

Family?
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Genesis 29:18-30

There's an old saying: "*With friends like that, who needs enemies?*" As we continue to study the life of Jacob, we might say "*With family like that, who needs enemies?*" Already we've seen favoritism, deception, trickery, dysfunction, and now threats of violence. The Issac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau family would have given Dr. Phil enough material for a weeklong series!

The real reason Jacob fled from home was because his brother Esau was going to kill him for stealing the birthright and blessing. The story Rebekah told was that her son was going back to her people to find a nice Jewish girl to marry. As we'll see, that wasn't totally untrue. In order for Jacob to fulfill God's promise to make his descendants a great nation that would bless the world, Jacob DID need to find a wife; and why not a cousin, --- or two?

Why not go wife hunting at your uncle's house? When we meet Uncle Laban, another old saying comes to mind for Jacob the deceiver: "*Those chickens WILL come home to roost.*" Paul put it this way in Galatians 6:7 (NKJV) ⁷ *Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.*

Big Idea: God uses imperfect people with imperfect lives to accomplish His plans. DISOBEDIENCE and DECEPTION in God's people leads to God's DISCIPLINE; but God's DISCIPLINE can bring DIRECTION and DESTINY.

Genesis 29:16–30 (NLT)

¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters. The older daughter was named Leah, and the younger one was Rachel. ¹⁷ There was no sparkle in Leah's eyes, but Rachel had a beautiful figure and a lovely face.

¹⁸ Since Jacob was in love with Rachel, he told her father, "I'll work for you for seven years if you'll give me Rachel, your younger daughter, as my wife."

¹⁹ “Agreed!” Laban replied. “I’d rather give her to you than to anyone else. Stay and work with me.” ²⁰ So Jacob worked seven years to pay for Rachel. But his love for her was so strong that it seemed to him but a few days.

²¹ Finally, the time came for him to marry her. “I have fulfilled my agreement,” Jacob said to Laban. “Now give me my wife so I can sleep with her.”

²² So Laban invited everyone in the neighborhood and prepared a wedding feast. ²³ But that night, when it was dark, Laban took Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. ²⁴ (Laban had given Leah a servant, Zilpah, to be her maid.)

²⁵ But when Jacob woke up in the morning—it was Leah! “What have you done to me?” Jacob raged at Laban. “I worked seven years for Rachel! Why have you tricked me?”

²⁶ “It’s not our custom here to marry off a younger daughter ahead of the firstborn,” Laban replied. ²⁷ “But wait until the bridal week is over; then we’ll give you Rachel, too—provided you promise to work another seven years for me.”

²⁸ So Jacob agreed to work seven more years. A week after Jacob had married Leah, Laban gave him Rachel, too. ²⁹ (Laban gave Rachel a servant, Bilhah, to be her maid.) ³⁰ So Jacob slept with Rachel, too, and he loved her much more than Leah. He then stayed and worked for Laban the additional seven years.

- Okay, let’s deal with the first question everyone has. How do you spend your wedding night with the wrong girl and not know it? It was dark in the tent; she was veiled; perhaps Jacob had too much to drink at the reception. We don’t know how, but we know Laban’s trickery worked.
- It was customary for the family of the groom to pay a bridal price to the family of the bride. But Jacob’s family and the bank accounts were back at home. So he made a proposition to Uncle Laban to work for his bride.
- Verse 17 says Rachel was “*beautiful in form and appearance.*” She must have been more than just beautiful if Jacob was willing to do farm labor for seven years to be able to marry her. Rachel must have been special!
- Apparently it was not so easy to find a husband for poor Leah. Verse 17 says her eyes were “weak” (“delicate” in the NKJV.) We don’t know if that meant they were sweet, dull in

- appearance, or if she had to wear thick glasses. Either way, Leah, it seems wasn't the "catch" that Rachel was.
- Leah's name didn't help matters. *The name Leah means 'cow' and Rachel means 'ewe,'* Can't you hear it? *"Daddy calls me his little lamb,"* said Rachel, *"and he named you COW!"* Nice names, Uncle Laban!
 - Did Laban trick Jacob because he was concerned about being left with an "old maid" daughter, or just to get seven more years of work, or both?
 - Whatever his motive it's clear Laban, like his sister (Jacob's mother) Rebekah was not above using deception to get his way.
 - Verse 25 tells us Jacob was enraged! The Life Application Study Bible comments, *"How natural it is for us to become upset at an injustice done to us while closing our eyes to the injustices we do to others. Sin has a way of coming back to haunt us."*ⁱⁱ
 - Jacob the con man had met his match and God gave Jacob a taste of his own medicine at the hands of Laban. Still, God was in control.
 - As Jacob's son Joseph would one day say to his brothers, ²⁰ *You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good.* (Genesis 50:20 NLT)
 - Last week we saw that Jacob had an encounter with God that confirmed the Heavenly Father's plans, purpose, and presence for him.
 - Jacob seemed to "get it" and made a "profession of faith."
 - We might have left feeling like Jacob's life would be smooth sailing as he grew into his place in God's story of redemption as the ancestor of Jesus the Messiah. So much for that.
 - It appears Jacob was sincere in his confession that he would serve God. But DISOBEDIENCE and DECEPTION in God's people leads to God's DISCIPLINE. God's DISCIPLINE can bring DIRECTION and DESTINY.
 - The LORD had some work to do on Jacob. Sometimes God grows our character and commitment to Him at the hands of other sinful people.
 - Think of David running from jealous, sinful King Saul. God had promised David would be king, but he allowed Saul to try to kill

- David. For some reason God was developing David through the injustice of Saul's rage.
- Though it appears Jacob had begun to change his deceiving, conniving ways, Uncle Laban turned the tables and took advantage of him.
 - To his credit Jacob worked the additional seven years for Rachel.
 - Jacob was growing in his character. But there were still bad choices.
 - The dysfunction and rivalry in the family only gets worse as the sisters struggle to outdo the other in baby production to be the favorite wife. Polygamy, surrogate mothers, it is sordid stuff but it led to twelve sons who would father twelve tribes that would become the nation of Israel.
 - You'll have to read about that on your own in chapter 30.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- The good news: God can use imperfect people with imperfect lives to accomplish His purposes. His grace can take any messed up, sinful person and turn their life into an amazing story of redemption.
- The bad news: Accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord, doesn't exempt us from hardship and injustice at the hands of other sinful people.
- Sometimes God uses hard situations to draw us closer to Him and to grow our character to prepare us to fulfill His plan for our lives.
- Hebrews 12:11 (ESV) tells us, *¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*
- Jacob would labor on Laban's "ranch" for twenty years.
- You have to believe it was a grind and he wondered what God was doing; but one day the LORD would change Jacob's name from "deceiver" to Israel. From then on Jacob was not known as a "con man" but as a God-honoring man and the father of a nation.
- As we've said, God can turn DYSFUNCTION and DISOBEDIENCE into DISCIPLINE that leads to DESTINY. He

did it for Jacob and He will do it for us if we will surrender to Him in faith.

ⁱ Achtemeier, P. J., Harper & Row and Society of Biblical Literature. (1985). In [*Harper's Bible dictionary*](#) (1st ed., p. 552). San Francisco: Harper & Row.

ⁱⁱ Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 133410-133411). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.