

Study Guide

Series: Wrestling With God
“Jacob and His Two Wives”

Monday – Read Genesis 29:1-15. God begins to carry out the promise to watch over Jacob. Jacob finds his uncle Laban and meets Laban’s daughter Rachel. Laban welcomes Jacob to his home as a kinsman. This story is a lot like the one in Genesis 24, when Abraham’s servant found Isaac’s wife (and Jacob’s mother) Rebekah. Last week we read God’s promise to Jacob: “I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go.” (Genesis 28:15) How does today’s reading show God fulfilling that vow? What makes it important for Jacob (and us) to know that his journey works out well not just due to his talent and skill, but also to God’s blessing? So far, we’ve mainly seen the dark side of Jacob. Like all of us, he had another side. He showed gallantry, kindness and a certain amount of courage in helping Rachel and making contact with his uncle’s family. Who do you know whose “dark side” dominates your view of them? Look for and name the “bright spots” in that person.

Tuesday - Read Genesis 29:16-30. Jacob got married—twice! Jacob worked seven years, married Rachel, he thought, and was shocked to find her older sister Leah with him the next morning. Leah wasn’t necessarily ugly. The word rendered “weak” can also mean “delicate,” a compliment. But Jacob loved Rachel, not Leah. A week later, Laban gave him Rachel—for seven more years of work! In that time, the norm was, as Laban said, to marry an older daughter first. In not being candid about this from the first, Laban duped Jacob. Have you ever dealt like Laban? Have you ever felt like Jacob, hurt and angry? How can God’s wisdom help you see below the surface at such times, and lead toward healing and peace? Laban gave his daughters lavish dowries, but also an example of deceit in his personal dealings. From verse 30 we can see that he set them up for a home filled with sorrow and conflict. What are you working hard to pass on to your children? Will your main legacy be a quantity of “stuff,” or a life filled with integrity and love?

Wednesday – Read Genesis 29:31 – 30:24. Leah and Rachel battled bitterly with each other. Leah had children, but longed for Jacob’s love. Rachel had his love, but ached for children. Both wives gave Jacob their maidservants as pawns in their struggle for family status. Amid all the emotional pain, something vital was happening: the 12 forefathers of the tribes of Israel were being born. This is Israel’s own story of how God kept the covenant promise to make Abraham’s family a great nation. No glitzy fake heroics here! If God worked through the envy and pain of Jacob’s family, what may God do as you face hard situations? When has God bent an “evil” in your life to create a “good” for you and God’s kingdom? Jacob, his wives and the writer of Genesis all held notions about God and childbearing that we don’t share. God loved and worked with them despite their faulty ideas. Can you see where God worked in your life when you held ideas that you no longer hold? What makes loving God perhaps even more vital than knowing all about God?

Thursday - Read Genesis 30:25 – 31:21. Once Rachel had a son, Jacob asked to go home. “Stay,” said Laban. They made a deal based on sheep coloring that seemed stacked in Laban’s favor. But Jacob did very well. Jacob’s methods aren’t credible today—even Jacob and Genesis

gave God credit for his success. Though God again promised safety, Jacob got scared and ran—again. One minute Jacob praised God for giving him success, the next he plotted how best to advance himself. Jacob was—well, a lot like us. When has God worked for you and others through something you planned and initiated? When has God done something startling, which left you feeling “Wow—I’m just along for the ride”? Laban said he’d learned about God’s blessing “by divination” (later banned in Lev. 19 and Deut. 18). Then Rachel stole her father’s “household gods”! What does it tell you about Israel’s God that God did not just give up on these idol-worshipping, “irrational” people in horror? How wide is your understanding of God’s love?

Friday – Read Genesis 31:22-55. Laban pursued Jacob, and accused him of stealing flocks, daughters and the household gods. Violence hung ominously in the air. But God warned Laban, and Rachel craftily hid the gods that she, not Jacob, had taken. In the end, they made a covenant of peace. They set up a pillar of stone as a memorial and boundary, praised God and parted forever. After twenty years of deals made and broken, rubbing sharp elbows daily, Jacob and Laban had many grievances. But God led them to set aside their complaints and make peace. In what relationships would setting up a “Mizpah pillar” (verses 49-53) improve your life? What kind of help with your feelings would you need to do that? The first part of Jacob and Laban’s talk is a classic Middle Eastern bazaar scene. The words twist and turn, sliding easily from compliments to condemnation. What are some ways you are tempted to use slippery speech in today’s world? How does Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 5:34-37 challenge you?