

OUTLINE GENESIS 29:1-30 'WHO IS FIRST?' + suggestions for reflection  
Series 'God moves in a mysterious way' #7  
IBC Eindhoven, 14 March 2021

## INTRODUCTION

Have you ever been first in your life? Perhaps you were the oldest of your siblings. Or you were the best in your class or in sports. May be you won a competition and gained a prize? Or is all this talk about the first not talk about your life?

This part of the Jacob narrative shows us life full of competition and rivalry. And we are going to look into the Biblical teaching on the question of rank and precedence in more detail. But first the Jacob narrative.

## SCENE AT THE WELL - Genesis 29:2-14

- Much happens at wells. Abraham's servant found Rebekah to become Isaac's wife. Arriving at Haran - meeting Rachel - Jacob tries to send the shepherds away
- Narrator emphasising 'brother' 3 x in verse 10 - 'his mother's brother' a sensitive subject in Genesis
- Story begins idyllic even romantic -
- Verse 14: Laban calling his nephew 'you are my bone and my flesh' // Genesis 2:23

## JACOB AND LABAN'S DAUGHTERS

- Topic of payment and wages introduced by Laban. This was not something like a dowry. Later on the daughters accused their father of selling them to Jacob (Genesis 31:14).
  - But the subject of payment and wages is not entirely new to Jacob. He bought from his brother Esau his birthright. Jacob has met his match in Laban. Irony is striking and perhaps a fair retaliation to Jacob...
- Two daughters: Leah with the weak (tender) eyes and the beautiful Rachel, the younger one
- After working 7 years for Rachel, he is given Leah. The story is told with humor - in the morning: behold - Leah!
- Laban: it is not our custom here... younger first... no first the oldest!
- Jacob has struggled with the reality of primogeniture - and now he must wait, Rachel must wait
- Two competitive sisters, a husband caught between them and an exploitative father-in-law: this a narrative of faith? Yes God moves in a mysterious way

## WHO IS FIRST?

1. What is the Biblical teaching here? Primogeniture is Biblical 'norm' - between brackets
2. But Abel/Cain, Jacob/Esau, Rachel/Leah (?)
3. Again Ephraim/Manasseh - Genesis 48:10ff - At the end of Jacob's life there is a curious event with again the younger one being blessed as the first: Ephraim the younger was blessed by Jacob as the first and Manasseh the oldest as the second - in spite of Joseph's attempt to do it the proper way - Genesis 48:10 (eyes failing - he could hardly see), 14 and 19.

- *The words of Jesus come to mind that the first shall be the last and the last shall be first. Is God's kingdom our world upside down? No, I believe it is not upside down, it's a different kingdom altogether.*

4. Emphasis in narrative - who is first chosen! - strikethrough 'first'
  - Reflect on this narrative: Rachel and Leah. No judgement is passed on either of these women, nor on Jacob or Laban. Yes, there is wrongdoing by Laban as was the case with Jacob. But that is not the focus of teaching in this narrative. The teaching rather is that God moves in a mysterious way. In spite of trickery, lies and local customs, God works out his plan of salvation, choosing Jacob and calling Israel. We do not always understand the why. And we cannot conclude that it is the world upside down. For though the youngest is chosen, this is not always the case.
  - Indeed Rachel is the youngest and is loved, but it will be Leah the oldest who will give birth to Judah, from whom king David and the Messiah will be born. Leah and not Rachel will be buried in the cave in Machpelah together with the other patriarchs and matriarchs - Genesis 49:29-32
  - God moves through Leah in a mysterious way

We are accustomed to rank and see who's first, who's most important, but in God's kingdom it's not always the first that makes the difference - teaching in Scripture from Genesis onwards - confirmed in teaching of Jesus

## MARK 10:35-45

1. John and James boldly request to be first
  2. Jesus teaching servant leadership 43-44 — not like kingdom on earth, lording and exercising authority.
    - *Not a new concept - OT ambivalence towards kingship*
- // OT teaching for kings: Deuteronomy 17:18-20 - the king in Israel was required to obey God's law and called to serve '*.. and not consider himself better than his brothers...*'
  - NOTE 1: Ambition not wrong; it is good to excel
    - Striving to excel and to work and make good use of your talents is praised in Scripture. Paul even compares spiritual life with a race: 1 Corinthians 9:24 '*Run in such a way as to get the prize.*' But here it is ambition as a response to God's call and not as an attempt to beat or gain advantage over or at the expense of someone else.
  - NOTE 2: Serving = seeking good for others
    - Serving others does not mean that you do what they want. It also doesn't mean that you should play down on your own talents and regard others better, even if they are not. This is false humility! Serving others means seeking the good of the other person - having genuine interest in his/her welfare (Philippians 2:20f). Not being preoccupied with your interest, your own dignity. Philippians 2:3-11
  - The question of rank and precedence and service is answered in this profound teaching of Jesus, mostly in his sacrifice on the cross
  - Verse 45: '*For even the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.*' **BE IN AWE - WORSHIP**

## SUGGESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND SHARING

1. Reflect on this part of the Jacob narrative. A very human story. How does God nevertheless move in a mysterious way?
2. Read Matthew 20:1-16 and reflect on Jesus' teaching about the first and the last
3. Listen to Graham Kendrick's song 'The Servant King' and worship our God and Saviour through Jesus Christ