

Genesis Bible Study 16

Justice and Mercy?

taken from

***Salvation for the Social Order: For Those Who Haven't Read the Bible
and for Those Who Think Religion is Merely a Private Matter***

by Philip E. Friesen

Reading: Genesis 28:10-29:28

Principal Question: Is God fair?

Main Point: God's judgment is different from human judgment.

Notes

This story is about both faith and justice. God is a character in the story. God told Jacob, "I will be with you." After that God disappears from the story. You will have to decide whether God is with Jacob or not. You will need to discuss whether you think God is fair or not. However, remember, the answers you propose today may not be the answers you will find at the very end of the story.

Genesis 28-29 Condensed in Simple English

Jacob left home to go to Haran. This first night he slept outside with his head on a stone. He dreamed he saw a ladder reaching up to heaven, and angels going up and down. God stood at the top and spoke to Jacob, "I am the Lord, the God of your father and grandfather. I will give this land to you, you will have as many descendants as the dust of the earth, and you will bless every people of the earth. I will go with you, and bring you back safely." Jacob woke up frightened thinking, "Wow, this is God's house, and I didn't know it!"

He got up early, set the stone up on end, and poured oil on it as an act of worship, saying, "If you will be with me, give me food and clothes, and bring me home safely, then this stone will be the place I worship you, and I will give you 10% of everything I have."

Jacob went east and saw a well with three flocks of sheep waiting to be watered. A large stone covered the well. Jacob asked the shepherds, "Where are you from?"

"Haran," they answered. Jacob asked again, "Do you know Laban?"

"We know him," they responded.

"How is he?" Jacob inquired.

"He is well, and look, his daughter, Rachel, is coming with his sheep," they replied.

While they were talking, Rachel came. Jacob stood up, moved the stone away, and watered Laban's sheep. Then he kissed Rachel and cried. He told her who he was, and she ran back to get her father, who came promptly and invited Jacob to the house.

After a month had passed, Laban said to Jacob, "You should not work for me for free. What would accept for wages?"

Laban had two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Leah was not so attractive, but Rachel was beautiful. By this time Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel, and he said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel."

Laban answered Jacob, "You are the best man I could find, and you have a deal."

After the seven years had passed, Jacob asked Laban for Rachel. Laban threw a weeklong wedding party and invited everyone to come. Then after the first night of feasting was over, Laban put Leah into Jacob's tent, and he slept with her.

When the sun came up, Jacob discovered that he had been tricked. He complained to Laban, and Laban said, "In our country we have to marry the oldest daughter first. Spend the week with Leah, and I will give you Rachel as well." So Jacob married Leah, but he loved Rachel more than Leah, and he gave Laban seven more years of work for Rachel.

Discussion

1. Read the story. What questions do you have?
2. How do you explain Jacob's dream? Have you ever had a dream of special significance to you?
3. Did Jacob deserve the good things he received from God?
4. Did Jacob deserve what Laban did to him, considering what he did to Esau?
5. Do you like Jacob any better after reading this story than you did at first? Why or why not?
6. How was Jacob's character similar to his mother, Rebekah?
7. How was Rebekah's character similar to her brother, Laban?
8. Do you remember any of Grandfather Abraham's behavior that is similar to Jacob's?

Cultural and Historical Notes

Religious devotees in the ancient world sometimes slept in or near a temple hoping to receive a message from a god. By contrast Jacob is far away from any religious place; and he is not looking for a religious experience. He does not know that at Bethel he is near to the place where his grandfather, Abraham, worshipped God when Abraham first arrived in Canaan. Jacob is not thinking about God at all.

After awaking from his dream, Jacob set up the large stone on end. In Canaanite culture, a stone set up like this was often used as an object of worship. Canaanites believed that a spirit inhabited the stone, and should be worshipped. The Hebrews used stones like this to remember an event or a person who died, but not for worship. Today we still use a stone to mark the burial place of a relative.

Content Questions for English Comprehension

9. Describe Jacob's sleeping accommodations while traveling.
10. What did God promise Jacob?
11. What did Jacob promise God?
12. Give the names of each person in the story.
13. What kind of work did Rachael do?
14. Describe the watering of sheep in this story?
15. How many years did Jacob work to get his bride?