



Rachel

Jacob's Love For Her
Was Patient and
Practical

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Overview

Rachel's story is told in Genesis 29:1-35:20. She is also mentioned in Ruth 4:11.

History seems to repeat itself here. Twice a town well at Haran was the site of significant events in one family's story. It was here that Rebekah met Eliezer, Abraham's servant, who had come to find a wife for Isaac. Some 40 years later, Rebekah's son Jacob returned the favor by serving his cousin Rachel and her sheep from the same well.

The relationship that developed between them not only reminds us that romance is not a modern invention, but also teaches us a few lessons about patience and love.

Jacob's love for Rachel was both patient and practical. Jacob had the patience to wait seven years for her, but he kept busy in the meantime. His commitment to Rachel kindled a strong loyalty within her. In fact, her loyalty to Jacob got out of hand and became self-destructive.

She was frustrated by her barrenness and desperate to compete with her sister for Jacob's affection. She was trying to gain from Jacob what he had already given: devoted love.

Rachel's attempts to earn the unbearable are a picture of a much greater error we can make. Like her, we find ourselves trying somehow to earn love—God's love. But apart from his Word, we end up with one of two false ideas.

Either we think we've been good enough to deserve his love or we recognize we aren't able to earn his love and assume that it cannot be ours. If the Bible makes no other point, it shouts this one: God loves us!

His love had no beginning and is incredibly patient. All we need to do is respond, not try to earn what is freely offered. God has said in many ways, "I love you. I have demonstrated that love to you by all I've done for you. I have even sacrificed my Son, Jesus, to pay the price for what is unacceptable about you—your sin. Now, live because of my love. Respond to me; love me with your whole being; give yourself to me in thanksgiving, not as payment." Live life fully, in the freedom of knowing you are loved.

Daughter of Laban and the favorite wife of Jacob

Meets Jacob at a well

Genesis 29:9-12

As this conversation was going on, Rachel arrived with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherd.

And because she was his cousin, the daughter of his mother's brother, and because the sheep were his uncle's, Jacob went over to the well and rolled away the stone and watered his uncle's flock.

Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and tears came to his eyes. He explained that he was her cousin on her father's side, her aunt Rebekah's son. So Rachel quickly ran and told her father, Laban.

Jacob serves Laban for an additional seven years to obtain her as his wife

Genesis 29:15-30

Laban said to him, "You shouldn't work for me without pay just because we are relatives. How much do you want?"

Now Laban had two daughters: Leah, who was the oldest, and her younger sister, Rachel.

Leah had pretty eyes, but Rachel was beautiful in every way, with a lovely face and shapely figure. Since Jacob was in love with Rachel, he told her father, "I'll work for you seven years if you'll give me Rachel, your younger daughter, as my wife."

"Agreed!" Laban replied. "I'd rather give her to you than to someone outside the family."

So Jacob spent the next seven years working 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 contract," Jacob said to Laban. "Now give me my wife so we can be married."

So Laban invited everyone in the neighborhood to celebrate with Jacob at a wedding feast. That night, when it was dark, Laban took Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her. And Laban gave Leah a servant, Zilpah, to be her maid.

But when Jacob woke up in the morning—it was Leah! "What sort of trick is this?" Jacob raged at Laban. "I worked seven years for Rachel. What do you mean by this trickery?"

"It's not our custom to marry off a younger daughter ahead of the firstborn," Laban replied. [27] "Wait until the bridal week is over, and you can have Rachel, too—that is, if you promise to work another seven years for me."

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

It was the custom of the day for a man to present a dowry, or substantial gift, to the family of his future wife. This was to compensate the family for the loss of the girl. Jacob's dowry was not a material possession, for he had none to offer.

Instead he agreed to work seven years for Laban. But there was another custom of the land that Laban did not tell Jacob.

The older daughter had to be married first. By giving Jacob Leah and not Rachel, Laban tricked him into promising another seven years of hard work.

People often wonder if working a long time for something they desire is worth it. Jacob worked seven years to marry Rachel.

After being tricked, he agreed to work seven more years for her (although he did get to marry Rachel shortly after he married Leah)!

The most important goals and desires are worth working and waiting for. Movies and television have created the illusion that people have to wait only about an hour to solve their problems or get what they want.

Don't be trapped into thinking the same is true in real life. Patience is hardest when we need it the most, but it is the key to achieving our goals.

Jacob was enraged when he learned that Laban had tricked him. The deceiver of Esau was now deceived himself.

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.

Although Jacob was tricked by Laban, he kept his part of the bargain. There was more at stake than just Jacob's hurt.

There was Rachel to think about, as well as God's plan for his life. When we are tricked by others, keeping our part of the bargain may still be wise. Nursing our wounds or plotting revenge makes us unable to see from God's perspective.

Sterility of Rachel

Genesis 29:31

But because Leah was unloved, the Lord let her have a child, while Rachel was childless.

Today parents usually give their children names that sound good or have sentimental appeal.

But the Old Testament portrays a more dynamic use of names. Parents often chose names that reflected the situation at the time of the birth.

They sometimes hoped their children would fulfill the meaning of the names given them. Later the parents could look back and see if their grown children had lived up to their names.

Sometimes a person's name was changed because his or her character and name did not match. This happened to Jacob ("he grasps the heel," figuratively, "he deceives"), whose name was changed to Israel ("he struggles with God").

Jacob's character had changed to the point that he was no longer seen as a deceiver, but as a God-honoring man.

Rachel's maid bears children for her.

Genesis 30:1-8

When Rachel saw that she wasn't having any children, she became jealous of her sister. "Give me children, or I'll die!" she exclaimed to Jacob.

Jacob flew into a rage. "Am I God?" he asked. "He is the only one able to give you children!"

Then Rachel told him, "Sleep with my servant, Bilhah, and she will bear children for me."

So Rachel gave him Bilhah to be his wife, and Jacob slept with her. Bilhah became pregnant and presented him with a son. Rachel named him Dan, for she said, "God has vindicated me! He has heard my request and given me a son."

Then Bilhah became pregnant again and gave Jacob a second son.

Rachel named him Naphtali, for she said, "I have had an intense struggle with my sister, and I am winning!"

Each of the three great patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) had wives who had difficulty-conceiving children.

It is interesting to note how each man reacted to his wife's predicament. Abraham had relations with Sarah's maidservant in order to have his own child, thus introducing bitterness and jealousy into his family.

Isaac, by contrast, prayed to God when his wife was barren. God eventually answered his prayers, and Rebekah had twin sons.

Jacob, however, followed his grandfather's example and had children by his wives' maidservants, leading to sad and sometimes bitter consequences.

Leah and Rachel make plans.

Genesis 30:15

But Leah angrily replied, "Wasn't it enough that you stole my husband? Now will you steal my son's mandrake roots, too?"

Rachel said, "I will let him sleep with you tonight in exchange for the mandrake roots."

Rachel and Leah were locked in a cruel contest. In their race to have more children, they both gave their maidservants to Jacob as concubines.

Jacob would have been wise to refuse, even though this was an accepted custom of the day. The fact that a custom is socially acceptable does not mean it is wise or right.

You will be spared much heartbreak if you look at the potential consequences, to you or others, of your actions. Are you doing anything now that might cause future problems?

Rachel becomes the mother of Joseph.

Genesis 30:22-25

Then God remembered Rachel's plight and answered her prayers by giving her a child.

She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. "God has removed my shame," she said.

And she named him Joseph, for she said, "May the Lord give me yet another son."

Soon after Joseph was born to Rachel, Jacob said to Laban, "I want to go back home."

Eventually God answered Rachel's prayers and gave her a child of her own. In the meantime, however, she had given her maidservant to Jacob.

Trusting God when nothing seems to happen is difficult. But it is harder still to live with the consequences of taking matters into our own hands.

Resist the temptation to think God has forgotten you. Have patience and courage to wait for God to act.

Rachel becomes the mother of Benjamin

Genesis 35:16-18

Leaving Bethel, they traveled on toward Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). But Rachel's pains of childbirth began while they were still some distance away.

After a very hard delivery, the midwife finally exclaimed, "Don't be afraid—you have another son!" Rachel was about to die, but with her last breath she named him Ben-oni; the baby's father, however, called him Benjamin.

Rachel steals the household images (teraphim, legal deed) of her father

Genesis 31:4

Jacob called Rachel and Leah out to the field where he was watching the flocks,

Rachel and Leah agree to Jacob's plan for their departure

Genesis 31:14-19

Rachel and Leah said, "That's fine with us! There's nothing for us here—none of our father's wealth will come to us anyway.

He has reduced our rights to those of foreign women. He sold us, and what he received for us has disappeared.

The riches God has given you from our father are legally ours and our children's to begin with. So go ahead and do whatever God has told you."

So Jacob put his wives and children on camels. He drove the flocks in front of him—all the livestock he had acquired at Paddan-aram—and set out on his journey to the land of Canaan, where his father, Isaac, lived.

At the time they left, Laban was some distance away, shearing his sheep. Rachel stole her father's household gods and took them with her.

Laban searches for the images.

Genesis 31:33-35

Laban went first into Jacob's tent to search there, then into Leah's, and then he searched the tents of the two concubines, but he didn't find the gods. Finally, he went into Rachel's tent.

Rachel had taken the household gods and had stuffed them into her camel saddle, and now she was sitting on them. So although Laban searched all the tents, he couldn't find them.

"Forgive my not getting up, Father," Rachel explained. "I'm having my monthly period." So despite his thorough search, Laban didn't find them.

Do you remember feeling absolutely sure about something? Jacob was so sure that no one had stolen Laban's idols that he vowed to kill the offender.

Because Rachel took them, this statement put her safety in serious jeopardy. Even when you are absolutely sure about a matter, it is safer to avoid rash statements. Someone may hold you to them.

Rachel's death and burial

Genesis 35:18-20

Rachel was about to die, but with her last breath she named him Ben-oni; the baby's father, however, called him Benjamin.

So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). Jacob set up a stone monument over her grave, and it can be seen there to this day.

Rachel was buried a short distance from Bethlehem.

Genesis 48:7

As I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died in the land of Canaan. We were still on the way, just a short distance from Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). So with great sorrow I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath."

Lessons from her life:

Loyalty must be controlled by what is true and right
Love is accepted, not earned

Key verse:

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

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Holy Bible: King James Translation

Holy Bible: Living Bible Translation

Additional comments and charts are taken from: *Life Application Study Bible*. Illinois: Tyndale House 2007. Print

Matthew Henry Concise Bible Commentary