



LEAH, RACHEAL AND JACOB AS VICTIMS OF DECEPTION: A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

In the book of Genesis, Leah and Racheal are two siblings born to Laban. He promises his younger daughter Rachael in marriage to his nephew Jacob. But Laban resorts to deception on the wedding day when he secretly swaps the bride Rachel, his younger daughter to his elder daughter Leah. This paper explores the way this deceitful step affects three lives. It is symbolic of the fact that evil motives always result in negative ramifications and undesirable outcomes, not just on those immediately involved but on generations to come.

INTRODUCTION

In the book of Genesis, the author (Moses) introduces Leah without much flamboyant description. Unlike the other characters in the story, Leah's name is just dropped in the story flow and the author subtly describes her as plain and unattractive while her younger sister Rachel is described as a beauty. "Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form and beautiful." (Genesis 29:17, NIV)

The story of Leah starts off with her father's deception of giving her in marriage to Jacob instead of Rachel against his promise. The outcome of this decision sends ripples in the lives of the three main protagonists namely Leah, Racheal and Jacob and they never really come out of the damage. Their lives are crippled forever.

Content:



Laban, father of Leah and Racheal is instrumental in brewing poison in the lives of his daughters as well as his nephew. He goes against his promise of giving his daughter Racheal in marriage to Jacob and swaps the bride. “Laban brought together all the people... But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob.” (Genesis29:17, NIV). One can find Jacob confronting his father-in-law, Laban on feeling betrayed for not marrying the girl of his choice. On the other hand, Leah longs for her husband’s love and looks forward to a happy married life. She falls prey to her father’s conniving act and suffers being unwanted by her husband from the very beginning of her married life. The author does not record whether she resisted the marriage of unpromised love or walked willingly to accept her unfortunate fate. Nevertheless the aspect that cannot be ignored or overlooked is her suffering and longing to get her husband’s love starts from day one. It shatters her to see her husband’s undying love for her younger sister Rachel. She perceives that Jacob is smitten by the beauty of Racheal and is in love with her only for her beauty. She feels life is so unfair. She feels that it is not her fault that she is not blessed with good looks like her sister.

Though Jacob suffers due to his father-in-law’s deception, it is short lived because he gets to marry the love of his life- Rachel, once the weeklong marital ritual is done with Leah. Jacob readily agrees to the condition laid down by his father-in-law because he is madly in love with Rachel and can do anything in order to possess her. Richard L. Strauss remarks

She is the most beautiful creature he had ever laid eyes on, and he feels that life without her would be worthless. So Jacob served seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him but a few days because of his love for her. These are the loveliest words ever penned of a man’s feeling for a woman. He muses that seven years is a long time to wait, and Jacob really did grow to love Rachel during those years. (Strauss L. Richard web)

So, he recovers quickly and forgets it all. But Leah is deeply anguished by the fact that she has to live with a man who does not love her and will probably never love her. The pain is doubled with the fact that her husband loves her younger sister and not her. Even the Lord is touched by her undying and pure love for her husband and he blesses the couple with their first baby. “When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Rueben, for she said, ‘It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now’” (The New Revised Standard Version. Genesis 29:31-32).

Her unconditional love for her husband brings about renewed optimism in her. She looks forward every rising morning with all her strength and courage that she can win her husband’s heart or even a grain of his love. When she bears Jacob’s son, Rueben, she

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anxiously expects that her husband would look at her with love as Reuben also happens to be Jacob's first born son. Her physical pain during labour is effortlessly borne by her in the hope that her husband will fall in love with her after a glimpse of their son. Leah is devastated to see that all her hopes that she had built over nine months just to catch a glimpse of love from her husband remains unfulfilled. But she never loses hope. For each child, she waits expectantly for her husband to reciprocate her love and names them after deep emotions.

As time passes by, realisation dawns on her that her love will always be unrequited. This realisation does not dampen her spirits but in turn makes her a stronger person. She moves ahead in life and channelizes her love to the ever loving God who has not failed to lavish His love and compassion on her. God has not overlooked her misery and this fact gives her an inner strength to carry on with life and she channelizes her love on bringing up her children.

One is filled with empathy even for Rachael. Rachael is Jacob's first love. She is also madly in love with Jacob. The fact that the man who loves her first is married to her sister disturbs her. In addition to that, she finds it unbearable that her sister provides an heir to Jacob while she is left barren. Though she is married to the man who loves her to distraction, she feels incomplete. The fact that she is unable to bear children agonises her. For a woman, the ultimate gift that she thinks she can give is bearing children of the man she loves. This twist of fate where she witnesses her sister bearing children torments her to such an extent that she develops a feeling of hatred and jealousy towards her sister and starts competing with her. "Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or else I die!'" (Genesis 30:1). This angers Jacob, who feels helpless as it is not his fault that Rachael is unable to conceive. In her obsession and madness to have Jacob's baby, Rachael stoops so low that she crosses all limits of dignity. She drags Reuben, her innocent stepson born to Leah into this ugly squabble. She bargains for his mandrakes with the hope that she will be able to conceive. But in vain.

Jacob became angry with Rachel, insisting that her problem wasn't his fault. When Rachel saw Leah's son Reuben bringing mandrakes (love apples) to his mother from the field, she bargained with Leah for them, hoping that the "magical" fruit would enable her to conceive. Leah retorted, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" But even the mandrakes Leah gave Rachel (in exchange for sleeping again with Jacob) did not produce a son for Rachel. (Genesis 30:14-15)

So there begins an unending enmity between the two sisters who turn into bitter competitors, each wanting Jacob for themselves. The sibling rivalry gets murkier when Leah agrees to part with the mandrakes in exchange for spending a night with Jacob. Here, it is observed that two



sisters who shared a loving relationship turn bitter enemies in their marital journey. This is all because of their father. They are victims of their father's trickery and have to face the brunt of their father's deception till their last breath.

Conclusion:

It is observed that Leah, Racheal and Jacob were just victims of Labaan's trickery. None of the three can be really blamed for their actions. Racheal's hatred was justified because of the circumstances. Leah's jealousy was also quite normal under the circumstances. The rift between the sisters obviously had an impact on Jacob. He was crushed and could not do justice to both his wives. An important point to note from this story is that the actions by the characters not only affected their lives but it had a great impact on their future generations as well. The rift between the sisters had a dark shadow on their descendants also. The vast gulf dividing their respective worlds influenced the relationships among their own children. Beginning with the rivalry between Joseph (Rachel's child) and his brothers (primarily Leah's children), who sought to kill him but instead were placated by selling him as a slave to a passing caravan—the schism keeps resurfacing. Negative qualities like Deception and envy do not solve our problems or get us what we want. It makes us blind to what we have and miserable about what we lack. So, the deeds that we do, good or bad affect our near and dear. One single deed of deception that Labaan did, not only had a rippling effect on three lives but had an impact on generations to come. This is because the younger generation is influenced by the older generation, directly or indirectly.

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