

Deceiver Deceived

Read: Gen 29, Heb 12

H/N 8/02/04pm

Study: Gen 29:15-30

Psalms: 25:1-7, 25:8-13, 25:14-19, 25:20-22

Jacob's father sent him off to Haran to get a wife from the daughters of Laban his uncle. He was of course fleeing death threats from his brother Esau also, having just acquired the birthright by deception. Both these factors are important as background to this narrative before us today.

The Lord appeared to Jacob and promised to go with him on this journey and bring him back to the land of Canaan. He guided Jacob to the house of Laban – after meeting Rachel his daughter at the well.

Jacob arrived destitute – he had nothing – but Laban took him in and he started to work for Laban. After a month Laban realized how good a worker he was and offered to give him wages. Laban probably noticed Jacob's attraction toward his daughter Rachel also. In a calculating way Laban asked Jacob to name his own wages.

We experienced such a custom in India. Often when you ask how much something is, whether it be the cost of a taxi or an item from the shop the man will say 'as you please' or 'you take it I want nothing'. The idea is that you may offer a good price – if you don't you will surely find out.

It is even happening here nowadays with regard to salaries. One man applying for a job came across the question expected salary on the application form. The employer wanted him to nominate how much pay he expected but this man after thinking for a long time he wrote yes!

So Laban asked Jacob how much pay he expected. His answer was somewhat unusual- he wanted his daughter in marriage. Being madly in love Jacob offered to work for seven years if he could have Rachel as his wife. Seven years of free labour – and that from a competent worker like Jacob – Laban could hardly believe his ears. His answer however was cool and calculating – *better I give her to you than another man*. This labour was of course in lieu of a dowry or bride price which Jacob did not have.

Default in prayer

Jacob was making a major decision in his life- he was choosing his life partner. He had gone to his relatives according to the command and was choosing from the daughters of Laban – but still this man should have been on his knees in prayer as he took such a momentous decision. He did not have his parents around to advise him – so how much more he needed the wisdom of the Lord. With such wisdom he could have avoided the deception perpetrated on him by Laban.

Rachel (meaning 'ewe') was *beautiful in form and appearance* in contrast to her elder sister Leah (meaning 'cow') who had weak/delicate eyes. Jacob was greatly attracted to Rachel and indeed was in love with her. Now there was nothing wrong with being attracted to a beautiful woman but dangers often lurk in such attraction – hence the greater need for prayer. Normally of course his family would have been around to give advice but Jacob was alone in making this choice. His uncle Laban was not going to be of much help.

It is interesting to note that Jacob's father had no choice in who he married. Abraham's servant came to this place and with much prayer selected a wife for him.

Young people and parents today need to be prayerful concerning marriage for there are dangers

today just as there was for Jacob.

Devotion

Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her (29:20). These beautiful words epitomise the love of a man for a woman. This was true love. Jacob was willing to wait as long as it took for the woman he loved. It is ironic that he in fact nominated this extra long time. He willingly served the time that he might get his chosen bride.

Young people come under a lot of pressure in our society to be promiscuous. Lust not love is what they hear. Our society has denigrated true love – the love that we see here with Jacob. However 'true love waits' is a motto being promoted among young people today to try to counter the rampant immorality. May such a lesson as we see demonstrated here by Jacob be heard loud and clear among the young – and not so young – today.

Deception

The deceiver was deceived. Jacob was about to taste some of his own medicine as we say. He was to be on the receiving end of a deception. It was a nasty trick to play on a vulnerable young man – on his wedding day of all things. But then he tricked his father on his deathbed. All deception is by definition nasty business.

Jacob cleverly deceived his own father by dressing up like his brother. This deception also involved dressing up – the bride would have been veiled. It involved a younger and older sister – the younger getting in ahead of the firstborn in marriage. There were a number of parallels which bring irony into the narrative and convey a lesson to Jacob.

Seven years passed as *if a few days* to Jacob – although he must have been counting the days. For when the time came he reminded Laban and demanded his wife. Note he did not specify her name in v 21, but there was no misunderstanding. Laban knew that it was the younger daughter he wanted and had worked for.

Laban arranged a feast for the whole town. There would have been eating and drinking late into the night. Then in the evening Laban took his daughter and gave her to Jacob, and *he went in to her*. She would have been veiled and the light no doubt was poor. It was only in the morning that he realized he had spent the night with Leah not Rachel. If it is difficult to understand why Jacob did not recognize the woman he was with, remember she was in fact Rachel's sister and probably similar in many ways – and it would have been dark remember.

Jacob was incensed. After all those years the time had finally come to marry his beloved Rachel. He was full of joy and expectation. But what had happened. He awoke next to the ugly sister Leah. He demanded an explanation from Laban. '*Why have you deceived me*' he shouted.

Note that word – *deceived* in v 25. It is a word echoed in his very name Jacob. The arch deceiver knew what it meant.

Laban had an explanation ready at hand. It is not our custom to marry the younger before the older, the firstborn, sister he said. We have no reason to question the truth regarding this custom. It is still the practice in societies today. But we might ask why Laban did not marry Leah off in the years that Jacob had to wait. Was she that ugly or was he calculating to get another seven years of free labour. It is difficult to imagine a father could be so mercenary, that a father could subject his daughters to rivalry within a bigamous marriage – and particularly for Leah who was unloved.

We do not know why Laban did this but we do know that the Lord over-ruled in the relationships that followed – Leah had sons while Rachel was barren for some time.

In all this the Lord was also teaching Jacob a lesson. He was the chosen one, the one the Lord chose from before he was born to inherit the promises. But that did not mean he was immune from discipline – from justice at the hand of the Lord. The Lord disciplines those he loves (Hebrews 12). Jacob had deceived his father – he must know that this was not right. What better way for him to learn the lesson than for him to suffer at the hands of another deceiver – a taste of his own medicine.

This is not to say that we will always experience divine retribution. We will not always be taught the hard way. God is a God of mercy. After all he waited for seven years to teach Jacob this lesson. He is a God who forgives. He had assured Jacob of his covenant love. But as a child of God, Jacob must be corrected. This man who was so ready to deceive must be disciplined.

The Scriptures are given for our correction and instruction in righteousness (2 Timothy 3:16) But we are not always ready to listen to Scripture are we? Sometimes the Lord will teach us a lesson in a more direct way. He will make us taste our own medicine. Jacob was to learn that it is not pleasant to be deceived.

This was all part of his maturing as child of God. The Lord was teaching him the hard way you might say. He was to have great responsibility as the leader of God's people. The Lord had to take him and mould him into the man he wanted – a man of great faith. As Isaiah (64:8) prayed – *we are the clay and you are the potter and all we are the work of your hand.*

In all this God's purposes were being advanced. He was over-ruling as always in the affairs of men for his own glory. From Leah and Rachel and their maid servants Zilpah and Bilhah would come the 12 tribes of Israel.

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