



... Don't take the first step ...

1 And Isaac called Jacob, and blessed him, and charged him, and said unto him, Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. 2 Arise, go to Padanaram, to the house of Bethuel thy mother's father; and take thee a wife from thence of the daughters of Laban thy mother's brother. 3 And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; 4 And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham. 5 And Isaac sent away Jacob: and he went to Padanaram unto Laban, son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob's and Esau's mother. (Gen 28:1-5)

Sarai was the precious, God-given wife of Abram in Ur of the Chaldees. She was such a perfect mate for Abraham (Abram) that Abraham desired his son, Isaac, would have such a wife; so, he sent to the remnant of his family for Rebekah. Rebekah was the wife God intended for Isaac. She was wise and diligent. As the old adage goes, *"The apple does not fall far from the tree."* So now, Isaac sends his son Jacob to take a wife from the House of Laban (Laban being Rebekah's brother). He solemnly counsels Jacob to take no wife from among the unbelieving Canaanites. May this be a lesson to those young Christian men and ladies who are attracted to unbelievers – never strike that match for it will burn your whole house down. It is easier to extinguish a fire while it is only a spark rather than wait until the flames engulf premises. That means: do not allow temptation in the wrong direction to grow. Stifle them while they are tender twigs. Lydia Sigourney describes this best in her poem, *The Camel's Nose*. Though this is one of the most oft quoted poems, it appears in only one published work, *"The Posey Ring – Poems for Children"*. It would benefit every child in America to learn this poem and its moral:

The Camel's Nose

Once in his shop a workman wrought
With languid hand, and listless thought,
When through the open window's space
Behold!-a Camel thrust his face.
"My nose is cold," he meekly cried,
"Oh, let me warm it by thy side."
Since no denial word was said,

In came the nose, in came the head,
As sure as sermon follows text
The long, excursive neck came next,
And then, as falls the threatening storm
In leap'd the whole ungainly form

Aghast the owner gazed around,
And on the rude invader frown'd,
Convinc'd as closer still he prest,
There was no room for such a guest,
Yet more astonish'd, heard him say,
"If incommoded, go your way,
For in this place I choose to stay."
Oh, youthful hearts, to gladness born,
Treat not this Arab lore with scorn.
To evil habit's earliest wile
Lend neither ear, nor glance, nor smile,
Choke the dark fountain ere it flows,
Nor even admit the Camel's Nose.

Well, our friend, Isaac, was a good and well-trained father. He wanted the best for his son, Jacob, and the best was a mate of his own interests and values – more importantly, one who was Godly. Should parents prepare their own sons and daughters for anything less! If you do not, your faith is in question.

So Jacob embarks on the way to Haran by way of Padanaram. His obedience to Isaac may also have been motivated by his fear of his brother, Esau, who considered himself defrauded by Jacob. In resentment of the birthright blessing passing down to Jacob, Esau went out to Ishmael and took a daughter of his people. This reveals a bit more of Esau's rebellious character.

Before nuptial love comes the love owed to God by His elect. On the way to Haran, Jacob stops at Bethel and has his dream of the heavens opening and a ladder leading up thereto with the Angels of God ascending and descending. God promises the same promise He had given to Abraham that Jacob would be the father of so many as the dust of the earth. He sets up an altar there and calls the place the "gate of heaven."

Proceeding onward to Haran, Jacob came to a stone-closed well where many flocks of sheep were gathered. These are very much like the Wells of Living Water that God has providentially placed in our way that are opened in understanding only to those who are of the true seed of Abraham by faith. Jacob was the man to open that well and water the flocks of Laban that were 'coincidentally' brought at that moment to the well by Rachel.

Romanticists speak of "love at first sight," and in Jacob's case, this was a reality when he feasted his eyes upon Rachel. This was a love that would not find an end in the many disappointments and shortcomings placed before it. From that instant, Jacob loved Rachel with a sacrificial love; and it was a love that endured to the end. Rachel's first son would be a great blessing to Jacob and all of his brothers. That first son of Rachel was Joseph whom Jacob loved dearly as well. But before these blessings came to pass, there were many difficulties for Jacob to cross. It is so often true with such a heartfelt and tender love. However, Rachel was not the first wife of Jacob – it was her sister, Leah.

15 And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? tell me, what shall thy wages be? 16 And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. 18 And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. 19 And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. 20 And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her. (Gen 29:15-20) Jacob labored for Laban, the father of Leah and Rachel, for seven years in order to marry the beautiful Rachel. He was promised Rachel for that sacrificial labor. But justice is circular (*what goes around, comes around*) and Jacob was swindled into marrying the older sister, Leah. Leah was a good woman, but it was Rachel that Jacob loved. That fraud which Jacob had performed against Isaac in blessing him comes to haunt him.

21 And Jacob said unto Laban, Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her. 22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place, and made a feast. 23 And it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter, and brought her to him; and he went in unto her. 24 And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah Zilpah his maid for an handmaid. 25 And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? (Gen 29:21-25)

Laban responded: 26 And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27 Fulfil her week, and we will give thee this also for the service which thou shalt serve with me yet seven other years. 28 And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week: and he gave him Rachel his daughter to wife also. 29 And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter Bilhah his handmaid to be her maid. 30 And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years. (Gen 29:26-30) As with most of chosen seed of Abraham, Rachel was barren, but God gave Leah conception to soften the pain of Jacob's rejection. But God can transform even our sinful misadventures into a means of fulfilling His promise and will. Leah would bear children to Jacob who would be a part of the seed of promise – including Judah. My old high school French professor used to love to quote Sir Walter Scott's *Marmion*: "*Oh! what a tangled web we weave When first we practise to deceive!*" Webs are strong and intricate for Jacob.

The custom of which Laban spoke in marrying the oldest daughter first is still current in Asia. It is a humiliation to the older for the younger to be wed first in places such as China, Korea, and Japan.

22 And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. 23 And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: 24 And she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son. (Gen 30:22-24) The favored wife, Rachel, gave him a bounty for his undying love – JOSEPH! Unusual marriages often produce unusual fruit, and Joseph was Jacob's everlasting blessing both in youth and in old age. May every Christian marriage be so blessed as this between Rachel and Jacob sans Leah.