

JACOB'S STORY: FROM DECEIVER TO PATRIARCH

Genesis 25-46



The purpose of this study is to show God's love, patience, and promise keeping. It demonstrates how God can make a mercurial character such as Jacob into a patriarch, a man who played a leading role in the story of God's chosen people. God not only changed his name but gave him the opportunity to change his ways. It is a story that gives each one of us hope. Not one of us, whatever we have done wrong in our past, is beyond the grace and forgiveness of God.

WEEK THREE - JACOB, THE DECEIVED

Read Genesis chapters 29 to 31

We read last week how Jacob made a vow to God, promising him a tenth of all that God gave him, if God would meet his needs so that he could go back to his father's house in peace, then he would be Jacob's God too. Now, he has to put this into practice.

Chapter 29:

It would seem as if the family was making a habit of meeting future wives at a well! Remember how Abraham, Isaac's father, sent his servant to find a wife for his son saying that he would know immediately he saw her (*Genesis 24*). When the servant set eyes on Rebekah, he knew that this was to be Isaac's bride. Here, Jacob meets Rachel, also at a well, and from this point, we step into yet more deceit. (Take note that Rebekah, Jacob's mother, was Laban's sister.)

When Jacob was on his journey to his uncle, he saw three flocks of sheep all waiting to be watered. According to the shepherds, it was the local custom to wait until all the sheep who needed watering arrived at the well before the large stone that covered the mouth of the well was removed. However, when Rachel, who looked after her father's sheep arrived, Jacob took it on himself to remove the stone and water his uncle's flock for her. He then explained the family relationship.

- What does this incident tell us about Jacob's character?

- Can you think of any 'local customs', either in the family, or in the church, that you think are unnecessary and would be prepared to ignore?

We now have this new character, Laban, becoming part of the narrative. He welcomes his nephew Jacob with open arms and after around a month, raises the question of payment for the work Jacob was doing. Clearly, for Jacob, it had been love at the first sight of Rachel and so asks that she becomes his wife.

- What was Jacob's offer to Laban?
- We have a saying: "what goes around, comes around". How was Jacob, the deceiver, now the deceived?
- Do you think it crossed Jacob's mind that there were strong similarities to what his mother, and himself, had done to Isaac and Esau?
- How does the wily Laban turn things again, to his own advantage?
- Are we always sincere and absolutely honest in what we say and do?
- Despite bearing children (when Rachel seemed unable to do), how does Leah express her sorrow regarding the situation.

Chapter 30:

- Of whom does the first half of this chapter remind you?
- Why do you think Jacob wanted to return home after the birth of Joseph?

Read verses 27-43

This seems a very strange passage, but one commentary has the following explanation:

Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary

37. Jacob took rods, etc.—There are many varieties of the hazel, some of which are more erect than the common hazel, and it was probably one of these varieties Jacob employed. The styles are of a bright red colour, when peeled; and along with them he took wands of other shrubs, which, when stripped of the bark, had white streaks. These, kept constantly before the eyes of the female at the time of gestation, his observation had taught him would have an influence, through the imagination, on the future offspring.

According to [Genesis 31:9-11](#), Jacob used no deceit in this because it was God's commandment.

Whichever way we might view it, this action made Jacob a very rich man according to verse 43 of chapter 30: "As a result, Jacob's flocks increased rapidly, and he became very wealthy, with many servants, camels, and donkeys."

Chapter 31:1-13

Needless to say, Laban's sons soon started to grumble saying that Jacob had robbed their father: *"All his wealth has been gained at our father's expense". And Jacob began to notice a considerable cooling in Laban's attitude toward him. Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your father and grandfather and to your relatives there, and I will be with you."* (verses 1-3)

- Were they justified in their complaints?
- How often in families, especially after someone has died without leaving a will, do we find conflicting views as to how money and goods should be shared out?
- When we read [verse 3](#), do we believe that this was God's way of pushing Jacob to return to his family?
- What do think about Jacob's justification to his wives, for leaving Laban? What is so ironic about this?
- Do we believe that God works in our lives today to bring about what is best for us?

This is a complex story and aspects of it are hard to understand but I think there is a lot we can learn from our study.



Prayer:

Father God help us to trust in you and in your word. Help us to be honourable in all our actions so that we might have a good testimony before others.