

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 27

Chapter 30

As chapter 30 begins, Jacob was between 82 and 84 years old. We will never really know his exact age because the Bible does not indicate the ages of Rueben, Simeon, Levi and Judah at their deaths or the age of Jacob at their births.

Rachel's Jealousy

Genesis 30:1 Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die." ² Then Jacob's anger burned against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

Rachel held the most important possessions Jacob could give her, his heart, mind and soul. Yet, she was not satisfied; she wanted that which her sister had. Leah had children. Her children did not distract Jacob's love for Rachel, but children were more important to Rachel than Jacob's love. What she said to Jacob was reprehensible. She wanted children and stated that if she could not have them, she would just as soon die. That statement cut to the heart of Jacob. She was his love and only desire. How terrible it is for one highly loved to cut the lover to the bone with words and actions. Jacob had no power to do what God had not allowed. Jacob knew that he was not able to overpower the will of God. He knew that he could not produce in Rachel's womb that which was not placed there by God.

Rachel's Plan

Genesis 30:3 And she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her, that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children." ⁴ So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her.

We saw this tactic used before when the barren and old Sarah gave her young maid Hagar to Abraham to bear a child. We must remember that maids were the sole property of their owners. In this case, as it was with Sarah and Hagar, Rachel owned Bilhah outright; all the work that Bilhah did belonged Rachel. Even if Rachel had allowed Bilhah to marry, a child born to that marriage would have belonged to Rachel.

The English translation says, "that through her I too may have children," but the Hebrew text adds another thought that the English does not. It says, "that I may be built up by her." The Hebrew word for child is *ben* and it comes from the word *banah* which means to build. In other words, with the birth of each child, the family of the parents is built. Rachel was not contributing to the building of the family because she was barren. Therefore, she took the resource she owned and put it to work in order to contribute to the building of Jacob's family.

That resource was her maid Bilhah who could bear a child who would enable Rachel to take part in the building of the family of Jacob.

Bilhah's Son Dan

Genesis 30:5 And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. ⁶ Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son." Therefore she named him Dan.

Bilhah's son was named Dan which means "judged or judging." Bilhah did not name the boy, Rachel did.

Bilhah's Son Naphtali

Genesis 30:7 And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸ So Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, *and* I have indeed prevailed." And she named him Naphtali.

After the birth of Dan, Jacob had relations with Bilhah again and she gave birth to a second son whom Rachel named Naphtali. The name means "wrestling." The root word for wrestling in the Hebrew means to twist or entwine. Thus, Rachel had successfully entwined herself into the building of Jacob's family. This passage seems to indicate that Rachel had prevailed in a wrestling match with her sister, but that could not be the case. Leah had given Jacob four children by this point in the story and Rachel had contributed only two. Therefore, the proper interpretation of this passage is that Rachel had successfully twisted her way into the building of Jacob's family by using her maid to give Jacob two sons. It does not mean that Rachel had entered a wrestling match with Leah and prevailed.

Leah's Plan

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

The timing of Leah's realization that she was barren is not explained in this story; however, Moses' purpose in telling this story was simply to introduce the children of Jacob in the order of their births. We must remember, Moses did not personally know the twelve sons of Jacob. They had all died in Egypt at least a hundred years before Moses was born. However, the descendants of those twelve had become the tribes that Moses led out of Egypt. For many reasons, in that culture, the birth order was important. Therefore, Leah must have realized that she was barren after Bilhah was pregnant with Naphtali. During that pregnancy, she copied the action of Rachel and gave her maid to Jacob so she could continue building the family. This discovery indicates that at least a year must have transpired after Leah gave birth to Judah before she offered Zilpah to Jacob.

Zilpah's Son Gad

Genesis 30:10 And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son.¹¹ Then Leah said, "How fortunate!" So she named him Gad.

That pregnancy added a minimum of 40 weeks to the timeline, providing Zilpah conceived that first week. Gad's name means "fortune" and indicates the comfort that the child's birth brought to Leah; she was fortunate enough to be able to help build the family through her maid.

Zilpah's Son Asher

Genesis 30:12 And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.¹³ Then Leah said, "Happy am I! For women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.

The wording Moses used concerning the two children born to Jacob through Zilpah breaks from the normal pattern of "she conceived and bore" as with Leah and Bilhah. Moses simply says in verse 10 that "Zilpah bore Jacob a son ... Gad." Here, verse 11 also says that "Zilpah bore Jacob a son ... Asher." Moses will use the regular pattern when Leah bears her next two sons and when Rachel bears her son; he will not use it with the birth of Leah's daughter.

In the regular sense, Zilpah probably conceived and bore two sons with Jacob in a two year period. However, because of the structure of the description of the births of these two sons, we must not discount that these two might have been twins. Whether or not that was the case, the birth of these two sons added at least another year to the timeline before Leah gave birth to her next son.

The second son of Zilpah was named Ashur which means "blessedness or happiness." The birth of Gad brought new fortune to Leah but Ashur's birth brought her happiness.

Rachel Requests Mandrakes

Genesis 30:14 Now in the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."

Rueben was Leah's first child born in the 2230th year after the creation of Adam when Jacob was 78 years old. This date is determined with the understanding that Jacob finished the marriage week of seven days with Leah and then immediately entered a marriage week with Rachel for seven more days. Then he worked off his debt in the following seven years. If Jacob had to wait until he had served Laban for the seven years before he married Rachel and Rueben was born in the 2236th year after the creation of Adam, it would add to the difficulty of justifying the birth of Leah's seven children in the remaining six year period of Jacob's time in Harah.

The harvest of wheat occurs in the month of May which is the same time that the fruit of the mandrakes is ready to be eaten. Rueben was old enough to go into the fields and gather the mandrakes; it does not mean that Rueben went into the field by himself. If the timing of this event is correct in this study, Rueben is at least five years old but he may have been as old as eight.

Many of the cultures, including the Greeks and Orientals, have documented the importance of the mandrake plant as an aid for conception. Once Rachel saw the fruit in Rueben's hands, she she starved for its taste in the hope that it would bring her the great fortune of conception in order to break her time of barrenness.

Leah's Reply

Genesis 30:15a But she said to her, "Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son's mandrakes also?"

This verse is often read so fast that its importance is missed. Leah's statement, "Is it a small matter for you to take my husband?" shows the bitter rivalry between the two sisters. Leah was the primary wife because she was the first although her marriage to Jacob was completed in deception. Rachel held Jacob's heart but Leah held the position. Leah's place as the first wife held more power than Rachel's. Therefore, Leah had the right to say, "Is it a small matter for you to take my husband?" Evidently, Jacob was spending more time with Rachel than with Leah and she was keenly aware of the inequality of allotted time. Evidently Rachel was in control of the nightly distribution of Jacob's time which should have been the duty of Leah. Now, Leah expressed her offense that Rachel desired the property of her son in addition to her allotment of Jacob's time.

Rachel's Deal for the Mandrakes

Genesis 30: 15b So Rachel said, "Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes."

Rachel's craving for a child which led her desire to eat the mandrake fruit caused her to work a deal with her older sister and she said, "he may lie with you tonight in return."

Leah's Son Issachar

Genesis 30: 16 When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he lay with her that night. ¹⁷ And God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ Then Leah said, "God has given me my wages, because I gave my maid to my husband." So she named him Issachar.

Leah agreed to the deal offered by Rachel for the fruit. The LORD saw the dispute between the two sisters. Even though Rachel was willing to use any means to gain a child, it was not her time in God's will. In her desperation, she turned to mandrakes in an attempt to control the will of God. This action was no different from giving her maid to Jacob to bear children in her stead. She had attempted to take control of the natural course of conception by adding a food to enhance her ability to conceive. In other words, she wanted to jumpstart the will of God's natural design.

Leah's purchase of Jacob for the night from Rachel indicates at least two possibilities. One, a schedule of some sort existed between Rachel and Leah for the sleeping arrangements with Jacob and that night he was originally scheduled to be with Rachel. Two, Rachel was dominating the nightly schedule with Jacob and Leah was more than willing to make the trade for the possibility of Jacob's time.

Rachel's deal resulted in Leah's conception and the ultimate birth of Issachar. His name means "payment satisfied." The price of the mandrakes was well worth the night with Jacob.

Leah's Son Zebulun

Genesis 30: 19 And Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son to Jacob. ²⁰ Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good gift; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun.

Leah's barrenness was broken with Rachel's deal for the mandrakes. After Issachar's birth, Leah then conceived and gave birth to Zebulun, her last son. His name means "dwelling." Evidently, because Leah had given Jacob more sons than Rachel through her maid, she expected to gain the love of Jacob and she thought the schedule would change and he would spend more nights with her than with Rachel.

Leah's Daughter Dinah

Genesis 30: 21 And afterward she bore a daughter and named her Dinah.

The LORD was not through with Leah yet; she finally gave Jacob a daughter and named her Dinah. Her name means "judgment." Leah must have believed that the LORD had judged her more worthy of being the wife of Jacob than Rachel and for that very reason Leah gave her daughter the name "judgment." Behind the name was Leah's intent that was selfish and bitter toward Rachel; Leah was more worthy than her sister.

Rachel's Son Joseph

Genesis 30: 22 Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb. ²³ So she conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." ²⁴ And she named him Joseph, saying, " May the LORD give me another son."

The time had arrived for Rachel to give birth to a son. Rachel thought her barrenness was a reproach and expressed that thought in words. Little did she know the importance of the timing of her son's birth! Little did she know the impact this son would have on the world and its leaders! Little did she know how the LORD would use this son in the formation of His chosen people who would bring forth the fulfillment of the covenant with the birth of the Savior! How little did she know! She named him Joseph which means "he who adds."

Notice that Moses says, “God gave heed to her.” We do not see that Rachel prayed to the LORD anywhere in this passage or those that have gone before. This action was one instigated by God. After all the other sons and daughter were in the family, “God remembered Rachel.” He opened her womb and allowed her give birth to a son to fulfill His purpose and plan, not hers.

Total Time of Jacob's Stay in Haran – Twenty Years											
Timing of the Birth of Jacob's Children											
Rachel's Children				Zilpah's Children				Bilhah's Children			
Leah's Children				Dan				Gad Ashur			
Rueben				Simeon				Levi			
Judah				Issachar				Zebulun			
Dinah				Joseph				Joseph			
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Jacob's Desire of Canaan

Genesis 30: 25 **Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, " Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my own country.**
26 **"Give *me* my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me depart; for you yourself know my service which I have rendered you."**

The birth of Joseph acts as a time marker to indicate when he was born in the story, the age of Jacob and the start of Jacob's plan to return to his father's home in Beersheba. This plan did not begin until the time of Joseph's birth. In the next chapter, we will learn that Jacob stayed in Haran 20 years and Joseph's birth occurred at the beginning of that 20th year.

Laban's Desire for Jacob

Genesis 30: 27 **But Laban said to him, "If now it pleases you, *stay with me*; I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account."** 28 **And he continued, " Name me your wages, and I will give it."**

Laban did not like Jacob's plan to return to Canaan Land. He did not want to see his daughters or his grandchildren leave. However, Laban did not want to stir the wrath of Jacob. He said to Jacob, "I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account." The Hebrew is better translated, "I have learned by experience that the LORD has blessed me on your account." Laban was better off in this world because the LORD had blessed him though Jacob. Therefore, he was willing to pay Jacob whatever he desired to keep him and the family in Haran.

Jacob's Reasoning

Genesis 30: 29 **But he said to him, " You yourself know how I have served you and how your cattle have fared with me. 30 "For you had little before I came, and it has increased to a multitude; and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?"**

Laban had not had the same fortune as Abraham and Isaac. He was not a wealthy man until he encountered and embraced Jacob into his family. Jacob had made Laban wealthy. Everything that Jacob had done in Haran added to Laban's wealth. All Jacob had was his blood. He had no flocks, no fields of wheat or vegetables, no gold, no silver, no horses or carts. Even the tents or homes that Jacob's family lived in belonged to Laban. Remember, Jacob had agreed to work for a wife, not a paycheck. Now it was time for Jacob to become the owner of that which he needed to provide for his family when he left the presence and domain of Laban.

Laban's Request

Genesis 30: 31a **So he said, "What shall I give you?"**

Laban had not thought through this conversation at all. His desire and emotion were still directed at Jacob's desire to establish a life with his family in Haran. With that thought, he was willing to give Jacob anything he desired when he said, "What shall I give you?"

Jacob's Plan – Speckled, Spotted Goats and Black Sheep

Genesis 30: 31b **And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this *one* thing for me, I will again pasture *and* keep your flock: ³² let me pass through your entire flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted sheep, and every black one among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and *such* shall be my wages. ³³ "So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come concerning my wages. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, *if found* with me, will be considered stolen." ³⁴ And Laban said, " Good, let it be according to your word." ³⁵ So he removed on that day the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats, every one with white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into the care of his sons. ³⁶ And he put *a distance of three days'* journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.**

Jacob's plan was simple, he did not want money, he wanted livestock and he did not want all the livestock; he wanted only speckled and spotted sheep, black lambs, and the spotted and speckled goats. All the animals that were not speckled, spotted or black would be considered stolen from Laban's herds. Laban agreed to the plan but changed the details.

Jacob was to make the selection from the flocks of Laban to separate the abnormally colored animals. Instead, Laban changed that plan. Laban sorted the herds and sent all that were spotted, speckled and black with his sons to be pastured about three days away. Then he put Jacob in charge of the normal pure animals so that Jacob would not have any flocks that would ever belong to him. In other words, Laban did not give Jacob a single animal, yet, Laban made him the caretaker over his best of the animals that would surely bear pure perfect offspring. Laban wanted to ensure that Jacob would fail and therefore he would remain in Haran.

White Stripped Rods of Poplar, Almond and Plane Trees

Genesis 30: 37 **Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white which *was* in the rods. ³⁸ And he set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the gutters, *even* in the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink; and they mated when they came to drink.**

We have not addressed the name of Laban; in the Hebrew language it means "white." Notice that Laban saw Jacob peel back strips from the bark of the branches to expose the white wood below. In other words, he knew Laban was watching and the rods were a play on Laban's name and Jacob's request of Laban. Jacob asked for the abnormal animals so he made and placed abnormal shepherd's staffs in the troughs where the animals came to drink and mate.

What is the difference between a gutter and a trough? Two Hebrew words are used here, *rahat* and *shoqeth*. *Rahat* means the gutters that were dug to channel water down to the various watering troughs or *shoqeth*. In other words, all of the watering troughs were connected by open ditches or wooden structures that allowed the water from the well to be drawn and poured into the gutters which would divert the water to all the various water troughs where the animals would gather in smaller groups to drink. Along the gutters and at the troughs, Jacob planted these strange staffs in the ground.

Purpose of the Rods

Genesis 30:39 So the flocks mated by the rods, and the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. ⁴⁰ And Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban; and he put his own herds apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock. ⁴¹ Moreover, it came about whenever the stronger of the flock were mating, that Jacob would place the rods in the sight of the flock in the gutters, so that they might mate by the rods; ⁴² but when the flock was feeble, he did not put *them* in; so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's.

Jacob had started with a pure line of sheep and goats which had no abnormal coloring. According to this passage, he used the stripped staffs as a formal but primitive method of selective breeding. The method allowed for the strong animals to bear offspring and the weaker ones to fail which he accomplished by the placement of the stripped staffs.

Result of the Rods

Genesis 30:43 So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.

What was the result of Jacob's selective breeding? He became exceedingly wealthy in six months. The gestation of sheep is 145 days; the gestation of goats is 150 days. In general, both sheep and goats bear two offspring with each pregnancy. Therefore, in Jacob's case, by the end of half a year, 100 sheep had become 300. With Jacob, 100 pure colored sheep produced 200 abnormal spotted, speckled or black sheep which, according to Laban's agreement belonged to Jacob. The above statement is just an example; Laban put tens of hundreds of pure animals in Jacob's care. Jacob separated the two-thirds increase from the pure white line that belonged to Laban making Jacob wealthier than Laban in sheep and goats in just six months. The increase was so great that Jacob had to hire male and female workers to care for his flocks. At that time, Jacob had acquired enough wealth to provide for his own family without the help of his father-in-law! Jacob had accomplished what Isaac had sent him to do twenty years before.