

Genesis Chapter 30

Verses 1-21: The competition between the two sister/wives is demonstrated in using their maids as surrogate mothers (verses 3, 7, 9, 12). In declaring God had judged the case in favor of the plaintiff (verse 6), in bartering for time with the husband (verses 14-16), in accusing one of stealing her husband's favor (verse 15), and in the name given to one son, "wrestled with my sister" (Naphtali; in verse 8).

The race for children was also accompanied by prayers to the Lord or by acknowledgment of His providence (verses 6, 17, 20, 22; also 29:32-33, 35).

This bitter and intense rivalry, all the fiercer though they were sisters, and even though they occupied different dwellings with their children as customary, shows the evil lay in the system itself (bigamy). Which is a violation of God's ordinance (Gen. 2:24), could not yield happiness.

Genesis 30:1 "And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die."

When the Lord saw that Rachel was loved and Leah hated, He closed the womb of Rachel and this produced the envy (in verse 1).

"Or else I die": A childless woman in ancient Near Eastern culture was no better than a dead wife and became a severe embarrassment to her husband (see verse 23).

This is a hard thing to understand. In our society, if a man had more than one wife, it is called bigamy. When God created man and woman, He said they two shall become one flesh. Any arrangement aside from this brings trouble. Jealousy and strife had entered Rachel in this case.

There is no grief like a married woman who is not able to bear children. Women do not feel fulfilled, until they have children. This is the case even more so with Rachel, because her sister had four children. Rachel blamed Jacob.

Genesis 30:2 "And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, [Am] I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?"

"Am I in God's stead": Although spoken in a moment of frustration with Rachel's pleading for children and the envy with which it was expressed, Jacob's words do indicate an understanding that ultimately God opened and closed the womb.

Even when you love someone as Jacob loved Rachel; you cannot bear being blamed for something you had nothing to do with. He reminded Rachel, that God had refused the blessing of children to her.

Genesis 30:3 "And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her."

“Bear upon my knees” does not indicate an adoption rite (48:12; 50:23). It is a welcoming-in at birth of a new child. In the Hurrian tales, the event is associated with birth, the naming of the child, the welcoming into the family, and the handling by the parents.

When the surrogate gave birth while actually sitting on the knees of the wife, it symbolized the wife providing a child for her husband.

Genesis 30:4 "And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her."

"And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid": To be enjoyed as a wife, though she was no other than a concubine; yet such were sometimes called wives, and were secondary ones, and were under the proper lawful wife, nor did their children inherit. But those which Jacob had by his wives' maids did inherit with the rest.

"And Jacob went in unto her": Consenting to what Rachel his wife proposed to him: having concubines, as well as more wives than one. This was not thought criminal in those times; and was tolerated of God, and in this case for the multiplication of Jacob's seed.

Perhaps he might the more readily comply with the motion of his wife, from the example of his grandfather Abraham, who took Hagar to wife at the insistence of Sarah.

Genesis 30:5 "And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son."

“And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son”: This was so far acceptable by the Lord, that he blessed her with conception and Jacob with a son by her.

How these women ever thought that their maid's children would be theirs, I cannot imagine. This plan would cause more confusion, not less. Now, instead of being jealous of Leah, Rachel will have Bilhah to be jealous of also.

Genesis 30:6 "And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan."

"And Rachel said": As soon as she heard that Bilhah had bore a son.

"God hath judged me": And hereby testified His acceptance, as she understood it, of the step she had took in giving her maid to her husband, and she was justified in what she had done.

"And hath also heard my voice": Of prayer; she had prayed to God that her maid might have a child, or she have one by her.

"And hath given me a son": Whom she reckoned her own, Bilhah being her servant, and so her children born of her, to be hers. Or whom she adopted and called her own, and therefore took upon her to give it a name.

Here let it be observed, that she looked upon this child as a gift of God, as the fruit of prayer, and as in mercy to her, God dealing graciously with her, and taking her part, and judging righteous judgment.

"Therefore called she his name Dan": Which signifies "judgment"; The reason of it lies in the first clause of the verse.

Now, this was really a strange situation. The mother was not even allowed to name her baby. Rachel named him Dan and even claimed him for her own. It reminds me of the surrogate mothers of our day.

The mother who bears the child has no rights at all to the child.

"Dan" means judgement.

Genesis 30:7 "And Bilhah Rachel's maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son."

"And Bilhah, Rachel's maid, conceived again": Soon after the birth of her first child.

"And bare Jacob a second son": This was his sixth son, but the second by Bilhah.

Genesis 30:8 "And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali."

"And Rachel said, with great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister": Or, "with the wrestlings of God". Wrestling and striving in prayer with God, being vehement and persistent in her petitions to him, that she might have children as well as her sister. Some render it, "I used the craftiness of God", or "great craftiness with my sisters"; by giving her maid Bilhah to her husband, and having children by her.

"And I have prevailed": As she strove in her desires and prayers to have another child before her sister had; in that she prevailed, or she was succeeded in her desires. She had children as she wished to have.

"And she called his name Naphtali": Which signifies "my wrestling", being a child she had been striving and wrestling for. These two sons of Bilhah were born, as say the Jews, Dan on the twenty ninth day of Elul or August, and lived one hundred and twenty seven years; Naphtali on the fifth of Tisri or September, and lived one hundred and thirty three years.

This was so ridiculous. It had become a contest to see who God would allow to have the most children.

Genesis 30:9 "When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife."

"When Leah saw that she had left bearing": For a little while, for she afterwards bore again, and observing also what her sister had done.

"She took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife": In this she was less excusable than Rachel, since she had four children of her own, and therefore might have been content without desiring others by her maid; nor had she long left off bearing, and therefore had no reason to give up hope of having any more.

Genesis 30:10 "And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a son."

"And Zilpah, Leah's maid, bore Jacob a son": For it seems he consented to take her to wife at the motion of Leah, as he had took Bilhah at the instance of Rachel. And having gratified the one, he could not well deny the other; and went in to her, and she conceived, though neither of these things are mentioned, but are all necessarily supposed.

This seems as if Jacob had no say so about who his bed partner would be, but we know this was not true. God had planned to start twelve tribes of very different people. This was God's plan being unwittingly carried out by these jealous women. God arranges things to fit His plans, not for our convenience.

Genesis 30:11 "And Leah said, A troop cometh: and she called his name Gad."

"And Leah said, a troop cometh": A troop of children, having bore four herself, and now her maid another, and more she expected; or the commander of a troop cometh, one that shall head an army and overcome his enemies; which agrees with the prophecy of Jacob (Genesis 49:19).

"And she called his name Gad": Which signifies a "troop", glorying in the multitude of her children that she had or hoped to have.

"Gad" means fortune.

Genesis 30:12 "And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a second son."

"And Zilpah, Leah's maid, bare Jacob a second son": As well as Bilhah, and no more.

Genesis 30:13 "And Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed: and she called his name Asher."

"And Leah said": Upon the birth of the second son by her maid.

"Happy am I": Or, "in my happiness"; or, "for my happiness". That is, this child is an addition to my happiness, and will serve to increase it. For the daughters will call me blessed; the women of the place where she lived would speak of her as a happy person, that had so many children of her own, and others by her maid (see Psalm 127:5).

"And she called his name Asher": Which signifies "happy" or "blessed". These two sons of Zilpah, according to the Jewish writers, were born, Gad on the tenth day of Marchesvan or October, and lived one hundred and twenty five years; and Asher on the twenty second day of Shebet or January, and lived one hundred and twenty three years.

"Asher" means happiness. Asher was the eighth son of Jacob. Blessings from God, many times, come in the form of children. Leah knew God had abundantly blessed her.

Genesis 30:14 "And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes."

"Mandrakes": This is an herb of the belladonna family, considered to be an aphrodisiac. It has a yellow fruit the size of a small apple. Peoples of the ancient Near East attributed sensual desire to this plant and thought it would aid conception.

Jacob had 8 sons by then from 3 women and about 6 years had elapsed since his marriages. The oldest son, Reuben, was about 5. Playing in the field during wheat harvest, he found this small, orange-colored fruit and "brought them to his mother Leah." These were superstitiously viewed in the ancient world as "love-apples", an aphrodisiac or fertility-inducing narcotic.

Verses 15-16: This odd and desperate bargain by Rachel was an attempt to become pregnant with the aid of the mandrakes, a folk remedy which failed to understand that God gives children (verses 6, 17, 20, 22).

Genesis 30:15 "And she said unto her, [Is it] a small matter that thou hast taken my husband? and wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also? And Rachel said, Therefore he shall lie with thee to night for thy son's mandrakes."

"And she said unto her": Leah to Rachel, taking this opportunity to bring out a thing which had some time lain with uneasiness upon her mind.

"Is it a small thing that thou hast taken away my husband?" Got the greatest share of his affections, and had most of his company; which last was very probably the case, and more so, since Leah had left off bearing. And this she could not well stomach, and therefore upon this trifling occasion blurts out with it.

"And wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also?" Which were poor things to be mentioned along with a husband; and besides, Rachel did not offer to take them away from the child without her leave, which she in very humble manner asked of her.

"And Rachel said, therefore he shall lie with thee tonight for thy son's mandrakes": Which showed no great affection to her husband, and a slight of his company, to be willing to part with

it for such a trifle. It seems by this as if they took their turns to lie with Jacob, and this night being Rachel's turn; she agrees to give it to Leah for the sake of the mandrakes.

Or however, if she had his attention of him to herself very much of late, as seems by the words of Leah above, she was willing to give him up to her this night. On the consideration; which Leah agreed she should have, as appears by what follows.

It seems as if these mandrakes were similar to fertility drugs of our day. Rachel wanted a child and would go to any length to get one. It seems a great deal of time had elapsed since Rachel married Jacob, or else Reuben would not be old enough to go to the field alone.

Ungers says that the mandrake plant is a narcotic and could kill if taken in quantity. The Bible did not indicate that at all. It indicated life, not death.

Genesis 30:16 "And Jacob came out of the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, Thou must come in unto me; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes. And he lay with her that night."

"And Jacob came out of the field in the evening": From feeding his flocks.

"And Leah went out to meet him": Knowing full well the time he comes home.

"And said, thou must come in unto me": Into her tent, for the women had separate tents from the men; as Sarah from Abraham; and so, these wives of Jacob had not only tents separate from his, but from one another.

"For surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes": That is, she had hired that night's lodging with him from Rachel, with the mandrakes her son Reuben had brought out of the field. Jacob made no objection to it; but consented, being willing to please both his wives, who he perceived had made this agreement between them.

"And he lay with her that night": And that only, for the present: for, by the way of speaking, it looks as if he did not continue with her more nights together at that time, but went, as before that evening, to Rachel's tent.

Genesis 30:17 "And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son."

"And God hearkened unto Leah": To the prayer of Leah, as the Targum of Jonathan, for more children. The desire of these good women for the company of their husband was not from lust, or an amorous desire in them, but for the sake of having many children, as appears by giving their maids to him.

And the reason of this was, as Bishop Patrick well observes, that the promise made to Abraham of the multiplication of his seed, and of the Messiah springing from thence, might be fulfilled.

And is the true reason of Moses's taking such particular notice of those things, which might seem below the dignity of such a sacred history.

"And she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son": The fifth he had by her, but the ninth in all, that were born unto him.

This was a strange situation, as we said before. It seems Jacob did whatever Rachael wanted him to do, even to sleeping with her sister. In God's sight, Leah had got the worst of this deal, and He blessed her and made her fruitful.

Genesis 30:18 "And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband: and she called his name Issachar."

Note that while Rachel got the mandrakes, Leah received another son! His name was "Issachar," meaning "Reward."

Genesis 30:19 "And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son."

"And Leah conceived again": For bearing children Jacob took more to her, and more frequently attended her apartment and bed.

"And bare Jacob a sixth son": The sixth by her, but the tenth by her and his two maids.

Genesis 30:20 "And Leah said, God hath endued me [with] a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun."

"Now will my husband dwell with me": The plaintive cry of one still unloved (29:31), as confirmed by Jacob's frequent absence from her home. She hoped that having 6 children for Jacob would win his permanent residence with her.

"Zebulun": The name means "dwelling," signifying her hope of Jacob's dwelling with her.

From all of this, it seems that even though Leah had blessed Jacob with six sons, that he did not really live with her. It seems Jacob lived with Rachel and visited Leah.

Genesis 30:21 "And afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name Dinah."

"Dinah": Although not the only daughter to be born to Jacob (37:35; 46:7), her name is mentioned in anticipation of the tragedy at Shechem (chapter 34).

"Dinah" means justice. Daughters were not ordinarily mentioned, unless they play a prominent role of some kind. Such was the case here, as we will see as we go on with the lesson.

Genesis 30:22 "And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb."

“And God remembered Rachel” All the desperate waiting (see 30:1), and pleading climaxed at the end of 7 years with God’s response. Then Rachel properly ascribed her delivery from barrenness to the Lord, whom she also trusted for another son (verses 23-24).

Genesis 30:23 "And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach:"

"And she conceived and bare a son": Through the goodness of God unto her, and for which she was greatly thankful.

"And said, God hath taken away my reproach": The reproach of barrenness with which she was reproached among her neighbors; and perhaps by her sister Leah, and indeed it was a general reproach in those times.

Especially, it was the more grievous to good women in the family of Abraham, because they were not the means of multiplying his seed according to the promise, and could have no hope of the Messiah springing from them.

Genesis 30:24 "And she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son."

“Joseph”: 1914 B.C. His name means “he will add” or “may he add,” indicating both her thanks and her faith that God would give her another son.

Either God had removed the reproach of her childlessness or would give her another son. God did give Benjamin much later.

Verse 22 indicates that Rachel had been praying to God, when it said ..." harkened to her". The fervent prayer will not go unanswered. Sometimes, the answer is a long time in coming, but God hears and answers prayers. As we have said before, these people believe being barren was a punishment from God. To bear children was an honor.

Joseph was not to be like the others. This son was from a love union of the spirit. These other sons had to do with flesh and worldliness. He would be Jacob's favorite.

This was the son whom God would send the blessings through. Joseph would be God's man. We must watch him carefully. Through him we will see a type and shadow of Jesus. Joseph was the eleventh child of Jacob.

In future lessons, we will find Jacob loved Joseph more than the others. This will cause trouble in the family. We will watch the miraculous protection provided Joseph in the worst of circumstances. This son was called of God for a time and a purpose.

There would be one more son born to Rachel which would round out the twelve tribes of Israel. For the time being Joseph was the youngest, and the favorite, born of Jacob's beloved Rachel.

Genesis Chapter 30 Questions

1. What threat did Rachel make to Jacob?
2. What is it called today when men have more than one wife?
3. How did God establish the first marriage?
4. Why was Rachel jealous of Leah?
5. Who had kept Rachel from bearing children?
6. Who did Rachel give Jacob so that she could have children?
7. Who named the child?
8. What was his name?
9. What does it mean?
10. What was Bilhah's second son named?
11. What was Zilpah's child named? Why?
12. What was her second son named?
13. What does the name mean?
14. Who found the mandrakes?
15. What were mandrakes?
16. How had Leah hired Jacob to come to her?
17. What does "Issachar" mean?
18. What made Leah feel that she had finally won Jacob?
19. Why was the birth of Dinah mentioned?
20. What does Dinah mean?
21. When Rachel finally conceived, what did she say?

22. What was her son named?
23. What did the word "harkened" indicate?
24. How was this son different from the others?
25. We will see what in Joseph?
26. In the worst circumstances, what did God do for Joseph?
27. Joseph was the _____ son of Jacob? (number)
28. Give two words that indicate Joseph's position with Jacob?