

## Genesis (2011) 29A

- Jacob has left for Haran, to find Isaac's relatives still living in that land
  - He is alone and he is carrying virtually nothing of significance
  - As he left the land, God appeared to him promising to bring him back into the land of his fathers
    - God's message was intended to give Jacob peace and confidence about this journey
  - But what Jacob lacked in physical baggage, he makes up for in spiritual and emotional baggage
    - He is still showing a stubborn tendency to trust in his own abilities rather than in God's promises
    - He resorts to deception and schemes to get what he wants
    - But in Haran he'll meet his match in Uncle Laban
  - The story of Jacob's time in Haran lasts three chapters or so, but tells us a lot about Jacob and the story of Israel
    - It tells us the story of how Jacob obtains his four wives
    - And it shows us how the people of Jacob, the people God calls Israel, originate

[Gen. 29:1](#) Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the sons of the east.  
[Gen. 29:2](#) He looked, and saw a well in the field, and behold, three flocks of sheep were lying there beside it, for from that well they watered the flocks. Now the stone on the mouth of the well was large.

[Gen. 29:3](#) When all the flocks were gathered there, they would then roll the stone from the mouth of the well and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.

[Gen. 29:4](#) Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran."

[Gen. 29:5](#) He said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know him."

[Gen. 29:6](#) And he said to them, "Is it well with him?" And they said, "It is well, and here is Rachel his daughter coming with the sheep."

- The opening verse of Chapter 29 says plainly that Jacob went on his journey

- But the Hebrew is more descriptive
  - It literally reads “Jacob picked up his feet”
  - The phrase is similar to the English colloquialism, “a spring in his step”
- It suggests Jacob was encouraged by God’s appearance in Bethel, and so Jacob leaves the land with a measure of confidence
  - He’s gonna need that spring in his step because the walk to Haran is 450 miles
  - Like walking from Austin, TX to Tulsa, OK
    - And in the summer time
  - This is roughly the same trip that Abraham’s servant took to find Isaac’s wife, Rebekah
- And like the servant before him, Jacob arrives at a well
  - Jacob is in the land of the sons of the east
    - This is a reference to the branch of Abraham’s family who remained in the east rather than moving to Canaan
  - Of course we know that any reference to the east is a warning sign that we’re dealing with men who do not know the Lord
    - There is a reason why these family members remained in the east while Abraham moved west into the Promised Land
    - God called Abraham – and only Abraham – to enter Canaan, because Abraham alone was selected to receive God’s promises
    - The rest of Abraham’s family remained as they were: pagan worshippers
- Jacob enters the pastures near Haran, and he comes upon a well in a field
  - The well was literally the local watering whole for shepherds grazing their flocks
    - Three shepherds had assembled their sheep at the well and were waiting to water their flocks

- We're told the well was covered by a large stone, so the shepherds couldn't water their herds
- As Jacob approached he wants to know how close he is to his goal, so he inquires about Haran
  - They tell him in vs.5-6 that they know Laban and in fact his daughter is approaching now
  - This is almost exactly like the encounter the servant had at the well in the earlier story
  - But there are differences
    - The servant prayed for God to give him clear direction and signs
    - And when they came, the servant thanked the Lord and gave Him glory
- Here Jacob never bothers to seek the Lord's help, either taking it for granted or overlooking it entirely
  - And yet God's fingerprints are all over these circumstances
  - God is no less in control; the only thing that's changed is the beneficiary's perspective
    - Unlike the servant, Jacob remains unaware of the Lord working in this moment
    - Because he isn't seeking to know the Lord's will much less how he can join the Lord in the work
- Jacob is a useful illustration for us in the perils of making decisions and working our plans without a solid prayer life and an attitude of seeking the Lord in all we do
  - God is always at work in and around us
  - But if we don't check in with Him, we miss that work
    - It still happens one way or another, but we're oblivious
    - So we can't see the Lord's working, adapt to it, work with it, and glorify Him for it
  - We need to remember that our prayers aren't "for" God

- They create opportunity for us, blessing for us
- Our weekly prayer time on Tuesday nights isn't something God needs and it's not a chore
- It's the privilege reserved for those called the children of God

**Prov. 15:29** The LORD is far from the wicked,  
But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

**John 9:31** "We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him.

- We alone have the opportunity to approach God in prayer, so we should take advantage of it
- Jacob continues to move forward in life without considering God's role in his daily life
  - As far as Jacob is concerned, God is back in Bethel sitting on his staircase
  - But no, God said He would be with Jacob wherever he went, and here he is working to bring Jacob to exactly the right place in perfect timing to meet Rachel, Laban's daughter
- As Jacob and the men watch Rachel approach, Jacob asks why they are waiting in the hot midday sun

**Gen. 29:7** He said, "Behold, it is still high day; it is not time for the livestock to be gathered. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them."

**Gen. 29:8** But they said, "We cannot, until all the flocks are gathered, and they roll the stone from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."

**Gen. 29:9** While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess.

**Gen. 29:10** When Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother.

- Jacob is an experienced shepherd, and so he recognizes this is a strange situation
  - Shepherds sitting in the midday heat with the sheep gathered is not normal

- Normally, animals were gathered in safety at night, then watered in the morning
- Then they moved out into the pasture to graze in the safety of the daylight
  - As night approached, the herds are regathered, and usually they are watered again at night
- So Jacob asks why are you still sitting here now?
  - The shepherds say they must wait until all the herds have gathered before they open the well and water the herd
  - Wells were often sealed by rocks to protect them from people or animals falling in or sand storms covering it over, or anything else that might contaminate or ruin it
  - Rachel's herd is the last one of the group to gather, so she is the one everyone has been waiting for
  - From the sound of it, they have been waiting for the entire morning, which is not a productive day for a shepherd
- So why do they have to wait for every flock to gather? Why didn't the shepherds just move the stone, water their flock, and then let the next shepherd do the same? Why must everyone be there together?
  - Perhaps because it took the combined strength of all the shepherds to roll the stone?
    - But that can't be the reason, because in v.10, we see Jacob alone rolled the stone away
    - Obviously one man can manage the task
  - The real reason is Rachel, who was coming with her father's sheep
    - Rachel's name is a play on words in this context, because her name means a ewe lamb
      - So a girl lamb is leading the sheep
    - This well is owned by Laban, and Rachel is his daughter we're told
    - All these shepherds are probably grazing on Laban's land

- Some of them might have been employed by Laban
  - But in either case, they were obligated to follow Laban's rules if they use his well
- It's likely that Rachel did not have the strength by herself to roll the stone away
  - So Laban probably required the men to wait for Rachel every day before watering their own flocks
  - This way Rachel could gain access to the water as well
- But here comes Rachel strolling in at midday while the rest of the shepherds waste the day waiting for her
  - The entire scene paints a picture of a poorly run operation
  - Laban's household is in desperate need of someone to step in and get things organized and running properly
- Enter Jacob, the skilled sheepherder
  - He's just the guy Laban needs to get this operation into shape
    - And as we'll soon see, Laban is a good judge of talent
  - Jacob is also a take charge guy, which becomes obvious in vs.9-10
  - He immediately gets up, moves the stone and begins to water the sheep
- The text doesn't say what Jacob's thinking was, but his actions intimated a certain mindset
  - He jumps up, moves the stone and waters the woman's flocks – probably an act of chivalry for the one woman sheepherder
  - It also suggests he was disgusted with the other shepherders laying around in the middle of the workday doing nothing useful
- God's handiwork just continues to amaze us
  - The Lord guides Jacob across 450 miles of desert in search of the family he's never met
    - And the Lord directs him to exactly the right well at exactly the right time

- To meet exactly the right woman
- And then to make sure the family respects and welcomes Jacob, God has prepared a need perfectly suited to Jacob's strengths
- When the Lord appeared to Jacob He declared He would "keep" Jacob wherever he goes
  - The word keep in Hebrew is *shamar*, which means preserve, defend, guard, take care of
    - God is going to ensure Jacob's success in this time, because God is faithful to His promises
  - The Lord has made similar promises to believers today
    - To meet our needs, to never leave us nor forsake us, to be with us always, even to the end of the age
  - Just because the Lord promises to meet our needs doesn't mean His provision will drop miraculously from Heaven in the form of manna
    - He might do that, of course, but more often He works in natural ways to meet our needs, like He is doing here with Jacob
    - Jacob couldn't have asked for a better opportunity as he arrives in Haran
    - He finds the family with no struggle and they are prepared to receive him warmly, especially when they learn his talents
  - God is clearly at work to keep Jacob...but has Jacob taken note of God's work? Not yet

[Gen. 29:11](#) Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted his voice and wept.

[Gen. 29:12](#) Jacob told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

[Gen. 29:13](#) So when Laban heard the news of Jacob his sister's son, he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Then he related to Laban all these things.

[Gen. 29:14](#) Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him a month.

- There is something quite unusual in v.11

- A man kissing a woman
  - In all the Bible, there are only 45 mentions of any form of kiss
  - Only two of those are of a man kissing a woman
    - One is here, the other is in the Song of Solomon
    - I don't know what is more surprising...that there is only 1 mention of romantic kissing outside the book of Songs
    - Or that is there is only 1 mention of romantic kissing in the book of Songs
  - Given the full context of the kiss, this isn't a romantic kiss though
    - Jacob's kiss is one of joy as he greets his long lost relative
- He lifted up his voice and wept
  - It's important to notice the lack of any reference to God in that verse
  - Contrast Jacob's response to his good fortune with that of Abraham's servant

[Gen. 24:26](#) Then the man bowed low and worshiped the LORD.

[Gen. 24:27](#) He said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the LORD has guided me in the way to the house of my master's brothers."

- Jacob is thankful, but he isn't thinking specifically enough
- He lifts his voice up and cries tears of joy, but he doesn't go the final step to acknowledge the Lord's responsibility for these blessings
  - We need to guard against this same tendency
  - In the back of our minds, we know the Lord is at work to bless us in ways big or small
  - But in those moments when things go our way, do we credit Him? Do we say, whether to ourselves or others, thank the Lord?
- So Jacob tells Rachel that he is the son of her father's sister, he is Rachel's cousin



- Now when Rachel reaches her father's home, she announces Jacob's arrival
  - And the news spreads fast
  - Laban learns that his sister's boy was in town, so he runs to meet Jacob
    - His willingness to run communicates his sincere excitement to have a distant relative honor him with this visit
    - Since it was such a long distance to travel, it was understood that he would be staying a while
- This is the same Laban that negotiated for his sister's marriage with Abraham's servant
  - That was 97 years ago, so Laban is an old man
  - But men are still living nearly 200 years in this day, so Laban is only a little past middle age
- Of course, the first thing that happens with a family reunion, we catch up on all the family news
  - At the end of v.13 it says Jacob related all these things to Laban
  - Meaning, Jacob told Laban about all that had transpired to bring Jacob to his doorstep
- Laban's response is to acknowledge Jacob is the son of his sister, and welcome him like a son
  - Once again the circumstances with Laban are perfectly set to ensure Jacob gets a warm reception...all God's work
- Jacob stays a month with Laban, we're told
  - In this day, a visiting relative didn't just spend their days lying around on the couch watching the History Channel, raiding the fridge and watching everyone else work
  - Everyone worked every day, regardless of where they laid their head
    - So Jacob would have gone to work immediately in some capacity while he stayed at Laban's

- Since we know Jacob was a shepherd, we can safely assume he went to work putting Laban's shepherding operation in order
- And as we'll see in the coming weeks, Jacob quickly becomes a very valuable part of Laban's operation
- Jacob is a man blessed by God, so it should come as no surprise that Jacob's contribution would bless Laban
  - Remember God's promises in His covenant
  - God will bless others through the covenant he makes with Jacob
- But Laban is a son of the east, and so he is not a man operating on godly principles
  - Which gives God an opportunity to use Laban's sin as an instrument to disciple and teach Jacob
  - We'll watch and learn from those lessons ourselves in the coming weeks of study