

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: December 16, 2018
Lesson Title: "Family?"
Lesson Passage: Gen. 29:15-30

ABOUT THIS LESSON

The lesson passage combines a story of true romance with a tale of deceit and trickery. Having fallen in love with Rachel at first sight, Jacob agrees to work for her father, Laban (Jacob's uncle), for seven years in exchange for the privilege of marrying her. But on the morning after his wedding night, Jacob awakens to find that Laban has given him his older daughter, Leah, as his bride. Though Jacob is understandably chagrined, he agrees to serve Laban another seven years in exchange for the privilege of taking Rachel as his second bride. But Jacob continues to love Rachel more than Leah.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Explain the nature of Jacob's kinship with Laban.
- (2) On a map, locate Laban's home in the area of Haran.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

To establish the geographical setting of the story in our lesson passage, locate Beer-sheba, the boyhood home of Jacob (see Gen. 26:32-33; then locate Haran in northern Mesopotamia, where Jacob's uncle Laban lived (Gen. 27:43).

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. Review the story of Jacob's first meeting with Rachel (Gen. 29:1-14): (1) Arriving in Laban's homeland, near Haran, Jacob came upon a well where herds of sheep were watered. Three flocks of sheep were lying around the well, as their shepherds waited for more help to arrive, before attempting to move the huge stone that covered the well's entrance (29:2-3,7-8). (2) After Jacob had exchanged greetings with the shepherds, Rachel arrived with her father's sheep. And "when Jacob saw Rachel," he could no longer wait, but, with a surge of unusual strength, he lifted the stone from the opening by himself and watered the flock that Rachel was tending (Gen. 29:10). Jacob then kissed her and tearfully told her who he was (vv. 11-12). (3) Because she was either excited or agitated, Rachel went home and shared the news with her father, who hurried out to greet his nephew (29:12-14).

2. Explain the reason for Laban's offer to Jacob (Gen. 29:15) after Jacob apparently had been there for a month (29:14b): (1) In affluent households, there were usually two kinds of workers. Slaves worked without remuneration, but enjoyed maintenance (i.e., food and

clothing) and bodily protection. There were also paid workers, like shepherds and domestic servants. But Jacob was neither of those. He was a relative, which Laban mentions at the beginning of his speech in v. 29. How, then, in this special case, could Laban reward Jacob for his service, since he now knew that Jacob would be there for a protracted stay? (2) Jacob answers Laban's question with a request for Rachel, whom he loves. (In ancient Semitic cultures, daughters were thought of as a possession, property that could be transferred from one owner to another; so, at the engagement a compensating sum was paid. Jacob's offer to repay Laban with seven years of service was a very generous price which Laban could hardly refuse (v. 20).

3. Describe what happened when Jacob had completed his seven years of service (Gen. 29:21-26): (1) Having completed his part of the bargain, Jacob claimed Rachel as his bride (v. 21). (2) Laban responded by hosting a wedding feast and, presumably, a wedding ceremony; and in the evening the heavily veiled bride was escorted to the groom's quarters. But the bride was Leah, not Jacob's beloved Rachel (v. 23). (3) In the morning, when Jacob discovered Laban's ruse, he was understandably angry (v. 25); but though he had been tricked, he was now legally bound to Leah. (4) Laban's explanation that in his country one did not give the younger in marriage before the older (v. 26) was a weak excuse for his treachery; but it did not matter, what was done could not be undone. (5) However, Laban did offer Jacob an alternative that would give him his beloved Rachel, although he was still obligated to honor his marriage to Leah (read Gen. 29:27).

4. Comment on Gen. 29:28-30: Verse 28 seems to imply that Jacob completed his pledge to serve Laban another seven years before Laban gave Rachel to him as a wife. However, the wording of verse 29 implies the possibility that Jacob "served Laban for another seven years" after he "went in to Rachel" (v. 30a).

5. With reference to the comment, "he (Jacob) loved Rachel more than Leah" (v. 30), explain the comparison of the two sisters in Gen. 29:17: (1) The adjective describing Leah's eyes in v. 17 is usually translated "weak," but what is probably meant is that they were pale, lacking in luster. (In that culture, eye make-up was widely used to make a woman's eyes glow.) (2) The name Leah probably meant "cow," and Rachel meant "ewe." (This was a cultural note, rather than a comment on the two sisters' appearance. The tribes that descended from Leah were cattlemen, while the Rachel tribes were shepherds.)

CLOSING THE LESSON

Conclude with a preview of upcoming lessons: Next week our Bible study will feature a Christmas lesson based on the angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary that she is to be the mother of the Messiah. But, after that, as we continue the story of Jacob, we will see that he evened the score with Laban by getting rich off of Laban's assets.