

Genesis

Chapter 30



**Michael Fronczak
Bible Study Resource Center
564 Schaeffer Dr.
Coldwater, Michigan 49036**

biblestudyresourcecenter.com

Copyright © 2005, 2007

Torah Class: In the last lesson we saw Jacob.....not YET called Israel..... take a wife. Actually, he wound up with 2 wives.....the sisters Leah and Rachel....because his conniving father-in-law Lavan had deceived him much in the same way Jacob had deceived his own father. Is it not amazing in life that Yehoveh often shows us our own sin, and the devastating effects it has on others, by permitting someone to do to us as we have done to another. Jacob pulled the old switch-a-roo on his father, Isaac, because he wanted to ensure that he (and not his brother, Esau) received the best blessing. And, as upsetting as this deception was to his father, it embittered Esau for years to come. Now, after working for 7 years for Lavan that he might have Rachel for a wife, during the wedding ceremony Lavan pulls the old switch-a-roo on Jacob, who wakes up to find that it was Leah, and not Rachel, who he had married.

Near the end of chapter 29, Jacob became a father for the first time. Let me remind you that he was now into his 80's. And, the focal point of the last several verses of Chapter 29 is about Leah providing those sons for Jacob.....first Rueben, then Simeon, next Levi, and finally Judah. The chapter ends by telling us that for some unknown reason, Leah's womb dries up.

The first several verses of Chapter 30 are going to change gears, and tell us much about Rachel; and the contrast between Leah, the plain but godly sister, and Rachel, the beautiful but worldly sister, could not be more clear. Jacob is still up in Haran of Mesopotamia. It is interesting that we find that like Abraham who was born in a land outside of the promised land, so would Jacob's children.....the ones who in the future would be called the tribes of Israel....begin life as foreigners.¹

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.

[envied] What the Bible Says about Envy

1. Commands against envy (Psalm 37:1-7; Proverbs 3:31; Proverbs 24:1; 1 Peter 2:1)
2. A work of the flesh (Romans 1:29-31; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:3)
3. Results of envy (Job 5:2; Proverbs 14:30; Proverbs 27:4; Song 8:6; 1 Cor. 3:3; James 3:14; James 5:9)
4. One thing that does not envy (1 Cor. 13:4)
5. Instances of envy (Genesis 4:4-8; Genesis 16:5-6; Genesis 21:9-10; Genesis 26:14; Genesis 30:1,15; Genesis 31:1; Genesis 37:4-11,19-20; Judges 11:28-30; Judges 12:1-10; Judges 16:3; 1 Samuel 18:8-9,29; 1 Samuel 20:31; Esther 5:13; Daniel 6:4; Matthew 27:18; John 11:47; Acts 13:45; Acts 17:5)

Give me children, or else I die—This is a most reprehensible speech, and argues not only envy and jealousy, but also a total want of dependence on God. She had the greatest share of her husband's affection, and yet was not satisfied unless she could engross all the

¹ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

privileges which her sister enjoyed! How true are those sayings, Envy is as rottenness of the bones! and, Jealousy is as cruel as the grave!²

Give me children, or else I die—either be reckoned as good as dead, or pine away from vexation. The intense anxiety of Hebrew women for children arose from the hope of giving birth to the promised seed. Rachel's conduct was sinful and contrasts unfavorably with that of Rebekah (compare Genesis 25:22) and of Hannah (1 Samuel 1:11).³

The theme of bad relations between a fertile co-wife and a barren one, with the latter as their husband's favorite, appears in more developed form in the story of Hannah in 1 Sam Chapter 1.⁴

Ephrem the Syrian; “Rachel thought Jacob had not prayed for her”

Leah bore Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah and then ceased giving birth, whereas Rachel was barren. Because she heard Jacob say that Abraham had prayed over the barren Sarah and was heard and that Isaac had also prayed for Rebekah and was answered, she thought that it was because Jacob had not prayed for her that her closed womb had not been opened. For this reason, she said in anger and in tears, “Give me children, or I shall die!” (Commentary on Genesis 28:1.1)⁵

Ramban: “Give my children”

The commentators said that the means that Rachel asked Jacob to pray on her behalf. Or else I die – Rashi comments: “For one who is childless may be considered as dead.” This is a Midrash of our Rabbis.

But I wonder. If so, why was Jacob angry with her? And why did he say, Am I in G-d's stead? For G-d hearkens to the righteous. [I wonder concerning] that which Jacob said [to Rachel, as quoted in Rashi: “You say that I should do as did my father, who prayed on behalf of Rebekah, but I am not circumstanced as my father was. My] father had no children at all. I, however, have children. It is from you that he had withheld children and not from me.” Do not the righteous pray on behalf of others? There were Elijah and Elisha who prayed on behalf of strange women.

It would appear that on account of Jacob's answer, our Rabbis took him to task, saying in Bereshith Rabbah: “The Holy one, blessed be He, said to Jacob, “Is this the way to answer a woman who is oppressed by her barrenness? By your life! Your children are destined to stand before her son Joseph!”

In line with the plain meaning of Scripture, Rachel asked of Jacob that he give her children, but her intent was truly to say that he should pray on her behalf and continue indeed to pray on her behalf and continue indeed to pray until G-d would, in any case, grant her children, and if not, she would mortify herself because of grief. In her envy she spoke improperly, thinking that because Jacob loved her he would fast, put on sackcloth

²Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

³JFB Commentary

⁴The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

⁵Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

with ashes, and pray until she would have children, so that she should not die of her grief.⁶

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?*

[anger was kindled against Rachel] First record of a husband being angry with his wife (cp. 1 Samuel 1:2-23; 2 Samuel 6:20-23; Esther 1; Job 2:10).

The question *Can I take the place of God?* Reappears in 50:19 (where it is translated, "Am I a substitute for God?") There, probably not coincidentally it is Rachel's first-born who asks it, and in a context of reconciliation of siblings once driven by jealousy.⁷

Torah Class: Rachel, blessed with beauty, a quality for which she could take no credit; the wife who got the lion's share of Jacob's attention, is now jealous of the one trait of her sister that, other than for that one trait, made Leah an after thought in Jacob's life; and that is the ability to have children. Like a small, petty child, Rachel actually blames Jacob for her barrenness, and Jacob replies by telling her pretty firmly that it would certainly appear that HE is not where the problem lies. So, taking a page from her grandmother, Sarah's, life, she gets into the act by giving her personal servant-girl to Jacob to have children in her stead. We see this reference here, as we've seen now a few times before, of the servant-girl being given by her mistress "as a wife". Just remember that in reality this servant girl is what, in English, we would call a concubine. Her status was, indeed, elevated from servant, by becoming a concubine of Jacob's. But, that status did NOT reach to that of either Leah or Rachel's, who were BOTH legal wives, with all the rights and honors and marriage ceremonies that went with the position of "legal wife" versus "concubine-wife".

This story of Jacob and Leah and Rachel allows me to point something out, here, that needs to be made clear: God most certainly did NOT validate Jacob's choice to take TWO wives.....any more than he did Isaacs, nor Abrahams. Too often we like to say, 'Well, its in the Bible, so God must be OK with it'. Not so. VERY often, the Holy Scriptures simply tell the historical truth, tell us what was said or what happened, and then do NOT specifically comment on it. Rather these statements simply stand on their own. God had made quite clear early in Genesis that marriage was the forming of one flesh from two; not 3,4,5,6, or as Solomon so much later, a thousand.

This is why it is so important to read and study the WHOLE bible; so that we can separate God's commands, principles, and characteristics from simple statements of historical fact. The Bible is full of statements by men and women; and many of those statements are outright lies, or self-aggrandizing, or greatly exaggerated, or wishful thinking, or rationalizations of personal behavior, or simply expressions of widely held superstitions. In the case of Jacob, he deceived his brother Esau, and his father; it wasn't

⁶ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

⁷ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

right, but he did it, and the Bible simply reports it. Jacob didn't pick the wife (Leah), on his own, that apparently God selected for him. . . . he picked the one (Rachel) that most pleased his fleshly and impulsive male desires. It wasn't right, but he did it, and the Bible simply reports it. Then, he wound up marrying two wives; it wasn't right, but he did it, the Scriptures tells us about it, and so on. We must never assume that since the Bible does not comment on every statement or action as to whether it was right or wrong, good or evil, that those not commented on must be, to at least some degree, acceptable to God. For, if we have the Torah in our hearts, and have read it and studied it, we will KNOW what was right and wrong in God's eyes; and THAT is what we are expected to do. The fact that we are given the full, unflinching view of who these Biblical characters were, flaws and all, doesn't change God's absolute, unchanging, uncompromising truth. Like us, *every* Bible character, except Yeshua, was imperfect and did things they ought not have done.⁸

Chrysostom: “Jacob replied with great wisdom”

Why, Jacob says, do you ignore the Lord of nature and fix the blame on me? He it is who has deprived you of the fruit of the womb. Why not make your request to him, who can open nature's workplace and quicken the womb to childbirth? So understand that God is the one who has deprived you of the fruit of the womb and granted your sister such fertility. So don't look to me for what I am powerless to provide and over which I have no lordship. I mean, if it lay in my power, I would certainly give you pride of place ahead of your sister by securing greater respect for you. But since, no matter to what degree I am kindly disposed to you. I can do nothing to solve your problem, address your request to him who inflicted the sterility and has the power to remedy it. See the good man's common sense in that, though provoked to anger by her words, he replied to her with great wisdom, instructing her precisely in everything and making the responsibility clear to her, lest by ignoring the Lord she might seek from another what God alone was able to provide. (Homilies on Genesis 56:19)⁹

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.

Missler: Rachel's sons through Bilhah do not reflect the faith Leah had. Rachel felt wronged over her barrenness. Her effort to have children through her maidservant reflects Sarah's similar attempt with Hagar.¹⁰

Rachel followed Sarai's policy in Genesis 16:2. Children were regarded as a special favor of God, and barrenness was considered a mark of divine displeasure. Males were

⁸ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

⁹ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

¹⁰ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

especially important, to build and preserve the family. Slaves and their offspring were the property of the mistress.¹¹

She shall bear upon my knees—The handmaid was the sole property of the mistress, as has already been remarked in the case of Hagar; and therefore not only all her labor, but even the children borne by her, were the property of the mistress. These female slaves, therefore, bore children vicariously for their mistresses; and this appears to be the import of the term, she shall bear upon my knees.¹²

maidservant as surrogate wife. Just as Sarah gave Abraham her maid Hagar as a surrogate wife (Genesis 16:1-4), so too the wives of Jacob give him their maids. The object is for a barren (or unloved) wife to have children by means of this legal surrogacy. Provision for this custom is also found in the Lipit-Ishtar Code and in the Code of Hammurabi from Mesopotamia.¹³

Each of the three great patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) had wives who had difficulty conceiving children. It is interesting to note how each man reacted to his wife's predicament. Abraham had relations with Sarah's maidservant in order to have his own child, thus introducing bitterness and jealousy into his family. Isaac, by contrast, prayed to God when his wife was barren. God eventually answered his prayers, and Rebekah had twin sons. Jacob, however, followed his grandfather's example and had children by his wives' maidservants, leading to sad and sometimes bitter consequences.¹⁴

The words *that through her I too may have children* is another connection to the story of Hagar (16:2). Ancient Near Eastern evidence suggests that placing a child on one's knees represents acknowledgment of that child as one's own.¹⁵

Rachel's desperation led her to bring her maid **Bilhah** to Jacob as a surrogate wife (for Sarah doing the same thing with Hagar, see ch. 16). This was accepted practice in the ancient Middle East to protect an infertile wife. A woman could be divorced if she failed to conceive.¹⁶

McGee: We find here Jacob and Rachel reverting to the practice of that day. Remember that Abraham and Sarah had done the same thing. God did not approve of it then, and He is not going to approve of it now. The Bible gives us an accurate record, but that does not mean that God approved of all that was done. In fact, it is quite obvious that He disapproved of this. My, the strife that we have already called to your attention in

¹¹ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

¹² Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

¹³ Bible Background Commentary

¹⁴ Life Application Notes

¹⁵ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

¹⁶ The Nelson Study Bible

Abraham's family. It was also in the family of Isaac. Now it is in Jacob's family already—and he is in for a great deal more trouble.¹⁷

Genesis 30:4

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

Ephrem the Syrian; “Joint heirs”

So, lest she nag him, asking him every day for children, Jacob who was sent from his parents to take a daughter of Laban, agreed to take the foreign woman, but it was also so that the sons of the maidservants might become joint heirs with the sons of the free women that Jacob took maidservants and freewomen. So he took Bilhah, and she conceived and bore Dan and Naphtali. (Commentary on Genesis 28:1.2)¹⁸

Genesis 30:5

And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son.

Rachel and Leah were locked in a cruel contest. In their race to have more children, they both gave their maidservants to Jacob as concubines. Jacob would have been wise to refuse, even though this was an accepted custom of the day. The fact that a custom is socially acceptable does not mean it is wise or right. You will be spared much heartbreak if you look at the potential consequences, to you or others, of your actions. Are you doing anything now that might cause future problems?¹⁹

Ramban: “and she bore to Jacob a son”

In the case of all the handmaids Scripture mentions the phrase, to Jacob [in connection with the birth of their children], in order to relate that Jacob desired and acknowledged them and that they were not called by him ‘sons of the handmaids,’ but ‘sons of Jacob,’ just like the sons of the mistresses who traced their lineage to him. In the case of the fifth and sixth sons of Leah it also says, to Jacob, since due to her abundance of sons, Scripture deems it necessary to say that Jacob desired and befriended all of them. This is not mentioned in connection with the birth of the first [four sons of Leah because it is obvious that Jacob desired them].²⁰

¹⁷ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:124). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

¹⁸ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

¹⁹ Life Application Notes

²⁰ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

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.

Missler: The names of the two sons born to Bilhah reflected Rachel's bitter struggle and feeling of victory. The name **Dan** is explained by the word *dananni*, God has vindicated me, that is, He now had corrected Rachel's wrong, her barrenness. Dan: that is, "Judging."²¹ Dan means "judging"—for God has judged me worthy of a son by my maid.

Genesis 30:7

And Bilhah Rachel's maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son.

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.

[**Naphtali**] Naphtali means "wrestling"—for I have struggled with my sister for offspring and have prevailed by my maid. The name Naphtali reflected her great struggle (*naptule*) which, she said, "I fought" (*niptalti*) with my sister (30:8).

Torah Class: Let's move on. Rachel gives Bilah to Jacob to bear a child in her stead. Verse 3 says that Rachel gave Bilah so that she "may bear on my knees and through her I too may have children". That phrase "may bear on my knees" is a Hebrew idiom that is reflective of a long-standing Middle Eastern custom. The custom is that by ceremonially placing a child on one's knees or lap, that person is signifying that they are claiming that child as their own. This is a LEGAL claim. And, it is done for reasons as we see here.....where a servant is meant to be used as a surrogate mother for the servant's master.... or when a child is being legally adopted. So, we have to understand that in the same way Rachel had full right to claim the child that her servant Bilah will bear, Rachel EQUALLY has full right NOT TO accept a child her servant produces. She is not obligated to accept a child that her servant produces, even if that child came from her own husband's seed. So, for all we know.....and it is likely the case....Bilah probably produced some girl babies along the way and there is no evidence that Rachel accepted them as her own. It would have been great shame on Bilah if she were not allowed to produce and KEEP some children for herself. And, a servant of this type was well treated, loved and cared for, and considered a part of the family, so it is unthinkable she would not have been permitted to have and raise some children of her own. Of course, the purpose of this narrative in Genesis is to show where the tribes of Israel came from, and so the only pertinent information would be about the sons that were produced, and not daughters.....though, we will find one notable exception in coming chapters.

²¹ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

Bilah, Rachel's servant, now Jacob's concubine, bears him a son in Rachel's name: and the son's name is Dan, which means, "to judge". Not too long thereafter, she gives him another son, Naftali (which means, "wrestling" or "contest").²²

Genesis 30:9

When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife.

Rachel's method of producing children through her maid may have inspired Leah to do likewise, and Jacob had more sons.

Ramban: "When Leah saw that she had left off bearing she took Zilpah her handmaid," I do not know what motivated this deed of Leah and why she gave her handmaid to her husband for she was not barren that she should hope to have children through Zilpah, and it is not natural for women to increase the number of their husbands' wives. We must, however, say that the matriarchs were prophetesses, who knew that Jacob was destined to establish twelve tribes, and Leah desired that the majority of his sons be from her or from her handmaid, who was in her power, so that the sister Rachel would not prevail over her with respect to the number of her sons. Therefore, she said, G-d hath given me my share, because I have given my handmaid to my husband. Jacob also came unto her on account of this, i.e., that he raise many sons for he knew it to be so, as our Rabbis have said.

It is possible that knowing that the Land had been given to their children, and realizing that Abraham and Isaac had not had many children, Jacob wanted to have many wives in order to increase his progeny so as to inherit the Land, for a fourth generation shall come hither again, and so Leah wanted to give him her handmaid so that he would not wed a stranger.²³

Genesis 30:10

And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a son.

Bilhah . . . Zilpah—Following the example of Sarah with regard to Hagar, an example which is not seldom imitated still, she adopted the children of her maid. Leah took the same course. A bitter and intense rivalry existed between them, all the more from their close relationship as sisters; and although they occupied separate apartments, with their families, as is the uniform custom where a plurality of wives obtains, and the husband and father spends a day with each in regular succession, that did not allay their mutual jealousies. The evil lies in the system, which being a violation of God's original ordinance, cannot yield happiness.²⁴

²² Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

²³ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

²⁴ JFB Commentary

Genesis 30:11

And Leah said, A troop cometh: and she called his name Gad.

Leah responded by offering Jacob her maidservant Zilpah, to whom **Gad** (fortune). [Gad: that is, "a troop, or, company."]

[**Gad**] Gad means "a troop" or "an army," as if this son added to Leah's other four made a an army.

Genesis 30:12

And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a second son.

Genesis 30:13

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

[**Asher**] Asher means "happiness" or "blessedness." Leah concluded that women would call her happy and blessed because of the six sons she and her maid had borne Jacob.

Torah Class: Leah (who we are told at the end of the last chapter stopped bearing children), seeing Rachel's success, and its apparent rewards, allows herself to now be infected with these weak notions; she gives HER servant-girl, Zilpah, to Jacob to bear children in her stead. Jacob, *his* sinful weaknesses so readily apparent, just can't seem to do the right thing either, and accepts Leah's servant girl as another of his concubines. First Gad ("good fortune") then Asher ("happy") are born to Zilpah. They are claimed by Leah as her own.²⁵

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.

Asher ("happy; blessing"): Leah saw that with God's help she was prospering.

[**mandrakes**] *dudaim* A dark green lettuce-like plant with purple flowers and red fruit (about the size of a small apple) with pleasant smell. They were used in so-called love potions, for it was believed that conception was insured by eating it (Genesis 30:14-16; Song 7:13). Arabs later called them "fruit apples of Satan," for some unknown reason. Rachel felt she needed mandrakes more than Leah whom God made fruitful without them

²⁵ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

(Genesis 30:16-21), while Rachel remained unfruitful in spite of eating them and having faith in superstition.

Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, found some mandrake plants, supposedly aphrodisiacs, and Rachel felt they would work for her.

Clarke: What these were is utterly unknown, and learned men have wasted much time and pains in endeavoring to guess out a probable meaning. Some translate the word lilies, others jessamine, others citrons, others mushrooms, others figs, and some think the word means flowers, or fine flowers in general. Hasselquist, the intimate friend and pupil of Linne, who traveled into the Holy Land to make discoveries in natural history, imagines that the plant commonly called mandrake is intended; speaking of Nazareth in Galilee he says: "What I found most remarkable at this village was a great number of mandrakes which grew in a vale below it. I had not the pleasure to see this plant in blossom, the fruit now (May 5th, O. S.) hanging ripe to the stem, which lay withered on the ground. From the season in which this mandrake blossoms and ripens fruit, one might form a conjecture that it was Rachel's dudaim. These were brought her in the wheat harvest, which in Galilee is in the month of May, about this time, and the mandrake was now in fruit." Both among the Greeks and Orientals this plant was held in high repute, as being of a prolific virtue, and helping conception; and from it philtres were made, and this is favored by the meaning of the original, loves, i.e., incentives to matrimonial connections: and it was probably on this account that Rachel desired them. The whole account however is very obscure.²⁶

mandrake plants. *Mandragora officinarum* is a stemless, perennial root in the potato family found growing in stony ground. It resembles the human figure and has narcotic and purgative properties, which explain its medicinal use. Its shape and pungent fragrance may be the origin of its use in fertility rites and as an aphrodisiac (see Song 7:13-14). It has dark green, wrinkled leaves from which rise a violet, bell-shaped flower. Its fruit is a yellowish berry, approximately the size of a small tomato, which can be consumed. The mandrake is native to the Mediterranean region but is not common in Mesopotamia.²⁷

The mandrake, a plant with purplish flowers and branching roots, was thought to have aphrodisiac properties (cf. Song of Songs 7:13). The bitterness of Leah's tragic position as the wife Jacob never wanted and never loved is especially poignant in vv. 15-16. She has to bargain with her sister to hire her husband just to sleep with her.²⁸

²⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

²⁷ Bible Background Commentary

²⁸ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

(Song of Songs 7:10-13) ¹⁰*I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me.* ¹¹*Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field; let us lodge in the villages.* ¹²*Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves.* ¹³*The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.*

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.

The long-time feuding over Jacob was still going on between Rachel and Leah.

Thou hast taken my husband—It appears probable that Rachel had found means to engross the whole of Jacob's affection and company, and that she now agreed to let him visit the tent of Leah, on account of receiving some of the fruits or plants which Reuben had found.²⁹

Ramban: "Is it a small matter that thou hast taken away my husband?"

The intent thereof is as follows: "is it a small matter that you take my husband unto yourself as if you are his wife and I am a handmaid? Will you now also make yourself the mistress to take the mandrakes in whose odor I delight?"

It is possible that Rachel wanted the mandrakes in honor of Jacob to perfume his couch. Leah had done in the customary way of women, just as it is written, I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon. Therefore, Leah said, Is it a small matter that thou has taken away my husband from me that you now also take my son's mandrakes to win him over with them?

And some scholars say that *duda'im* are herbs, which act as a male aphrodisiac, the word being derived from the expression, the time of *dodim* (love). Therefore Leah said, Is it a small matter that thou has taken away my husband? As I have mentioned.³⁰

(Proverbs 7:17) *I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.*

²⁹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

³⁰ Ramban, Nachmanides, Commentary on the Torah, Genesis, Rabbi C. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House

(Ezekiel 16:8) *Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of (dodim) love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine.*

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.

I have hired thee—We may remark among the Jewish women an intense desire of having children; and it seems to have been produced, not from any peculiar affection for children, but through the hope of having a share in the blessing of Abraham, by bringing forth Him in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.³¹

Torah Class: The fact is, there was a bit of a battle going on here between the two sisters; they each wanted to be their husband's favorite, and they each figured they would earn that favoritism by giving him highly valued sons. So, a little later, these competitive and superstitious sisters make a deal. It seems that Reuben, Leah's son, goes into the field to gather Mandrakes; Mandrakes are supposed to be an aphrodisiac. Why would he do that? Because Reuben was well aware that Jacob, his father, would alternate sleeping with his two legal wives: Leah, and Rachel; but Leah was still playing 2nd fiddle to Rachel, and of course, that open favoritism bothered Reuben, because it bothered his mother, Leah. Sex being just a part of life, particularly for children raised around herds and flocks, Reuben is just trying to help his mother who undoubtedly complained to her son about the unfairness of the situation, and he thinks perhaps Mandrakes are the answer to his mother's unhappiness.

In Hebrew, the word translated mandrake, is *duda'im*. And while much folklore is attached to the aphrodisiac powers of mandrakes, they *were* widely used for real, and useful, medicines. A mandrake bears a small, cherry tomato-like fruit that ripens about the same time as the wheat harvest. It has a very heavy fragrance. Aphrodite, the Greek Goddess of love, had a nickname of "the Lady of the Mandrake". What is interesting is that since Hebrew is a root-word based language, we find that the word for mandrake, *duda'im*, is an offshoot of a Hebrew word *dodai*, which means, "love". So, in the Song of Solomon, for instance, we'll see a play on those two words in which it is said....
"Therefore, I will give my *dodai* (love) to you.....as the *duda'im* (mandrakes) gives off their fragrance..."

But, as we're about to see, while the Scriptures don't directly SAY that the use of mandrakes for the purposes Leah and Rachel had in mind are just ridiculous superstition, it does make a point of demonstrating that, when we see that the one who gave up the

³¹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

mandrakes, Leah, is the one who produces 3 more children, while Rachel, the one who wound up with the mandrakes, remains barren for a few more years. So, Rachel, upon seeing the Mandrakes her nephew, Rueben, had gathered, never even considering Leah's feelings, says, hey, why don't you give me some of those. Leah says, yeah right, so YOU can go sleep with MY husband. Yikes. What to do? Well, in what must have passed for wisdom between the two of them, Leah gives Rachel the Mandrakes in exchange for Rachel agreeing that it will be Leah that sleeps with Jacob that night. Wow.....talk about R rated.³²

Genesis 30:17

And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son.

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.

Thus Leah hired Jacob with the plants and had a son **Issachar**. Issachar is explained by *siekartika* ("my hire," KJV).

[Issachar] Issachar means "my hire" or "my reward." Leah reasoned that God rewarded her for giving her maid to Jacob, and repaid her for having lost his affections to Rachel (Genesis 30:17-18 with Genesis 30:15). Hence a satisfaction or compensation for work done

Genesis 30:19

And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son.

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.

Missler: The name of Leah's sixth son **Zebulun**, has the double significance of dowry or "gift" as well as "honor"; Leah said God gave her Zebulun as a gift and her husband would treat her with honor. Thus Leah's hopes never left her. [Zebulun: that is, "dwelling": Gr. *Zabulon*.]³³

[Zebulun] Zebulun means "dwelling" or "cohabitation." Leah concluded that since she and her maid had borne eight of the ten sons thus far, Jacob would love and dwell with her as he had formerly with Rachel (Genesis 30:20 with Genesis 30:15).

³² Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

³³ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

And Leah said, God hath endued me with a good dowry—The birth of a son is hailed with demonstrations of joy, and the possession of several sons confers upon the mother an honor and respectability proportioned to their number. The husband attaches a similar importance to the possession, and it forms a bond of union which renders it impossible for him ever to forsake or to be cold to a wife who has borne him sons. This explains the happy anticipations Leah founded on the possession of her six sons.³⁴

Genesis 30:21

And afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name Dinah.

Then Dinah, a daughter, was born to her. [Dinah = Judgment.

[**afterwards**] "Afterwards" evidently means that in the next year she had Dinah.

[**Dinah**] Dinah means "vindicated." Leah may have believed God was vindicating her in the struggle with Rachel over Jacob's affections.

afterwards, she bare a daughter—The inferior value set on a daughter is displayed in the bare announcement of the birth.

Torah Class: Anyway, Leah gets pregnant and then gives birth to Issachar, which means, "he (God) brings reward". V18 informs us that this confused woman actually decided that Issachar was God's **reward** to her for her having given to Jacob her servant-girl as a concubine. Talk about a dysfunctional family....(makes me feel better just telling you the story).

Anyway, Leah then goes on to give Jacob another son, Zebulun, meaning "dwelling". Why dwelling? Because Leah thought for sure that since her child-bearing score card far outpaced her sister Rachel's, that Jacob would dwell with her in preference to, or even perhaps to the exclusion of, Rachel! Next, we have that exception to the rule of the Bible usually only recording the sons that were born; a girl, Dinah, is born to Leah. After that, it's Rachel's turn and she gives birth to Joseph, whose name is a very interesting word play in the original Hebrew as used here in these verses.³⁵

Genesis 30:22

And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.

[**God hearkened to her**] Rachel, like others, was praying and struggling inwardly concerning her barrenness. God heard her prayers. After the severe reproof which Rachel had received from her husband, Genesis 30:2, it appears that she sought God by prayer, and that he heard her; so that her prayer and faith obtained what her impatience and unbelief had prevented.

³⁴ JFB Commentary

³⁵ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

What Rachel does with the mandrakes she buys is strangely unreported. One expects them to play a role in her overcoming her infertility but it is God alone who is given credit for that. His remembering her underscores her favored status (cf.8:1). On the basis of a word for “remembering” in Lev. 23-24 (translated “commemorated”), the Talmud dates Rachel’s conceiving (as well as Sarah’s [see 21:1-8n.] and Hannah’s) to Rosh Ha-Shanah. The matriarchs thus play a prominent role in the traditional Rosh He-Shanah liturgy.³⁶

Finally, God enabled Rachel to have a child. The three verbs, **remembered**, **listened**, and **opened**, emphasize that conception is a gift from God.

Genesis 30:23

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

Genesis 30:24

And she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son.

Finally Rachel gave birth to **Joseph** (*yosep*) but not by the mandrakes. This shows that births are given by God, not manipulated by people. Joseph’s name, like Zebulun’s, had a double meaning: she said, God has taken away (*’asap*) my disgrace; and she prayed that He would add (*yosep*) another son. Finally Rachel was jubilant, looking in faith for a second child from God. [Joseph = Adding.]

The Patriarchs		In Egypt?
Reuben	Looked, affliction	Moses: Ex 2:25 looked..affliction 3:7 “Heard my cry” Ex 3:7
Simeon	Hearing; Heard	When was YHWH “joined?”
Levi	Husband; joined	Passover, Jer 31:31,32 Ex 5:11; Ps 106:11,12
Judah	Praise	
		In Wilderness?
Dan	Judged; judgment	Wilderness: Meribah
Naphtali	Wrestlings; prevailed	At Amalek Ex 17:11
		In the Land?
Gad	Troop cometh	Nations oppose Israel
Asher	Happy	Overthrow
Issachar	Hire; service	Occupation
Zebulon	Dwelling	Occupation
		Kingdom?
Joseph	Adding	
Benjamin	Son of my right hand	

³⁶ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

[Joseph] Joseph means "adding." Rachel predicted God would give her another son.

[The LORD shall add to me another son] This is the 41st prophecy in Genesis (Genesis 30:24, fulfilled in Benjamin, Genesis 35:16-20). The next prophecy is in Genesis 31:3. The first recorded prophecy by a woman. Rachel predicted that she would have another son.

Eventually God answered Rachel's prayers and gave her a child of her own. In the meantime, however, she had given her maidservant to Jacob. Trusting God when nothing seems to happen is difficult. But it is harder still to live with the consequences of taking matters into our own hands. Resist the temptation to think God has forgotten you. Have patience and courage to wait for God to act.³⁷

Torah Class: Look at verse 23. Speaking about Rachel, it says that she gave birth to a son, Rachel announced that "God as taken away my disgrace". The Hebrew word translated as taken away is *asaf*. In the next verse, 24, Rachel goes on to say that she therefore would name him *yosef*, because the Lord ADDED another son to her. *Yosef* means, "to add". *Asaf*, take away, *yosef*, add. This was a prophetic name for Joseph, because in a few years Joseph would be taken away from his father, and then many years after that added back in.

It's interesting to note, here, as I mentioned at the beginning of this lesson, that **all** but ONE of Jacob's sons would be born while he was still in bond-servitude to Laban, and while still living up in Haran of Mesopotamia. So, just as the sons of Israel would be born outside of the promised land, so would they be held captive and grow into a nation outside of the promised land, in Egypt.³⁸

Genesis 30:25

And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.

[when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away] This proves that Leah's six sons and a daughter, Bilhah's two sons, Zilpah's two sons, and Rachel's first son were all born during the fourteen years Jacob lived with his wives; for when Joseph was born Jacob desired to return to Canaan, but was persuaded to stay at Haran six more years

Jacob's request. A woman's status in the family would be very tenuous if she had not borne children. A barren woman could be and often was discarded, ostracized or given a lower status and would find protection in her relatives. Now that Rachel's status in Jacob's family is established, Jacob feels free to request permission to leave.³⁹

³⁷ Life Application Notes

³⁸ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

³⁹ Bible Background Commentary

when Rachel had born Joseph—Shortly after the birth of this son, Jacob's term of servitude expired, and feeling anxious to establish an independence for his family, he probably, from knowing that Esau was out of the way, announced his intention of returning to Canaan (Hebrews 13:14). In this resolution the faith of Jacob was remarkable, for as yet he had nothing to rely on but the promise of God (compare Genesis 28:15).⁴⁰

Genesis 30:26

Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee.

[wives] Polygamy

Polygamy is forbidden in the New Testament (Matthew 19:4-5; Mark 10:2-8; 1 Tim. 3:2,12; Titus 1:6; see Acts 17:30), but was tolerated in the Old Testament (Exodus 21:10; 1 Samuel 1; 2 Samuel 12:8; 2 Chron. 24:3), and practiced (Genesis 4:19; Genesis 16:1-4; Genesis 25:1-6; Genesis 26:34; Genesis 28:9; Genesis 29:16-28; Judges 8:30; 1 Samuel 1:2; 1 Samuel 25:39-44; 2 Samuel 3:2-5; 2 Samuel 5:13; 2 Samuel 12:8; 1 Kings 11; 1 Chron. 4:5; 1 Chron. 14:3; Job 27:15). During Armageddon, women will desire it (Isaiah 4:1). See the evil effects of polygamy (Genesis 16:1-4; Genesis 29:20-30:26; Deut. 17:17; 1 Samuel 1:1-10; 1 Kings 11:1-11; 2 Chron. 11:21).⁴¹

(Isaiah 4:1) *And in that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own apparel: only let us be called by thy name, to take away our reproach.*

The underlying assumption seems to be that Jacob had accepted the status of an indentured servant. This, he could not leave without his master's permission and his wives and children would belong to the master (Exod. 21:2-4; cf. Gen 31:43). The verb translated Give me leave serves as the standard term for manumission in the story of the exodus (e.g., Exod. 4:23).⁴²

Genesis 30:27

And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake.

[LORD hath blessed me] Seven examples of seeing God prosper men:

1. Abimelech saw God with Isaac (Genesis 26:28)
2. Laban saw God with Jacob (Genesis 30:27)

⁴⁰ JFB Commentary

⁴¹ Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

⁴² The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

3. Potiphar saw God with Joseph (Genesis 39:3)
4. The jailer saw God with Joseph (Genesis 39:23)
5. Egyptians saw God with Joseph (Genesis 41:39)
6. Saul saw God with David (1 Samuel 18:28)
7. Israel saw God with Solomon (1 Kings 3:28)

[for thy sake] Another example of God blessing for man's sake, not for His own sake (cp. [□]Genesis 26:24, note).

Chumash; Classic Question: “How much did Laban prosper due to Jacob?

Zohar: I have found out by divining, that God has blessed me because of you. Laban used magic and sorcery and tested his mazal to see if [he was blessed] because of Jacob. He found that due to Jacob he received an additional hundred sheep, a hundred lambs, and a hundred male goats to his flocks every month.⁴³

divination of Laban. An Israelite reader would have been struck by Laban’s suggestion that Yahweh has given information by means of divination. There is no mention of what type of divination Laban used, but all divination was later forbidden under the law. Divination assumed that there was knowledge to be gained about the activities and motives of the gods through the use of various indicators (such as entrails of sacrificed animals). It operated in a worldview that was contrary to that promoted in the Bible. Nevertheless, God occasionally chooses to use such methods, as the Bethlehem star attests.⁴⁴

Laban claimed to have learned by divination that God had blessed him because of Jacob. In other words, he thought his idols had given him this insight.⁴⁵

Laban said . . . I have learned—His selfish uncle was averse to a separation, not from warmth of affection either for Jacob or his daughters, but from the damage his own interests would sustain. He had found, from long observation, that the blessing of heaven rested on Jacob, and that his stock had wonderfully increased under Jacob's management. This was a remarkable testimony that good men are blessings to the places where they reside. Men of the world are often blessed with temporal benefits on account of their pious relatives, though they have not always, like Laban, the wisdom to discern, or the grace to acknowledge it.⁴⁶

Even Laban, ascertaining the divine will by a method that is later prohibited (Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10), can see that Jacob is a graced person who brings good luck to those around him (cf. 2 Sam. 6:12).⁴⁷

⁴³ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

⁴⁴ Bible Background Commentary

⁴⁵ Life Application Notes

⁴⁶ JFB Commentary

⁴⁷ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

McGee: This is quite interesting. You may recall that Abimelech, king of Gerar, found that he was blessed when Isaac was in his midst. Now Uncle Laban has discovered that God is with Jacob and has blessed him for Jacob's sake. So Uncle Laban says, "My boy, don't rush off; don't leave me. I've been blessed, and I want to raise your wages."⁴⁸

Chumash; Sparks of Chasidus: Laban's Blessing:

The first opinion of the Zohar perceived the non-Jew to be secondary to the Jew. Therefore, Laban received an inferior blessing to Jacob.

R' Abba on the other hand took a deeper approach, seeing the non-Jew not as an assistant but as a crucial partner in a Jew's observance of torah and mitzvos. Therefore, Laban was able to share a part of Jacob's personal blessing.⁴⁹

Genesis 30:28

And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it.

According to Deut. 15:12-15, the master is obligated to endow his newly manumitted indentured servant liberally.⁵⁰

Genesis 30:29

And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me.

Genesis 30:30

For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude; and the LORD hath blessed thee since my coming: and now when shall I provide for mine own house also?

For it was little which thou had before I came—Jacob takes advantage of the concession made by his father-in-law, and asserts that it was for his sake that the Lord had blessed him: Since my coming, according to my footsteps—every step I took in thy service, God prospered to the multiplication of thy flocks and property.⁵¹

When shall I provide for mine own house—Jacob had already laid his plan; and, from what is afterwards mentioned, we find him using all his skill and experience to provide for his family by a rapid increase of his flocks.

⁴⁸McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:124). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁴⁹Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

⁵⁰The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

⁵¹Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Olt Testament

Election, Other Nations—Laban learned through actions forbidden to Israel (Lev 19:26; Dt 18:10, 14) that his rich blessings from God came through his association with Jacob. Covenant and election brought blessings to all associated with Jacob (27:29). Other nations were not the elect through whom God chose to work. God was concerned for them and was seeking to bless them.⁵²

McGee: Listen to Jacob complaining. He is singing the blues! He is saying, “All I’ve got out of all this service for you are two wives with their two maids and a house full of boys.” In fact, he has eleven boys at this point. What in the world is he going to do? How is he going to feed them? He says, “God has blessed *you* and He has prospered *you*, and I don’t have anything.”⁵³

Genesis 30:31

And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed *and* keep thy flock.

Jacob agreed that God had blessed Laban (v. 30). Thus Jacob proposed a plan by which (ostensibly) he would gain little.

[Thou shalt not give me any thing] I won't take any wages but what God's providence gives me (Psalm 118:8; Hebrews 13:5).

Genesis 30:32

I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and *of such* shall be my hire.

[speckled] Speckled young produced by white dams (Genesis 30:35; Genesis 31:8). Eastern sheep were almost uniformly white, and goats black and brown; spotted animals of either kind were rare.

I will pass through all thy flock to-day—Eastern sheep being generally white, the goats black, and spotted or speckled ones comparatively few and rare, Jacob proposed to remove all existing ones of that description from the flock, and to be content with what might appear at the next lambing time. The proposal *seemed* so much in favor of Laban, that he at once agreed to it. But Jacob has been accused of taking advantage of his uncle, and though it is difficult to exculpate him from practising some degree of dissimulation, he was only availing himself of the results of his great skill and experience in the breeding of cattle. But it is evident from the next chapter (Genesis 31:5-13) that there was

⁵² Disciple’s Study Bible

⁵³ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:124). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

something miraculous and that the means he had employed had been suggested by a divine intimation.⁵⁴

Removing It was God's control over the breeding process operating through the laws of heredity, not Jacob's highly dubious scheme of prenatal influence, that produced the increase in the colored animal progeny. Cp. Gen 31:11-12, where the angel of the LORD showed Jacob what was really happening: "See, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are striped, speckled and spotted." This is recognized by Jacob's own testimony: "Thus God has taken away the cattle of your father" (31:9).⁵⁵

McGee: In other words, the pure breeds will be Laban's, but the offbreeds, those that are not blue-ribbon cattle, will be Jacob's. Jacob said, "You just let me have these, and that will be my wages." That sounds like a pretty good proposition for Laban.⁵⁶

Genesis 30:33

So shall my righteousness answer for me in time to come, when it shall come for my hire before thy face: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the sheep, that shall be counted stolen with me.

Jacob's plan was most risky. Nevertheless he was looking out for his own interests, hoping to prosper from this.

sheep breeding. The coloring chosen by Jacob (dark lambs and variegated goats) generally made up a very small proportion of the herd. Jacob seems to be settling for a share that was far smaller than usual, in that contracts of the day designated sometimes as much as 20 percent of new births for the shepherd (Bedouin studies today suggest that 10 percent is common). Byproducts (wool, milk products) are not mentioned here, but a percentage of those were also often part of the shepherd's compensation.⁵⁷

Genesis 30:34

And Laban said, Behold, I would it might be according to thy word.

⁵⁴ JFB Commentary

⁵⁵ New Scofield Study Bible

⁵⁶ McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:124). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵⁷ Bible Background Commentary

Genesis 30:35

And he removed that day the he goats that were ringstreaked and spotted, and all the she goats that were speckled and spotted, and every one that had *some* white in it, and all the brown among the sheep, and gave *them* into the hand of his sons.

[And he removed that day the he goats that were ringstraked and spotted, and all the she goats that were speckled and spotted, and every one that had some white in it, and all the brown among the sheep] Laban agreed to Jacob's terms, but removed these colors from the flocks at the beginning of the agreement, thinking that no more would be produced by the ones left to Jacob. This way he would have Jacob's services for little or nothing. Thus, Jacob began with flocks containing not one of the kind he had requested for his wages.

[his sons] How many sons Laban had is not known. Jacob had eleven by this time (Genesis 30:22-28).

Clarke: It is extremely difficult to find out, from Genesis 30:32 and Genesis 30:35, in what the bargain of Jacob with his father-in-law properly consisted. It appears from Genesis 30:32, that Jacob was to have for his wages all the speckled, spotted, and brown among the sheep and the goats; and of course that all those which were not party-colored should be considered as the property of Laban. But in Genesis 30:35 it appears that Laban separated all the party-colored cattle, delivered them into the hands of his own sons; which seems as if he had taken these for his own property, and left the others to Jacob. It has been conjectured that Laban, for the greater security, when he had separated the party-colored, which by the agreement belonged to Jacob, see Genesis 30:32, put them under the care of his own sons, while Jacob fed the flock of Laban, Genesis 30:36, three days' journey being between the two flocks. If therefore the flocks under the care of Laban's sons brought forth young that were all of one color, these were put to the flocks of Laban under the care of Jacob; and if any of the flocks under Jacob's care brought forth party-colored young, they were put to the flocks belonging to Jacob under the care of Laban's sons. This conjecture is not satisfactory, and the true meaning appears to be this: Jacob had agreed to take all the party-colored for his wages. As he was now only beginning to act upon this agreement, consequently none of the cattle as yet belonged to him; therefore Laban separated from the flock, Genesis 30:35, all such cattle as Jacob might afterwards claim in consequence of his bargain, (for as yet he had no right); therefore Jacob commenced his service to Laban with a flock that did not contain a single animal of the description of those to which he might be entitled; and the others were sent away under the care of Laban's sons, three days' journey from those of which Jacob had the care. The bargain, therefore, seemed to be wholly in favor of Laban; and to turn it to his own advantage, Jacob made use of the stratagems afterwards mentioned. This mode of interpretation removes all the apparent contradiction between Genesis 30:32 and Genesis 30:35, with which commentators in general have been grievously perplexed. From the whole account we learn that Laban acted with great prudence and caution, and Jacob with great judgment. Jacob had already served fourteen years; and had got no patrimony whatever, though he had now a family of twelve children, eleven sons and one daughter, besides his two wives, and their two maids, and several servants. See Genesis

30:43. It was high time that he should get some property for these; and as his father-in-law was excessively parsimonious, and would scarcely allow him to live, he was in some sort obliged to make use of stratagem to get an equivalent for his services. But did he not push this so far as to ruin his father-in-law's flocks, leaving him nothing but the refuse? See Genesis 30:42.⁵⁸

Genesis 30:36

And he set three days' journey betwixt himself and Jacob: and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

Laban thought this over and quickly closed the deal (v. 34). He could see only advantages for himself. But Laban's ploy added to the risk. For greater advantage, Laban immediately removed all the animals of abnormal color, giving them to his sons and not to Jacob. And as an additional precaution he placed a three-day journey between them. Thus he was seeking to ensure that Jacob would have a difficult time acquiring a large herd.

[three days journey] This would be about fifty miles from Jacob.

[rest of Laban's flocks] All the flocks separated from the kind Jacob was to receive as wages (Genesis 30:31-35).

Genesis 30:37

And Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chestnut tree; and pilled white streaks in them, and made the white appear which *was* in the rods.

[Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chestnut tree] Here Jacob tampered with nature but whether this caused him any prosperity is not certain, because Genesis 31:4-13 indicates that God was helping him. Laban had deceived him by changing his wages ten times, but God saw to it that Jacob received his just compensation (Genesis 31:5,7,9,11-12).

[pilled] Literally, "peeled a peeling," meaning he made white stripes in the rods by laying the white wood bare (Genesis 30:37).

Jacob took rods, There are many varieties of the hazel, some of which are more erect than the common hazel, and it was probably one of these varieties Jacob employed. The styles are of a bright red color, when peeled; and along with them he took wands of other shrubs, which, when stripped of the bark, had white streaks. These, kept constantly before the eyes of the female at the time of gestation, his observation had taught him would have an influence, through the imagination, on the future offspring.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

⁵⁹ JFB Commentary

Jacob's strange plan to produce sheep and cattle which would be colored according to his request may have been viewed at the time as a sound procedure. It was not the reason, however, for the successful growth of Jacob's herd. Even Jacob later recognized that the sovereign, providential blessings of God were responsible for this growth (cf. 31:11, 12; 32:10).⁶⁰

Genesis 30:38

And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink, that they should conceive when they came to drink.

And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks—It has long been an opinion that whatever makes a strong impression on the mind of a female in the time of conception and gestation, will have a corresponding influence on the mind or body of the fetus. This opinion is not yet rationally accounted for. It is not necessary to look for a miracle here; for though the fact has not been accounted for, it is nevertheless sufficiently plain that the effect does not exceed the powers of nature; and I have no doubt that the same modes of trial used by Jacob would produce the same results in similar cases. The finger of God works in nature myriads of ways unknown to us; we see effects without end, of which no rational cause can be assigned; it has pleased God to work thus and thus, and this is all that we know; and God mercifully hides the operations of his power from man in a variety of eases, that he may hide pride from him. Even with the little we know, how apt are we to be puffed up! We must adore God in a reverential silence on such subjects as these, confess our ignorance, and acknowledge that nature is the instrument by which he chooses to work, and that he performs all things according to the counsel of his own will, which is always infinitely wise and infinitely good.⁶¹

Genesis 30:39

And the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle ringstreaked, speckled, and spotted.

Missler: God blessed Jacob in an unusual way. Here there is a wordplay on the name Laban for as Jacob peeled back the bark on the sticks and exposed the white (*laban*), he saw his flocks grow. He played the Laban game and won—he outwitted “Whitey.” Clearly, as Jacob later admitted (31:7-12), God intervened to fulfill the expectations Jacob had in the branches. The peeled branches, placed in the watering troughs, appeared to make his animals reproductive as they mated in front of the troughs. It is reported that especially in the case of sheep, whatever fixes their attention in copulation is marked upon the young. Also, lambs conceived in the spring and born in the autumn were stronger than those born in the spring. [For authorities that suggest support of these

⁶⁰ Believer's Study Bible

⁶¹ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

practices (including Bochart, Pliny, Columella, et al) see C. F. Keil & F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol 1, p.293-4].⁶²

[conceived] Hebrew: *yacham* (HSN-3179), be in heat. When translated conceived it is only used of animals except in Psalm 51:5.

use of rods. Jacob's solution to Laban's treachery contains elements of scientific breeding and folklore tradition. Clearly, shepherds would have been aware of the estrus cycle of their sheep (which runs from June to September), and observation would have demonstrated that breeding healthy animals would produce vigorous lambs. What is not scientific, however, is the principle that certain characteristics (coloration in this case) can be bred for through visual aids. The striped rods which Jacob places before the troughs of the sheep cannot genetically affect the sheep. This type of sympathetic magic is found in many folk traditions (including modern tales of colors worn by a mother determining the sex of her child). It plays a part in the trickster theme of this narrative and is reflective of a culture which depended on a mixture of magical and commonsense methods to produce results.⁶³

It is unclear what this method was or how it worked. Some say that there was a belief among herdsmen that vivid impressions at mating time influenced the offspring. Most likely, the selective breeding and God's promise of provision were the main reasons that Jacob's flocks increased.⁶⁴

Genesis 30:40

And Jacob did separate the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the ringstreaked, and all the brown in the flock of Laban; and he put his own flocks by themselves, and put them not unto Laban's cattle.

Jacob did separate the lambs, etc.—When Jacob undertook the care of Laban's flock, according to the agreement already mentioned, there were no party-colored sheep or goats among them, therefore the ring-streaked, etc., mentioned in this verse, must have been born since the agreement was made; and Jacob makes use of them precisely as he used the pilled rods, that, having these before their eyes during conception, the impression might be made upon their imagination which would lead to the results already mentioned.⁶⁵

Cyril of Alexandria: "Those who belong to Christ"

There is no association between the holy and the profane, between the pure and the impure. Those who belong to Christ are separated and refuse to mix with those who are in the world; they are free from carnal desires. They are marked by their way of life or

⁶² Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

⁶³ Bible Background Commentary

⁶⁴ Life Application Notes

⁶⁵ Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

rather are distinguished by their virtue. “The unmarked ones were Laban’s and the marked ones were Jacob’s” (Glaphyra on Genesis, 5:4)⁶⁶

Genesis 30:41

And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger cattle did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the cattle in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods.

In addition, Jacob used selective breeding by mating the stronger animals for himself and the weak female goats and sheep for Laban. But this was not the only time God’s part in Jacob’s success was much greater than it seemed to an observer.

Genesis 30:42

But when the cattle were feeble, he put *them* not in: so the feebler were Laban’s, and the stronger Jacob’s.

Laban proves his offer to have been in bad faith, but Jacob overcomes the trickery with a clever technique of his own. The basis for Jacob’s actions in vv. 37-42 is the folkloristic belief that what animals see while mating determines the appearance of their young. Thus, when the goats (which are ordinarily dark in the Near East) see the white of the shoots (v.37; the word for white is the same as Laban’s name), they conceive kids with patches of white. Similarly, Jacob positioned the sheep (which are normally white) in view of the streaked or wholly dark-colored animals (v.40), so that they would bear lambs with dark patches. Thus was the master trickster Laban finally and justly tricked, and thus did Jacob, by the blessing of God and by his own ingenuity, achieve the wealth that had been characteristic of his grandfather and father as well (13:2; 26:13-14). The refugee is becoming a patriarch.⁶⁷

Genesis 30:43

And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.

Missler: So Jacob was greatly prospered in fulfillment of God’s promise at Bethel, and at the expense of Laban, who now received in part the recompense due him. A fascinating struggle developed between Jacob and Laban. Laban’s injustice and artifice preceded Jacob’s project, just as Isaac’s attempt to bless Esau had earlier prompted Jacob’s deception. In both cases the attempt to defraud Jacob was actually overcome by Jacob. Afterward, however, Jacob viewed his real gain as divine blessing, though he had to accept the effects (fear and danger) of his craftiness.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Genesis, Thomas C. Oden, Intervarsity Press

⁶⁷ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

⁶⁸ Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

Torah Class: Fourteen years, 7 years each for his two wives, have passed and Jacob is ready to have his bond-servitude acknowledged as paid-in-full by Laban. But, the ever-crafty, greedy Laban is not ready for Jacob to leave for he has profited greatly by Jacob's presence. Laban is a pagan spiritualist: that is, he believes in the spirit world. He believes there are MANY gods in the spirit world.and he believes that Jacob's god is but ONE of these gods. So, in V27 Laban invokes Jacob's God and says that he has "spiritually divined" (divining things of the spiritual world are what psychics and mediums so) that it is Jacob's God that has caused all the great increase in the herds and flocks to occur: which is most certainly true, but Laban is just saying it to get Jacob to stay.

So, here we see two masters of deception, Jacob and Laban, do battle with one another. Jacob employs the thing he knows best, tending flocks and herds, to his advantage against the apparently ignorant Laban. He says he'll stay for a while more if he is given all the speckled and spotted sheep AND goats. The clever Jacob convinces Laban the reason for this is that it makes it easy to both identify which animals belong to him and which belong to Laban, and to identify the INCREASE of the two flocks. In reality, Jacob knows he can make his own flock increase more, and Laban will never be able cheat him by saying some of those animals are his because their coloring sets them apart. The deal about the sticks that seem to make the animals breed and produce spotted, stripped, and speckled offspring has been called by Bible scholars anything from rank superstition, up to the ancient way of promoting Mendelaen genetic breeding.

Now, more is at work here than meets the eye.but these subtleties are automatically disguised by the translation from Hebrew to other languages. Notice that the emphasis in these passages is on color; specifically, the color of the animals would determine whether the animal belonged to Jacob or Lavan. And, the gist is that the all white sheep, and the all-dark goats go to Laban; while the goats that had white spots or streaks in their dark hair, and the white sheep that had some dark spots in their wool, are to go to Jacob. It must be understood that sheep were usually pure white, and goat's normally dark brown or black. Implicit is that Lavan had a big preference for the white animals. . . . sheep; why? Because white, for sheep, was the norm, and no spots of dark color normally occurred on sheep. It was the reverse for goats: they were always dark and only rarely had white spots on them. So, if it was all white, it was to go to Laban, and practically all the sheep were white. In Hebrew, the word white is Lavan. Get it? Jacob's father-in-law's name means, "white". And, all the "white" animals were to go to Mr. White.

Lavan's expectation was that the amount of sheep born all white would vastly outnumber those who had dark spots on them; ditto for the amount of dark colored goats that would greatly outnumber those who had white spots. That the herds of spotted goats and sheep increased as much or more than the all white sheep or all dark goats, infuriated Lavan. The white spots and white streaks on the goats denote that Jacob got the best of Lavan in a very visible way. This was a very open insult to Lavan, and it would quickly fester into a big problem, because it would stare him in the face every day. In the end, Jacob grew far superior flocks and herds to Laban's, and Jacob became greatly prosperous as a result. The servant had become greater than his master. All this did nothing but exacerbate an already dangerous rift between Lavan's clan and Jacob's growing family. Trouble was just over the horizon.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

Chumash: Toras Menachem: “the maids”

After God blessed Jacob with “extremely fertile flocks,” Jacob would soon have been unable to tend to them singlehandedly. Thus, the first purchase that Jacob made with the money raised from the sale of his flocks would have been servants, to help him attend the flocks. Therefore, when Rashi lists Jacob acquisitions he places servants first, as this would surely have been Jacob’s first purchase. But he begs the question: If Jacob purchased servants first then why does our verse 43, mention maid before servants?⁷⁰

Jacob grows wealthy. After strained negotiations about payment for Jacob’s services, Laban agrees to his son-in-law’s terms, but then tries to cheat him anyway. Jacob outsmarts Laban, cleverly arranging for the rapid proliferation of his own share of the flocks.⁷¹

Born to Leah:

1. Reuben
2. Simeon
3. Levi
4. Judah
5. Issachar
6. Zebulun
7. Dinah, daughter

Born to Bilhah, Rachel’s maid:

1. Dan
2. Naphtali

Born to Zilpah, Leah’s maid:

1. Gad
2. Asher

Born to Rachel:

1. Joseph
2. Benjamin

Clarke Summary: No wonder, when he used such means as the above. And had maid-servants, and men-servants—he was obliged to increase these as his cattle multiplied. And camels and asses, to transport his tents, baggage, and family from place to place, being obliged often to remove for the benefit of pasturage.

We have already seen many difficulties in this chapter, and strange incidents, for which we are not able to account. 1. The vicarious bearing of children; 2. The nature and properties of the mandrakes; 3. The bargain of Jacob and Laban; and 4. The business of the party-coloured flocks produced by means of the females looking at the variegated rods. These, especially the three last, may be ranked among the most difficult things in

⁷⁰ Chumash, The Gutnick Edition, Genesis, Rabbi Chaim Miller, Published by Kol Menachem

⁷¹ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

this book. Without encumbering the page with quotations and opinions, I have given the best sense I could; and think it much better and safer to confess ignorance, than, under the semblance of wisdom and learning, to multiply conjectures. Jacob certainly manifested much address in the whole of his conduct with Laban; but though nothing can excuse overreaching or insincerity, yet no doubt Jacob supposed himself justified in taking these advantages of a man who had greatly injured and defrauded him. Had Jacob got Rachel at first, for whom he had honestly and faithfully served seven years, there is no evidence whatever that he would have taken a second wife. Laban, by having imposed his eldest daughter upon him, and by obliging him to serve seven years for her who never was an object of his affection, acted a part wholly foreign to every dictate of justice and honesty; (for though it was a custom in that country not to give the younger daughter in marriage before the elder, yet, as he did not mention this to Jacob, it cannot plead in his excuse); therefore, speaking after the manner of men, he had reason to expect that Jacob should repay him in his own coin, and right himself by whatever means came into his power; and many think that he did not transgress the bounds of justice, even in the business of the party-coloured cattle.

The talent possessed by Jacob was a most dangerous one; he was what may be truly called a scheming man; his wits were still at work, and as he devised so he executed, being as fruitful in expedients as he was in plans. This was the principal and the most prominent characteristic of his life; and whatever was excessive here was owing to his mother's tuition; she was evidently a woman who paid little respect to what is called moral principle, and sanctified all kinds of means by the goodness of the end at which she aimed; which in social, civil, and religious life, is the most dangerous principle on which a person can possibly act. In this art she appears to have instructed her son; and, unfortunately for himself, he was in some instances but too apt a proficient. Early habits are not easily rooted out, especially those of a bad kind. Next to the influence and grace of the Spirit of God is a good and religious education. Parents should teach their children to despise and abhor low cunning, to fear a lie, and tremble at an oath; and in order to be successful, they should illustrate their precepts by their own regular and conscientious example. How far God approved of the whole of Jacob's conduct I shall not inquire; it is certain that he attributes his success to Divine interposition, and God himself censures Laban's conduct towards him; see Genesis 31:7-12. But still he appears to have proceeded farther than this interposition authorized him to go, especially in the means he used to improve his own breed, which necessarily led to the deterioration of Laban's cattle; for, after the transactions referred to above, these cattle could be of but little worth. The whole account, with all its lights and shades, I consider as another proof of the impartiality of the Divine historian, and a strong evidence of the authenticity of the Pentateuch. Neither the spirit of deceit, nor the partiality of friendship, could ever pen such an⁷²

⁷² Adam Clarke's Commentary on the Old Testament

Alfred Edersheim, Bible History, Old Testament

We do not suppose that Rachel, who had no children of her own, waited all this time without seeking to remove what she enviously and jealously regarded as her sister's advantage. Indeed, the sacred text nowhere indicates that the children of Jacob were born in the exact succession of time in which their names are recorded. On the contrary, we have every reason to suppose that such was not the case. It quite agrees with the petulant, querulous language of Rachel, that she waited not so long, but that so soon as she really found herself at this disadvantage compared with her sister, she persuaded her husband to make her a mother through Bilhah, her own maid, as Sarah had done in the case of Hagar. Thus the sins of the parents too often reappear in the conduct of their successors. Instead of waiting upon God, or giving himself to prayer, Jacob complied with the desire of his Rachel, and her maid successively bore two sons, whom Rachel named "Dan," or "judging," as if God had judged her wrong, and "Naphtali," or "my wrestling," saying: "With great wrestling have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed." In both instances we mark her gratified jealousy of her sister; and that, although she owned God, it was not as Jehovah, but as Elohim, the God of nature, not the covenant-God of the promise.

Once again the evil example of a sister, and its supposed success, proved infectious. When Leah perceived that she no longer became as before, a mother, and probably without waiting till both Rachel's adopted sons had been born, she imitated the example of her sister, and gave to Jacob her own maid Zilpah as wife. Her declension in faith further appears also in the names which she chose for the sons of Zilpah. At the birth of the eldest, she exclaimed, "Good fortune cometh,"* and hence called him "Gad," or "good fortune;" the same idea being expressed in the name of the second, Asher, or "happy." Neither did Leah in all this remember God, but only thought of the success of her own device. But the number of children now granted to the two sisters neither removed their mutual jealousies, nor restored peace to the house of Jacob. Most painful scenes occurred; and when at length Leah again gave birth to two sons, she recognized, indeed, God in their names, but now, like her sister, only Elohim, not Jehovah; while she seemed to see in the first of them a reward for giving Zilpah to her husband, whence the child's name was called Issachar ("he gives," or "he brings reward"); while she regarded her last-born son, Zebulun, or "dwelling," as a pledge that since she had borne him six sons, her husband would now dwell with her!

* This is the correct translation; or else after another reading: "With good luck!"

It has already been stated that we must not regard the order in which the birth of Jacob's children is mentioned as indicating their actual succession.* They are rather so enumerated, partly to show the varying motives of the two sisters, and partly to group together the sons of different mothers. That the scriptural narrative is not intended to represent the actual succession of the children appears also from the circumstance, that the birth of an only daughter, Dinah ("judgment") is mentioned immediately after that of Zebulun. The wording of the Hebrew text here implies that Dinah was born at a later period ("afterwards"), and, indeed, she alone is mentioned on account of her connection

with Jacob's later history, though we have reason to believe that Jacob had other daughters (See Genesis 37:35, and 46:7), whose names and history are not mentioned.

* In Jacob's last blessing (Genesis 49) we find quite a different succession of his sons; this time also with a view to the purposes of the narrative, rather than to chronological order.

And now at last better thoughts seem to have come to Rachel. When we read that in giving her a son of her own, "God hearkened to her," we are warranted in inferring that believing prayer had taken in her heart the former place of envy and jealousy of her sister. The son whom she now bore, in the fourteenth year of Jacob's servitude to Laban, was called Joseph, a name which has a double meaning: "the remover," because, as she said, "God hath taken away my reproach," and "adding," since she regarded her child as a pledge that God - this time "Jehovah" - "shall add to me another son." The object of Jacob's prolonged stay with his father-in-law was now accomplished. Fourteen years' servitude to Laban left him as poor as when first he had come to him. The wants of his increasing family, and the better understanding now established in his family, must have pointed out to him the desirableness of returning to his own country. But when he intimated this wish to his father-in-law, Laban was unwilling to part with one by whom he had so largely profited. With a characteristic confusion of heathen ideas with a dim knowledge of the being of Jehovah, Laban said to Jacob (we here translate literally): "If I have found grace in thy sight (i.e. tarry), for I have divined* (ascertained by magic), and Jehovah hath blessed me for thy sake." The same attempt to place Jehovah as the God of Abraham by the side of the god of Nahor - not denying, indeed, the existence of Jehovah, but that He was the only true and living God - occurs again later when Laban made a covenant with Jacob.(Genesis 31:53) It also frequently recurs in the later history of Israel. Both strange nations and Israel itself, when in a state of apostasy, did not deny that Jehovah was God, but they tried to place Him on a level with other and false deities. Now, Scripture teaches us that to place any other pretended God along with the living and true One argues as great ignorance, and is as great a sin, as to deny Him entirely.

* It is a very remarkable circumstance that the Hebrew word for divining is the same as that for serpent. In heathen rites also the worship of the serpent was connected with magic; and in all this we recognize how all false religion and sorcery is truly to be traced up to the "old serpent," which is Satan.

In his own peculiar fashion Laban, with pretended candor and liberality, now invited Jacob to name his wages for the future. But this time the deceiver was to be deceived. Basing his proposal on the fact that in the East the goats are mostly black and the sheep white, Jacob made what seemed the very modest request, that all that were spotted and speckled in the flock were to be his share. Laban gladly assented, taking care to make the selection himself, and to hand over Jacob's portion to his own sons, while Jacob was to tend the flocks of Laban. Finally, he placed three days' journey betwixt the flocks of Jacob and his own. But even so, Jacob knew how, by an artifice well understood in the East, to circumvent his father-in-law, and to secure that, though ordinarily "the ringstraked, speckled, and spotted" had been an exception, now they were the most

numerous and the strongest of the flocks. And the advantage still remained on the side of Jacob, when Laban again and again reversed the conditions of the agreement.(Genesis 31:7) This clearly proved that Jacob's artifice could not have been the sole nor the real reason of his success. In point of fact, immediately after the first agreement with Laban, the angel of God had spoken to Jacob in a dream, assuring him that, even without any such artifices, God would right him in his cause with Laban.(Genesis 31:12, 13) Once more, then, Jacob acted, as when in his father's house. He "made haste;" he would not wait for the Lord to fulfill his promise; he would use his own means - and employ his cunning and devices - to accomplish the purpose of God, instead of committing his cause unto Him. And as formerly he had had the excuse of his father's weakness and his brother's violence, so now it might seem as if he were purely on his defense, and as if his deceit were necessary for his protection - the more so as he resorted to his device only in spring, not in autumn,* so that the second produce of the year belonged chiefly to his father-in-law.

* Thus we understand Genesis 30:41, 42. The spring-produce is supposed to be stronger than that of autumn.⁷³

Pink – Gleanings in Genesis

JACOB AT PADAN ARAM, CONTINUED

GENESIS 29, 30

JACOB'S stay at Padan-Aram was a lengthy one, much longer than he imagined when he first went there, so little do any of us know what the immediate future holds for us. We move to some place expecting to settle there, and lo, in a short time, God calls us to strike our tents and move to another region. Or, we go to a place thinking it is only for a transient visit, but remain there many years. So it was with Jacob. How blessed to remember, "My times are in the hand" (Ps. 31:15).

A somewhat lengthy account is given describing Jacob's sojourn in Laban's home. It is not our aim to expound in detail this section of Genesis—abler pens have done that; rather shall we proffer a few general remarks upon some of the outstanding features which are of special interest and importance.

The thirtieth chapter of Genesis is not pleasant reading, yet is it, like every other in the Old Testament, recorded for our learning. No reflecting Christian mind can read through this chapter without being disgusted with the fruitage and consequences of *polygamy* as therein described. The domestic discords, the envies and jealousies between Jacob's several wives, forcibly illustrate and demonstrate the wisdom and goodness of God's law that each man should have his own wife, as well as each woman her own husband. Example is better than precept, and in Gen. 30 the HOLY Spirit sets before us an example of what a plurality of wives must necessarily result in—discord, jealousy and hatred. Islet us thank God, then, for giving to us His written precepts to regulate the

⁷³ Alfred Edersheim, Bible History, Old Testament, studylight.org

marriage relationship, the observance of which is necessary not only for the protection of the purity of the home but for its peace and happiness as well.

Though the strifes and jealousies of Jacob's wives were indeed distressing and disgusting yet, we must not attribute their desire for children, or the devices they resorted to in order to obtain them, to mere carnal motives. Had there been nothing more than this the Holy Spirit would not have condescended to record them. There can be little doubt that the daughters of Laban were influenced by the promises of God to Abraham, on whose posterity were entailed the richest blessings, and from whom the Messiah Himself, in the fullness of time, was to descend. It was faith in these promises which made every pious woman of those times desirous of being a mother, and that explains why we read so often of Hebrew women praying so earnestly for this honor.

In the previous article we dwelt at some length on the law of retribution as it was exemplified in the history of Jacob. In an unmistakable and striking manner it is shown again and again in the inspired narrative how that he reaped just what he had sown. Yet it must be borne in mind that in dealing retributively with Jacob God was not acting in wrath but in love, holy love it is true, for Divine love is never exercised at the expense of holiness. Thus, in this evident retribution God was speaking to our Patriarch's conscience and heart. A further illustration of the righteousness of God's governmental dealings is here seen, in that, now Jacob had obtained Laban's firstborn daughter his desire was thwarted—she was barren. As another has remarked, "God would have His servant Jacob learn more deeply in his own wounded affections the vileness of selfseeking deceit, and hence He permitted what He would use for chastening and good in the end." (W. K.)

That which occupies the most prominent place in the passage we are now considering is the account there given of the birth and naming of Jacob's twelve sons by his different wives. Here the record is quite full and explicit. Not only is the name of each child given, but in every instance we are told the meaning of the name and that *which occasioned* the selection of it. This would lead us to conclude there is some important lesson or lessons to be learned here. This chapter traces the stream back to its source and shows us the beginnings of the twelve Patriarchs from which the twelve-tribed Nation sprang. Then, would not this cause us to suspect that the *meaning of* the names of these twelve Patriarchs and that which *occasioned* the selection of each name, here so carefully preserved, must be closely connected with the early history of the Hebrew Nation? Our suspicion becomes a certainty when we note the *order* in which the twelve Patriarchs were born, for the circumstances which gave rise to their several names correspond exactly with *the order* of the history of the Children of Israel.

Others before us have written much upon the twelve Patriarchs, the typical significance of their names, and the order in which they are mentioned. It has been pointed out how that the Gospel and the history of a sinner saved by grace is here found in veiled form. For example: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, means, *See, a Son!* This is just what God says to us through the Gospel: to the Son of His love we are invited to look—"Behold the lamb of God." Then comes Simeon whose name signifies *Hearing* and this points to the reception of the Gospel by faith, for faith cometh by hearing, and the promise is, "Hear, and your soul shall live." Next in order is Levis and his name means *Joined*, telling of the blessed *Union* by which the Holy Spirit makes us one with the Son through the hearing of the Word. In Judah, which means *Praise*, we have manifested the Divine life in the believer, expressed in joyous gratitude for the riches of grace which are

now his in Christ. Dan means *Judgment*, and this tells of how the believer uncompromisingly passes sentence upon himself, not only for what he has done but because of what he is, and thus he reckons himself to have died unto sin. Naphtali means *Wrestling* and speaks of that earnestness in prayer which is the very breath of the new life. Next is Gad which means *a Troop or Company*, speaking, perhaps of the believer in fellowship with the Lord's people, and Jacob's eighth son announces the effect of Christian fellowship, for Asher means *Happy*. Issachar means *Hire*, and speaks of *service*, and Zebulon which signifies *Dwelling* reminds us that we are to "occupy" till Christ comes; while Joseph which means *Adding* tells of the *reward* which He will bestow on those who have served diligently and occupied faithfully. Benjamin, the last of Jacob's sons, means *Son of my right hand?* again speaking directly of Christ, and so the circle ends where it begins—with our blessed Lord, for He is "The First and the Last."

There is, then, a typical significance behind the meaning of the names of Jacob's twelve sons, and we believe there is also a prophetic significance behind the carefully preserved record of the words used by the mothers upon the naming of their sons, a significance which must be apparent to all, once it is pointed out. In view of the fact that the Hebrew nation became known as the children of Israel, it is to be expected that we should look closely at the children of Jacob, from whom the nation took its name. And further, in view of the fact that Gen. 29, 30 records the *early* history of Jacob's twelve sons, we should expect to find their history in some way corresponds with the *early* history of the Nation descended from them. Such is indeed the case, as we shall now endeavor to set before the reader.

What we have written above in connection with the typical significance of the names of Jacob's twelve sons is no doubt, with perhaps slight variations, well known to our readers. But it is to be noted that in addition to the naming of the twelve Patriarchs, Gen. 29 and 30 records the *circumstances* which gave rise to the selection of their respective names, for in each case a *reason* is given *why* they received the names they did, yet, so far as we are aware, little or no attention at all has been paid to this feature. We are fully satisfied, however, that the words uttered by the respective mothers of these twelve sons on the occasion of their births, is not without some special significance, and it behooves us to enquire prayerfully into the Spirit's purpose in so carefully preserving a record of them.

Jacob's first son was born to him by Leah, and was named Reuben, and upon giving her son this name she said, "Surely the Lord hath *looked* upon my *affliction*" (Gen. 29:32). The second son was also borne by Leah and was named Simeon, and her reason for thus naming him was as follows, "Because the Lord hath *heard* that I was hated" (Gen. 29:33). The striking resemblance between these two utterances and what is recorded in Exodus in connection with the sufferings of Israel in Egypt is at once apparent. First, we read that "God *looked* upon the Children of Israel" (Ex. 2:25). Then, unto Moses He said, "I have surely seen the *affliction* of My people which are in Egypt" (Ex. 3:7). Then, corresponding with the words of Leah when Simeon was born, He adds, "And have *heard* their cry" (Ex. 3:7). It is surely something more than a mere coincidence that at the birth of Israel's *first* two sons their mother should have spoken of "affliction," which she said the Lord hath "looked upon" and "heard," and that these identical words should be found in the passage which describes the *first* stage in the national history of the Children of Israel who were then "hated" and "afflicted" by the

cruel Egyptians. When the Lord told Moses He had seen the “affliction” of His people Israel and had “heard” their cry, did He not have in mind the very words which Leah had uttered long years before!

Jacob’s third son was named Levi, and at his birth his mother said, “This time will my *husband* be *joined* to me” (Gen. 29:34). Again these words of the mother point us forward to the beginning of Israel’s national history. When was it that Jehovah was “joined” to Israel, and became her “husband?” It was on the eve of their leaving Egypt on the night of the Passover when the lamb was slain and its blood shed and sprinkled. Then it was Jehovah was “joined” to His people—just as now God is joined to us and becomes one with us only in Christ: it is in the Lamb slain, now glorified, that God and the believing sinner meet. And then it was that Jehovah entered into covenant relationship with the chosen Nation, and became their “Husband.” Note how this very word is used in Jer., and mark how this reference points back to the Passover night: “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel, and with the House of Judah: not according to the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of *Egypt*; which My covenant they brake, although I was an *Husband* unto them, saith the Lord” (Jer. 31:31, 32).

Jacob’s fourth son was Judah, and upon his birth the mother said, “Now will *I praise* the Lord” (Gen. 29:35). As Leah’s words at Levi’s birth point us back to the Passover, so her words at Judah’s birth carry us forward to the crossing of the Red Sea, where Israel celebrated Jehovah’s victory over their foes in song and praised the Lord for their wondrous deliverance. Then it was that, for the first time, Israel sang: “Who is like unto Thee, O word, among the gods? Who is like Thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in *praises*, doing wonders?” (Ex. 15:11.) Mark, too, that the Psalmist when referring back to this momentous event said, “And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left. Then believed they His words: they sang *His praise*” (Ps. 106:11, 12).

Next comes Dan, and upon his birth Rachel said, “God hath *judged* me” (Gen. 30:6). If the line of interpretation and application we are now working out be correct, then these words of Rachel, following those of Leah at the birth of Judah, which as we have seen carry us, prophetically, to the Red Sea, will bear upon the early experiences of Israel in their Wilderness wanderings. Such, indeed, we believe to be the case. Do not the above words of Rachel, “God hath *judged* me,” point us to the displeasure and “wrath” of God against Israel when, in response to their “murmuring” He sent the “quails,” and when again they provoked His wrath at the waters of Massah and Merribah?

At the birth of Jacob’s sixth son Rachel exclaimed, “With great *wrestlings* have I wrestled with my sister, and I have *prevailed*” (Gen. 30:8). How strikingly this corresponds with Israel’s history! The very next thing we read of after that God “judged” Israel for their sin at Merribah was their conflict or “wrestling” with Amalek, and again be it particularly noted that the selfsame word used by Rachel at the birth of Naphtali is used in describing the “wrestling” between Israel and Amalek, for in Ex. 17:11 we read, “And it came to pass, when *Moses* held up his hand, that Israel *prevailed*: and when he let down his hands Amalek *prevailed*.” Surely it is something more than mere coincidence that the very word used by the mother of Naphtali should occur twice in the verse which records that in Israel’s history which her words prophetically anticipated; the more so, that it agrees so accurately with *the order* of events in Israel’s history.

The utterances of the mother of the seventh and eighth sons of Jacob may be coupled together, as may also those connected with the birth of his ninth and tenth sons. At the birth of Gad it was said, “*A troop cometh*” (Gen. 30:11), which perfectly agrees with the order of Israel’s history, for after the Wilderness had been left behind and the Jordan crossed, a “troop” indeed “came” to meet Israel, the seven nations of the Canaanites seeking to oppose their occupation of the promised land. The words of the mother of Asher, the next son, “*Happy am I*” (Gen. 30:13), tell of Israel’s joy following the overthrow of their foes. Then, the words of Ineh at the birth of Jacob’s ninth and tenth sons, namely “God, hath given me my hire” (Gen. 30:18), and “God hath endued me with a good dowry” (Gen. 30:20), tell of Israel’s *occupation* of the goodly inheritance with which Jehovah had “endowed” them. Then, just as there was a break or interval before the last two sons were born, and just as these two *completed* Jacob’s family, and *realized* his long cherished desire, inasmuch as *they* were born to him by his beloved Rachel, so her words, “The Lord shall add to me another son” (Gen. 30:24), and “The son of my sorrow” changed by the father to “Son of my right hand” (Gen. 35:18), would point to the *completion* of Israel’s history as an undivided nation and the *realization* of their long cherished desire, in the giving to them a King, even David, to whom was “added” only one “other,” namely, Solomon; and the *double* sentence uttered at Benjamin’s birth was surely appropriate as a prophetic intimation of Solomon’s course—so bright, yet so dark—for while in his reign the Kingdom attained its highest dignity and glory (the position signified by the “right hand”), yet, nevertheless, from the time of Solomon’s coronation began Israel’s *sorrowful* decline and apostasy.

Thus we have sought to show how the utterances of the mothers of Jacob’s twelve sons were so many prophetic intimations of the course of the history of the Nation which descended from them, and that the *order* of the sayings of these mothers corresponds with the *order* of Israel’s history, outlining that history from its beginning in Egypt until the end of the undivided Kingdom in the days of Solomon, for it was *then* the history of Israel as a nation terminated, the ten tribes going into captivity, from which they have never returned, almost immediately after.

To complete the study of this hidden but wonderful prophecy, particular attention should be paid to the way in which Jacob’s sons were *grouped* under their different mothers, for this also corresponds exactly with *the grouping* of the outstanding events in Israel’s history. The first four sons were all *borne* by Yeah, and her utterances all pointed forward to *He group* of incidents, namely, Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and the Egyptians. The fifth and sixth sons were borne by a different mother, namely, Bilhah, and her utterances pointed to a *detect* series of events in Israel’s history, namely, to their experiences in the Wilderness. The seventh and eighth sons were borne by Zilpah, and the ninth and tenth by Leah, and their utterances, closely connected yet distinct, pointed, prophetically, to Israel’s occupation and enjoyment of Canaan. The eleventh and twelfth sons were *separated* from all the others, being borne by Rachael, and so also that to which her words at their births pointed forward to, was also clearly *separated* from the early events of Israel’s history, carrying us on to the establishment of the Kingdom in the days of David and Solomon.

In drawing this article to a close, one or two reflections upon the ground we have covered will, perhaps, be in place:

First, What a striking proof of the Divine inspiration of Scripture is here furnished! Probably no uninspired writer would have taken the trouble to inform us of the words used by those mothers in the naming of their boys—where can be found in all the volumes of secular history one that records *the reason why* the parent gave a certain name to his or her child? But there *was* a good and sufficient reason why the words of Jacob’s wives *should be* preserved—unknown to themselves their lips were guided by God, and the Holy Spirit has recorded their utterances because they carried with them a hidden, but real, prophetic significance; and in that recording of them, and their perfect agreement with the outstanding events in the history of Israel, in which, though centuries afterward, these prophetic utterances received such striking fulfillment, we have an unmistakable proof of the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures.

Second, What an object lesson is there here for us that nothing in Scripture is trivial or meaningless! It is to be feared that many of us dishonor God’s Word by the unworthy thoughts which we entertain about it. We are free to acknowledge that much in the Bible is sublime and Divine, yet there is not a little in it in which we can see no beauty or value. But that is due to the dimness of our vision and not in anywise to any imperfection in the Word. “All Scripture” is given by inspiration of God, the proper nouns as much as the common nouns, the genealogical lists equally as much as the lovely lyrics of the Psalmist. Who would have thought that there was anything of significance in *the meaning* of the names of Jacob’s sons? Who would have supposed that it was of first importance that we should note *the order* in which they were born? Who would have imagined there was a wondrous prophecy beneath the words used by the mothers on *the occasion* of them naming their sons? Who? Each and all of us *ought* to have done so. Once we settle it for good and all that there is nothing in the Bible which is trivial and meaningless, once we are assured that *everything* in Scripture, each word, has a significance and value, then we shall prayerfully ponder every section, and *expect* to find “hid treasures” (Prov. 2:4) in every list of names, and according unto our faith so it will be unto us.

Third, What a remarkable illustration and demonstration of the absolute Sovereignty of God is found here in Genesis 29 and 30! What a proof that God *does* rule and overrule! What a showing forth of the fact that even in our smallest actions we are controlled by the Most High! All unconsciously to themselves, these wives of Jacob in naming their babies and in stating the reasons for these names? were outlining the Gospel of God’s Grace and were prophetically foreshadowing the early history of the Nation which descended from their sons. If then these women, in the naming of their sons and in the utterances which fell from their lips at that time were unknown to themselves, *guided by God*, then, verily, God is *Sovereign* indeed. And so alarms His Word, “*for OF HIM, and through Him, and to Him, are all things.*” (Rom. 11:36.)⁷⁴

⁷⁴Pink, A. W. (2005). *Gleanings in Genesis* (262). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

Book of Jasher: Chapter 31

16 And at that time Rachel was barren, and she had no offspring, and Rachel envied her sister Leah, and when Rachel saw that she bare no children to Jacob, she took her handmaid Bilhah, and she bare Jacob two sons, Dan and Naphtali.

17 And when Leah saw that she had left bearing, she also took her handmaid Zilpah, and she gave her to Jacob for a wife, and Jacob also came to Zilpah, and she also bare Jacob two sons, Gad and Asher.

18 And Leah again conceived and bare Jacob in those days two sons and one daughter, and these are their names, Issachar, Zebulon, and their sister Dinah.

19 And Rachel was still barren in those days, and Rachel prayed unto the Lord at that time, and she said, O Lord God remember me and visit me, I beseech thee, for now my husband will cast me off, for I have borne him no children.

20 Now O Lord God, hear my supplication before thee, and see my affliction, and give me children like one of the handmaids, that I may no more bear my reproach.

21 And God heard her and opened her womb, and Rachel conceived and bare a son, and she said, The Lord has taken away my reproach, and she called his name Joseph, saying, May the Lord add to me another son; and Jacob was ninety-one years old when she bare him.

22 At that time Jacob's mother, Rebecca, sent her nurse Deborah the daughter of Uz, and two of Isaac's servants unto Jacob.

23 And they came to Jacob to Haran and they said unto him, Rebecca has sent us to thee that thou shalt return to thy father's house to the land of Canaan; and Jacob hearkened unto them in this which his mother had spoken.

24 At that time, the other seven years which Jacob served Laban for Rachel were completed, and it was at the end of fourteen years that he had dwelt in Haran that Jacob said unto Laban, give me my wives and send me away, that I may go to my land, for behold my mother did send unto me from the land at Canaan that I should return to my father's house.

25 And Laban said unto him, Not so I pray thee; if I have found favor in thy sight do not leave me; appoint me thy wages and I will give them, and remain with me.

26 And Jacob said unto him, This is what thou shalt give me for wages, that I shall this day pass through all thy flock and take away from them every lamb that is speckled and spotted and such as are brown amongst the sheep, and amongst the goats, and if thou wilt do this thing for me I will return and feed thy flock and keep them as at first.

27 And Laban did so, and Laban removed from his flock all that Jacob had said and gave them to him.

28 And Jacob placed all that he had removed from Laban's flock in the hands of his sons, and Jacob was feeding the remainder of Laban's flock.

29 And when the servants of Isaac which he had sent unto Jacob saw that Jacob would not then return with them to the land of Canaan to his father, they then went away from him, and they returned home to the land of Canaan.

30 And Deborah remained with Jacob in Haran, and she did not return with the servants of Isaac to the land of Canaan, and Deborah resided with Jacob's wives and children in Haran.

31 And Jacob served Laban six years longer, and when the sheep brought forth, Jacob removed from them such as were speckled and spotted, as he had determined with Laban,

and Jacob did so at Laban's for six years, and the man increased abundantly and he had cattle and maid servants and men servants, camels, and asses.

32 And Jacob had two hundred drove of cattle, and his cattle were of large size and of beautiful appearance and were very productive, and all the families of the sons of men desired to get some of the cattle of Jacob, for they were exceedingly prosperous.

33 And many of the sons of men came to procure some of Jacob's flock, and Jacob gave them a sheep for a man servant or a maid servant or for an ass or a camel, or whatever Jacob desired from them they gave him.

34 And Jacob obtained riches and honor and possessions by means of these transactions with the sons of men, and the children of Laban envied him of this honor.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ The Book of Jasher, Faithfully Translated 1840, Hebrew to English, J.H.Perry & Co, Salt Lake City UT

