

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 29:1-14

“The Daughters of Laban”

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(Genesis answers three basic theological questions. The first question is, “Whose world is it anyway?” The text answers the question by affirming that it is God’s world by right of creation. It is God’s world because God made it. The second question Genesis asks is “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way?” The answer is by trusting God and obeying Him. Family becomes the concern and Genesis begins to answer the third question, “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way particularly with the members of our own family?” In Genesis 25, we visited the family of Abraham, and we have seen how Abraham’s family was fractured because Abraham did not trust God completely and did not follow the plan of God for marriage. We saw how the family of Isaac, Abraham’s heir, was divided by parental favoritism. So far, we have not seen a family that remained healthy and intact. This text continues by showing what happened in Isaac’s family.)

Genesis 29:1-14

Verses 1-3

¹ Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples. ² There he saw a well in the open country, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. ³ When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well’s mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.

- Jacob, Isaac’s heir, fled from his father’s house to escape the wrath of his brother Esau. Esau, Isaac’s first born, had sworn to kill his brother, Jacob, because Jacob, with the help of their mother, had stolen the birth right of the first born from Esau by tricking Isaac. Jacob was advised by both his parents to go to his Uncle Laban, his mother’s brother, for two reasons: 1. to escape Esau’s wrath and 2. to find a wife for himself from among his uncle’s daughters.

- Jacob came to a place where there was a well around which three flocks of sheep were grazing. The well was covered by a large stone. To water the sheep the stone needed to be removed from the mouth of the well. After the sheep had finished drinking, the stone was returned to cover it.

Verses 4-6

⁴ Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?"

"We're from Harran," they replied.

⁵ He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?"

"Yes, we know him," they answered.

⁶ Then Jacob asked them, "Is he well?"

"Yes, he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep."

- Jacob asked the shepherds gathered at the well where they were from. He learned that they came from Harran, where his Uncle Laban lived. The shepherds acknowledged that they knew Laban and that Laban was well. They also pointed to a shepherdess who was approaching the well with her sheep and told Jacob that the woman was Laban's daughter, Rachel.

Verses 7-8

⁷ "Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture."

⁸ "We can't," they replied, "until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep."

- Jacob attempted to get the other shepherds to water their sheep and leave the well. They were reluctant to go because removing the stone was difficult. It was easier to move the stone once and replace it rather than to remove and replace it several times.
- Jacob's motive in trying to get the other shepherds to leave the well is uncertain. But, given his scheming nature, it is suspicious.

Verses 9-12

⁹ While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherd. ¹⁰ When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep. ¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. ¹² He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father.

- Jacob opened the well for Rachel and helped her water her sheep. He then kissed her and told her that she was his cousin. His greeting of Rachel was emotional. Perhaps this is why he wanted the other shepherds to leave. However, the nature of the greeting was proper for the time.
- Rachel ran to her father to tell him that his sister's son had come.

Verses 12-14a

¹³ As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. ¹⁴ Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood."

- Laban went immediately to greet Jacob. They embraced and kissed and Laban brought Jacob to his house.
- The text says that Jacob told Laban "all these things." That phrase implies that Jacob was open and honest about what had happened and why he had come to Laban. This would imply that Jacob had changed, perhaps because of his dream (see 28:10-22).
- Laban's response to Jacob is astounding. The words he uses to address Jacob, "You are my own flesh and blood" (literally in Hebrew, "my flesh and bone"), are words used in adoption contracts. Laban welcomes Jacob as his own son.
- The scene implies that the relationship between Jacob and Laban is open and honest at the start. Family relationships should be open and honest.

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