

• *Jacob's painful training*

Jacob is now a disciple, a learner. God is his teacher. He is coming under the discipline of many trials ^{☞1} and then will be made to face the painful truth about himself as never before ^{☞2}. His painful training starts when there comes a very intense need in his life. He wants to marry Rachel. Then God trains Jacob by letting him meet his own sins in someone else.

☞1 29:1–30:43
☞2 31:1–55

• *Laban's trickery – Zilpah not Rachel*

The story jumps over seven years. Jacob finishes his contract for seven years' work and claims the fulfilment of his agreement ^{☞1}. Laban agrees and arranges for a wedding festival ^{☞2}. One gets the impression that there is not a good relationship between Laban and Jacob. The request for his wife has to come from Jacob. He has to 'remind' Laban of the agreement. The words of Genesis 29:21, 'Give me my wife,' are short and sharp. Normally celebrations like this would take a whole week (if Judges 14:12–18 is a glimpse of normal practice). However the bride was to be given to the man on the night of the first day of celebrations. It was also the custom that the bride was to be veiled before her prospective husband until the night of the wedding (note what happens when Isaac and Rebekah first meet in 24:65). The wedding night was spent in a dark tent. Jacob was vulnerable to all of Laban's trickery. Late in the night Laban substituted Leah instead of Rachel ^{☞3}. Her wedding-gift from her father is her maid Zilpah ^{☞4}. In the darkness of the wedding-tent Jacob was deceived by Leah also. When he woke up in the morning it was to discover that he had spent the night with Leah!

☞1 29:21
☞2 29:22

☞3 29:23
☞4 29:24

God trains Jacob by letting him meet his own sins in someone else.

• *Eyes dimmed by the lateness of the night*

Jacob went through the kind of anguish that he had put Esau through. Over seven years previously Esau had wept in distress at being tricked by Jacob and had 'cried out with an exceedingly great and bitter cry' ^{☞1}. Jacob is now going through the same experience. Seven years before Jacob had deceived Isaac when 'his eyes were too dim to see' ^{☞2}. Now Laban has deceived Jacob when Jacob's eyes are dimmed by the lateness of the night and the veil which covers Leah's face. In a different way 'his eyes were too dim to see' and he is being treated in the way in which he had treated his brother. Seven years before Rebekah had got Jacob to cooperate in deceiving Isaac; now Laban has got Leah to cooperate in deceiving Jacob. Seven years before once the oath was taken the situation could not be changed. Now, Jacob has fulfilled the marriage procedures with Leah. His situation cannot be changed and Leah is his for life! **God trains Jacob by letting him meet his own sins in someone else.**

☞1 27:34
☞2 27:1

• *Irreversible!*

• *No source of family help for Jacob - seven more years of service*

After a protest from Jacob ^{☞1} and a feeble excuse from Laban ^{☞2}, Jacob has to agree to another seven-year agreement to work for Laban. There was not much he could do. He was a long way from home. Normally in a situation of such injustice one would call upon one's family to help, but Jacob was in no position to ask the help of Isaac and Esau! He has to 'celebrate' his marriage to Leah for seven days ^{☞3} and then he is given Rachel as his second wife seven days after marrying his first wife ^{☞4}. She too is given a wedding-gift, her maid Bilhah ^{☞5}.

☞1 29:25
☞2 29:26
☞3 29:27
☞4 29:28
☞5 29:29

Training can come when we are forced to handle strife and conflict

Training can come when we are forced to handle strife and conflict. Jacob is happy to have his beloved Rachel ^{☞1} but he has also collected a whole host of troubles for himself. He is now committed to another seven years working for Laban. He has two wives, but one of them he does not love. Inevitably there will be rivalry and jealousy between the two sisters. Jacob had behaved badly in a situation of rivalry with his brother; now he has to cope with rivalry between two sisters and he is married to both of them! He had stolen the position of Isaac's beloved Esau; now Laban has arranged things so that Leah stole the position of his beloved Rachel.

☞1 29:30

• *Three ways in which God overruled*

- *Self awareness*

- *Multiplication*

- *Pain softened*

• *A deceitful character requires radical surgery*

• *God's choice not based on human goodness*

• *God' changes us*

However there are three ways in which God overrules in all of this. (1) It gives Jacob a forced understanding of what his own character is like. He meets his own sins in the sins of others. (2) Despite the great pain of what is happening to him it actually advances the promises of God. God had promised to multiply the family of Abraham and especially do so through Isaac and through Jacob. Of the twelve tribes that came out of Jacob's line, eight of them descended from Leah and her maid Zilpah. (3) Meanwhile God softened the pain for Jacob by giving him his beloved Rachel, and he softened the great pain of the unloved Leah by giving her four children ¹. It would at least give her a position of honour in the family. God knows how to adjust pains and joys, so that the joys enable us to keep our peacefulness in the midst of troubles.

When we have a deceitful character as Jacob did – and we are all Jacobs in one way or another – God has to take the surgical knife to us. Troubles and strife of one kind or another will drive us to God. The very worst aspects of our character are likely to be forced to the surface so that we see ourselves as we really are.

God still uses us. Jacob was chosen, we remember, before he was born. His future was planned by God. His being chosen by God had nothing to do with anything good in him. He was not a better person than Esau.

We are saved without works and God starts using us without regard for our goodness or our wickedness. And yet God does want our character to change. And the greatest blessings are likely to come when we have become 'a vessel for honour, sanctified, useful to the Master' ¹.

¹ 29:31–35

¹ 2
Timothy 2:21



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