Jacobs family in Haran

We read from the Bible (ERV): Genesis 29:1-30

Jacob Meets Rachel
1. Then Jacob continued his trip. He went to the country in the East.

2. He looked and saw a well in the field. There were three flocks of sheep lying near the well, where the sheep drank water. There was a large rock covering the mouth of the well.

3. When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the rock away from the well. Then all the sheep could drink from the water. After the sheep were full, the shepherds would put the rock back in its place.
4. Jacob said to the shepherds there, “Brothers, where are you from?”
They answered, “We are from Haran.”
5. Then Jacob said, “Do you know Laban, the son of Nahor?”
The shepherds answered, “We know him.”
6. Then Jacob said, “How is he?”
They answered, “He is well. Look, that is his daughter Rachel coming now with his sheep.”
7. Jacob said, “Look, it is still day and long before the sun sets. It is not yet time for the animals to be gathered together for the night. So give them water and let them go back into the field.”
8. But they said, “We cannot do that until all the flocks are gathered together. Then we will move the rock from the well, and all the sheep will drink.”
9. While Jacob was talking with the shepherds, Rachel came with her father’s sheep. (It was her job to take care of the sheep.)

10. Rachel was Laban’s daughter. Laban was the brother of Rebekah, Jacob’s mother. When Jacob saw Rachel, he went and moved the rock and gave water to the sheep.

11. Then Jacob kissed Rachel and cried.

12. He told her that he was from her father’s family. He told her that he was the son of Rebekah. So Rachel ran home and told her father.
13. When Laban heard the news about his sister’s son Jacob, he ran to meet him. Laban hugged him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban everything that had happened.
14. Then Laban said, “This is wonderful! You are from my own family.” So Jacob stayed with Laban for a month.
Laban Tricks Jacob
15. One day Laban said to Jacob, “You are a relative of mine. It is not right for you to continue working for me without pay. What should I pay you?”
16. Now Laban had two daughters. The older was Leah and the younger was Rachel.
17. Leah’s eyes were gentle, but Rachel was beautiful.

18. Jacob loved Rachel, so he said to Laban, “I will work seven years for you if you will allow me to marry your daughter Rachel.”
19. Laban said, “It would be better for her to marry you than someone else. So stay with me.”
20. So Jacob stayed and worked for Laban for seven years. But it seemed like a very short time because he loved Rachel very much.
21. After seven years Jacob said to Laban, “Give me Rachel so that I can marry her. My time of work for you is finished.”
22. So Laban gave a party for all the people in that place.

23. That night Laban brought his daughter Leah to Jacob. Jacob and Leah had sexual relations together.

24. (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter to be her maid.)

25. In the morning Jacob saw that it was Leah he had slept with, and he said to Laban, “You have tricked me. I worked hard for you so that I could marry Rachel. Why did you trick me?”
26. Laban said, “In our country we don’t allow the younger daughter to marry before the older daughter.

27. Continue for the full week of the marriage ceremony, and I will also give you Rachel to marry. But you must serve me another seven years.”
28. So Jacob did this and finished the week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

29. (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.)

30. So Jacob had sexual relations with Rachel also. And Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. Jacob worked for Laban for another seven years.

Jacob is on a journey to visit his family in Haran. To do so he must travel some 800 kilometers on foot.

When he is almost there, he comes across shepherds in the field waiting at a well. He asks, "Where are you from? They tell him they are from Haran. 'Do you know Laban, the (grand) son of Nahor?' he asks. They know him. 'Is he doing well?' 'Yes, look there comes his daughter Rachel with the flock.'

Jacob asks why they are waiting at the well in the middle of the day, surely the animals can still graze for a while?

They tell all the flocks to gather, only then will they roll the stone from the opening and be able to water the animals.

At that moment, Rachel also arrives at the well. She is the daughter of Laban, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's mother.

Jacob walks to the well, slides off the stone and gives his uncle's flock to drink.

He single-handedly removes the stone from the opening. But surely the shepherds sitting at the well were waiting for the other shepherds to do this together? So was the stone too heavy to shift alone? Or was it a custom/usage to do this together? Bible translations differ in their explanations.

It is more plausible that it is a custom for this well. After all, we know Jacob from earlier Bible stories as a homely boy. His brother is a strong, tough hunter. But Jacob prefers to be with his mother in the tents. Nor does it say that Jacob is given superpowers here to roll off the stone. In that case, Jacob does not care about this custom and draws his own plan: his uncle's herd, which is herding this beautiful girl, must be given to drink now.

When all the animals have been given to drink, Jacob kisses Rachel and begins to cry. He tells her that he is her cousin. Rachel quickly runs to her father to tell him everything. Laban quickly runs to the well to welcome his cousin: he hugs and kisses him. Then they go home together.

For a month Jacob is a guest of his uncle.

Then Laban finds that Jacob can do something for a living. 'Even though you are family, you don't have to work for nothing,' Laban says 'say what you want to earn.'

Jacob has already thought about this and has his answer ready: 'I will work seven years for you if I can marry your daughter Rachel.'

Jacob is in love with Rachel. He knows that the custom is to pay a dowry, and Jacob is willing to pay seven years of labor for Rachel.

Laban agrees: 'I would rather give her to you than to any other man.'

How happy Jacob is! The ensuing seven years of labor fly by!

And then the day he has been looking forward to arrives: Jacob marries his bride.

It is a great feast with good food and drink. Late at night, Laban brings the bride to Jacob.

But the next morning Jacob sees not Rachel, but Lea beside him in bed. He rushes to his uncle and says, "How can you do that? I worked for Rachel for seven years, didn't I? You have deceived me!

The deceiver is deceived. Jacob who deceived his father so ugly to get the greatest blessing is now deceived himself.

Laban says, 'it is not the custom here for the youngest to marry before the oldest.' But finish the wedding week with Lea, then you may also marry Rachel afterwards if you work for me for seven years after that.'

Jacob agrees. What else could he do? He is eager to marry Rachel.

It is not the dream start to the marriage between Jacob and Rachel. And it's far from fun for Lea, too. It creates tension between the sisters and rivalry toward Jacob. After all, Jacob loves Rachel more than Lea.

***Prayer: Lord, a story from the Bible about how people treat each other. Even in our time, we hurt other people with our choices. And other lives are again affected our choices.***

***Help us Lord not to go only for ourselves. But to also consider other people and their feelings.***

Questions:

- While searching for a bride for Jacob's father Isaac, Abraham's servant also sits at a well near Haran. He asks in a prayer for God to designate the bride for Isaac (see Beginner's Bible Study 11. Rebekah). Jacob does not do this.

When making important decisions, how important is it to ask the Lord for guidance? Or are you allowed to make choices without involving God? How do you think about this?

- Jacob has arrived at his destination. This is where he is building his life. Have you arrived at your destination yet?

- Why does Laban deceive Jacob by giving him Lea on the wedding night instead of Rachel?

- What consequences does this action of Laban have for:

- Jacob

- Lea

- Rachel

- The mutual relationship between Laban and Jacob?

- Where is God in this story?

This Biblestudy was written by Carla Heuvelman and can be found on www.febebijbelstudies.nl