

Chapter Seven – Jacob is Cheated

One night when Jacob was on his way to Haran, he dreamt of a ladder standing on the earth with its top reaching far up into heaven, like a stairway. Angels were going up and down the ladder. God was at the top and said to him, “I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of your father Isaac. This land on which you are sleeping is my gift to you and to your descendants.” When Jacob woke up, he took the stone which he used as a pillow to set up an altar and poured oil on it and called the place Bethel, which means, the “House of God.” Then he made a vow to God that, if all went well with him in Haran and he could return home one day, Bethel would become a holy place and he would give a tenth of all he received to God as an offering.

Jacob then went on his way and reached the eastern country. In the open plain, he met Rachel, the younger daughter of his uncle, with her flock of sheep. He was deeply attracted by her beauty. He went to the well, removed the heavy stone that covered it and drew water for her. When she had finished watering her sheep, Jacob went up to her and kissed her and said, “I am Jacob, Rebecca’s son, and your father is my uncle. Can I stay in your house?” At this she ran quickly home to tell her father the news. Jacob had already fallen in love with her.

When Laban heard of his nephew’s arrival, he went out to meet him. He embraced him and brought him back home. He listened to his story about why he had to run away and then said, “You are my nephew, my own flesh and blood; you can stay here as long as you like.” Jacob stayed and offered to take care of the sheep and goats. After a month Laban said to him, “Because you are my nephew, there is no reason why you should be working for me without wages. Tell me how much you want?”

Now Laban had two daughters – Leah, the older, with dull eyes and not pretty, and Rachel who was very beautiful. Jacob, who was in love with Rachel, said, “I will work seven years for you without any pay, if you give me Rachel for my wife.” Laban agreed.

So Jacob worked seven years to win Rachel, and the time seemed like only seven days, so great was his love for her. However, on the wedding night, Laban switched Leah for Rachel. Perhaps Jacob was too drunk and did not realize what had happened until the next day. He was frustrated at being tricked by Laban. Laban explained to him that according to the custom of the region, the older sister must marry first; and if he still wanted to marry Rachel, he would have to work for him for another seven years. There was nothing that Jacob could do. The one he truly loved was Rachel. He worked for Laban for another seven years.

In all these years, Laban had cheated him of his wages ten times; and he was not as friendly as he used to be. Twenty years passed by and Jacob felt that it was time to return to his father’s home.

On the way back home, Jacob was very worried that his brother Esau would not forgive him and would kill him. He prayed to God for protection as he was so afraid that Esau would harm even the women and the children. He sent some messengers ahead of him to Esau and instructed them to say to Esau, “Our master, Jacob, is your obedient servant. Whatever he owns is yours. He is hoping to gain your favour.” He was trying to win Esau over with his gifts, hoping that he would forgive him.

When Jacob finally met Esau, he bowed down to the ground seven times with his family. Esau came up and threw his arms around him and kissed him. They were both in tears. Esau had long ago forgiven Jacob and he was glad to see his brother again. Jacob offered everything that he owned to him but Esau refused to accept them as he was already contented with all that he had received.

Later, God appeared to Jacob again in Bethel and gave him a new name, Israel; and that is why his descendants are called Israelites. God continued, "Have many descendants. Some of them will be kings. You and your descendants will receive the land I gave to Abraham and Isaac."

After some time, Esau took his family and left the land where Jacob and his family had settled as both of them had too much livestock and the land was not able to support both.



The reunion of Esau and Jacob

Questions:

1. How did Jacob show that he loved Rachel?
2. In which TWO ways did Laban cheat Jacob?
3. Why is cheating wrong?
4. Why might some students be tempted to cheat in school?
5. Suggest TWO good qualities of Esau. Explain your answer.
6. Why are Christians expected to forgive others?
7. When do you personally find it difficult to forgive?