

**FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Genesis Lesson 23 ( 29:1 – 30:24): Some Summary Thoughts:**

As we work our way through the “Jacob cycle,” Scripture presents its stories on several levels. One level is the “physical” level in which the characters interact with human emotions and human foibles. In this regard, we watch Jacob live up to his name as “heel grabber” or “conniver” and wonder why God will put up with this master deceiver as someone He has chosen to carry the promise of “land” and “descendants” made first to Abraham, then Isaac, and finally Jacob. The physical reality in chapters 25 through 36 is that Jacob is fleeing for his life, having deceived his brother Esau into giving him both the “first-born” birthright and blessing. Conflict marks Jacob’s life. This continues as he meets an even better manipulator in his wife’s brother Laban outside the “promised land.” Jacob contracts for one wife, is outmaneuvered by Laban, and then spends at least 14 years serving Laban for 2 wives, 2 handmaids, and ultimately 12 children.

On a spiritual level, God appears to be allowing this time to be used for Jacob’s character transformation. Jacob had his own “conversion” experience when he accepted God as his own personal God, albeit with several conditions (28:20-21). As we read, years will pass in Jacob’s “sanctification” process where he (like we) must learn to put *full trust in God* to guide and empower His chosen/called people in service to Him. The greater literary ring composition organization of the chapters point out Jacob’s movement from deceiver to reconciler as God is with him, protecting him, per God’s promise to Jacob in his dream (28:15):

- (A) Prologue (25:19-24)
- (B) Isaac and the Canaanites: Conflict and Covenant (26)
- (C) JACOB AND ESAU: DECEPTION (27)
- (D) Bethel: Departure from promised land (28:10-22)
- (E) Jacob and Laban: Deception and Reconciliation (29-31)**
- (D) Mananaim: Return to promised land (32:1-2)
- (C) JACOB AND ESAU: RECONCILIATION (32-33)
- (B) Jacob and the Canaanites: Deception and Enmity (34)
- (A) The Edomites (36)

More ring composition and literary organization of chapters 29-31 reveal God’s continuing hand in Jacob’s prosperity and the emergence of the “multitude” that God first promised to his grandfather Abraham (12:1-3), and further promised personally to Jacob (28:13-14). Though Jacob still faces conflict with his relatives and within his own household as his wives compete for his attention, his character transformation is underway.

- (A) Jacob arrives in Haran (meets Laban) (29:1-14)
- (B) Jacob and Laban make a contract (29:15-20)
- (C) Laban deceives Jacob (29:21-30)
- (D) The birth of Jacob’s 12 children (29:31-30:24) [God does prosper, per the blessing: a *multitude*]
- (C) Jacob tricks Laban (30:25-43) [flocks increase]
- (B) Jacob and Laban dispute (31:17-24) [God promises presence & orders Jacob to return, vv. 3,13]
- (A) Jacob departs from Laban (Haran) (31:43-54) [Jacob credits God, v.42; Laban concurs/covenants, v 44]

**Perhaps one key lesson for all of us is that even when conflict appears to consume us, God still is actively at work blessing, protecting, and guiding His “called” people. And while “conversion” may occur quickly, “sanctification” is actually a lifelong process.**

Another interesting potential lesson comes as we read the names given by Jacob’s wives to their children. The names almost all reflect how they perceive God is interacting with them as they live their lives. Perhaps part of what we need to re-learn is that God is the author and sustainer of all life – a fact that Jacob’s family understood well – a fact that we take for granted at our own peril today.

Finally, we can place Rachel’s “barrenness” among other accounts in Scripture: Abraham’s wife Sarah, Isaac’s wife Rebekah, and even the priest Zacharias’ wife Elizabeth (Luke 1:5-7) who was described as “*righteous in the sight of God*” (Lk 1:6). But God opened their wombs, and in the New Testament account of Elizabeth, God followed up her pregnancy with His announcement to Mary that she would give birth by the agency of His Holy Spirit. The angel told Mary: “*Behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God*” (Lk 1:36-37). The last part of the statement is exactly the same as that told to Abraham and Sarah in Gen 18:14. Again, the lesson is simple: God is sovereign, and God is in control whether we sense it or not.