

Boomerang – Its Reaping Time for Jacob

Text: Gen. 29:1-30

Introduction:

1. Over the next three chapters of Genesis, we have the record of Jacob's twenty long years away from the land of Canaan.
2. In this chapter we follow Jacob on his journey from Bethel where God met Him in grace to his arrival in Haran where he meets up with his family.
- If in New Testament terms Genesis 28 represented Jacob's justification, Genesis 29 brings out the truth of God's work in sanctification. We see God's hand working in the life of his son Jacob guiding him into God's perfect will and dealing with the self-life in Jacob. Wiersbe writes, "Jacob may have left his family problems behind but he had to take along his biggest problem – himself." After Bethel we see the hand of God working in Jacob's life to take Jacob from self-reliance to God-reliance.
3. We will divide the text under three headings for our study.

I. GOD'S PROVIDENCE IN JACOB'S LIFE (VS. 1-14)

The hand of God worked providentially in Jacob's journey to lead him in the direction of His will. The first part of this chapter really helps set the scene for what will follow. "The story before us is a very ordinary one. A journey, a meeting with shepherds near a well, a young woman coming up, an act of courtesy; and yet these small events led to great and far-reaching results. How very much depends upon very little! There is nothing really small in human life." (Thomas) God's Providential leading is seen in:

A. The Progress made in his Journey (Vs. 1)

1. Having experienced the Divine encounter at Bethel, Jacob continues in his journey. The phrase "went on his journey" has the idea of "lifted up his feet". There is a new enthusiasm and hope, a new spring in Jacob's step after Bethel. Jacob had started on his own journey of faith, his own relationship with God. Griffith Thomas writes, "Jacob is now in the greatest of all schools that of experience, and there are many lessons to learn."
2. Remember, the faith journey begins with salvation. You must come to God through Christ by faith and receive the gift of salvation. Salvation is not an end but a beginning! The beginning of a new walk with God which ultimately reaches the final destination of heaven itself.
3. The presence and the promises of God spurred Jacob forward in his walk with God. Bethel, as precious as it was, was intended to move Jacob forward in the will of God. "Bethel was intended to fit Jacob for the journey and all that lay before him." (Thomas)

B. The Place at the end of his Journey (Vs. 2-4)

1. We need to learn to see God's hand in the small details of life. Out of all the places at which Jacob could have arrived after his journey, God led him to a well in a field where the local shepherds would

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water their flocks. History was about to repeat itself in a wonderful way. Many years earlier, Abraham's servant had found Rebekah, Jacob's father's wife, at a well in Haran (Genesis 24). Wiersbe notes, "In the trusting Christian's life, there are no accidents, only appointments." John Butler adds, "There are not chance-happenings, no chance-meetings, no chance-delays, no chance-losses, no chance-anythings in our lives. All is of Divine appointment."

2. When we are walking with God in the centre of His will for our lives, there is no such thing as random chance or happenstance. God leads and God directs! Remember that God so often uses places and people in His Providential dealings with us in the journey of faith.

C. The People encountered in his Journey (Vs. 5-14)

1. Jacob's encounter with the shepherds (Vs. 5-8)

- a. Importantly, these men knew Laban and were able to point Jacob in the right direction.
- b. The shepherds were waiting for the stone to be rolled away from the well's mouth so that they could water the flocks. Perhaps they were too young to move the stone?

2. Jacob's encounter with Rachel (Vs. 9-12)

- a. God has a wonderful way of causing you to cross paths with key people at key times in your life. In this case, God led Jacob to his future spouse. Be encouraged that God can and does lead in this area!
- b. Jacob's encounter with Rachel was a clear case of "love at first sight". Notice how Jacob responded when he saw Rachel approaching:
 - i. He rolled the stone away from the well's mouth. Jacob was a strong man who could work. He was no wimp. No doubt the sight of Rachel spurred him to action!
 - ii. He watered the flocks for Rachel. Jacob had a good work ethic and this will be further demonstrated in his life as the account of his life develops further.
 - iii. He kissed Rachel. Please remove from your mind any sort of Hollywood image here. This was the kiss of greeting common in the East, not a passionate, romantic kiss.
 - iv. He cried loudly. We get a sense for the inner emotions of Jacob at this time. Think of the context. He had recently had to run for his life from his brother and had endured the long and dangerous journey to Haran. To meet one of his own kin would have been a great blessing and relief.
 - v. He informed Rachel as to who he was. No doubt Rachel had heard stories of her legendary Aunty Rebekah. It must have been an amazing experience for her to meet her son Jacob out of the blue.

- c. We also get a first glimpse at Rachel as a woman in these verses. She was a beautiful lady (See Vs. 16) but she was also industrious and diligent (Vs. 9 – 'kept' means to tend). To be a

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shepherdess of her father's flocks would have been hard work. She had both inner character and outer beauty. She also responded as a characterized young lady would and took the news of Jacob's arrival in her life straight to her father.

3. Jacob's encounter with Laban (Vs. 13-14)

- a. Laban also responded positively to Jacob's arrival and welcomed him into his home. From our first impressions of Laban in Genesis 24:29-31, it is highly likely that Laban was excited to see Jacob as he saw another opportunity for personal gain.
- b. Jacob's initial stay with Laban is noted as being "the space of a month". Little did Jacob know at this point that he would be there in God's school of faith for 20 years!

II. GOD'S PROVISION IN JACOB'S LIFE (VS. 15-20)

God would use Laban in a number of ways in Jacob's life but for now we note two areas of provision:

A. The Provision of Wages (Vs. 15)

1. In that first month's stay, Jacob's diligent work ethic was noted by Laban – "shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought?" Laban, as shifty as he would prove to be, had some sense of duty to his nephew and offers him a paid position as one of his workmen.
2. A good work ethic is an important quality that needs to be developed in a prospective husband. Whatever faults Jacob had, he was not a lazy man and could be counted upon to work hard. He was a contributor, not a freeloader! John Butler writes, "**Lazy people make lousy spouses.**" Marriage and family life has many joys and blessings but it requires hard work and the investment of time and energy.
3. Proverbs 12:24 "**The hand of the diligent shall bear rule:** but the slothful shall be under tribute."

B. The Provision of a Wife (Vs. 16-19)

Jacob had come to Haran to find a wife according to his father Isaac's instruction (Gen. 28:2) and there was no doubt in Jacob's mind that he had found the ideal wife in Laban's household.

1. The Description of Laban's Daughters (Vs. 16-17)

- a. Leah – the eldest of the two and described as "tender eyed". The word 'tender' has the idea of 'soft' or 'gentle'. The first time the word appears is back in Genesis 18:7 – "And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf **tender** and good..." The same word is also translated 'tenderhearted' (2 Chr. 13:7) and 'soft' (Job. 41:3, Prov. 15:1, 25:15).
 - i. It appears to mean that Leah had beautiful eyes. They were soft and gentle, revealing something of a soft and gentle inner disposition.
 - ii. Adam Clarke defines the words as meaning "soft, delicate, lovely". He states, "I believe the word means just the reverse of the signification generally given to it. The design of the inspired writer is to compare both the sisters together, that the balance may appear to be greatly in

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favour of Rachel. The chief recommendation of Leah was her soft and beautiful eyes; but Rachel was (יפת תאר yephath toar) beautiful in her shape, person, mien, and gait, and (יפת מראה yephath mareh) beautiful in her countenance. The words plainly signify a fine shape and fine features, all that can be considered as essential to personal beauty.”

- b. Rachel – the younger of the two and described as “beautiful and well favoured”. The word ‘beautiful’ is a translation of two Hebrew words. One means “beautiful” and the other means “outline”. The words together mean “beautiful in form” (Whitelaw). The words “well favoured” are translated from a Hebrew word meaning “beautiful in appearance” (Whitelaw) which speaks here especially of her face. We could say that Rachel had both a beautiful face and figure.
 - i. There is nothing sinful about natural beauty but it should NOT be the sole criteria in choosing a spouse. Rachel was beautiful outwardly but she also had some inner character as noted previously.
 - ii. The Bible extols spiritual beauty over natural beauty. Natural beauty is not nothing. God’s creation is filled with natural beauty and God made women to possess feminine charm and beauty. But inner beauty is of the highest value and is extolled in the New Testament. 1 Peter 3:3-4 “Whose adorning let it not be that outward *adorning* of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; **But let it be the hidden man of the heart**, in that which is not corruptible, *even the ornament* of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.”

2. The Decision regarding Laban’s Daughters (Vs. 18-20)

Jacob’s heart was set on marrying Rachel, not Leah and so requests that she be given to him in marriage in exchange for 7 years work. In the culture of the East, a dowry was expected. Jacob did not have the means to pay a dowry so he offered his labour instead. We get a sense for just how much Jacob loved Rachel in these verses.

- a. The depth of Jacob’s love (Vs. 18). Jacob highly valued Rachel as a prospective spouse and was willing to work hard in order to marry her. True love highly values the object of its love. Jacob deeply and sincerely loved Rachel.
- b. The patience of Jacob’s love (Vs. 19-20). Jacob was willing to work and wait for seven years in order to marry Rachel. Most will not have to wait that long once they meet their future spouse in the will of God (Isaac and Rebekah a good example of a much quicker courtship) but whatever the time frame you face in the will of God, true love is willing to wait.
- c. The purity of Jacob’s love (Vs. 21). It is clear from Jacob’s request to Laban that he and Rachel had kept their virginity throughout their lengthy courtship. This is still God’s way despite

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the fact it is now rare even amongst professing believers.
“**Society is filled with barnyard morals.**” (Butler)

III. GOD’S PURGING IN JACOB’S LIFE (VS. 21-30)

Jacob now enters a period of reaping in his life. The loving Hand of God is going to chasten Jacob using Laban as His instrument.

A. The Deceitfulness of Laban (Vs. 21-24)

“Laban was just as deceitful as his nephew Jacob. Laban’s heart was full of greed and guile. His outward charitableness towards Jacob were simply cosmetics that concealed great corruption of character.” (Butler)
Jacob is about to meet his match in uncle Laban! Witty Jacob is about to be outwitted! Laban’s dishonourable character is highlighted in:

1. **His delay in giving Rachel to Jacob (Vs. 21).** Jacob worked willingly and diligently for seven years, upholding his end of the deal. Laban should have taken the initiative to uphold his end of the deal at the completion of the seven years but Jacob had to go to him and demand he follow through with his end of the commitment. Laban was a man of the world; a man focused on selfish gain even if it meant attaining it at the expense of others. Laban was a greedy miser and a clever Scrooge.

2. **His dishonesty in giving Leah to Jacob (Vs. 22-24).** In those days a special wedding feast was held that would last up to seven days. At the climax and conclusion of the feast, the bride to be would be presented to the groom. He would then take her into his own tent or chamber and consummate the marriage. In the custom of the times, Leah would have been veiled. Being Rachel’s sister, she was probably similar in size and stature and without seeing her face, Jacob didn’t discern the difference. “Laban is seen to be the equal of his clever sister Rebekah, and **Jacob is being paid back with the family coin.**” (Thomas)

B. The Discipline of Jacob (Vs. 25-30)

We should not conclude that God was behind Laban’s deceitfulness. God is not the author of evil. However, God can and does providentially use such things to accomplish His purposes in the lives of His children. Through this experience, Jacob came into contact with two timeless principles:

1. The law of God in sowing and reaping (Vs. 25)

Key point: God loves us too much to let us get away with sinful behaviour.

a. Jacob wakes up in the morning and to his shock and indignation, discovers he has married Leah, not Rachel! Jacob goes to Laban and confronts him with what he had done. Jacob is so displeased that Laban would dare to “**beguile**” him! Laban responds with the “cultural argument” as an excuse for his behaviour. Many still love the “everyone does it” argument to excuse their sin!

b. Jacob had just discovered one of God’s established laws – you reap what you sow! Consider several Scriptures that establish this law of sowing and reaping:

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- i. Galatians 6:7-8 “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: **for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.** For he that **soweth** to his flesh shall of the flesh **reap** corruption; but he that **soweth** to the Spirit shall of the Spirit **reap** life everlasting.”
 - ii. Hosea 8:7 “For they have **sown** the wind, and they shall **reap** the whirlwind:”
 - iii. Hosea 10:13 “Ye have **plowed** wickedness, ye have **reaped** iniquity; ye have eaten the **fruit** of lies: because thou didst trust in thy way, in the multitude of thy mighty men.”
- c. Think about Jacob’s sowing and reaping - the deceiver got deceived, the trickster got tricked, the liar got lied to, the supplanter got supplanted. Look at a number of specific parallels¹:
- i. Jacob took advantage of his older brother’s hunger and swindled him out of the birthright; Laban took advantage of Jacob’s love for Rachel for his own personal gain.
 - ii. Jacob deceived his father and was in turn deceived by a father – his father-in-law.
 - iii. Jacob’s deception involved the eldest son and now the eldest daughter is involved in Jacob being deceived.
 - iv. Jacob kissed Isaac deceptively (Gen. 27:27) and then got kissed deceptively by Leah.
 - v. Jacob was influenced by and collaborated with one of his parents to deceive Isaac and now Leah is influenced to deceive Jacob by one of her parents.
 - vi. Jacob deceived Isaac into thinking he was blessing Esau when he blessed Jacob and now Laban deceives Jacob into thinking he was marrying Rachel when he was actually marrying Leah.
 - vii. Jacob used a special meal to deceive his father and now Laban uses a special feast as a part of his deception of Jacob.
 - viii. Jacob dressed up in his brother’s clothes so he would look and smell like Esau and now Leah comes to Jacob dressed in such a way that he thinks it is Rachel. Note: It is very possible/likely Laban even dressed Leah up in Rachel’s clothes and scented her with Rachel’s perfume so that she looked and smelt like Rachel.
 - ix. Jacob pretended to be Esau and stole the blessing; Leah pretended to be Rachel and stole the wedding!
 - x. Henry Morris writes, “Jacob must have been quickly struck with the similarity of this situation to the deception he himself had played on Isaac and Esau. Isaac had thought Jacob was Esau, and so gave him the blessing. Now Jacob had thought Leah was Rachel, and had taken her to wife. In both cases, the deception had been

¹ List adapted and expanded from John Butler’s commentary.

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commanded by a parent and in both cases the purpose of the deception was to acquire something desperately desired. Jacob had been sure the end justified the means in his case, but perhaps Leah and Laban also felt the same way in their case.”

- d. The Divine law of sowing and reaping should make us think soberly about what we are sowing into the field of our lives each day. Are you sowing that which is good and godly or that which is sinful? **If you sow a sinful crop, you will reap a sad harvest.**
2. **The love of God in chastening and transforming (Vs. 26-30).**

Jacob would have to work an additional 7 years for Rachel (note from verse 30 that he married her before serving the 7 years) which meant more time in the “**labour for Laban**” team.

Key point: God loves us too much to let us stay the way we are. As one pastor put it, “God loves you just the way you are but he loves you too much to leave you the way you are.” Hebrews 12:6 “For **whom the Lord loveth** he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

 - a. God is committed to the sanctification process in the lives of His children and this means dealing with the self-life in all of us. Romans 8:29 “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” **Jacob must come face to face with Jacob before he can become Israel. You will not become a prince with God (Israel) until you realize you are a pauper in Adam (Jacob).** All of us must come to the realization of Romans 7:18 “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” and the cry of Romans 7:24 “O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”
 - b. God was using Laban as a mirror in Jacob’s life to help him to see his own faults. Remember that often God uses people in our lives to mirror us if we are humble enough to admit it! Sometimes the things that frustrate us the most in the lives of others are the very things that are blind spots in our own lives.
 - c. Jacob responds to the situation with acceptance and submission. It is likely that Jacob discerned the hand of God was dealing with him over what he did to Esau his brother. When God touches our lives in such a way, we can’t but know it is God (See Genesis 42:21). “For one who has been so grievously wronged, he submits rather tamely...One cannot help but feel that the memory of the treachery he practiced on his brother and his father was being refreshed strongly and sealed his lips from making further accusations. The justice of God’s retributions seems to have overwhelmed Jacob and made him very docile on this occasion.” (Leupold)

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- d. In like manner, we need to respond right when we are chastened by God. Hebrews 12:5-11 provides some helpful instruction on the Christian and chastening. We learn:
- i. The Reality of Chastening (Vs. 5-6). Chastening is something we should expect from our loving Heavenly Father and is one of the signs of our sonship. Sometimes a good licking from the Lord is just what we need!
 - ii. The Response to Chastening (Vs. 5, 7)
 1. The wrong response to God's chastening – "My son, **despise not** the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." The word 'despise' means "to have little regard for", "to regard lightly". Sadly, many Christians don't learn from God's chastening in their lives and just like a stubborn and foolish child, go and do the same thing all over again!
 2. The right response to God's chastening – "If ye **endure** chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons". The word 'endure' means "to stay under". We are to accept our chastening from the Heavenly Father with a submissive spirit. Chastening is not enjoyable but it is profitable (Vs. 11).
 - iii. The Results of Chastening (Vs. 9-11). The Heavenly Father's chastisement is so that we might:
 1. Become partakers of his holiness (Vs. 10)
 2. Bear the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Vs. 11)

Conclusion:

1. What are you sowing in the soil of your life?
2. How are you submitting to God's sanctifying work in your life? When chastening comes, do you despise it or learn from it?