

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Genesis 29:15-30

New International Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, January 3, 2016

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

The **[International Bible Lesson](#)** (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, January 3, 2016**, is from **Genesis 29:15-30**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the **[International Bible Lessons Commentary](#)** website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the **[International Bible Lesson Forum](#)**.

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Genesis 29:15-30

(Genesis 29:15) 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.”

After Jacob and his mother Rebecca deceived his brother Esau and his father Isaac, Jacob fled to Rebecca's brother Laban in Haran (about a 500 mile journey). Jacob met Rachel at a well and he helped her water the family flock of sheep. Laban invited Jacob to his home, and for a month Jacob continued to help with the family flock. Jacob was serving Laban “for nothing.” Laban may have seen how much Jacob loved Rachel, and he finally asked Jacob what he would take for wages for serving him. After leaving his father, Jacob became a servant of Laban.

(Genesis 29:16) Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.

Jacob wanted to marry Rachel, but after Laban's deception he married both of his daughters. Leah became the mother of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and Rachel became the mother of Joseph and Benjamin after some years of inability to conceive children. Joseph became the father of two tribes: Ephraim and Manasseh.

(Genesis 29:17) Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful.

Different translations describe Leah's eyes as "lovely," "weak," "tender." Her eyes were either beautiful in contrast to Rachel's beauty; or, in addition to not being as beautiful as Rachel her eyes suffered from a defective vision or beauty. It may be that Rachel always looked more desirable than Leah because neither were married before Jacob was deceived into marrying both sisters.

(Genesis 29:18) Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."

Jacob loved Rachel, but in order to marry her he had to pay for the privilege (which tablets from that time indicate was customary). Some believe that Jacob's offer of seven years of service was extraordinary, but such was Jacob's love for Rachel that he named what some consider a high price to show how much he valued her. The perfect number of "seven" is interesting to note. Perhaps the number indicates Jacob's perfect love for Rachel.

(Genesis 29:19) Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me."

Laban's comment seems somewhat strange. Did he mean that Jacob's offer of seven years of labor was a better offer than other men had made him for Rachel? Did he intend to make an agreement that he could easily change because it was not a firm commitment or agreement, but left room for deception? Perhaps both? His reply does not seem to indicate a binding contract from Laban's point of view, but Jacob took it as such.

(Genesis 29:20) So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

Perhaps Jacob worked side-by-side with Rachel as they pastured and watered Laban's flock, because with his strength he could move the stone from the well by himself and Laban did not need to be concerned about the safety of his daughters when they were with Jacob. If Jacob and Rachel labored together, they bonded in love and spirit in a way that made seven years seem short to Jacob.

(Genesis 29:21) Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her."

Jacob fulfilled his agreement with Laban as far as he understood the agreement. Laban, however, had left himself a legal loophole in the agreement so he could "legally" deceive Jacob, which of course was unethical behavior and a great sin with woeful consequences. By means of deception with Laban's sister (Rebecca), Jacob had once cheated his brother and father. Now, Jacob learned personally the sad consequences of deception and sin in a way that would have an effect on the rest of his life and family.

(Genesis 29:22) So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast.

A wedding feast preceded the consummation of the marriage. Perhaps similar to the wedding feast in Cana, much wine was consumed (see John 2). There are a few details about how these weddings were carried out – probably without the detailed exchanging of vows as in contemporary weddings, but with a mutual understanding of the customs of the day before the laws of Moses guided the kingdom of Israel.

(Genesis 29:23) But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her.

We do not know if Leah consented to the deception of her father. Whether she did or not, she would have been obligated to obey her father according to the custom of the day. From the Bible, we know that believers are obligated to obey God first if commanded by any human authorities to disobey God (see Acts 4:19-20; Acts 5:29).

(Genesis 29:24) And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant.

Jacob fulfilled his obligation to Leah and married her even though he did not know at the time that he was marrying her instead of Rachel. What he did would not be “undone.” Before learning about Jacob’s response to Laban’s deception, we learn that Laban gave Zilpah to Leah. Later, Leah gave her to Jacob, and she bore him Gad and Asher, who also became fathers of two tribes of Israel.

(Genesis 29:25) 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?”

We often reap what we sow (and it is only by the grace and mercy of God when we do not reap all the consequences of all the sins that we have sown). The obvious answer to Jacob’s question is Laban wanted seven more years of service from Jacob and he selfishly did not consider the effect of his deception on his daughters Leah and Rachel. Though Jacob did not love or want Leah, God noticed her suffering and comforted her through many children: “When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless” (Genesis 29:31).

(Genesis 29:26) Laban replied, “It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one.

Currently, we do not know of this custom as being widespread. It may have been a local custom that Laban did not tell Jacob about in advance, in order to take unfair advantage of him. Or, it may have been an invented “family custom” in order to cheat Jacob while appearing to be law-abiding.

(Genesis 29:27) Finish this daughter’s bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work.”

Though he did not love her as he loved Rachel, Jacob did not want to divorce Leah, for then he would lose Rachel. His only option at that moment was to publicly agree with the marriage contract or break fellowship with Laban and Rachel. He could marry Rachel immediately, only if he worked another seven years. Laban was neither a good father to his daughters nor a good father-in-law to Jacob.

(Genesis 29:28) And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.

Jacob did as Laban commanded. The consequences of marrying two sisters brought unhappiness into the family that lasted decades and generations. Later, the laws of Moses forbid marriages of this type: “Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living” (Leviticus 18:18). The unhappy story of Leah and Rachel illustrates the wisdom of this law of Moses.

(Genesis 29:29) Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant.

Because Rachel could not bear children immediately, she gave Bilhah to Jacob so she could legally adopt their children as her own. Bilhah bore Jacob two sons: Dan and Naphtali, who became fathers of two tribes of Israel.

(Genesis 29:30) 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.

Eventually, Jacob worked twenty years for Laban (he worked thirteen years after his marriages to Leah and Rachel) before fleeing with his family back to his home in the land God promised to Abraham. As Jacob told Laban: “It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times” (Genesis 31:41). In spite of all Jacob did to Isaac and Esau, and all Laban did to Jacob, Leah, and Rachel, God worked it out for good and Jacob learned to trust in and obey God. This would not be the last time Jacob would be deceived, for he was later deceived about the death of his favorite son, Joseph, but God used that deception to save Jacob’s family in Egypt.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. How would you describe Jacob’s work ethic? Contrast it with what others might have done in his situation with Laban and his family.

2. How might Laban's answer to Jacob regarding his wages have been crafty in preparation to deceive Jacob later "if he wanted to and saw the opportunity"?
3. How long did Jacob's first seven years of work feel to him and why did he feel that way?
4. How do our feelings for someone influence how we serve them? What kind of feelings do believers and unbelievers have toward God and how do those feelings influence their service of God?
5. Can you name one or more good consequences that God worked out in spite of Laban's sins against Jacob and his daughters?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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