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Jacob, Leah, and Rachael
Genesis 25:20-37:2

**OT504: The Hebrew Bible & the
Eastern Mediterranean World: OB**

Linda M. McCamery

Student ID# 114339

Email: mccameryl1@nyack.edu

The father in the stories of Jacob, Leah, and Rachael Genesis 25:20-37:2

To get a closer look at the father in Israel culture in the world of the Bible and how they used wisdom to survive in an hostile world. For this view we will look at Jacob who used his wit to establish his household through the combination the knowledge to obtain an inheritance through manipulation. “Jacob or Israel was the favorite father of Middle (2200 to 1550 BCE) or late (1550 to 1250 BCE) Bronze Age clans who stories in the Bible and who social setting maybe reflected in documents from Mesopotamia and Egypt.”¹ The documents along with bible reference can be used as proof that these clans existed. It noted the geographic settings where the Hebrew villager live throughout the hills of Jerusalem. They worked as farmers, shepherds, and herders.

The biblical text I have selected for my comparative study on Israel’s Culture deals with the story of Rachael and Leah from Genesis 29-31. Rachael and Leah are the daughters of Laban the son of Nahor, who was Jacob mother Rebecca brother. Laban accepted Jacob into his house (kinsman redeemer) as part of his family, “Surely thou art bone my bone and my flesh.” Laban spoke to Jacob a month later about his wages for his work, so Joseph asked for Rachael hand in marriage. Laban agreed to accept Jacob labor for seven years as payment for Rachael. As it was custom of his village, Laban gathered all the men and had a feast. Laban gave his daughter Leah a handmaid and lead Leah to the room prepared for the groom and his new wife in her marital veil later that night and Jacob went in unto her. Jacob realize he was married to Leah when he saw her face in the light. He confronted Laban about deceiving him and Laban explain their culture about marrying the first born first. Laban gave Jacob Rachael for seven more years of service. Jacob lived in his father-in-law household with his wives and there two maid servants.

¹ [CITATION Mat93 \l 1033], p 17

Leah was the primary wife and Rachael was the second wife; so Leah held the primary status, but Jacob loved Rachael. Leah had six sons and two by her handmaid. Rachael had two sons and two by handmaid. Jacob wives and children were considered part of Laban household. It was not until Jacob asked leave of Laban that he was able to take his wives, his children, and servants back to his family.

Jacob, Leah, and Rachael manipulated people and nature to gain what they needed to survive. Jacob build a coral where he doctored the water with natural resource (plant, wood, that could be use ad dye) which made the sheep and cattle spotted. He had entered into a verbal agreement with his Laban to sell him the spotted stock. Laban agreed with him. Leah swap time with her husband, by offering M plant the Rachael. Cleverness was the wisdom of the powerless.²

Double cross-cousin marriage to Rachael and Leah created a bond between his Jacob and his uncle. Jacob had asked Laban to return to his family with some substance of the Labor of his hand to be able to provide for his family. In his dealing with Laban his father-in-law Jacob had met a worthy opponent, Laban was not afraid to use manipulation to achieve success. “In the bible cleverness celebrates the way the tenacity with which the powerless survive, and it honors Yahweh for helping the poor rather than supporting the powerful.”³

When Jacob had finally escape Laban throughout the different up and downs of striving for his success, Jacob had faith in God. Jacob told both of his wives that God told him to return to his people. Leah and Rachael said they would go because their father had taken their wealth. When he had tricked his father-in-law into selling him the sheep and the cattle he was attending to as a herder, he saw that Laban was furious because Jacob had out witted him. Jacob, Leah, Rachael, their children left with all their possession. Laban road after them to overtake them

² Ibid, p 17.

³ Ibid, p 19.

with a desire to use his authority to punish Jacob, but God told him, "God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night and said to him, 'Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad.'"(Genesis 31:24, NLT). When Laban caught up with Jacob and his daughters, all he could do was to reprove for not telling him they were leaving. Laban asked him why he had stolen his but Jacob had not stolen them, Rachael had. Rachael and felt that their father had stolen their property, so she took it back. Along with the 'Cuneiform tablets from Nuzi now documented Jacob's legal sophistication, showing that birthrights can be bought or sold and so could verbal wills. So after searching for the statues and did not find them because Rachael was sitting on them. Laban made Jacob swear before witnesses and with a sacrifice that no harm would come to his daughters or their children. Finally, Laban kissed Jacob and gave him his blessing for them to leave. This was the proper way to depart from your family home, and no one had to lose face. Through the wisdom of Yahweh, their relationship was restored. Hospitality practices were held in a high place, each to ward off offense.

Jacob knew that Yahweh had told him to return home and he would be blessed there. However crossing the Jabbok was a challenge for him. Jacob sent his herdsman and servant over and told them to tell Esau this was a gift for them, and that Jacob was coming. Jacob sent his wives and children across and told them to say that Jacob sent them and he was coming hoping this would appease him. When Jacob waited and the Bible said was approached by a man, Jacob wrestled with him and would not let him go. He touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, was out of place until Jacob had to limp away. Jacob told the angel I will not let you go until you bless me. Here again we see interaction between Yahweh and his people. The man/angel/God told his name would be changed from Jacob to Israel. There was an interchange as if he was not clear if it was God or an angel he was wrestling. The symbolization of the change of name to an encounter with God,

Israel means, “Wrestle with God.” Jacob name the place Peniel because was the place he spoke to God face-to-face. At this point Jacob decided to move forward to face Esau.

When Jacob came close to his brother Esau, he bowed himself before him to demonstrate his sincerity to ask for forgiveness. Esau asked whom all the people and animal belong to, Jacob told him, this was God blessing to him. The children that God has given him. As a demonstration of submitting himself to his brother thereby restoring to his birthright, he apologies as his brother greets him with a kiss. Esau came to Jacob with a large host and told him, I have enough my brother. Esau offers to travel with Jacob, Leah and Rachael, but Jacob refuses stating he needed to allot time for the small one to travel. We can see the cultural expectation of hospitality rules are present. As Yahweh had told Jacob, he had provided for both him and his brother, he did not have to fear.

Jacob did continue toward his homeland and was able to establish his own household. In this household, he was the father. Leah still had her position as the first wife and Rachael hers as the second wife. Jacob took his sons and slave also to makeup his household. “For a hundred pieces of silver,^[c] he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. There he set up an altar and called it El Elohe “ (Gen 33:19-20). I will stop her because this story was about Jacob, Leah and Racheal. There is much more, but that will take us into the next generation. Jacob was considered an outlaw, in fact, his story is one of the most beloved stories in the bible, that has documents that speak of him and his family, in Egypt, Mesopotamia and other ANE resources. The bible does not celebrate Jacob’s life to teach people to cheat or steal, it is evident that marginalized people, the poor, ordinary people can rise to great height through wisdom and serving God. There are many

other obstacle the family has to face, but Jacob, Leah and Rachael can bear witness that serving God is the answers. In the end he always had their backs.