

God Gives Laws with Good Reasons

International Bible Lesson

Genesis 29:15-30

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L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

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

When Laban used a custom to deceive Jacob, the Bible does not tell us if Laban used a real custom of his family and people or a custom he created for his own convenience. Without telling Jacob in advance about the custom, he tricked Jacob into marrying his oldest daughter Leah, when Jacob loved and thought he was marrying Laban’s youngest daughter Rachel. Laban abused his daughters and Jacob for his own selfish purposes when he forced Jacob to marry both of them in exchange for Jacob serving him fourteen years. Leah was unloved, and Laban’s trickery, even if he used a real custom, brought decades of unhappiness to both of his daughters and Jacob. When God saw Leah’s unhappiness, He intervened and brought her much happiness through her children. She also became the mother of Levi, the ancestor of Moses, and of Judah, the ancestor of Jesus the Messiah. So, God was able to bring everlasting goodness and happiness out of Laban’s sin and Leah’s sorrow. God also did not want this “custom” to prevail, and from the unhappiness the “custom” brought Jacob and his family we can understand why. Therefore, God gave this law to the Israelites through Moses: “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). We may not understand all of the reasons for all of God’s laws, but God has good reasons for giving us His laws, and God’s laws are always for our good. For this reason, God has given believers the Holy Spirit to guide them in understanding and obeying God’s laws.

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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?