

Series: Flawed Families of Scripture

VBC

Pastor John Johnson

Genesis 29 – Leah and Rachel

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“Desperate Tentwives”

INTRO

In “Walk the Line,” the story of Johnny Cash

- the movie tells the story of a man who had two loves
- the wife he married—who bore him his children, paid the bills, managed the home
- and the woman in his band—June Carter

-these two affections collide in one of the movie’s most unsettling scene...

We may find this unsettling—not just because of the abusive behavior

- but because it may get close to home
- in all too many marriages—there is a sort of triangular relationship
- there is an unloved woman—the loved—and the lover
- which is the story of and Leah and Rachel—and Jacob—Genesis 28-30

Like all stories—there is a sequence of acts, scenes

ACT I—JACOB IS SENT OFF ON HIS OWN

Scene One—Jacob is sent to Uncle Laban’s

- forced to flee because of his brother’s hatred for him
- here he is in his 50’s—conniver, no life—no career—underachiever—momma’s kid
- and yet—

Scene Two—Along the way—God reassures Jacob of His blessing—Genesis 28

- Jacob sees God in a dream
- and in it he was assured of a future
- the sort received by Abraham and Isaac—later to Moses, Joshua, Gideon

Scene Three—Jacob meets Rachel—read 29:10

- Jacob ends up at a well
- a sort of local hangout—where he meets his cousin Rachel
- and apparently Rachel is hot

- because Jacob suddenly became this full on man—rolling away stones that typically took several men
- like guys at SAC when a good looking woman comes into the weight room—they start lifting things heavy

ACT II—JACOB EXPERIENCES LOVE, DECEPTION, AND POETIC JUSTICE

Scene One-Jacob meets the family—and he must have Rachel-read 29:13-20

- Jacob wants Rachel—but he comes empty handed—he had no wealth—no capital to transfer
- and in ANE times—a good wife went for 50 shekels
- so it was food for work—wife for work

- which was okay—Jacob was smitten with love for the younger sister
- and the choice was obvious

- a. for Rachel was beautiful in form and face
 - when Jacob looked into Rachel's eyes—he became hopelessly lost, captured
- b. when he looked into Leah's
 - there was no sparkle, no sizzle, no appeal
 - just a collection of cornea, retina, and optic nerves—that were tired and weak

The names themselves indicated a difference—

- a. Rachel's name meant "little lamb"
- b. Leah's name meant "weary one"
 - and in related Semitic language—"cow", wild cow
 - which probably explains Jacob's preferences

Scene Two—Jacob gets married—to the woman he does not anticipate—read 29:21-25

- Laban is a con—he will take full advantage
- how Jacob was duped is unclear—lateness of the hour, too much drink, veiled bride
- Jacob—the arch deceiver—has now been deceived

- and maybe there was poetic justice here
 - Jacob's mother schemed to *steal* the rights from the older child
 - Jacob's uncle schemed to *ensure* the rights of the older child

Jacob has an easy explanation—read 26-27

-maybe Laban was saying—in our (as opposed to your) country—the younger does not supplant the older

But it's okay—

ACT III—JACOB GETS THE GIRL

Scene One—Jacob gets married to the woman he is in love with—read 29:28-30a

Scene Two—Uncle Laban will again get his payment—read 30b

-and so—this third act ends with seven more years

-only these will be long years in a story filled with two competitive sisters, one exploitative father in law, and one dysfunctional husband

ACT IV—JACOB LIVES WITH THE PAIN OF TWO SPOUSES

Scene One—Leah hopes children will earn her his affections—read verse 31

-Jacob doesn't love Leah-never did

-he avoids her tent—and heads right for Rachel's every night—which had to be incredibly painful

-but God notices—He heard her prayers and gave her kids

If you look closely—you will see that the names trace Leah's sad story—form a sort of journal of her life—reflecting her sense of isolation and her longing for love

-29:32-God sees—Jacob-do you notice me?

-and nothing suggests he does

-29:33-Simeon-God has heard my hurt—I am this unloved, hated woman

-Jacob—do you hear—are you listening?

-and of course—he doesn't—for his affections went elsewhere

-29:34-Levi—"he will attach to me"—a name declaring her hope that finally Jacob will connect—will love her

-he will because we have lots of kids

-but there is no connection beyond the physical act of intercourse

-no connecting emotionally, spiritually

-just empty sex

And so—by the 4th child-maybe a settled resignation

-29:35-Judah—"I will confess, praise"—the journal goes a different direction

-at least I have these kids

Scene Two—Leah's fruitfulness eats away at Rachel

- by now, we see these are desperate tentwives—twisted sisters
- both craving for what the other has
 - one wants love—one wants children
- both resentful of Jacob for what he fails to provide

It's here we see the ugly side of Rachel—read 30:1

- her beauty generally got her what she wanted
- but it could not give her children
- so she took it out on Jacob
- whose response is rather pathetic-read verse 2

- so Rachel came up with her own plan
- one way or another—she will win this contest—even if she has to use a surrogate womb and Jacob as stud service

- and the names also put her feelings to words
- 30:6-Dan— “He has pleaded the case”—a name declaring her satisfaction that God has spoken, vindicated Rachel
- 30:8-Naphtali— “wrestlings” —a name declaring she has prevailed over her sister (even though the score is Leah 4, Rachel 2)

Scene Three-Rachel's triumph is short lived

- not to be outshined—Leah too went to her own bench for a pinch hitter—read verse 9

- 30:11—Gad—a name of blessing-“fortune” —a name declaring she is rich(er)
- 30:12—Asher—a name describing her happiness for having so many children
- 30:18—Issachar— “wages” —God has paid me for my wisdom in giving Jacob my maidservant (which shows how distorted Leah's spiritual life was)
- 30:20—Zebulun— “he will honor me” —which expressed Leah's hope Jacob would finally honor her—for she gave him six sons (we're headed to the bottom of the ninth-Leah's got a commanding lead—8-2)

Scene Four—Rachel finally becomes pregnant—read 30:22-24

- Rachel—so undeserving—nonetheless got God's attention
- and it leaves Rachel with hope—hence the name of her son
 - 30:24—Joseph— “he increases” —which expressed her hope God would add another son

-she would have one more son-Ben-Oni— “son of mourning,
sadness”
-for it would come with the loss of her life—chapter 35

Final score—Leah 8/Rachel 4

-or counting daughters and grandchildren—
-Leah - 49
-Rachel - 21

-we look hard for inspiration—it’s hard to feel sympathy for any of these
characters

- a. Jacob was deceived—but then—he had it coming to him
-he is the total passive man—manipulated by everybody
- b. Laban as the father is a conniver—always looking out for his interests
- c. Leah is a victim—who may have thought if I can get him in bed he will love
me—if I can get pregnant and have his children he will love me
-but like so many other women—she discovers this is not true
- d. Rachel is a vindictive, demanding woman—who will do anything to win

-and yet—through them came the twelve leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel
-we are again overwhelmed with God’s grace

APP

So where do we go with this flawed family?

-there are two huge mistakes the passage warns us to avoid

1. FIRST MISTAKE—IF WE CAN JUST HAVE KIDS—HE WILL LOVE ME
-when women become desperate—they can make the same mistake Leah
made
-but it misunderstands men—it misunderstands love
-misunderstands God
-you can’t build a relationship on a bed
2. SECOND MISTAKE—I CAN LIVE WITH TWO SPOUSES
-and yet—many do
-it may be that there are a number of Leah’s in this room today
-who live with the pain of being unloved
-because they live with a Jacob
-live with a spouse who is in love with someone, something else

Psychologists tell us marriages are often a collection of four spouses

-those we live with—and those we “hang on the wall”

-here are some of those loves—

- a. A CAREER—that a spouse is forced to compete with—that receives more passion than the marriage receives
- b. KIDS—whose demand for attention crowds out love
- c. EXPECTATION—often it is an image in the mind of who you want her/him to be—an expectation—that like a second spouse—is who you are really in love with—that you won't let go
 - that you expect your spouse to live up to
- d. AN IMAGE ON A SCREEN—that is the main focus of your affections-pornography can be the other spouse
- e. A PERSON—who is real, living—that you fanaticize having a relationship with
 - or already have an emotional affair with
 - someone you think about more than your mate
 - someone you share more of yourself with than your spouse—your dreams, your passions, your hurts, your heartaches
 - an emotional affair just waiting to become a physical affair

God's word would say—

1. Come back to your covenant—made at a holy altar
 - marriage is a vocation to total abandonment
 - it is a total surrender to the possibility of being married to anyone, anything else
2. Come back to reality-what you fantasize is a lie
 - forbidden fruit has its brown spots
 - come back before God abandons you to your pursuits-Proverbs 22:14; Romans 1
3. Come to the Cross
 - bring these affections to the Cross
 - call them what they are—sin, betrayal
 - renounce them everyday—let God bury them