

XLVII. Genesis in Biblical Perspective
The Gospel of Christ from Genesis
“The Sovereignty of God and Providential Multi-Tasking”
Genesis 29:1–30
Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

We will cover Genesis 29:1–30 in this study on the life of Jacob. This is the Word of God. It’s the truth. Genesis 29:1–3 says *[1] Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east. [2] As he looked, he saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep lying beside it, for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large, [3] and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place over the mouth of the well.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, and the Word of our God abides forever.

Prayer:

Father, would You allow in these moments the mediations of our heart in Your Word and the words of my mouth from Your Word to be acceptable in Your sight O Jesus, our Redeemer, Amen.

School days, school days, Dear old golden rule days. Readin' and 'ritin' and 'rithmetic, Taught to the tune of the hickory stick. Some of you know that song (*School Days, School Days*). There is a marvelously effective school of grace in which the good news is, enrollment is free, but graduation costs and in this school every saved sinner will sooner or later attend. What school is that? It is the school of hard knocks. The Lord does actually use a hickory stick in it or at least the proverbial hickory stick. For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines (Proverbs 3:12, Hebrews 12:6) that we might learn of Him.

In our study Jacob has now come to that school. Enrollment is free, graduation costs, but there are some phenomenal lessons here. In this school we see a sovereign God and His providential multi-tasking. We see a sovereign God and all the things that He is accomplishing. The journey of Jacob now becomes a marvelous thing for us to look at as believers to understand how God brings a believer, change a believer, bring a sinner to Christ to believe, change a sinner, conform a sinner and then work in that sinner so that sinner is now fit to be used of the Lord. This chapter is of inestimable value in focusing upon our sovereign God multi-tasking His providence to save a sinner, change a sinner, and to prepare that sinner to serve Him.

I believe the events in this chapter inspired David to write Psalm 20:1 which says *[1] May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble! May the name of the God of Jacob protect you!* Why would he say the God of Jacob? This school has some marvelous lessons of His providence that we are to learn but before get to those lessons let’s take a look at how he gets to this school. I have divided up the text into two sections. The first section is the arrivals – the arrival of Jacob in Haran, the arrival of Rachel at the well, and the arrival of Laban at the well to meet Jacob.

The translators in this text did a little interpretation of their own when they said in Genesis 29:1, Jacob went on his journey. Literally the original text says “Jacob lifted up his feet.” It was an idea of a journey but it was more than that. My dad used to say that

when you get excited you can pick them up and lay them down. Let's remember some of our study on Jacob. We looked at his birth and God in His sovereignty said at his birth that the older would serve the younger and My love has been placed upon Jacob. God's electing love had been placed upon Jacob while His judgment would remain upon Esau. This electing love that had been placed upon Jacob promised the blessings of the covenant but Jacob wasn't satisfied with God making a promise and God fulfilling it, Jacob decided he wanted to get it all his way.

So in Genesis 25 he stills the birthright from Esau. In Genesis 27 he in conspiracy with his mother fools his father and not only gains the birthright but steals the family blessing. Then Isaac having been broken from his own willful disobedience to the Lord, now brings the covenant blessing placing it on Jacob yet Esau who has been pilfered out of his birthright and family blessing and now watches the covenant blessing being placed upon Jacob, now Esau says he is going to kill Jacob. Though now Rebekah takes care of her son by arranging with Isaac not only the covenant blessing but now to send him away back to her country where she had come from, where Abraham had originally come from to secure for him a wife and especially not a Canaanite wife. But most of all to get away from Esau who has said he will kill him. Jacob begins a journey to flee Esau and to find a wife.

He gets about fifty miles down the road and a couple of days travel. He takes a stone to lay his head down in Genesis 28 and then God comes with a vision. God Himself gives to Jacob a promise and does it by bringing a ladder from heaven down to the earth that is loaded with angels. He lets him know that this is the ladder of God and where it lands is the house of God. That's why Jacob calls the place Beth-el which means the house of God. As Jacob acknowledges the ladder of God, it's the gate of heaven. This isn't Jacob's ladder, it is God's ladder. In fact, the ladder is God. Jesus is the ladder and He tells us that in the Gospel of John. It's not something where you climb up to heaven but it's something where heaven comes down to you to save you by grace and take you there. So wherever Jesus lands becomes the house of God and those who are called to Him come in through Him as the Gate of heaven.

When Jacob wakes up he is definitely changed. He anoints the stone and makes it a sacred place. Then he makes a covenant vow to God saying "If You will be my God, stay with me, and if You will bring me back to this land then I will worship You." We can see that Jacob is impressed but he's not yet converted. If he was then the vow would have been distinctly different. It wouldn't have been "If You...then I" it would have been "Since You...then I." Since You are the Lord God who keeps His covenant, since You have made these promises to me, then I will worship You and serve You but he is still manipulative, selfish, deal-making Jacob even yet, but God is working.

One thing is that he is now no longer leaving home, begrudging Esau to find a wife but now he starts back on his journey lifting up his feet. He is picking them up and laying them down. I can hear him singing now "We're off to the land of Ur, the wonderful land of Mesopotamia..." That doesn't quite fit but that is what he is doing now. He is off and skipping away into that place. Jacob, I'm sure, would have been very much aware because of the time he spent with his mother of how he had the mother he did, hearing the story of how Isaac got his wife.

Abraham, Isaac's father, had sent a servant whose name was Eleazer who swore he would follow through this Abraham's request of a wife for Isaac. Before Eleazer got

to the land he prayed “O God, I trust You. You show me the one it’s to be my master’s son’s wife.” God in His providence brought them to a well and when he got there, there came Rebekah. Then came ole’ Laban making the deal. Laban got the money and Eleazer went, not without stopping, to praise the Lord.

Now Jacob shows up at the well, not sure if it was the same well Eleazer was at but it couldn’t have been too far away from that one. When Jacob arrives at the well he is prayerless. He is not praying but God’s providence is still working. Three shepherds show up with three flocks and yet they’re not watering their flocks because the place where they water them as this large stone that just one man can’t move. You have to get a whole bunch of shepherds to move it away and then they have to move it back so they’re kind of just being lazy around there until they can get that stone moved. Then the sheep and the shepherds can be cared for but not until you can get enough people to help move the stone for then you can get to the well. So now Jacob has arrived at this place. And now Rachel is about to arrive also.

Genesis 29:4–12 says *[4] Jacob said to them (the shepherds), “My brothers, where do you come from?” They said, “We are from Haran.” [5] He said to them, “Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?” They said, “We know him.” [6] He said to them, “Is it well with him?” They said, “It is well; and see, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep!” [7] He said, “Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered together. Water the sheep and go, pasture them.” [8] But they said, “We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep.”*

[9] While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. (There is a lot of word stuff in this passage. The name Rachel means little lamb. The little lamb comes with all her father’s sheep. She is a lamb caregiver, a shepherdess.) [10] Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. [11] Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. [12] And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

I think this is the first real love story in the Bible. I know others in the Bible loved each other and I’m not questioning that but this is a love story. This is one of those love-at-first-sight stories. Jacob saw Rachel and it just came over him. When he saw her he didn’t even see the stone. He thought “I’m the man” and forget the shepherds because he went and rolled away the stone by himself. Not only is the feat of strength accomplished, but an act of servanthood as he then takes the flock and waters the flock that has come up. So here is Jacob the man moving the stone and then playing the servant as he takes care of the sheep. As he sees Rachel he realizes this is the one for him. Here comes the birth of the phrase ‘the kissing cousin’ as he now sees his cousin and kisses her. As he does this, this loud lamentation came forward. Jacob is pretty much undone and greatly impassioned as you see from the feat of strength.

Now here comes the arrival of Laban found in Genesis 29:13–14 which says *[13] As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all*

these things, [14] and Laban said to him, “Surely you are my bone and my flesh!” And he stayed with him a month.

So Jacob heard the news. Remember Rebekah? She is gone and she did get married and now her son is back here. I believe when it said ‘Laban heard the news’ that is was referring to Jacob moving that stone by himself. I have a name for this man and I call him ‘larcenist Laban.’ I can just see what he is thinking right now – here is Jacob, son of Rebekah who I sold to marry Isaac – and the dollar signs are just turning in his mind. There is another deal coming. Jacob comes and tells Laban everything. Then Laban opens up his home to Jacob and Jacob enjoys his hospitality for one month. Now the arrivals end and the agreements begin.

Genesis 29:15–20 says [15] *Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? (That’s a nice way to say your month is up, can’t freeload on me and now you go to work) Tell me, what shall your wages be?” [16] Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. [17] Leah's eyes were weak (back then most of what you would see because of modesty is a woman’s eyes and she would be known for her eyes), but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. [18] Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” [19] Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.” [20] So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.*

This is a love story. Jacob is thinking, ‘Seven years is a piece of cake if I can get Rachel.’ The agreement is made and the month of hospitality is done. The deal is struck and Jacob becomes an indentured servant for seven years in order to gain the necessary dowry for this woman to become his. Then the agreement is completed beginning in verse 21.

Genesis 29:21–25 says [21] *Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” [22] So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. [23] But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. [24] (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) [25] And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! Have you ever heard of the phrase ‘bait and switch’? That is what Laban the larcenist has just done. The bait was the deal and then the dress, it taking place at night, the veil, and the feast would have included much food and drink, hence is when the switch takes place. In the midst of all of it Jacob has now consummated a marriage with Leah instead of Rachel.*

Genesis 29:25–30 says [25] *And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” [26] Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. [27] Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” [28] Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. [29] (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) [30] So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.*

Here is the agreement completed again. Now seven years becomes fourteen years. Larcenist Laban now secures Jacob indentured servitude for another seven years as he turns the table on him. He now obtains his devotion and work in order to get Rachel.

What did the school of hard knocks in God's multi-faceted providence teach us? I want to divide this up into three areas and then we'll conclude with some takeaways. First there are three unmistakable providential lessons from the school of hard knocks. The first lesson is that sin has consequences. Jacob has come to Haran to Laban to gain a wife. Earlier Eleazer had come to the same place to gain a wife for his father, Isaac, who would become his mother, Rebekah. When he got there, he prayed, God provided, and he had the money that had been given to him by Abraham and because he had the money he was able to strike the deal with Laban and take Rebekah home. Now comes, not a servant, but the heir of one of the richest men in Palestine, Jacob, but because he has gained his inheritance in an ill-gotten gain with methods of the flesh, he had to leave without it – not a servant but a son. Yet when he gets there he has nothing to give. Because of Jacob's sin of how he attempted to gain his position with his father, he comes with nothing and therefore he ends up with no financial accessibility. His methods and manipulation have robbed him of that so now he has to engage as a slave and a servant for fourteen years. Sin has consequences. Even though the man by title has the birth right, the family the blessing and the covenant blessing he has nothing available and it cost him fourteen years of his life.

The second lesson that God wants us to remember is that a man reaps what he sows. I want to be careful to say this. Am I forgiven of the eternal consequences of my sin and does God periodically restrain the effects of actual sin even as a believer in my life? Yes, but I must remember that if I go out and gorge myself with drink and become drunk, I'm in an accident and someone is killed and I lose an arm, am I forgiven as a believer for such a momentary lapse? Yes, but I still don't have an arm and somebody doesn't have a loved one. Sin has consequences and a man reaps what he sows.

What is Jacob? He is a deceiver. The deceiver has been deceived. The deceiver was deceived. You can't miss the Divine irony that is being stated throughout this chapter. Here is the deceiver who by deception sought has the younger to gain what was supposedly to go to the older. Now he who wanted the younger daughter is given the older daughter. The younger who wanted to usurp the older is now usurped by the older daughter in place of the younger daughter. The man who entered in to a mother and son conspiracy is now the victim of a father and daughter conspiracy. The man who would willingly take advantage of his father to fool him, is now fooled by his father in law. The man who would take advantage of the blindness of his father is now deceived in the darkness of night. The man who would take advantage of the unreigned passions of his brother Esau, in appetite and the unreigned passions of his father for his son Esau, in order to deceive his brother and father, has now been taken advantage of in his passion for Rachel and he becomes deceived. The man sows what he reaps. Sin has consequences.

I want to plead with every man and woman reading this. Never allow the Gospel of grace that promises the power of transformation and the full reception just as I am, to embolden you to sin. Shall we sin because of grace? One reason not to, is because it has consequences in our family, our marriage, our ministry and our children.

The third unmistakable providential lesson is the school of hard knocks has a long semester. You don't get out until you learn your lessons. Jacob will be in the school of hard knocks for over twenty years until he learns his lesson. God doesn't work on short semesters. He works until you learn the lessons, even if it requires the discipline of the hickory stick. There is no doubt that Jacob is learning. I don't think he is converted yet but he's learning. I know there may be some speculation on my part but I believe he is learning.

I think a little bit before Jacob might have killed Laban but while he confronts him he is somewhat restrained. Let's go to work again. By the way, notice that he has no ill words for the co-conspirator Leah. Now he doesn't love her like he loves Rachel. That's very clear and that's hurtful but he has no ill words for her who occupied the place with her father that he had occupied with his mother. There seems to be a gentle work of grace that is starting to break him that will bring him.

Also, never lose sight of the goodness of God either but Jacob isn't converted here. What does he do? He resorts to polygamy. He does the same thing his brother Esau does. His brother married three wives and he marries two wives. Isn't wonderful that the Bible is so honest? Even though Jacob is loved and revered in Israel Leviticus 18:18 says that a man shall not in his lifetime marry the sister of his wife and shall not marry two sisters. Even though the command has not yet been given the Word of God honestly displays Jacob as violating that principle and violating the principle of monogamous marriage. Here he is evidencing that he is not yet converted, yet we can see that God is doing something.

So sin has its consequences as we pointed out in lesson one where what a man sows he reaps. Lesson two is the school of hard knocks is a long semester until we learn our lessons and then and then only does the school bell ring. That is because God loves you and God wants us to learn. Thirdly, what are the unmistakable providential lessons? I want to give you three here.

One, the presence of God is continued with Jacob even in his prayerlessness, praiselessness and self-centeredness. God stays with him. God continues to work upon him.

Secondly, God stays with His promises. What did He tell Jacob? He said "I'll make you a nation." Out of all of Jacob's manipulation, deception and being deceived what is going to happen? There will be two wives and two handmaidens. What will happen out of that? God will see to it that there will come twelve sons and a daughter that will come from Jacob. A nation will be given. Unmistakable providential blessings even though Jacob, like we, are as undeserving, God says "I will be with you" and He stays with him. He says "I'll make you a great nation" and He blesses him.

Then notice the unmistakable providential blessing of extended kindness to those around the one whom God's love has been placed upon, most notably Leah. Doesn't your heart go out to Leah? Mine does and we'll take a closer look at in the next study. She'll have four sons and one of them will be the line of the kings which will be Judah. The other will be the line of the priests which will be Aaron. Moses by the power of the Holy Spirit is writing this book of Genesis and Leah is Moses' great, great, great, great, great grandmother. Who will say "May the God of Jacob protect you" from Psalm 20? It is David and David is a descendant of Leah. God will even care for Leah.

Thirdly and finally there is an unmistakable providential purpose. God saves His people. O how I rejoice in that! I love the hymn *How Vast the Benefits Divine* by Augustus Montague Toplady that says “This is Thy will, that in thy love we should ever abide; That earth and hell shall not prevail to turn Thy Word aside. Not one of all the chosen race but shall to heaven attain, Partake on earth the purpose grace and then with Jesus reign” even Jacob.

You may be reading this and wondering why am I reading this. Is it God calling you to the well of eternal life? The God who saved Jacob will save you. If you’ll just say “I know I’m a sinner, I know I need a Savior and I turn to the God of Jacob to protect me. If He redeems Jacob I know He can and will redeem me and He will lose not one of those who are His.” It is an unmistakable declaration that the salvation of the Lord is sure. You reading this today is not by accident. You have come and God is ready to work in your life like Jacob so that you will willingly come to a Savior.

Another unmistakable providential purpose is there for those of you who know Jesus Christ as your Savior. Does this not encourage you that the God of Jacob will protect you? The One that protected this deceiver will protect you. God’s promises are sure in Jesus Christ. All of His promises are yes and amen. Your God is unstoppable. Heaven and hell cannot stop Him. Your God is not just a Promise Maker for promise makers are a dime a dozen but your God is a Promise Keeper and that’s a rare jewel. Put your trust in Him.

Finally what a Savior! From this text God can and does save and change sinners. God saves with redeeming grace – come just as I am – and God always changes with transforming grace, just like He will Jacob and He will bring Jacob and change him. Our God can and does save sinners. God saves deceivers, the arrogant, the prideful, the manipulators and the selfish. Do you know why I know He saves these people? It is because He saved me. Then He can take deceivers and make them lovers of truth. He can take the prideful and make them long for the heart of humility.

Our God has a well that you may drink from. It is covered by that heavy stone of the Law, sin and death. While there is no one who could roll away that stone there is One that Jacob pointed to that blew the stone away. It is Jesus Christ. Now you may come and drink of Him, the well of everlasting Life. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the privilege to study this text in which You speak profoundly for Your glory and our encouragement. If you made the prayer, “I’m a sinner. I can’t save myself. I surrender and trust in Jesus Christ for the gift of eternal life” then we’d love for you to contact us at Briarwood to pray with you at (205)776-5200 and help you get started on your journey with Christ. Those who know Christ join me now from this text with confidence in our Sovereign God and how He is multi-tasking the providence of our life in so many threads interwoven for His glory. O God our God You are irresistible, unstoppable and therefore we are saved. O God, Your power not only receives us but changes us. The God of Jacob is our God and we are as ill-deserving and more so than Jacob but we have a Savior. Glorious is His Name and we exalt Him for Jesus’ sake, Amen.