

## The Book of Genesis

### Chapter 29

**29:1** *Then Jacob continued on his journey* [Hebrew: "lifted up his feet"] *and came to the land of the eastern peoples.* (NIV)

#### Jacob's Journey

Jacob was in high spirits, hurrying on to his destination. He arrived there in 1758 B.C.

**29:2-6** *There he saw a well in the field, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well. Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?" "We're from Haran," they replied. He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?" "Yes, we know him," they answered. Then Jacob asked them, "Is he well?" "Yes, he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep." (NIV)*

#### Bethuel

There is no mention of Bethuel, just Nahor, the grand-patriarch of Haran, and Laban, his grandson who was still influential in the area.

#### Shepherdess

It was not normally the duty of daughters to take care of livestock, unless there were no sons.

**29:7-8** *"Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture." "We can't," they replied, "until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep." (NIV)*

The stone was too heavy for them to move. It was necessary for them to wait until all the shepherds arrived so the stone could be more easily moved.

**29:9-10** *While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep. (NIV)*

Jacob single-handedly removed the stone that normally took more than two men. Between this event and the wrestling match with God, we can begin to see that although Jacob had not been interested in livestock and hunting when he was younger, he was not a weakling.

**29:11-16** *Then Jacob kissed* [reference to a customary greeting] *Rachel and began to weep aloud. He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father. As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all*

***these things. Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood." After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, Laban said to him, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be." Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah ["weariéd"], and the name of the younger was Rachel ["ewe" or "sheep"]. (NIV)***

***29:17 Leah's eyes were lovely [Hebrew: "rakkoth" meaning "soft" in beauty], and Rachel was graceful [TAN: "shapely"] and beautiful. (NRS)***

***29:18-20 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." So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. (NIV)***

### Marriage Negotiations

Although the custom during this period was for the brother to negotiate marriage for his sisters, Laban negotiates the marriage of Rachel. The only reason this could happen is if he had no sons. Also, Laban states Jacob would be a better husband than another man: a son-in-law related by blood would be an ideal heir. Custom allowed a man to adopt a son-in-law in order to make him the legal heir.

***29:21-24 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her." So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast ["mishteh" = a feast of drinking]. But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her. And Laban gave his servant girl [personal maid] Zilpah ["a trickling"] to his daughter as her maidservant. (NIV)***

### End of Seven Years

The period of seven years had come to an end and Jacob wanted the payment for which he had negotiated with Laban. This occurred in 1751 B.C.

### Laban's Deception

The alcohol from the feasting had affected Jacob's perception so much that he did not realize Laban had switched his daughters.

***29:25 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?" (NIV)***

Jacob now begins to realize what it feels like to be deceived.

***29:26 Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. (NIV)***

Laban had not brought this information to Jacob's attention during the entire seven years of servitude.

***29:27-31 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 girl [personal maid] Bilhah [“timid”] to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years. When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved [KJV: “hated”; Hebrew: “sahneh” meaning “loved to a lesser degree”], He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. (NIV)***

### Leah’s Condition

The use of the term “opened her womb” implies that, by nature, Leah was barren. This means God worked a miracle to allow her to bear children.

### Jacob’s Dependence on God

After not getting what he wanted due to Laban's deceit, Jacob is denied offspring from the only wife he wanted. Just as Abraham and Isaac had to depend on God to produce the desired heirs, so Jacob now learns he too must depend on God.

***29:32-35 Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben [“see a son”], 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 [“heard”]. 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 [“joined”—the tribe that was to join the people to God]. 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 [“praise”—the tribe from which the One to be praised descended]. Then she stopped having children. (NIV)***

### Leah’s First Four Sons

The first of Leah’s sons, Reuben, was probably born in 1750 B.C. and was then followed about every two years with the next one—Simeon, Levi, and Judah.