

SISTER WIVES

GENESIS 29:14-30 JULY 20, 2022

It is very unlikely that you will be struck by lightning this year. You've got a one-in-a-million chance. Though, over the course of your life, the odds move quite a bit. Live to be 80 and your chance is one in fifteen thousand.¹

Being attacked by a shark is even less likely than getting zapped in a storm. The chance that Bruce will make a meal of you is one in 3.4 million.² If you still don't like those odds, I can help you: Don't go in the ocean. Problem solved.

The life-changing misfortune we'll read about in Genesis tonight is even more unlikely than a lightning strike or a shark attack. I'd go as far as saying the con Jacob falls victim to is something that *can't* happen to us. Laws against polygamy and indoor lighting play a big part in that. But even though this story feels outlandish, it still teaches us quite a few principles about God's love, God's justice, and how we should conduct ourselves as faith-filled people.

We may not be tribal shepherds who enter into marriage contracts for multiple wives, yet these verses speak directly and authoritatively to each of us listening tonight. 1+1 still equaled 2 four thousand years ago, and God's truth revealed in Scripture remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. A passage like this one, which feels so far removed from modern life, is a wonderful testament to the fact that God's Word is *alive* and powerful. It is never irrelevant or outdated.

So let's take a look at this shocking turn of events.

Genesis 29:14a - ¹⁴Laban said to him, "Yes, you are my own flesh and blood."

Some commentators believe Laban was, unofficially, 'adopting' Jacob,³ while others think the Hebrew indicates that Laban had to be *convinced* that Jacob really was who he said.⁴

We know that Laban is not a loving, family man. He's greedy and self-centered. He treats his two daughters not as treasures but as stock to be milked for material gain. Even their names betray Laban's mindset. The name Leah means 'cow.' Rachel means 'ewe.'⁵

Genesis 29:14b-15 - After Jacob had stayed with him a month, ¹⁵Laban said to him, "Just because you're my relative, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be."

¹ <https://www.weather.gov/safety/lightning-odds>

² <https://www.surfertoday.com/surfing/what-are-my-chances-of-being-attacked-and-killed-by-a-shark>

³ *Bible Knowledge Commentary*

⁴ *NET Study Bible Notes*

⁵ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

One source writes: "Among pastoral people a stranger [was] freely entertained for 3 days. On the fourth he [was] expected to tell his name and errand. If he prolonged his stay after that he must set his hand to work in some way."⁶

Bruce Waltke points out that a blood relative *would* work for free. Instead, Laban approaches Jacob as if he were any other contracted employee. From the start, we see a business-like tension among these two men.

Jacob was staying in Laban's home, freely eating the food and dressed from Laban's closet. After all, Jacob had no money or resources of his own at the time. And so, Jacob was doing the honorable and decent thing to work and not freeload. But Laban sends a message that says, "Don't get too comfortable. This *isn't* your house."

Genesis 29:16-17 - ¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters: the older was named Leah, and the younger was named Rachel. ¹⁷ Leah had tender eyes, but Rachel was shapely and beautiful.

Your translation may say that Leah's eyes were 'delicate,' or 'weak,' or that they had 'no sparkle.' Some scholars think Moses was saying she had pale or blue eyes.⁷

The focus on the physical reminds us that Jacob still has not knelt to pray. He spends no time seeking the Lord or seeking His will. He's more interested in Rachel's figure than the walk of faith.

Genesis 29:18 - ¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel, so he answered Laban, "I'll work for you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."

For all my criticism of Jacob, it really is true that he loved Rachel. He had one of the most romantic and dedicated loves ever recorded. This offer would be *double* the going rate for a bride price.⁸

Traditional American lore says a fellow should pay three months' salary for an engagement ring. Jacob says, "Make it seven *years'* salary!"

Jacob spent those years working with Laban's flocks. Dr. Henry Morris points out that he would've been able to spend a lot of time with Rachel, the shepherdess.⁹ And so, Jacob's love grew and developed over that time.

You unmarried folks - especially the young ones - don't rush into marriage. Three times we're told in the Song of Solomon (which is all about love and marriage): "do not stir up or awaken love until the appropriate time."¹⁰

⁶ *Commentary Critical And Explanatory On The Whole Bible*

⁷ *ibid.* (See also Rober Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*)

⁸ R. Kent Hughes *Genesis: Beginning And Blessing*

⁹ Henry Morris *The Genesis Record*

¹⁰ Song Of Solomon 2:7, 3:5, 8:4

How did Rachel feel about it? The text doesn't tell us, but we know Rebekah had a say in whether she would marry Isaac or not. And so, we can guess that Rachel either fell in love with Jacob or, at very least, was not unwilling to marry him.¹¹

Before we move on, let's pause to remember the situation Jacob has made for himself. Jacob is a *rich* man. He's the patriarch of a great house in Canaan. He is a powerful sheik, or at least he *should* have been. But, like the prodigal son, he finds himself penniless in a faraway land, forced into servitude under an uncaring master because he went his own way.

Often we're convinced that God is going to withhold something from us - that He isn't moving at the proper speed or that we know the best way to a better life. But that's what landed Jacob and the prodigal into their predicaments. Meanwhile, God *our Father* wants life for us and that more abundantly. We've got to trust Him and wait for Him and follow His leading, rather than try to cut our own path through life.

Genesis 29:19 - ¹⁹Laban replied, "Better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay with me."

Laban certainly doesn't come off like father of the year. He also doesn't exactly sign on the dotted line. That's because he's hatching a plan and knows he's got Jacob on the hook.

Genesis 29:20 - ²⁰So Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, and they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

This is one of the most captivating verses in the Old Testament. Of course, when only applied to Jacob, it becomes a little tarnished by his shortcomings and the scandal that's about to unfold. But take this verse and remind yourself that it uncovers only the smallest sliver of Christ's love for you. It is an unfailing, unlimited, active love. Jesus said, "My Father is still working, and I am working also."

Like Jacob, the Lord works tirelessly because of His love for you. Not for seven years, but for more than 6,000 years! Before time began, the Lord started His work to love you and save you and make you His own. The Bible says those thousands of years are like a few days to God. And so, from heaven's perspective, it has seemed like only a few days because of God's love for us.

Jesus has done much more than herd some sheep. For the joy that lay before Him, He endured the *cross*! You were worth *that* job. He's still waiting, still *working* out of His love for you, waiting for the consummation of all that work, when His Bride will finally be presented to Him in eternity.

Genesis 29:21 - ²¹Then Jacob said to Laban, "Since my time is complete, give me my wife, so I can sleep with her."

¹¹ John Goldingay *Genesis*

It seems Laban was dragging his feet. But Jacob? He was counting down the days. He already considered Rachel to be his wife. But, notice this: Even before the Mosaic Law, even in these primitive, loosely administrated times, God's people did not have sex before marriage.

God's righteous standard for sexual activity has always been the same. That standard is met always and *only* in the confines of monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Anything else is rebellion against God our Father and Creator and falls short of His standard and command.

Genesis 29:22-24 - ²²So Laban invited all the men of the place and sponsored a feast. ²³That evening, Laban took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and he slept with her. ²⁴And Laban gave his slave Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her slave.

The wedding feast would last for seven days. I don't think we can overestimate how scandalous this trick of Laban's really was. Think of how embarrassed Jacob would've been any time he was around *any* of these other men in the community. He had been made a public spectacle, a patsy.

Leah, for her part, must have been a willing participant in the scheme.¹² She could've revealed herself that night in the tent, but she didn't. It seems that she had fallen in love with Jacob. Later in this chapter, we'll see she pines for his love and hopes to win it through childbirth.¹³

People are quick to say that Leah was veiled and the tent was dark, and maybe Jacob was drunk. We'll never know, and that's ok. But isn't it telling that Jacob didn't even take a moment to look into those pale eyes of Leah's, which would have immediately given her away?

There's something more important going on here than the scandal, and that's a Biblical principle that still applies to you and me today - a person will reap what they sow.

God is a God of justice, of retribution, and discipline. Jacob's mother had convinced him to steal his sibling's identity and deceive a man who could not see in order to secure his financial future. And now, the same is happening to him.

Paul spells out this eternal truth very plainly in Galatians 6.

Galatians 6:7-8 - ⁷Don't be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap, ⁸because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit.

Being a believer doesn't mean you are exempt from this rule. If anything, it is applied *more* to us, because those the Lord loves He disciplines. We reap what we sow. Sow to the Spirit!

¹² Hughes

¹³ Genesis 29:32

Genesis 29:25 - ²⁵When morning came, there was Leah! So he said to Laban, “What have you done to me? Wasn’t it for Rachel that I worked for you? Why have you deceived me?”

Jacob is shocked and confused, but his own words provide the answer he’s looking for - at least spiritually. Linguists point out that the same word is used for “deceived” to describe what he did to his own father. Of course, the schemer isn’t happy when the scheme is played on him.

Genesis 29:26-27 - ²⁶Laban answered, “It is not the custom in our country to give the younger daughter in marriage before the firstborn. ²⁷Complete this week of wedding celebration, and we will also give you this younger one in return for working yet another seven years for me.”

Laban is stone cold. Look at how casual he is about this. He’s ruthlessly conned this guy, made him a sucker in front of the whole community, and now has the guts to say, “You’re gonna work for me seven *more* years.”

In the end, Jacob would work 14 years for Rachel, four times the going rate for the bride price. But, he’d effectively end up with four ‘wives,’ as Zilpah and Bilhah become his concubines.

Laban is another one of those terrible Bible dads. There are a few guys in the running for worst dad. Lot is probably the worst. Jephthah and David are on that list, but Laban is, too. As one commentator points out, he effectively ensures that his two precious daughters would live out their days in animosity, resentment, and rivalry.¹⁴

So, what would Jacob do?

Genesis 29:28a - ²⁸And Jacob did just that.

What could he do? Who would he petition for help? Everyone would’ve said, “Forget it, Jake. It’s Haran-town.”

Plus, how could Jacob complain after what he had done to his father? There’s a great scene in the classic movie *The Sting* where the villain tries to cheat Paul Newman at cards, but Paul Newman cheats him first. While the bad guys are trying to figure out what to do, the boss shouts: “What was I supposed to do? Call him for cheating better than me?” It was time for Jacob to face what he’d done - to reap what he had willingly sown.

Genesis 29:28b-30 - He finished the week of celebration, and Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. ²⁹And Laban gave his slave Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her slave. ³⁰Jacob slept with Rachel also, and indeed, he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

¹⁴ John Calvin *Genesis*

Jacob didn't have to wait seven more years before he married Rachel. They tied the knot at the end of the weeklong feast then he worked seven more years to pay off that debt.

A great story of romance was sullied by selfishness. It reminds us that even good things will invariably be corrupted if we don't walk with the Lord. Everything had been going so well as far as Jacob was concerned, but suddenly he's got himself set up for a lifetime of strife, family trouble, and emotional baggage.

So, how does this story speak to us in the here and now of our experience?

First, it shows us how *not* to treat the family around us. Not just our blood relatives, but the family of faith. When we live for self, when we're always looking for our own benefit, when we follow convention and desire instead of the Lord's leading, things are going to wreck. People are going to become commoditized and collateralized. Christians should *never* interact with each other the way Jacob and Laban and Leah and the other guests at the party act. The Christian life is about serving others and honoring them and speaking the truth and not manipulating and not cheating.

Second, this story may be old, but the principle of reaping what you sow is still current. Our conduct matters and our choices matter. The Lord wants to lead us down a path that leads to fulfillment, spiritual abundance, peace, and joy, but if we want those things, we have to sow to the Spirit and cultivate accordingly.

The third message from this text is the most important and so that's what we'll end on. Consider God's incredible love for you. Jacob's passionate, sacrificial, hard-working love for Rachel is nothing compared to how God feels about you. He has worked for you from before the foundation of the earth. He didn't just clock in a certain number of days. He laid down His life. And, unlike Jacob, He wasn't coerced or tricked into taking you, like some Leah He never wanted. No, the Lord has loved you always and His love for you does not abate. He is *still* working hard for you, day by day, waiting patiently for that moment when we're finally presented to Him. Knowing that day is coming, let's reflect often on the significance of God's personal love for us, and let's keep ourselves ready for the day He finally comes to take us home.