

GENESIS Why The Beginning Matters

Study 20

Jacob and his Family

Genesis 29-31

Part 1 of 5: Scamming the Scammer

Genesis 29:16-30

Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel." Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her."

So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant.

When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"

Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."

And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant. Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

1) a) Fill in Blanks. Laban scammed Jacob. According to the video lecture, what is the benefit (pros) and consequence (Cons) of this scam?

Benefit (pros)	Consequence (Cons)
Married off two daughters at 3 times the normal price each	Risk embittering Jacob
One of them totally wouldn't have any chance of marriage	Trapped his own daughter in a loveless, forced marriage
	Cheated own nephew

b) Discussion question. What was Laban hinting at when he said “It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one”?

It is a reference for Jacob cheating his older brother’s firstborn rights.

Part 2 of 5: Sons

Genesis 29:31-35
 When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, “It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.”
 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.” So she named him Simeon.
 Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” So he was named Levi.
 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “This time I will praise the Lord.” So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

2) a) Fill in Blanks. Fill in on the responses of Leah when she had each of her son and comment on the changed of motivation.

Son	Meaning of name	Verse	Leah’s response/motivation
Reuben	Reuben sounds like the Hebrew for <i>he has seen my misery</i> ; the name means <i>see, a son</i> .	Gen 29:32	Surely my husband will love me now (her value decided by giving a son)
Simeon	Simeon probably means <i>one who hears</i> .	Gen 29:33	Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.
Levi	Levi sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for <i>attached</i> .	Gen 29:34	Now at last my husband will become attached to me, (her value in giving many sons)
Judah	Judah sounds like and may be derived from the Hebrew for <i>praise</i> .	Gen 29:35	This time I will praise the Lord (no longer dependent on her value of bearing children)

Part 3 of 5: More Wives More Problems

Genesis 30:1-8
 When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her

sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?"

Then she said, "Here is Bilhah, my servant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I too can build a family through her."

So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, and she became pregnant and bore him a son. Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him Dan.

Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." So she named him Naphtali.

When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, "What good fortune!" So she named him Gad.

Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.

3) Discussion question. Does God approve of polygamy that Rachel and Leah initiated?

Genesis 30:16-24

So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night.

God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband." So she named him Issachar.

Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun.

Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." She named him Joseph, and said, "May the Lord add to me another son."

4) a) Fill in the blanks. Fill in the idols of each of the character.

Name of person	The person's idol
Leah	Jacob
Jacob	Rachel

Rachel	babies
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b) Fill in the blanks. Fill in the signs on types of reaction when idols are threatened or destroyed.

Idols threatened	Idols destroyed
Angry	Lost
Afraid	Devastated
Anxious	Directionless

c) Objective question. According to the video lecture, choose the type of relationship that had resulted in Jacob's family as a result of these idols.

- A. Unity
- B. Favouritism
- C. Fairness
- D. Anger
- E. Healthy Competition
- F. Unhealthy Competition
- G. Calmness
- H. Strife
- I. Peacefulness
- J. Disunity

d) Discussion question. Rachel in Genesis 30:5-6 and Leah Genesis 30:16-18 has interpreted the events as God's grace towards them. Was this a correct interpretation?

Part 4 of 5: Streaked, Speckled or Spotted

Genesis 3:3-13

Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."

So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were. He said to them, "I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me. You know that I've worked for your father with all my

strength, yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. If he said, 'The speckled ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, 'The streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked young. So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me.

"In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.'"

4) Discussion question. How did Jacob see the provision of streaked, speckled or spotted flocks?

Part 5 of 5: Jacob's Transformation

Genesis 32: 9-12

Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, Lord, you who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,' I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two camps. Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. But you have said, 'I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.'"

5) Discussion question. How was Laban's deceitfulness used for good of Jacob? (Refer to Hebrews 12:7 to help you)

Quick Verse Reference

Hebrews 12:7-8

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.

Takeaway

Christians need to continuously be aware of and reject the various idolatries that they knowingly or unknowingly worship in their own lives and although painful, allow God to transform them and redirect the worship to Himself.

Case Study

Case 1 – Polygamy

Paul Lee was studying Genesis and noted that Jacob had two wives Leah and Rachel. Paul also noted Abraham had Hagar, Sarah, and concubines. Additionally, David had many wives and concubines and Solomon had hundreds of them.

Later in life, Paul had an affair with two other women in China in two different towns in addition to his first wife in KL.

His church leaders found out about his situation and confronted him about it but he was unrepentant because he countered that there was not a single verse in the bible that specifically prohibited polygamy.

In fact, Deut 21:15-16 states

“If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, and they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved, and if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, then it shall be, on the day he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the unloved, the true firstborn.

This scripture seems to imply there was polygamy during the OT and there was no prohibition about it as the Levitical law even prescribed how to distribute inheritance so there is implicit support for polygamy.

1) a) Discussion question. Is polygamy wrong in the Bible?

Model Answer

Yes.

b) Discussion question. Let us consider why. In Genesis 2, what was the original design for marriage?

Model Answer

The biblical norm is one man one woman in one flesh as in Genesis 2. Any deviation from that is wrong.

c) Discussion question. One might argue that there is no explicit command against polygamy in the OT. However, are the consequences good? Consider one example of this in the OT.

Model Answer

It is true there is no explicit command against polygamy but the OT narratives that describe the practice of polygamy often describe the awful circumstances that arise out of such practices.

Here are examples:

The first polygamist, Lamech, calls a family conference so he can boast about his inordinate vengeful violence. He's clearly not a nice man (Gen 4:19-24).

Jacob has two wives and two concubines, a situation that creates family heartbreak, envy, and, ultimately, attempted murder (Gen 29-37).

Gideon has many wives and many sons (Judges 8:30). This results in a civil war and wholesale slaughter in Israel (Judges 9).

David has a seemingly insatiable appetite for women. He has many wives (2 Sam 5:13), and in the end, steals another man's wife and murders him (2 Sam 11-12). The resulting, big family was not a happy one: they ended up committing incestuous rape (2 Sam 13) and rebellion which almost destroyed David's kingdom (2 Sam 14).

Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. They led his heart away from the Lord and led to the break-up of his kingdom (1 Kings 11:3-4). The stories tell the story all by themselves, don't they? Polygamy, according to the Bible, is a disaster.

d) Discussion question. Consider Deut. 17:17, was God encouraging having multiple wives?

Quick Verse Reference

Deuteronomy 17:17

And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold.

Model Answer

Deut 17:17 God warns the king of the dangers of getting multiple wives.

e) Discussion question. Is God condoning polygamy or making provisions for the consequences of it in Deuteronomy 21:15-16?

Quick Verse Reference

Deuteronomy 21:15-16

If a man has two wives, and he loves one but not the other, and both bear him sons but the firstborn is the son of the wife he does not love, when he wills his property to his sons, he must not give the rights of the firstborn to the son of the wife he loves in preference to his actual firstborn, the son of the wife he does not love.

Model Answer

Biblical passages that talk about polygamy like in Deut 21 are not condoning polygamy but merely make provisions so that one of the many problems polygamy brings which is bitter disputes over inheritance, will be mitigated.

f) Discussion question. In the NT, give one example where monogamy is explicitly advocated.

Model Answer

New Testament is more explicit in advocating one man and one woman. The first to come to the mind of many would be the qualifications for leaders in the church given by the Apostle Paul to Timothy and Titus. In 1 Timothy 3:2 and 12 and Titus 1:6, we are told that leaders of the church must be the “husband of one wife.”

In 1 Corinthians 7:1–16, Paul answered questions that the Corinthian church had about marriage. In this passage, Paul used the singular form of wife and husband throughout the passage. In fact, this is true of the New Testament writers in general.

Scripture compares the relationship of husband and wife to that of Christ and the church. In Ephesians 5:25–33, Paul explained this relationship and referred back to Genesis 2:24. Once again, God’s standard for marriage is defined as one man and one woman. Paul finished this analogy by stating, “let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband” (Ephesians 5:33).

g) Discussion question. In the NT, give one example where monogamy is explicitly advocated.

Model Answer

Be faithful to the wife he has married.

Case 2 – Suffering and God’s Promise

Phillip Goon is a Christian attending the 2nd Baptist church for a while but found things very unexciting in church and left for a more vibrant church in his neighborhood. The pastor was so charismatic in his preaching and so confident and stressed that God is always faithful and as believers, we have the blessing of Abraham. He often claimed the promises in Psalms.

The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore
(Psalms 121:5-8 ESV)

Phillip was very much encouraged by the messages which seem so upbeat unlike his old church when they always talk to him about nonpractical theology and suffering.

However, one day he was cheated on a business deal in which he lost three parcels of land worth RM12 million to a gang of swindlers who used to bribe the folk at the land office to change the name of the titles and even the presiding judge. He was financially finished and had to declare bankruptcy as a result of this.

He reread Psalms 121 and felt God had let him down tremendously and scripture could not be relied upon. He got really mad at God.

He went back to church and the pastor told him that he must have sinned against God in some way, maybe there was lust in his heart or he might have lied and that’s why this misfortune had come upon him.

2) a) Discussion question. Do you agree with this pastor that some sin or lack of faith must have resulted in his misfortune?

Model Answer

No, he is trying to put the blame all on the back of Phillip again and defend his poor interpretation of scripture.

b) Discussion question. Before continuing further, let us consider Jacob's life as an example. Was Jacob's life blessed and comfortable?

Model Answer

After God's promise, Jacob's life is far, far from 'blessed' and comfortable. In chapter 29 his uncle Laban swindles him and forces him to marry someone he does not want to. In chapter 35 the love of his life dies in childbirth. In chapter 37 he loses the second love of his life — Joseph — through the deceit and jealousy of his other sons. He lives his life in permanent grief and mourning. This is "guarding"?! Readers can be excused for asking: "If this is what God means by 'watching over' and 'guarding' someone, what use is it?" There are many places in the Bible that reflect God's promise to "keep" us. (This is the same Hebrew word translated here as "watch over" or "guard".)

c) Discussion question. Was God keeping Jacob from harm? Explain why or why not.

Model Answer

The life of Jacob seems to contradict this promise of God being our "keeper". Jacob suffered a great deal of "harm" under God's keeping, and others (e.g. Job) have suffered even more than he. How do we answer this?

Part of our problem is our own cultural expectations. When a civilization like ours experiences unprecedented peace and prosperity for so many years, it becomes natural for us to expect that a long and trouble-free life is "the natural right of all decent people." When we read about Jacob's life, we ask why God allowed all these bad things to happen. But we must realize that most people throughout most of history expected to bury at least a couple of their children in infancy and a couple of different spouses. Contemporary people in the West expect more comfort and safety than anyone ever has.

But the ultimate problem is that we lack perspective. God puts every incident you experience in the context of a) your whole life, and b) everything that is going on in the world and in history. He also can see all the different lives we could have had if this or that happened, in light of everything that is going on in the world and in history. In other words — something that feels pretty terrible might help us avoid something far more terrible if we had the eyes and wisdom to see it. In histories like that of Jacob, it is possible to see a bit of the bigger perspective as readers. We can see how Jacob's troubles honed him and humbled him and prevented him from bigger mistakes, and so on. Jacob was being protected from "harm" in a broader and deeper way, though he often was literally harmed by the conflicts he suffered. (He was permanently crippled by his mysterious wrestling contest.)

d) Discussion question. Using the example of Jacob's life and how God kept him through his suffering, can you advise Phillip Goon to change his perspective?

Model Answer

A fascinating passage that shows how different God's perspective is from ours is in Luke 21. Here Jesus is speaking to his disciples about the kind of opposition they will face.

"They will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you... to prisons... You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. All men will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish." (Luke 21:12, 16-18)

Rather startling isn't it? Jesus can calmly say that they will be hounded, imprisoned, and put to death, but "not a hair of your head will perish". There is no mistake. He says "you will be killed" and "you won't be harmed" in virtually the same sentence. What does that mean? First of all, the reference to "not a hair" means that God is not simply staying aloof and watching, but he is exercising minute control over the situation. Second of all, Jesus is thinking of "perishing" (cf. "harm" in Ps 121) differently than we are! This is because he is thinking of 'happiness' in a more multi-dimensional way than we do. People who are ultimately "happy" know themselves well, know God well, rely on his grace, accomplish things for him, and as a result live with little or no fear. In short, people are only "happy" if they are like Jesus. The many strong assertions that God is a God of love, that our anguish is anguish to him, and that he has suffered immeasurably in order to eventually wipe all suffering and tears out of our lives. That means that God never allows suffering or trouble unless it is absolutely necessary to make us like Jesus. He is 'watching over' us even in the suffering, because a) he is with us in it, b) he gives us resources for it, and c) he only allows it if it is some way to get to his goal of a new world and a new 'you' in Christ.