

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 29:15-30

“Isaac’s Wives”

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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 29:15-30

Verse 15

15 Laban said to him, “Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.”

- See notes on Genesis 27:1-29:14. Jacob, Isaac’s heir, fled to his Uncle Laban’s house to escape from the wrath of his brother Esau and to find a wife from among the descendants of Abraham.
- Laban suggests to Jacob that it is unfair for Jacob to work for him and not receive a fair wage. So, he offers to pay Jacob a wage for the work he does while Jacob lives in his household.
- In so doing Laban makes clear Jacob’s status in his household. Jacob is not Laban’s heir, nor will he be so. Jacob will be one who works for Laban and to whom Laban pays a wage. Jacob is a hired hand.

Verses 16-18

¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. ¹⁸ Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, “I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.”

- Laban had two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Leah was the older and had “weak eyes.” The phrase probably means that she was “cross-eyed.” Rachel, the younger of Laban’s daughters, was lovely and Jacob was “in love” with her.
- Jacob agreed to work for Laban for seven years and that, at the end of that time, Laban would allow him to marry Rachel.

Verses 19-21

¹⁹ Laban said, “It’s better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.” ²⁰ So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her.”

- Laban agreed to the contract. The terms are clear. Jacob will work for Laban for seven years, and then, he will be allowed to marry Rachel.
- When seven years had passed and the terms of the contract were fulfilled, Jacob asked to be allowed to marry Rachel.

Verses 22-24

²² So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. ²³ But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. ²⁴ And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant.

- Laban held the marriage feast. At the feast, the bride’s face would have been covered so that she could not be seen by the groom or any of the other people attending the feast. When the time came, the bride would be put to bed. The groom would come to her and sleep with her in the dark. He would probably have been somewhat drunk, too. So, Jacob went to bed with the woman he thought was the bride for whom he had worked for seven years.
- But, Laban had switched his daughters. He gave Jacob Leah as his wife instead of Rachel. Laban deliberately violated the terms of his contract with

Jacob. This is contrary to the word of the Lord. Laban did not trust God nor obey God. This is not how family members should behave towards other members of the family. Laban's action is in no way honorable.

- However, by sleeping with Leah, even without knowing who she was, he consummated the marriage and accepted Leah as his wife. Yes, he had been tricked by his crafty uncle. But Jacob had lived in Laban's household for seven years. He should have learned that Laban was tricky and been more cautious in his dealing with his uncle. Jacob is responsible for what Jacob does and so he is bound by his actions. Leah is now his wife. Laban is wrong. He tricked Jacob. But Jacob is in Laban's household because he tricked Esau. And now he has married the wrong woman because he was not cautious.
- Laban gave Leah her maid, Zilpah. This act was confirmation of the fact that Leah was now Jacob's wife.

Verses 25-27

²⁵ When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

²⁶ Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. ²⁷ Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."

- When Jacob awakened the next morning, he discovered that he was in bed with Leah. He went to Laban and confronted him with his deceit. Laban told Jacob that custom demanded that the older sister be married before the younger one. Laban suggested that he finish the "honeymoon" week with Leah and then marry Rachel, immediately.
- Laban told Jacob the terms of the deal would be seven more years of service.

Verses 28-30

²⁸ And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. ²⁹ Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant. ³⁰ Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

- Jacob agreed to Laban's terms. After the honeymoon with Leah, Jacob married Rachel. And he then worked seven more years for Laban.
- The deal was sealed by the giving of the maid, Bilhah, to Rachel.
- Jacob now has two wives. His household is not organized according to God's plan for the family. Jacob now knows that he cannot trust his father-in-law. Jacob is not trusting God nor is he obeying God. In the next chapters of Genesis we will see how this affects Jacob's family.

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