

# GENESIS 29:1 – 30:43

## TWO PEAS IN A POD

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What do most of us do when we arrive in a strange place by ourselves? We try to find an anchor. That is, we look for something familiar to us: something to which we can attach ourselves. If we arrive in a foreign city we look for something in English or another American, another English speaking person. If we arrive at some out of town conference we may walk up to someone wearing a shirt with our favorite football team on it. We all look for something familiar as an immediate anchor to which we can attach ourselves. Familiarity brings a certain level of comfort to us. It eliminates, at least in part, the unknown. The unknown can be scary. Familiarity brings some feeling of control and tends to be settling. We tend to get along better with those that mirror our own culture, feelings and opinions. That's just the way it works.

But what if we were to come in contact with someone that mirrored our character flaws? What if we were to come in contact with someone so much like us that we become frustrated?

That is what happens to Jacob in this portion of scripture. He meets his Uncle Laban, resulting in Jacob getting a dose of his own medicine. We pick up the story with Jacob arriving at a well outside of Haran, the home of his relatives.

Gen. 29:1 – 14

- Jacob rolls up on a typical pastoral scene; shepherds waiting to water their flocks.

- Agreements to wait for a specific person before watering were common regarding communal wells. It was usually a contract.
- Jacob broke that contract in order for Rachael to water her father's sheep.
- A kiss between relatives was an acceptable greeting in that culture. This would not have been seen as being forward by Jacob.

### Gen. 29:15 – 35

- Laban offers to pay Jacob for his labor and asks his price.
- Jacob wants Rachael. This is the bride price; a dowry in a sense.
- The bride price was asked of the groom by the bride's family and was to be placed in trust for her protection in case of the groom's death, abandonment or divorce. This was all the protection she had until she had a son old enough to care for her.
- Laban pulls a fast one on Jacob. This is his first dose of medicine.
- A picture of the culture in the wedding feast. Marriage customs in that day combined legal and festive elements much different from our day.
- The bride was veiled during the festivities. Festivities that often led to drunkenness.
- Laban turned out the lights.
- Possibly being drunk and in the dark can lead to a whole host of problems. ;/)
- Laban obfuscates when challenged by Jacob over getting Leah over Rachael.
- Leah's eyes: "tender" or "weak" eyed. Eyes were considered a component of beauty in that culture. This statement doesn't necessarily mean that there was something wrong with

Leah's eyes. It just means that while Leah has some striking features of her own, she pales in comparison to Rachael.

- Jacob renegotiates for the hand of Rachael. He received her after a week with Rachael. He then worked for another seven years to acquire Rachael.
- Jacob is not happy being on the receiving end of a bait and switch.

Gen. 29:31 – 30:24

### THE BABY RACE BEGINS

- God opens Leah's womb due to her not being lived like Rachael. A wife that produced sons was a hot commodity.
- A new twist on the unloved and the first-born. Hagar was likely unloved by Abraham. And though Ishmael was loved by his father he was eventually sent away.
- Esau was the first- born but was rejected by God.
- Now it is the unloved wife that produces the first child. This son will eventually be rejected due to his behavior.
- Tension in the home festers as each wife has something the other wants; Leah has children, Rachael has love.
- The names of Leah's children reflect both the tension in the home and Leah's longing to be loved.
- The children seem to become pawns in the battle for the love and affection of Jacob.
- Rachael's womb is finally opened and an end to her public disgrace has finally come.
- If we pay careful attention to the text, we can see that the family history portion of the text doesn't end with the births of all the children but with the pronouncement of the end of Rachael's barrenness. This suggests that her barrenness was the real issue at hand rather than the extension of the family lineage.

Gen. 30:25 - 43

*Jacob wants to leave*

- So why is Rachael's barrenness the issue? We know from hindsight it was an obstacle to the birth of Joseph. But that would not have been evident in the immediate context. There were plenty of children.
- The timing of this event is not a coincidence.
- It goes back to Rachael's protection. In that day, if a woman had borne no children she could easily be discarded or demoted. The only protection she had was from her father's family. They would then take responsibility for her.
- Prior to the birth of Joseph, a request to leave would have been inappropriate for Jacob and risky for Rachel. She would have left her family with a man that could have put her away at any time. She now has some protection from that scenario.

Jacob and Laban renegotiate

- Laban asks Jacob to stay. Jacob has made him rich with the increase in his flocks.
- Jacob asks for the spotted sheep and goats. These are considered to be worth less.
- The belief that what livestock viewed prior to birth affected the offspring.
- There is a word play in the Hebrew. The Hebrew word for white is *laban*, so all the sheep that are white are *Laban*.

The reversal begins

- Will Jacob recognize the reversal?
- If so, will he learn from it?
- Do we recognize the reversal?

- If so, do we learn from it?
- Will Jacob recognize from whence his success has come or will he attribute it to himself?
- Harry Chapin; 1974; The Cat's in the Cradle... As the song continues, the roles gradually reverse.