

For Better or For Worse - Lessons From Old Testament Couples
Jacob and Rachel: Labor of Love

Lesson #4 for July 28, 2007

Scriptures: Genesis 29:1-30:16.

1. Review the story of Jacob and Rachel. Was Rachel particularly good-looking or were there other reasons why Jacob loved her? What kind of marriage is possible with four wives who are rivals? Did Jacob really love Rachel or is this a case in which he just loved Rachel more than the others?
2. Try to imagine yourself in Jacob's place. What should Jacob have done when he woke up the morning after his marriage and discovered that he was sleeping with the wrong woman? To what extent did Leah participate in this deception? Did either Rachel or Leah have any other suitors? Should Jacob have stuck with Leah and not married Rachel? Should Jacob have forced Laban to take Leah back and give him Rachel instead?
3. What do you think Jacob said to Leah on their first day of marriage? What did he say to Laban? What did he say to Rachel? Was Rachel involved in that deception in any way?
4. Should Jacob have said, "Okay, this is the woman I am married to. I will stick with her." Should he then have tried to learn to love her? Do you think Leah was jealous of Rachel and in love with Jacob all along?
5. Did Jacob have any options? What do you think would have happened if Jacob had said, "This is ridiculous; I'm going home"?
6. How many people in the community knew about the deception? How soon did they find out? Do you think the people in Haran would have supported Laban in this deception or would they have supported Jacob?
7. After having married two sisters, shouldn't Jacob have refused two secondary wives? Rachel—if we can believe what we read—tried to force Jacob to have a child with Bilhah so that she, Rachel, could have a descendant. Would these two secondary wives be considered surrogate mothers in our day?
8. Why do you think the Scriptures mention several times that Jacob loved Rachel? In effect, Jacob worked 14 years for the hand of Rachel. The other three wives were "forced" upon him. Is there any humanly possible way that he could have learned to love them equal to the degree that he loved Rachel?
9. Read again the covenant promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. (Genesis 12:1-3; 26:4; 28:1-4,13-15) One of the main aspects of those covenant relationships was that they were supposed to have many children. Although Abraham had given birth to eight children, only one was considered to be the son of promise. Isaac, in turn, gave birth to two; but, again, only one was the one to carry on the birthright. Did Jacob think that it was time to do something differently—to start increasing the number of people in the family line?
10. In our day, every one of these marriages would have been forbidden by law! Is it possible that the close genetic relationship between husband and wife was at least partly responsible for their difficulty in having children? Abraham married his half-sister! Isaac married a cousin! Jacob was instructed by his father to seek a wife from among his cousins. What impact do you think that was going to have on the family line?
11. Would you marry a sibling or even a cousin if he/she was the only one in your area that you believed truly shared your Christian beliefs? What does it mean to be "unequally yoked together"? (2 Corinthians 6:14) How much agreement does there need to be between husband and wife before they can be called "equally yoked"?

12. What do we know about the custom of dowry? In the end, did the requirement for a dowry to be paid by Jacob improve his marriage situation? Why didn't Jacob send a request for some help from his parents to pay his dowry?
13. Read Genesis 6:1-5 in different translations. What was being described? Who were the "sons of God"? Who were the "daughters of men"? Is it possible, as some translations suggest, that heavenly beings cohabited with earthly females? That is a major theme in many pagan religions, especially polytheistic religions.
14. Why do you think Leah managed to have children so easily yet it was so difficult for Rachel? Was God manipulating things? Or was Satan manipulating things? Did Jacob's relationship with his wives have anything to do with their capacity to give birth?
15. When Jacob first appeared at the home of Laban, Laban seemed to be very generous in his attitudes toward Jacob. What changed over the years? Why? Read Genesis 29:15-30. How many people can be honest, true, and decent in their treatment of others when greed becomes involved?
16. Was there any validity in the excuse that Laban gave to Jacob for giving him Leah instead of Rachel? (Genesis 29:26)
17. One of the major points made in this lesson is that we need to wait patiently for God to work out the details of our lives. How does that fit with 2 Peter 3:12?
18. What is the meaning of the phrase "waiting patiently upon the Lord"? (Hebrews 6:12; 12:1; James 5:11; Revelation 14:12)
19. Finally, Jacob decided that he had to leave his father-in-law. What were the most important factors in that decision? Given the brief amount of information that we have available, how would you characterize Jacob and his work versus Laban and his work? How did Rachel and Leah feel about the relationship between their father and their husband?
20. Is marital love always supposed to take priority over filial love?
21. What efforts do you think Jacob made to try to be fair to all four wives? Or did he? Was he always obviously favoring Rachel?
22. One of the modern business tools that has been used very successfully is the spreadsheet. It allows a business to answer questions like, what would happen if this or that were changed? When we get to heaven, will God allow us to ask such questions? Would you like to be able to change some of the details—on the "spreadsheet"—of the story of Jacob and Rachel and see how it would work out? Jacob—later known as Israel—became the father of the chosen race. Did his children inherit the jealousies that existed between their mothers?
23. Could you be a Seventh-day Adventist and marry another Seventh-day Adventist and still not be equally yoked together? How much is included in the "equally yoked together" expression? The average length of marriage in our day seems to be getting shorter and shorter. More and more frequently, people are divorcing. Should we automatically assume that those who have been married for long times are happily married?

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