

“...the LORD saw...”

In our studies together I have been fascinated by the way God shows a compassion for people we would probably not bother with. We see how God's compassion is not like our own, but is far superior!

Jacob tricked and deceived his father and his brother. He had to run away to be saved from Esau's wrath. At the same time he was sent to his uncle's city, to find a wife. He discovered one, but in so doing he was himself the subject of trickery and deception, from his own uncle, Laban. Not only that, but he was also tricked into marriage by his intended wife's sister, Leah! Plus, on top of all that, to marry his intended bride, Rachel, he had to promise a further seven years hard work for Laban. All-in-all, he obtained his desires only after much trouble and work. Yet, he was in God's eye because he was vital to continue God's promises.

What continually strikes me is that though these men deceived and were the subject of deception, they remained God's special people! This has many ramifications, for it shows us that Christians make mistakes and even sin deliberately, but, in the end, it is God Who judges and not us. What does this mean for us today?

It suggests to me, at least, that we must leave any judgement to God. We must apply the discipline found in the New Testament, because the guidance given there was given by God for the proper government of the churches. However, we must not add to this proper discipline our own judgements, which are unwarranted.

This can be hard indeed, especially if we have been wronged, or if we perceive ourselves to have been wronged. If a man or woman has been disciplined then our next step is to continue in genuine love and care, not with an extension of punishment issued by ourselves based on our emotional reactions.

God blessed Leah, just as He blessed Esau and others. He blessed Leah, we are told, because He saw how she was being treated by Jacob and Rachel. Even lately, I have come to see that my own opinion infiltrates what God says. It was never my intention to do so, but it happened, here and there. I must now put that matter right and remove from all my writings anything that is opinion. How can I receive blessings when I deny it to others by giving my own opinions, no

Genesis 29

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 10 April 2015 13:13

matter how relevant they might seem to me? (That is, I must only give God's word).

I am not talking about not judging at all, for we are commanded to judge others... properly. We are to apply the strictures found in Bible texts, and to leave them at that, and not be tempted to add our own words or objectives. This can sometimes be very hard to do, but it must be done, or we start to become opinionated rather than Biblical.

Of course, we can use scripture as our base, and so give words of wisdom founded on scripture. But, beyond that, we should not go. I am only just learning the reality of this truth, and I pass it on to you, in the hope that we may all go forward in truth and in love, letting God speak and not our own minds or hearts.

The same aim should be in our study times. For myself, such an approach is vital and I commend it to all who teach and preach. In particular do not fall into the 'spiritualising' trap of adding flowery words and ideas to what is plainly taught in scripture. God does not require our own input! We are not teachers in our own right, but are supposed to be faithful witnesses to *His* word, as declared in scripture. Thus, we must make every word count, for time is short.

Verses 1-9

1.

"Then Jacob went on his journey, and came into the land of the people of the east.

2.

And he looked, and behold a well in the field, and, lo, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks: and a great stone was upon the well's mouth.

3.

And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in his place.

4.

Genesis 29

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 10 April 2015 13:13

And Jacob said unto them, My brethren, whence be ye? And they said, Of Haran are we.

5.

And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nahor? And they said, We know him.

6.

And he said unto them, Is he well? And they said, He is well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep.

7.

And he said, Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together: water ye the sheep, and go and feed them.

8.

And they said, We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and till they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep.

9.

And while he yet spake with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep: for she kept them.”

Jacob had received a powerful and vivid confirmation of his, and his descendants', destinies. Now, he carried on his journey, 'into the land of the people of the east'. That is, 'eastward' as viewed from his home.

As he travelled, he saw a water-well covered by a large stone, in a field. Three flocks of sheep were lying on the ground nearby. The well was a watering hole for flocks. The stone probably stopped evaporation. We can tell from the text that this was not an open well, but was one probably set into a rock – the stone was rolled away from the mouth and rolled back again, so users had to walk-in to the water, which was like a spring, rather than draw it upward from the ground.

Genesis 29

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 10 April 2015 13:13

When he got nearer the flocks, he asked a question of the herdsmen, prefacing his query with a common greeting, "My brethren". He asked where they came from and they replied 'Haran' ('mountaineer'). Abraham stayed at Haran (located in Mesopotamia) until his own father died, before he began his journey to the promised land. Jacob asked if they knew Laban, his uncle, and they said they did, indicating that they did not just know *of* him, but knew him personally.

'Is Laban well?' asked Jacob. The herdsmen answered that he was indeed well, and then added that Rachel, Laban's daughter (Jacob's cousin), was just approaching with her father's sheep. Jacob said, 'It is an important day, though it is not really the time of day to do so, go and water your sheep and feed them.' But, the herders replied, 'No, we can't do that until all the flocks are present; then we roll away the stone and water our flocks.' As Jacob spoke, so Rachel arrived at the well and cared for them.

Verses 10-12

1.

"And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother.

2.

And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept.

3.

And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father."

Jacob went up to the well and rolled the great stone aside, so that Rachel could water her flock. He must have been in an emotional frame of mind, for he kissed Rachel and wept. The 'kiss', *n ashaq*, may have been a literal kiss, but it could also have been a gentle touch on the arm. It might appear strange that he introduced himself as Laban's 'brother', when he was actually Laban's nephew, but the word for 'brother',

Genesis 29

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 10 April 2015 13:13

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, can also mean a relative or someone of the same tribe. He was, then, simply telling Rachel that he was one of her family. Delighted, Rachel ran to the city and told her father, Laban.

Verses 13-20

1.

“And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things.

2.

And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him the space of a month.

3.

And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?

4.

And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.

5.

Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured.

6.

And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.

7.

And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me.

Genesis 29

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 10 April 2015 13:13

8.

And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.”

When Laban heard the glad news, he ran out to greet his nephew with a fond embrace and a kiss (this time meaning a literal kiss). Jacob then returned to Laban’s house and told him everything. ‘You are my family’, said Laban, ‘please stay’... and Jacob stayed a month. By this time Jacob was about 77 years of age.

Evidently, Jacob was not idle during his stay. Laban said, ‘You are my family, but you should not work for me for nothing – what wage do you want?’ Now, Laban had two daughters: the eldest was Leah (‘weary’), and she was ‘tender eyed’, meaning gentle and timid. The other daughter, Rachel (‘ewe’), was “beautiful and well favoured”; that is, her shape and look were lovely, or, in context, lovelier than Leah.

Jacob did not have a dowry with him, so he felt it necessary to work for the hand of his wife. His estimation of his future wife must have been extremely high, for he offered to work seven whole years for nothing for Laban, on condition that he could then marry Rachel. Laban said that it was better that she went to family than to a stranger, so he agreed. Jacob must have been besotted with Rachel, for the time flew by, such was his love for her.

Verses 21-30

1.

“And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her.

2.

And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast.

3.

Genesis 29

Written by K B Napier
Friday, 10 April 2015 13:13

And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her.

4.

And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid.

5.

And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?

6.

And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.

7.

Fulfill her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.

8.

And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also.

9.

And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid.

10.

And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.”

Genesis 29

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At the end of the seven years, Jacob asked for the hand of Rachel in marriage, as promised. Laban did not respond in truth, for he only pretended to carry out his promise. He ordered his servants to prepare a great wedding feast. After the feast, in the dark, and with the woman probably veiled, Laban brought his daughter to Jacob, and the couple went into their tent. But, Laban had brought him the eldest daughter, Leah, whose hand-maid was Zilpah ('a trickling'), who later became Jacob's concubine.

It is obvious that Jacob did not realise he had been tricked, by his shock the next morning, to find Leah and not Rachel, by his side. He went to Laban and asked him why he had tricked him, when a promise had been made seven years before. It is almost a reminder to him that he, too, had gained much by cheating his own father.

Laban's answer was clever rather than genuine. He said that it was against custom to give the younger daughter for marriage, when the eldest daughter was still unmarried. Then he added that, to comply with custom, Jacob should 'fulfil her week' for Leah, meaning to complete the marriage feast days, and so confirm the marriage. He would give Jacob Rachel, but on condition that he did another seven years' service!

At the end of the seven days feast, Rachel also became Jacob's wife, unintended though this was for Jacob. In this is a problem, for Jacob was willing to put up with deceit and a dual-marriage, for the sake of having the woman he wanted. Is this acceptable? Think about the principle rather than the specific action.

And so Jacob finally married the woman he loved. Rachel was given Bilhah ('troubled') as her handmaid. She, too, later became Jacob's concubine. We are told that Jacob loved Rachel more than he loved Leah. Probably, this was because he did not ask to marry Leah in the first place, so any love he had was on a lesser plane.

Verses 31-35

1.

"And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.

2.

And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the

Genesis 29

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Friday, 10 April 2015 13:13

LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me.

3.

And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon.

4.

And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have born him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi.

5.

And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, Now will I praise the LORD: therefore she called his name Judah; and left bearing.”

We now see that God’s sense of justice is not like our own! Though Leah was imposed upon Jacob, God dealt kindly with her. He saw Leah was ‘hated’. We are not told if Jacob hated her as a woman who married under false pretences, or if it came from Rachel, who saw her as an interloper. This very hatred was turned upon Rachel, for God ensured that Leah became pregnant whilst Rachel was kept barren for a season. Thus it was that Leah produced a child first, a boy named Reuben (‘behold a son’), so named because God had seen her in her anxiety.

Sadly, Leah thought that production of a son would cause Jacob to love her more. But, as we know from life, it is usually a mistake to think that a child will engender love. She quickly became pregnant again, with Simeon (‘heard’), saying that, again, God had blessed her because she was so hated.

A third son, Levi (‘joined to’) came along, and again Leah thought that surely three sons would finally bind Jacob to her. She was desperate to be loved by Jacob and so had a fourth son, in an attempt to persuade him to do so. The fourth son was Judah (‘praised’). But Leah must have realised it was pointless, for Judah was her last child for a while.

Genesis 29

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