

## Adam Clarke:

## Introduction

Jacob proceeds on his journey, Genesis 29:1. Comes to a well where the flocks of his uncle Laban, as well as those of several others, were usually watered, Genesis 29:2, Genesis 29:3. Inquires from the shepherds concerning Laban and his family, Genesis 29:4-6. While they are conversing about watering the sheep, Genesis 29:7, Genesis 29:8, Rachel arrives, Genesis 29:9. He assists her to water her flock, Genesis 29:10; makes himself known unto her, Genesis 29:11, Genesis 29:12. She hastens home and communicates the tidings of Jacob's arrival to her father, Genesis 29:12. Laban hastens to the well, embraces Jacob, and brings him home, Genesis 29:13. After a month's stay, Laban proposes to give Jacob wages, Genesis 29:14, Genesis 29:15. Leah and Rachel described, Genesis 29:16, Genesis 29:17. Jacob proposes to serve seven years for Rachel, Genesis 29:18. Laban consents, Genesis 29:19. When the seven years were fulfilled, Jacob demands his wife, Genesis 29:20, Genesis 29:21. Laban makes a marriage feast, Genesis 29:22; and in the evening substitutes Leah for Rachel, to whom he gives Zilpah for handmaid, Genesis 29:23, Genesis 29:24. Jacob discovers the fraud, and upbraids Laban, Genesis 29:25. He excuses himself, Genesis 29:26; and promises to give him Rachel for another seven years of service, Genesis 29:27. After abiding a week with Leah, he receives Rachel for wife, to whom Laban gives Bilhah for handmaid, Genesis 29:28, Genesis 29:29. Jacob loves Rachel more than Leah, and serves seven years for her, Genesis 29:30. Leah being despised, the Lord makes her fruitful, while Rachel continues barren, Genesis 29:31. Leah bears Reuben, Genesis 29:32, and Simeon, Genesis 29:33, and Levi, Genesis 29:34, and Judah; after which she leaves off bearing, Genesis 29:35.

## Verse 1

Then Jacob went on his journey - The original is very remarkable: And Jacob lifted up his feet, and he traveled unto the land of the children of the east. There is a certain cheerfulness marked in the original which comports well with the state of mind into which he had been brought by the vision of the ladder and the promises of God. He now saw that having God for his protector he had nothing to fear, and therefore he went on his way rejoicing.

People of the east - The inhabitants of Mesopotamia and the whole country beyond the Euphrates are called כְּדִמִּי (kedem), or easterns, in the sacred writings.

## Verse 2

Three flocks of sheep - תְּשֵׁנִים (tson), small cattle, such as sheep, goats, etc.; See note on Genesis 12:16. Sheep, in a healthy state, seldom drink in cold and comparatively cold countries: but it was probably different in hot climates. The three flocks, if flocks and not shepherds be meant, which were lying now at the well, did not belong to Laban, but to three other chiefs; for Laban's flock was yet to come, under the care of Rachel, Genesis 29:6.

## Verse 3

All the flocks - Instead of הַדָּרִים (hadarim), flocks, the Samaritan reads (haroim), shepherds; for which reading Houbigant strongly contends, as well in this verse as in Genesis 29:8. It certainly cannot be said that all the flocks rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the sheep: and yet so it appears to read if we prefer the common Hebrew text to the Samaritan. It is probable that the same reading was originally that of the second verse also.

And put the stone again upon the well's mouth - It is very likely that the stone was a large one, which was necessary to prevent ill-minded individuals from either disturbing the water, or filling up the well; hence a great stone was provided, which required the joint exertions of several shepherds to remove it; and hence those who arrived first waited till all the others were come up, that they might water their respective flocks in concert.

## Verse 4

My brethren, whence be ye? - The language of Laban and his family was Chaldee and not Hebrew; (see Genesis 31:47); but from the names which Leah gave to her children we see that the two languages had many words in common, and therefore Jacob and the shepherds might understand each other with little difficulty. It is possible also that Jacob might have learned the Chaldee or Aramitish language from his mother, as this was his mother's tongue.

## Verse 5

Laban the son of Nahor - Son is here put for grandson, for Laban was the son of Bethuel the son of Nahor.

#### Verse 6

Is he well? - שָׁלוֹם (hashalom lo)? Is there peace to him? Peace among the Hebrews signified all kinds of prosperity. Is he a prosperous man in his family and in his property? And they said, He is well, שָׁלוֹם (shalom), he prospers.

Rachel - cometh with the sheep - רָחֵל (rachel) (the ch sounded strongly guttural) signifies a sheep or ewe; and she probably had her name from her fondness for these animals.

#### Verse 7

It is yet high day - The day is but about half run; neither is it time that the cattle should be gathered together - it is surely not time yet to put them into the folds; give them therefore water, and take them again to pasture.

#### Verse 8

We cannot, until all the flocks be gathered together - It is a rule that the stone shall not be removed till all the shepherds and the flocks which have a right to this well be gathered together; then, and not before, we may water the sheep. See note on Genesis 29:3.

#### Verse 9

Rachel came with her father's sheep - So we find that young women were not kept concealed in the house till the time they were married, which is the common gloss put on מַאֲהָרָה (almah), a virgin, one concealed. Nor was it beneath the dignity of the daughters of the most opulent chiefs to carry water from the well, as in the case of Rebekah; or tend sheep, as in the case of Rachel. The chief property in those times consisted in flocks: and who so proper to take care of them as those who were interested in their safety and increase? Honest labor, far from being a discredit, is an honor both to high and low. The king himself is served by the field; and without it, and the labor necessary for its cultivation, all ranks must perish. Let every son, let every daughter, learn that it is no discredit to be employed, whenever it may be necessary, in the meanest offices, by which the interests of the family may be honestly promoted.

#### Verse 10

Jacob went near, and rolled the stone - Probably the flock of Laban was the last of those which had a right to the well; that flock being now come, Jacob assisted the shepherds to roll off the stone, (for it is not likely he did it by himself), and so assisted his cousin, to whom he was as yet unknown, to water her flock.

#### Verse 11

Jacob kissed Rachel - A simple and pure method by which the primitive inhabitants of the earth testified their friendship to each other, first abused by hypocrites, who pretended affection while their vile hearts meditated terror, (see the case of Joab), and afterwards disgraced by refiners on morals, who, while they pretended to stumble at those innocent expressions of affection and friendship, were capable of committing the grossest acts of impurity.

And lifted up his voice - It may be, in thanksgiving to God for the favor he had shown him, in conducting him thus far in peace and safety.

And wept - From a sense of the goodness of his heavenly Father, and his own unworthiness of the success with which he had been favored. The same expressions of kindness and pure affection are repeated on the part of Laban, Genesis 29:13.

#### Verse 14

My bone and my flesh - One of my nearest relatives.

#### Verse 15

Because thou art my brother, etc. - Though thou art my nearest relative, yet I have no right to thy services without giving thee an adequate recompense. Jacob had passed a whole month in the family of Laban, in which he had undoubtedly rendered himself of considerable service. As Laban, who was of a very saving if not covetous disposition, saw that he was to be of great use to him in his secular concerns, he wished to secure his services, and therefore asks him what wages he wished to have.

#### Verse 17

Leah was tender-eyed - רַחֵם (raccoth), soft, delicate, lovely. I believe the word means just the reverse of the signification generally given to it. The design of the inspired writer is to compare both the sisters together, that the balance may appear to be greatly in favor of Rachel. The chief recommendation of Leah was her soft and

beautiful eyes; but Rachel was **יפה תואר** (yephath toar), beautiful in her shape, person, mien, and gait, and **יפה מאר** (yephath mareh), beautiful in her countenance. The words plainly signify a fine shape and fine features, all that can be considered as essential to personal beauty. Therefore Jacob loved her, and was willing to become a bond servant for seven years, that he might get her to wife; for in his destitute state he could produce no dowry, and it was the custom of those times for the father to receive a portion for his daughter, and not to give one with her. One of the Hindoo lawgivers says, "A person may become a slave on account of love, or to obtain a wife." The bad system of education by which women are spoiled and rendered in general good for nothing, makes it necessary for the husband to get a dowry with his wife to enable him to maintain her; whereas in former times they were well educated and extremely useful, hence he who got a wife almost invariably got a prize, or as Solomon says, got a good thing.

#### Verse 20

And Jacob served seven years for Rachel - In ancient times it appears to have been a custom among all nations that men should give dowries for their wives; and in many countries this custom still prevails. When Shechem asked Dinah for wife, he said, Ask me never so much - dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me. When Eliezer went to get Rebekah for Isaac, he took a profusion of riches with him, in silver, gold, jewels, and raiment, with other costly things, which, when the contract was made, he gave to Rebekah, her mother, and her brothers. David, in order to be Saul's son-in-law, must, instead of a dowry, kill Goliath; and when this was done, he was not permitted to espouse Michal till he had killed one hundred Philistines. The Prophet Hosea bought his wife for fifteen pieces of silver, and a homer and a half of barley. The same custom prevailed among the ancient Greeks, Indians, and Germans. The Romans also had a sort of marriage entitled *per coemptionem*, "by purchase." The Tartars and Turks still buy their wives; but among the latter they are bought as a sort of slaves.

Herodotus mentions a very singular custom among the Babylonians, which may serve to throw light on Laban's conduct towards Jacob. "In every district they annually assemble all the marriageable virgins on a certain day; and when the men are come together and stand round the place, the crier rising up sells one after another, always bringing forward the most beautiful first; and having sold her for a great sum of gold, he puts up her who is esteemed second in beauty. On this occasion the richest of the Babylonians used to contend for the fairest wife, and to outbid one another. But the vulgar are content to take the ugly and lame with money; for when all the beautiful virgins are sold, the crier orders the most deformed to stand up; and after he has openly demanded who will marry her with a small sum, she is at length given to the man that is contented to marry her with the least. And in this manner the money arising from the sale of the handsome served for a portion to those whose look was disagreeable, or who had any bodily imperfection. A father was not permitted to indulge his own fancy in the choice of a husband for his daughter; neither might the purchaser carry off the woman which he had bought without giving sufficient security that he would live with her as his own wife. Those also who received a sum of money with such as could bring no price in this market, were obliged also to give sufficient security that they would live with them, and if they did not they were obliged to refund the money." Thus Laban made use of the beauty of Rachel to dispose of his daughter Leah, in the spirit of the Babylonian custom, though not in the letter.

And they seemed unto him but a few days - If Jacob had been obliged to wait seven years before he married Rachel, could it possibly be said that they could appear to him as a few days? Though the letter of the text seems to say the contrary, yet there are eminent men who strongly contend that he received Rachel soon after the month was finished, (see Genesis 29:14), and then served seven years for her, which might really appear but a few days to him, because of his increasing love to her; but others think this quite incompatible with all the circumstances marked down in the text, and on the supposition that Jacob was not now seventy-seven years of age, as most chronologers make him, but only fifty-seven, (see on Genesis 31 (note))., there will be time sufficient to allow for all the transactions which are recorded in his history, during his stay with Laban. As to the incredibility of a passionate lover, as some have termed him, waiting patiently for seven years before he could possess the object of his wishes, and those seven years appearing to him as only a few days, it may be satisfactorily accounted for, they think, two ways:

1. He had the continual company of his elect spouse, and this certainly would take away all tedium in the case.
2. Love affairs were not carried to such a pitch of insanity among the patriarchs as they have been in modern times; they were much more sober and sedate, and scarcely ever married before they were forty years of age, and then more for convenience, and the desire of having an offspring, than for any other purpose.

At the very lowest computation Jacob was now fifty-seven, and consequently must have passed those days in which passion runs away with reason. Still, however, the obvious construction of the text shows that he got Rachel the week after he had married Leah.

**Verse 21**

My days are fulfilled - My seven years are now completed, let me have my wife, for whom I have given this service as a dowry.

**Verse 22**

Laban - made a feast - **וַיַּעַל לַבָּן** (mishteh) signifies a feast of drinking. As marriage was a very solemn contract, there is much reason to believe that sacrifices were offered on the occasion, and libations poured out; and we know that on festival occasions a cup of wine was offered to every guest; and as this was drunk with particular ceremonies, the feast might derive its name from this circumstance, which was the most prominent and observable on such occasions.

**Verse 23**

In the evening - he took Leah his daughter - As the bride was always veiled, and the bride chamber generally dark, or nearly so, and as Leah was brought to Jacob in the evening, the imposition here practiced might easily pass undetected by Jacob, till the ensuing day discovered the fraud.

**Verse 24**

And Laban gave - Zilpah his maid - Slaves given in this way to a daughter on her marriage, were the peculiar property of the daughter; and over them the husband had neither right nor power.

**Verse 26**

It must not be so done in our country - It was an early custom to give daughters in marriage according to their seniority; and it is worthy of remark that the oldest people now existing, next to the Jews, I mean the Hindoos, have this not merely as a custom, but as a positive law; and they deem it criminal to give a younger daughter in marriage while an elder daughter remains unmarried. Among them it is a high offense, equal to adultery, **â€œ**for a man to marry while his elder brother remains unmarried, or for a man to give his daughter to such a person, or to give his youngest daughter in marriage while the eldest sister remains unmarried.**â€™** - Code of Gentoo Laws, chap. xv., sec. 1, p. 204. This was a custom at Mesopotamia; but Laban took care to conceal it from Jacob till after he had given him Leah. The words of Laban are literally what a Hindoo would say on such a subject.

**Verse 27**

Fulfill her week - The marriage feast, it appears, lasted seven days; it would not therefore have been proper to break off the solemnities to which all the men of the place had been invited, Genesis 29:22, and probably Laban wished to keep his fraud from the public eye; therefore he informs Jacob that if he will fulfill the marriage week for Leah, he will give him Rachel at the end of it, on condition of his serving seven other years. To this the necessity of the case caused Jacob to agree; and thus Laban had fourteen years **â€™** service instead of seven: for it is not likely that Jacob would have served even seven days for Leah, as his affection was wholly set on Rachel, the wife of his own choice. By this stratagem Laban gained a settlement for both his daughters. What a man soweth, that shall he reap. Jacob had before practiced deceit, and is now deceived; and Laban, the instrument of it, was afterwards deceived himself.

**Verse 28**

And Jacob did so - and he gave him Rachel - It is perfectly plain that Jacob did not serve seven years more before he got Rachel to wife; but having spent a week with Leah, and in keeping the marriage feast, he then got Rachel, and served afterwards seven years for her. Connections of this kind are now called incestuous; but it appears they were allowable in those ancient times. In taking both sisters, it does not appear that any blame attached to Jacob, though in consequence of it he was vexed by their jealousies. It was probably because of this that the law was made, Thou shalt not take a wife to her sister, to vex her, besides the other in her life-time. After this, all such marriages were strictly forbidden.

**Verse 31**

The Lord saw that Leah was hated - From this and the preceding verse we get the genuine meaning of the word **וַיִּשְׂא** (sane), to hate, in certain disputed places in the Scriptures. The word simply signifies a less degree of love; so it is said, Genesis 29:30: **â€œ**Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah,**â€™** i.e., he loved Leah less than Rachel; and this is called hating in Genesis 29:31: When the Lord saw that Leah was hated - that she had less affection shown to her than was her due, as one of the legitimate wives of Jacob, he opened her womb - he blessed her with children. Now the frequent intercourse of Jacob with Leah (see the following verses) sufficiently proves that he did not hate her in the sense in which this term is used among us; but he felt and showed less affection for her than for her sister. So Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated, simply means, I have shown a greater degree of affection for Jacob and his posterity than I have done for Esau and his

descendants, by giving the former a better earthly portion than I have given to the latter, and by choosing the family of Jacob to be the progenitors of the Messiah. But not one word of all this relates to the eternal states of either of the two nations. Those who endeavor to support certain peculiarities of their creed by such scriptures as these, do greatly err, not knowing the Scripture, and not properly considering either the sovereignty or the mercy of God.

#### Verse 32

She called his name Reuben - רֶעֹבֶן (reuben), literally, see ye or behold a son; for Jehovah hath looked upon, רָאָה (raah), beheld, my affliction; behold then the consequence, I have got a son!

#### Verse 33

She called his name Simeon - שִׁמְעוֹן (shimon), hearing; i.e., God had blessed her with another son, because he had heard that she was hated - loved less than Rachel was.

#### Verse 34

Therefore was his name called Levi - לֵוִי (levi), joined; because she supposed that, in consequence of all these children, Jacob would become joined to her in as strong affection, at least, as he was to Rachel. From Levi sprang the tribe of Levites, who instead of the first-born, were joined unto the priests in the service of the sanctuary. See Numbers 18:2, Numbers 18:4.

#### Verse 35

She called his name Judah - יְהוּדָה (yehudah), a confessor; one who acknowledges God, and acknowledges that all good comes from his hands, and gives him the praise due to his grace and mercy. From this patriarch the Jews have their name, and could it be now rightly applied to them, it would intimate that they were a people that confess God, acknowledge his bounty, and praise him for his grace.

Left bearing - That is, for a time; for she had several children afterwards. Literally translated, the original לָמַד מִלֵּדֶת (taamod milledeth) - she stood still from bearing, certainly does not convey the same meaning as that in our translation; the one appearing to signify that she ceased entirely from having children; the other, that she only desisted for a time, which was probably occasioned by a temporary suspension of Jacob's company, who appears to have deserted the tent of Leah through the jealous management of Rachel. The intelligent and pious care of the original inhabitants of the world to call their children by those names which were descriptive of some remarkable event in providence, circumstance of their birth, or domestic occurrence, is worthy, not only of respect, but of imitation. As the name itself continually called to the mind, both of the parents and the child, the circumstance from which it originated, it could not fail to be a lasting blessing to both. How widely different is our custom! Unthinking and ungodly, we impose names upon our offspring as we do upon our cattle; and often the dog, the horse, the monkey, and the parrot, share in common with our children the names which are called Christian! Some of our Christian names, so called, are absurd, others are ridiculous, and a third class impious; these last being taken from the demon gods and goddesses of heathenism. May we hope that the rational and pious custom recommended in the Scriptures shall ever be restored, even among those who profess to believe in, fear, and love God!