



## Genesis – 30:1-35 The Birth of a Nation (Lesson #39)

To access missed lessons, lesson guides, and additional materials please visit our class website:  
<https://truth-seekers.net>

**30:1** When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" **2** Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" **3** Then she said, "Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her." **4** So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her.

**Vs 1** - The chaos associated with Laban's deception is just getting started! Here Rachel watches as her sister bears four children in a row while she remains barren.

Now, as this story unfolds, you will see it is likely that Jacob is spending more time with Rachel than Leah, yet Leah has quickly born four children while Rachel has remained barren.

You and I know the back-story: "When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren." (Ge 29:31 ESV)

Notice Moses tells us that she "envied" her sister. She became **jealous of her sister**, she desired to have what her sister had, namely male children from Jacob.

**APPLICATION: Envy or jealousy will eat our lunch.** It will lead us to sin, it causes us to miss the blessings we have and fixate on what we do not have (Gal 5:19-21; Pro 14:30)

She goes to her husband and with **great frustration**, almost **laying the problem at his feet** she proclaims to him.... **Give me children or I die!**

This word mentioned in **anger and frustration is ironic**, for it is in the **act of childbirth** that will Rachel will **ultimately die**. Rachel will die giving birth to the final son of the 12 (Benjamin) (Gen 35:16-19).

**Vs 2** - Notice **Moses tells us that Jacob's anger was kindled against her.**

Then Jacob asked Rachel: "**Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?**"

Now on the face this is true, **but a little harsh! Am I in the place of God?** For it is **God who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb. I suspect those words stung!**

**APPLICATION:** May our wife's frustration, pain, and even shame cause our hearts to go out to them even if they lash out with their tongues.

**Vs 3** - Rachel's despair has led her to **propose a desperate step**. Here she hatches a plan to have children by her handmade and she says: "Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth **on my behalf**, that even **I may have children through her**."

This is of course a **cultural practice** of the **ancient near east** and should sound very familiar to us (Gen 16:1-2).

I mentioned it last week, Bilhah's name means "**troubled**" or "**terror.**" Rachel's plan, Jacob will go into Bilhah and she will bear **children on her behalf**.

**OBSERVATION:** Desperation can lead us to make bad decisions.

**Vs 4** - We read in verse 4 that *Jacob went in to her*. We cannot help but wonder how much **additional chaos** this will bring into **Jacob's home**.

*5 And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. 6 Then Rachel said, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan. 7 Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8 Then Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali.*

**Vs 5-6** - As we might guess, terror conceives a bears Jacob and son. Rachel says: *"God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son."*

Notice the word **"judged"**, God has judged, the Hebrew word is: **דָּוַן (duwn)**, to judge, contend, or plead. **God has (duwn). Thus she named him: דָּן (Dan)**, which means judged.

**Vs 7-8** - So it seems that following the birth of Dan, Rachel has Jacob continue to go into her handmade.

This was likely not a twice and done but would have happened many times to secure children. Then **Bilhah conceives** again and bears **for Rachel from Jacob a second son** (this is the **sixth son**, the **sixth tribe of Israel**).

Rachel says, *"With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed."*

Now before we unpack that and the boy's name, I hope you see that **envy has led to competition**, and all of this is bringing chaos into the home of Jacob, Leah, Rachel, and hey lets add Bilhah into this!

She declares with great wrestling, the Hebrew word is **נִפְתָּלוּ (naphtuwl)** I have **wrestled with my sister** and I have **prevailed**. So, she named the boy **נַפְתָּלִי (Naphtaliy)**, which means **"my wrestling."**

What started out as jealousy has turned into a wrestling match, as least from Rachel's perspective with her sister.

---

*9 When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 10 Then Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. 11 And Leah said, "Good fortune has come!" so she called his name Gad. 12 Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. 13 And Leah said, "Happy am I! For women have called me happy." So she called his name Asher.*

**Vs 9** - It appears **that a competition is on**. Leah recognizes that she is no longer bearing children, Rachel's handmade is bearing children, Leah takes her handmade and offers her to Jacob to go in to and bear children.

These two sisters are now competing with one another to have the most male children through their husband Jacob. **Jacob is nothing more than a pawn in this competition.**

Here Leah brings Zilpah into the competition. As a reminder Zilpah's name means **"trickling."** Jacob now goes into Zilpah and what we imagine might happen, happens!

**Vs 10-11** - Zilpah becomes pregnant and ultimately has a son (the **first** through Zilpah, but the **fifth** that will go to Leah's account, and the **seventh** overall, the **seventh** tribe of Israel).

Leah's says: Good fortune **גַּד (gad)** has come, so she names the boy **גַּד (Gad)** which means **"good fortune."**

**Vs 12-13** - So following the birth of this son, Leah continues to send Jacob in to her handmade. Can you imagine the chaos and confusion as Jacob is being moved from tent to tent in this competition to have more children than your sister.

**Zilpah** again and bears Jacob a **second son**, if we credit this to Leah, this is the **sixth son** for her, this is the **eighth son overall**, this is the **eighth tribe of Israel**.

Leah said “**happy am I**” the Hebrew word is אֲשֶׁר (**‘osher**), so she named the boy אֲשֶׁר (**‘Asher**), which means “**happy!**”

Obviously, we are reading through this in minutes, but this has been happening over years.

**Discuss:** Now during this second seven years children are being born to Jacob, I suspect the pregnancies are likely overlapping one another.

You can imagine while Leah was pregnant with the third or fourth child, Rachel was unable to get pregnant so she brings Bilhah into the mix. Once Leah stops bearing, and Bilhah is bearing, Leah brings Zilpah in the mix.

---

---

*14 In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." 15 But 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?" Rachel said, "Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes." 16 When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he lay with her that night.*

**Vs 14** - As we read verse 14 this is a seemingly **harmless event**, and we wonder why this would even be recorded, we will see soon enough.

Moses tells us during the wheat harvest, this would have been in the May/June timeframe, that Reuben, the oldest son, who is a young boy at this point, found mandrakes.

We know these as “love apples” They are berries with a white reddish blossom and a yellow fruit that looks similar to small apples (Son 7:11-13).

Mandrakes were considered to be an **aphrodisiac**. The boy likely having no idea what these are, brings them to his mom (Leah).

Somehow Rachel learns that Leah has these mandrakes and she says: *"Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."*

Dr. Fruchtenbaum believes that we should see this in context of Rachel wanting them based on the fact they were a **sexual stimulant**. Leah is having nothing to do with just simply giving her sister these mandrakes. Leah responds.

**Vs 15** – In her response, a few things **become even clearer**.

First, we are not exactly sure what Leah means or is referring to when she says: *"Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband?"* A few observations and thoughts:

- 1) It appears that Jacob is spending more time with **Rachel than Leah**.
- 2) It appears Leah feels that Jacob (her husband) has been “**taken away**” from her.
- 3) Of course, there is some **irony here** since Leah married Jacob through deception of which she was involved in.
- 4) Laban's deception may have gotten his elder daughter married off, but it has brought chaos and confusion into the home of these two sisters.
- 5) To use some modern vernacular, this is a **dysfunctional home**.

**APPLICATION:** If you are like me, your life story includes many less than perfect times and circumstances.

Good news, God uses people who come from less than perfect circumstances, who have in their history some bad decisions.

**God is not looking for people with a perfect past.** He is looking for people who will follow him in the here and now. God can take your **messy past** and turn it around for good and for His glory!

We saw what Leah said, it is akin to “that is not happening”, why should I give this **aphrodisiac to you?** Why would I (Leah) work to improve your love life with my husband that you stole from me.

Now we see Rachel’s response: *“Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son’s mandrakes.”*

Now keep in mind, as we **walk through this story** it is **descriptive** and not **prescriptive**. We are not being told **how to live**, but **rather what happened**.

Now this response generates a **number of questions and an obvious conclusion**:

- 1) How could Rachel trade Jacob’s time like this?
- 2) How were things like this decided?
- 3) Were they on a schedule?
- 4) Was Rachel deciding where Jacob slept each night?
- 5) Did Jacob sleep principally with Rachel?
- 6) There is so much we do not know here.

But Rachel looked at Leah and said **he may lie with you tonight** in exchange for the fruit.

**Vs 16** - We can picture Jacob, **coming in from the field** from a **hard day’s work** and Leah goes out to meet him and says: *“You must come in to me, for I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes.”*

We do not know the arrangements, but we know what Leah said and we see that Jacob complied.

Jacob appears to be a **pawn** in the **war for children** that is going on between these two sisters.

Now before we leave this point, one quick thing. The word translated “**hired**” is the Hebrew word שָׂכַר (**sakar**). So tuck that away for one second.

*17 And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. 18 Leah said, "God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband." So she called his name Issachar. 19 And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. 20 Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor 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.*

**Vs 17** - Now, when we read Vs 17 – it seems that Leah had a **legitimate complaint** and **God listened and responded to her complaint** and she conceived a bore a **fifth son**.

Now this is her **fifth son**, if we add in the two from her handmade Zilpah that is her **seventh son**, if we add in the two from Bilhah (Rachel’s handmade) that is **Jacob’s ninth son**, so Leah’s bears to **Jacob his ninth son!**

**Vs 18** - She says God has **paid me my wages** שָׂכַר (**sakar**), so she named the boy יִשָּׂשכָר (**Yissaskar**) which means **there is payment**, or **there is recompense**. She named him **God has paid my wages**.

**Vs 19** - It seems that following the birth of Leah’s fifth son, **Jacob continued, with some regularity to go into Leah** and once again **she conceives**. And we read that Leah bears Jacob a **sixth son**. This would be the **10<sup>th</sup> son overall, 10 tribes of Israel**.

When this child is born she says: *“God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons.”*

The word translated “**endowed**” is the Hebrew word: זָבַד (**Zabad**), the word translated “**endowment**” is זֶבֶד (**zebed**) so she names the boy זְבוּלֹן (**Zëbuwlwn**) which means **exalted**.

By the way – So that you have a **cool word** to take home from Sunday School. The Hebrew words זָבַד (**Zabad**) and זֶבֶד (**zebed**) are both a **hapax-legomenon**, that means each one is only used once in the entire Hebrew bible.

**APPLICATION:** This should remind each of us that we **draw our value**, not from our spouse or any other human. We must draw our value and significance from God and his love for us and value of us.

**Vs 21** - The we are told, **after these six sons**, she bears a **daughter** and names the daughter **Dinah**. Leah bears a daughter and names her Dinah which means judgment, it is the **feminine form of Dan**.

We know for sure that other daughters were born to Jacob (Gen 37:35; 46:7, 15). But Dinah is the **only one that is named**.

The question you might have; why is Dinah mentioned, I believe because something **very bad, something very horrible will** happen to this girl when **she is a young woman**. Moses is providing her name now to prepare us when she comes up in the **narrative later in Genesis 34! This level of evil that we will see should not surprise us for the land is filled with... Canaanites!**

---

---

*22 Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. 23 She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." 24 And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the LORD add to me another son!"*

**Vs 22** - Then we are told that **God remembered Rachel** and that God **listened to Rachel** and no doubt **her pleas because she was barren**, and **God opened her womb**.

God remember her, not in the sense that He forgot her, but He **moved towards her to exercise grace!**

**God listened to her:** God heard her prayers, meaning not that he simply heard them, for He hears everything, but He listened in the sense that He acted and He moved.

She was praying and God listened, **God heard her pleas**.

She felt like she needed **mandrakes** to fix her problem, but God is the one who ultimately brought her this son! **God is what she needed!** To Rachel is born **her FIRST SON!** She gives **birth to a son**, this is her first son, but **Jacob's 11<sup>th</sup> son**.

**Vs 23-24** - Rachel **conceived** and bore a son and she said that God has “**taken away**” the Hebrew word is אָפַח (**'acaph**) God has **taken away** my reproach. Then we are told she named the boy Joseph יוֹסֵף (**Yowceph**), for she said “**may the LORD add**” יָסַף (**yacaph**) to me **another son**.

In the Hebrew Joseph יוֹסֵף (**Yowceph**) is a combination of the word for **taken away** and **add!** Equally, she seems to have named him Joseph with the **hope that God would send another son!** Notice she too is using **Yahweh**.

---

---

*25 As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. 26 Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you." 27 But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you. 28 Name your wages, and I will give it." 29 Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me.*

**Vs 25** - As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, scholars believe that the second set of seven years had just recently ended. Jacob went to Laban and said **send me on my way** that I may go home. But notice how Jacob says this, that I may go to my own home and country.

You can imagine, Jacob is saying my **contract is fulfilled**, therefor **send me on my way**, with both of my wives, back to **the Promised Land**.

**Vs 26** - Send me with my wives and my children, for **my service is complete** and you know **how I served you**. At this point it seems Jacob is clear, my time is up, you know I served you faithfully and I am now ready to go back to Beersheba, back home.

**Vs 27-28** - Laban, the man of the **counter-offer** responds; I learned by **divination** that Yahweh has blessed me because of you.

**Divinization** - The Hebrew word means **enchantment** or the **practice of divination**. We do not know exactly what he did, but it seems to be related to some pagan practice likely steeped in the occult.

Laban's point is clear, I have **divined** that **Yahweh has blessed me** because of **you**.

Laban makes a **counter-offer**. If I have found favor in your site, name your wages and I will give it.

Here the **contract being fulfilled**, Laban says listen I have learned that Yahweh blessed me abundantly because of you. If you like me even in the smallest way, **stay with me longer**, name your wages for staying and I will pay it.

**Vs 29** - Jacob highlights what Laban has **already confessed** to, namely that Jacob served Laban faithfully and Laban has been blessed and his livestock have **fares well** under Jacob. Jacob has been faithful in spite of Laban unfaithfulness!

*30 For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?" 31 He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it: 32 let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages.*

**Vs 30** - Here Jacob shares some things we **did not know**. Laban **did not have that much** before Jacob showed up. At least comparatively he did not have much.

But what he **had** has been **increased abundantly** (the Hebrew word means to **"break forth"**) the point is the Laban has enjoyed an **explosion in the growth** of his flocks under Jacob. The Lord has blessed Laban and multiplied his sheep and goats because of Jacob.

Jacob now has two wives and two female slaves and (at least) 12 young children and his focus must shift to caring and providing for my own household.

**Vs 31-32** - Laban asks, what terms, what shall be your wages, **what shall I give you? This question, in the specificity of the question is where Jacob goes!**

Jacob responds in the back half of verse 31, you shall **not "give" me anything!**

**Scholars have two different opinions of the proposal:**

Vs 32 I will pass through the flock and remove (for myself) or he is asking for the offspring for himself.

- 1) Speckled and spotted sheep
- 2) Black lambs (most lambs are white)
- 3) Speckled and spotted goats

At this point we can imagine that most of the sheep and goats were solid colors and they were not speckled and spotted and the number of **completely black goats is small**.

So this is an easy request for Laban to approve because Jacob is only asking for a **small number of animals** or the **offspring (which statistically) will be a small number of animals**.

*33 So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen." 34 Laban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said." 35 But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge of his sons. 36 And he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock.*

**Vs 33** - You see his point. It will be easy to tell mine from yours and if I have the ones that are not spotted and speckled or black sheep, then I have yours. So the originals or the offspring of the streaked and spotted and the black goats will be mine.

**Vs 34 - Laban agrees immediately!** Let it be as you have said! Obviously, this looks like a great deal for Laban, and then, as you will see, Laban is going to try to sweeten the deal for himself through deception.

**Vs 35** - Then **that very day**, Laban went through the heard and removed the goats that were speckled or spotted, and all the lambs that were black.

He moved everything from the flock that might produce specked or spotted and all the black sheep. He put those in **charge of his sons**.

Laban removed everything that would produce a heard for Jacob. This is another **grievous** act of **deception**. The game appears to be rigged and Jacob has no chance of getting ahead.

**Vs 36** - He put a large distance between the two flocks, likely so that Jacob would not stumble upon this heard of speckled spotted, and black sheep being kept by Laban's sons. Equally, no cross-breeding.

But hear this: while Laban was ripping of Jacob, we are told: ***Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock.***

---

*37 Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. 38 He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, 39 the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. 40 And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban's flock.*

**Vs 37** - This is a little confusing, but let's walk through what Jacob does. He takes sticks, poplar, almond, and plane trees, and he peels them back to expose the white. So, he makes the sticks appear spotted or streaked.

**Vs 38** - He then sits these sticks in front of where the flocks go to drink water for they also mate in these places.

**Why did he do this?** Many believe it was superstitious and many speculate that Jacob believed that when the animals looked upon these streaked and spotted pieces of wood there would be a prenatal influence and the offspring would be born to look like the wood.

Of course, that is possible, but it is speculation, for the text does not tell us that, it only tells us what he did.

As you think about this Jacob is over 90, he has been a rancher all his life. It is possible that he knew something, based on his experience that is not fully explained in this text? We read that the animals mated in the presence of the rods.

Is it possible that Jacob had learned that wood streaked like this could cause a desire in the male animals to mate? **This plan** would benefit Jacob, but it would also benefit Laban.

**Vs 39** - So it seems the flocks did reproduce, as Jacob hoped. But then we read...

The flocks bred in front of these sticks, since they are placed where the water is and they brought forth striped, spotted, and specked offspring.

He expected more births, and he got that, but **surprisingly**, he also got principally animals that were **striped, speckled, and spotted**.

Statistically this was very unlikely, but a sovereign God has stepped in to this whole disaster as Laban has stacked the deck against Jacob. We will see this more clearly in a moment.

**Vs 40** - As this happens, Jacob separates them from Laban's flock. He separated his flock out. He separated the ones born speckled and spotted as well as the black sheep, for they are his wages.

*41 Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks, 42 but for the feebler of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feebler would be Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. 43 Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys."*

**Vs 41** - So when the strong in the flock would breed, Jacob would lay out these sticks, in the troughs in front of them. Again, if Morris understands this Jacob is encouraging the stronger to mate.

**Vs 42** - He did not do this when the weaker mated. So it seems possibly when the weaker showed up to water he did not use the sticks and when the strong showed up he did.

**Vs 43** – Thus, through this all, over the years that followed, Jacob collected more and more animals, and principally stronger animals and grew richer and richer, his flocks **grew exponentially**, he hired male and female servants and purchased work animals, both camels and donkeys.

What Jacob did seems to be one of two things:

- 1) Jacob, the shepherd did something that he had learned through his years of working with sheep and goats that encouraged mating and God blessed the breeding with those that belonged to Jacob.
- 2) Jacob practicing some type of pre-scientific procedure, some type of prenatal influence that really did not do anything, but God, blessed his folly with great increases.

Now let me show you what Jacob thought, as he is talking to his wives, we will see this again next week (Gen 31:7-13).

You see, if we hear what Jacob has to say about this, he does not mention pre-natal influence. He rather gives **all glory to God** and even says that **God caused my wages to match the agreement**. He mentions nothing about some kind of unscientific belief in stripped wood causing stripped output.

Jacob was blessed not because he is clever! He was blessed by God as promised in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 28:13-15). God is blessing Jacob and preparing him for his return to the Promised Land as he **promised him!**

**If you are a believer you too are blessed by the Sovereign of the Universe!**

---

---