

The Cloud of Witnesses

Leah Laban's elder daughter

Lesson 1: Leah's surprising marriage

Reading: Genesis 29:16-28

Some of the events recorded for us in Scripture are amazing, aren't they? I guess this is one reason why many of us regard the Bible as unique.

Yes, it is God's story. Yes, it includes a history of the Jewish people; however, the record often provides an in-depth view of humanity, which most of us would prefer to hide or ignore. Indeed, most of us are very grateful that God doesn't publicise our mistakes and failures the way He has recorded the lives of people in the Bible. Nevertheless, Scripture does warn us that our lives and words are recorded and we are accountable for them all, sooner or later.

For some reason God allows us to see into the motivation and 'heart' of so many of His great leaders. The Patriarchs, Moses and David, are exposed before us. Why? So we may reflect and ponder. So we can accept their mistakes as a warning. So we can follow their good example.

Jacob was a deceiver and Laban either decided to give Jacob 'a taste of his own medicine' or even more likely, he was just exposing a family trait. Regardless of the culture of the day, Laban was keen to get his daughters off his hands but, in doing so, he determined that if the younger one was the more popular, he had better do something drastic to rid himself of the burden of the elder unmarried and unwanted daughter. Jacob provided the answer.

Because most of us come from a western cultural perspective, it is almost incomprehensible how Jacob could be hoodwinked into consummating his marriage with the wrong girl (unless he was drunk or totally exhausted!).

The pain and deep sense of rejection felt by an unwanted girl must be extreme. One can only imagine how that would be exaggerated because of the added pressure of being the older sibling.

Yes, we need to consider Leah, the elder daughter of Laban and the natural matriarch of the dynasty. Obviously rejected by all the local men, Laban had been singularly unsuccessful in arranging a marriage for her. Added to which Leah probably knew deep down that Rachel was more attractive and thus more likely to secure a future. Leah would have been resigned to end her days as the butt of jokes and the servant of the family.

Into this milieu Jacob arrived. A rugged hunk of a man and someone worth trying to please. Someone who could be used to gain her family's approval and a marriage proposal. Did Leah try too hard or had she already lost out by that precipitous initial meeting of Rachel and Jacob at the well? Jacob was exhausted, afraid, alone and apprehensive and there stood Rachel – a 'saviour', a close relative, a girl who showed affection and gratitude. Was that an irreversible relationship?

Laban does not strike one as a person of compassionate feelings. More of a businessman, looking after his interests and future. How did he broach the subject of his deception to Leah? Did he paint the worst possible scenario so that Leah would agree out of total desperation? Did Laban threaten

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Leah? Did he demand it of her? What hope did Laban offer Leah? What was she to get out of the deal, other than a way of escape?

However, the practical details played out. Leah was forced to or agreed to the details of the plan. She had the 'joy' of being Jacob's first 'wife'. Just imagine the sense of guilt, shame and deep-seated jealousy that would have been aroused in her sister, Rachel. Was the price worth it?

Whatever else, the 'Cinderella' of the family – got her prince!

Leah would say to us today...

Take heart, you may feel rejected, forgotten or even forsaken, but God knows, and has amazing ways of proving your worth to Him. There is nothing more wonderful than being a princess of the King of kings – God's special and favourite girl.

Prayer

Father, thank You that You know all about us – our struggles, our frustrations and our pain. Thank You that, despite our circumstances, you have a destiny for us. Please help me to relax and allow You to accomplish Your plan for my life. Amen.

Additional Readings

- Genesis 45:1-10
- Psalm 139:1-16
- Romans 8:28-39

Questions

1. How do you think Leah felt when Jacob declared his love for Rachel?
2. What do you think passed through Leah's mind during the seven years Jacob worked for Laban in order to have Rachel?
3. How do you think Leah felt being used to deceive Jacob?

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Lesson 2: Leah unloved but pregnant

Reading: Genesis 29:31-35

In Proverbs 30 the writer says, “*Under three things the earth trembles, under four it cannot bear up: a servant who becomes king, a fool who is full of food, an unloved woman who is married, and a maidservant who displaces her mistress.*” I wonder if the author was thinking about Jacob, Leah and Rachel when he wrote that.

“*An unloved woman who is married.*” Marriage is a covenant, not a contract. It is supposed to be binding until the death of either party. However, mutual love was expected to be the cementing emotion. We know from the New Testament that the love God talks about is a decision of the will, rather than feelings – although feelings are helpful.

We can choose to love and we can choose to fall out of love. Most people in a long-term marriage would confess that they chose to love; they chose to stay married through all the challenges they faced. Unresolved relationship conflicts are never the pathway to a healthy life, for us or our children. Most children who are balanced come from a home with both biological parents. It’s the fundamental foundation for a healthy society.

It would appear that Leah chose to love Jacob despite his rejection and lack of love for her. She would have submitted to his demands for marital rights or managed to persuade him to agree to hers. Whichever was the case, the Lord graciously “*opened her womb*” and she gave birth to a son (Leah eventually bore Jacob six sons).

Names were important in the Hebrew culture and meant a great deal more than just the ‘word’ to which the child would respond. The names Leah gave her children emanated from her emotional state at the time:

- *Reuben – it is because the Lord has seen my misery*
- *Simeon – because the Lord heard that I am not loved*
- *Levi – now my husband will become attached to me*
- *Judah – Praise (this time I will praise the Lord)*

It’s interesting to trace Leah’s emotional journey. It started in misery, moved to being unloved and feeling attached to her husband, then to praising God. It’s amazing what the gift of a baby does in people’s lives.

Leah hung on to her marriage to Jacob with every ounce of her body. She would have tried to get Jacob to love her, despite his antagonism and reticence. She would have persevered and overcome the bitterness, the rejection, the humiliation and the pain. For Leah, opting out was not an option. Her trust in God seemed to have been very strong. Though humans might fail her, somewhere within her was a faith that somehow, at some appointed time, God would come to her aid and vindicate her.

God did. God not only opened Leah’s womb but she became the mother of most of the tribes of Israel. Levi was the forefather of the High Priests and the family line of Aaron, Miriam and Moses. Judah was the ancestor of David and eventually the human ancestral line of our Messiah, Jesus.

Did God know all this at the time? Yes. Was He overseeing everything? Yes. Did God love Jacob?

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Yes. Did He love Leah? Too right, He did – and in His love and grace, God included Leah in the ancestral line of the Lion of the Tribe of Judah!

Out of sorrow, rejection and bitterness came the greatest gift and greatest joy of all. The source of all Praise!

Leah would say to us today...

Being barren is an awful stigma. God was so gracious to me. Not only did He look down and realise that I was unloved by my husband, but He made a way for me to feel fulfilled, regardless of the way Jacob treated me. No matter your circumstances, do not be afraid to let God know exactly how you feel. He has a heart of compassion and will come to your aid, and then, like me, you will find yourself praising God too.

Prayer

Father, thank You for knowing all about my circumstances. Thank You for being a compassionate and all-seeing God. I praise You that You are also omnipotent. You are a God of miracles. Please continue to perform miracles in my life – not for my glory but for the extension of Your Kingdom. Amen.

Additional Readings

- Jeremiah 31:1-13
- Isaiah 55:1-13
- Ephesians 5:21-29

Questions

1. How do you reconcile God's acceptance of Leah's marriage with His character of righteousness?
2. Why did Jacob fail to love Leah even after she had 'given' him sons?
3. Why did Jacob decide to continue to father a large family through Leah, even at the expense of Rachel's happiness?