson from Leah's story that our sorrows and trials sometimes lead to great and lasting things.

After Leah has born four sons, Rachel has become quite desperate. In fact, so desperate, that she lashes out at Jacob in an irrational way. It's important to remember that Rachel is not just dealing with being barren, but jealousy that her sister is like fertile myrtle. Jacob understandably is angry with her for blaming him and makes it known that it's God's decision, not his. Rachel decides to give him her maid, Bilhah, to bear children for her. When verse three of chapter 30 says, "bear on my knees", Rachel is saying they will be her children. This was a phrase used to denote who the child belonged to.

Bilhah conceives and gives birth to two sons. Rachel names the first one Dan, which means "a judge", because she believes God is vindicating her and heard her prayers. The second one she names Naphtali, which means "wrestling". She feels she has been wrestling with her sister to bear Jacob children and has finally succeeded.

Leah feels like she's in a competition with her sister as well, which prompts her to give Jacob her maid, Zilpah, in order to bear more sons. Zilpah bears two more sons for Leah. She names the first one Gad, which comes from a root word meaning "fortune" because she feels fortunate to have another son. Zilpah's second son is named

Asher meaning "happy" because she believed other women would call her happy to have six sons to her credit.

As we continue on in chapter 30, we come across the mandrake story. Mandrakes are plants that are from the potato family with roots that resemble the body of a human. They are also known as the love apple and their roots and leaves are somewhat poisonous because they contain alkaloids that are hallucinogenic and narcotic in nature. Because of these characteristics, it has a history of superstitious practices. Although we are not told exactly why Rachel wants them so badly, many speculate that they were considered an aphrodisiac or could help cure infertility. Whether she wanted them for this purpose or she just really like their flavor, they do not open the womb that God has closed.

Leah bargains with Rachel to have Jacob spend the night with her. God opens Leah's womb again and she bears two more sons for Jacob. She gives birth to Issachar whose name means "there is recompense" and Zebulun whose name means "exalted". Even after 5 other sons that she has born herself and the two that Zilpah bore on her behalf, Leah still hopes that Jacob will dwell with her. He does not, but Leah ends her child bearing with the first recorded daughter, Dinah, whose name means "judgment".

Finally, God decides to open Rachel's womb and she bears Jacob his favorite son, Joseph. His name means "Jehovah has added". I find it fitting that Rachel gives God all the credit. She has asked God for this day for many years and struggled as she watched three other women give sons to her husband. She honors God with



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Joseph's name and asks Him to give her another son.

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What problems do you see that Jacob's polygamy has brought on him and his family?

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What do you think life was like for Bilhah and Zilpah?

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How or why do you think Rachel had the authority to send Jacob to Leah for the night in exchange for the mandrakes?

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Do you feel sorry for Leah or do you think she deserves being second place because of her part in deceiving Jacob?

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What are some other life lessons you can learn from Leah and Rachel?

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## Read Genesis 30:25-43

The time has come for Jacob to return home. He approaches Laban about making that happen, but Laban does not want Jacob to leave. It would seem that Laban has been dabbling in divination and determined that his newfound wealth is due to God's blessing upon Jacob. With boldness, Jacob makes it clear that he is the reason Laban is doing so well and it is time for him to provide for his own family. He strikes a deal with Laban to be paid with the speckled, spotted, and black sheep. The percentage of these in a flock is typically low so Laban probably thought it was a good deal. In fact, Jacob says that Laban doesn't have to give him anything. He removes all those that are speckled, spotted, or black and Laban sends them off in the care of his sons. Jacob will pasture and keep Laban's flock and all that come out marred in this way, will be his to keep. This seems like a very easy way to keep Laban from cheating Jacob. It will be obvious which ones belong to Jacob and which ones belong to Laban.

The last part of chapter 30 details how Jacob uses some rods to strengthen and increase his flocks. The scriptures do not tell us if or how these rods accomplish this goal. Regardless, Jacob's flocks grow and he becomes very prosperous. It is apparent throughout Jacob's entire time in Haran that God is with him mightily and going beyond all that he promised him on that fateful night in Bethel so many years ago.



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**Do you think that Rachel finally having a son had anything to do with Jacob's decision to return home? If so, why?**

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**What do you think of Laban's character up to this point?**

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**Do you think that the rods Jacob used really had any influence on the production of speckled, spotted, or black sheep? If so, how?**

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We have come to the end our lesson for now. Next time we will journey with Jacob once again on the long road back home. I pray you ladies have enjoyed this time in Genesis so far and will hang in there as we cover more of this great text. God bless!