

I Connect Sunday School Class Notes

September 5, 2021

Meet in Building B, Room 1

Praises and Concerns

Genesis 29

Commentary

Jacob is in Mesopotamia with Laban.

The divine care and blessing promised to Jacob at Bethel (Genesis 28:15) are illustrated in the narrative of the sojourn of the patriarch at Haran, which apparently lasted for twenty years (Genesis 31:41), after which he returned to the land of promise, blessed with a numerous family, and rich in goods. But equally marked is the severe discipline to which he was subjected in order that the darker features in his character might be purified, and that he might learn to put his reliance, not in unworthy scheming, but in simple faith in the love and blessing of the God of Abraham and Isaac.

Jacob arrives in Paddan-Aram , enters into relationship with his uncle Laban, and marries and has children. At the center of the next three chapters are the birth of Jacob's sons, the future tribes of Israel.

1 Jacob got to his feet and set out for the land of the easterners.

Commentary

The land of the people of the easters, a general term for the lands eastward of Palestine, here e.g. Mesopotamia (Paddan-aram)

2 He saw a well in the field in front of him, near which three flocks of sheep were lying down. That well was their source for water because the flocks drank from that well. A huge stone covered the well's opening. 3 When all of the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the well's opening, water the sheep, and return the stone to its place at the well's opening.

Commentary

A well often belonged to two or three families. The opening was covered with a heavy stone which could only be moved by the united efforts of the shepherds of their several flocks. By this device it was impossible for one, more than another, to obtain an undue share of the precious water.

4 Jacob said to them, "Where are you from, my brothers?" They said, "We're from Haran." 5 Then he said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?" They said, "We know him."

6 He said to them, "Is he well?" They said, "He's fine. In fact, this is his daughter Rachel now, coming with the flock." **7** He said to them, "It's now only the middle of the day. It's not time yet to gather the animals. Water the flock, and then go, put them out to pasture." **8** They said to him, "We can't until all the herds are gathered, and then we roll the stone away from the well's opening and water the flock." **9** While he was still talking to them, Rachel came with her father's flock since she was its shepherd. **10** When Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his uncle, and the flock of Laban, Jacob came up, rolled the stone from the well's opening, and watered the flock of his uncle Laban.

Commentary

Jacob must have been very strong to do this himself.

11 Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud.

Commentary

Wept at finding himself among family.

12 Jacob told Rachel that he was related to her father and that he was Rebekah's son. She then ran to tell her father. **13** When Laban heard about Jacob his sister's son, he ran to meet him. Laban embraced him, kissed him, and invited him into his house, where Jacob recounted to Laban everything that had happened.

14 Laban said to him, "Yes, you are my flesh and blood." After Jacob had stayed with Laban for a month, **15** Laban said to Jacob, "You shouldn't have to work for free just because you are my relative. Tell me what you would like to be paid." **16** Now Laban had two daughters: the older was named Leah and the younger Rachel. **17** Leah had delicate eyes, but Rachel had a beautiful figure and was good-looking. **18** Jacob loved Rachel and said, "I will work for you for seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter."

Commentary

Jacob had no rich gifts to offer for Rachel, such as Abraham sent for Rebekah (Genesis 24:53). He therefore offered his services. Kitto says that 'personal servitude to the father is still in some places in the East, including to this day Palestine, the price paid by young men who have no other means of providing the payment which a father has always been entitled to expect for his daughter, as compensation for the loss of her domestic services.'

19 Laban said, "I'd rather give her to you than to another man. Stay with me." **20** Jacob worked for Rachel for seven years, but it seemed like a few days because he loved her. **21** Jacob said to Laban, "The time has come. Give me my wife so that I may sleep with her."

22 So Laban invited all the people of that place and prepared a banquet. (a wedding feast) **23** However, in the evening, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he slept with her.

Commentary

Jacob, the deceiver, is now the deceived. The bride would be closely veiled (see Genesis 24:65), and, it being night, Leah successfully connived at her father's deception.

24 Laban had given his servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah as her servant. **25** In the morning, there she was—Leah! Jacob said to Laban, "What have you done to me? Didn't I work for you to have Rachel? Why did you betray me?" **26** Laban said, "Where we live, we don't give the younger woman before the oldest. **27** Complete the celebratory week with this woman. Then I will give you this other woman too for your work, if you work for me seven more years." **28** So that is what Jacob did. He completed the celebratory week with this woman, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as his wife. **29** Laban had given his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her servant. **30** Jacob slept with Rachel, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He worked for Laban seven more years.

Commentary

Though the blame in the matter rests with Laban rather than Jacob, who must have regarded Rachel as his true wife, we shall see, as in the case of Abraham, the unhappiness and jealousy which too often attended such double unions.

Genesis is organized by genealogical lists, and includes an important subplot of barrenness. Suddenly, the ancestral family expands into 11 sons and one daughter, representing the initial fulfillment of the ancestral promise of "descendants" and introducing all but one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

31 When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was unable to have children. **32** Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben because she said, "The LORD saw my harsh treatment, and now my husband will love me."

Commentary

Naming the newborn is often the mother's prerogative. The writer derives the name from Raah beonyi, 'looked on my affliction'

33 She became pregnant again and gave birth to a son. She said, "The LORD heard that I was unloved, so he gave me this son too," and she named him Simeon. **34** She became pregnant again and gave birth to a son. She said, "Now, this time my husband will embrace me, since I have given birth to three sons for him." So she named him Levi. **35** She became pregnant again and gave birth to a son. She said, "This time I will praise the LORD." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped bearing children.

Genesis 30

1 When Rachel realized that she could bear Jacob no children, Rachel became jealous of her sister and said to Jacob, "Give me children! If you don't, I may as well be dead."

Commentary

Rachel envied her sister] Remember that to be childless was regarded as a great reproach: cp. Luke 1:25. Fruitfulness meant an addition of strength and prosperity to a family.

2 Jacob was angry at Rachel and said, "Do you think I'm God? God alone has kept you from giving birth!" **3** She said, "Here's my servant Bilhah. Sleep with her, and she will give birth for me. Because of her, I will also have children."

Commentary

Rachel's solution is a surrogate motherhood through a slave-girl as a substitute wife. Once Leah ceases bearing children, Rachel follows suit in the competition, completing the four matriarchs of ancient Israel – Leah, Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah.

4 So Rachel gave her servant Bilhah to Jacob as his wife, and he slept with her. **5** Bilhah became pregnant and gave birth to a son for Jacob. **6** Rachel said, "God has judged in my favor, heard my voice, and given me a son." So she named him Dan. **7** Rachel's servant Bilhah became pregnant again and gave birth to a second son for Jacob. **8** Rachel said, "I've competed fiercely with my sister, and now I've won." So she named him Naphtali. **9** When Leah realized that she had stopped bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as his wife. **10** Leah's servant Zilpah gave birth to a son for Jacob, **11** and Leah said, "What good luck!" So she named him Gad. **12** Leah's servant Zilpah gave birth to a second son for Jacob, **13** and Leah said, "I'm happy now because women call me happy." So she named him Asher. **14** During the wheat harvest, Reuben found some erotic herbs in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Give me your son's erotic herbs."

Commentary

The mandrake grows wild in Mediterranean countries> Its fruit was regarded as an aphrodisiac and was perceived as a fertility drug.

15 Leah replied, "Isn't it enough that you've taken my husband? Now you want to take my son's erotic herbs too?" Rachel said, "For your son's erotic herbs, Jacob may sleep with you tonight." **16** When Jacob came back from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must sleep with me because I've paid for you with my son's erotic herbs." So he slept with her that night. **17** God responded to Leah. She became pregnant and gave birth to a fifth son for Jacob. **18** Leah said, "God gave me what I paid for, what I deserved for giving my servant to my husband." So she named him Issachar. **19** Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to a sixth son for Jacob, **20** and she said, "God has given me a wonderful gift. Now my husband will honor me since I've borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun. **21** After this, she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah. **22** Then God remembered Rachel, responded to her, and let her conceive. **23** She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my shame." **24** She named him Joseph, saying to herself, May the LORD give me another son.

25 After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me off so that I can go to my own place and my own country. **26** Give me my wives and children whom I've worked for, and I will go. You know the work I've done for you." **27** Laban said to him, "Do me this favor. I've discovered by a divine sign that the LORD has blessed me because of you, **28** so name your price and I will pay it." **29** Jacob said to him, "You know how I've worked for you, and how well your livestock have done with me. **30** While in my care, what little you had has multiplied a great deal. The LORD blessed you wherever I took your livestock. Now, when will I be able to work for my own household too?"

Commentary

Jacob by a stratagem possesses himself of a large portion of his uncle's flocks. The natural craftiness of the patriarch comes out very strongly in this transaction, but Laban undoubtedly had already obtained Jacob's services for fourteen years by mean and unworthy devices, and had given him no opportunity of enriching himself, nor had he assisted his daughters (Genesis 31:15-16).

31 Laban said, "What will I pay you?" Jacob said, "Don't pay me anything. If you will do this for me, I will take care of your flock again, and keep a portion. **32** I will go through the entire flock today, taking out all of the speckled and spotted sheep, all of the black male lambs, and all of the spotted and speckled female goats. That will be my price.

Commentary

Sheep are usually white, and goats either black or brown.

33 I will be completely honest with you: when you come to check on our agreement, every female goat with me that isn't speckled or spotted and every male lamb with me that isn't black will be considered stolen." **34** Laban said, "All right; let's do it."

Commentary

It would appear that Laban, after sorting out Jacob's speckled sheep and goats from his own pure ones, gave the former in charge of his sons to be kept at a distance from his own, thereby hoping to prevent there being any more spotted ones born in his own flock, which he would have to give to Jacob. Jacob meanwhile had to remain and look after Laban's flocks. But Jacob had other plans for increasing his possessions.

By the device described in Genesis 30:37-38 (which he only employed when the stronger ewes were breeding, Genesis 30:41), he brought it about that Laban's pure ewes produced speckled lambs, which he claimed as his own. In addition he arranged to keep these speckled kids and lambs in view of Laban's ewes with the same result (Genesis 30:40), thus gradually acquiring flocks of his own.

Both Jacob and Laban take actions that they believe will outwit the other.

35 However, on that very day Laban took out the striped and spotted male goats and all of the speckled and spotted female goats—any with some white in it—and all of the black male lambs, and gave them to his sons. **36** He put a three-day trip between himself and Jacob, while Jacob was watching the rest of Laban's flock. **37** Then Jacob took new branches from poplar, almond, and plane trees; and he peeled white stripes on them, exposing the branches' white color. **38** He set the branches that he had peeled near the watering troughs so that they were in front of the flock when they drank, because they often mated when they came to drink. **39** When the flock mated in front of the branches, they gave birth to striped, speckled, and spotted young.

40 Jacob sorted out the lambs, turning the flock to face the striped and black ones in Laban's flock but keeping his flock separate, setting them apart from Laban's flock. **41** Whenever the strongest of the flock mated, Jacob put the branches in front of them near the watering troughs so that they mated near the branches. **42** But he didn't put branches up for the weakest of the flock. So the weakest became Laban's and the strongest Jacob's. **43** The man Jacob became very, very rich: he owned large flocks, female and male servants, camels, and donkeys.

Genesis 31

1 Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, "Jacob took everything our father owned and from it he produced all of this wealth." **2** And Jacob saw that Laban no longer liked him as much as he used to. **3** Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your ancestors and to your relatives, and I will be with you."

Commentary

Tantamount to Abraham's call, this call places Jacob under divine mandate to return to the promised land. His uncle must not stand in his way.

4 So Jacob sent for Rachel and Leah and summoned them into the field where his flock was. **5** He said to them, "I am aware that your father no longer likes me as much as he used to. But my father's God has been with me. **6** You know that I've worked for your father as hard as I could. **7** But your father cheated me and changed my payment ten times. Yet God didn't let him harm me. **8** If he said, 'The speckled ones will be your payment,' the whole flock gave birth to speckled young. And if he said, 'The striped ones will be your payment,' the whole flock gave birth to striped young. **9** God took away your father's livestock and gave them to me. **10** When the flocks were mating, I looked up and saw in a dream that the male goats that mounted the flock were striped, speckled, and spotted. **11** In the dream, God's messenger said to me, 'Jacob!' and I said, 'I'm here.' **12** He said, 'Look up and watch all the striped, speckled, and spotted male goats mounting the flock. I've seen everything that Laban is doing to you. **13** I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a sacred pillar and where you made a solemn promise to me. Now, get up and leave this country and go back to the land of your relatives.'"

Commentary

Rachel and Leah point out that their father had no claim on them, since Jacob had won them by his services, and Laban had given them no share in the profits he had made through their husband's labours. They agree to leave their home.

14 Rachel and Leah answered him, "Is there any share or inheritance left for us in our father's household? **15** Doesn't he think of us as foreigners since he sold us and has even used up the payment he received for us? **16** All of the wealth God took from our father belongs to us and our children. Now, do everything God told you to do." **17** So Jacob got up, put his sons and wives on the camels, **18** and set out with all of his livestock and all of his possessions that he had acquired in Paddan-aram in order to return to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

Commentary

Laban will no doubt attempt to stop Jacob again. Jacob decides against attempting to negotiate further with his dodgy father-in-law, taking advantage of the three days' journey between them, and he simply leaves.

19 Now, while Laban was out shearing his sheep, Rachel stole the household's divine images that belonged to her father.

Commentary

These were figures of metal, wood, or clay of varying sizes, apparently in human form. They probably answered to the 'Lares and Penates,' or household gods of the Romans, which were supposed to ward off danger from the home and to bring luck. This would explain Rachel's reason for stealing them. Laban speaks of them as 'my gods' in Genesis 31:30. There is an, interesting reference to them in 1 Samuel 19:13, 1 Samuel 19:16. From Ezekiel 21:21; RV it is clear they were connected with magic and soothsaying. It has been suggested that in some cases the teraphim were mummied human heads, perhaps of ancestors, and were consulted in some way as an oracle. Whatever they were, it is not probable that their possession by the Jews interfered seriously with belief in and worship of God, though we find their use rightly denounced as superstitious. The following passages refer to the teraphim (RK: Household gods): Judges 17:5; 1 Samuel 15:23; RV 2 Kings 23:24; RV Hosea 3:4; Zechariah 10:2 RV.

Payne Smith remarks on 'the tendency of uneducated minds, even when their religion is in the main true, to add to it some superstitions, especially in the way of fashioning for themselves some lower mediator.'

20 Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not sending word to him that he was leaving. **21** So Jacob and his entire household left. He got up, crossed the river, and set out directly for the mountains of Gilead. **22** Three days later, Laban found out that Jacob had gone, **23** so Laban took his brothers with him, chased Jacob for seven days, and caught up with him in the mountains of Gilead. **24** That night, God appeared to Laban the Aramean in a dream and said, "Be careful and don't say anything hastily to Jacob one way or the other." **25** Laban reached Jacob after Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains. So Laban and his brothers also pitched theirs in the mountains of Gilead. **26** Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You have deceived me and taken off with my daughters as if they were prisoners of war. **27** Why did you leave secretly, deceiving me, and not letting me know? I would've sent you off with a celebration, with songs and tambourines and harps. **28** You didn't even let me kiss my sons and my daughters good-bye. Now you've acted like a fool,

29 and I have the power to punish you. However, your father's God told me yesterday, 'Be careful and don't say anything hastily to Jacob one way or the other.' **30** You've rushed off now because you missed your father's household so much, but why did you steal my gods?" **31** Jacob responded to Laban, "I was afraid and convinced myself that you would take your daughters away from me. **32** Whomever you find with your divine images won't live. Identify whatever I have that is yours, in front of your brothers, and take it." Jacob didn't know that Rachel had stolen them. **33** Laban went into Jacob's tent, Leah's tent, and her two servants' tent and didn't find them. So he left Leah's tent and went into Rachel's. **34** Now Rachel had taken the divine images and put them into the camel's saddlebag and sat on them. Laban felt around in the whole tent but couldn't find them. **35** Rachel said to her father, "Sir, don't be angry with me because I can't get up for you; I'm having my period." He searched but couldn't find the divine images.

Commentary

Rachel's trickery succeeds, showing she is as resourceful as her father and husband.

36 Jacob was angry and complained to Laban, "What have I done wrong and what's my crime that you've tracked me down like this? **37** You've now felt through all of my baggage, and what have you found from your household's belongings? Put it in front of our relatives, and let them decide between us. **38** For these twenty years I've been with you, your female sheep and goats haven't miscarried, and I haven't eaten your flock's rams. **39** When animals were killed, I didn't bring them to you but took the loss myself. You demanded compensation from me for any animals poached during the day or night. **40** The dry heat consumed me during the day, and the frost at night; I couldn't sleep. **41** I've now spent twenty years in your household. I worked for fourteen years for your two daughters and for six years for your flock, and you changed my pay ten times. **42** If the God of my father—the God of Abraham and the awesome one of Isaac—hadn't been with me, you'd have no doubt sent me away without anything. God saw my harsh treatment and my hard work and reprimanded you yesterday." **43** Laban responded and told Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. Everything you see is mine. But what can I do now about my daughters and about their sons?"

Commentary

Laban and Jacob conclude a covenant of friendship. 'The narrative.. is disconnected, and full of duplications, and is certainly the result of a union of several sources' (D.). The main features are the erection of a great stone as a memorial pillar by Jacob, and the collection of a heap of stones on which the covenant meal was held: cp. Genesis 26:30. The cairn of stones and pillar were erected as witnesses to Jacob's promise that he would not ill-treat Laban's daughters, and to an agreement pledging both Jacob and Laban to regard Mt. Gilead as a boundary which neither must cross with hostile motives. The narrative was of special interest in after times as the original settlement of the border between Israel and Syria (represented by Jacob and Laban).

44 Come, let's make a treaty, you and me, and let something be our witness." **45** So Jacob took a stone, set it up as a sacred pillar, **46** and said to his relatives, "Gather stones." So they took stones, made a mound, and ate there near the mound. **47** Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. **48** Laban said, "This mound is our witness today," and, therefore, he too named it Galeed. **49** He also named it Mizpah, because he said, "The LORD will observe both of us when we are separated from each other.

Commentary

Galeed (Hebrew) and Jeger-sahadutha (Aramaic) mean “heap of witness.”

Mizpah means “outlook place.”

50 If you treat my daughters badly and if you marry other women, though we aren't there, know that God observed our witness." **51** Laban said to Jacob, "Here is this mound and here is the sacred pillar that I've set up for us. **52** This mound and the sacred pillar are witnesses that I won't travel beyond this mound and that you won't travel beyond this mound and this pillar to do harm. **53** The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor will keep order between us." So Jacob gave his word in the name of the awesome one of his father Isaac. **54** Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and invited his relatives to a meal. They ate together and spent the night on the mountain. **55** Laban got up early in the morning, kissed his sons and daughters, blessed them, and left to go back to his own place.

**The Lord bless us and keep us;
the Lord make his face to shine upon us and be gracious to us;
the Lord lift up his countenance upon us and give us peace.**