

## GENESIS 29:1-14 (EXILE FROM THE LAND)

**Introduction:** The stories about Jacob contain pictures within pictures. As always, Bible stories are meant to show us what really happened, but also what will happen. Eventually, everything points to Jesus and our relationship with Him.

The life and record of Jacob and those he interacts with is no different. Let us keep our minds alert and our eyes open to the wonders ahead. Today we leave the Land of Promise and head to the land of the people of the east.

**Text Verse:** "I will betroth you to Me forever;  
Yes, I will betroth you to Me  
In righteousness and justice,  
In lovingkindness and mercy;  
<sup>20</sup> I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness,  
And you shall know the LORD. Hosea 2:19, 20

God promised to betroth a people to Himself forever. As believers in Jesus Christ, we become a part of that relationship. It is a relationship pictured in a meeting at a well in an open field many thousands of years ago, and so... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

### I. Flocks By a Well

**<sup>1</sup> So Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the East.**

In this first verse of Chapter 29, there is a happiness in the Hebrew which is seen in almost none of our translations. The verse literally says, "Lifted Jacob his feet and came to the sons of the East."

It is as if he were skipping in joy at the prospects of his journey after receiving the assurances of God at Bethel. Within this one verse, is a journey of 400 miles of which nothing is mentioned. However, beginning

with this verse is also a picture of the people of Israel during their exile from the land.

In the story of his time away, there will be other pictures too, but Jacob's entire time out of Canaan paints a broad tapestry of Israel's times of exile - once to Babylon for 70 years, and once in the Diaspora for 2000 years. Here is the picture for us to see -

First, he is outside of the land of blessing. In Genesis 26, God told Isaac to dwell in the land and He would bless him. In Deuteronomy 28:64, God promised disobedient Israel that they would be scattered among the nations - away from their homeland.

Next, he is without an altar. At no time during his exile is there recorded that he built an altar. This is true with Israel during her dispersion. Hosea 3:4, 5 tells us this -

For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or *sacred* pillar, without ephod or teraphim. <sup>5</sup>Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days.

During the entire time of their exile, there have been no proper sacrifices to God. Despite being protected and kept as a people, the spiritual connection of temple worship has been lacking, just as no altar is recorded as being built by Jacob during his time away.

Not only would he be out of the promised land and with no altar, but he would dwell in a land of foreign gods. This will be seen when he resides with Laban who is a man with homemade gods in his house. This is Israel to a T as they have dwelt in pagan lands.

Along with that, he will gain an evil reputation during his time away. We'll see this in Genesis 31:1 -

"Now *Jacob* heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, 'Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth.'"

Likewise, Israel during both of her dispersions received evil reputations such as in the book of Esther during the first exile, and in the nation of Germany leading to the holocaust in the second exile. We even see this continuing in America today. COMMENT

However, despite the evil name, Jacob has been promised to be kept under covenant care by God. Likewise, Israel has been saved and protected by God just as He promised in both dispersions. Jacob was finally brought back to the land, and unfaithful Israel has also been brought back home after both dispersions.

God is ever-faithful to his unfaithful people. They reap the shame and the punishment from the seeds of disobedience that they sow, but God never has nor will He ever forsake them. These are just some of the patterns between Jacob and Israel when they are outside of the covenant land given to them by God.

**<sup>2</sup> And he looked, and saw a well in the field; and behold, there *were* three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks. A large stone *was* on the well's mouth.**

This is not the same well where Abraham's servant met Rebekah, Jacob's mother, many years before. That well was close enough to the house to carry a jar for use by the family and the description of the two is different in how the water is obtained from them.

This is a well in the open fields which is used by the shepherds specifically for their flocks. When he came to it, there are three flocks already at the well, but there was a large stone covering it and so they're just sitting there with their own flocks waiting.

This then is a spring well which flows underground and bubbles up to the surface. Because of shifting sands or evaporation, the well would have been

covered with a giant flat stone that had a hole cut in the middle. This would form the cistern's mouth.

On top of that hole would be a big heavy stone. By placing a stone over the mouth, the pressure of the stone would keep the water from coming up and evaporating on the open land. The water then is precious and the well is considered common property for all of the shepherds as we'll see next -

**<sup>3</sup> Now all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone from the well's mouth, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the well's mouth.**

The term that was used in the previous verse indicates a very large stone, but there is no definite article in front of the word. This means that it wouldn't take every shepherd to move it, but rather that not all shepherds who used it could move it.

This shows that there was probably some type of agreement between all of the people that no one would water their flock until everyone came together. Until then, everyone else would sit around and wait for the others.

Once everyone showed up, the top would be popped and the water would bubble out so the flocks would come and lap it up. Is anyone seeing a picture of anything yet?

**<sup>4</sup> And Jacob said to them, "My brethren, where *are* you from?"  
And they said, "We *are* from Haran."**

Here we have a friendly greeting from Jacob. He's in a foreign land and certainly doesn't want to appear like a stranger and so he calls the shepherds his brothers and asks where they're from.

Their language would be different than what the people of Canaan spoke, but because his mother is from here, he would certainly understand them, having learned it from her. Any difficulty between the two would be no

problem, because Deborah came along with him from Canaan too and she was from there.

Their answer to him must have been a welcome one. "We are from Haran." It is the land he was sent to and the land that they were from. He still could be a long distance from Haran because the shepherds would travel these long distances with their flocks, but he was now among people who probably knew his family.

**<sup>5</sup> Then he said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know him."**

Laban is actually the grandson of Nahor. Laban's father is Bethuel, but Nahor was certainly well known and Bethuel may not have been or he might have died. For whatever reason, he asks about Laban in connection with Nahor. And they answer knowingly.

## **II. Introducing Rachel**

**<sup>6</sup> So he said to them, "Is he well?" And they said, "He is well. And look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep."**

Jacob's question about Laban is an eastern way of inquiry - *ha'shalom lo?* "Is there peace to him?" The word peace, or *shalom*, is more than just a state of calm, but an entire concept of the wellness and prosperity of the person. It is contentment and blessing. Their answer confirms he has this - "*shalom*"... he is well.

And as what seems to happen time and time again, God intervenes immediately with something new and which proves that things occur by more than happenstance. No sooner did Jacob ask about Laban than the people say they know him and "Yes, he's doing fine. And by the way, here comes his daughter Rachel."

Were we to not have ever read the rest of the story before, we could safely guess that this will be Jacob's wife someday. He was sent out of the land to find a wife from the family of his mother, he arrives at a well with people

that know the family he's looking for, and then a daughter of that family comes up at that moment.

God's hand and His timing are all over the story and it shows He is in complete control over what's happening. Rachel, the daughter of Laban, comes with her sheep. As we will see, this shepherdess will become one of the four mothers of the children of Israel.

Eventually she will bear two children to Jacob - Benjamin and Joseph. Both of them will come to prefigure Jesus. Joseph will receive the birthright of his father and one of his sons, Ephraim will inherit the preeminent blessing.

From her son Benjamin will come Saul the first king of Israel and also Paul, the author of much of the New Testament. Her name means "Ewe" as in a female lamb. This young shepherdess is obviously a most important figure in the pages of the Bible.

**<sup>7</sup>Then he said, "Look, *it is still high day; it is not time for the cattle to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go and feed *them*.*"**

Jacob is a shepherd himself and so he knows what is right and normal for tending the sheep, but he doesn't know the customs of the well and so he gives them this friendly advice without understanding why they're hanging around doing nothing.

Normally in the middle of the day when it's the hottest, the shepherds would take a break and relax in the shade and let the animals gather by the waters. The picture of the 23rd Psalm comes to mind here - "He leads me by still waters."

But, once the hottest part of the day was behind, the animals would be taken back out into the fields to eat more. This is now that time of day and he's not understanding why they're just sitting around. And so he tells them that the sun is still high in the sky and they should water them and get them back out in the fields.

They're not going to get big and fat and yummy standing around looking at each other. But without taking any offense at his sheep tending instructions, they explain why they're sitting around...

**<sup>8</sup> But they said, “We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well’s mouth; then we water the sheep.”**

The local agreement is that only when all the flocks are gathered together will they roll the stone from the mouth of the well. If they had already watered their sheep and left, then whenever Rachel or some other young, small, or weak shepherd came, they wouldn't be able to uncover the well. Only when they were all there would they water the sheep. In other words - Today we're waiting on Rachel...

**<sup>9</sup> Now while he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a shepherdess.**

There is all kinds of speculation as to why Rachel is the shepherdess of the family. Laban has sons as well, and so it's possible that they were too young at this time to tend the sheep.

His oldest daughter, Leah, isn't taking care of them. The Bible says though that she had weak eyes and so the speculation is that either the sun is too strong for her eyes or that she couldn't see well enough to keep track of them. Whatever the reason, God ensured that Rachel, the Ewe lamb, would come first to meet Jacob.

**<sup>10</sup> 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.**

There was probably a lot of emotion in Jacob at this moment. He had left his home and land at a great age - 77, probably never having been away from them for more than a short time when he was out shepherding his

own flocks. Then he arrives at a well where his cousin is coming in to water the sheep.

And she is, as we will learn, very beautiful. All of this and more surely had him overwhelmed and so in a display of his care for the family and in order to impress Rachel, he moves this great stone off the well by himself and waters the flock for her. He is a man looking for a wife and she is a beauty that will suit his needs.

**<sup>11</sup> Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept.**

This is the second time a person is kissed in the Bible. The first is when Jacob kissed Isaac before being blessed and now Jacob, the one who is blessed, kisses his cousin and future wife. Then he lifted up his voice - maybe in praise of God, maybe in a triumph over the long journey, or maybe in elation over meeting Rachel.

For whatever reason, the emotions that went along with the voice resulted in weeping.

**<sup>12</sup> And Jacob told Rachel that he *was* her father's relative and that he *was* Rebekah's son. So she ran and told her father.**

Depending on what translation you use, it will say Jacob told her that he was her father's relative, kinsman, brother, etc. The Hebrew says that he was her father's brother. This might seem confusing, but it's not meant in a literal sense.

Brother, in this sense is extended to remote degrees of family relationships such as a nephew, a cousin, an uncle, etc. I bring this up as I do from time to time, to show you that different translations will attempt to explain things differently and can lead to wrong interpretations about things.

This is why it's best to read different translations in order to get a fuller understanding of what is being said and why. Anyway, as soon as she hears who he is, she took off to tell dad, certainly leaving the flocks in his care while she was gone.



### III. Welcome in a Foreign Land

**<sup>13</sup> Then it came to pass, when Laban heard the report about Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. So he told Laban all these things.**

Laban certainly remembers the 10 camels full of goods bearing the servant of Abraham who came to find a wife for his son. He probably knows through communicating with Rebekah that Isaac has prospered greatly and has become great and that this blessing will flow down to his own son as well.

Laban is a worldly guy as we saw before and yet he is a family man. He will attempt to get the two concepts merged so that he will be blessed as well as take care of his sister's son. And so, just as he did almost 100 years earlier, he runs out to meet the visitor.

Genesis 24:29 says, "Now Rebekah had a brother whose name *was* Laban, and Laban ran out to the man by the well."

Once again, Laban runs out to a man by a well to become a part of God's word and the story of mankind moving from the fall to his restoration in Christ. There at the well, Laban embraces Jacob, and for the third time in the Bible it notes a kiss.

He kisses him and then brings him to his house where Jacob tells him all about his journey and maybe why he left in the first place.

**<sup>14</sup> And Laban said to him, "Surely you *are* my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him for a month.**

While in the house, Laban has had a chance to discern the truth of what Jacob was saying. In finding this out, he acknowledges that Jacob is his bone and his flesh. This means that they are of the same stock and group of people; they are family.

Because of this, Jacob is now allowed to stay and participate in the family life. The ending verse today tells us that He stayed there for a month which is literally a month of days or the time from one moon cycle to another. This is where we'll end today in order to pick up with a new portion of Jacob's adventure next week.

However, I said earlier that Jacob's time out of the land of Canaan is a picture of Israel's time out of their land during times of exile. While they were out, and for those who are still out, they are often greeted as family and are welcome in the lands they stay.

But, through diligence, God's blessing, and being a tight knit family of people, they eventually become alienated from the people they live with and this has caused them to be moved out time and again - a people ever in search of their own place.

This will happen to Jacob, and it has happened to Israel, but God has kept them as a family throughout the ages and He always keeps their land open and waiting for them. Jacob will spend many long years away from home, but he will return as God promised.

And though Israel was dispersed for 2000 years, God has favored them once again with their own land. The book of Amos tells us that they will never be uprooted from their home again.

The times are coming to their fulfillment and God's blessing is upon His people. It is the wise and prudent soul who prays for these people and whose heart blesses them. God has His eyes and His heart upon them and we should as well.

Now that we've looked at the historical and cultural details of today's story, what we need to do is attempt to figure out why these verses are here. Why are the details included at all? Does anybody here have a clue? I had none until I did this sermon and God opened it up to me.

Jacob is a picture of Christ. In verse 1 he travels out of the Promised Land to the land of the people of the east. This is a picture of Jesus leaving heaven

(the last place Jacob was noted at was Bethel, the House of God, a picture of heaven.) He travels to the east - a picture of the world of fallen man in the Bible.

In verse 2, he comes to a field, a picture of the world from which man derives his sustenance. This is seen in Genesis 3:17 - "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life." There in the field are three flocks waiting to be watered, a picture of the three groups of people mentioned in the book of Acts.

The Jews in chapter 2, the Samaritans, or the mixed Jew/Gentile people in chapter 8, and the gentiles in chapter 10. All are needing the water of life, just as the flocks need the water from the well.

The number three in the Bible stands for that which is solid, real, substantial, complete, and entire. Things that are especially complete are stamped with the number three. \*God's attributes are three: omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence. His essence is revealed in three - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

\*There are three great divisions completing time--past, present, and future.  
\*Three persons in grammar express and include all the relationships of mankind - me, you, and us. \*Thought, word, and deed complete the sum of human capability.

We could go on and on with examples from the Bible and from creation, but the three flocks are the complete sum of humanity - Jew, Jew/Gentile mix, and Gentile.

In verse 3 we see that the water can't be accessed until all the shepherds and their flocks are at the field together. The water is a picture of the Holy Spirit and the stone needs to be rolled out of the way before it can be received. Do you see where this is going?

In verse 4, Jacob asks the shepherds where they are from. Their answer is that they're from Haran, which means "mountainous." Shepherd's are

those who lead flocks, and the message of Jesus is one which according to Isaiah is proclaimed from the mountains.

The mountains are the place where people often seek God either rightly or wrongly. So here we have a picture of the people of the world, seeking after religion and being led by shepherds.

In verse 5, Jacob asks for Laban the son of Nahor and wants to know his condition, and if he is well. Laban, as explained eons ago, means brick or white. Bricks when fired will turn white, so there is that connection. Jacob is asking about Laban. As a brick he is hardened clay - picturing fallen man.

Nahor is a picture of man thirsting for the water of life. A root of his name is used in Psalm 69:3 in this way -

I am weary with my crying; My throat is dry; My eyes fail while I wait for my God.

The word "dry" or "parched" is the same basic word as his name. Laban the dried brick and the son of the parched man is someone who needs the Water of Life to be quenched - he is fallen man.

In verse 6, Rachel, meaning Ewe shows up. Rachel is the same word used to describe Jesus in Isaiah 53:7 -

He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He opened not His mouth;  
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,  
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,  
So He opened not His mouth.

And Rachel is leading her flocks to the water. Are you seeing it? This makes a fourth flock at the well. The number four is the number of things that have a beginning, of things that are made, of material things, and matter itself.

It is the number of material completeness. \*The fourth day saw the material creation finished and so it represents the earth. \*Four is the number of the great elements - earth, air, fire, and water.

There are four directions earth north, south, east, and west. \*There are four divisions of the day - morning, noon, evening, and midnight. \*There are four seasons - spring, summer, autumn, and winter. We could go on, but you get the picture.

Here is the Lamb leading the flocks to the water. These are those who already know the Lord, but there are those from the other three flocks - Jew, Jew/Gentile mix, and Gentiles that are waiting to receive Him too. They are all at the well to receive the water.

In verse 7, Jacob tells the other shepherds that they need to get busy, water their flocks and get back in the fields, it's still high day. The work ends at nighttime, not in the day. This is seen in John 9, where Jesus says, "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; *the* night is coming when no one can work. <sup>5</sup> As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

But there's a problem. They tell Jacob, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep." Are you seeing it? In verse 9, Rachel, brings her father's sheep - the believing Jews who have waited on their Messiah.

In verse 10, Jacob sees her - and then it specifically mentions twice "the daughter of Laban his mother's brother" and then it mentions "the sheep of Laban, his mother's brother." They are fallen sons of Adam, but they are His kin - the leaders and the people who have waited so long for Jesus.

When Jacob sees them, he rolled the great stone from the well's mouth to water the flock. This is a picture of the great stone which Jesus rolled away from the mouth of the tomb, thus allowing for the Holy Spirit, the Water of Life to come. It is the restoration of the life lost back at the fall of man. As Jesus said in John 7 -

<sup>38</sup> "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." <sup>39</sup> But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

You can see the symbolism going right through the story, right up until verse 14 where Laban says, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." This takes us right back to the idea that Jesus came from man, but didn't inherit man's sin. He was born of a woman, but not of a man. In Genesis 2:23, we read this -

And Adam said:  
"This *is* now bone of my bones  
And flesh of my flesh;  
She shall be called Woman,  
Because she was taken out of Man."

Adam received a wife, taken from man - just as Christ's bride will receive a husband born of a woman. Jesus Christ really came in the form of a man to redeem fallen man. For those who call on Jesus, from any group of people on earth, they will receive the promised Holy Spirit and they will be led to the living waters.

The stone is Christ; the water is Holy Spirit which issues from Christ, the well is where the Spirit of Christ dwells; Jacob pictures Christ; the Rachel - the Lamb pictures Christ. Everything here points to fallen man and his encounter with Christ. And you too can encounter Him.

**Closing Verse:** They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat; <sup>17</sup> for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Revelation 7:16, 17

Next Week: Genesis 29:15-30 (Seven Years and Seven Days From the Law to Grace)

## **Water from the Well**

So Jacob went on his journey away from his home  
And came to the people of the East and to their land  
And he looked and saw a well in a field where he did roam  
And behold, three flocks of sheep guarded by the shepherds' hand

A large stone was on the mouth of the well  
Now all the flocks would be gathered there  
And they would roll the stone away after a spell  
And water the sheep and put the stone back with care

And Jacob said to them, My brethren where are you from?  
And in response they said, from Haran we do come

Then he said to them, "Do you know Laban son of Nahor?"  
And they said we know him, "Indeed we do."  
So he said to them, "Is he well can you tell me more?"  
And they said "He is well, yes it is true."

"And look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep."  
Then he said, "Look, it's still high day  
It's not time for the cattle to be gathered for them to sleep  
Water the sheep and go feed them, okay?"

But they said, We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together  
And they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth  
Then we water the sheep, not just whenever  
You must not be from around here. Are you from the south?

Now while he was still speaking with them in his address  
Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess

And it came to pass when Jacob saw Rachel  
The daughter of his mother's brother  
And the sheep of Laban his uncle as well  
That he rolled the stone from the well without another

And he watered Laban's flock which Rachel kept  
Then Jacob kissed Rachel and lifted up his voice and wept

And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kin  
And that he was Rebekah's son  
So she ran and told her father about him  
Certainly all the things he'd done

Then it came to pass, when Laban heard  
The report about Jacob his sister's son  
That he ran to meet him his curiosity stirred  
And embraced him and kissed him there under the sun

And he brought him to his house, yes into his home  
So he told Laban all these things which did arise  
And Laban said to him "Surely you are my flesh and my bone  
And he stayed with him for a month under the Eastern skies

As with Jacob, so did Israel leave the land  
Twice in their history this came to pass for them  
Having been under the Judge's divine hand  
But in faithfulness He returned them home again

Yes, God is faithful to His covenant and to His word  
And in faithfulness He keeps His people near  
In truth and surety He deals, He is the faithful Lord  
And so be not downcast; instead be of good cheer

He will guide His people home, none will He lose  
In His mighty grasp are we, when His Son Jesus we choose

Stand on His promises and given him glory and praise  
And rest in His goodness for eternal days

Hallelujah and Amen...