

Jacob and Rachel: Labor (Work) of Love



SABBATH—JULY 21

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 29–31:16.

MEMORY TEXT: “Husbands, love your wives. Love them just as Christ loved the church. He [Christ] gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25, NIV).

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT CULTURE, MARRIAGES WERE ARRANGED BY THE PARENTS. Jacob and Rachel proved to be a very good example of a love marriage. Jacob's love for Rachel has become famous, maybe for good reason.

But the marriage of Jacob and Rachel does not end “happily ever after.” When Jacob left Padanaram¹ 20 years later, he had gained great wealth through raising cattle, sheep, and goats. But Jacob and Rachel went through many difficult times together. Jacob and Rachel's marriage was not always perfect, but they never stopped loving each other. Their strong love helped them go through hardships. Rachel's early death did not weaken Jacob's love for her children but rather made it stronger.

THIS WEEK'S STUDY UP CLOSE: We can learn many lessons from Jacob and Rachel. But the most important lesson is, our actions and mistakes have results that go far beyond ourselves.

1. Padanaram—“The place where Isaac's wife, Rebekah, came from, where Laban lived, and where Jacob spent 20 years serving Laban.”—Adapted, *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 820.

SUNDAY—JULY 22**MARRYING WITHIN THE FAITH
(Genesis 28:1, 2)**

We left off last week with Isaac and Rebekah sending Jacob away for two reasons. One reason was to keep him from marrying outside the faith. The other reason was to get Jacob away from his angry brother. Esau had sworn that as soon as Isaac died he would kill Jacob for stealing his blessing (Genesis 27:41). We also learned that Isaac began the covenant blessing² by telling Jacob not to choose a wife from the Canaanites³ but to take a wife from his own family group.

When you think about the covenant blessing in Genesis 28:1–4, why was the choice of the right wife so important in order for the blessing to come true?

Marrying within the faith was very important to the early Bible leaders. It was so important that they were willing to overlook the problem of marrying within the family. Abraham was married to his half sister and Isaac to his cousin. And now Jacob is told by Isaac to look for a wife from among the daughters of Laban—his own cousins. Abraham had told his trusted servant not to get a wife for Isaac

from among the Canaanites (Genesis 24:3). Esau also knew how upset Isaac was about Esau's pagan wives. So, Esau went and married yet another wife—the daughter of his uncle Ishmael.

How could the wickedness that caused the Flood in Genesis 6:1–5 help us understand why marrying “out of the faith” was very bad?

Some believe that the wickedness was caused by angels' marrying humans. But Jesus pointed out that angels do not marry (Mark 12:25). Others think that the wickedness was polygamy.⁴ Some of the future children of Cain were polygamists.⁵ Lamech, a man with more than one wife, is an example of a polygamist (Genesis 4:19). But the easiest way to know what “wickedness” means here is to understand that the followers of God (“the sons of God”) were marrying the “daughters of men.” And the daughters of men were not followers of the Lord. This was terrible to God.

Second Corinthians 6:14 gives a principle⁶ that should be obeyed in marriage and in all other things we do: It is best not to be “yoked” with unbelievers. This is the Bible's way of telling us not to form marriages

2. covenant blessing—the gift or reward God promises to give to His people for obeying Him. This reward is part of the agreement between God and His people. Serve God, and He will keep His promises to you.

3. Canaanites—the people who lived in the land of Canaan before the Israelites came and lived there.

4. polygamy—the practice of having more than one wife or husband at the same time.

5. polygamists—people who are married to more than one person at the same time.

6. principle—a basic rule or standard of good behavior.

and close friendships with people who do not love or follow God. Sadly, such marriages and friendships all too often lead us away from God instead of leading the unbelievers to God. But most of us are, at one time or another, around people who do not follow God. What principles should we follow when we are “yoked” with those who do not share our beliefs?

MONDAY—JULY 23

WORKING AND WAITING (Genesis 29:1–15)

What do these verses in Genesis 29:1–15 tell us about how “pure” Laban’s reasons were for deceiving Jacob?

Whatever reasons Laban had in the beginning for lying to Jacob and tricking him, Laban knew he could get more out of Jacob than he (Laban) would have to give Jacob. Laban would have to marry his daughters off anyway. So, why not let his daughters marry Jacob? That way Laban could get what he could from Jacob for a dowry.⁷

There are different kinds of dowries in the Old Testament. The bride’s father gave a maidservant to his daughter at the time of her marriage. Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel received maidservants (Genesis

16:1; Genesis 24:61; Genesis 29:24, 29). But the groom also must give gifts to the bride’s family. Abraham’s servant gave gold and silver jewelry and expensive clothes to Rebekah and other expensive gifts to her mother and to her brother Laban. But Jacob had arrived without any money. He had nothing to offer except hard work. So, he offered to work seven years for Rachel.



Jacob worked seven years so he could marry Rachel.

What was behind such treachery⁸ in Genesis 29:15–30? What does that tell us about the power of selfishness?

How did Laban cover up his act in Genesis 29:26? Why was this reason such a poor excuse?

7. dowry—a marriage gift that is worth a lot of money; a man gives this gift to the father of the woman he wants to marry in order to have the right to marry her.

8. treachery—lying; not being honest; not being loyal or true to others.

As the local man, Laban would have the support of the town's people. Jacob was not born there. As the employer, Laban had Jacob in his power. At the end of seven years Laban had paid Jacob nothing yet. Most of all, Jacob's love for Rachel made him a slave to Laban. So, Jacob had no choice but to allow Laban to get away with the trick. We see only a mild complaint from the helpless young man. Jacob had to work another seven years for Rachel. But Laban let Jacob marry Rachel not long after marrying Leah.



Laban tricked Jacob and gave him Leah as a wife instead of Rachel.

Look again at Laban's excuse. In what ways do we need to be careful of making an excuse to cover up unfair acts?

TUESDAY—JULY 24

FAMILY FIGHTING (Genesis 29:28–30:24)

Read Genesis 29:28–30:24 and then answer these questions:

❶ In what ways was this family making the same mistakes in marriage as their parents made?

❷ In what ways were the fighting and jealousy⁹ between the women shown?

❸ How did Jacob's actions make matters worse?



Rachel did not have any children. She gave her maid to Jacob, hoping to have a child this way.

The contest between the two sisters led to them giving their maid-servants to Jacob to have sons for them. When Rachel's maidservant had her second son, Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won" (Genesis 30:8, NIV). Rachel had said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll [I will] die" (Genesis 30:1, NIV). These words strangely told the future, because Rachel later died in childbirth (Genesis 35:16–18).

9. jealousy—an unhappy feeling that is caused when another person has something you want to have.

When Rachel finally had a son, she named him Joseph, meaning “may he add,” saying, “ ‘May the Lord add to me another son’ ” (Genesis 30:24, NIV). Sadly, the birth of her second son killed Rachel.

Notice the words of Rachel to Jacob in Genesis 30:1 and the hopeless feeling that these words show. When was the last time you felt hopeless and had a problem that only God could solve? What did you do? What lessons did you learn that could help you if you faced the same problem again?

WEDNESDAY—JULY 25

JACOB’S LEAVING (Genesis 31:1–21)

Read back over what we have read so far about this family in Genesis 29 and 30. What were the sins and mistakes that each person made? What does this tell us about how belief alone in the true God is not enough to change our lives? Read also 2 Corinthians 7:1.

This story of Laban and Jacob and his wives is foolish enough. Each person is guilty in his or her own way. Even Jacob, the leader, a follower of the true God, does not always do what is right. This is just another Bible example of how far humans have fallen and how much grace¹⁰ they need.

10. grace—God’s mercy to us.

11. traits of character—traits are qualities, such as being honest and faithful, that make up your character or who you are.

12. favoritism—treating a person special because you like that person more than you like others.

Based on Genesis 30:25–31:16, how would you answer the following questions?

- ❶ What caused Laban’s attitude (feeling) toward Jacob to change? What lesson is there for us?
- ❷ What are some of the good traits of character¹¹ in Jacob?
- ❸ What was Laban’s daughters’ attitude toward their father? Was this attitude fair?

This family showed a lot of trickery, jealousy, and favoritism.¹² But the Lord was there, working out His plan for this family, even though human mistakes were made. At the same time, how much better this story could have been if all the family members loved God first and had loved one another as themselves. As you go about your daily work, in what ways can you try to live as God would have you live, without making mistakes and without hurting others?

THURSDAY—JULY 26

TREATING SOME PEOPLE BETTER THAN OTHERS (Genesis 29:30)

What plan for family trouble is found in Genesis 29:30?

God was working in the life of Jacob, even though he had faults. But Jacob's faults were not small. His faults brought pain and suffering not only upon Jacob but also upon his loved ones. When will we learn to think before we act? When will we think about the results of the choices we make? How many of us would love to go back in time and do things differently? Sadly, we cannot. All we can do is try not to make the same mistakes in the future.

Of all the mistakes Jacob made, one of the worst was loving Rachel more than Leah. Sure, Leah was not the one he wanted. But Jacob was still married to her. And he did not seem to mind having all those children with her either.

How did Jacob treat Rachel better than he treated Leah in Genesis 33:1–3?

Rachel died. But Jacob continued to show his favoritism¹³ to the children he had from her. Jacob gave Joseph the coat of many colors (Genesis 37:3). But Jacob did not give such coats to his other sons by Leah. Benjamin was the one held back by the father as the others went to buy grain from Egypt (Genesis 42:4). Jacob did this even though he already had ten other sons (Genesis 46:21).



**Jacob gave Joseph a coat of many colors.
This made Joseph's brothers jealous.**

This favoritism brought a great deal of suffering to the family. Jacob should have followed the principles¹⁴ of the God he followed. If Jacob had, his life would have been much better. This is a lesson for all of us too. How careful we need to be in how we treat others.

Most of us do not have to deal with the problems of having many wives instead of one. But we all need to be careful how we treat others. No doubt Leah and her children had suffered from Jacob's actions. What can you do to be more careful in dealing with the

13. favoritism—treating a person special because you like that person more than you like others.

14. principles—laws or rules upon which other laws are based; the Ten Commandments.

feelings of others who want your love and need you to spend time with them?

FRIDAY—JULY 27

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read “Rachel,” pp. 924, 925, in *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Dictionary*; read also “The Marriage of Isaac,” pp. 171–176; “Jacob and Esau,” pp. 177–182, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*.¹⁵

“Let your life preach the faith you believe in. Be sure that the truth never makes a person feel foolish. Truth should not make a person lose patience or act rough or feel worry. Make clear to all your patience, kindness, mercy, and true goodness. These acts show the character¹⁶ of the God whom you serve.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*,¹⁷ p. 400.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Talk about what it means to be unequally yoked¹⁸ with people who do not believe in God as we do. How are

we as Christians to act when we are together with those who do not believe in God? What can we learn from what others have gone through?

❷ What advice would you give to someone who was thinking about marrying outside the faith?

❸ We can learn a lot from the story this week about how not to act. What principles¹⁹ can we learn from what we have read that can help us not to make the kind of mistakes that Jacob’s family made?

❹ Greed is a powerful feeling within the human²⁰ heart. What ways can we protect ourselves from being completely influenced by²¹ it?

❺ If a couple in your class has been married a long time, have them tell everyone what the keys are to a happy marriage. What are the principles to a happy marriage? What must couples never do? What should they always do? How can we use those principles in other areas of our lives?

15. patriarchs and prophets—patriarchs were early Bible leaders, such as Abraham and Isaac, or other leaders, such as Moses; prophets are men and women sent by God to warn us about what will happen in the future.

16. character—who you are; all the things that a person does, feels, and thinks are what a person is made of; your character is the sum of the choices you make, such as the choice to be honest or to cheat.

17. evangelism—the act of spreading the good news about Jesus to the world.

18. unequally yoked—being married or having close friendships with those who do not believe in Jesus.

19. principles—basic rules or standards of good behavior.

20. human—man, woman, or child.

21. influenced by—affected or changed by the power of another person or thing.