

When Jacob Saw Rachel, Daughter of Laban, He Kissed Her and Began to Weep Aloud

29: 1-14a

DIG: Compare 24:10-32 with this passage. How do you account for the similarities in how Isaac and Jacob met their respective mates? How do you account for Jacob showing up at the exact well where the sheep of his relatives were being watered?

REFLECT: What do you think of love at first sight? How important are family ties and a common faith to you in your choice of a mate? What else matters to you in this regard?

Jacob may have lingered for a time at Bethel, reflecting on what the LORD had said to him there. But eventually Jacob (Hebrew: Ya'akov) lifted up his feet and continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples (29:1). There is a new spring in his step as a result of his encounter with ADONAI. It is the same for you and me today. God says to us: I will never leave you or forsake you. So we can say with confidence: ADONAI is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me (Hebrews 13:5b-6)? When we are reminded of His promises to us, do we not lift up our feet as we journey through this world? The rest of Jacob's journey passed along in silence.

ADONAI had promised to be with Ya'akov (28:15), and as he continued on his journey to Padan Aram, the LORD guided him to the exact well where the sheep of his relatives were being watered. There he saw a well in the field outside of town, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large (29:2). Here we see the importance of water in that country. It is still a very important item because there is a shortage of water in many places. This well seems to be stored water rather than a well of flowing water. It needed to be protected; that is why at a certain time during the day the large stone was removed from the top of the well, and then everyone watered their sheep. Everyone got the water they needed, then the stone was put back to close the well.⁴⁵⁷

When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well (29:3). However, the sheep were watered in order of their arrival, and there were already some shepherds who had come early to "get in line."

Being an experienced **shepherd**, **Jacob** thought it was strange that **the shepherds** and **their sheep** were laying around an unopened well in the middle of the day. Nevertheless, **he greeted the shepherds** warmly: **My brothers, where are you from? We're from Haran**, they replied. **He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?" (Evidently Laban was better known through his grandfather, Nahor, than through his father, Bethuel).** **"Yes, we know him,"** they replied. Like when Eliezar was searching for a bride for his father, **Jacob** was amazed and grateful that those **shepherds** were from Haran and also knew his uncle **Laban**. Then **Ya'akov** asked them, **"Is he well?"** **"Yes, he is,"** they said, **"and his daughter Rachel will be coming with the sheep" (29:4-6).**

It is interesting that both **Jacob** and **the shepherds** still spoke the same language. The language of Haran was Aramaic, or Chaldee, and was evidently the language well known to Abraham, and therefore to Isaac and **Ya'akov**. The means by which these patriarchs communicated with the Canaanites, and even with the Egyptians, in the course of their travels, is never mentioned. Their languages were certainly quite different. Evidently they either spoke through interpreters or else they themselves were good linguists and had learned several languages. As far as the immediate family of Abraham was concerned, however, it is reasonable that they all had continued to speak Aramaic, as well as Hebrew.⁴⁵⁸

When **he** learned that **Laban's** very own **daughter Rachel** would be coming soon, **his** heart skipped a beat. This might be **his** future wife! **He** was anxious to meet **her**, but it would be better if **the shepherds** were not around. **Jacob** quickly devised a plan. **Look, he said, the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture.** But **the shepherds** did not cooperate, saying: **We can't, until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep (29:7-8).** It was **their** custom to wait until **all the flocks** had **gathered**, then **the stone** would be **rolled away** and the watering would begin.

However, while he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess (29:9). It was unusual for a woman to do this kind of work. **Laban** did have sons who tended **his sheep (31:1)**, and two daughters. But evidently **he** had so many **flocks** and herds in different regions at this time that the whole family needed to help take care of **them**. **Rachel** means *ewe lamb*, and it was the ancient custom to give names of animals to children. It was significant that the meeting between **Jacob** and **Rachel** took place at a **well**, which was often associated with **God's** blessing (**16:13-14; 21:19-25, 33**).

It was no accident that **Ya'akov** was to meet **Rachel** at that **well**. **ADONAI** doesn't roll the dice. It was no accident that a caravan of Ishmaelites passed by on their way to Egypt as Joseph's brothers were plotting his death. It was no accident that Pharaoh's daughter went

down to the river to bathe, and one of her attendants found the baby Moses in a basket among the reeds. It was no accident that Ruth gleaned the fields of Boaz. It was no accident that on a specific night, King Ahasuerus could not sleep so he had the record of his reign read to him, which contained an entry of how Mordecai had exposed a plot on the king's very life, which not only led to the saving of Mordecai's life, but the Jewish nation itself (see my commentary on [Esther Be - That Night the King Could Not Sleep](#)). No, this was not an accident. **Jacob** had a divine appointment.

When Jacob saw Rachel, he fell hopelessly in love with her. It was love at first sight. Before introducing himself, **he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep.** But **he** was so overcome with emotion that **he** proceeded to **kiss her.** This was a **kiss** of personal greeting, but this was only practiced by relatives or close friends. If **she** was shocked by **his kiss, she** was probably even more shocked when **he began to weep aloud (29:10-11)! Ya'akov realized he** was at the right place with the right person. But **he** managed to control his emotions long enough to tell **her that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah.**

Then it was **Rachel's** turn to be emotional. When **she** learned who **Ya'akov** was, **she ran and told her father (29:12).** I think **Jacob** had a strong sense that this woman could be the wife **God** had chosen for **him.** **He** must have heard **his** own mother, **Rebekah,** share many times how **she** had come to **the well** near Haran and met Abraham's chief servant, Eliezer. **He** was there to find a wife for **Jacob's father** Isaac, and **his** mother Rebekah, of course, was the woman who appeared at the well.⁴⁵⁹ **Ya'akov** probably remained behind to tend to **Rachel's sheep** while **she** was gone.

As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. **Rebekah** had left **her** family and **Laban** ninety-seven years earlier and **he** was anxious for news of **her.** I am sure **they** had quite a lot to talk about **(24:50-60).** **He embraced him and, as is the common custom in the Near East, greeted him with a kiss and brought him to his home.** **There Ya'akov told him** the whole family history over the previous ninety-seven years. At some length, **Laban** said to **him, "You are my own flesh and blood (29:13-14).** This statement has been found in ancient adoption ceremonies and **he** seems genuinely delighted to welcome **his relative** into **his** house.⁴⁶⁰ So far . . . **Rebekah's** plan seemed to be working very well.