

Genesis 28-30a • Chapter Study

INTRODUCTION

Remember our Outline for Genesis . . .

- I. Introduction • Chs. 1-11
- II. The Patriarchs [Abraham & His Descendants] • Chs. 12-50
 - A. Abraham – Chs. 12-25
 - B. Isaac – Chs. 26-28
 - C. Jacob – Chs. 28-36
 - D. Joseph – Chs. 37-50

Last week we read of Isaac & Rebekah's twin sons, Esau & Jacob.

Though Esau was the firstborn, God had told them the order of priority for blessing would be reversed, with the younger being the one who would carry on in the promise of God to Abraham.

We saw the early life of the boys – Esau was an outdoorsman, a hunter.

Jacob was a stay at home domestic type.

One day, coming in from the hunt, Esau exaggerated his hunger and begged a bowl of lentil stew from Jacob. Jacob offered some in exchanged for the birthright, which Esau foolishly cast away.

Then Rebekah and Jacob conspired to trick Isaac into giving Jacob the patriarchal blessing, thinking he was giving it to his favorite son, Esau.

When Esau realized he'd lost the place of favor as the firstborn, he grew furious at Jacob and determined to kill him as soon as their father Isaac died.

Rebekah discovered Esau's plan and told Jacob he needed to flee.

So she again worked a plan to manipulate her husband into sending Jacob away, back to her hometown in Mesopotamia.

CHAPTER 28 • JACOB'S STORY GENESIS 28-36

A. Vs. 27:46–28:5 - Jacob Sent Away To Laban

46And Rebekah said to Isaac, "I am weary of my life because of the daughters of Heth; if Jacob takes a wife of the daughters of Heth, like these who are the daughters of the land, what good will my life be to me?"

Earlier we read that Esau had taken two wives from among the Hittites who populated that area; Judith & Basemath. [26:34-35]

It says they were a "grief of mind to Isaac & Rebekah."

Abraham had taken great pains to make sure Isaac was not hitched to any of the Hittite or Canaanite women.

He sent his servant on the long and difficult trip to Mesopotamia to find a wife from among his relatives.

Abraham was concerned that there be no alliance with the native peoples of Canaan so that none of them could lay claim to the land in future generations.

The land had been promised to him and his descendants alone, to the exclusion of the Canaanites, so they could not become a part of the lineage.

Isaac and Rebekah were crushed when Esau took a couple native gals to be his wives. Certainly he knew the family heritage and promise!

He knew his family's history, and that of his own parents, but Esau cared not at all for the promise. This is proven time and again.

He sold his birthright for a bowl of beans.

Then he married a couple of local girls, though he KNEW this was taboo.

Esau was a carnal man; meaning his present fleshly desires weighed more heavily on him than the spiritual promises of God's blessing to come.

His carnality is well summarized by his foolish comment when bargaining with Jacob for the bowl of stew, "I am about to die; so what good is this birthright?" [25:32]

Rebekah had developed a deep dislike for Esau's wives, that's putting it mildly, and she complained to Isaac that if Jacob took a wife from among the Hittites, things would go from bad to worse.

While her compliant is legit and real, she was really conspiring to manipulate Isaac into sending Jacob away from the danger of an angry Esau.

1Then Isaac called Jacob and blessed him, and charged him, and said to him: "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.

2Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father; and take yourself a wife from there of the daughters of Laban your mother's brother.

Laban was of course, Jacob's uncle. That means Laban's daughters would be Jacob's cousins.

Note that it says Isaac blessed Jacob.

What had been obtained fraudulently before is now affirmed. Isaac has now come to the place of surrender to God's plan that the younger son was to be the one to whom the promises made to Abraham will flow.

3 "May God Almighty bless you, And make you fruitful and multiply you, That you may be an assembly of peoples; **4**And give you the blessing of Abraham, To you and your descendants with you, That you may inherit the land In which you are a stranger, Which God gave to Abraham."

There is now no doubt – Jacob is the one to and upon whom the legacy of God's promise is to pass.

5So Isaac sent Jacob away, and he went to Padan Aram, to Laban the son of Bethuel the Syrian, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Jacob and Esau.

Jacob's trip to Mesopotamia is summed up here and seen as completed.

Actually, in a few verses, we'll get some details about what happened on the way.

But first, a little side light about Esau . . .

B. Vs. 6-9 – Esau's Lame Attempt to Please His Parents

6Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan Aram to take himself a wife from there, and that as he blessed him he

gave him a charge, saying, "You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan," 7and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and had gone to Padan Aram. 8Also Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan did not please his father Isaac. 9So Esau went to Ishmael and took Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael, Abraham's son, the sister of Nebajoth, to be his wife in addition to the wives he had.

When Esau heard about Isaac's charge to Jacob not to marry any of the local girls, his own union with his Hittite wives was thrown into high contrast.

Isaac's knowing renewal and affirmation of the fatherly blessing on Jacob proved to Esau that he was quickly slipping out of favor with his father and in an attempt to regain that favor, he devised a plan.

If what they wanted was their sons to marry relatives, then by golly, he'd find one to marry himself!

So he went to the descendants of Ishmael and took another wife from among them.

No doubt he proudly presented Mahalath to his parents, thinking they would shower appreciation and blessing on him.

But Mahalath, as one of the daughters of Ishmael, was also exempt from being able to receive the promise – remember, Ishmael had been "cast out."

These verses teach us a great lesson so we'll return to them this Sunday.

C. Vs. 10-22 – Jacob At Bethel

10Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. 11So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. 12Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13And behold, the Lord stood above it and said: "I am the Lord God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. 14Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. 15Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

As Jacob made his way north from Beersheba, the sun set and he settled down for the night.

It's a good 40 miles from Beersheba to this place – so either this was his second day out, or he had quickened his pace in order to put some real distance between he and his angry brother.

The land at this place is covered with large flat rocks.

It's the very first place that Abraham had camped when he arrived from Mesopotamia.

As Jacob settled down for the night, he grabbed a stone and put it under his head, probably covering it with his bundle to soften it.

Then he dreamt – but it was more than a dream; it was a vision in which he saw a ladder stretching from earth to heaven.

On that ladder he saw heavenly beings going up and coming down.

Then he saw the glory of the Lord above the ladder and heard God speak the covenant blessings of Abraham to him personally.

Up to this point, Jacob has only heard stories of his grandfather Abraham and his visits with God.

Isaac had told him of how God had come to him as well and renewed the promises made to Abraham to him.

At this point, the reality of it all becomes crystal clear to Jacob.

He is the next link in the chain.

It's a bit puzzling what significance the ladder has.

Why would God choose this vision for Jacob? It would certainly be enough to just come to him and speak the words of the covenant, but Jacob is also given this picture of a ladder that spans the distance between heaven and earth.

The reason God gave Jacob this vision was to alter Jacob's perception of reality.

As we're going to see, Jacob's natural tendency is to be highly self-sufficient.

He's a manipulator, a schemer, a conniver – just as his name suggests; heel-catcher.

He believes in the promise of God to Abraham and wants it for himself.

But his ideas on how to obtain it, as we've already witnessed, is through clever conniving and trickery.

God wanted Jacob to realize that the spiritual and the physical world are not totally separate things.

Heaven and Earth are linked and are all part of God's control and realm.

Wherever Jacob went, God wanted him to know that He was there.

15Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you."

There's a nonsense saying that's become popular today – wherever you go – there you are.

The ladder in Jacob's dream taught him that wherever he went, God was there too. Did Jacob learn the lesson?

16Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." 17And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!"

Jacob seems to get it, but then he puts too much emphasis on that particular location. That place wasn't special!

If Jacob had walked a mile further that day, God would have still met with him in the same manner.

It will be a while before Jacob will come to the full realization that God was with him wherever he went.

In John 1:51, Jesus used Jacob's dream of the ladder as a picture of Himself.

[Jesus said,] "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

It's in Jesus, the God Man, that the realms of spirit and physical are bridged.

He is the link between heaven and earth – the only link.

John 14:6 –

Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

The substance of what God said to Jacob in v. 15, He says to us.

In Matthew 28:20, Jesus said that He would be with us to the end of the age.

In Phil. 1:6 Paul says that we can be confident of this very thing –

... that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

18Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it.

19And he called the name of that place Bethel [house of God]; but the name of that city had been Luz previously.

To memorialize God's visitation, Jacob turned the stone he'd used as a pillow on end and then "sanctified" it by pouring oil on it.

Pouring oil on something or someone was a way of anointing & consecrating it for a sacred purpose.

Not far away from where Jacob had spent the night there were the ruins of a small Canaanite settlement called Luz.

The city of Bethel, which would later grow up in this place, plays an important role in Israel's history.

It's second only to Jerusalem in the number of times mentioned in the OT.

20Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, **21**so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God. **22**And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

Jacob the Wheeler-dealer!

Some commentators turn Jacob's "If" into a "Since".

They say that Jacob is making a vow based on God's promised blessing.

They have him saying, "Since God will be with me, then Yahweh shall be my God."

While that interpretation works with several passages in the Greek NT, it doesn't here.

Jacob is making a vow alright, but it's a bargain, a deal.

God has come with a special promise, and Jacob is filled with awe at God's glory.

But Jacob is the kind of guy who, because he's a conniver, sees everyone else as a conniver too – and that's colored his view of God.

So he says, IF God keeps His promise, then Jacob will embrace Him as a God worthy of his devotion, and he'll even back it up by giving a tenth of his wealth to Him.

Now – here's what's so encouraging to me about this story.

Jacob has just had a vision of God!

God has spoken directly to him a grand and glorious promise that isn't based on anything Jacob does – it's unilateral and unconditional on God!

Jacob, instead of simply bowing in abject humility and worship, showing the utmost of appreciation, resorts to form, and manages to work a deal.

Notice there's no affirmation from God, no commendation for Jacob's vow.

All Jacob said in trying to make this deal with God was silly and useless!

But it was an accurate reflection of just where Jacob's heart was.

I'm so thankful that God doesn't expect perfection out of me the moment I am born again and for the rest of my life.

I'm so thankful He knows that spiritual growth takes time and that the silly and foolish stuff in me that is the old Lance is something that will eventually pass away.

Visions, dreams, even face to face encounters with God do not mean instantaneous moral perfection.

Jacob had Bethel, and wakes up in the morning to erect a monument and then strike a deal with God.

How is this possible – well, because Jacob was Jacob; Heel-catcher, dirty, sneaky thief!

It is going to take more time and more breaking before he becomes Israel – Prince with God.

You and I are still in process; we are still being changed.

We too are promised new names – but we don't get them till we ascend that ladder into the presence of God's glory in heaven.

In the meantime, we're still Lance, & _____ & _____ & . . .

Yes – we are NEW CREATURES IN CHRIST – but the old habits, the old patterns so deeply etched onto our flesh take time to be erased.

All we need to do is hold on to God who has promised to never leave us, but rather to be with us wherever we go, blessing us, and completing what He has begun.

Like Jacob, we'll experience the work of His grace, breaking us from our self-dependence and sin and conforming us to the image of His son.

CHAPTER 29

D. Vs. 1-30 – Jacob Gets Two Wives

1. Vs. 1-12 – Jacob meets Rachel

1So Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the East. **2**And he looked, and saw a well in the field; and behold, there were three flocks of sheep lying by it; for out of that well they watered the flocks. A large stone was on the well's mouth. **3**Now all the flocks would be gathered there; and they would roll the stone from the well's mouth, water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the well's mouth. **4**And Jacob said to them, "My brethren, where are you from?" And they said, "We are from Haran." **5**Then he said to them, "Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" And they said, "We know him." **6**So he said to them, "Is he well?" And they said, "He is well. And look, his daughter Rachel is coming with the sheep."

The only way for a traveler to know where he was, was by asking the people the name of the place.

Jacob knew he was nearing the region of Haran where his Uncle Laban lived because of the answers he got from the people he met along the road.

Finally he arrived. And there was a well, covered by a large stone, probably to keep people and stray animals from falling into it.

As he approached, Jacob saw 3 flocks that were waiting nearby.

As v. 7 says, it was mid-day, way too early for flocks to be watered.

This was the time of day when they ought to be grazing and lazing on the ground.

He asked the shepherds if they knew Laban and if so his condition.

They knew him, and in fact, approaching the well was his daughter with his flock.

Rachel was still a ways off yet so Jacob asked why the shepherds were just sitting around the well.

7Then he said, "Look, it is still high day; it is not time for the cattle to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go and feed them."

No doubt he preferred some privacy when he met his cousin and the presence of the other shepherds would be a bother.

8But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and they have rolled the stone from the well's mouth; then we water the sheep."

The shepherds replied it was the tradition that they would all gather their flocks at the well and water them all at the same time.

It's possible that the stone which covered the well was large and required a lot of effort to move so they would wait till there were several of them there then work at it together.

The flocks would then be watered in the order they arrived, so the shepherds lined up much earlier than they should have so they could have first crack at the water. [Picture] [Picture]

9Now while he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. **10**And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother.

Jacob wasn't going to sit around and wait.

He man-handled the stone aside and watered Rachel's sheep, in much the same fashion that his own mother had watered Abraham's servant's camels.

This act of service and strength on Jacob's part would show a preference for Rachel that was bound to impress her. If she was impressed – then she was stunned when this stranger then came to her . . .

11Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice and wept.

She had to think the guy was a nut-case.

12And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's relative and that he was Rebekah's son. So she ran and told her father.

Now it's all clear. Rachel had of course heard all about her aunt Rebekah being whisked away by the rich caravan from Canaan to become the wife of her distant relative Isaac.

For a young woman it was a highly romantic story that you can be sure had been told around many family celebrations. Here as the son of the fabled Rebekah and Isaac.

2. Vs. 13-30 – Jacob Is Out-Connived by Uncle Laban

13Then it came to pass, when Laban heard the report about Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. So he told Laban all these things. **14**And Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh." And he stayed with him for a month.

Rebekah had said that when Esau cooled down, she would send for Jacob; she said it would be a few days – well, that was highly optimistic.

While he waited – no word came, and the days stretched into weeks, and then a month and Jacob couldn't just live off their kindness so he went to work helping out with things around the little household.

15Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what should your wages be?"

Laban knew that as a young man, Jacob would need to be employed and seeing real industriousness in him, rather than let someone else profit off him, Laban offered to pay him for his labor.

Plus, Laban could see that Jacob had his eye on his younger daughter and knew what Jacob would ask for as wages.

16Now Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. **17**Leah's eyes were delicate, but Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance.

The language that describes Leah is difficult to interpret and the commentators are all over the place in their renderings here.

Some Bibles says Leah was "weak-eyed," that she had extremely poor vision and as a result had a lot of trouble, possible even with her eyes being malformed in some way.

Recent research leans more in the direction of seeing Leah's eyes as of a light color instead of the dark brown that was so highly prized by the people of the ancient Middle East.

The primary mark of beauty was dark, clear, shiny eyes.

They were said to have fire in them and conveyed a sense of life.

Leah's eyes, being lighter in color wouldn't have the same fire in them and so it was said she was "delicate," less robust – and so the idea of her being weak.

18Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter."

Normally it was 2 fathers who would work out the arrangement of a marriage between their children.

The fathers would bargain over a proper bridal price to pay the father of the bride.

Don't forget, women did most of the work, and so the loss of a daughter in marriage meant a good part of the workforce was going to be missed.

The bride price was an attempt to soften the blow.

But the fathers would bargain and negotiate the bride price for hours.

Jacob, has to do his own negotiating – and since he doesn't have any wealth with him, he has to offer his own labor – the sweat of his brow in the service of Laban.

He offers to work for him for 7 years! This was a super generous offer – but Jacob wants to make sure it's accepted without further negotiating.

Indeed – Laban agrees right off. He sees how badly Jacob wants Rachel and knows he can take advantage of him.

As we read on later, we see that Jacob's wives resented this arrangement.

They had grown up day-dreaming about how much they would fetch as a ride price.

To have their worth reduced to time is degrading.

They feel like they've been sold rather than betrothed.

19And Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me." **20**So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her.

The 7 years he worked for Rachel passed quickly and the time came for the wedding.

21Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her." **22**And Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast. **23**Now it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. **24**And Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. **25**So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah. And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?" **26**And Laban said, "It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. **27**Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years."

There was a big wedding feast, and as was the custom, the bride remained veiled throughout the ceremony.

Then, while everyone was enjoying the wedding feast, she was taken to the bridal chamber where Jacob was waiting.

It was dark and she was veiled until they were all alone.

In the morning light, Jacob woke up to find himself face to face with none other than - - - Leah!

In outrage, he confronted Laban who made up some lame excuse about the local customs.

This was nothing other than a swindle and Laban, Jacob, and everyone else knew it full well!

Jacob's outrage had to be tempered a bit by the way this whole thing reminded him of a swindle he'd participated in back home with his father when he'd deceived him into giving him the blessing.

Then the younger had taken the elder's place. Here the elder takes the younger's.

Jacob, the conniver has been out-connived, out-swindled, out-scoundreled.

The dirty sneaky thief has been ripped off.

Laban tells Jacob to give Leah the full 7 days that was supposed to mark their honeymoon, and then he would consent to the marriage of Rachel as well – to be followed by another 7 years of Jacob's labor!

If the first 7 years of labor were Jacob's education in the School of Hard-knocks, this second 7 years was his post-graduate work on a Doctorate in the field of "You Reap What You Sow."^[1]

28Then Jacob did so and fulfilled [Leah's] week. So he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife also. 29And Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as a maid. 30Then Jacob also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served with Laban still another seven years.

How much good-will do you suppose there was between the two sisters Leah and Rachel?

It seems clear Leah loved Jacob – she hadn't said anything to him when they were getting married.

She knew Jacob had worked the first 7 years for her younger sister, but she remained silent because she really loved Jacob and wanted to be his wife.

She was probably hoping when he woke up that first morning he'd realize the switch that had been made and then just learn to live with it.

The thought that her father would then consent to let Jacob marry Rachel too never crossed her mind.

This dual marriage was wrong. And though the Bible doesn't mark it explicitly as such, it's ultra clear from the way it is described that this thing was displeasing to God.

Really, nothing good comes of this bigamy, which will soon turn into polygamy.

Which wife was the one God ordained for Jacob? LEAH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

You see, just as Jacob's conniving back home with Esau hadn't really done anything to win him the promise of God, but only trouble, so Laban's switcheroo on Jacob had actually given him the wife God intended for him!

How can we say that? Because it was through Leah that the son, Judah came – and Jesus was of the tribe of Judah!

Leah also gave birth to Levi – the tribe that produced Moses and the priestly line.

E. Vs. 31-30:24 – Jacob's Sons

1. Vs. 31-35 – Leah's first 4

31When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. 32So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, "The Lord has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me." 33Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the Lord has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon. 34She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi. 35And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now I will praise the Lord." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing.

Leah had 4 sons in rapid succession.

With the birth of each, Leah was convinced Jacob's heart would swing toward her.

You see, children were just about everything in that culture, and specially sons.

Sons meant an expansion of the family enterprise and so an increase in wealth and security.

Having 4 sons so quickly meant Leah, though weak by appearance, was in fact full of fertility and life.

She named the boys Reuben: Behold A Son! - "For the Lord had looked upon her affliction of being unloved."

Simeon: Heard – "For the Lord has heard of my situation."

Levi: Joined – "For certainly my husband's heart will be joined to me now."

Judah: Praise – "Now I praise the Lord."

V. 31 says that the Lord opened Leah's womb because she was unloved.

Literally in Hebrew the word unloved is "hated."

Some commentators say that it's simply a word of comparison.

If Jacob loved Rachel, then in comparison, he hated Leah.

We see that kind of spin here in the NKJV where it softens the word to "unloved."

But I wonder if Jacob didn't in fact loath Leah?

She represented 7 years of hard labor – and was a constant reminded of how he'd been out done in trickery; she was a monument to him being made a fool of by Laban.

How hard do you suppose it was for Leah, who probably loved Jacob, to have to endure his scorn?

And then, as these 4 sons prove – that he would have sex with her, though she knew he didn't love her?

It's an odd thing but true, that men seem to be able to have sex with a woman they do not love!

A survey taken in 1995 asked men: "Have you ever had sex with a woman you have actively disliked?" 58% answered "Yes!"^[2]

Of course it was totally appropriate for Jacob and Leah to engage in sex – they were married.

What's sad is the large number of women who are willing to engage in sex before marriage just to hold on to some guy – thinking, as Leah did here, that this would knit his heart to her.

A few years ago there was a story in the local newspaper about a woman who had contracted AIDS from a Ventura man who knew he was infected but never told her.

She said, "All I wanted is someone to love me, and now I'm going to die for that. I don't think I should have to die for that."

She shouldn't!

You single ladies, don't think that being sexually intimate with a guy is going to cause his heart to be knit to yours.

Yours will be toward him; but it generally doesn't work that way back.

Without the commitment of marriage sex is out of bounds.

Rachel was not about to let her sister get this advantage of 4 sons on her without answering back in some way.

She'd been busy trying to conceive too, but when it was obvious something was wrong, she came up with an idea we've seen before when people get desperate and decide to help God out.

CHAPTER 30

2. Vs. 1-8 – Rachel's Scheme For Children

1Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!"

Ladies, what's it like when two women are envious of each other?

What would it be like if they shared the same husband and lived in the same house?

No doubt, Leah said to herself – "If only I was beautiful and had my husband's affection like Rachel."

And no doubt Rachel said, "If only I had sons like Leah."

How much of our lives do we spend in pointless envy – long for what others have and failing to enjoy what is ours.

My daughter recently was in a bad habit of seeing something on TV or that another person had and saying, "Unfair!"

OOO it irked me and I shut it down quickly!

But how often do we do that and I wonder God's view of it.

Rachel's frustration at being barren ends up being thrown in Jacob's face!

The language means she kept this attitude up over a long time.

She's ticked and blames it ultimately on HIM!

Why does he go to Leah!

What's wrong with him that he can't make her get pregnant?

She begins to think Jacob might be playing some cruel trick on her.

2And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

Jacob may be getting the barest hint of what's going on now.

Just as God had closed his grandmother's and mother's wombs, so Rachel is barren.

3So she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear a child on my knees, that I also may have children by her." 4Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, [not that he married her, but that he used her as a wife] and Jacob went in to her. 5And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. 6Then Rachel said, "God has judged my case; and He has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan. 7And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8Then Rachel said, "With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali.

Dan means Judge. Naphtali means Wrestling.

Rachel follows the same routine Sarah had when she offered her Egyptians maidservant Hagar to Abraham. It was wrong then and it's wrong here.

What's painful is the way Jacob seems to be willing to go along with this!

He didn't need to do this! He already had 4 sons!

The expression Rachel uses here for the surrogacy – "she will bear a child on my knees" gives us a picture of how the sons of Bilhah would be accounted in the family.

When it came time for Bilhah to deliver, Rachel would actually take up a position underneath and behind her, cradling Bilhah on her thighs, so that when the child was born, Rachel would be as close as possible and the child would come from between her legs, as it were.

Thus, Rachel would be accounted the mother.

There's something remarkable in the contrast between the way Leah and Rachel name their sons.

Look at the way Leah refers to God in vs. 31-35 of ch. 29 compared to the way Rachel refers to Him.

Leah calls Him by His covenant name – LORD = Yahweh.

To Rachel – it's the generic name El = God

Only the people of promise can call him Yahweh. Anyone can call him El.

Throughout the story, Leah comes across as the one who's Jacob's proper, God-ordained wife.

She is the one who's interested in the covenant, in the promise. Rachel comes off as a petulant, spoiled brat.

Though Leah seems far more interested in the things of God, she's far from perfect, as the next verses make painfully clear . . .

3. Vs. 9-13 – Leah Parrots Rachel

9When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife. 10And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. 11Then Leah said, "A troop comes!" So she called his name Gad. 12And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. 13Then Leah said, "I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed." So she called his name Asher.

Leah takes a page out of her sister's playbook and convinces Jacob to attend to her maid Zilpah, and of course, Jacob seems more than happy to oblige.

Gad means "Good Fortune" & Asher means "Happy."

Look at how bitter the rivalry has become.

Leah had started naming her kids after her hopes and expectations in the Lord.

When Rachel has two sons through Bilhah, she names them provocative names that speak of competition – Judge and Wrestling.

Leah answers back with 'Oh yeah – well I got good fortune and am happy cause I GOT MORE KIDS THAN YOU DO!'

4. Vs. 14-21 – Leah's Other Children

14Now Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." 15But she said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" And Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes."

Mandrakes were thought to be a potent fertility medicine & aphrodisiac.

For that reason, in the ancient world they were called "love apples."

Reuben brought some home one day to his mother and when Rachel saw them she pleaded with Leah to give them to her.

Leah expresses her long pent up bitterness at how Rachel had stolen Jacob's affection from her.

It seems that Jacob was at this point in the habit of staying in Rachel's tent.

Since Leah had stopped producing children, he no longer went to her.

But Rachel agreed to rent him to Leah that night for the mandrakes; Leah agreed.

16When Jacob came out of the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes." And he lay with her that night.

Okay – Jacob has got to be kind of digging this – not for the sexual element to it, but that these gals are fighting over him.

That's pretty exciting – you come home from work, and your wife meets you on the front lawn; she grabs you by the shirt and

says, "Come with me! You're all mine you big hunka-hunka' burning love," and drags you into the house!
No wonder Jacob was able to conceive another son.

17And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. **18**Leah said, "God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband." So she called his name Issachar. **19**Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. **20**And Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." So she called his name Zebulun. **21**Afterward she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah.

Jacob now has 10 sons and a daughter.

Issachar means Reward & Zebulun means Dwelling.

Dinah is the feminine form of Dan - Judgement

5. Vs. 22-24 – Rachel's First Son

22Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. **23**And she conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach." **24**So she called his name Joseph, and said, "The Lord shall add to me another son."

In her desperation, Rachel turned finally to the Lord and pleaded with Him for children.

He rewarded her with a son whom she named Joseph.

This name has two meanings; Add & Subtract

She saw Joseph as the first of two sons, and the one who would remove her pain of being childless.

[\[1\]](#) Adapted from Guzik (Mine's better!)

[\[2\]](#) Guzik – Online Commentary