

December 16, 2018

Genesis 29:16-30 – Family?

Introduction

Can you remember how you met your spouse? Many of you could recount, with a gleam in your eyes, how you met your spouses. With little difficulty, you could describe the circumstances surrounding when and where you met. You could likewise recount the events which led to your dating, and eventually, your wedding. In this week's lesson, we will see the unusual circumstances that surround Jacob's marriage to Rachel. It is a love story unlike many that have been told.

Jacob's Proposal (Gen. 29:16-20). How did Jacob meet his wife? According to Genesis 29, this story begins innocently enough. Jacob finally arrives in Haran to meet his uncle Laban. He was in Haran for the primary purpose of finding a wife (Gen. 28:1-3). The text explains that Jacob was near a well when some local men arrived to water their flocks. Jacob discovered that the men were from Haran. Jacob asked if they knew Laban and they responded that they did. In fact, these men told Jacob that Laban's daughter Rachel was coming to the well to get water for their sheep (Gen. 29:6). After meeting Rachel, Jacob meets his uncle, Laban, too.

Where our focal passage picks up, Jacob has been in Haran for a month (Gen. 29:14). Apparently, Jacob has been working for Laban during this time for no salary. Laban wants to offer his nephew something for his labor (Gen. 29:15). In response to Laban's request, Jacob makes an offer: he will work for seven years so he can marry Laban's youngest daughter, Rachel (Gen. 29:18). Laban agrees, and the text notes that seven years "seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her" (Gen. 29:20). What a love story! At this point, however, the story takes an interesting turn. What happened next?

Laban's Deception (Gen. 29:21-24). The seven years pass and Jacob is ready to marry Rachel. To commemorate the occasion, Laban prepares a feast and invites all the men in the area to come and celebrate (Gen. 29:22). As was customary in that day, after the celebratory feast, the marriage was to be consummated. Instead of giving his younger daughter, Rachel, to Jacob, Laban, gave his older daughter, Leah, to him instead (Gen. 29:23-24). The next morning, Jacob realized what had happened. He had been deceived by Laban. In an ironic twist, Jacob, the man who had been deceitful with others on two previous occasions in his life, was now the one who had been tricked!

When questioned about this, Laban explained that it was not proper in his culture to allow a younger daughter from a family to marry before the firstborn daughter married (Gen. 29:26). Because of this, Laban had to give Leah in marriage first before he could allow Rachel to marry. Due to his love for Rachel, Jacob worked out another agreement with his uncle, Laban. This agreement contained two key elements.

Seven More Years (Gen. 29:25-30). What were the key features of this second agreement? First, Laban agreed to allow Rachel to marry Jacob. They would have to wait a week, though. To understand the reason for this delay, one must keep in mind the customs of that day. At that time, when a couple got married, families would come together and celebrate for a week. Can you imagine?

Based on this custom, Laban asked Jacob to honor this practice. Jacob agreed. At the end of that week, Jacob and Rachel got married. To receive Rachel's hand in marriage, the second feature of this new agreement begins. Jacob consented to work for his uncle another seven years.

Conclusion

The account of Jacob's marriage to Rachel helps us understand a couple of truths. First, we really do reap what we sow. Jacob had deceived his brother Esau. Now, Jacob is the one who is tricked. Second, God's plans continue to unfold in spite of the actions of imperfect people.