

FATHERHOOD – Part Six
-JACOB AND HIS SONS-
“FAMILY TRAITS – Part 1”
Sermon 8/25/19

It has been said that women tend to marry their fathers and men tend to marry their mothers. I don't know if this is true or not, but I do see some evidence of this in the life of Jacob, the second born son of Isaac and the grandson of Abraham. Jacob married a woman who closely resembled his mother Rebekah. She had some strong traits which she passed down to her son and when looking for a wife I believe Jacob recognized these same traits in his future wife and was attracted to her because of them. These are the family traits that we will look closely at today.

Last week we learned that Jacob was in danger of losing his life at the hands of his older brother Esau because he had stolen the blessing of the first-born by deceiving his father Isaac. At the urging of his mother, Jacob was sent away to avoid the imminent danger from his brother but also with the pretext that he was to find a wife from among his mother's relatives. It is in this journey to find a wife that Jacob will end up reaping what he has sown and will himself taste the bitterness of being deceived by a close family member.

When Jacob arrived in Padan-Aram, located today in southeastern Turkey, he was immediately drawn to his uncle Laban's youngest daughter, Rachel. He initially stayed with his uncle and worked for room and board alone. But after a month Laban felt it was not fair that his relative should work without pay. So he asked Jacob what would be a fair wage. Jacob replied that he would work for him for seven years if he would give him his younger daughter Rachel as payment. Laban agreed to the terms. This is where the inherited family traits of his mother Rebekah start to rise to the surface.

After seven years the time finally came for Rachel to be given to Jacob. Laban then gathered all the men of the place and prepared a feast for the young couple. But when evening came Laban deceived Jacob, bringing his older daughter Leah to Jacob instead of Rachael. Unaware of the switch, Jacob lay with Leah throughout the night. It was not until morning that Jacob realized it was Leah and not Rachel whom he had slept with. How can this be? How can someone who loved one sister and worked beside the other not know the difference between the two, especially in such an intimate setting as the marriage bed?

The Bible does not say but we may get some clues from a different source called the Book of Jasher, also known as the Book of the Upright. Passages from this book are quoted in 2 Samuel 1:18-27 when David asked his men to teach the sons of Judah the song of the bow as it was written in the Book of Jasher. It is mentioned again in Joshua 10:12-14. After Joshua asked the sun to stand still so that Israel could avenge themselves on their enemies the Scripture says, *“Is it not written in the book of Jasher?”* So, some things that are written in Scripture are also written in the book of Jasher.

Yet there are things written in the book of Jahser which are not mentioned in Scripture. For instance, the book of Jasher says that Leah and Rachel were twins. Something we do not read in Scripture. Yet they did have some differences. Scripture says that *“Leah's eyes were*

weak, but Rachel was beautiful of form and face” (Genesis 29:17). If they were indeed twins this could mean that they were fraternal and not identical twins, or it could just indicate that the “deformity” in Leah’s eyes detracted from her appearance. But if Leah and Rachel were indeed twins it may explain why the “feel” of Leah in the night would be similar to the feel of Rachel.

The book of Jasher also states that Laban had the lights extinguished in the tent the night of the wedding feast. If true it would mean that Jacob would not have been able to rely on his eyesight to see the deception. It was not until the morning light that Jacob could see that it was Leah he had just shared his marriage bed with, and not Rachel. It should also be noted that at that time a woman usually wore a veil covering her face prior to and up until the consummation of the marriage. This and the darkness might have contributed to the success of Laban’s deception.

The Book of Jasher provides an interesting tale and perhaps gives some insight as to how Jacob could be so easily deceived; but the Book of Jasher is not Scripture so it cannot be held with the same regard for truthfulness as the Bible itself. In addition, copies of the Book of Jasher that exist today have many versions and are centuries removed from the one quoted in the Bible. So, I present the ideas from the Book of Jasher as something of interest, not something of certainty.

Whatever the reason for Jacob’s ignorance, whether it be too much wine, too much darkness or the building of passion during the night, what we do know is that Jacob was deceived by his uncle Laban. After explaining that it was not the custom of the land to give the younger in marriage before the firstborn, Laban also consented to give Jacob his younger daughter Rachael as his second wife, but with two conditions. He had to spend a full week with Leah alone, then he had to serve another seven years for Rachel, the wife he had originally been promised. Through deceit Laban gained seven more years of service from Jacob, his own sister’s son. During this time Jacob had to endure the continued deceit of his untrustworthy father-in-law.

Throughout his years of service Laban cheated Jacob, changing his wages ten times. Finally, one day at the prompting of the Lord, Jacob took his wives, his children, and his animals and left while Laban was out shearing his flock. The Scriptures say that “*Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing. So he fled with all that he had; and he arose and crossed the Euphrates River, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead*” (Genesis 31:20-21). Now it was Laban’ turn to feel the sting of deceit. This did not sit well with Laban.

Last week, when we looked at Jacob, we saw the deception that he perpetrated upon Esau. He pretended to be his older brother so that his ailing father would give the blessing of the firstborn to him and not to his older brother. But he was enticed to do so at the urging of his mother. And his mother was the sister of his uncle Laban. So we see that deception was prevalent in the home of Rachael and Laban, Jacob’s mother and uncle. But we also saw deception in the home of Jacob’s grandfather Abraham. You may remember that Abraham deceived two kings when he stated that Sarah was his sister and not his wife; a half-truth to be sure, since she was his step-sister, but a deception none-the-less.

My point is that there is a history of deception running through Jacob’s family line stemming from both his mother and his father’s side of the family. Yet we also saw previously that Jacob was a willing accomplice in the deception perpetrated by his mother against his brother Esau. And we see also that even in his escape from his uncle Laban he resorted to

deception in order to leave as quickly and as quietly as possible.

But this deception was not limited to Jacob alone. Unfortunately, as we look ahead to the wives and sons of Jacob, we see this family trait continuing to appear. When Jacob left Laban for his own country his wife Rachel stole the household idols that were her father's. When confronted with this theft by Laban, Jacob, unaware of what Rachel had done, denied it vehemently and encouraged Laban to search all their possessions to see if he could find what he claimed was stolen from him.

Knowing she was guilty, Rachel took the household items which she had stolen, and placed them in her camel's saddle which was inside her tent and then sat on them. When Laban began to search her tent, she lied to her father and said, *"Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is upon me."* Laban searched all of Jacob's possessions but was unsuccessful in his search. Because of Rachel's deception Laban did not find the idols that had been stolen from him (Genesis 31:33-35).

With nothing to show for his efforts and no proof to back up his accusations, Laban left the tent of Rachel empty handed. Jacob, now feeling vindicated and full of righteous anger, began to vent against Laban for his "false" accusations. This went on for a time, but they ultimately made a pact of peace at the sight where they had confronted each other, setting up a pillar of stones. These stones would be a witness that Laban would not pass by these stones to harm Jacob and Jacob would not pass by them to harm Laban. Jacob then swore an oath, offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called everyone to the meal. He then spent the night on the mountain. Early in the morning Laban arose, kissed his grandchildren and his daughters, and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his own place (Genesis 31:54-55).

One would hope that the practice of deception would have ended with the separation of the two families. But this was not to be the case. Though Jacob would have an encounter with the Angel of the Lord on his way to his family home and have his name changed from Jacob to Israel, the seeds of deception would soon sprout within his own sons. After meeting up and reconciling with Esau, the brother whom he had deceived, the Scriptures say *"Jacob came safely to the land of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan. He bought a piece of land where he had pitched his tent from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father."* It is from this place that the continuation of deception in the family line begins to reveal itself.

Genesis 34 tells the story of Jacob and Leah's daughter Dinah. (Remember Leah was the sister of Rachel and Jacob's first wife by deceit). Their daughter Dinah was raped by Shechem, the son of Hamor the Hivite, who was ruler of the land in which they settled. When Jacob heard about this, he kept silent because his sons were out in the field. Jacob wisely understood that those in his household were much fewer than those in the town of Shechem. He knew who held the power at that moment, so he wisely remained quiet until his sons returned.

When his sons came home and heard the news they were grieved and very angry. Shechem said he loved Dinah in spite of the rape and wanted to marry her; but they had no intention of allowing this to happen. Instead they devised a plot to eradicate not only the man who raped their sister, but all the men of the town as well. We read about this in Genesis chapter 34.

GENESIS 34:13-17

“The sons of Jacob answered the request of Shechem and his father Hamor with deceit. They said to them, “We cannot do his thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised for that would be disgraceful to us. Only on this condition will we consent to you; if you will become like us, in that every male of you be circumcised, then we will give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live with you and become one people. But if you will not listen to us to be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and go.””

Hamor and Shechem were both agreeable to the terms of peace presented to them by the sons of Jacob and presented these terms to the men of the city. However, their motive was not one of honor but one of greed for Shechem promised the men of the town that once they were allowed to intermarry with the daughters of Jacob’s family, all of their livestock, property, and animals would belong to them. This was enough incentive for the leaders of Shechem to consent that all the men of their city would be circumcised.

This agreement did not arise out of pure motives. It came from a place of greed and lust and as such, it would sound the death knell for the people of Shechem. The Scriptures describe it this way:

GENESIS 34:25-29

“...on the third day, when the men of the town were in pain, two of Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, each took his sword and came upon the city unawares, and killed every male. They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the edge of the sword and took Dinah from Shechem’s house and went forth. Jacob’s sons came upon the slain and looted the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their flocks and herds and their donkeys, and that which was in the city and that which was in the fields; and they captured and looted all their wealth and all their little ones and their wives, even all that was in the houses.”

Everything the men of Shechem currently owned and all they had hoped to gain by their greed slipped through the fingers in death. They were surely deceived by the sons of Jacob and this deception caused their demise. But their own deception was also turned against them. The one sin of Shechem, son of Hamor, ruler of the land of Shechem, against Jacob’s daughter Dinah, resulted in the death of all who were under his father’s rule and protection. His one moment of lust caused the loss of everything and everyone he loved, as it did for the men of the town as well. Once again, we see how one rash decision can negatively impact the innocent.

But let’s get back to Jacob, the father of Dinah. Jacob seemed to be speechless when it came to the rape of his daughter. Something this tragic can overwhelm a person and leave them without words to express their anguish and this may have been the case with Jacob. But Jacob also understood the situation he was in and was concerned about acting rashly without the protection of his sons who were out tending his livestock in the field.

His silence remained however, even when his sons returned and met with Hamor, who proposed the inconceivable idea of marriage to the very one who had defiled their sister. His silence continued as his sons presented their deceptive conditions for marriage. Why? Jacob must have suspected something was afoot when his sons suggested the idea of circumcision. He also knew, when his sons proposed their terms for peace, that the act of circumcision was not enough to make these idol worshippers into Hebrews. Yet he did nothing to dissuade his sons from their

plan, or to warn Hamor and his son of their deceit.

Jacob may have thought silence was the best road to take, given the gravity of the situation. But in his silence, he publicly gave his stamp of approval to the deception. And his silence was as much a deceit as the actions his two sons took. It wasn't until Jacob learned of the death of the inhabitants of Shechem by the hands of his sons that Jacob seemed to find his voice again.

GENESIS 34:30-31

“Jacob said to Simeon and Levi (the two sons who had destroyed the city and taken everything as plunder), ‘You have brought trouble on me by making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and my men being few in number, they will gather together against me and attack me and I will be destroyed, I and my household.’ But they said, ‘Should he treat our sister as a harlot?’”

Now that the deed was done and his family had to deal with the consequences, Jacob finally has something to say. He lashes out in anger and fear over what they had done, blaming his sons for the consequences of something which he did nothing to prevent. Though there was no one in the town left to cause them harm, Jacob knows full well that you cannot kill a ruler and everyone in his town, take all their possessions as plunder, and expect it to go unnoticed.

What were they to do when the surrounding villages heard what had happened and that Jacob's family was the cause of it? If the surrounding peoples banded together to attack, they couldn't protect themselves. What were they to do? They couldn't stay outside the ruins of Shechem awaiting the inevitable. Would God come to their aid? Or had God distanced Himself from Jacob because of what his sons had done? Was God still actively involved in his life and would He rescue him and his family from their unintentional enemies? To help us understand what was going through the mind of Jacob at that time, a little background is needed.

The God of his father Isaac was not a distant God to Jacob. About twenty years earlier, after fleeing from his brother Esau, the Lord appeared to Jacob in a dream and revealed His will for him. Here is the dream, the words God spoke to him, and Jacob's reply.

GENESIS 28:12-22

“He (Jacob) had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, ‘I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

‘Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.’ So Jacob rose early in the morning....and called the name of that place Bethel...Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God.’”

Jacob must have thought of this dream and his response as he contemplated his fate and the fate of his family after what his sons had done to the town of Shechem and its inhabitants. Was God still with him? Would God keep him and his family alive long enough to return to his family home? Would the God of Abraham and Isaac, the God who appeared to him at Bethel, be true to his promise? Jacob did not have long to wait. In his anguish the Lord provided the answer. He said to Jacob,

GENESIS 35:1-4

“Arise, go up to Bethel and live there, and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esau.’ So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, ‘Put away the foreign gods which are among you, and purify yourselves and change your garments; and let us arise and go up to Bethel, and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me wherever I have gone.’ So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which they had and the rings which were in their ears, and Jacob hid them under the oak which was near Shechem.”

So, Jacob’s family left the city of Shechem and made their way toward Bethel. *“As they traveled,”* the Scripture tells us, *“there was a great terror upon the cities which were around them and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob”* (Genesis 35:5). Throughout their journey God was fulfilling His words to Jacob by ensuring they were safe from any attack or retribution for their actions.

True to his word, Jacob built an altar when he arrived in Bethel renaming the place El-bethel (meaning the house of the one true God), because it was there that God had revealed Himself to Jacob when he fled from his brother Esau. As Jacob makes good on his promise to make the Lord his God things seem to calm down for this family. But if you think a simple commitment by Jacob is enough to change the hearts of all think again.

Today we’ve seen what deception looks like in the family line of Jacob. But there is more to come. The roots of deception run deep in this family and their poisonous influence will once again manifest itself in unsuspecting ways. Unfortunately, we’ve run out of time today so we will pick this theme up again next week. In the meantime, think about your own family traits. Those things which you have either inherited or have been taught through example. Not all family traits are bad, some are very good. We can pass on a legacy of faith and trust, honesty and integrity, and a deep faithfulness to the Lord. Or we can pass on our weaknesses, our faults and our sins. It really is a matter of choice.

The words of Joshua to the Israelites, *“Choose this day whom you will serve”* echo throughout history. Each generation must daily decide for itself whom they will serve. Will they serve their baser instincts, or will they serve the Lord? My hope is that everyone here will respond as Joshua responded. *“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”* May this be the cry of all who love the Lord. May we daily die to self and live for Him, putting to death the deeds of the flesh so that the negative traits which we have inherited from our families may pass away and never see the light of day in succeeding generations. Can I get an “Amen”?

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