

GOD MY SHEPHERD!
GENESIS CH29:1-12

ILLUSTRATION

Start with Genesis Ch48:11. Andrew Steinmann in his commentary on Genesis states “These two chapters cover the 20 years of Jacob's life spent in Haran. Three themes are intertwined here.

One is Laban's taking advantage of Jacob: he deceives him into marrying Leah, and makes him work another 7 years for Rachel. Jacob, it appears, meets poetic justice: the one who deceived his father is in turn deceived by his uncle.

A second theme developed here is rivalry between Jacob's two wives. While Jacob has finally escaped his sibling rivalry with Esau, he now experiences sibling rivalry as an outsider to the two competitors, his wives.

The third theme, however, is the most important: no matter what circumstances Jacob encounters, he prospers because Yahweh is with him and is blessing him. This blessing comes not only in the form of God providing children (**Ch29:31; Ch30:22**) but also in the form of Jacob's own cleverness in breeding sheep (**Ch30:37-43**).

Thus, the account of Jacob's years in Laban's household build on themes already introduced in previous narratives:

- cunning and deception as a character flaw in several generations of Abraham's family (**Ch12:10-19; Ch20:1-18; Ch26:7-11; Ch27:1-10**)
- family rivalry (**Ch16:1-16; Ch21:8-13; Ch25:22-23, 27-34**)
- God's blessing in His commitment to Abraham (**Ch12:1-3; Ch22:16-18; Ch26:2-5; Ch28:13-15**)” (Andrew Steinmann, Commentary on Genesis, page 277-278).

THE “NEW” SHEPHERD ON THE BLOCK (Ch30:37-43)! V1

After his vision at Bethel which contained, a ladder going from earth to heaven, God's angels going up and down it, our Lord Jesus standing above it and then speaking making promises centred on His presence and provision, impacted on Jacob where he is no longer scared of his brother, or worried about leaving his material possessions behind! **He is in fact energised as he heads off to complete his 500 mile plus journey. The Hebrew phrase for “went on his journey” translates “lifted up his feet”, meaning that he got under way joyfully!** According to Kent Hughes **“the ladder is an apt symbol for God's providential directing all of life for the believer”** (Kent Hughes, Commentary on Genesis, page 365).

As Jacob continues his journey it is worth remembering that this all started some 162+ years before:

1. Terah (Abraham's father) and his family are from “Ur of the Chaldeans” which is modern day Iraq, actually, about 190 miles south-east of Baghdad!
2. When we look back in history, we discover that the place, Ur of the Chaldeans”, was a dark, pagan society that worshipped the moon god, through the Temple of “Nanna” (how's that for a name!)
3. We learn that one of Terah's sons, Haran dies in the land of “Ur of the Chaldeans”, (**Gen Ch11:27**) and that his daughter, Milcah, marries her uncle Nahor, Abraham's brother!
4. We learn from the book of Joshua Ch24:2 **“And Joshua said to all the people,**

'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor, and they served other gods'!

5. ***We learn from the book of Acts Ch7:2-4*** - And Stephen said: "Brothers and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran (modern day Turkey), and said to him, 'Go out from your land and from your kindred and go into the land that I will show you.' Then he went out from the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living."

THE LAZY SHEPHERDS ON THE BLOCK! V2-8

When Abraham's servant came to find a wife for Isaac, he went to the local well to test which of the local girls would make a suitable partner (Ch24:11). As Jacob comes into the vicinity of Haran, he too approaches a well (v2) and begins talking to the local shepherds. The narrator explains the custom there of waiting until all the shepherds have gathered, before the flocks are watered (v2-3), presumably to prevent any one shepherd from taking more than their fair share.

The shepherds who are there are not really interested in the new arrival, or what he has to say. Look at the narrative that takes place between them in verses 4-8:

1. v4 establishes that Jacob has arrived at Haran!
2. v5 establishes that these shepherds know Laban!
3. v6 establishes that it is well with Laban and that they are waiting around for Rachel, one of his daughters!
4. v7 establishes that Jacob knows all about sheep and that he wants to talk to Rachel alone, when she arrives
5. v8 establishes that these shepherds just see Jacob's advice as interfering and so ignore him!

THE SINGLE SHEPHERDESS ON THE BLOCK! V9-12

Shepherdess Kim Goodling says, "Our farm-stay guests often seem to have a romantic view of what I do as a shepherd. I have come to realize that they really have very little knowledge behind the skills of a shepherd. It's as if they are looking through mist, only getting half of the picture of the life of a shepherd. They can see the general forms and shape of my work but not the day to day details. If I were to write an ad for a shepherd position, here is a list of skills and attributes that would make a fine shepherd:

Skills of a Shepherd

1. Must be tough at heart. Shepherding is not just about sweet lambs and bucolic (pleasant) pastures with sheep grazing. It is about the survival of the fittest. It is about making life and death decisions that will tear your heart apart.
2. Must be willing to do hard work. Shepherding does not just require hard physical labour of moving fences, moving sheep, and handling 40 pound bales of hay. It is about heart work. It is having to do hard things and making hard decisions. It is about learning to go with your instincts and let your gut be your guide.
3. Must be willing to be humbled daily. Proud people need not apply. If there is any one thing that can bring you to your knees, it is shepherding. There will be days when you make the wrong decision, when you overlook the obvious, when the not

so obvious will attack and leave you on your knees. If ever you thought you knew it all, forget it! There will always be days when you realize there is much yet to learn.

4. Must not be afraid to learn new things. On a regular basis, you will be required to learn a new skill, a new task, a new way of doing things. An experienced shepherd once told me as she was coaching me over the phone on how to do an internal exam on a labouring ewe, "if you don't want to do it, then you should not be a shepherd." Shepherding will take you out of your comfort zone at times and you have to be willing to step forward.

5. Must have great endurance. Shepherds must be willing to work in all adverse weather conditions-rain, sleet, snow, subzero degree temperatures, extreme heat, and humidity and they must be able to keep sheep alive in such adverse conditions. They must be able to work with little sleep, lift with little strength, study with weak knees.

6. Must exhibit ability to observe. One time my husband found me just standing in our paddock area with the sheep. He asked me what I was doing. I responded, "getting to know my sheep." It takes great observation and getting to know what normal looks like to identify what is not normal.

7. Must have the patience of a saint. Sheep will test you and you must be able to outlast them and outsmart them. Once you think you have them figured out, they are at it again."

When we meet family relatives for the first time, what do we all tend to do? We firstly introduce ourselves (the chocolate orange)! Why is the sequence different here? Why does Jacob introduce himself last? Look at the sequence of events:

1. v9 Rachel arrives with her father's sheep!
2. v10 Jacob sees Rachel and the sheep belonging to Laban (x3) and rolls back the stone (vv2 – which was large!; v3 – which would usually be rolled back by all the shepherds!; v8 – once all the sheep were present!)
3. v11 Jacob now kisses Rachel, the first ever recorded kiss between a man and woman who are not husband and wife, nor son and mother! ***This is not a romantic kiss!***
4. v11 Jacob overwhelmed with emotion, cries!
5. v12 only now does Jacob disclose his identity!
6. v12 Rachel runs home to tell dad!

Why introduce himself last? Jacob's actions appear to be in the wrong order, yet, for Rachel she seems unaffected by the unorthodox order of things and runs home to tell dad!

APPLICATION

God takes Jacob to the land!

God is in control of the timings!

God is in control of all human life!

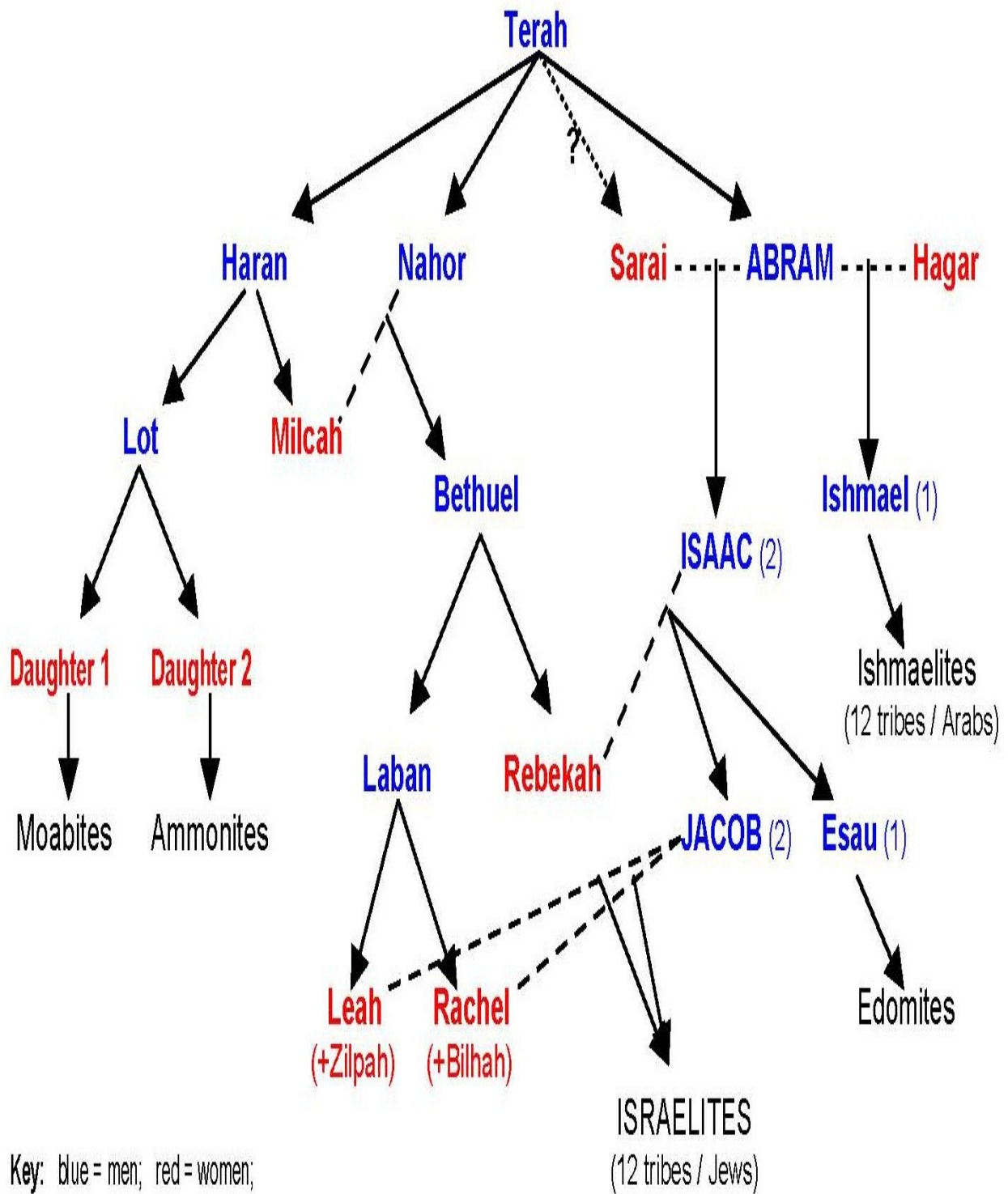
Have a look at the following verses and see what they reveal about Jesus as our "Shepherd".

Jesus the "Good Shepherd" John Ch10:11

Jesus the "Great Shepherd" Hebrews Ch13:20

Jesus the "Chief Shepherd" 1st Peter Ch5:4

Family of Abraham



Key: blue = men; red = women;
dashes = spouses; arrows = children