

## **Genesis 29**

### **Genesis 29:1 Then Jacob went on his journey**

How far would you go to find someone you could marry under the covenant? The trip to Haran was over 500 miles. How many years would you sacrifice for such a privilege? How important is it that your children are born in the covenant? Do we consider ourselves of the House of Israel? Do we remember Jacob our father, after whom this famous house is named? Consider his great example honoring the new and everlasting covenant! What would he give to be married under covenant to the woman of his dreams? Why didn't he settle for some great looking Canaanite hottie?

The father of the House of Israel is a great example to all of us. He shows us how to build our own house—upon the foundation of a temple marriage so that all of our children can be born in the covenant. There is no distance too far to travel; there is no waiting period too long to wait. Those who need to get married should do as Jacob did and go on a journey in search of such a privilege.

### **Ezra Taft Benson**

Now, I want to speak frankly to you young men and young women of the Church. When you marry, your decision not only affects you, but your future children and generations after you. Every child born to Latter-day Saint parents deserves to be born *under the covenant* of temple blessings.

May I now tell you about something most sacred? Picture in your mind a small room beautifully adorned—something akin to a lovely living room. In the center is an altar, covered with velvet and lace. Chairs line the walls of the room, where just family and closest friends may observe. With family observing, and a priesthood man of God officiating, you will be asked to kneel at the altar opposite your companion. You will be given instructions, and a benediction will be pronounced upon you. Then you will be sealed together as husband and wife for time and all eternity. You are given the same promise that Adam, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob received. Let me read it to you from the Doctrine and Covenants. Essentially you will receive, as the Lord said:

**“Ye shall come forth in the first resurrection; ... and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers ... ; [Ye] shall pass by the angels, and the gods, ... to [your] exaltation ... , which glory shall be a fulness and a**

continuation of the seeds forever and ever” (D&C 132:19). Temple marriage is a gospel ordinance for exaltation.

Don't trifle away your happiness by an involvement with someone who cannot take you worthily to the temple. Make a decision now that this is the place where you will marry. To leave that decision until a romantic involvement develops is to take a risk, the importance of which you can't calculate now. (“This Is a Day of Sacrifice,” *Ensign*, May 1979, 33)

### **Genesis 29:2-3 And he looked, and behold a well... And thither were all the flocks gathered**

“In dry territory, water sources are natural meeting places. Just as his grandfather's servant, on arriving near Haran, met Rebekah at the well, so Jacob meets Rachel. It is instructive to compare these stories (Genesis 24:29). It helps also to notice others where meetings at a well result in marriages—such as Moses in Exodus 2:15 and Ruth who meets Boaz over water his servants have drawn (Ruth 2:9)...

“In the patriarchal betrothal stories, certain common elements recur:

- The well is in a foreign land (remember that Judah is “foreign” for Ruth);
- Water is drawn;
- The girl invites the man to eat at her home (Boaz invites Ruth, again reversing the pattern);
- She hurries home with the news;
- A marriage is arranged.”

(Barry J. Beitzel, ed., *Biblica: The Bible Atlas*, [Australia: Global Book Publishing, 2006], 118)

### **Genesis 29:10 when Jacob saw Rachel**

Love at first sight? Is it possible? Certainly, the Bible is the last place we would expect to find such a spontaneous eruption of emotion. First loves can endure. Love at first sight can last, but that is definitely the exception. Jacob and Rachel were exceptional people; they were the exception and had a lovely marriage together.

“The expression ‘love at first sight’ may be a pleasant thought to contemplate, but most people do not fall in love at first sight at all. Such things as enjoying another’s company and being proud to be in the company of someone who is attractive to us are more accurate than love at first sight.

“A person’s first romance is most often just an infatuation, whereas true love develops over a period of time. Getting to know and appreciate another person’s attitudes, feelings, and interests, and sharing mutual experiences may develop into a mature and deep love, but even then it is a fragile and sometimes tentative association.

“A second false notion about marriage is a too-common belief in the fairy tale phrase, “They married and lived happily ever after.” To achieve marital happiness, it is necessary that couples work together to overcome difficulties and temptations, and they must show a willingness to meet the other challenges that will always be a part of their married life together.

“Other fanciful notions often touted are: ‘Love conquers all’ and ‘We can live on love.’ While it is true that love is a vitally important force that can compel much good between two people, it does not provide all things. It is necessary that couples develop other interests socially in a wholesome atmosphere, with different people and divergent views to round out their lives. Such experiences often make them more grateful for what they have at home.

“Marital success requires commitment, involvement, dedication, and reevaluation of the real purposes of marriage. With that in mind, here are some points to consider for strengthening your own marriage.” (Dale F. Pearson, “ ‘Love Conquers All’ ... And Other Fanciful Notions,” *Ensign*, June 1973, 14)

### **Genesis 29:10 Jacob... rolled the stone from the well’s mouth, and watered the flock of Laban**

We may think of Samson having great strength (Judg.14:5-6; 16:30) or David who killed Goliath while in his youth (1 Sam. 17). But consider the strength of Jacob! The men of Haran said they couldn’t roll the stone from the well until all the flocks were gathered. Well, Jacob decides to do it himself. It was a “great stone” (v. 2), and it would have been difficult for only one man to accomplish the task. Jacob rolls the stone away to show his strength and also as an act of kindness to Rachel.

Jacob's act foreshadows the Messiah's resurrection. Two unnamed angels announce the resurrection but Matthew records that one of them "came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it" (Matt. 28:2). Just as Jacob provided living water for the flocks of Laban, so the angel opened the door for the Resurrected Christ—the source of living water—to the sheep of the covenant. Now we don't know the identity of those two angels. We shouldn't speculate, but there would be some poetic justice if we were to find out that one of them was Jacob, Christ's forefather and the father of the House of Israel to whom Jesus was sent, who had centuries before rolled another great stone to provide living water for the flock.

### **Genesis 29:11 Jacob kissed Rachel**

Now the Hollywood rendering of this scene would certainly be dramatic and passionate. More likely, Jacob was kissing Rachel as a greeting and out of familial love (see v. 13). He would have given her multiple kisses on the cheeks. Those who would rather imagine this kiss as romantic and passionate may continue to do so, but it is hard to imagine Rachel accepting such a forward gesture from a total stranger—even if he looked handsome—even if he looked rich—even if he was strong enough to roll the stone away from the well's mouth.

"Jacob... kissed her first as his kinswoman, but quickly he fell in love with her." (*The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. by G. A. Buttrick et al [New York, Abingdon Press, 1952] vol. 1, p. 697)

"[The kiss was] a formal greeting, here offered with deep emotion." (*The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. by W. Gunther Plaut [New York, The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981], 199)

### **Genesis 29:17 Leah was tender eyed**

Leah was attractive, especially her eyes. However, her beauty was not as universal as Rachel's. The difference between Leah and Rachel "is not between ugliness and beauty but between two types of attraction." (*The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. by W. Gunther Plaut [New York, The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1981], 200)

### **Genesis 29:17 Rachel was beautiful and well favoured**

It is politically incorrect in the church to acknowledge that Jacob valued Rachel for her beauty. In the church, the unspoken message is that we want attraction to be based on spiritual values not physical assets. But latter-day saints are real people. Father Jacob was a real person. Rachel was beautiful; she also had great personal qualities. She had it all. So did Sarah, and so did Rebekah. All three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were married to women who were revered for their physical beauty.

Just as latter-day saint men should strive to stay fit and attractive in addition to honoring the priesthood, so the sisters should seek beauty both inside and out. Those that excel in outer beauty should concentrate on inner beauty, and vice versa. A lopsided emphasis on either is detrimental.

### **Ezra Taft Benson**

Keep yourselves attractive, maintain high standards, maintain your self-respect. Do not engage in intimacies that bring heartache and sorrow. Place yourselves in a position to meet worthy men and be engaged in constructive activities. ("To the Single Adult Sisters," *Conference Report*, October, 1988)

### **President David O. McKay**

A beautiful, modest, gracious woman is creation's masterpiece. When to these virtues a woman possesses as guiding stars in her life righteousness and godliness and an irresistible impulse and desire to make others happy, no one will question if she be classed among those who are truly great. ("Gospel Ideals," Salt Lake City: *The Improvement Era*, 1953, p. 449.)

### **Genesis 29:19 it is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man**

Whether true or not, an ancient Jewish tradition, suggests that Laban had long before planned to give Rachel to Jacob.

"Jewish Midrash claims the girls were fraternal twins and that their marriages to their twin cousins Esau and Jacob were arranged by Rebekah and Laban from the time of the girls' births (Ginzberg, *Legends*, 1:327,358)."

### **Genesis 29:20 Jacob served seven years for Rachel**

"Prophets expect more of us than Hollywood does. They expect us to notice, to flesh out with the inner eye of a spiritual imagination such apparently casual comments as, 'Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto

him but a few days, for the love he had to her.’ (Gen. 29:20.) It’s easy not to notice; there’s much more than we’re used to in those twenty-one simple words condensing seven years. But the force of that titanic tribute to the attractiveness of Rachel and the gallantry of Jacob and the power of the human soul for enduring loyalty is almost totally missed if you miss the unwritten detail between those lines, if you fail to put yourself imaginatively in Jacob’s sandals herding goats and sheep in some place like the Sevier Desert for seven long sun-withered, wind-blasted, grit-flavored, sheep-stinking, backbreaking years of your own ardently impatient youth.” (Steven C. Walker, “Between Scriptural Lines,” *Ensign*, Mar. 1978, 63)

### **Genesis 29:25 And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah**

In American culture, it is bad luck for the groom to see the bride before the ceremony on the day of their marriage. In Laban’s culture, apparently the bride was kept under a veil for the entire ceremony, allowing Leah to disguise herself as Rachel and marry Jacob without Jacob knowing who he had married. It also means that Jacob and Leah must have consummated their marriage in sufficient darkness, that Jacob didn’t recognize his new wife as Leah until the morning. That’s a pretty dirty trick for Laban to play on Jacob, but Leah must have been in on it as well. History is replete with this theme of the elder sister’s grief at a younger sister’s matrimony. Apparently, Laban was intent on preempting that pawning it off as a cultural norm, “It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.”

Jacob must have thought, “Why didn’t you tell me that seven years ago!” He must have been angry. He had every right to feel tricked, deceived, and betrayed!

“The biblical text reports Jacob’s anger and dismay when he discovered the deception, but no mention is made of the response of Leah or Rachel (Genesis 29:25). What did they think about their father’s marriage schemes for them? Why did the sisters go along with the plan? Did they have a choice? As an imposter at her own wedding, how did Leah feel when she knew her husband would soon discover that she was not his beloved Rachel? Where was Rachel during the ceremony? Was this an act of unselfishness on her part to allow her elder sister also to enjoy the blessings of marriage or was Rachel opposed to her father’s chicanery?” (Camille Fronk Olson, *Women of the Old Testament*, [SLC: Deseret Book, 2009], 69)

How did Jacob respond to this treachery? Do we give him credit for his calm and obedient response?

“Written marriage contracts were customary throughout the ancient Near East. Before the wedding day, the groom and the bride’s father (or his representative) signed the contract containing all the accepted negotiations. Consequently, Jacob held a solid legal claim against Laban for failing to meet his commitments in the contract and therefore could have been released from his marriage to Leah. Reflecting his weakened position, Laban proposed an appealing solution the moment Jacob accused him of duplicity. If Jacob would give Leah her due attention during the full bridal week, he could also marry Rachel. Furthermore, Laban did not require Jacob to wait until the negotiated seven additional years of labor were completed before relinquishing his second daughter to him, again indicating Laban’s awareness of his vulnerable position.” (Camille Fronk Olson, *Women of the Old Testament*, [SLC: Deseret Book, 2009], 69)

Every time we complain that life isn’t fair, we should remember our great father Jacob, who suffered the unfairness of life with the understanding that God makes everything right. He was staring another seven years of servitude in the face. Talk about a change of plans! Didn’t he have a right to complain?

“Life is not always fair in the mortal sense, and if we expect it to be, we will be discouraged. However, life is always fair in the eternal sense. Instead of asking ‘Why did—or why will—this happen to me?’ we can be asking ‘How can I grow through this experience and become a better person?’” (Sharon Evans Brown, “Till We Meet Again,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1995, 12)

“Most of us feel frustrated or impatient at times. But when we express those feelings by becoming angry with someone, we offend the Spirit and invite bitterness into our hearts. As we strive to come unto Christ and to perfect ourselves, we should ask ourselves not ‘What is fair?’ but, humbly, ‘What would Jesus have me do?’” (“Charity Is Not Easily Provoked,” *Ensign*, July 1988, 47)

**Genesis 29:27-30 Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for... yet seven other years**

Jacob is asked to serve for another seven years, but he is not required to wait another seven years. He is asked to wait just a week for Rachel, then he could marry her. Laban’s family would have to have another big marriage



party for Rachel. Perhaps they already had the decorations. Perhaps the relatives were already in town. Perhaps the handmaids had already been picked out.

### **Genesis 29:30 And he went in also unto Rachel**

Most men admit that it is difficult to keep one wife happy, let alone two, but what if those two were sisters? This brings up the subject of polygamy among the patriarchs. The Public Affairs Department doesn't want us to discuss it. Current Latter-day Saint doctrine rejects it as a practice but it was not always so. From 1843 until the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, plural marriage was practiced by the Mormons. For over 150 years, this has been a difficult historical fact for investigators to accept.

The author was once teaching an investigator in an obscure eastern city of South Korea. The man was most recently a Seventh Day Adventist. He prided himself on investigating every Christian religion that came his way. As some of the first LDS missionaries in his town, he became an eager investigator. He prided himself on his knowledge of the Bible, especially emphasizing Saturday as the true Sabbath day. When he found out that the Mormons had practiced polygamy, he said, "the Old Testament peoples that practiced polygamy produced offspring that were congenitally abnormal and rejected by God; didn't they?"

He had set himself up for failure with this observation. He had intended to use the Bible to place a condemning black mark on the practice of polygamy. The book of Genesis does quite the opposite. Abraham was a polygamist; Jacob was a polygamist. The 12 tribes of Israel came from 4 different women. We are talking about the House of Israel, God's chosen people, the sheep of His fold, the covenant clan to whom all the promises belong. Quite the opposite of being shunned by a disapproving God, they were accepted and honored by a God that would even use their polygamist names to identify Himself, even the God of Abraham the polygamist, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob the polygamist.

The Biblical precedent for this practice was not lost on Latter-day Saints of the late 1800's. The following excerpt is an example of hundreds of other quotes that defended the practice.

**Charles W. Penrose**



And I am afraid that a great many of our good Christian friends who are so terribly shocked about this feature of our faith, when they get to the [celestial] door and look in and see Abraham and Sarah and Hagar and Keturah, and those concubines given of the Lord to Abraham—when they see them in the eternal kingdom they will want to turn away and go to more congenial company, which they are at perfect liberty to do. If Abraham was on the earth today, these same good people would put him in the penitentiary, and yet they call Abraham “the father of the faithful, the Friend of God,” and want to go to his bosom when they die! If Jacob were here with his four wives, through whom he “did build the house of Israel,” the names of whose twelve sons are to be inscribed upon the gates of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, that is to come down from God out of heaven like a bride adorned for her husband—I say if Jacob were on the earth today, they would put him in jail! (*Journal of Discourses*, 25:228, given 26 July 1884)

### **Genesis 29:31 when the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb**

“The Hebrew word *sahnay* does not mean ‘hate’ as the term is used today, but rather conveys the idea of ‘loving less’.” (*Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis – 2 Samuel*, [CES: 1981], p. 87)

Rachel was the beautiful one. She was loved by Jacob. By comparison, it seemed that Leah was hated by Jacob. That must have brought her deep heartache. It must have been the source of great grief, the subject of many prayers. *The Lord* loved Leah as much as he loved Rachel. He saw how unfairly Leah had been treated, and God can always make up the difference. Opening Leah’s womb may not have been the only thing He did to make things right, but we must always have faith that he both *can and will* make right what mortality gets wrong.

### **Alexander B. Morrison**

Even though God is not the author of all human suffering, it is a measure of our devotion to His beloved son that from anguish and affliction can come spiritual enlightenment, soul growth, and a developing sense of self and of our relationship to God and Christ. The fire of affliction, which scars some souls, purifies and ennobles others, transforming them into celestial creatures filled with supernal joy. "All your losses will be made up to you in the resurrection, provided you continue faithful. By the vision of the Almighty I have seen it," said Joseph Smith, who knew more about struggle, pain, disappointment, and anguish than most. (*Teachings*, p. 296.)

There are, then, times when all we can do is hang on and endure to the end, recalling God's goodness to us in the past and His enduring love for us. In such circumstances Paul's words to the Corinthians take on added meaning: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." (1 Cor. 2:9) On such occasions we know, with Nephi, in whom we can trust. (See 2 Ne. 4:19, 34.) (*Feed My Sheep: Leadership Ideas for Latter-day Shepherds* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1992], 130)