

WEEK 4
03.25.18

LOVE AND DUTY: RACHEL AND LEAH



FOCUS VERSE

Deuteronomy 10:12

And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul

FOCUS TEXT

Genesis 29:15-30

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.

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.

30 And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years



FOCUS THOUGHT

The blend of
love and duty are
inescapable for
believers.



CULTURE CONNECTION

Our Deepest Wounds

There is a wound that is particularly painful and hard to endure, and that is the wound we suffer from a close friend or a loved one. It is one thing to suffer as the result of a physical activity or an industrial accident. It is quite another thing to feel betrayed or deeply hurt by someone with whom we have had a close relationship. A sprained ankle or a broken arm will often mend itself without long-lasting effects. But a wound from a friend or a fellow believer? That can be another matter. David complained to the Lord, “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psalm 41:9).

Let us not become embittered, even as

Esau allowed hatred to control his thoughts towards his brother, Jacob. With God’s help we can enjoy a healing process, though the recovery may seem to be terribly slow.

Before we judge others too harshly, we need to ask ourselves, “Whom have I injured in the past? What kindnesses have I left undone?” Perhaps there is little or nothing we can do about what has already taken place. But we can certainly do something about the future. Someone needs our encouragement and not our criticism. Someone needs our praise and not our fault-finding. Let us look for opportunities to encourage and commend others.

OUTLINE

- I. JACOB’S SEARCH FOR PEACE**
 - A. Jacob Fled from Esau
 - B. Jacob Went to His Mother’s Homeland
- II. JACOB’S ATTRACTION TO RACHEL**
 - A. Jacob Met Rachel at the Well
 - B. Jacob Agreed to Work for Laban
- III. THE CUSTOM OF THE LAND**
- IV. THE MARRIAGE OF LOVE AND DUTY**
 - A. Rachel Represents Love
 - B. Leah Represents Duty
 - C. Love and Duty Function Together

CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

The Bible is filled with fascinating stories, with many of them told that feature women as key players. God’s portrait gallery reveals that women often had a tremendous influence upon future generations. Some women lived in the background of their fathers or husbands, but others’ lives had a powerful impact upon their world. The Bible has always been faithful to reveal both the strengths and

the weaknesses of individuals. Some women like Rahab rose above their past; others like Gomer, Hosea’s wife, fell into debauchery. Some women were cruel and treacherous, but others were self-sacrificing and loyal. Many women in the Bible had certain traits that seem to stand out and to define their lives. The same would be true for men as well.

Rachel and Leah were sisters married to the same husband. Rachel represents the love that believers gain through knowledge of their heavenly bridegroom. Leah represents consistent, dutiful service to the Lord. It is true that love will bind us to duty. What begins with love will hold us and keep us in the times of our deepest trial and greatest temptation. We as believers are betrothed to Christ, and like the Shulamite in Song of Solomon 3:4 we should be able to say, “I have found him whom my soul loveth . . . and would not let him go.”

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

I. JACOB’S SEARCH FOR PEACE

The life that is unmindful of God’s presence can be muddled, full of strife and confusion. To a large extent that is a description of how Jacob

lived in his early years. Jacob, the second son of Isaac and Rebekah, was a selfish conniver who would take advantage of others when it suited his purpose. True, his mother had received a prophetic word from God regarding Jacob even before his birth, but somehow that did not seem to translate into reputable living. From his birth Jacob showed himself to have a grasping nature. (Because he took hold of his twin brother's heel when he was born, he was named Jacob, which means "he that supplanteth.") There would be little peace in the heart of Jacob as long as he continued in his despicable and deceitful ways.

A. Jacob Fled from Esau

There is forever a conflict between the flesh and the Spirit (Galatians 5:17). Esau, Jacob's older twin brother, put no real value on spiritual things. He was a man of the world who lived for the world. It is remarkable how casually he treated the privileges he could have enjoyed as the firstborn son of Isaac. He bartered away his birthright for a single meal, a stew of lentils, and then "rose up, and went his way" (Genesis 25:34) as if nothing of any great importance had happened. No wonder his actions were such an offense to God. Romans 9:13 states, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." The birthright the older son disdained (Genesis 25:34) involved not only a double portion of his father's inheritance but also spiritual blessings.

Unlike Esau, Jacob valued God's covenant promises. His mother may have shared with him what she had received prophetically from God years before. The Lord had told her that Esau would hold an inferior position to Jacob, and Rebekah, who strongly preferred her younger son, clung to that promise. Rebekah would do everything she could to ensure that Jacob would attain prominence.

When Isaac was old with extremely poor eyesight, he began to feel that death might be imminent. He called for Esau with the intention of bestowing upon him the paternal blessing. Never mind that God had chosen Jacob to be heir to the promise. Isaac loved Esau and his savory meat, and the two men could enjoy a meal together before the blessing was given. "Now therefore," Isaac instructed Esau, "take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy

bow, and go out to the field, and take some venison" (Genesis 27:3).

Should we suspect that Rebekah was listening outside Isaac's tent? We know she overheard what her husband had said, and while Esau went to hunt for venison, she sprang into action. She commanded Jacob to bring her two kids from the flock of goats. With these she would prepare savory meat such as she knew her husband loved; then Jacob could be the one to take the meat to Isaac and receive his father's blessing. It was a daring scheme, and it would demand immediate action. At first Jacob hesitated. "Behold," he reasoned, "Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man: My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him to be a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing" (Genesis 27:11-12). But Rebekah was not to be deterred by these misgivings. She stated, "Upon me be thy curse, my son: only obey my voice, and go fetch me them" (Genesis 27:13).

How carefully Rebekah proceeded with her deceitful scheme! If it were discovered, all hope of Jacob being blessed would be lost. Everything had to be done to make the plan as foolproof as possible. Somehow Isaac would have to be convinced that he was really promoting Esau and not Jacob. Rebekah needed to prepare the meat from the young goats in just the right way. She must find those special garments that belonged to Esau and put them on her younger son. She needed to be careful to cover the hands and the smooth of Jacob's neck with the skin of the kids of the goats. Finally, Rebekah would place the savory meat and the bread in the hand of her favored son, and then her part in the deception would be finished.

Isaac had some misgivings from the first when Jacob came into his presence. "Who art thou, my son?" (Genesis 27:18) he inquired. The voice he heard sounded like that of Jacob and not like that of Esau. It appeared strange as well to the older man that Esau could have found and prepared the venison so quickly. But Jacob was ready with an answer, and he said, "Because the LORD thy God brought it to me" (Genesis 27:20). This bold and blasphemous lie shows us Jacob at his worst. Whatever it might cost, he had determined to

follow through with the underhanded plot, and Jacob played his part like a professional.

Isaac decided to settle the matter conclusively, and feeling Jacob's hands, he was convinced that this was indeed his older son. The hands, the old man was sure, were Esau's, the smell of the garment, he believed, was of Esau as well. Betrayed by a kiss, a plate of meat, and some wine, Isaac proceeded to pronounce the prophetic and patriarchal blessing upon Jacob.

Jacob had just gone out when his brother came in. What a shocking meeting this would prove to be! When Esau heard from Isaac what had just taken place he cried with a bitter cry, and his heart began to throb with a seething hatred.

Rebekah had real reason to be alarmed when she heard that Esau was determined to kill Jacob after the passing of her husband. Fearing for her younger son's life, she commanded Jacob to flee to Haran where her brother, Laban, lived. That is also where Rebekah lived when Abraham's servant came in search of a bride for Isaac and chose her. She hoped Jacob could find a bride there as well.

Apparently Rebekah wanted Isaac to give Jacob that same directive, for she began a conversation with Isaac about her disappointment with Esau's choosing heathen wives. She mentioned to Isaac that she did not want Jacob to do the same thing. Isaac agreed and called Jacob in to bless him and direct him to go to Laban and choose one of his daughters for a wife. Isaac blessed Jacob again and sent him on his way.

B. Jacob Went to His Mother's Homeland

Commentators Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown have suggested that Jacob took an indirect route to avoid being apprehended by Esau. As the sun was setting, Jacob found a place to spend the night. Exhausted from the day's journey, "he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep" (Genesis 28:11). Here in this desolate place, the God of Abraham and Isaac was about to make Himself real to Jacob. Jacob dreamed of a ladder reaching up to Heaven with angels ascending and descending upon it.

There is something awesome about the place where the Almighty first meets us in an exceptional way. Always it should remind us of God's grace and of His mercy. Always this particular location should cause us to be filled with gratitude and wonder.

When Jacob woke from his sleep he said, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. . . . this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate heaven" (Genesis 28:16-17). This location had been known to Abraham (Genesis 12:8; 13:3), and it became a significant place of worship. "Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. And he called the name of that place Beth-el" (Genesis 28:18-19). Whenever and wherever there is genuine worship, we can be sure there will be dedication and sacrifice. Jacob vowed to honor God if He would provide for him and promised to give a tenth of all that he would receive from the hand of the Lord.

II. JACOB'S ATTRACTION TO RACHEL

A. Jacob Met Rachel at the Well

The meeting at the well was planned by neither Jacob nor Rachel, but without question it was in the will of God. At Bethel the Lord had told Jacob in his dream, "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest" (Genesis 28:15). It was providential that Isaac's son arrived at the well at midday, for then he met with shepherds who were from Haran and knew his Uncle Laban. These local shepherds were waiting at the well for all the flocks to be gathered together before the heavy stone from the mouth of the well would be rolled away.

As Jacob conversed with the shepherds, he asked whether they knew Laban. They did, and they pointed out that his daughter Rachael was arriving with her father's sheep. Not only was this the right place and the right time, but it was also the right situation. Jacob was able to impress Rachel with his strength and his kindness. "Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother" (Genesis 29:10).

What thoughts must have gone through

Rachel's mind as Jacob kissed her in a friendly, courteous greeting and then wept aloud! Perhaps she wondered when she heard he had traveled so far from home, and she may have been shocked to find that he was her cousin. It seems probable that Rachel left the sheep in Jacob's care as she hurried off to tell her father the unusual news.

B. Jacob Agreed to Work for Laban

Laban ran to meet his sister's son and certainly provided a warm welcome for the weary traveler. Perhaps Jacob felt that he had finally escaped from the kind of strife and turmoil he had experienced in his own home, but time would prove otherwise. Laban could be and would be as deceitful towards his nephew as Jacob had been toward his father and brother. Some principles never change. "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). And generally speaking, we reap a greater harvest than that which we have sown. That is the nature of a harvest.

Reason suggests that Jacob served his uncle for a number of days without pay. But then Laban decided this man would be well worth hiring to tend his sheep. Perhaps a bargain could be arranged. "And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?" (Genesis 29:15).

By now it must have become evident to everyone in the household that Jacob had become enamoured with Rachel. What value were wages? For Jacob there was a far greater treasure to be gained than money or material possessions. Without hesitation he said to Laban, "I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter" (Genesis 29:18). Because Jacob had no dowry to offer, he offered the only thing he had; he offered himself as a servant to Laban for seven years.

III. THE CUSTOM OF THE LAND

When he woke in the mornings Jacob thought of Rachel; when he trekked over distant hills with Laban's sheep he could see her face; when he walked the lonely plains he heard her voice. The hardships seemed insignificant, the long hours unimportant. "And

Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (Genesis 29:20).

And then the time arrived. "Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her" (Genesis 29:21). Having served his indenture, Jacob felt in his heart that Rachel was rightfully his.

But Laban had other thoughts. Subtly, having gathered the men of the area for a marriage feast, Laban made it appear that he was acting appropriately and in good faith. Jacob, however, was about to discover to his chagrin that this was far from the case. In the evening Laban brought Leah to Jacob instead of Rachel, and perhaps because Leah was veiled, the fraud was not discovered until the next morning. What a disappointment! What confusion! Somehow Leah had been persuaded by her father to take part in his despicable scheme, and as a result she would suffer some long-term consequences.

How could Laban justify what he had done? When Jacob demanded an answer, he was given the lame excuse that it was the custom of the land: "It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the first-born" (Genesis 29:26). Even if this had been the case, Laban should have informed Jacob long before he actually did. To make matters even worse, Laban required seven more years of labor for Rachel, although he agreed to give Rachel to Jacob after a week of being with Leah. We might think Laban would have been smitten by his conscience, but Proverbs 21:2 tells us "every way of man is right in his own eyes."

IV. THE MARRIAGE OF LOVE AND DUTY

Certainly there were contrasts and conflicts in Jacob's marriages. It could not be otherwise. The marriage with Leah had been arranged through deception; the one with Rachel materialized through love.

A. Rachel Represents Love

There is a desperate longing within everyone's heart to be loved. Consciously or subconsciously, we all crave affection. We want someone to care about us deeply, to be concerned about our feelings, our hopes,

our dreams. We want someone to be there when we are hurting and someone to be there when life becomes chaotic. Those who seemingly are the most cold-hearted and insensitive may deny this longing, but their protests ring hollow. Some are willing to pay a terrible price for what they think is love; for example, the teenager who sells her virtue for a night of illicit sex; the husband who indulges in an extramarital affair. But true love is life changing and uplifting, a powerful force that “is strong as death” (Song of Solomon 8:6). True love is unselfish and self-sacrificing, patient and forgiving.

Jacob found true love in Rachel. She represented all he had ever dreamed of. The Scripture says, “Rachel was beautiful and well favoured” (Genesis 29: 17). No doubt there were other features that attracted Jacob to Laban’s daughter. She had proven she was a hardworking shepherdess and had shown him kindness from the first.

Obviously God had orchestrated the romantic attraction between Jacob and Rachel. Esau had deeply grieved his parents by marrying two Hittite women. (See Genesis 26:34–35.) It was the parents’ earnest desire, and perhaps their fervent prayer, that Jacob would find a more suitable wife.

B. Leah Represents Duty

Leah was the firstborn daughter of her father, but Leah would have been keenly aware that she had not been the first loved by her husband. It must have been a painful realization, a constant reminder that her husband’s greatest affection was toward someone else. Leah was married to the man she loved, and she was faithful, but her thoughts must often have been troubled. Even knowing that Jacob labored fourteen years for Rachel, Leah strove year after year to win a greater portion of his affection.

Leah was determined to fulfill her duty as a wife. She was typical of many other people who, despite broken dreams and dreadful hardships in the home, continue to do their best. Disrespect and even hatred could not stop her. The envy of her sister Rachel could not crush Leah’s faith. She was truly a woman destined to make a difference. Often it is the person who struggles against tremendous

odds, and yet remains faithful, that God uses.

“And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren” (Genesis 29:31). Our mighty God sees all of our efforts to be trustworthy, and He sees all of our struggles. He has promised to “be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble” (Psalm 9:9). Leah was well aware the Lord was her source of help. As He began to bless this woman with children, she was careful to praise God for His goodness. When she gave birth to her firstborn, she called his name Reuben (behold a son) and said, “Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me” (Genesis 29:32). Dutifully and courageously Leah bore five other sons and a daughter to Jacob. It would be through the lineage of her fourth son Judah (praise) that our Savior would come.

C. Love and Duty Function Together

Love will initially draw a man and woman together, but it will take a sense of duty to keep the couple together. Circumstances change. Emotions fluctuate. Feelings oscillate. The young man who stands at a marriage altar looking at his beautiful bride may one day see his companion in a wheelchair or a hospital bed and in terrific pain. The physical beauty of his bride may have faded, only to be replaced by the telltale signs of age.

On the other hand, the wife may be the one holding a trembling hand and looking at the vacant stare of a frail patient in a nursing home. In the past he was her strong and handsome bridegroom, his eyes sparkling with indescribable joy. She was his cherished sweetheart. Much of that may have become only a memory, but the commitment to a spouse can remain as strong as ever.

Duty involves commitment, a moral responsibility to do what is required and what is right. The husband who labors for long hours in a coal mine to provide for his family has accepted his responsibility. We can count on the woman who has chosen nursing as a career if she has a great compassion for hurting people. We will know that a mother will be faithful to the child whom she loves, regardless of the pain that child may have caused her. And we can trust the pastor who prays earnestly for

his flock, for he will be there whenever and wherever he is needed.

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

It is not always what we want to do that is important. It is what we know in our hearts we should do. Someone has to clean up the area and wash the dishes after a church dinner. Someone has to mow the lawn in the summer and shovel the snow on the walkway to the sanctuary in the winter. Typically these are the not the kinds of jobs that will receive much recognition or appreciation. But love can cause even menial tasks to become meaningful.

If we truly love the Lord, we will be there when the church doors are open. Prayer

meetings will not be a drudgery but an opportunity to enter into His holy presence. We will delight in reading the Word of God, treasuring the Lord's promises and longing to conform to His image. We will find great pleasure in fellowshiping with other believers and in sharing the message of salvation with unbelievers. Worship will become a way of life. We will become joyful givers to God's work, for we know that He has given so much more to us.

And what has God given to us? He has provided us with the greatest gift of all. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). ■

REFLECTIONS

- Do you think Isaac was aware that the patriarchal blessing was intended by God for Jacob and not for Esau? Explain.
- What lessons can be learned from the deceitful behavior of Leah, Jacob, and Laban?
- Genuine love will lead to exceptional commitment. Discuss.
- Do you think the conflict between Jacob's wives had a major bearing on how Joseph would be treated in the future by his brothers? Discuss.