

# **Takes Work**

## **Genesis 29:9; 15-20**

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#### **I. Heaven Sent (Match made in Heaven) vs. 27-43**

- a. Jacob went
  - i. Had a vision in chapter 28:10-22
    - 1. God's plan
- b. Rachel Worked Independent vs. 6 & 9 –
  - i. She was a shepherdess
    - 1. The trait is in accordance with the freedom still allowed to unmarried girls **female shepherd**. While it is not uncommon today for women and small children to herd Bedouin flocks, in antiquity women would have done so only when the household had no sons. It was a dangerous practice since they might be molested, but it was also a way of attracting a husband
  - ii. This timing was the work of the loving sovereign God who was leading all the way (cf. 24:27).
    - 1. The fact that the meeting took place at a well is significant because a well was often associated with God's blessing (cf. 16:13–14; 21:19; 26:19–25, 33).

#### **II. Heaven Made vs. 16-17**

- a. Leah- eye
  - i. A woman's eyes were deemed an important feature of her charm due to the wearing of the traditional veil, covering the face except the eyes and cheeks (Song 4:1; 6:7), including a betrothed woman (e.g., 24:65–67; Song 1:7 with 15; 4:1, 3; 6:7; 38:13–14).
  - ii. What makes eyes "soft" is unclear; most commentators think it means they had no fire or sparkle, a quality much prized in the East. Whether her eyes were the only features that let her down is not said, but the glowing description of Rachel as having "a beautiful figure and a lovely face" suggests Leah was outshone by her sister in various ways.
  - iii. they lacked the lustrous brilliancy which is counted a feature of female beauty in the
  - iv. The term used is generally considered positive and speaks of fragility, vulnerability, tenderness or a delicate quality (NIV note). Although eyes were a principal component of beauty in the ancient world,
    - 1. Leah's positive features paled in comparison to Rachel's loveliness.

- v. The tenor of the passage, however, contrasts Leah and Rachel, first their order of birth and perhaps here their charm. This suggests that the term has the negative nuance of feeble, impotent (e.g., Deut 20:8; 2 Sam 3:39), meaning “dull-eyed”
- b. Rachel – beautiful form and face
  - i. Beautiful – beautiful in appearance
    - 1. Form – appearance
    - 2. Face- appearance.
  - ii. But the author’s description of the women followed immediately by the narration of Jacob’s love for Rachel implies that her beauty captivated him, whereas Leah was not enticing (v. 18). Moreover, there is the same association of beautiful form (*yāpeh*) and love in Amnon’s attraction to Tamar (2 Sam 13:1; cp. 1 Kgs 1:3–4, where the narration must clarify that the woman’s beauty in this case did not result in sexual relations)
  - iii. The phrase “beautiful” or “lovely in form” (*yēpat tō’ar*) by itself describes beautiful women (Deut 21:11; Esth 2:7), and “beautiful in appearance” (*yēpat mar’eh*) is also used alone for characterizing attractive women, including Sarah (12:11, 16; cf. 2 Sam 14:27; also David, 1 Sam 17:42)
  - iv. Here the author refers to their place as “older” and “younger” (v. 16) since this plays into Laban’s motive for deceiving Jacob (v. 26).
- c. Song of Solomon- physical attraction

### III. Work For It vs. 18-20

- a. Jacob worked – v.15
  - i. Wages - Payment received by a laborer in return for his work. Usually wages are calculated in terms of a medium of exchange, such as money, but they can be paid in any kind of goods or services. Jacob worked seven years in return for Laban’s younger daughter, Rachel
    - 1. Usually wages were agreed upon by employer and employee
    - 2. Laban’s question sounds concerned and friendly, but the very mention of “working” and “pay” introduces a jarring note. It sounds friendly to offer one’s destitute nephew wages, but should family relationships be reduced to commercial bargaining? The words “work, serve” (עָבַד) and “pay” (root שָׁכַר) are key terms in the subsequent narrative (29:18, 20, 25, 27, 30; 30:26, 29; 31:6, 41; 30:16, 32, 33; 31:7, 41) and are laden with echoes of the exploitation Jacob suffered at Laban’s hands. But Laban is canny; he has learned Jacob’s motives for coming (29:13) and in the last few weeks has observed his attachment to Rachel, which he is willing to exploit by inviting Jacob to make an offer.
    - 3. Laban addresses the subject of “wages,” offering to pay for the younger man’s labors (v. 15). As we noted in the introduction to

this narrative, “wages” is a recurring topic in the remainder of the Jacob-Laban account. The word group “work” (“serve,” ‘-b-d) is a key term in the Jacob-Laban narrative, which is the subject of their dispute (29:15, 18, 20, 25, 27[2×], 30; 30:26[3×], 29; 31:6, 41). Commentators often note that “serve” echoes the strife involving Jacob’s deception of his kinsman Esau (25:23; 27:29, 40). His show of generosity disarms Jacob, who gullibly believes his uncle’s offer is well intentioned. Laban mentions their relationship first, referring to his familial obligation toward Jacob. His initial question is rhetorical, meaning Jacob should not be utilized without compensation lest he be a slave. Yet he cannot establish the standard of payment for Jacob since he is not merely a hired worker either. His second question invites Jacob to consider his dilemma.

4. Since ten shekels of silver is a typical annual wage for a shepherd, Jacob is paying a higher price. That can be understood, however, given the circumstances: Jacob is in no position to negotiate, and the payment is being made in labor.
5. Seven years” probably indicated a considerable period of time, which was a handsome offer that Laban would relish (cf. Exod 21:2; Deut 15:12, 18), especially for the grueling nature of the work (31:38–40). Mosaic law required all debts cancelled at the end of seven years (Deut 15:1; 31:10).

ii. Jacob served – v.18

1. Served – Why was the word switched
2. Jacob, not being in a position to pay the purchase price (*mōhar*) for so eligible a bride, offered seven years’ service instead. The custom was recognised by the ancient Arabs, and is still met with
3. 7 years- What is surprising is the price he was prepared to pay for her hand, seven years labor, undoubtedly indicating the intensity of his affection for her. In the ancient Near East, betrothal was effected by paying a *נִדְחָתִים*, *tirḥatum* (Akk.), “marriage present,” “bride price” (Exod 22:15 [16]). This was essentially a capital transfer by the groom’s family to the bride’s family pledging the man to marry. The OT fixes the maximum marriage gift at fifty shekels (Deut 22:29), but typically the gifts were much lower. However, since Jacob could not ask his family to pay, he offered seven years of service instead. Since casual laborers received between one-half and one shekel a month in old Babylonian times (G. R. Driver and J. C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952] 1:470–71), Jacob was offering Laban a very handsome marriage gift in exchange for Rachel’s hand.

b. Love- feeling of love 18 &20

- i. Love- The term is frequently used for the desire or attraction of one person to another of the opposite sex, with the end goal sometimes marriage
    - a. Examples resulting in marriage include Jacob's love for Rachel (Gen 29:18), and Michal's love for David (1 Sam 18:20).
  - 2. but sometimes primarily a sexual encounter.
    - a. Focus on sexual desire is illustrated by Amnon's love for Tamar (2 Samuel 13) that results in rape. Often the balance between abiding attachment, romantic feeling, and sexual attraction cannot be clearly determined from a text; this ambiguity may well reflect the ambiguity of the situation such texts describe.
  - 3. The word "loved" (*'āhab*) is broadly and typically used when describing the affection of a person for another person (or thing), including romantic (sexual) passion (e.g., 34:3; Judg 16:4, 15; 1 Sam 1:5; 2 Sam 13:1, 15; 1 Kgs 11:1–2; 2 Chr 11:21; Esth 2:17; Ps Sol 1:3). Isaac had the same high regard for Rebekah (24:67). Since Jacob was penniless, he had no means to take a wife; but he could contract his labor as a hired worker, substituting labor for the traditional betrothal gift presented by the groom
- c. Few Days
- i. Jacob faithfully completed the season of seven years, for his desire for Rachel made them like "a few days" (v. 20; cf. 27:44). The author returns to the love that Jacob has, explaining why Jacob willingly locked himself into the deal.
  - ii. According to later laws (Exod 21:1–6; Deut 15:12–18), single men who entered into service as slaves had to be released after six years. But Jacob served seven years, yet "they seemed like a few days" because of his love for Rachel. The phrase "a few days" echoes 27:44, when Rebekah had told Jacob to stay with Laban "a few days." Now that the time has elapsed, Jacob hopes to marry Rachel and return to his homeland.