

# Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel

## 29: 14b-30

**DIG:** What was the reason for the dissension between Jacob's wives? What were the consequences of Jacob's favoritism of Rachel over Leah? What problems did Laban cause Jacob? How did Laban pull off the deceptive switch? Why didn't Ya'akov question who was in his tent on his wedding night?

**REFLECT:** When, like Ya'akov, have you had to suffer such delays in getting what you want? What did God want for you? Has favoritism hurt your family? If so, what does the Lord want you to do about it?

**Jacob** (Hebrew: **Ya'akov**) was hardworking and wanted to make **himself** useful, so **he** began to help with the family business, which was first and foremost handling the flocks. This kept **him** near **Rachel** and **his love** for **her** grew. **He** knew this was the woman **ADONAI** had chosen for **him**, and that **she** would fulfill every requirement to be the mother of the nation that **God** had promised. **After Ya'akov had stayed with him for a whole month, Laban** saw that **Jacob** was a valuable employee and **he** didn't want to let **him** go. So **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" (29:14-15).<sup>461</sup>

We are now introduced to another daughter, **Leah**. Now **Laban** had two daughters; the name of the older was **Leah**, meaning *a cow*, and the name of the younger was **Rachel**, meaning *a ewe lamb* (29:16). Both **daughters** were apparently well beyond the age at which women usually married, and **Laban** may have become very concerned about finding a husband for **Leah**, the older sister. According to **Laban's** later explanation (29:26), it was contrary to strong custom for **the younger** to be married before **the older**; and since **Leah** had been unable to find a husband, both **she** and **Rachel** had remained unmarried. Talk about pressure! Obviously, **Laban** should have explained this to **Ya'akov** at the time of **his** proposal, but **he** was full of **guile**. It was not clear why **Leah** was unable to find a husband; quite possibly it was because none of the eligible men of Haran were acceptable to **her** father.<sup>462</sup>

The Bible says that **Leah** had **weak eyes**, but the adjective *rak* is translated **weak** in only a few places (**Genesis 33:12; Deuteronomy 20:8**). More often it describes something that is **tender** (flocks, **Genesis 18:7**), **gentle** (a king's reign, **Second Samuel 3:39**), **soft** (speech, **Proverbs 15:1; Job 41:3**), **delicate** (a woman, **Deuteronomy 28:56; Isaiah 47:1**), and **young** (an experienced young man, **First Chronicles 22:5 and 29:1; Second Chronicles**

13:7). That is, **she** had **eyes** that according to the Oriental standard of beauty, were a great blemish.<sup>463</sup> Bright **eyes**, full of fire, are considered the height of beauty.

**Jacob** wasn't interested in **Laban's** wages; **he** was in love with **Rachel** who was lovely in form, and beautiful. **He** immediately proposed that **he** would work for him seven years in return for his younger daughter **Rachel**. **Jacob** had shown up empty-handed in Haran, and the seven years of service would pay for the bride price. It is unclear if **Laban** thought up the scheme of switching his daughters on the wedding night at this point, but it wouldn't be a surprise. **Laban** said: **It's better that I give her to you than to some other man**. Therefore, when **he** said: **Stay here with me**, and the deal was set (29:17-19). But **Laban** turned this joyous occasion into a nightmare.

So **Jacob** served seven years to get **Rachel**, but all the years seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. But when the seven years were up, **Laban** didn't say anything at all to **Ya'akov** because **he** wanted to keep him working for as long as possible. Finally, **Jacob** had to remind **Laban** that **he** had kept his part of the bargain, and now **he** wanted his bride. **He** demanded: **Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her** (29:20-21). **Laban** indirectly ignores **Jacob's** request, but instead makes plans for a wedding feast. **Jacob** assumes it is for his marriage to **Rachel**, but uncle **Laban** has a trick up his sleeve.

It was the custom to have a great wedding feast, lasting seven days, beginning with a banquet on the wedding night. So **Laban** brought together all the people of the place and gave a seven-day marriage feast (29:22). And at the banquet, **Laban** gave his servant girl **Zilpah**, meaning *nearness of intimacy*, as a wedding gift to his daughter as her maidservant (29:24). It seems that **Jacob's** senses were dulled with the wine of the feast. Wine was served there, and the veil and the darkness of the wedding tent would surely not themselves be sufficient to camouflage both **Leah** and her voice. The wine most likely affected **Jacob's** perception on his wedding night, just like wine affected **Lot** with his older and younger daughters. They, too, deceived their father, made him drunk, and had intercourse with him (19:30-38).<sup>464</sup>

But when evening came, **Laban** took his daughter **Leah** to the marriage tent and gave her to **Jacob**, and **Jacob** lay with her (29:23). Like a lamb to the slaughter, **Ya'akov** never questioned that it was really **Rachel**. **He** was totally duped.

What is left unsaid here speaks volumes. How does **Laban** pull this off? Where is **Rachel** while all this was going on? Whether **she** had simply been persuaded, or commanded, by **her** father to go along with this deceptive plan, or whether **she** had to be forcibly detained in the women's quarters during the evening and long night, we do not know. In any event, it must have been very difficult for **her**. It certainly wasn't easy for **Leah** either. How does **she** feel about being led to **Jacob's** tent by **her** father? Does **she** feel used? Although **she** really wanted a husband, **she** knew **Jacob** loved **Rachel** and that **he** thought **he** was making love to **her** that night. The Bible does not tell us what the feelings were between the two sisters. No doubt **Leah** was jealous of **Rachel**, but there is no reason to think that **she** would want to hurt **her** sister. Even though **she** was being obedient to **her** father in going through with the deception, **she** knew it was wrong. Unless **she** wanted **Ya'akov** so badly herself that nothing else mattered, it was probably a difficult night for **her** as well.<sup>465</sup>

When morning came **Jacob** got a little surprise - **there was Leah!** Once the deception was discovered, **he** was obviously angry with both **Laban** and **Leah**. But after **he** cooled down **he** had to recognize the similarity of this situation to **his** deception of **his** father and brother. Just as **Esau**, the older brother, stood between **Ya'akov** and **his** blessing, here **Leah**, the older sister, stood between **Jacob** and **his** true love.<sup>466</sup> Desperation clouded both decisions. **Ya'akov** believed that the end justified the means, and I am sure **Laban** and **Leah** felt the same way. In spite of **her** deception, **Jacob** realized that **Leah** had been in love with **him** all along. **He** was an honorable man and **he** didn't want to hurt **her** any more. **He** did learn to love **her**, though **he** would always love **Rachel** more than **Leah**.

Because of this little mix-up, Jewish tradition dictates that the marriage contract, or the Ketubah, be signed *before* the wedding - not afterward. Jewish men check out that bride *before* they go down the aisle. Christian tradition says that it is bad luck to see the bride before the wedding. But Jewish men *insist* on seeing her! This accomplishes two things. First, it protects the husband from this kind of deception, and secondly, it protects the wife's rights during the marriage and in case she is divorced or widowed. It is forbidden for Jewish couples to live together without a it. If the Ketubah is lost, a new one must be written. It has become traditional, since at least the fourteenth century, to decorate the Ketubah as artwork and hang it in the home as a keepsake.

*This was not divine retribution of the ungodly. This was a loving heavenly **Father** using **Laban's guile** for **His** glory. Later **Jacob's** youngest son **Joseph** would say to **his** brothers, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" (50:20). That is what happened here; **Laban** intended to harm **Jacob**, but **God** intended it for good. The desire of **ADONAI** was to teach **Ya'akov** three lessons that **he** needed to learn and use for the rest of **his** life.*

At his first opportunity, **Jacob** confronted **Laban** and said to him, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?" **Laban** tried to rationalize his behavior by saying: It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one (29:25-26). The phrase: It is not our custom here, is translated you have done things that you should not have done elsewhere. **Abimelech** uses this phrase with **Abraham** after **Abraham** deceived him (20:9). Likewise, the sons of **Ya'akov** use this phrase after they hear about their sister's rape (34:7). **Tamar**, daughter of **David**, attempted to discourage her half-brother **Amnon** from forcing himself on her by using this phrase. It is an expression that refers to serious violation of custom that threatens the very fabric of society, and is basically a rebuke.<sup>467</sup>

**Laban** tells **Ya'akov** that he hadn't read the small print. This ancient custom still exists in the East. But **Jacob** was not informed of this in advance. In addition, he had served there for seven years and would have known of this custom. However, most likely, this was another lie by **Laban**. There can be no doubt that this was an **Israelite in whom** there was much **guile** (**John 1:47 NKJ**)! Then, since he was on a roll, he makes **Jacob** another offer. Finish **Leah's** seven-day bridal week; then I will give you the youngest one also, in return for another seven years of work (29:27). **Uncle Laban** was certainly getting his money's worth wasn't he? But because **Ya'akov** was a man of character, and out of respect to **Leah**, he agreed.

Through this ordeal, **ADONAI** will teach **Jacob** three lessons. **The first lesson was to learn humble submission.** Because he had refused to submit to **God**, he must submit to serve a human master. **The second lesson was to respect the rights of the firstborn.** What **Ya'akov** had disregarded in connection with **Esav**, he must now concede concerning his wife **Leah**. **The third lesson was to learn patience.** Because he had refused to wait for the **LORD's** timing for the fulfillment of His promise (25:23), he had to wait seven years before he could marry **Rachel**, and that he would have to serve another seven years after that.<sup>468</sup>

And **Jacob** did so. He finished the bridal week with **Leah**, and then **Laban** gave him his daughter **Rachel** to be his second wife (29:28). At about the age of eighty, he had received two wives in eight days. In addition, **Laban** gave his servant girl **Bilhah**, meaning *terror*, as a wedding gift to his daughter **Rachel** as her maidservant (29:29). She, like **Zilpah**, would play an important role in **Jacob's** family life.

Even though the biblical record is accurate, **ADONAI** does not approve of polygamy. **God** didn't approve of **Satan's** lie and he didn't approve of **David's** sin. He judged them both for it. The Bible records several men who had more than one wife. **King David** had several wives and a harem, but it wasn't the best thing for him and it wasn't the best thing for **Ya'akov**, **Leah**

or **Rachel**. Even though the Biblical record is accurate here, the Bible never records any man who had more than one wife who was *happily* married.<sup>469</sup>

**Jacob lay with Rachel also and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years** as the bride price for **Rachel (29:30)**. Ya'akov was becoming like **his** mother and father, each of whom loved one son more than the other. Parental favoritism was replaced by marital favoritism.<sup>470</sup> The former led to friction in Isaac's family, and **Jacob's** favoritism for **Rachel** will lead to family discord that will plague **him** for the rest of his life. In **his** old age, **he** favored **Rachel's** son, **Joseph**, so much that **Leah's** sons wanted to kill **him**, as we shall see **(37:3-4, 18)**.<sup>471</sup>

**29:20** to **30** follow an antithetical structure. There is a parallelism, where the first letter is antithetical to the second letter, and so on.

- A     **Jacob's payment for a wife (29:20)**
- B     **Jacob's marriage to Leah through deception (29:21-24)**
- C     **Jacob's accusation against Laban (29:25)**
- C     **Laban's defense (29:26)**
- B     **Jacob's marriage to Rachel by negotiation (29:27-30a)**
- A     **Jacob's payment for a wife (29:30b)**