

GENESIS 29: JACOB AND RACHEL

Translation and Notes / by Gary A. Rendsburg

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1. And Ya‘aqov lifted-up his feet, and he went to the land of the Bene Qedem.
2. And he saw, and behold, a well in the field, and behold, there were three flock-herds lazing at it, for from that well they would water the herds; and the stone was large on the mouth of the well.
3. And all the herds would be gathered there, and they would roll the stone from upon the mouth of the well, and they would water the flock; and they would return the stone upon the mouth of the well to its place.
4. And Ya‘aqov said to them, “My brothers, from where are you?” And they said, “From Ḥaran are we.”
5. And he said to them, “Do you know Lavan son of Naḥor?” And they said, “We know.”
6. And he said to them, “Is it well with him?” And they said, “Well, and here is Raḥel his daughter coming^a with the flock.”

^a A delightful wordplay appears here. The feminine forms of the verb ‘come’, both here in v. 6 and again in v. 9, both predicated of Raḥel, are both *ba’a* (the present tense form in v. 6 is accented on the second syllable; the past tense form in v. 9 is accented on the first syllable). This verb evokes the sound

7. And he said, “Here the day is still great, it is not time to gather the livestock; water the flock, and go and shepherd.”

8. And they said, “We are not able until all the herds are gathered, and they roll the stone from upon the mouth of the well, so that we may water the flock.”

9. He was still speaking with them, and Raḥel came with the flock that was her father’s, for she was a shepherdess.

10. And it was, when Ya‘aqov saw Raḥel the daughter of Lavan the brother of his mother, and the flock of Lavan the brother of his mother; and Ya‘aqov approached, and he rolled the stone from upon the mouth of the well, and he watered the flock of Lavan the brother of his mother.

11. And Ya‘aqov kissed^b Raḥel; and he lifted-up his voice and he cried.

12. And Ya‘aqov told Raḥel that he was a brother^c of her father, and that he was the son of Rivqa; and she ran and she told her father.

that sheep make, and the effect is superb when one realizes that Raḥel means ‘ewe’!

^b Another delightful wordplay occurs here. The words for ‘watered’ in v. 10 and ‘kissed’ in v. 11 are spelled exactly the same: *waw – yod – shin – qof*. The first is pronounced *wayyašq*, while the second is pronounced *wayyiššaq*. The effect is even more playful when one recalls that the name Raḥel means ‘ewe’!

^c Used loosely here as ‘male relative’; in actuality, he was a nephew of Lavan.

13. And when Lavan heard the hearing-news about Ya‘aqov the son of his sister, he ran to greet him, and he hugged him, and he kissed him, and he brought him to his house; and he told Lavan all these things.

14. And Lavan said to him, “Indeed my bone and my flesh are you”; and he sat with him a month of days.

15. And Lavan said to Ya‘aqov, “Just because you are my brother, should you work for me for free? Tell me, what (should be) your wage?”

16. And Lavan had two daughters, the name of the greater-one was Le’a, and the name of the smaller-one was Raḥel.

17. And the eyes of Le’a were soft^d; and Raḥel was beautiful of form and a beautiful sight.

18. And Ya‘aqov loved Raḥel; and he said, “I will work for you seven years, for Raḥel your smaller daughter.”

19. And Lavan said, “Better that I give her to you than I give her to another man, sit with me.”

20. And Ya‘aqov worked for Raḥel seven years; and they were in his eyes as a few days, such was his love for her.

21. And Ya‘aqov said to Lavan, “Bring my wife, because my days are fulfilled, so that I may come unto her.”

^d Hebrew *rakkot*, literally ‘soft’, but the exact nuance here is not clear.

22. And Lavan gathered all the men of the place, and he made a drinking-feast.

23. And it was in the evening, and he took Le'a his daughter, and he brought her to him; and he came unto her.

24. And Lavan gave to her Zilpa his handmaid, for Le'a his daughter (as) a handmaid.

25. And it was in the morning, and behold, she is Le'a; and he said to Lavan, "What is this that you have done to me? Did I not work with you for Raḥel? And why did you deceive me?"

26. And Lavan said, "It is not done thus in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn.

27. Fulfill the week of this-one; and also this-one will be given to you, for the work that you will work with me, another seven years more.

28. And Ya'aqov did thus, and he fulfilled the week of this-one; and he gave him Raḥel his daughter to him as a wife.

29. And Lavan gave to Raḥel his daughter Bilha his handmaid, for her as a handmaid.

30. And he came also unto Raḥel, and also he loved Raḥel more than Le'a; and he worked with him another seven years more.