

Genesis 29 Bible Study

It can be easy to read the Old Testament like a story book, to think about the things that happen in it like moral fairy tales and not reality. It can be just as easy to look at the miraculous happenings of scripture as God intervening in the lives of great men and women of old and be resolved to the idea that He doesn't intervene like that anymore, but reading the Old Testament requires the full acceptance of the sovereign hand of God working in the lives of His people, actively leading and actively determining their destinies both then and now.

This week in Genesis 29 we will again see God bringing His people exactly where He intended them to do. This week we see Jacob arriving in the land of the east to find a bride. And miraculously he stops at the very well where his cousin will soon be watering her sheep. Let's have a look:

"So, Jacob moved on and came to the land of the eastern people. 2 He saw in the field a well with three flocks of sheep lying beside it, because the flocks were watered from that well. Now a large stone covered the mouth of the well. 3 When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone off the mouth of the well and water the sheep. Then they would put the stone back in its place over the well's mouth.

4 Jacob asked them, "My brothers, where are you from?" They replied, "We're from Haran." 5 So he said to them, "Do you know Laban, the grandson of Nahor?" "We know him," they said. 6 "Is he well?" Jacob asked. They replied, "He is well. Now look, here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep." 7 Then Jacob said, "Since it is still the middle of the day, it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. You should water the sheep and then go and let them graze some more." 8 "We can't," they said, "until all the flocks are gathered, and the stone is rolled off the mouth of the well. Then we water the sheep."

9 While he was still speaking with them, Rachel arrived with her father's sheep, for she was tending them. 10 When Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his uncle Laban, and the sheep of his uncle Laban, he went over and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well and watered the sheep of his uncle Laban. 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep loudly. 12 When Jacob explained to Rachel that he was a relative of her father and the son of Rebekah, she ran and told her father." (Genesis 29:1-12)

Does this meeting at the well remind you of another story we've read in Genesis? (see Gen. 24:10-28)

When the servant who was looking for a wife for Jacob's father Isaac met Rebekah, he said this, *"Praised be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his faithful love for my master! The Lord has led me to the house of my master's relatives!"* (Genesis 24:27)

What does this say about the sovereign hand of God?

When you find something you've been looking for or get somewhere you were planning to go, do you recognize the hand of God in that instance? What about when you get something you did not hope to get? Do you thank God for His sovereign hand in that as well? It can be easier to thank God for the good things in life than to accept His moving in the not so good things of life, but scripture assures us that for the believer He is moving in all the things of life.

What do the following verses tell us about God's hand in both the unwanted and wanted circumstances of life?

"And as for me, I am going to harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will come after them, that I may be honored because of Pharaoh and his army and his chariots and his horsemen." (Exodus 14:17, NET)

"A person plans his course, but the Lord directs his steps." (Proverbs 16:9, NET)

"But to this very day the Lord has not given you an understanding mind, perceptive eyes, or discerning ears!" (Deuteronomy 29:4, NET)

"O Lord, you are great, mighty, majestic, magnificent, glorious, and sovereign over all the sky and earth! You have dominion and exalt yourself as the ruler of all. You are the source of wealth and honor; you rule over all. You possess strength and might to magnify and give strength to all." (1 Chronicles 29:11-12, NET)

"For the Lord is king and rules over the nations." (Psalm 22:28, NET)

“For I, the Lord, say: ‘I will surely bring on these people all the good fortune that I am hereby promising them. I will be just as sure to do that as I have been in bringing all this great disaster on them.’ (Jeremiah 32:42, NET)

“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:44, NET)

“13 When Laban heard this news about Jacob, his sister’s son, he rushed out to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban how he was related to him. 14 Then Laban said to him, “You are indeed my own flesh and blood.” So, Jacob stayed with him for a month.

The New Testament tells us to rejoice always. These verses give us reason to rejoice. Knowing that God is sovereign, and that man is not should give us reason to rejoice always, even in the midst of difficult circumstances because God is in it. As we continue to read in Genesis 29, it may be hard to understand how God is in the despicable acts of Laban, but we have to remember that He is. So, let’s continue on:

15 Then Laban said to Jacob, “Should you work for me for nothing because you are my relative? Tell me what your wages should be.” 16 (Now Laban had two daughters; the older one was named Leah, and the younger one Rachel. 17 Leah’s eyes were tender, but Rachel had a lovely figure and beautiful appearance.) 18 Since Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel, he said, “I’ll serve you seven years in exchange for your younger daughter Rachel.” 19 Laban replied, “I’d rather give her to you than to another man. Stay with me.” 20 So Jacob worked for seven years to acquire Rachel. But they seemed like only a few days to him because his love for her was so great. 21 Finally Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife, for my time of service is up. And I want to sleep with her.” 22 So Laban invited all the people of that place and prepared a feast. 23 In the evening he brought his daughter Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. 24 (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) 25 In the morning Jacob discovered it was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, “What in the world have you done to me? Didn’t I work for you in exchange for Rachel? Why have you tricked me?” 26 “It is not our custom here,” Laban replied, “to give the younger daughter in marriage before the firstborn. 27 Complete my older daughter’s bridal week. Then we will give you the younger one too, in exchange for seven more years of work.”” (Genesis 29:13-27)

What could God possibly be doing through the despicable deception of Laban?

Remember the path of Jacob and what steps he took to try to “make” the promise of God happen; that He would inherit Esau’s blessing. Well, in Laban Jacob has met His match. Laban uses the same kind of trick that Jacob used on his dad. In fact, notice the similar theme of older and younger children in verse 26.

How many times do we think that God doesn’t have the means to do what He says He will do, and so we take matters into our own hands as Jacob did. Well, God has made a provision for this kind of “help” from His children. We can see it in Proverbs 3:11-12:

“My child, do not despise discipline from the Lord, and do not loathe his rebuke. For the Lord disciplines those he loves, just as a father disciplines the son in whom he delights.” (Proverbs 3:11–12, NET)

At first blush it might not look like the hand of God in this mess with the two sisters, but although God did keep His promise that Jacob would inherit the blessing of the covenant, He did not withhold the discipline He needed for his wrongdoing and faithlessness. Galatians 6:7 explains this idea: *“Do not be deceived. God will not be made a fool. For a person will reap what he sows.”*

So, for seven years Jacob paid the price and then received another blow, seven more years for Rachel. Notice here the absence of a response from Jacob upon hearing this heart crushing news. Instead what we see is simply action:

*28 Jacob **did as Laban said**. When Jacob completed Leah’s bridal week, Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. 29 (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) 30 Jacob slept with Rachel as well. He also loved Rachel more than Leah. Then he worked for Laban for seven more years.*

Do you notice a change in the behavior and attitude of Jacob from this response?

Perhaps this time with Laban is just what Jacob needed in order to grow in grace, a peace and faith. He certainly seems like a different man. We don't see any argument returned to his uncle, only obedience.

Now the text addresses the lot of Leah and Rachel:

31 When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he enabled her to become pregnant while Rachel remained childless. 32 So Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "The Lord has looked with pity on my oppressed condition. Surely my husband will love me now." 33 She became pregnant again and had another son. She said, "Because the Lord heard that I was unloved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon. 34 She became pregnant again and had another son. She said, "Now this time my husband will show me affection, because I have given birth to three sons for him." That is why he was named Levi. 35 She became pregnant again and had another son. She said, "This time I will praise the Lord." That is why she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children." (Genesis 29:31-35)

In what ways do we see the sovereign hand of God in this passage?

Whether it looks like a blessing or a curse, the child of God can know that God is present, and God is powerful. His power and His presence along with His love means that no matter the circumstances we can rejoice in what God is doing in our lives. *What do you need to rejoice about today?*