

GENESIS—WEEK 24

JACOB GROWS UP



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is Jacob and Laban's Daughters by Raphael (1483–1520)
On display at Albertina in Vienna*

Jacob falls head-over-heels for Rachel, but Leah ends up playing a larger role. It slowly dawns on Jacob that God is calling the shots, and He's calling them for Leah. This finally opens his eyes, and he comes around to loving Leah.

Jacob is thinking like a grown-up.

We're pleased to provide *the DEEP* studies in PDF format at no charge. We hope you will find them helpful and encouraging as you press on in your journey toward spiritual maturity in the Lord.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. To subscribe to the daily DEEP email, visit our website at www.ailbe.org and click the sign-up button at the bottom.

There, you will also discover many other resources, including many email newsletters, such as our worldview study *ReVision*, our devotional newsletter *Crosfigell*, and *the DEEP*.

We are a spiritual fellowship patterned after the Celtic Revival. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

T. M. Moore, Principal
tmmoore@ailbe.org

Thank you.

Genesis 29:1-35 — Jacob Grows Up
Copyright 2024 F. Michael Slay
The Fellowship of Ailbe
www.ailbe.org

All scripture references are noted. ESV stands for the English Standard Version. © Copyright 2001 by Crossway. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NKJV stands for the New King James Version. © Copyright 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved. NIV stands for The Holy Bible, New International Version®. © Copyright 1973 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. All rights reserved. KJV stands for the King James Version.

1 Genesis 29:1–12 (ESV)

Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it, for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well.

Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran." He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" They said, "We know him." He said to them, "Is it well with him?" They said, "It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!" He said, "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go, pasture them." But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."

While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

Jacob's crash course in theology goes nuclear. Jacob arrives at his uncle's town for the purpose of finding a wife and gets zapped with love at first sight. Jacob promised God that he would become a believer if a whole bunch of things went well for him. Not a bad start, eh, Jacob?

Then he single-handedly rolls away the stone that normally the shepherds (plural) would roll away. Gee, why would a guy do something like that in front of a pretty girl?

After he's done showing off, *Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud*. His weeping is more than just tears of joy over finding his relatives. He recognizes what's happening (including the parallels to how his dad found his mom), and it's emotionally powerful.

He's waking up.

No one is born great; you have to grow into it. God often manages this in amusing ways. The early steps aren't so much growth as preparing for growth. You have to be shaken before you're stirred.

But notice that this shake-up isn't a trial. Trials usually aren't for beginners, and Jacob is definitely a beginner. So, God hits him with some good things that are so surprising that Jacob gets choked up. He's starting to see for himself that God is great and God is good. It's a child's lesson, but an important one. Surely Isaac taught him this, but Jacob didn't learn it; he only memorized it.

Don't be discouraged when your children (or your students) do likewise. That'll come in handy later.

2 Genesis 29:13–20 (ESV)

As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

Thus begins one of the greatest love stories of all time. Jacob comes here to find a wife, and he hits the jackpot. He's experiencing total brain-melt. This completes Lesson #2 in Jacob's theology schooling—God is great and God is good. (Lesson #1 was the retroactive loss of privacy—God is omniscient and omnipresent.)

Meanwhile, Jacob's education goes through a curiously useful phase—forgetting. For seven years, Jacob is thinking about Rachel and not about God. By rediscovering God later, he will have a "second conversion." As is often the case, that will be intense.

C.S. Lewis illustrates this beautifully in *Screwtape Letter XIII*, where the "patient" has an experience described as "*repentance and renewal*." Lewis notes that, "*It amounts to a second conversion—and probably on a deeper level than the first.*"

Educators know that the second time someone learns something is often when the student really gets it. When Jacob "rediscovered" God, the lesson will feel fresh even though the concepts are familiar.

That will help it penetrate deeper.

The Bible is so rich, and its lessons so deep, that we can read it over and over and learn new things every time. That's why a daily quiet time makes sense. It takes over a decade to go through the whole Bible at the pace these DEEPs go at, but by then, you'll be ready to start over with different eyes.

That's a wonderful path to sanctification. Praise God that something so painless is also so good. Jacob won't always be so lucky; he's going to have a permanent hip injury plus a ton of emotional pain. If you're "in between" painful educational stages, thank the LORD and stay on course.

Jesus promised us persecution and trials, not quiet times. When you get a break and have some time to just study, treasure those times and make the most of them.

Get ready for the next trial.

3 Genesis 29:21–30 (ESV)

Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.

This sounds like the perfect lesson in paybacks; Jacob gets burned by the same trick he played on his father.

But something bigger is going on here. Leah’s heart is crushed.

Try to imagine how she must feel. Something is wrong with her eyes and it makes her less than *beautiful in form and appearance*. Jacob shows up, and, to no one’s surprise, isn’t interested in her but is totally smitten with her kid sister, who **is** *beautiful in form and appearance*.

So, Leah plays along with Laban’s plot to trick Jacob into marrying her. It’s too dark and/or he’s too drunk to notice. That qualifies as success in this dreadful scheme of things.

Then morning comes.

Oh, how Leah must have hoped and prayed that Jacob would have a reasonable reaction to finding her next to him. Instead, he’s angry and dashes off to confront Laban—leaving Leah alone to cry.

Great lessons will come from this.

We all have pain in our lives, but sometimes people get a boatload dumped on them. That’s when the Christian community needs to step up.

Pain is lonely. Friends can make that worse by worrying too much about what to say and avoiding even showing up. Fine, pray and then visit. It’s your presence that’ll be comforting, not your words.

Be serious about the agenda. What are their specific prayer requests? Be serious about the prayer too. Take enough time that you get a sense of the LORD’s direction.

And be serious about following up; call them and get updates.

Don’t just be a spectator of your friends’ battles. Partner with them.

4 Genesis 29:31–32 (ESV)

When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, “Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.”

Yeah, it really says “*hated*.” The King James says “*hated*,” too. The NIV says “*not loved*.” The New King James says “*unloved*,” but has a footnote that says, “Literally *hated*.”

There’s no sugarcoating this. The Hebrew is clear; Leah was hated. Sugarcoating God’s word interferes with the lessons. We need to feel Leah’s heartbreak.

Reuben means, “See, a son.” She explains this saying, “*Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.*” The text doesn’t say who she said this to, but surely Jacob heard of it.

God is schooling Jacob, and this time he’s going to learn a lot. Jacob has to be aware of Leah’s pain; he’s married to her for crying out loud. Her tears soak Jacob’s shirt. Now she announces that Reuben is God’s response to her prayers about Jacob not loving her.

Lesson #3—God hears prayer.

Now Leah is being favored by God. Jacob knows a thing or two about being favored by God—his momma taught him all about that—but this is puzzling. Rachel has been the favored one all her life. Leah, bless her heart, lived in Rachel’s shadow.

But when Leah dissolves into tears and prays her brains out, God turns the tables.

Lesson #4 – God is just (in complex and surprising ways).

But the individual lessons aren’t the key here. They’re forming a pattern, and it’s the pattern that’s important. The LORD is everywhere, good, hearing, and just. He’s God of everything. He—not Jacob—determines what happens next. It’s totally intimidating. Sign up or be on the losing team.

Jacob’s not there yet, but all this is starting to sink in.

So, how are you doing? Not all our prayers should be for someone else. When you pray for yourself, do you ask God for help or for guidance? The guidance bit can be important.

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! — Psalm 139:23-24 (ESV)

Notice how this prayer isn’t asking for a favor. It’s a servant talking to his Lord in a way that sounds like a servant talking to his Lord. It reflects the perspective of servitude.

Still, it’s perfectly okay to ask God for a blessing. Leah did.

5 Genesis 29:33–35 (ESV)

She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also.” And she called his name Simeon. Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, “Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” Therefore his name was called Levi. And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, “This time I will praise the LORD.” Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

What takes seconds to read about here, takes years to transpire. These events put relentless pressure on Jacob to change his attitude. Leah names her second son Simeon, which means “heard,” and announces, “*Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also.*” Remember, everyone is living in Laban’s household, and Laban loves Leah. Now she’s brought two grandsons into the household and Jacob is expected to appreciate that. His crush on Rachel is nice and all that, but Leah is producing.

Then she has another son—Levi, which means “attached,” saying, “*Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.*” While Jacob must be spending some time with Leah—she couldn’t get pregnant otherwise—she’s now demanding more. Sons are the coin of the realm, and Leah has a God-given gift for producing them. She’s announcing that Jacob will mainly be with her.

The fourth son is icing on the cake, and Leah names him Judah, which means “praise,” saying, “*This time I will praise the LORD.*” Notice that her bitterness is gone. Jacob really is spending a lot of time with Leah. She has won.

Actually, God has won. Jacob hated Leah, not just because of her weak eyes but because she tricked him. But God is on Leah’s side and Jacob now gets that. Eventually he just softens. He knows he can’t control who gets pregnant, and opposing God’s will just seems dumb.

But there’s an even deeper lesson; Jacob has learned to love Leah. He still loves Rachel, but he’s gotten more mature, and his appreciation of Leah is no longer just obligatory. Leah is a fine woman who shouldn’t be judged for her looks. Jacob is starting to think like a grown-up.

And Leah was the agent of that change. All she did was be herself, talking to Jacob, praying to God, and sharing her pain.

Leah’s tears were God’s chosen instrument to turn Jacob into a man.

This leads somewhere. Leah’s pain wasn’t just something God allowed; it was something God created. God gave Leah her weak eyes.

We like to talk about how God’s ways are higher than our ways, as long as we can change the subject when it gets too close to home. It’s obvious (from both the Bible and from life) that pain avoidance is not a big priority for God.

Something else is what it’s all about.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Have you ever been shocked by a blessing in a way that made you wonder?
2. Have you ever relearned something you already knew in a way that made you realize you didn't really know it before?
3. What great methods have you seen for comforting a friend in pain?
4. What is your main prayer for yourself?
5. Have you ever been deeply affected by someone else's affliction?