A Bride Worth Waiting For

Teaching Tips

January 3, 2016

Bible Study Guide 5

Words You Should Know

A. Brother (Genesis 29:15) *ach* (Heb.)—Near relation, a relative, cousin, a fellow countryman, fellow male friend; a general relationship whether by blood or affinity.

B. Love (vv. 18) *‘ahav* (Heb.)—To desire, delight, like, be fond of, covet; vehement inclination of the mind and a tenderness of affection.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Bait and Switch. Marriages can be marred by unforeseen circumstances. How might husbands and wives patiently work through undesirable circumstances to reach their personal goals? After Laban tricked Jacob into marrying his older daughter, Leah, Jacob willingly agreed to work for seven additional years in order to marry his beloved Rachel.

A. Assess the marital status of your students. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in discerning their needs and possible sensitivities to this lesson.

B. Develop an example where a brand advertised a promise but didn’t deliver.

O—Open the Lesson

A. Start the lesson with thoughtful prayer as you approach the topic, being cognizant of various ages, marital status, and life stages.

B. Review the Aim for Change and tie it in with the In Focus story.

C. Using the “bait and switch” advertising examples in preparation, ask students to share how it feels when a promise isn’t delivered as advertised. What about in a relationship?

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have students take turns reading the Focal Verses.

B. Ask students to share initial reactions to the story with the opening exercise in mind, paying special attention to the Background.

C. Discuss the In Depth section and call out particular points that resonated with students in providing exposition.

E—Explore the Meaning
A. Answer the Discuss the Meaning questions.

B. Read the Lesson in Our Society section.

**N—Next Steps for Application**

A. Discuss how to apply the Make It Happen section whether single or married.

B. Pray and thank God for His gift of marriage.

**Worship Guide**

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: A Bride Worth Waiting For

Song: “I Promise”

Devotional Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12–17

**Teaching God’s Word**

**Bible Background • GENESIS 28–30**

**Printed Text • GENESIS 29:15–30 | Devotional Reading • 1 TIMOTHY 1:12–17**

**Aim for Change**

By the end of the lesson, we will: RECALL the story of Jacob’s love for and commitment to marry Rachel; REFLECT on marital relationships and the ways unforeseen circumstances affect those relationships; and COMMIT to finding faith-based resolution to difficulties before abandoning relationships.

**In Focus**

Brenda and Edward had a whirlwind romance. Brenda served in the children’s ministry at church and encountered Edward, a divorced father of two, who dropped off his children before church every other Sunday. Edward wasn’t sure if he was ready to get involved, even after being divorced for two years, but couldn’t deny that there was something special about Brenda. Brenda tried to ignore her attraction, knowing that he was divorced, but the pull was too strong. Edward asked Brenda out for coffee after service and the two talked for hours. They started dating shortly thereafter; they were accountable to others, and involved their respective families. As Edward prayed about it, he was sure the Lord was saying to him that Brenda was “the one,” but he was tentative, having experienced an excruciating divorce with children involved. Edward sought counsel from his pastor, met with Brenda’s father for his blessing, and told his ex-wife his plans to remarry. The two were married six months later, but the honeymoon phase quickly ended. Brenda began to see Edward’s scars from his first marriage, his personality quirks, not to mention how she had to deal with the antics of his ex-wife and difficulties with his children. Brenda exclaimed to one of her friends, “I didn’t sign up for all this! What did I get myself into?”

*When two lives merge and there is a sudden change, one’s true self is revealed. How do two people’s lives merge when they enter into the marriage covenant?*

**Keep in Mind**
“And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years” (Genesis 29:30).

**Focal Verses**

**KJV**

**Genesis 29:15** And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?

16 And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.

17 Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured.

18 And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.

19 And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me.

20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her.

21 And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her.

22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast.

23 And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her.

24 And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid.

25 And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?

26 And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.

27 Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years.

28 And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also.

29 And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid.

30 And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

**NLT**

**Genesis 29:15** Laban said to him, “You shouldn’t work for me without pay just because we are relatives. Tell me how much your wages should be.”

16 Now Laban had two daughters. The older daughter was named Leah, and the younger one was Rachel.

17 There was no sparkle in Leah’s eyes, but Rachel had a beautiful figure and a lovely face.

18 Since Jacob was in love with Rachel, he told her father, “I’ll work for you for seven years if you’ll give me Rachel, your younger daughter, as my wife.”

19 “Agreed!” Laban replied. “I’d rather give her to you than to anyone else. Stay and work with me.”
So Jacob worked seven years to pay for Rachel. But his love for her was so strong that it seemed to him but a few days.

Finally, the time came for him to marry her. “I have fulfilled my agreement,” Jacob said to Laban. “Now give me my wife so I can sleep with her.”

So Laban invited everyone in the neighborhood and prepared a wedding feast.

But that night, when it was dark, Laban took Leah to Jacob, and he slept with her.

(Laban had given Leah a servant, Zilpah, to be her maid.)

But when Jacob woke up in the morning—it was Leah! “What have you done to me?” Jacob raged at Laban. “I worked seven years for Rachel! Why have you tricked me?”

“It’s not our custom here to marry off a younger daughter ahead of the firstborn,” Laban replied.

“But wait until the bridal week is over, then we’ll give you Rachel, too—provided you promise to work another seven years for me.”

So Jacob agreed to work seven more years. A week after Jacob had married Leah, Laban gave him Rachel, too.

(Laban gave Rachel a servant, Bilhah, to be her maid.)

So Jacob slept with Rachel, too, and he loved her much more than Leah. He then stayed and worked for Laban the additional seven years.

The People, Places, and Times

Laban. He was the son of Nahor, who was Abraham’s older brother, which means he was Isaac’s cousin, but he was also related to Rebekah through her father Bethuel, who was a child of Nahor’s. Laban settled on the eastern side of the Euphrates River.

Bridal Week. This was a period of seven days after the initial wedding ceremonies. Although it dates back to the ancient Near East, this tradition continues in many Orthodox Jewish communities. At the beginning of the bridal week, the bride and groom would sexually consummate their marriage. Afterward, the bride would remain in the wedding chamber for six days. During this time, the wedding party and guests would feast and celebrate the marriage of the bride and groom.

Background

Jacob, whose name means “surplanter” or “heel catcher” (Genesis 25:26), was the second son born to Isaac and Rebekah. Jacob and his brother Esau continued Isaac and Ishmael’s trend of sibling rivalry with a very adversarial relationship. Jacob outwitted his brother twice. First he tricked Esau out of his birthright by exploiting his irreverence for his birth position to fulfill his temporary need—a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:29–34). The second time, with the help of his mother, who devised the plan, Jacob tricked his father into releasing the firstborn blessing. The deception sent Esau over the edge. Esau pleaded with Isaac to bless him with something, to no avail; he set out to kill Jacob (Genesis 27). Now on the run, Jacob has had an unforgettable encounter with the living God where He reveals the promise He has made to his grandfather (Abraham) and father (Isaac) to birth a nation through him (Genesis 28:10–17). Jacob, whose name means “surplanter” or “heel catcher” (Genesis 25:26), was the second son born to Isaac and Rebekah. Jacob and his brother Esau continued Isaac and Ishmael’s trend of sibling rivalry with a very adversarial relationship. Jacob outwitted his brother twice. First he tricked Esau out of his birthright by exploiting his irreverence for his birth position to fulfill his temporary need—a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:29–34). The second time, with the help of his mother, who devised the
plan, Jacob tricked his father into releasing the firstborn blessing. The deception sent Esau over the edge. Esau pleased with Isaac to bless him with something, to no avail; he set out to kill Jacob (Genesis 27). Now on the run, Jacob has had an unforgettable encounter with the living God where He reveals the promise He has made to his grandfather (Abraham) and father (Isaac) to birth a nation through him (Genesis 28:10–17). As Jacob continues his journey, he moves eastward. He meets up with some men tending a flock from Haran, which is 400 miles northeast of Canaan, and learns that they work for his uncle Laban, his father’s brother. Jacob’s life would forever be changed, as he meets the love of his life Rachel, who was tending sheep with them (Genesis 29:1–10).

At-A-Glance

1. Willing to Work for Love (Genesis 29:15–20)

2. Tricked into Love (vv. 21–27)

3. Committed to First Love (vv. 28–30)

In Depth

1. Willing to Work for Love (Genesis 29:15–20)

Jacob was sent away from home by his mother not only to escape the threat of murder from his brother Esau, but also to find a wife. Rebekah did not want her son taking a wife among the women of their country but sent him to her homeland (Genesis 27:46). In Genesis 29:9–12, Jacob and Rachel meet and apparently it is love at first sight. He revealed that they were related through his mother and her father. In hearing the news of Jacob’s arrival, Laban immediately travels to greet him warmly and receive him as a relative (vv. 13–14).

Laban extends hospitality to Jacob, giving him food and shelter, but he also recognizes the value of Jacob’s work. Laban seemingly does not want to take advantage of Jacob and therefore asks him to name his price or wages in exchange for his continued service. Laban had two daughters, Leah, the oldest, and Rachel, the youngest. Leah has been historically portrayed as being the less attractive sister and Rachel the prettier. Jacob seeks compensation, not in money, livestock, or land, but for the beautiful Rachel to be his wife.

Jacob agrees to serve Laban for seven years to marry the younger daughter. In theory, Laban agrees to the terms, desiring to keep Jacob happy and have an extra hired hand. Out of his love for Rachel, he works seven years for Laban, fulfilling his end of the bargain. Jacob was so smitten by love that the seven years of labor seemed but a few days and worth the while to be with her (v. 20). Jacob’s intense desire for Rachel far outweighed the work he had to do. His display of love demonstrates the power of romantic relationships to motivate people to serve and undergo burdensome tasks for the one they love.

2. Tricked into Love (vv. 21–27)

The seven years are up and Jacob has completed the terms of his agreement with Laban. He approaches his uncle (soon to be father-in-law) and demands that he upholds his end of the bargain. Laban organizes a wedding feast with the men of his community. Like today, it was custom in Middle Eastern cultures that a banquet would precede the bride and groom coming together. Included in this time of celebration would be plenty of drinking and carousing. Laban threw a party for Jacob, and in the midst of the revelry, gave Leah to Jacob instead of Rachel. When Jacob came to himself, he realized he had been deceived (v. 25). The trickster got tricked! He had consummated a marriage to the wrong woman, because once a man engaged in sexual intercourse with a virgin, she was his wife. This turn of events was a low blow on Laban’s part, but some speculate that Jacob was getting his just reward for his deception to his brother and father.

Deception runs in the family. Laban gave the perception that he agreed to Jacob’s terms but had no intention of ever fulfilling his end of the bargain. Laban says it is not custom in his community to have the younger daughter marry
before the older and therefore requires Jacob to fulfill his marital duties of the marriage week to Leah as well as work another seven years for Rachel. Clearly Laban was being blessed by Jacob’s presence and not inclined to release him.

3. Committed to First Love (vv. 28–30)

Jacob, because of his love for Rachel, once again kept his end of the bargain and fulfilled his marital duties with Leah and worked another seven years for Rachel. Leah was an integral part of building what would be the nation of Israel, as she was the mother of six sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun (Genesis 29:31–35, 30:17–20). Although Jacob fulfilled his marriage commitment to Leah, he did not love her, so unfortunately her marriage was not a good one. Leah wanted her husband to love her, and although they engaged in marital relations and had children, she was deeply rejected. Laban finally gave Rachel to Jacob along with her handmaid Bilhah. She was truly the love of his life and the Scripture notes that “he loved her more than Leah” (v. 30). Rachel was barren for many years, but when she was finally able to bear children, Jacob loved Rachel’s children more than the others (Genesis 45:22, 37:3). Leah and Rachel are examples of being in relationships for the right and wrong reasons. It was not uncommon for couples in ancient times to have arranged marriages, but marital unions are most fruitful when they start from a place of true love. Jacob and Rachel’s relationship was special because together they weathered adversity and separation yet remained in love.

Search the Scriptures

1. What was Jacob’s request in return for his work for Laban and how long did he work (Genesis 29:18)?

2. What did Laban do to marry off Leah instead of Rachel (vv. 23–25)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. What are the implications of waiting for the right person to marry? What happens when one rushes into marriage?

2. What advice would you give to couples about working through life’s circumstances to maintain stability in their relationship?

Lesson in Our Society

Statistics show that the African American community is the least likely to marry and most likely to divorce. This is because of a multitude of factors including mass incarceration, family dysfunction, and economic disadvantage. It is also due to not understanding the meaning of marriage as God has designed it. It used to be common for African American couples to be married for fifty or sixty years; now this is not the case, as many are divorced or have never married.

There is life beyond the beautiful day. A couple must have the right foundation in order to last through the ebbs and flows of life. Ideally, two people should be rooted in Jesus Christ in order to build a sure foundation, and it takes working together in the Holy Spirit to make it last. It’s important to know your purpose, take the time, ask the right questions, and truly get to know and accept the person before deciding to marry. It is equally important to have godly counsel and the right expectations of marriage and your mate to ensure success. The right one is worth waiting for, so never mind the rush. If you are married, be in it for the long haul and prayerfully seek to understand each other.

Make It Happen

If you are married, reflect on the ways you and your spouse stay connected. If you are unable to readily pinpoint ways, now is the time to be intentional about staying connected. If you are not married, reflect on how you can use this season to be more in tune with your probable future needs in a marital relationship should you desire to marry. How can your group or church help inform married couples and singles on the realities of marriage no matter the age or life
Follow the Spirit
What God wants me to do.

Remember Your Thoughts
Special insights I have learned.

More Light on the Text

**Genesis 29:15–30**

15 And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be?

Jacob is working for his uncle Laban. After running from his brother Esau’s wrath, he found a home in Haran. Laban is the brother of Rebekah and soon is discovered to exhibit many of the same deceptive traits that Jacob and Rebekah have shown earlier in the narrative. Laban allows Jacob to negotiate for his wages (Heb. *maskoret*, mahr-HEH-ret). This word can also mean reward, but in this context is used as wages exchanged for work. It is also the same word used by Boaz in asking God to reward Ruth for her commitment to Naomi (**Ruth 2:12**).

16 And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. 18 And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter.

Here the narrator begins to describe the daughters of Laban anticipating Jacob’s wages. Leah is Laban’s older daughter and is described as having weak (Heb. *rak*, ROCK) eyes, meaning tender, faint, or delicate. The text could be saying that Leah had weak vision or that she had lovely eyes. In the first instance, Leah struggles not only with being less physically attractive than her younger sister, but also with her vision. In the second instance, she has her own beautiful traits, but she is still not physically attractive enough to gain Jacob’s love. In contrast, Rachel is described as beautiful (Heb. *yafeh*, ya-FEH) and well favoured (Heb. *mareh*, ma-REH). Both phrases use the Hebrew word for beautiful (Heb. *yafeh*, ya-FEH). The first phrase states that she is beautiful in form (Heb. *to’ar*, toe-AR), and the second says that she is beautiful in appearance (Heb. *mar’eh*, mar-EH). In context, both sets of words are used to describe Rachel’s loveliness as superior to Leah.

Jacob then offers to serve Laban seven years for Rachel. Being away from home without any family support, Jacob would not be able to pay the dowry or customary bride price. His offer to work for seven years made up for his lack of monetary payment to seal a betrothal. The narrator makes sure to reiterate that Rachel is the younger daughter. This is most likely to draw readers into the deception about to take place and also to point toward Jacob’s deception as the younger brother.

19 And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. 20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. 21 And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her.

Laban accepts Jacob’s offer, saying how it is favorable to him as well. By giving his daughter to Jacob, he would give her away to a near relative and therefore the wealth that she contributes to her new husband will stay in Laban’s family too. He asks Jacob to stay as hired labor. Whatever work Jacob had to do during his seven years of hired labor watching Laban’s flocks seemed to him “but a few days” because of the “love” (Heb. *’ahabah*, ah-ha-VAH) he had for Rachel. This word for love encompasses human love for family, God, or objects. In this case it is used for Jacob’s
desire for Rachel. Although this word has sexual connotations, it is more of an all-encompassing desire of the whole person for another.

Jacob was the one who took the initiative to raise the subject of his wife. This shows his eagerness to consummate the marriage. It also suggests reluctance on Laban’s part toward the union, inasmuch as he really did not need to be reminded that Jacob’s years of service were fulfilled (Heb. *mala‘*, *ma-LA*). The word means to fill or complete, in a physical sense or with regard to intangible things such as desire. Frequently the word is used with respect to time to talk about the completion of a set period or the arrival of a period of time (Genesis 25:24; Leviticus 8:33). In the Old Testament, it is used in the temporal sense less often but it is that sense which is used here. Jacob’s work was completed and it was time to receive his wages.

22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. 23 And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her.

Since no verbal reply from Laban was recorded, it is difficult to know what he was thinking. His silence may indeed suggest his reluctance to give Rachel over at this point. Nevertheless, he invited his neighbors to celebrate the wedding banquet, or marriage feast (Heb. *mishteh*, *mish-TEH*). These feasts commonly lasted seven days, but the length varied according to the circumstances of the bridegroom. In this case, it seems seven days was sufficient (v. 27).

During the wedding feast, the bride and groom would consummate the marriage in the wedding chamber or “tent.” The phrase “he went in unto her” is a play on words as it describes the entering into the marriage chamber as well as the sexual act. Laban’s deception of Jacob was possible because the bride usually entered the marriage chamber veiled, the veil being so long as to conceal not only the face but much of the body as well (cf. Genesis 24:65). The text also indicates that Laban brought Leah to Jacob in the evening, when it was dark. On top of all this, a wedding feast usually involved a lot of drinking. So we have three things that possibly contributed to Jacob’s deception: Leah’s bridal veil, the dark, and alcohol. In addition to tricking Jacob, Laban may very well have brought Leah to Jacob against her will. The Hebrew for “brought her” is a form of the verb “to enter” (*bo‘*, *BOE*). In this case, the form of the verb specifically indicates that he made her do it. We do not know how Leah feels about Jacob, but given the language of the verse and the fact that Rachel is described as more physically attractive, at best she would have had mixed feelings, and at worst she would have reviled the entire situation because of what it could do to her relationship with Rachel and because she knew the man wanted her sister, not her. She was essentially forced on a man who didn’t love her by her father who had also tricked the man.

24 And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid.

It was customary at marriages for the bride’s father to give her a large present, often a handmaid who became her confidential servant (Genesis 24:59, 61). These handmaids were responsible for the women and children of the family and cared for them by attending to personal needs (combing hair, washing) or more general domestic chores. In case of a childless marriage, they also served as concubines (Genesis 16:1–2, 30:4, 9). However unpleasant Laban was to Jacob, adhered to custom with regard to his daughters by presenting them each with a handmaid. Even in these handmaids, God would fulfill His purpose in shaping the nation of Israel, as they gave birth to four of the twelve patriarchs.

25 And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me?

Seven years he had toiled and worked for Rachel, and now Jacob found he had married her less beautiful sister instead. The question “What is this thou hast done unto me?” expresses Jacob’s astonishment. He could not understand why Laban had beguiled (Heb. *ramah*, *rah-MAH*) him. The word for beguile means to throw or cast down. In this context, it means to trick, with the connotation of intentionally tripping someone up. In accusing Laban of deceit, Jacob was in fact condemning himself. The deceiver had been deceived. Jacob argued with Laban, but he
could do nothing to alter the situation.

26 And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.

Laban gave the reason for his action: It is not customary to put the younger sibling before the firstborn. Remember that Jacob, the younger, had put himself before the firstborn Esau, so there was a certain poetic justice in Laban’s deception of Jacob. However, Laban’s attempt to justify his action was weak. He should have made this known to Jacob much earlier, when they made the agreement in the first place.

27 Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. 28 And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also.

However unwilling Jacob may have been to continue celebrating his marriage to Leah, he could not opt out: He was isolated and without family support. Laban’s only concession was that Jacob could take Rachel immediately as a second wife, and Jacob did want to marry Rachel. Realizing he had Jacob trapped, Laban then added another harsh demand: After marrying Rachel, Jacob had to work for Laban another seven years. Jacob agreed to comply with Laban’s terms; Rachel was the focus of his affections and intentions. Although taking a second wife was not Jacob’s original intent, his dream of having Rachel was not denied, but deferred.

29 And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid. 30 And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

The abrupt end of the conversation indicates Jacob’s grudging acceptance of Laban’s new terms. Both Laban and Jacob did the most honorable thing given the horrible situation they had made for themselves: Jacob completed Leah’s bridal week, and Laban gave him Rachel. Rachel, like her sister Leah, was given a maid (v. 24). Jacob did indeed serve another seven years, but unlike the first, they are not said to have “seemed unto him but a few days” (v. 20). Rather, they were days of sorrow and strife within the new family, as the account of the patriarchs’ births would soon make plain.

Say It Correctly

Zilpah. zil-PA.
Laban. le-BAHN.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Trustworthy Lives
(Proverbs 11:9–13)

TUESDAY

Honesty: the Best Policy
(Proverbs 12:19–26)

WEDNESDAY

Wisdom More than Strength
(Proverbs 24:3–7, 13–14)

THURSDAY

Judged Faithful
(1 Timothy 1:12–17)

FRIDAY

The Lord is Present
(Genesis 28:15–22)

SATURDAY

Welcome Home
(Genesis 29:9–14)

SUNDAY

A Bride Worth Waiting For
(Genesis 29:15–30)