

PART FORTY-ONE

THE STORY OF JACOB: HIS EXPERIENCES IN PADDAN-ARAM

(Genesis 29:1—31:16)

The Biblical Account

1. Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the children of the east. 2 And he looked, and, behold, a well in the field, and, lo, three flocks of sheep lying there by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks; and the stone upon the well's mouth was great. 3 And thither were all the flocks gathered: and they rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep, and put the stone again upon the well's mouth in its place. 4 And Jacob said unto them, My brethren, whence are ye? And they said, Of Haran are we. 5 And he said unto them, Know ye Laban the son of Nabor? And they said, We know him. 6 And he said unto them, Is it well with him? And they said, It is well: and, behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep. 7 And he said, Lo, it is yet high day, neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together; water ye the sheep, and go and feed them. 8 And they said, We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together, and they roll the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep. 9 While he was yet speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them. 10 And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. 11 And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. 12 And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father.

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13 And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things. 14 And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him the space of a month. 15 And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be? 16 And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 And Leah's eyes were tender; but Rachel was beautiful and well-favored. 18 And Jacob loved Rachel; and he said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. 19 And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. 20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

21 And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her. 22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. 23 And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her. 24 And Laban gave Zilpah his handmaid unto his daughter Leah for a handmaid. 25 And it came to pass in the morning that, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? 26 And Laban said, It is not so done in our place, to give the younger before the first-born. 27 Fulfil the week of this one, and we will give thee the other also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. 28 And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to

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wife. 29 And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her handmaid. 30 And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

31 And Jehovah saw that Leah was hated, and he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. 32 And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Because Jehovah hath looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me. 33 And she conceived again, and bare a son: and said, Because Jehovah hath heard that I am hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon. 34 And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Now this time will my husband be joined unto me, because I have borne him three sons: therefore was his name called Levi. 35 And she conceived again, and bare a son: and she said, This time will I praise Jehovah: therefore she called his name Judah; and she left off bearing.

1. And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and she said unto Jacob, Give me children or else I die. 2 And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? 3 And she said, Behold, my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; that she may bear upon my knees, and I also may obtain children by her. 4 And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her. 5 And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son. 6 And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan. 7 And Bilhah Rachel's handmaid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son. 8 And Rachel said, With mighty wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali.

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9 *When Leah saw that she had left off bearing, she took Zilpah her handmaid, and gave her to Jacob to wife. 10 And Zilpah Leah's handmaid bare Jacob a son. 11 And Leah said, Fortunate! and she called his name Gad. 12 And Zilpah Leah's handmaid bare Jacob a second son. 13 And Leah said, Happy am I! for the daughters will call me happy: and she called his name Asher.*

14 *And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes. 15 And she said unto her, Is it a small matter that thou hast taken away my husband? and wouldest thou take away my sons' mandrakes also? And Rachel said, Therefore he shall lie with thee to-night for thy son's mandrakes. 16 And Jacob came from the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, Thou must come in unto me; for I have surely hired thee with my son's mandrakes. And he lay with her that night 17 And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived and bare Jacob a fifth son. 18 And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I gave my handmaid to my husband: and she called his name Issachar. 19 And Leah conceived again, and bare a sixth son to Jacob. 20 And Leah said, God hath endowed me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun. 21 and afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name Dinah. 22 And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. 23 And she conceived, and bare a son: and said, Goth hath taken away my reproach: 24 and she called his name Joseph, saying, Jehovah add to me another son.*

25 *And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country. 26 Give me my wives and my children for whom I have*

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served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service wherewith I have served thee. 27 And Laban said unto him, If now I have found favor in thine eyes, tarry: for I have divined that Jehovah hath blessed me for thy sake. 28 And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it. 29 And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle have fared with me. 30 For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it hath increased unto a multitude; and Jehovah hath blessed thee whithersoever I turned: and now when shall I prove for mine own house also? 31 And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me aught: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed thy flock and keep it. 32 I will pass through all thy flock to-day, removing from thence, every speckled and spotted one, and every black one among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire. 33 So shall my righteousness answer for me hereafter, when thou shalt come concerning my hire that is before thee: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and black among the sheep, that, if found with me, shall be counted stolen. 34 And Laban said, Behold, I would it might be according to thy word. 35 And he removed that day the he-goats that were ringstreaked and spotted, and all the she-goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the hand of his sons: 36 and he set three days' journey betwixt himself and Jacob: and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

37 And Jacob took him rods of fresh poplar, and of the almond and of the plane-tree; and peeled white streaks in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods. 38 And he set the rods which he had peeled over against the flocks in the gutters in the watering-troughs where the flocks came to drink; and they conceived when they came to drink. 39 And the flocks conceived before the

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rods, and the flocks brought forth ring-streaked, speckled, and spotted. 40 And Jacob separated the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the ringstreaked and all the black in the flock of Laban: and he put his own droves apart, and put them not unto Laban's flock. 41 And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger of the flock did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the flock in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods; 42 but when the flock were feeble, he put them not in: so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. 43 And the man increased exceedingly, and had large flocks, and maid-servants and men-servants, and camels and asses.

1. And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. 2. And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold it was not toward him as beforetime. 3. And Jehovah said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee. 4. And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock, 5. and said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as beforetime; but the God of my father hath been with me. 6. And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. 7. And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me. 8. If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the flock bare speckled; and if he said thus, The ringstreaked shall be thy wages; then bare all the flock ringstreaked. 9. Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me. 10. And it came to pass at the time that the flock conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the he-goats which leaped upon the flock were ringstreaked, speckled, and grizzled. 11. And the angel of God said unto me in the dream, Jacob: and I said, Here am I. 12. And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and

see: all the he-goats which leap upon the flock are ring-streaked, speckled, and grizzled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. 13 I am the God of Beth-el, where thou anointedst a pillar, where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy nativity. 14 And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? 15 Are we not accounted by him as foreigners? for he hath sold us, and hath also quite devoured our money. 16 For all the riches which God hath taken away from our father, that is ours and our children's: now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do.

1. *Jacob's Meeting with Rachel* (29:1-12). (1) Note that *Jacob went on his journey*: literally, he *lifted up his feet*: "a graphic description of traveling." "Inspired by new hopes and conscious of loftier aims than when he fled from Beersheba, the lonely fugitive departed from Bethel" (PCG, 356). After the night of the dream-vision, Jacob "resumed his way with a light heart and elastic step; for tokens of the Divine favor tend to quicken the discharge of duty (Neh. 8:10)" (Jamieson, CECG, 201). (2) "*The land of the children of the east.*" His destination was *Paddan-Aram* (in the A.S.V. and the R.S.V., *Padan-Aram* in the A.V.), the homeland of Rebekah (Gen. 25:20), and the abode of Laban (Gen. 28:2-7), called the "field of Aram" by Hosea (12:12; A.V., "country of Syria"). Arabia, Mesopotamia, and the entire region beyond the Euphrates, are by the Bible writers included under the general designation, "the East" (cf. Job 1:3, Judg. 6:3, 1 Ki. 4:30). In the present instance, Mesopotamia is the country especially referred to. *Paddan-Aram* was a district of Mesopotamia; it is described as the large plain surrounded by mountains, in which the town of Haran was situated. This region was closely associated

with the history of the ancient Hebrew people. Abraham's family had settled there, and thither the patriarch sent his steward, Eliezer, to secure a wife for Isaac (Gen. 24:10ff.; 25:20), and now we find Jacob going there to find a wife (and secondarily to escape the revenge threatened by Esau his brother). (3) *The well of Haran*. On arriving in the area, Jacob came upon a well "in the field," that is, in the open field for the use of flocks, and covered at the time of his arrival with a huge stone: "*and, lo, three flocks of sheep were lying there by it.*" This, we are told, was a rather common Oriental scene (cf. Gen. 24:11, Exo. 2:16). This well in the open country evidently was distinct from the well at which Eliezer's caravan halted. The latter was a well used by the village maidens, situated in front of the town, and approached by steps (cf. 24:16), but this was in the open field for use primarily by the flocks, and at the time of Jacob's arrival was covered with a huge stone.

"There is a rude etiquette (in the Eastern country) which requires the chiefs to be foremost in all hardships which they and their followers encounter. So also the fact that Laban's daughters were keeping the flocks, and Jacob's mother carrying water from the well, and other similar examples, do not contradict the customs of wealthy Eastern shepherds. And who that has traveled much in this country has not often arrived at a well in the heat of the day which was surrounded by numerous flocks of sheep waiting to be watered. I once saw such a scene in the burning plains of northern Syria. Half-naked, fierce-looking men were drawing up water in leather buckets; flock after flock was brought up, watered, and went away; and after all the men had ended their work, then several women and girls brought up their flocks and drew water for them. Thus it was with Jethro's daughters when Moses stood up and aided them; and thus, no doubt, it would have been with Rachel, if Jacob had not rolled away the

stone and watered her sheep. I have frequently seen wells closed up with large stones, though in this part of the country it is not commonly done, because water is not so scarce and precious. It is otherwise, however, in the dreary deserts. Cisterns are very generally covered over with a large slab, having a round hole in it large enough to let down the leather bucket or earthen jar. Into this hole a heavy stone is thrust, often such as to require the united strength of two or three shepherds to remove. The same is seen occasionally over *wells* of 'living water'; but where they are large and the supply abundant no such precaution is needed. It was either at one of these cisterns, or less abundant and more precious wells, that Jacob met Rachel; and being a stout man, nearly seventy years of age, he was able to remove the stone and water the flock" (Thomson, LB, 589). There is nothing in this story to indicate that the city of Haran was within proximity of this well: as a matter of fact, when Jacob accosted the shepherds, he learned that they had come *from Haran*. (It should be noted here that the distance which Jacob had traveled, from Bethel to this spot, was some 400 miles: this might rightly be called the spatial gap between the first two verses of this chapter.) Evidently Laban was not a city-dweller, but a nomad sheik; the life that is depicted here is everywhere that of the desert.

Jacob then inquired of the shepherds whether they knew Laban "the son of Nahor," *i.e.*, the *grandson*, Laban's father having been Bethuel, who, however, here, as in ch. 24, remains in the background, at least is passed over as a person of no importance in the family (cf. 24:53, 55). By inquiry of the shepherds, Jacob learned that his relatives in the vicinity of Haran were "well." This prompted him to inquire of these shepherds why they were idling there during the best part of the day, instead of watering their flocks and sending them back to pasture. "Jacob's object evidently was to get these shepherds out of the way, in

order that his introduction to his fair cousin might take place in private, and the conversation relative to their respective families might not be heard by strangers" (Jamieson, CECG, 202; also Lange, Murphy, Keil). Or was his attitude here due to "the prudent and industrious habit of mind which "shone forth so conspicuously in himself and which instinctively caused him to frown upon laziness and inactivity" (Starke, Bush, Kalisch)? "From the middle of v. 2 the words are parenthetical, the watering of the flocks not having taken place till Rachel had arrived (v. 9) and Jacob had uncovered the well (v. 10)" (Whitelaw, PCG, 356). The shepherds replied: "We cannot, until," etc., v. 8: "in order to prevent the consequences of too frequent exposure in places where water is scarce, it is not only covered and secured, but it is customary to have all the flocks collected around the well before the covering is removed in the presence of the owner, or one of his representatives; and it was for this reason that those who were reposing at the well of Haran with the three flocks were waiting the arrival of Rachel" (CECG, 202). "Jacob is puzzled by the leisurely ways of these Eastern herdsmen, whom he ironically supposes to have ceased work for the day. He is soon to show them how things should be done, careless of the conventions which they plead as an excuse" (ICCG, 382). *The content of chapters 29, 30, 31, put Jacob in the important years of his life, learning in the school of experience.*

V. 9—Note well Rachel *the shepherdess* (cf. Exo. 2:16). It is customary among the Arabs of Sinai, that the virgin daughters drive the herds to the pasture. "Thus Jacob had reached his objective at or near Haran, and another famous and much-loved Biblical romance that the reader must read for himself gets under way" (Kraeling, BA, 83). When Jacob saw Rachel for the first time, *he rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock* which she was shepherding. As this was a stone of

no slight dimensions, how account for Jacob's strength? Surely the speculation advanced by Dillman, Gunkel, *et al*, that this was "a feat of strength" which "belonged to a more primitive legend, in which Jacob figured as a giant" (cf. 32:26) is utterly absurd. "As Rachel came up in the meantime, he [Jacob] was so carried away by the feelings of relationship, possibly by a certain love at first sight, that he rolled the stone away from the well, watered her flock, and after kissing her, introduced himself as her cousin ("brother," *i.e.*, relation of her father) and Rebekah's son. What the other shepherds thought of all this, is passed over as indifferent to the purpose of the narrative, and the friendly reception of Jacob by Laban is related immediately afterwards" (BCOTP, 285). "The strong impression that the beautiful Rachel made upon her cousin Jacob is manifested in two ways. He thinks himself powerful enough to roll the stone from the mouth of the cistern out of love to her, and disregards the possibility that the trial might fail. At the same time, too, he boldly disregards the common rule of the shepherds present. Rachel's appearance made him eager, as formerly Rebekah's appearance even the old Eliezer, when he took out the bracelets before he knew her. The power of beauty is also recognized here upon sacred ground. Tuch thinks that the united exertion of the shepherds would have been necessary, and the narrative, therefore, boasts of a Samson-like strength in Jacob. But there is a difference between Samson-like strength and the heroic power inspired by love" (Lange, CDHCG, 528). To this Gosman adds (*ibid.*) "Perhaps, however, there was mingling with this feeling the joy which naturally springs from finding himself among his kindred, after the long, lonely and dangerous journey through the desert." "A great stone was over the well where the sheep were watered, and the men who were there were waiting for other shepherds to come and help them roll it aside: but Jacob went and rolled it aside

himself. Why? Because he had met Rachel; and in contact with Rachel, Jacob from the first moment was a different man" (Bowie, IBG, 697). "What of the fact that Jacob rolls away singlehanded a stone which required the united efforts of the rest? That is to be explained partly by the fact that he was naturally very strong, then partly by a mixture of two facts: his joy at finding his kinfolks and his joy at finding such a pretty cousin stirs him greatly and makes him strong. It may be that we have here a Biblical instance of love at first sight, although even that had more fitly find mention in connection with the next verse. But to talk only of that love and to make Jacob act like a young fellow who tries to impress his lady-love-by feats of strength is just a bit shallow by way of interpretation. Life, here, as usual, was rather a complex of various motives that surged strongly in Jacob's heart. The text by its threefold repetition of the phrase, 'of his mother's brother Laban,' shows on what his thoughts dwell at the moment. It has remained for Gunkel and men of his type to ascribe to the narrative the attempt to make out Jacob to be a man of Herculean strength, a gigantic fellow—fabulous elements in the story. Such conclusions in reference to Jacob are, to say the least, most fantastic and far-fetched" (Leupold, EG, 788). (Note here, v. 10, the threefold use of the phrase, "his mother's brother." Was this repetition for the purpose of putting the greatest possible stress on the fact that Jacob had met with his own relatives, with "his bone and his flesh" (v. 14)? "The threefold repetition of this phrase does not prove that Jacob acted in all this purely as a cousin. The phrase is the historian's, and Jacob had not yet informed Rachel of his name" (PCG, 357). According to the practice in Eastern lands, the term "brother" is extended to include such degrees of relationship as those of uncle, cousin, or nephew. In v. 12, for instance, "brother" is equal to nephew: cf. Gen. 14:16, 24:48).

Rachel's appearance on the scene stirs Jacob emotionally to the depths of his soul, and so impels him to roll away the stone, water the sheep, and then *kiss the young woman and burst into tears*, v. 11. Was this just a "cousinly" demonstration of affection? We can hardly think so. "Allowing for the fact that in those days, among a different people, a kiss of cousins was a proper greeting, there is little doubt that Rachel was taken quite unawares; and may well have been astonished, for as yet she knew nothing of this strong shepherd's identity. The more natural procedure would have been to explain first who he was, then to give the kiss of greeting. The reverse of the procedure indicates how his glad emotions ran away with him. No man will determine how much of this emotion was plain joy at seeing a cousin and how much incipient love for pretty Rachel, and Jacob himself, perhaps, at the moment would have been least able to make an accurate analysis of what his heart actually felt at the occasion. We can hardly go wrong in claiming to detect a trace of love at first sight" (EG, 788). The threefold expression, *mother's brother*, v. 10, "shows that he acted thus as cousin (rolling the stone from the well's mouth, etc.). As such he was allowed to kiss Rachel openly, as a brother his sister (Song of Sol. 8:1 [Knobel]). Yet his excitement betrays him even here, since he did not make known his relationship with her until afterwards" (Lange, CDHCG, 528). Moreover, the strength of his emotion caused him *to lift up his voice and weep*, that is, to weep openly, to burst into tears, "not a dishonorable or unmanly thing for the Oriental then or now, for he is a man inclined to make a greater display of his emotions" (EG, 789). Jacob wept, "partly for joy at finding his relatives (cf. 43:30; 45:2, 14, 15); partly in grateful acknowledgement of God's kindness in conducting him to his mother's brother's house" (PCG, 357). Note the Jewish "traditions" concerning this experience of Jacob: "*and wept*. That he

had not been fortunate enough to marry her in his youth (Sforno). Because he foresaw through the Holy Spirit that she would not be buried with him. Another reason is, because he came to her destitute, unlike Eliezer who had come for his mother laden with riches. The reason for his state of destitution was, Eliphaz, Esau's son pursued him to slay him on his father's orders; but overcome with pity he refrained, yet being unable to disobey his father, he compromised on Jacob's suggestion, by taking all that he had, since 'a poor man is regarded as dead' (Rashi)" (SC, 169). (These assumptions strike the present writer as "hitting a new high in absurdity"). We must agree with Skinner that Jacob wept aloud "'after the demonstrative fashion of the Orient,' tears of joy at the happy termination of his journey" (ICCG, 382). The following description of the scene seems to be complete and accurate: "The encounter between Jacob and the local shepherds is a model of effective characterization. The traveler is excited and talkative after his long journey, whereas the herdsmen are composed, almost taciturn: they act as if each word were just too much trouble. True to an ageless pattern, the prospective suitor is inspired to a display of superhuman prowess at the very first sight of Rachel. He also appears to be more affectionate than one would think proper under the circumstances. Yet Jacob's impulsive kiss—a detail that Calvin attributed to a redactional slip on the part of Moses (cf. von Rad)—need not to have been out of tune with the mores of the times. We know from the Nuzi records, which so often mirror conditions in the Har(r)an area—and hence also in the patriarchal circle—that women were subject to fewer formal restraints than was to be the norm later on in the Near East as a whole" (ABG, 223). At this point in the story Jacob revealed his identity to Rachel and "she ran and told her father." "When the identity of Jacob is revealed to Rachel, she makes haste to impart the welcome news to

her father, not like Rebekah to her mother. In fact, Rebekah's mother is not even mentioned in these narratives and may already have been dead" (EG, 789).

2. *Jacob's Double Marriage* (29:13-30).

The Meeting with Laban. When Laban heard of Jacob's presence, "*he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house.*" "That Jacob made the whole journey on foot might have caused suspicion in the mind of Laban. But he is susceptible of nobler feelings, as is seen from the subsequent narration (31:24), although he is generally governed by selfish motives" (Lange, CDHCG, 528). Skinner is not so lenient: "The effusive display of affection, perhaps not wholly disinterested, is characteristic of Laban, cf. 24:29ff." (ICCG, 382). And Jacob "told Laban all these things," that is, all the matters related in chapters 27 and 28: "if Jacob came as a godly man and one repentant of his recent deceit, as we have every reason to believe that he was, then he could not do otherwise than relate the direct and the more remote reasons for his coming" (EG, 790). At any rate, the recital conveyed to Laban full proof of the newcomer's identity, eliciting his response, "*Surely thou art my bone and my flesh.*" The relation as acknowledged by Laban here could hardly have been anything more than blood relationship (consanguinity). And so Jacob abode with Laban "the space of a month." By this time, in all likelihood, Laban "had discerned that in Jacob he would have a very competent shepherd. No doubt Jacob began to serve in this capacity at once. His faithfulness and industry were immediately apparent. A measure of selfishness enters into Laban's proposal without a doubt. But most likely it is a compound of honest and selfish motives. The good features in it are that he wishes to bind a relative to himself, especially as this relative is unusually competent. Besides, he wants to arrive at a definite understanding as soon as possible in order to

obviate future misunderstandings. Furthermore, it behooves him as the elder to steer toward a definite agreement. Each of these good motives had an admixture of selfishness, for Laban was basically a selfish and a tricky man. No doubt, he was planning to gain this competent young man as a son-in-law. Laban must have anticipated the proposal that was actually made. Perhaps Laban had noticed that Jacob had fallen violently in love, and now Laban hoped that if he let Jacob set the terms, Jacob's newborn love would incline to make a generous proposal" (EG, 791-792). It must be noted too that Jacob in explaining the cause of his journey (v. 13) must have explained how it was that his poor appearance had come about, in view of the fact that he was the son of the rich Isaac.

We now discover that Laban had *two* daughters, the elder named Leah, and the younger Rachel. We are told that Leah's eyes were "weak," that is, lacking the lustre (fire) regarded as the height of beauty in Oriental women. "Eyes which are not clear and lustrous: to the Oriental, but especially to the Arabian, black eyes, full of life and fire, clear and expressive, dark eyes, are considered the principal part of female beauty. Such eyes he loves to compare with those of the gazelle" (Lange, *ibid.*, p. 528). Leah's eyes were tender, but Rachel was beautiful and well-favored, beautiful as to her form, and beautiful as to her countenance: "thus the passage indirectly says that Leah's *form* was beautiful." We are told now unequivocally that Jacob *loved* Rachel; hence, not being in a position to pay the purchase price (the customary dowry, or presents), he offered to serve Laban seven years for her. (We must remember also that his situation with respect to Esau compelled him to remain for some time with Laban). "The assent on the part of Laban cannot be accounted for from the custom of selling daughters to husbands, for it cannot be shown that the purchase of wives was a general custom

at that time; but is to be explained solely on the ground of Laban's selfishness and avarice, which came out still more plainly afterwards" (BCOTP, 285-286). It must be recalled, however, that the bestowing of costly presents on the prospective bride and her parents was a custom of the time (cf. Eliezer and Rebekah and her parents, 24:53). So it was that Jacob served seven years for Rachel "*and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.*" The inspired writer tells us that Laban agreed to Jacob's proposal on the ground that he would rather give Rachel to him (even though this would be giving the younger first?) than to a stranger; a custom, we are told, that still prevails among the Bedouins, the Druses, and other Eastern tribes. "A perfectly worthless excuse for if this had really been the custom in Haran as in ancient India and elsewhere, he ought to have told Jacob before" (BCOTP, 286). "As to the particular term of seven years, it seems to have been regarded in early times as a full and complete period of service (cf. Exo. 21:2). Even after betrothal, the intercourse of the parties is restricted. The Arabs will not allow them to see each other, but the Hebrews were not so stringent, nor, perhaps, the people in Mesopotamia. At all events, with Jacob the time went rapidly away; for even severe and difficult duties become light when love is the spring of action" (CECG, 203).

Laban's Deceit. When the time of service was fulfilled, Jacob asked for his reward, that is, the woman he loved. Now "Laban's character begins to unfold itself as that of a man ostensibly actuated by the most honorable motives, but at heart a selfish schemer, always ready with some plausible pretext for his nefarious conduct (cf. vv. 19, 26). His apparently generous offer proves a well-laid trap for Jacob, whose love for Rachel has not escaped the notice of his shrewd kinsman. . . . Laban proceeds to the execution of his long meditated *coup*. He himself arranges the marriage feast (cf. Judg. 14:10), inviting *all the men*

of *the place*, with a view doubtless to his self-exculpation (v. 26). The substitution of Leah for Rachel was rendered possible by the custom of bringing the bride to the bridegroom veiled (24:65). To have thus gotten rid of the unprepossessing Leah for a handsome price, and to retain his nephew's services for another seven years (v. 27) was a master-stroke of policy in the eyes of a man like Laban" (Skinner, ICCG, 383). (Note again Gen. 24:65. Does this mean that Rebekah set this fashion for brides in the patriarchal households? The law of proper clothing under the Mosaic Law is found in Deut. 22:5). When Jacob protested indignantly this deception which his uncle had perpetrated, the latter hid behind the specious rationalization, "To give the younger before the first-born is not done in our place," that is, in our society: a clear case in which that which was *legally right* was at the same time *morally wrong*: the wrong was not in the fact but in the *deception*. (In SC, p. 171, v. 26 here is explained thus: "The people here would not let me keep my word," Rashi). It should be noted, in this connection, that Jacob had been very explicit in this matter v. 18, but to no avail. "Jacob was so very explicit because he knew Laban's cunning. Therefore he did not say simply, 'Rachel,' but 'Rachel *thy daughter*.' Nor could Laban deceive him by changing Leah's name to Rachel: it must be 'thy *younger daughter*.' But it was of no avail; Laban deceived him after all" (SC, 170). But Laban had no scruples about driving even a harder bargain, vv. 27, 28: Fulfil the seven days of the wedding festival for Leah, said he, and *we will give thee* ("then the townspeople will agree") *the other also*, that is, Rachel, with the understanding that you will serve me yet another seven years. "For the bridegroom to break up the festivities would, of course, be a gross breach of decorum, and Jacob has no alternative but to fall in with Laban's new proposal and accept Rachel on his terms" (ICCG, 384). "To satisfy Jacob he promised

to give him Rachel in a week if he would serve him seven years longer. To this Jacob consented, and eight days later Jacob was wedded to the woman he loved" (UBG, 638). Laban may have proposed this to "satisfy" Jacob, but he certainly did not lose anything by the deal. "Laban's success is for the moment complete; but in the alienation of both his daughters, and their fidelity to Jacob at a critical time (31:14ff.), he suffered a just retribution for the unscrupulous assertion of his paternal rights" (ICCG, 384).

"Vv. 21-30: Jacob is betrayed into marrying Leah, and on consenting to serve another seven years obtains Rachel also. He claims his expected reward when due. 22-24: *Made a feast*. The feast in the house of the bride's father seems to have lasted seven days, at the close of which the marriage was completed. But the custom seems to have varied according to the circumstances of the bridegroom. Jacob had no house of his own to which to conduct the bride. *In the evening*: when it was dark. The bride was also closely veiled, so that it was easy for Laban to practise this piece of deceit. *A handmaid*. It was customary to give the bride a handmaid, who became her confidential servant (24:59, 61). 25-27: In the morning Jacob discovers that Laban has overreached him. This is the first retribution Jacob experiences for the deceitful practices of his former days. He expostulates with Laban, who pleads the custom of the country. It is still the custom not to give the younger in marriage before the older, unless the latter be deformed or in some way defective. It is also not unusual to practise the very same trick that Laban now employed, if the suitor is so simple as to be off his guard. Jacob, however, did not expect this at his relative's hands, though he had himself taken part in proceedings equally questionable. *Fulfil the week of this*. If this was the second day of the feast celebrating the nuptials of Leah, Laban requests him to complete the week,

and then he will give him Rachel also. If, however, Leah was fraudulently put upon him at the close of the week of feasting, then Laban in these words proposes to give Rachel to Jacob on fulfilling another week of nuptial rejoicing. The latter is in the present instance more likely. In either case the marriage of Rachel is only a week after that of Leah. 28-30: Rather than lose Rachel altogether, Jacob consents to comply with Laban's terms. Rachel was the wife of Jacob's affections and intentions. The taking of a second wife in the lifetime of the first was contrary to the law of nature, which designed one man for one woman (2:21-25). But the marrying of a sister-in-law was not yet incestuous, because no law had yet been made on the subject. Laban gives a handmaid to each of his daughters. To Rebekah his sister had been given more than one (24:61). Bondslaves had been in existence long before Laban's time (16:1). *And loved also Rachel more than Leah.* This proves that even Leah was not unloved. At the time of his marriage Jacob was eighty-four years of age; which corresponds to half that age according to the present average of human life" (Murphy, MG, 393).

Was this a case of what is known as *beena* marriage, that is, one in which the husband becomes a member of the wife's kin? Generally speaking, the narrative as a whole does not support the view that it was. Jacob did, of course, attach himself in a way to Laban's household; however, it does not follow that the former did not set up a house of his own. His remaining with Laban was due to his inability to pay the *bridal gift* otherwise than by *personal* service. As soon as the contract expired (by fulfilment) Jacob pleaded his right to "provide for his own house" (30:30). On the other hand, Laban certainly claimed the right to detain his daughters and to continue treating them as members of his own family (31:26, 43). It is doubtful, however, that "the claim was more than an extreme assertion of the right of a powerful family to

protect its female relatives even after marriage.” Concerning the dowry (Heb. *mohar*, price paid for a wife: Gen. 34:12, Exod. 22:17, 1 Sam. 18:25; *zebed*, a gift, Gen. 30:20): “In arranging for marriage, as soon as the parental consent was obtained, the suitor gave the bride a betrothal or bridal gift, as well as presents to her parents and brothers. In more ancient times the bride received a portion only in exceptional cases (Josh. 15:18 sq., 1 Kik 9:16). The opinion that the Israelites were required to buy their wives from the parents or relatives seems to be unfounded. The *mohar* in the Old Testament was not ‘purchase money,’ but the *bridal gift* which the bridegroom, after receiving the bride’s assent, gave to *her*, not to the parents or kinsfolk” (UBD, 274). “In early O.T. times wives were selected for sons by the heads of tribes or families, as Abraham for Isaac (Gen. 25:20), Isaac for Jacob (28:6). Betrothal was effected by the payment of the *mohar* (usually 50 shekels) to the father of the prospective bride, not as a purchase price, but as a compensation for the loss of the daughter (Gen. 34:12, 1 Sam. 18:25); by the presentation of substantial gifts to the girl (Gen. 34:12, Exo. 21:7, 22:15-17; Deut. 22:28ff.; Ruth 4:5, 10); or by the groom’s agreeing to serve the bride’s father for a period of time, as Jacob served Laban for Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29:18, 20, 25, 30). The bride often brought considerable means to the new home, e.g., Abigail (1 Sam. 25:42). The recently discovered Eshnunna Law Code current in Babylon probably 3800 years ago (the oldest law code yet known) required the payment of ‘bride money’ by the prospective groom, and a refund of the same plus 20% interest in case the bride died” (HBD, 421). It should be noted that the marriage of both sisters to Jacob took place about the same time; evidently such a connection was then permissible, although later prohibited (Lev. 18:18). We find in this narrative, not only bigamy, but polygamy, and polygamy on a larger scale than has hitherto appeared

in Genesis. These marriages, however, are not to be judged by the rules of the Christian, or even if the Mosaic, code of morality. "For although the will of the Creator was sufficiently indicated by the union of a single pair at first, a clear definite marriage law, specifying the prohibited degrees of consanguinity had not been enacted, and the idea of incest, therefore, must be excluded" (CECG, 203).

The Problem of Polygamy. According to Scripture, marriage is a divinely ordained institution, designed to form a permanent union between the male and female, *i.e.*, the conjugal union, which is the basis of all social order. (Gen. 1:27-28; Matt. 5:32, 19:9). The *physiological* sex union in marriage has a twofold function: *procreative*, to reproduce the species, and *unitive*, to enhance the intimacy of the conjugal union. Because the human infant is the most helpless, and the most helpless for the longest time, by comparison with animal offspring, it stands in greater need of parental protection, affection and training; hence the permanent monogamous relation that provides for the satisfaction of all these essential human needs, both of children and parents, is obviously the divinely ordained relationship, as the Bible clearly teaches. However, at an early period the original law as made known to our first parents was violated, and the familial institution corrupted, by the degeneracy of their descendants, and concubinage and polygamy became rather common (cf. Gen. 4:19-24). The patriarchs themselves took more than one wife. Abraham, at Sarah's prompting took her maid as his subordinate wife, and later a second wife, Keturah. Jacob was inveigled, through Laban's duplicity, to take Leah first, and then Rachel, to whom he had been betrothed, as wives; and later, through the rivalry of the two sisters, he took both of their handmaids and begat sons by them. "From these facts it has been inferred that polygamy was not wrong in ancient times, nor at all opposed to the divine law as revealed to the Jews. But this is an unwarranted

conclusion. It is true, indeed, respect being had to the state of religious knowledge, and the rude condition of society, and the views prevalent in the world, that the practice could not infer, in the case of individuals, the same amount of criminality as would necessarily adhere to it now, amid the clear light of Gospel times. But still all along it was a departure from the divine law. . . . Christ taught the divine origin and sacredness of this institution. It is more than filial duty; it is unifying; the husband and wife become one through the purity and intensity of mutual love; common interests are necessitated by common affection (Matt. 19:5-6, Eph. 5:31); only one single ground for divorce is lawful (Matt. 19:9)" (UBD, 697-701). That ground is, of course, unfaithfulness to the marriage vow (Matt. 5:32, 19:9). Departures from the original standard, even under the Old Testament, were tolerated, but never with God's complete approval (cf. Acts 17:30, Matt. 19:8). "The Mosaic law aimed at mitigating, rather than removing evils which were inseparable from the state of society in that day. Its enactments were directed: (1) to the discouragement of polygamy; (2) to obviate the injustice frequently consequent upon the exercise of the rights of a father or a master; (3) to bring divorce under some restriction; and (4) to enforce purity of life during the maintenance of the matrimonial bond" (UBG, 697). (For all aspects of the problems of the dowry, marriage, concubinage, divorce, etc., the reader is referred to Unger's *Bible Dictionary*, in the opinion of the present writer, one of the most comprehensive and reliable in its field.

V. 30—Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. There can be little doubt that this affection for Rachel was truly love at first sight, and love of the most ardent kind. However, it is not a matter of surprise to learn that Rachel should occupy a place in his affection far above that of her sister, who, after all, must have been a willing accomplice

in the treacherous plot to trap him into a marriage with her. Subsequent developments seem to establish the fact that Leah was more than willing to become Jacob's bride. As a matter of fact, her affection for him seems to have engendered a rivalry between the two sisters to be instrumental in providing for Jacob a numerous progeny. Jacob's love for Rachel, on the other hand, is rightly described as "more like what is read in the pages of romance than what is paralleled in real life."

Jacob Suffers Retributive Justice. "We have here an illustration of how a man must reap as he has sown. The deceit which Jacob practiced on Esau was returned to him by Laban, who practiced the same kind of deceit. For all of that, however, Jacob was under the covenant care of God and did not come out a loser in the end. Yet in later years Jacob's own sons practiced on him a similar form of deceit in connection with Joseph's abduction (37:32-36)" (HSB, 48). "V. 23—Leah being veiled, as ch. 24:65, and it being dark, Jacob could not discern the fraud. Thus he who beguiled his brother, and imposed on his dim-sighted father, was now, in like manner, beguiled himself. V. 25—By bitter experience Jacob was now taught how painful, how harrowing, to the feelings of others, was the cunning and duplicity which he himself had practised on his father and brother. From this moment to the day of his death he continued to be the victim of deception and falsehood. Retributive justice seems to have followed him until, in God's providence, it completely purified him" (SIBG, 262). Laban's deception in first palming off Leah on Jacob instead of giving him Rachel, whom he wanted to marry, was the first retribution Jacob experienced for the deceitful practises of his former days. He had, through fraud and cunning, secured the place and blessing of Esau—he, the younger, in the place of the elder; now, by the same deceit, the elder is put upon him in the place of the younger. What a man sows that shall he also reap.

Sin is often punished with sin" (Gosman, BCOTP, 529). (Retributive justice, in Greek thought, was personified by the name of Nemesis. That Nemesis finally overtakes and punishes inordinate human pride and ambition was the thesis of the histories of Herodotus, who is known as "the father of history." The same idea is explicit in Scripture: cf. Num. 32:23, Ezek. 21:27, Rom. 2:5-11, Prov. 12:14, Gal. 6:7, 1 Tim. 5:24, Rev. 20:11-15).

V. 30—Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban yet another seven years for her. "A *great stone* was over the well where the sheep were watered, and the men who were there were waiting for other shepherds to come and help them roll it aside; but Jacob went and rolled it aside himself. Why? Because he had met Rachel; and in contact with Rachel, Jacob from the first moment was a different man. He kissed her first as his kinsman, but quickly he fell in love with her. He said to Laban, her father, that he would serve seven years for her; *and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.* In the light of words like these, Jacob's remoteness in time and place passes like a shadow, and he is at one with all lovers of every age in the timeless wonder of the meeting of man and maid. Moreover, Jacob showed himself to be an individual to a degree that was notable in that period when family pressure was generally so controlling. His father, Isaac, had his bride picked out for him. Laban tried to foist upon Jacob the daughter he wanted Jacob to take; but in spite of that deception, Jacob would not be turned from the girl to whom his heart went out. He served for her not only the first seven years of his agreement, but seven years more; and Rachel was henceforth the center of his life's devotion. In the whole story of his career, which sometimes was far from beautiful, this relationship with Rachel shines like a shaft of sunlight, sifting with a lovely radiance through a broken, cloudy sky" (IBG, 697).

The nuptial feast generally lasted a week (Judg. 14:12, Job 11:19); after this week had passed, Jacob received Rachel also: that is, two wives in eight days. To each of his daughters Laban gave one maid-servant to wait upon her; fewer, it may be noted, than Bethuel gave to his daughter Rebekah (24:61). "The difference between the house at Haran and Isaac's house at Beersheba, appears from this, that Laban entangled Jacob in polygamy. And even in this case the evil consequences of polygamy appear: envy, jealousy, contention, and an increased sensuality. Nevertheless, Jacob's case is not to be judged according to the later Mosaic law, which prohibited the marrying of two sisters at the same time (Lev. 18:18). Calvin, in his decision, makes no distinction between the times and the economies, a fact which Keil justly appeals to, and insists upon, as bearing against his harsh judgment (that it was a case of incest)" (BCOTP, 533). "Isaac's prejudice, that Esau was the chosen one, seems to renew itself somewhat in Jacob's prejudice that he must gain by Rachel the lawful heir. The more reverent he appears therefore, in being led by the Spirit of God, who taught him, notwithstanding all his preference for Joseph, to recognize in Judah the real line of the promise" (*ibid.*, 533; cf. Gen. 49:10). "Jacob's service for Rachel presents us a picture of bridal love equaled only in the same development and its poetic beauty in the Song of Solomon. It is particularly to be noted that Jacob, however, was not indifferent to Rachel's infirmities (30:2), and even treated Leah with patience and indulgence, though having suffered from her the most mortifying deception" (*ibid.*, p. 532). "This bigamy of Jacob must not be judged directly by the Mosaic law, which prohibits marriage with two sisters at the same time (Lev. 18:18), or set down as incest, since there was no positive law on the point in existence then. At the same time, it is not to be justified on the ground, that the blessing of God made it the means of the fulfilment

of His promise, viz., the multiplication of the seed of Abraham into a great nation. Just as it had arisen from Laban's deception and Jacob's love, which regarded outward beauty alone, and therefore from sinful infirmities, so did it become in its results a true school of affliction to Jacob, in which God showed to him, by many a humiliation, that such conduct as his was quite unfitted to accomplish the divine counsels, and thus condemned the ungodliness of such a marriage, and prepared the way for the subsequent prohibition in the law" (BCOTP, 287).

Certainly it should be noted here, that it was a son born to Jacob by Leah who became the ancestor of Messiah. That son was Judah; hence Messiah is named the Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5, cf. Gen. 49:9-10): "Leah's election is founded upon Jehovah's grace. Without any doubt, however, she was fitted to become the ancestress of the Messianic Line, not only by her apparent humility, but also by her innate powers of blessing, as well as by her quiet and true love for Jacob. The fulness of her life becomes apparent in the number and in the power of her children; and with these, therefore, a greater strength of the mere natural life predominates. Joseph, on the other hand, the favorite son of the wife loved with a bridal love, is distinguished from his brethren, as the separated (ch. 49) among them, as a child of a nobler spirit, whilst the import of his life is not as rich for the future as that of Judah. . . . The history of Jacob's and Leah's union sheds a softening light upon even the less happy marriages, which may reconcile us to them, for this unpleasant marriage was the cause of his becoming the father of a numerous posterity; for it, indeed, proceeded the Messianic Line; leaving out of view the fact that Leah's love and humility could not remain without a blessing upon Jacob. The fundamental condition of a normal marriage is doubtless bride love. We notice in our narrative, however, how wonderfully divine grace may change

misfortune, even in such instances, into real good. God is especially interested in marriage connections, because He is thus interested in the coming generations" (Lange, CDHCG, 533). The fact must not be overlooked, however, that, as we have stated heretofore several times, the manifestations of Divine grace are the products of the Divine foreknowledge of man's free choices; in this particular case, the foreknowledge of the blessing which Leah's humility and love would bring into Joseph's life and to his progeny, no small part of which was the foreknowledge of Judah's intercession with Joseph for the life of young Benjamin and the well-being of his aged father Jacob: one of the most touching incidents in the lives of the patriarchs (Gen. 44:18-34).

Jacob—Man of Many Wrestlings. "Jacob here appears clearly as the man of the wrestlings of faith and as the patriarch of hope. However prudent, it happens to him as to Oedipus in the Greek tragedy. Oedipus solved the riddle of the Sphinx, yet is blind, and remains blind in relation to the riddle of his own life. Laban cheated him, as his sons did afterward, and he is punished through the same transgression of which he himself was guilty. Jacob is to struggle for everything—for his birthright, his Rachel, his herds, the security of his life, the rest of his old age, and for his grave. But in these struggles he does not come off without many transgressions, from which, however, as God's elect, he is liberated by severe discipline. He, therefore, is stamped as a man of hope by the divine providence. As a fugitive he goes to Haran; as a fugitive he returns home. Seven years he hopes for Rachel; twenty years he hopes for a return home; to the very evening of his life he is hoping for the recovery of Joseph, his lost son in Sheol; even whilst he is dying upon Egyptian soil, he hopes for a grave in his native country. His Messianic hope, however, in its full development, rises above all these instances, as is evident in the three chief

stages in his life of faith: Bethel, Peniel, and the blessing of his sons upon his death-bed. His life differs from that of his father Isaac in this: that with Isaac the quickening experiences fall more in the earlier part of his life, but with Jacob they occur in the later half; and that Isaac's life passes on quietly, whilst storms and trials overshadow, in a great measure, the pilgrimage of Jacob. The Messianic suffering, in its typical features, is already seen more plainly in him than in Isaac and Abraham; but the glorious exaltation corresponds also to the deeper humiliation" (CDHCG, 532).

3. *Jacob's Family* (29:31—30:24).

Basic Facts: (1) Jacob became the father of twelve sons and one daughter. "The inferior value set on a daughter is displayed in the bare announcement of her birth." (2) The assignment of the names here by the respective mothers themselves is determined by the circumstances. (3) The entire history of the birth of these sons is reflected in their names. (Their names all reappear in Jacob's Blessing, ch. 49). (4) Most significant of all, in the birth of these twelve sons, we have the basis for the future development of the Old Covenant in the history of the twelve tribes, especially in their organization into the Hebrew theocracy at Sinai and occupancy of the Land of Promise. All this was, of course, prophetic of the strictly spiritual norms and institutions of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34; Hebrews, chs. 7, 8, 9, 10; John 1:17; 2 Cor., ch. 3; Col. 2:8-16; Gal. 3:15-29; 4:21-31; Eph. 2:11-22, etc.). "The account of the jealousy and contention between Leah and Rachel (Gen. 29:31, 30:1-2), and the subsequent sinfulness and jealousy of the sons of Jacob (Gen. 34:25, 30; 35:22; 37:8, 18; 49:5-6) show vividly the fruits of polygamy. For the one man, Adam, God made the one woman, Eve. And why only one? Because He sought a godly seed (Mal. 2:15). Broken and ungodly homes produce ungodly offspring" (OTH, 101).

Leah's first four sons, 29:31-35. Jacob's weakness showed itself even after his double marriage in the fact that he loved Rachel more than Leah ("hated," in Leah's case, meant less loved; not so much "hated" as "rejected" or "unloved": ABG, 230). When Yahweh saw that Leah was thus less loved, He "opened her womb." "The birth of Leah's first four sons is specifically referred to Jehovah's grace; first, because Jehovah works above all human thoughts, and regards that which is despised and of little account (Leah was the despised one, the one loved less, comparatively the one hated, Deut. 21:15); secondly, because among her first four sons were found the natural first-born (Reuben), the legal first-born (Levi), and the Messianic first-born (Judah); even Simeon, like the others, is given by Jehovah in answer to prayer. Jacob's other sons are referred to Elohim, not only by Jacob and Rachel (30:2, 6, 8), but also by Leah (vv. 18, 20) and by the narrator himself (v. 17), for Jacob's sons in their totality sustain not only a theocratic but also a universal destination. *He opened her womb*, that is, God "made her fruitful in children, which should attach her husband to her. But theocratic husbands did not esteem their wives only according to their fruitfulness (cf. 1 Sam., ch. 1)." Leah named her firstborn *Reuben*, that is, *Behold, a son!* "Joyful surprise at Jehovah's compassion. From the inference she makes: *now, therefore, my husband will love me*, her deep, strong love for Jacob, becomes apparent, which had no doubt, also, induced her to consent to Laban's deception." *Simeon (he has heard)*, her second son, "receives his name from her faith in God as a prayer-answering God." *Levi (he will cling, joined, reconciler, etc.)*. "The names of the sons are an expression of her enduring powerful experience, as well as of her gradual resignation. After the birth of the first one, she hopes to win, through her son, Jacob's love in the strictest sense. After the birth of the second, she hoped to be put on a footing of equality

with Rachel, and to be delivered from her disregard. After the birth of the third one she hoped at least for a constant affection. At the birth of the fourth she looks entirely from herself to Jehovah," hence the name of the fourth, *Judah* (*I shall praise, or just praised*). (Quotes above are from Lange, CDHCG, 529, 530). "The eye of the Lord is upon the sufferer. It is remarkable that both the narrator and Leah employ the proper name of God, which makes the performance of promise a prominent feature of his character. This is appropriate in the mouth of Leah, who is the mother of the promised seed. *That Leah was hated*—less loved than Rachel. He therefore recompenses her for the want of her husband's affection by giving her children, while Rachel was barren. *Reuben*—behold a son. *The Lord hath looked on my affliction*. Leah had qualities of heart, if not of outward appearance, which commanded esteem. She had learned to acknowledge the Lord in all her ways. *Simeon*—answer. She had prayed to the Lord, and this was her answer. *Levi*—union, the reconciler. Her husband could not, according to the prevailing sentiments of those days, fail to be attached to the mother of three sons. *Judah*—praised. Well may she praise the Lord, for this is the ancestor of the promised seed. It is remarkable that the wife of priority, but not of preference, is the mother of the seed in whom all nations are to be blessed. Levi the *reconciler* is the father of the priestly tribe. Simeon is attached to Judah. Reuben retires into the background. "On the etymology of the proper names of this and of the next chapter it has been remarked: 'the popular etymologies attached to the names are here extremely forced and sometimes unintelligible' (Skinner). Such a statement is the result of the critic's confusion. He acts on the assumption that these etymologies are to be scholarly efforts based on a careful analysis of Hebrew roots according to the Hebrew lexicon. Whereas, in reality, these are not etymologies at all but expres-

sions wrought into the form of proper names, expressing the sentiments or the hopes associated with the birth of these sons. So someone or even the mother may have remarked at the birth of the first-born, 'Look, a son,' *Reu-bhen.*' What is there 'forced' or 'unintelligible' about such a name? The added explanation as to what further thoughts Leah associated with this name 'Reuben' do, indeed, not grow out of the words, 'look, a son,' but they lay bare the inmost thoughts of her heart. Leah knows God as 'Yahweh,' an index of fine spiritual understanding and faith, and ascribes to him her fertility. She sees that Yahweh delights in being compassionate toward them that have 'affliction,' and hers was a state of affliction; and she anticipates that her husband will love her more." As for the second son Simeon, "Yahweh heard (*shama*), so she calls him 'hearing.'" "So in Hebrew the idea becomes more readily apparent. Leah implies that she has asked for this child in prayer. Again she ascribes the son to the graciousness of 'Yahweh.' She must have been a woman of faith." With respect to the name Levi, "here the play on words centers upon the root *lawab* which in the passive signifies 'grow attached to.' How poor Leah must have thirsted for the love that was denied her! Leah now stands on pretty firm ground; any man would be grateful for three healthy sons: especially are men in the Orient minded thus." As for the fourth, *Judab* (Praised), "apparently her hopes are by this time realized: she is no longer disregarded or loved but little. But in a sense of true devoutness she lets all praise be given to Yahweh and here contents herself with pure praise" (Leupold, EG, 801-803).

Rachel's adopted sons, 30:1-8. A rather passionate scene, in which Rachel does not appear to advantage by any means. She even vented her spleen on Jacob: "*Give me children, or else I die.*" Certainly not, I will take my life; but rather, I die from humiliation or dejection.

Driven by jealousy of her sister, she yields her place to her maid, Bilhah. "Her vivid language sounds not only irrational, but even impious, and therefore she rouses also the anger of Jacob" (Lange). "Her petulant behavior recalls that of Sarah (16:5), but Jacob is less patient than Abraham, as he exclaims, in substance: *Why ask me to play God? You know that God alone controls the issues of life and death* (cf. Deut. 32:39, 1 Sam. 2:6). In Freudian terms, Rachel was "projecting" her own weakness upon her husband, a favorite avocation of humankind generally (cf. Gen. 3:12, 13). (Cf. Gen. 50:19, 2 Ki. 5:7). "Rachel becomes impatient of her barrenness and jealous of her sister, and unjustly reproaches her husband, who indignantly rebukes her. God, not he, has withheld children from her. She does what Sarah had done before her (16:2, 3), gives her handmaid to her husband. No express law yet forbade this course, though nature and Scripture by implication did (2:23-25)" (Murphy, MG, 397). Since Jacob had already sired offspring by Leah, Rachel could hardly have doubted his ability to do so by her, and must have recognized that the fault was with her. But she was unwilling to face the facts and tried to palm off the responsibility for the situation on Jacob. V. 3—that she, Bilhah, "*may bear upon my knees*, and I also may obtain children by her." (cf. 50:19, 23; 2 Ki. 5:7). "From the fact that children were *taken upon the knees*, they were recognized either as adopted children (50:23), or as the fruit of their own bodies (Job 3:12)" (Lange). "An illusion to the primitive ceremony of adoption, which here simply means that Bilhas's children will be acknowledged by Rachel as her own" (Skinner). "To place a child on one's knees is to acknowledge it as one's own; cf. the Hurro-Hittite tale of Appu. . . . This act is normally performed by the father. Here, however, it is of primary interest to the adoptive mother who is intent on establishing her legal right to the child" (Speiser, ABG, 230). The

ceremony may be traced to a widespread custom, according to which, "in lawful marriage, the child is actually brought forth on the father's knees. . . . Then it became a symbol of the legitimization of a natural child, and finally a form of adoption generally" (ICCG, 386). (Cf. Job 3:12; *Iliad* 9:455ff.; *Odyssey* 19, 401ff.; Gen. 50:23). In the case before us, "the putative mother names the adopted child." Rachel named Bilhah's first son *Dan* ("judge"; "*dananni*", "he has done justice to me"), *i.e.*, God had procured justice for her, hearkened to her voice and removed the reproach of childlessness. Bilhah's second son: Rachel named him *Naphtali* ("wrestlings," "wrestlings of prayer she had wrestled with Leah"). "The wrestlings of God could only be in the wrestlings of prayer, as we afterward see from Jacob's wrestlings, through which he becomes Israel" (Lange, 530; cf. Gen. 32:24-25). "In reality, however, with God Himself, who seems to have restricted His mercy to Leah alone" (Delitzsch). "Leah, who had been forced upon Jacob against his inclination, and was put by him in the background, was not only proved by the four sons whom she had bore to him in the first years of their marriage, to be the wife provided for Jacob by Elohim, the ruler of human destiny; but by the fact that these four sons formed the real stem of the promised numerous seed, she was proved still more to be the wife selected by Jehovah, in realization of His promise, to be the tribe-mother of the greater part of the covenant nation. But this required that Leah herself should be fitted for it in heart and mind, that she should feel herself to be the handmaid of Jehovah, and give glory to the covenant God for the blessing of children, or see in her children actual proofs that Jehovah had accepted her and would bring to her the affection of her husband. It was different with Rachel, the favorite and therefore high-minded wife. Jacob should give her what God alone could give. The faithfulness and blessing of the covenant God were still

hidden from her. Hence she resorted to such earthly means as procuring children through her maid, and regarded the desired result as the answer of God, and a victory in her contest with her sister. For such a state of mind, the term *Elohim*, God the sovereign ruler, was the only fitting expression" (BCOTP, 288-289). "But how can Rachel speak of a victory over her sister rich in children? Leah has left bearing, while Bilhah her maid, begins to bear; at the same time, Rachel includes as much as possible in her words in order to overpersuade herself. [She believes she has overcome—Gosman]. Hence, still, at Joseph's birth, she could say: Now (not before) God has taken away my reproach" (Lange, CDHCG, 530; cf. 30:23-24).

Leah's adopted sons, 30:9-13. Leah, however, was not content with the blessing of four sons bestowed on her by Yahweh. The means employed by Rachel to retain the favor of her husband made her jealous, and this jealousy moved her to resort to the same device, viz., that of giving her handmaid Zilpah to Jacob for the begetting of adopted sons. Jacob begat two sons by Zilpah. Leah named the first one Gad (*good fortune*, or *good fortune has come*). She named the second *Asher* (the *happy one*, or the *bringer of happiness*). "Leah is still less excusable than Rachel, since she could oppose her own four sons to the two adopted sons of Rachel. However, the proud and challenging assertions of Rachel seem to have determined her to a renewed emulation; and Jacob thought that it was due to the equal rights of both to consent to the fourth marriage. That Leah now acts no longer as before, in a pious and humble disposition, the names which she calls her adopted sons clearly prove" (Lange, *ibid.*, 530) (It is worth noting that *Gad* was the name of an Aramean and Phoenician god of Luck (*Tyche*, cf. Isa. 65:11. It is possible also that the name *Asher* is historically related to

the Canaanite goddess Asherah, consort of El in Ras Shamra texts.)

Leah's last two sons, 30:14-20. We have here what might be called a primitive tradition. These occur in Scripture, simply as matters of fact, historically; even though they may savor of magic they serve to give us the background against which the careers of the patriarchs are portrayed. It must be understood that *the mere recording of magical theories and practices, and popular superstitions, of any period, as historical facts, does not mean that they are Biblically sanctioned.* According to the story of Gen. 30:14-16, Reuben, when a boy of some four or five years of age, brought to his mother a plant found in the fields, of the kind known as *Mandragora officinarum*. This is described as a narcotic, laxative perennial of the nightshade family, related to the potato and the tomato. Out of the small white-and green flowers of this plant, according to the Song of Solomon 7:13, there grows at the time of the wheat harvest, yellow, strong, but sweet-smelling apples, of the size of a nutmeg. These were thought to promote fruitfulness. "The fruit of the plant is still considered in the East to have aphrodisiac properties" (ABG, 231), hence the common designation, *love-apples*. Theophrastus (who took over the Lyceum after the death of Aristotle) tells us that love-potions were prepared from the plant's roots. It was held in such high esteem by the ancients that the goddess of love, in some areas, was known as Mandragoritis. Mandrakes are still used by Arabs as a means of promoting child-bearing. "As for mandrakes themselves something may be said. Reuben gathered them in wheat-harvest, and it is then that they are still found ripe and eatable on the lower ranges of Lebanon and Hermon, where I have most frequently seen them. The apple becomes of a very pale yellow color, partially soft, and of an insipid, *sickish* taste. They are said to produce dizziness; but I have seen people eat them without experiencing any

such effect. The Arabs, however, believe them to be exhilarating and stimulating, even to insanity, and hence the name *tuffah el jan*—‘apples of the jan’” (Thomson, LB, 577).

The incident of the mandrakes shows how thoroughly the two wives were “carried away by constant jealousy of the love and attachment of their husband.” When Rachel requested that Leah give her some of the mandrakes, the latter bitterly upbraided her with not being content to have withdrawn (alienated?) her husband from her, but now wanting to get possession of the mandrakes which her little son had brought in from the field. It would seem that peculiar, even paradoxical, emotions are involved in the actions of these two women. It should be remembered that Leah is said to have left off bearing, after the birth of Judah (29:35). Was she now fearful that Rachel might now, with the help of the mandrakes, excel her in prolificness? “It is obviously the design [of the narrator] to bring out into prominence the fact that Leah became pregnant again without mandrakes, and that they were of no avail to Rachel. . . . Moreover, it could not be the intention of Rachel to prepare from these mandrakes a so-called love-potion for Jacob, but only to attain fruitfulness by their effects upon herself. Just as now, for the same purpose perhaps, unfruitful women visit or are sent to certain watering-places. From this standpoint, truly, the assumed remedy of nature may appear as a premature, eager self-help” (Lange, *ibid.*, 530-531). It should be noted that Rachel asked only for *some* of the mandrakes: it seems that there was no thought in her mind of depriving Leah of all these potent means of fruitfulness, nor is there any evidence that she thought of her sister as having “left off bearing” (a statement of the author of the narrative). “Reuben, as little children will, presents the mandrakes to his mother. Rachel, present at the time, and much concerned as usual about her sterility, thinks

to resort to this traditional means of relieving the disability and asks for 'some of the mandrakes' (*min*, 'some of') of Reuben. She had hardly thought that this harmless request would provoke such an outbreak on her sister's part. For Leah bitterly upbraids her with not being content to have withdrawn her husband from her, but, she petulantly adds, Rachel even wants to get the mandrakes of her son Reuben. Apparently, her hope that her husband would love her after she had born several sons (29:32) had not been fully realized. Childless Rachel still had the major part of his affection. Quite unjustly Leah charges Rachel with alienation of affection where such affection had perhaps never really existed. Leah was still being treated with more or less tolerance. So Leah certainly begrudges her sister the mandrakes, lest they prove effective and so give her sister a still more decided advantage. . . . Rachel desires to preserve peace in the household, and so concedes to yield the husband to her sister for the night, in return for the mandrakes which she nevertheless purposes to eat. The frank narrative of the Scriptures on this point makes us blush with shame at the indelicate bargaining of the sisters—one of the fruits of a bigamous connection" (EG, 812). "A bitter and intense rivalry existed between Leah and Rachel, all the more from their close relationship as sisters; and although they occupied separate apartments with their respective families, as is the uniform custom where a plurality of wives obtains, and the husband and father spends a day with each in regular succession, this arrangement did not, it seems, allay the mutual jealousies of Laban's daughters. The evil lies in the system, which, being a violation of God's original ordinance, cannot yield happiness. Experience in polygamous countries has shown that those run great risk who marry two members of one family, or even two girls from the same town or village. The disadvantages of such unions are well understood" (Jamieson, CECG, 205). Matthew Henry suggests a some-

what different interpretation of sisterly motivation in the case before us, one which is certainly well worth considering: "Whatever these mandrakes were, Rachel could not see them in Leah's hands, where the child had placed them, but she must covet them. The learned Bishop Patrick very well suggests here that the true reason of this contest between Jacob's wives for his company, and their giving him their maids to be his wives, was the earnest desire they had to fulfil the promise made to Abraham that his seed should be as the stars of heaven in multitude. And he thinks it would have been below the dignity of the sacred history to take such particular notice of these things if there had not been some such great consideration in them" (CWB, 50). (However, certain objections to this view would be the following: (1) Rachel asked for only *some*—not all—of the mandrakes: this would seem to indicate she was seeking only to put an end to her own sterility; (2) implicit in this view is the assumption that the sisters were fully cognizant of the *details* of the Abrahamic Promises, but we find no sure evidence that this was the fact; (3) implicit in this view also is the failure to apprehend fully the stark *realism* of the Biblical narratives; the Bible is one book that pictures life as men and women live it, never turning aside from truth even to hide the faults of men of great faith. The Bible is pre-eminently the Book of Life. It makes us fully aware of human character and its weaknesses.)

Leah parted with the mandrakes on condition that Rachel would permit Jacob to sleep with her that night. "After relating how Leah conceived again, and Rachel continued barren in spite of the mandrakes, the writer justly observes (ver. 17), '*Elohim hearkened unto Leah,*' to show that it was not from such natural means as love-apples, but from God the Author of life, that she had received such fruitfulness" (BCOTP, 290). Leah then bore Jacob two more sons: (1) the first she named *Issachar*

(“hire,” “reward”), that is to say, “there is reward” or “he brings reward.” (2) The second she named *Zebulun* (“dwelling”). The import of the first name is, either that she had hired her husband, or that she had received her hire—*i.e.*, a happy result—from God. The name of the second signified “she hoped that now, after God had endowed her with a good portion, her husband to whom she had borne six sons, would dwell with her, *i.e.*, become more warmly attached to her” (Delitzsch). “The birth of a son is hailed with demonstrations of joy, and the possession of several sons confers upon the mother an honor and respectability proportioned to their number. The husband attaches a similar importance to the possession, and it forms a bond of union which renders it impossible for him ever to forsake or to be cold to a wife who has borne him sons. This explains the happy anticipations Leah founded on the possession of her six sons” (Jamieson). It is to be noted that “in connection with these two births, Leah mentions Elohim only, the supernatural Giver, and not Yahweh, the covenant God, whose grace has been forced out of her heart by jealousy” (Delitzsch). It should be noted that the reference here to the “wheat harvest” (v. 14) has prompted the critics to affirm that *the agricultural background shows the episode here to be out of place in its nomadic setting*. But the text does not say that the nomads did the harvesting. Besides, no one would deny the possibility of their using the expression ‘wheat harvest’ to specify a definite season of the year even if they themselves did no harvesting. Moreover, this may be only the author’s remark, used to specify the particular season when, as his readers would know, mandrakes usually ripened. In addition to all these considerations, there is the explicit information that the patriarchs on occasion sowed and reaped in their homeland (cf. 26:12) and perhaps their relatives did so in Mesopotamia. It is quite possible, too, that the lad

Reuben might have wandered into the fields where some of his farmer-neighbors were harvesting, and gathered his mandrakes there. We see no reason for accepting the critical view stated above as the only explanation of the milieu of this incident. (Cf. Exo. 9:32, Deut. 8:8, Judg. 6:11, Ruth 2:23; 1 Sam. 6:13, 12:17; 1 Chron. 21:20; 2 Chron. 2:10-15, 27:5; Ezra 6:9, 7:22; Matt. 13:25, 29; Luke 3:17; John 12:24).

Leah's daughter, v. 21. The name *Dinah*, about the same in meaning as Dan, could signify "Vindication." However, the etymology is not indicated in the text. Moreover, Dinah is not included in Gen. 32:22, where Jacob's household is said to have consisted of his two wives, his two handmaids, and his eleven children. Later Scriptures would seem to indicate that Dinah was not Jacob's only daughter (cf. Gen. 37:35, 46:7). It is likely that Dinah is specifically mentioned here in passing, as preparatory to the incident in her history—that of her defilement—related in ch. 34. The fact that Dinah is given only passing mention here is ample evidence of the subordinate place of the daughter in the patriarchal household.

Rachel's first son, 30:22-24. God *remembered* Rachel and *hearkened* to her (prayers) and *opened her womb*. The expression used here denotes a turning-point after a long trial (cf. 8:1) and in the matter of removing unfruitfulness (1 Sam. 1:19-20). God gave Rachel a son, whom she named *Joseph*, *one that takes away*, or *he may add*: "because his birth not only furnished an actual proof that God had *removed* the reproach of her childlessness, but also excited the wish, that Jehovah might *add* another son. The fulfilment of this wish is recorded in chap. 35:16ff. The double derivation of the name, and the exchange of *Elohim* for *Jehovah*, may be explained, without the hypothesis of a double source, on the simple ground, that Rachel first of all looked back at the past, and, think-

ing of the earthly means that had been applied in vain for the purpose of obtaining a child, regarded the son as a gift of God. At the same time, the good fortune which had now come to her banished from her heart her envy of her sister (ver. 1), and aroused belief in that God, who, as she had no doubt heard from her husband, had given Jacob such great promises; so that in giving the name, probably at the circumcision, she remembered Jehovah and prayed for another son from His covenant faithfulness" (BCOTP, 290). According to Lange, the text allows only one derivation: *he may add*: "to take away and to add are too strongly opposed to be traced back to one etymological source. Rachel, it is true, might have revealed the sentiments of her heart by the expression, God hath taken away my reproach; but she was not able to give to her own sons names that would have neutralized the significance and force of the names of her adopted sons, Dan and Naphthali. That she is indebted to God's kindness for Joseph, while at the same time she asks Jehovah for another son, and thereupon names Joseph, does not furnish any sufficient occasion for the admission of an addition to the sources of scripture, as Delitzsch assumes. The number of Jacob's sons, who began with Jehovah, was also closed by Jehovah. For, according to the number of twelve tribes, Israel is Jehovah's covenant people" (CDHCG, 531). The majority of Old Testament commentators seem to agree that the meaning of Joseph's name is more literally, "add"; that is to say, *May Yabweb add to me another son*. "At last Rachel bears a son, long hoped for and therefore marked out for a brilliant destiny" (ICCG, 389). "A double thought plays into the name Joseph: it incorporates both of Rachel's remarks. For *yosepb* may count as an imperfect of '*asaph*', 'to take away.' Or it may also count more definitely as imperfect (*Hifil*) of the verb *yasaph*, 'to add.' We must admit this to be very ingenious. But why deny to a

mother a happy ingenuity on the occasion of her greatest joy? Why try to inject the thought of a confusion of two sources?" (EG, 816). We are disposed to conclude this phase of our study with the pertinent and (one might well say) almost facetious remarks of Dr. Leupold in relation to Leah's action, v. 16: "Jacob's lot cannot have been a very happy one. To an extent he was shuttled back and forth between two wives and even their handmaids. Almost a certain shamelessness has taken possession of Jacob's wives in their intense rivalry. Leah almost triumphantly claims him as a result of her bargain, as he comes in from the field" (EG, 813). We are glad to note that with the birth of Joseph, the "shuttling back and forth" on Jacob's part seems to come to an end and the dove of peace settles down over his household, as evidenced especially by the loyalty of both daughters to their husband in the continued contest with their father Laban (cf. 31:4-16).

4. *Negotiations With Laban (30:25-43).*

Jacob proposes to provide for his own household, 30:25-31. From the reading of the text it seems that Joseph must have been born at the end of the fourteen years of Jacob's service. However, it must be understood that apparently there is no attempt made here to report the births of Jacob's sons in strict sequence chronologically. Apparently the children born of one mother are listed in a group "in order to dispose of all of them at once, except in the case of Leah where approximately a year may have elapsed between the birth of her fourth and fifth sons." By this time Jacob's family was almost complete, and he might well be thinking of establishing his own household. When the birth of Joseph occurred, evidently at the earliest in the fifteenth year, Jacob enters into a preliminary parley with Laban for the purpose of taking his household back unto *his own place and his own country*, that is, to Canaan in general, and to that part of it where

he had formerly resided (28:10, 34:18, 35:6-7). Since Jacob had pledged himself to seven additional years of service for Rachel, he could hardly call his whole household his own until the second seven years were fulfilled. He now wants Laban to acknowledge the fulfilment of his contract by giving him his wives and children so that he may depart, pointing out the fact that his service throughout all these years had been marked by faithfulness (v. 26). "There is no obsequiousness about Jacob's attitude, no difference. He knows his father-in-law must be dealt with firmly. On the other hand, he also knows how to treat him with becoming respect. Laban deferentially replies that he has "divined" that Jehovah was blessing Jacob's endeavors, and through His blessing of Jacob's service was indirectly blessing him, *i.e.*, Laban himself, with material prosperity. What is the import of the word "divined" as used here (v. 27)? Does it mean simply *close observation and minute inspection* (Murphy)? Or is there a reference here to augury, divination, or something of the kind? Leupold gives it, he had "consulted omens." "What heathen device Laban had resorted to in consulting the omens cannot be determined. But the act as such does reveal a departure from the true service of God and practically stamps him as an idolator. His reference to God as Yahweh is merely a case of accommodating himself to Jacob's mode of speech. Laban did not know Him as such or believe in Him. Any man with even a measure of insight could have determined without augury what Laban claimed had been revealed to him by augury. Jacob's faithful service of Yahweh was not kept hidden from him" (EG, 818). "In a Mesopotamian context, such as the present, the term refers undoubtedly to inquiries by means of omens: cf. Ezek. 21:26)" (Speiser, ABG, 236). We know that Laban was addicted to heathen superstitions (cf. 31:22-32).

Laban, an eminently selfish man, was ready to go to almost any limit to retain a man whose service had been so advantageous to himself. "He makes Jacob a proposition which at once substantially alters Jacob's status. From the position of a bond servant he is raised to that of a partner who may freely dictate his own terms. Now, indeed such an offer is not to be despised, for it puts Jacob in a position where he can build up a small fortune of his own and removes him from the necessity of returning home practically a penniless adventurer, though a man with a good-sized family." (We present here the translation which is given us in the *Jerusalem Bible*, which, for simplicity and clarity is unexcelled, as follows: "When Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, 'Release me, and then I can go home to my own country. Give me my wives for whom I have worked for you, and my children, so that I can go. You know very well the work I have done for you.' Laban said to him, 'If I have won your friendship . . . I learned from the omens that Yahweh had blessed me on your account. So name your wages,' he added, 'and I will pay you.' He answered him, 'You know very well how hard I have worked for you, and how your stock has fared in my charge. The little you had before I came has increased enormously, and Yahweh has blessed you wherever I have been. But when am I to provide for my own House?' Laban said, 'How much am I to pay you?' and Jacob replied, 'You will not have to pay me anything; if you do for me as I propose, I will be your shepherd once more and look after your flock.'"

The new contract, 30:32-36. Continuing the JB rendering: "Today I will go through all your flock. Take out of it every black animal among the sheep, and every speckled or spotted one among the goats. Such shall be my wages, and my honesty will answer for me later: when you come to check my wages, every goat I have that is

not speckled or spotted, and every sheep that is not black shall rank as stolen property in my possession.' Laban replied, 'Good! Let it be as you say.' That same day he took out the striped and speckled he-goats and all the spotted and speckled she-goats, every one that had white on it, and all the black sheep. He handed them over to his sons, and put three days' journey between himself and Jacob. Jacob took care of the rest of Laban's flock."

Jacob's stratagem, 30:37-43. Jacob gathered branches in sap, from poplar, almond and plane trees, and peeled them in white strips, laying bare the white on the branches. He put the branches he had peeled in front of the animals, in the troughs in the channels where the animals came to drink; and the animals mated when they came to drink. They mated therefore in front of the branches and so produced striped, spotted and speckled young. As for the sheep, Jacob put them apart, and he turned the animals towards whatever was striped or black in Laban's flock. Thus he built up droves of his own which he did not put with Laban's flock. Moreover, whenever the sturdy animals mated, Jacob put the branches where the animals could see them, in the troughs, so that they would mate in front of the branches. But when the animals were feeble, he did not put them there; thus Laban got the feeble, and Jacob the sturdy, and he grew extremely rich, and became the owner of large flocks, with men and women slaves, camels and donkeys."

To understand Jacob's stratagem it must be understood that in the Orient sheep are normally white (Psa. 147:16; Song of Sol. 4:2, 6:6; Dan. 7:9), and goats are normally black or brownish black (Song 4:1). Exceptions to this differentiation, it is said, are not numerous. Jacob said at the beginning of the negotiations that Laban should not *give* him anything: in the proposition he is now making he is not changing his mind: he means simply that in subsequent breeding, separation of his animals from

those of his father-in-law shall be determined by the principles of "selective breeding" which he now proposes. "For his wages Jacob asks the abnormal animals (black sheep and white-spotted goats): Laban agrees, shrewdly, as he thinks. Jacob's plot is briefly this: 1. He sees to it that when the goats mate, vv. 37-39, they are in sight of white-striped rods: this affects the formation of the embryo. 2. At the same time he makes sure that the sheep are looking at the black goats in the flock, v. 40. 3. For this operation he selects the robust strains, leaving the weaker animals and their offspring to Laban. In this way Jacob takes his 'honorable revenge'" (JB, 51, n.).

Laban "not only recognizes, almost fawningly, Jacob's worth to his house, but is even willing to yield unconditionally to his determination—a proof that he did not expect of Jacob too great a demand. But Jacob is not inclined to trust himself to his generosity, and hence his cunningly calculated though seemingly trifling demand. Laban's consent to his demand, however, breathes in the very expression the joy of selfishness; and it is scarcely sufficient to translate: Behold, I would it might be according to thy word. But Jacob's proposition seems to point to a very trifling reward, since the sheep in the East are nearly all white, while the goats are generally of a dark color or speckled. For he only demands of Laban's herds those sheep that have dark spots or specks, or that are entirely black, and those only of the goats that are white-spotted or striped. But he does not only demand the speckled lambs brought forth thereafter, after the present number of such are set aside for Laban (Tuch, Baumgartner, Kurtz), but the present inspection is to form the first stock of his herds (Knobel, Delitzsch). ["The words, 'thou shalt not give me anything,' seem to indicate that Jacob had no stock from Laban to begin with, and did not intend to be dependent upon him for any part of his possessions. Those of this description which should

appear among the flocks should be his hire. He would depend on divine providence and his own skill. He would be no more indebted to Laban than Abraham was to the king of Sodom—Gosman]. Afterwards, also, the speckled ones brought forth among Laban's herds are to be added to his, as is evident from his following arts. For when he invites Laban to muster his herds in time to come, it surely does not mean literally the next day . . . but in time to come. As often as Laban came to Jacob's herds in the future he must regard all the increase in speckled and ringstreaked lambs as Jacob's property, but if he found a purely white sheep or an entirely black goat, then, and not only then, he might regard it as stolen. . . . Laban's language is submissive, while that of Jacob is very frank and bold, as became his invigorated courage and the sense of the injustice which he had suffered" (Lange, CDHCG, 536-537).

Jacob's management of Laban's herds. Note the *three days' journey between them, v. 36*. Certainly these days' journeys were those of the herds and are not to be measured according to journeys of human beings. Thus it will be seen that although separated by three days' journey of the animals, they were close enough that Laban could overtake Jacob at any time if he so desired. By means of this separation it would seem that Jacob not only gained Laban's confidence but his property as well. All in all, in this exchange of artifices it is difficult to determine which of the two—son-in-law or father-in-law—was the trickier, and more hypocritical, of the two. The *first artifice* that Jacob employed was that of the peeled rods in the watering troughs. "Jacob managed by skill to acquire the best portion of Laban's flock of sheep and goats. Black sheep, or goats other than black or brown, were rarities, and those Jacob was to have. According to the story he employed an ingenious breeding device to use maternal impression on the unborn of the flocks. He set

peeled rods in the watering-troughs, where the flocks came to breed, to impress the mothers of 'the stronger of the flocks.' Thus he managed to breed an ample supply of the new varieties" (Cornfeld, AtD, 86). Jacob, of course, must select rods from trees whose dark external bark produced the greatest contrast with the white one below it. The text suggests the fresh poplar (or styrax-tree), the almond-tree (or perhaps the hazelnut tree), and the plane tree (which resembled somewhat the maple tree). For the purpose Jacob had in mind, "the gum-tree," we are told, "might be betted adapted than white poplars, almond-tree or walnut better than hazelnut, and maple better than plane-tree"). Jacob "took fresh rods of storax, maple and walnut-trees, all of which have a dazzling white wood under their dark outside, and peeled stripes upon them, 'peeling the white naked in the rods.' These partially peeled, and therefore mottled rods, he placed in the drinking-troughs . . . to which the flock came to drink, in front of the animals, in order that, if copulation took place at the drinking time, it might occur near the mottled sticks, and the young be speckled and spotted in consequence. . . . This artifice was founded upon a fact frequently noticed, particularly in the case of sheep, that whatever fixes their attention in copulation is marked upon the young" (K-D, BCOTP, 293). Was this an old wives' superstition? Or had it some validity? "The physiological law involved is said to be well established (Driver), and was acted on by ancient cattle breeders (see the list of authorities in Bochart, *Hierozoicon*, etc. II, c. 49, also Jeremias, *Das Alte Testamunt im Lichte des alten Orients*, 2nd ed. 1906). The full representation seems to be that the ewes saw the reflection of the rams in the water, blended with the image of the parti-colored rods, and were deceived into thinking they were coupled with parti-colored males (Jer., We [Illhausen], *Die Composition des Hexateuchs*, 41)" (Skinner, ICCG, 393). "This artifice was

founded upon a fact frequently noticed, particularly in the case of sheep, that whatever fixes their attention in copulation is marked upon the young" (K-D, *ibid.*, 293). "This crafty trick was based upon the common experience of the so-called fright of animals, especially of sheep, namely, that the representations of the senses during coition are stamped upon the form of the foetus (see Boch, *Hieroz*, I, 618, and Friedreich on the Bible, I 37, etc.*)" (Lange *ibid.*, 537). Jacob's *second artifice* was the removal of the speckled animals, from time to time, from Laban's herds and their incorporation into Jacob's; in the exchange Jacob put the speckled animals in front of the others, so that Laban's herds had always these parti-colored before their eyes, and in this manner another impression was produced upon the she-goats and sheep. Obviously, this separation of the new-born lambs and goats from the old herds could only be gradual; indeed this whole transaction was gradual, extending over several years (cf. 38:41). Jacob's *third artifice*. "He so arranged the thing that the stronger cattle fell to him, the feebler to Laban. His first artifice, therefore, produced fully the desired effect. It was owing partly, perhaps, to his sense of equity toward Laban, and partly to his prudence, that he set limits to his gain; but he still, however, takes the advantage, since he seeks to gain the stronger cattle for himself" (Lange *ibid.*, 537).

Vv. 40-42. "A further refinement: Jacob employed his device only in the case of the sturdy animals, letting the weaker ones gender freely. The difference corresponds to a difference of breeding-time. The consequence is that Jacob's stock is hardy and Laban's delicate" (ICCG, 393).

The following summarization is clear: "V. 40—Jacob separated the speckled animals from those of a normal color, and caused the latter to feed so that the others would be constantly in sight, in order that he might in this way obtain a constant accession of mottled sheep. As soon as

these had multiplied sufficiently, he formed separate flocks (viz., of the speckled additions) and *put them not unto Laban's cattle, i.e.*, he kept them apart in order that a still larger number of speckled ones might be produced, through Laban's one-colored flock having this mottled group constantly in view. Vv. 41, 42—He did not adopt the trick with the rods, however, on every occasion of copulation, for the sheep in those countries lamb twice a year, but only at the copulation of the strong sheep . . . but not 'in the weakening of the sheep,' *i.e.*, when they were weak, and would produce weak lambs. The meaning is probably this: he adopted this plan only at the summer copulation, not the autumn, for, in the opinion of the ancients (*Pliny, Columella*), lambs that were conceived in the spring and born in the autumn were stronger than those born in the spring (*Bichart*, p. 582). Jacob did this, possibly, less to spare Laban, than to avoid exciting suspicion, and so leading to the discovery of his trick" (BCOTP, 294).

Murphy explains as follows: "Jacob devises means to provide himself with a flock in these unfavorable circumstances. Vv. 37-40: His first device is to place partly-colored rods before the eyes of the animals at the rutting season, that they might drop lambs and kids varied with speckles, patches, or streaks of white. He had learned from experience that there is a congruence between the colors of the objects contemplated by the dams at that season and those of their young. At all events they bare many straked, speckled, and spotted lambs and kids. He now separated the lambs, and set the faces of the flock toward the young of the rare colors, doubtless to affect them in the same way as the peeled rods. *Put his own folds by themselves*. These are the party-colored animals that from time to time appeared in the flock of Laban. Vv. 41, 42: In order to secure the stronger cattle, Jacob added the second device of employing the party-colored rods only when the strong cattle conceived. The sheep in the

East lamb twice a year, and it is supposed that the lambs dropped in autumn are stronger than those dropped in the spring. On this supposition Jacob used his artifice in the spring, and not in the autumn. It is probable, however, that he made his experiments on the healthy and vigorous cattle, without reference to the season of the year. V. 43—the result is here stated. *The man brake forth exceedingly*—became rapidly rich in lands and cattle” (MG, 399-400). (The reader probably will need to go to the dictionary for the meaning of the word “cattle,” as this word is used in the foregoing paragraph).

The original proposal made by Jacob, and Laban’s quick acceptance, must be recalled here. *Thou shalt not give me anything*, v. 31. This certainly shows that Jacob had no live stock from Laban at the outset. *I will pass through all thy flock today (with thee, of course). Remove every speckled and spotted sheep, and every brown sheep among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats. And such shall be my hire.* That is, not those of this description that are now removed, but the uncommon parti-colored animals when they shall appear among the flock already cleared of them. These were the animals of the rare coloring. Not those of this description that are now removed, for in this case Laban would have given Jacob something; whereas Jacob evidently was resolved to be entirely dependent on Divine providence for his hire. Note especially his statement: *My righteousness shall answer for me*, v. 33, that is, at the time of inspection and accounting to Laban. The color will determine at once to whom the animal belongs. (In view of the complex artifice that Jacob had in mind, *was this really righteousness, or was it a kind of self-righteousness? Was Jacob thinking that the means would justify the end, in this instance? If so, was he assuming that Providence would support such a rule of action?* At any rate, Laban consented willingly to this proposal. Why?

Because, obviously, he thought his son-in-law's proposal was rather naive, to say the least: from his point of view, it was a course of action that would play right into his own hands, for the simple reason that parti-colored cattle were uncommon. Jacob is now to begin with nothing, and to have for his hire any parti-colored lambs or kids that would appear in the flocks from which every specimen of this rare class had been carefully removed. Laban simply could not lose in this kind of deal! So Laban thought. But Laban was not aware of Jacob's cleverness! In this contest of wits, it is difficult to determine which of the two was the greater *con* man!

Dr. Cuthbert A. Simpson evaluates this Jacob-versus-Laban (or vice versa) series of transactions bluntly, yet withal so realistically, that his analysis is certainly in order here, as follows: When Jacob proposed to set up an establishment (household) for himself, "Laban, unwilling to lose his services, offered to allow him to fix his own wages. Jacob replied that he wanted nothing at the moment, but proposed that Laban should remove from his flocks all the speckled and spotted animals. These were to be set apart by themselves (cf. v. 36). Jacob would then care for the rest of the flock and would receive as his wages any speckled and spotted that might be born to these normally colored animals in the future. To this Laban promptly agreed (vss. 34-36)—indeed, why should he not accept a proposal so favorable to himself? If Jacob was such a fool to suggest it, let him take the consequences! But Jacob, though he may have been a knave, was no fool. He placed rods upon which he had peeled white streaks before the eyes of the stronger animals in the flocks at rutting time, with the result that the young born to them were *striped, speckled, and spotted*, and so belonged to him (vss. 37-39, 42a). Thus his substance increased rapidly (v. 43), and Laban was left with the feebler animals (vs. 42b). This story of one knave out-

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witting another—doubtless another piece of shepherd lore—is of a piece with that in 25:27-34 (cf. also 26:1-11, 27:1-40), and it was told by J-1 with unfeigned delight; clever Jacob had outwitted the dull nomad Aramaean” (IBG, 708). With this analysis in general we are inclined to agree. However, the fact must not be overlooked that these sections cited had very definite connection, both morally and spiritually, with the history of the Messianic Line. (Moreover, the deceptions practised on Jacob were moral and spiritual—impositions on his familial relationships—whereas those perpetrated on Laban were of a material and hence secondary character.)

The “conclusion of the whole matter” is precisely as Jacob had planned: “the man increased exceedingly, and had large flocks, and maid-servants and men-servants, and camels and asses” (v. 43). This progress materially was evidently a matter of years, not just days: (cf. 31:41). The account simply closes with this remark, *i.e.*, concerning Jacob’s wealth, without intimating approbation of his conduct or describing his increasing wealth as a blessing from God. “The verdict is contained in what follows.”

5. *Jacob’s Preparation for Flight* (31:1-16).

The complete success that Jacob achieved excited the envy and jealousy of Laban’s sons, who were evidently old enough to be entrusted with the care of their father’s flocks (cf. 30:35), whose conduct as described here shows that the selfish disposition peculiar to this family was as fully developed in them as in Laban himself. It must have been from rumor that Jacob obtained knowledge of the invidious reflections cast on him by these cousins (31:1), as evident from the fact that they were separated from him at a distance of three days’ journey (a journey measured obviously by the movement of the animals involved). Jacob had also sensed a growing change in Laban’s feelings toward him (v. 2). Inwardly he was

prepared for the termination of all his connections with his father-in-law; at the same time he received instructions from Yahweh in a dream to return to his homeland with an accompanying promise of Divine protection (vv. 10-13). (No matter to what extent we may be disposed to inveigh against Jacob's trickery, we must never lose sight of the fact that Laban had deceived and exploited him for fourteen years or more. And we must realize also that God is often compelled to achieve his purposes through very weak and selfish human vessels. Such was undoubtedly the case here.) V. 2—*the countenance of Laban was not toward him as before: lit.*, was not the same as yesterday and the day before: a common Oriental form of speech. "The insinuations against Jacob's fidelity by Laban's sons, and the sullen reserve, the churlish conduct, of Laban himself, had made Jacob's situation, in his uncle's establishment, most trying and painful. It is always one of the vexations attendant to worldly prosperity, that it excites the envy of others (Eccl. 4:4); and that, however careful a man is to maintain a good conscience, he cannot always reckon on maintaining a good name in a censorious world. This Jacob experienced; and it is probable that, like a good man, he had asked direction and relief in prayer. Notwithstanding the ill usage he had received, Jacob might not have deemed himself at liberty to quit his present sphere under the impulse of passionate fretfulness and discontent. Having been conducted to Haran by God (cf. 28:15), and having got a promise that the same heavenly Guardian would bring him again into the land of Canaan—he might have thought he ought not to leave it, without being clearly persuaded as to the path of duty. So ought we to set the Lord before us, and to acknowledge him in all our ways, our journeys, our settlements and plans in life. Jacob did receive an answer, which decided his entrance upon the homeward journey to Canaan, with a re-assurance of the Divine presence and

protection by the way. But he himself alone was responsible for making his departure a hurried and clandestine flight" (CECG, 208). So Jacob called Rachel and Leah to him, evidently to the field where he was watching his flocks, in order to communicate to them his intentions and the reasons for them. Note that Rachel and Leah only were called; the other two women were still in a state of servitude and hence not entitled to be taken into account. "Having stated his strong grounds of dissatisfaction with their father's conduct, and the ill requital he had gotten for all his faithful services, he informed them of the blessing of God, that had made him rich notwithstanding Laban's design to ruin him; and, finally, of the command from God he had received to return to his own country, that they might not accuse him of caprice, or disaffection to their family, but be convinced that, in resolving to depart, he acted from a principle of religious obedience" (CECG, 209).

Note the sequence of names here: Jacob sent and called *Rachel and Leah*: "Rachel first, because she was the principal stay of his household, it having been for her sake that he entered into relations with Laban. Leah's descendants admitted Rachel's precedence inasmuch as Boaz, a member of the tribe of Judah, Leah's son, and his kinsmen said, *The LORD make the woman . . . like Rachel and like Leah*, Ruth 4:11" (Rashi, SC, 179).

Note also Jacob's charge, that Laban had deceived him and *had changed his wages ten times, i.e., many times*; ten, besides signifying a definite number, frequently stands in Scripture for *many* (cf. Lev. 26:26, 1 Sam. 1:8, Eccl. 7:9, Dan. 1:26, Amos 6:9, Zech. 8:23). Note that the *Angel of God* who spoke to Jacob in a dream was the Divine Being who identified Himself as the God of Bethel (v. 13; cf. 32:24-32, 35:9-15, 48:15-16). That is to say, he was not one of the angels who were seen ascending and descending on the symbolic ladder of Jacob's dream-vision

at Bethel (28:12-15): He identified Himself with God. (See art., "Angel of Jehovah," in my *Genesis* textbook, Vol. III, pp. 216-220, 496-500). Vv. 11-13, "The Angel of God specially draws Jacob's attention to what he sees. Jacob is not to regard the thing seen as trivial but as indicative of the fact that God 'had taken note of all that Laban had done' to him and was, of course, Himself taking measures to safeguard Jacob in what seemed like an unequal contest. Very definitely God identifies Himself to Jacob as the one who formerly had appeared at Bethel and to whom Jacob had appointed a pillar and vowed a vow. This is another way of saying that what He had then promised to do for Jacob is now actually being done. For assuredly, but for divine interference Jacob would have suffered irreparable loss" (EG, 835).

It should be noted that the two wives were of one mind and were in complete agreement with their husband (vv. 14-16). In fact, they say, their father has treated them as if they were "foreigners," and not of his own flesh and blood. Proof of this, said they, was in the fact that he had, to all intents and purposes *sold* them as servants would be sold: seven (or fourteen) years of service had been the price paid. Besides, whereas a less greedy father would have used the gift from his prospective son-in-law to provide a dowry for his daughters, Laban had entirely used it up, most likely by investing it directly in flocks and herds until it was completely absorbed. Now therefore, said they, *whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do* (v. 16). "From one point of view the wives are correct when they assert that all the present wealth of their father belongs to them and to their children, because he apparently had been wealthy before Jacob came, who by his assiduous and skillful management increased his father-in-law's 'riches' enormously. By all canons of right Jacob's family ought to have been adjudged as deserving of a good share of these riches. But the wives saw that their

father was not minded to give them or their husband anything at all. Apparently, the long pent-up grievances find expression in these words. Ultimately, then, the wives arrive at the conclusion that the best thing Jacob can do is to obey God's command and depart. Their mode of arriving at this conclusion is not the most desirable; they finally conclude to consent to what God commands because their best material interests are not being served by the present arrangement. Jacob, no doubt, approached the problem on a higher plane: he was obeying the God of his fathers, who had made promises to Jacob previously and was now fulfilling these promises. So in Jacob's case we have fidelity to God; in the case of his wives a greater measure of interest in material advantage. For that reason, too, Jacob's wives refer to Him only as *Elohim*" (EG, 836).

Vv. 17-21. So the father "rose up" and set the members of his family on camels, and with all his cattle and his substance which he had accumulated, and while Laban was engaged in shearing sheep, he "stole away un-awares to Laban the Syrian." That is to say, he fled posthaste. *He took about the only course he could to liberate himself from the clutches of his father-in-law.*

The following summarizations of Jacob's experiences in Paddan-Aram are excellent: "After the birth of Joseph, Jacob wished to become his own master; but Laban prevailed on him to serve him still, for a part of the produce of his flocks, to be distinguished by certain marks. *Jacob's artifice to make the most of his bargain may be regarded as another example of the defective morality of those times; but, as far as Laban was concerned, it was a fair retribution for his attempt to secure a contrary result.* Jacob was now commanded in a vision by 'the God of Bethel' to return to the land of his birth; and he fled secretly from Laban, who had not concealed his envy, to go back to his father Isaac, after twenty years spent in Laban's service—

fourteen for his wives, and six for his cattle. Jacob, having passed the Euphrates, struck across the desert by the great fountain at Palmyra; then traversed the eastern part of the plain of Damascus and the plateau of Bashan, and entered Gilead, which is the range of mountains east of Jordan, forming the frontier between Palestine and the Syrian desert" (OTH, 102. *Italics mine—C.C.*.)

"In those days, getting the better of the other man was a sign of cleverness, and the Nuzi contracts also reflect this attitude. Jacob came under Laban's jurisdiction, and on condition that he would work for Laban a further seven years, he could finally marry his beloved Rachel. Then he agreed to work another seven years to acquire flocks of his own. He managed by skill to acquire the best portion of Laban's flock of sheep and goats. Black sheep, or goats other than black or brown, were rarities; and those Jacob was to have. According to the story he employed an ingenious breeding device to use maternal impression on the unborn of the flocks. He set peeled rods in the watering-troughs, where flocks came to breed, to impress the mothers of the 'stronger of the flocks.' Thus he managed to breed an ample supply of the new varieties. . . . Jacob came besides into possession of great wealth: two wives, two handmaids brought in by his wives as marriage gifts, in accordance with Mesopotamian custom (they were also his concubines who gave him children), and a large retinue of servants and followers, and also children, of whom he had eleven. But after twenty years of hard work Jacob's hopes were dashed. Laban had had sons born to him after their contract had been made: sons who, according to local usage, would become Laban's chief heirs rather than the adopted son. They were younger men who resented the position he had attained. The whole picture presented is of crafty tribesmen, each partly in the right, seeking loopholes in the laws. And Laban insisted on one item in the original

contract: that Jacob would not be permitted to take another wife in addition to the two daughters of Laban. The narrator of the story makes it clear that Jacob could only extricate himself from Laban's control by flight in the spring; and the two wives sided with their husband, agreeing that home was no longer the place for them" (Cornfeld, AtD, 86).

FOR MEDITATION AND SERMONIZING

Reflections

"Sinful marriages have sad consequences. Wives chosen for their beauty often bring a troublesome temper along with them. Envious discontentment and disappointed pride make multitudes miserable! Immoderate desire of children, or other created enjoyments, hurry many into fearful disorders! But it is vain ever to expect that happiness from creatures which can be had only in and from God himself. No love to persons should hinder our detestation and reproof of their sins. Even the godly are apt to fall into snares laid for them by their near relatives. And bad examples are more readily imitated than good ones. If we are once overcome by sin, we are apt to yield to it more easily afterward. Many are more governed by the estimation of the world than by reason or religion. It is very wicked for parents to transmit their quarrels to their children. It is no lessening of our guilt that God brings good out of our evil. People often promise themselves happiness in that which will be their death or ruin. Saints have need to trust their God, as all others may deceive them; and reason to desire their heavenly home, as this world is not their rest. What an advantage to families are servants remarkably pious! How criminal for covetous masters to defraud them of their wages! What good words worldly men can give to serve their own ends, and how wise they are for their own carnal interests! But their

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caution is vain when God designs to frustrate their purposes; and they often outwit themselves who intend to impose upon others. All agreements ought to be made with great clearness and accuracy, that no stain be thereby occasioned to our character; and in the use of lawful means to promote our wealth, our trust should be fixed on the promised providence of God. His blessing can quickly increase a little, and make it a great store." Again, on ch. 31, v. 13: "This is a simple statement, but there is most cheering truth embodied in it. He had vowed prospectively to dedicate a tenth of his property to the Lord, and thus in the ordinary affairs of life to testify to his complete dependence on the divine will. Now after a long and hard struggle, when wealth was acquired, and by the envy of an unjust master was placed in peril, the Lord graciously reminds him of the vision at Bethel" (SIBG, 263, 264).

Jacob's Vision of the Eternal

Gen. 28:11-22; John 14:1-9

Jacob was now fleeing from the face of Esau, and was on his way to Paddan-Aram. The first day he journeyed about forty-eight miles, and arrived at a place originally called Luz, but which, on account of the vision he had there, he afterwards called Beth-el. There never was a scene more truly solemn and interesting, than that with which the patriarch was favored on this memorable occasion. It was designed for his instruction and support; and the devout Christian, in reviewing it in the spirit of devout contemplation, cannot fail to receive both information and comfort from it. Let us, then, notice,

1. *What Jacob saw on this Occasion.* Overcome with the fatigue of the journey, he had selected a spot of ground for his couch, a stone for his pillow, and the outstretched canopy of heaven for his only covering. Wearied nature

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was recruiting her energies by balmy sleep, when God was pleased to manifest himself to his servant, through the medium of a striking vision or dream.

(1) The object presented to his notice was a ladder. (2) Its position—between heaven and earth, filling the whole of the vast space between the two. (3) Its base—rested on the earth, close to the spot where he lay. (4) The top of it—reached to heaven, the place of Deity. (5) Above it—watching it, and viewing it with complacency and delight, stood the Lord, Jehovah of Hosts. (6) Upon it—were angels, the spiritual host of God, and they were ascending and descending as messengers, bearing tidings from heaven to earth, from God to man.

The appearance of the ladder might be intended to illustrate,

(1) The doctrine of divine providence. Both heaven and earth are under the divine government. Both worlds connected. God's eye constantly directed to the concerns of men. Angels minister to the necessities of the saints. This was eminently calculated to console the mind of Jacob in his present circumstances.

It might be intended to prefigure,

(2) The mediatorial work of Christ. Jesus is, emphatically, the sinner's ladder or way to heaven. None can come to God but by him. He has reconciled heaven to earth. The father looks upon men, through the work of his Son, with pleasure and delight. Angels, too, are now incorporated with believers, form a distinguished branch of this one family, and are all ministering spirits to those who shall be heirs of salvation: John 14:6, Heb. 1:14. Notice,

2. *What Jacob heard.* "And the Lord said, I am the Lord God of Abraham, etc." Here Deity, (1) Proclaimed himself the God of his fathers. "God of Abraham and Isaac," etc. He who made them a separate people, distinguished them, blessed them, etc. Him whom they had

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worshiped, trusted, etc. (2) He promised him the possession of the country where he then was. "The land whereon thou liest," etc., v. 15. (3) He promised him a numerous progeny, and that of him should come the illustrious Messiah, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. (4) He promised him his divine presence and protection. "I am with thee, and will keep thee," etc. This promise extended to all times and to all places, and to the end of life. "I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken," etc., v. 15. How condescending and gracious on the part of Deity! What comfort for Jacob! Yet how infinitely short of those rich promises given to believers in the gospel. Notice,

3. *What Jacob felt.* "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place," v. 16. (1) He felt the influence of the Divine Presence. "The Lord is in this place." (2) He felt a sacred and solemn fear. "And he was afraid and said, How dreadful is this place!" Where God is, how solemn! Angels prostrate themselves before him, etc. (*Religious Dread.* When Jacob woke from his vision and felt that he had stood at the gate of heaven, there was first the sense of wonder and thanksgiving at the revelation of God's mercy; but then there swept over him an overwhelming awe. *How dreadful is this place!* he cried. When a man is made to know that God has not forgotten him, even though he has been a moral failure, there is the moment of rapturous exaltation such as Jacob had when he saw the shining ladder and the angels; but when he remembers the holiness of God, he turns his face away from its intolerable light. The vision must be more than the immediate emotion: it calls him to account. Who can contemplate the distance between him and God, even when the angels of God's forgiveness throw a bridge across it, and not bow down in agonized unworthiness? So it was with Jacob. The consciousness of guilt in him made him

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shrink from the revelation of God even when he craved it. He had done wrong, and he was trying to escape its consequences. His brother's anger was formidable enough: but there was something more formidable which he wanted to forget but which confronted him. His conscience was shocked into the certainty that he could not get away from God. The dread of that perception was on him now. Before he could ever be at peace with himself and with his world, he would have to come to grips with the facts of his past experience—and with the invisible power of the righteousness he had violated—and wrestle with them for his life, as he would one day at Peniel. It was well for Jacob that his awareness of God did not end with the vision of the ladder, but went on to realize the purification through which he must go before he could take the blessings which the angels of the ladder might bring to him. For Jacob, and for all men, there can be no flippant self-assurance. In relation to their sins the inexorable love of God must first seem dreadful before it can be redeeming" [IBG, 691, 692].) (3) He felt himself on the precincts of the heavenly world. "This is none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven." Where God reveals his glory, is heaven. He might well exclaim thus; for here he was surrounded with heavenly intelligences—had a vision of Jehovah, etc. Notice,

4. *What Jacob did.* (1) He expressed his solemn sense of the Divine Presence, vv. 16, 17. (2) He erected and consecrated a memorial of the events of that eventful night. Took the stone—made a pillow—poured oil upon it—called the place Beth-el. How pious! God had honored him, and he now desired to erect a monument to His glory. How necessary to keep up in his mind a remembrance of God's gracious manifestation! How proper to give God a public profession of our love, and fear, and obedience! (3) He vowed obedience to the Lord. Seeing that God had thus engaged to bless and keep him, he now

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resolved, and publicly avowed his resolution to love God, and to serve him with all his life and substance, v. 22. (4) He went on his way in peace and safety. How could he fail to proceed in peace and safety, when the Omniscient God guided, and the Almighty God protected him! Yet, this privilege have all his saints.

Application. Learn, 1. The privileges of piety. Divine manifestations, promises, etc. "In all thy ways acknowledge him," etc. 2. The duties of piety. God distinguishes his people, that they may be brought to holy obedience, and conformity to himself. "I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God," etc., Rom. 12:1. 3. The delights of public worship. God's house is indeed the gate of heaven, the way to heaven is through his house. 4. How glorious a place is heaven, where the pure in heart shall see God and dwell in his presence forever! (The foregoing is taken verbatim [with the bracketed exception] from the volume, *Five Hundred Sketches and Skeletons of Sermons*, Appleton Edition, New York and London, 1913).

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON PART FORTY-ONE

1. Where was Paddan-aram? Why did Jacob go there? Whom would he find there?
2. How had this area figured in patriarchal history prior to that time?
3. What was the first scene which Jacob encountered on arriving there?
4. Summarize Thomson's description of Mesopotamian wells, cisterns, and stone coverings.
5. What conversation took place between Jacob and the shepherds?
6. Explain the phrase, "Rachel the Shepherdess" as indicated in ch. 29:9.
7. What was Jacob's reaction on seeing Rachel the first time?

JACOB: IN PADDAN-ARAM

8. How was Jacob related to Rachel? Who was her father? Her sister?
9. In what rather unusual ways did Jacob react on seeing Rachel the first time?
10. Explain how the story of Jacob and Rachel parallels that of Eliezer, Rebekah and Isaac. In what respects do they differ? Why are they frequently referred to as "idylls"?
11. How is Jacob's weeping at his meeting Rachel the first time to be explained?
12. What are some of the rabbinical explanations of his show of emotion?
13. State the circumstances of Jacob's meeting with Laban. Where have we met Laban before?
14. Explain what is meant by Leah's "weak" eyes.
15. What was the first deception which Laban perpetrated on Jacob? What circumstance made it easy for him to do this?
16. How did Laban try to "rationalize" this deception?
17. To what additional service did Jacob commit himself in order to get Rachel as his wife? Is this service to be regarded as a kind of "dowry" to offset his coming to Laban without material gifts of any kind?
18. In what respects did Laban reveal himself as a "selfish schemer"?
19. What was the prevailing custom with respect to the giving of the younger daughter in marriage before giving the older?
20. What service did Jacob accept to obtain Rachel in marriage?
21. Are we right in saying that Jacob remained with Laban all these years as a result of his inability to pay the *bridal gift* otherwise than by personal service?
22. What is the full significance of the statement that the seven years of service for Rachel "seemed unto Jacob but a few days, for the love that he had to her"?

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23. Explain how Laban by his sharp practices inveigled Jacob into bigamy directly and indirectly into polygamy.
24. What was the *mohar* in the patriarchal culture?
25. Explain how bigamy and polygamy violate the will of God with respect to the conjugal union. Relate Acts 17:30 to these Old Testament practices.
26. Explain the circumstances of Jacob's double wedding.
27. Was the bigamous relationship here a case of incest? Explain your answer?
28. When was such a relationship as that which Jacob had with the two sisters prohibited by the Mosaic Law? In what Scripture is this prohibition found?
29. Explain why we say that in these various incidents Jacob was suffering what is called Retributive Justice? What name did the Greeks give to the personification of Retributive Justice?
30. Which of Jacob's sons became the ancestor of Messiah? What was his name? Who was his mother?
31. Why do we call Jacob a "man of many wrestlings"?
32. What do we learn about Jacob's feeling for Leah as compared with his feeling for Rachel?
33. Write from memory the names of Jacob's thirteen children and the names of their mothers respectively?
34. Are we justified in thinking that the Divine promise that Abraham's seed should be as the stars of the heavens in multitude was involved in any way with the motivation that produced Jacob's numerous progeny?
35. Show how the jealousy between Rachel and Leah continued to produce unpleasant consequences.
36. Explain why we speak of the sons of the two handmaids as "adopted" sons.
37. What is the import of Rachel's cry, "Give me children, or else I die"?

JACOB: IN PADDAN-ARAM

38. What was Jacob's rather harsh reply to Rachel's complaints? Was it justified?
39. What, later, caused Leah to become discontented with being the mother of only four sons? What did she do about it?
40. Explain fully the story of the mandrakes. Was this pure superstition, or did it have some basis in fact?
41. How was the lad Reuben innocently involved in this?
42. How would you answer the criticism that the agricultural background shows the episode to be out of place in a nomadic setting? How does the reference to the "wheat harvest" figure in this discussion?
43. What step did Jacob take after his fourteen years of service for Leah and Rachel?
44. What is the probable explanation of Laban's statement that he had "divined" that Yahweh was blessing Jacob's endeavors?
45. What was the new contract into which Jacob entered at this time with Laban? What was the purpose of each in entering into this contract?
46. What three artifices did Jacob use to increase his wealth at Laban's expense?
47. Do we know of any real scientific evidence to support the principle of selective breeding which Jacob employed here?
48. On what grounds can we justify Jacob in resorting to such methods, if at all?
49. What was the result, in so far as Jacob was concerned, of his strategy in this selective breeding?
50. What does Scripture tell us with regard to Jacob's wealth?
51. For how long a time did Jacob continue in service for Laban? What was he doing through the last six years of this service?
52. What caused him to decide to break away from Laban and return home?

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53. What attitude did his two wives take with reference to this decision, and why?
54. What caused Jacob to depart hastily? What route did he take? Of what did his retinue consist?
55. Summarize your final evaluation of the characters of Jacob and Laban. Would you say that Laban was the more deceptive of the two? Would you justify Jacob's acts with reference to Laban? Explain your answer.