

Genesis 29:15-30

Aim of lesson

To show God's continuing care for Jacob.

Background study

Genesis 30 and 31. Refer to the customs of the day regarding marriage.

Suggested outline of lesson

Remind the children how happy Jacob was to be welcomed into Laban's household, and that from the start he felt a great affection for Rachel, the younger daughter. It had been almost love at first sight, and Jacob soon realized that here was the woman he wanted to marry. The depth of his love for her was confirmed by his willingness to agree to work for such a long time before the wedding could take place.

The deceiver deceived

The fact that Leah, the older daughter, was still unmarried at the end of this time presented Laban with a serious problem. Explain that it was considered a disgrace for a woman not to marry and that, as the older daughter, she must be married before the younger. Instead of being honest with Jacob, Laban resorted to deception, and we can imagine Jacob's distress, disappointment and anger at the end of the wedding celebrations to find that he had been married to the wrong daughter. It will be necessary to explain to the children how different that wedding was from any which the children may have attended, for the groom was not allowed to see his wife's face until after the marriage had been performed.

Two wives for one

In those days it seems to have been lawful for a man to have more than one wife. In fact, Jacob gained two wives within a week, although he had to commit himself to working for Laban for a further seven years, and he was powerless to do anything about this as he had no other means of support. However, rather than feeling resentful of the harsh treatment he had received, Jacob's love for Rachel was so great that he was willing and content to do this (quote verse 20 to the children). Ask them to work out how many years altogether Jacob had to work to fulfil the agreement, and to suggest what might have been the individual feelings of the four people involved in this chain of events. Jacob, the deceiver, had been cheated and was trapped in a situation that led to years of hard work. Rachel had had to submit to her father's ruling and take second place to her older sister, but was sure of Jacob's devotion. Leah must have felt hurt, knowing that Jacob did not love her as he loved her sister, and perhaps her father's scheme caused her to feel humiliated. Laban had a duty to his older daughter but, nevertheless, acted dishonourably and made excessive demands upon his son-in-law.

Twelve sons

Describe how God compensated Leah by giving her children before Rachel, and tell the children about the twelve sons that were born to Jacob and his wives. Develop the theme of God's providence in the remaining years that Jacob spent in Haran, for he was blessed abundantly in spite of Laban's further attempts to deprive him of success and to keep him dependent on him. Summarize the account of the selective breeding of the cattle and how Laban's greediness was turned to Jacob's advantage by the power of God, the creator and sustainer of all forms of life. The more Laban, in his greed, tried to cheat Jacob out of what was his due, the more Jacob prospered; no man can frustrate the purpose of God.

Return to Canaan

God told Jacob it was now time to return to Canaan, the land of promise (Genesis 31:3 and 11-13) and repeated that he would be with him as he had been since the vision at Bethel. Knowing his uncle's cunning, Jacob decided to leave in secret - not an easy thing to do with all his flocks and his large family. But he succeeded, and the possessive Laban lost his daughters, his grandchildren and his hard-working son-in-law. Jacob confessed that it was God who had blessed him so abundantly, in fulfilment of the promise, and he returned to his homeland in very different circumstances from those in which he had left.

Relevance to the children's lives

Throughout this story Jacob appears to be the kind of man who accepted his difficulties without complaint. When he was deceived he did not seek revenge but continued to do what was right. What do you think made Jacob change from being, when he was younger, a deceiver like Laban to a man of honesty and hopefulness? (Refer to the way that Jacob learned, as a result of the vision, to depend not on himself but on God.)

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, help us to put our trust in you as we grow older. We know and believe that you will help and bless us at the right time. Amen.

Memory verse

"If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go ... then the Lord shall be my God" (Genesis 28:20-21).