

Time to Reap 9-16-07

Genesis 29:1-30

Jacob has left his home to escape the wrath of Esau and to seek a wife from among his relatives. Abraham's brother Nahor's descendents were still in the area of Haran, northeast of the Promised Land. Archeologists tell us that this was a thriving town on a trade route early in the second millennium B.C.

Jacob has just had an encounter with God at Bethel and been promised that God would be with him, bless him, and bring him back safely. (Genesis 28:15) We learned that wherever he was, the ladder of Jesus brought angelic ministry. The ladder, the house of God and the Gate of God were with him and are with us.

The Hebrew text begins with him "lifting up his feet" (went on his journey). We might say these promises put new spring in his step for that nearly 1000-mile trip to seek out his uncle Laban. The plan was for him to stay there until Esau's anger subsided and then his mother would send word for him to return. (Genesis 27:45)

Like Abraham's servant before him, he arrived at a well. This was quite natural, as most trails would lead to wells. A generation earlier Abraham's servant asked God to bring the woman that Isaac was to marry and have her offer to give him and his camels a drink from a well. She went drew from that well for hours watering his camels, and Abraham's servant knew God had led him to the woman destined to be Isaac's bride. (See Genesis 24) Now the son of that bride is standing before a similar well seeking a bride and a place of refuge.

He must have been delighted to hear that Laban was well and that his daughter was approaching. His journey was complete. Without accurate maps and road markers, a journey like that must have been quite an adventure. To find you had made it safely to your destination was a great relief. (Psalm 121:8) That's kind of how I feel when I have to journey into Los Angeles and find someone's home. From now on I'm renting a car with GPS!

Then he had this little encounter with the shepherds. Remember that shepherds are often young boys of the ages of 9 to 14. The sheep are lying down waiting to be watered but no one is watering them. Jacob asked why, and the shepherds respond that they wait until everyone has come and then they move the stone. I don't know if they were lazy and wanted as many hands as could be available to move the stone so it would be easier, or if it was just a tradition they had followed without question for years. The image reminds us of spiritual shepherds who will not do the work required to water their flock. (Ezekiel 34:2)

When Rachael (the name means ewe lamb) approached with her flock, Jacob single handedly moved the stone and watered the sheep. This is so similar to what his mother had done before for the servant of Abraham. He really is his mother's son. He takes action and is generous. He had certainly heard the stories of how his mother had drawn the water for the camels and how it was a sign to the servant of

Commented [notes1]: 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Commented [notes2]: 45 When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?"

Commented [notes3]: 8 the LORD will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Commented [notes4]: 2 "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?'

Abraham. He wanted to appear just as strong and generous to this beautiful young shepherdess.

It wasn't until after he had watered the sheep that he revealed that he was a relative. He kissed her and then wept aloud. He kissed her as a greeting in the same way he will soon kiss Laban, her father. (1Corinthians 16:20) There is nothing more meant by the kiss, though he will fall in love with her later.

Commented [notes5]: 20 All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

The weeping aloud was probably due to the realization that God had been merciful to him. He didn't deserve protection and guidance. He certainly didn't deserve the presence of God and the blessing of God, yet he knew that he was experiencing it. I get the same way when it suddenly hits me that God has been faithfully working in my life. Something will happen and trigger the realization that God is present and blessing me and I can't help it; I begin to weep tears of joy and gratitude. I think it's because I know I don't deserve it. That causes me to taste the faithfulness and mercy of God. It is such a sweet relief. (Genesis 45:2)

Commented [notes6]: 2 And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

I think we often allow our guilt and sense of justice to distance ourselves from God. I know that I can go through my religious routines but never allow God to really speak to my heart because I know there are things that should be rebuked. But then God shows up in a merciful and loving way and I suddenly realize I'm already forgiven. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, God isn't holding it against me. (Acts 3:19) I'm loved. It is too rich a relational experience to keep inside. It wells up into tears. How many times have you seen one of the elders bring the call to worship and get choked up as they relate the goodness of God in their life? It's the same thing. Or how many times have you tried to tell someone of an experience with the Lord and had to hold back tears? Jacob was relieved to know he had made the journey safely, but I think that even more than that, he knew God was fulfilling His promise to go with him and bless him.

Commented [notes7]: 19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord,

Just like her aunt Rebecca, Rachel ran to tell Laban. It must have reminded Laban of the time Rebecca ran to tell him of the visitor from Abraham's camp. It would mean news of the last 40 years of Rebecca's life, and meeting his nephew for the first time. ¹³ *As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things.*

So Jacob went to work for Laban. He managed the flocks of Laban, as we will see later, because Laban had no sons. After working for a month, Laban had decided he better pay him or he might lose him. 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."*

We are introduced to the other daughter, Leah. ¹⁶ *Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.*¹⁷ *Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful.* The older and younger theme prepares us for a repeat of the rivalry we saw in Jacob and Esau. Leah was older than Rachael, and had weak or delicate eyes. I don't know if that

means she was always squinting and that wasn't too attractive or if there was just no fire in her eyes. But Rachael took after her mother and grandmother, a knockout. Keep in mind that in that day a knockout was strong boned and plump, not the anorexic models of today. So Jacob made Laban a generous offer. Since he didn't have a bride-price to offer for Rachael, he offered 7 years of service. (Genesis 34:12) That was about twice the going rate, which meant that she was highly valued. We would say she was a real catch.

¹⁹ Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." Jacob and Laban were still in the honeymoon phase of their relationship. They hadn't discovered the other's true nature. Laban was happy to have a hard working and seemingly generous son-in-law. Jacob was glad to have the contract accepted. He would have a wife. Everything is mutually pleasing, so far.

And then comes one of the most romantic verses in Scripture. Ladies, hold on to your heart. 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. He must have truly loved her, not just lusted after her. Lust would make the time seem forever, the seven years like seventy. But love, love to be around her, love to enjoy her company, that each day went too quickly because he longed to listen to her voice a little longer, that kind of love can make the time seem short, like only a few days.

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her." Now, to us, that sounds a little crude, but we must understand that their physical union was the consummation of the marriage. It was like our signature on the marriage license. We have a hard time with this because our culture is so different. We talk about premarital sex. To them, sex was the marriage. Of course if you did so without the family's permission you were treating the woman like a harlot and would have to run for your life, or agree on the bride-price and marry her. (Exodus 22:16) Ancient cultures understood the seriousness of sexual relations. We have cheapened it so much in this day and age that it has lost its significance and with that the value of it in the home and the marriage.

²² So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. A marriage was a week-long feast. It was a great excuse to put down your work and just party. There was plenty of wine and entertainment. The father of the bride went all out to make sure the guests were celebrating and enjoying the time. In some Eastern countries this tradition has continued. Imagine calling your employer and saying, "I can't come to work this week. I've been invited to a wedding." Then imagine him being fine with it!

²³ But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her. ²⁴ And Laban gave his servant girl Zilpah to his daughter as her maidservant. By the time the first day had ended, the bridegroom would have drunk enough to be a little less discerning, and the bride would be brought out veiled. He would put his robe around her and take her into their private room. In the darkness of their private room, when the veil was removed, this kind of a trick would be possible. This was the consummation of the marriage. The friend of the bridegroom

Commented [notes8]: 12 Make the price for the bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I'll pay whatever you ask me. Only give me the girl as my wife."

Commented [notes9]: 16 "If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife."

would wait outside the door to hear the groom tell him the marriage was consummated. (John 3:29) The friend (best man) would then tell the assembled party and there would be a shout of congratulations and the party would continue.

Commented [notes10]: 29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete.

The deceiver had been deceived. Jacob had met his match. He deceived his father and now his uncle has deceived him. I wonder if Jacob had confided in Laban about what his mother and he had done to Isaac. It may have even given Laban the idea. Deception seems to run in this family. Did they learn it from Nahor or is it just the old human nature? One thing is certain, Jacob is being taught that you reap what you have sown. (Job 4:8)

Commented [notes11]: 8 As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.

It is an unchanging law of God, just as certain as the law of gravity. The Scriptures tell us that if we sow to the flesh, we will of the flesh reap corruption. (Galatians 6:8) If you live for the temporal, you will reap the temporal. If you sow selfishness, you will run into selfishness everywhere you turn. The wheeler-dealer ends up getting conned. The con is often conned by his partners. Those who live by the sword die by the sword. We see this sowing and reaping over and over. The longer you live the more stories you collect of people getting exactly what they have given to others. On the positive side, Jesus said the merciful receive mercy. (Matthew 5:7)

Commented [notes12]: 8 The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

Commented [notes13]: 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

You see, as we reap what we sow, our perceptions are shaped by our own condition. What we are in our heart of hearts we look for in others. If we sow kindness and respect, we will reap it and therefore have that impression of those around us. If our attitude toward others is gracious, other's attitudes toward us will be gracious. (Luke 6:38) Jacob sowed deception. He reaped deception. And then he wondered how Laban could be so hardhearted.

Commented [notes14]: 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

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?" I wonder if he didn't think about those words later. "Why have you deceived me?" Why had Jacob deceived his father? Why didn't he trust God? Someone once said that God allows us to meet people that act toward us like we act toward God. Ouch! Chew on that one. Jacob was meeting his mirror image, and he didn't like what he was seeing. But did he relate it to his own shortcomings? (James 1:23,24) Do we?

Commented [notes15]: 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

²⁶ Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. ²⁷ Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work." Here we are again with the older and younger sibling battle. Jacob got away with it at home, but not here in foreign land. He was tricked into doing things according to tradition. Laban wanted another seven years of Jacob's labor, a total of 4 times what would normally be the bride-price for these two women. Because of his love for Rachel, Jacob consented. He just needed to finish out that week of partying and then he could have Rachel too, but he would have to pay with another 7 years of labor. Laban made out like a bandit. He got double the expected price for Rachel, and at least double for Leah if not 3 times, and he only had to pay for one wedding party.

The trickster Jacob was tricked and because of the love he had for Rachel, he agreed. ²⁸ *And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.* ²⁹ *Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant.* ³⁰ *Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.* Just as God had worked in spite of Jacob and Rebekah's scheming, so now God was at work in spite of Laban's scheming. The royal line of Judah and the priestly line of Levi would be come from the less loved Leah. (Genesis 35:23) Jesus, our Savior, came through the neglected bride, Leah.

Commented [notes16]: 23 The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.

The same inequity of love Jacob felt growing up he is now repeating in his own home among his wives. The same rivalry he experienced with his brother, he is beginning to foster in his own home among his wives, and yet the ladder of Jesus is still bringing that angelic ministry into his life. The house of God and the Gate of God are still with him, to mature him, and to strengthen his faith. We can know that in our times of difficulty, God's presence is still with us to accomplish those very same things in our lives. When we end up reaping what we have sown, God is still there. The angels are still ascending and descending upon us.

Our story this week has gone from the heights of knowing God's blessing and presence to these depths of reaping what we have sown. But we should not consider the reaping as something less than a blessing. Reaping what we have sown is one of God's way of turning us from our wicked ways. In our Bible study last week in Acts 3, Peter declared that was why Jesus came, that was the blessing to the world through the patriarchs, turning us from our wicked ways. (Acts 3:26) Blessing isn't just things going our way, increased wealth, safety, health or even the assurance of heaven! Blessing can be calamity. Blessing can be that trembling that Isaac experienced. Anything that gets us to see our true condition, or awakens us to an area in life where we were blindly acting against God's will is a blessing.

Commented [notes17]: 26 When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

The tears of joy and relief at realizing God's mercy in spite of what we have done are essential in deepening our relationship with God. So are these sudden realizations: "*Why have you deceived me?* Oh yeah, that is what I did to my father." Thank God for the law of sowing and reaping. It wakes us up. It puts the fear of God into our life. It makes us think before we act. This law is a blessing from God to turn us from our wicked ways, but it is only realized as a blessing when we do turn. (Isaiah 19:22) Unless we turn we are just suffering from the effect of what we caused. If we turn, we find a deeper relationship with God and freedom from the demands of our old nature, from these destructive cycles. We will all deal with the law of sowing and reaping, but we won't all let it be a blessing in our life. Will you?

Commented [notes18]: 22 The LORD will strike Egypt with a plague; he will strike them and heal them. They will turn to the LORD, and he will respond to their pleas and heal them.