

Genesis 29:31-30:24 – Baby Wars! (Overcoming Idolatry)

I. God's Mercy To The Unloved and Outcast (29:31)

A. God Opened Leah's Womb

1. Leah is unloved by Jacob (probably reminded of the deception every time he sees her.
2. God sees Leah's humiliation and opens her womb to bear children

B. Rachel is Barren

1. Rachel is the pretty and "loved" wife. She is Jacob's favorite
2. God does not yet see fit to open Rachel's womb
3. This brings conflict between the two sisters, which results in a child-bearing race to win Jacob's affection

II. Leah's First Four Sons (32-35)

A. The Naming of Reuben (32)

1. Leah bears her first son – Reuben
 - a. Reuben means "See! A Son!"
 - b. The first-born son is a highly prized commodity
2. Leah acknowledges God has seen her suffering
 - a. She names him Reuben because God has "seen" her affliction
 - b. She refers to the affliction of being unloved by her husband
3. Leah hopes to earn Jacob's love
 - a. She longs for the love of Jacob
 - b. She is seeking her joy and purpose in her husband's affection
 - c. She does not receive Jacob's love because of Reuben

B. The Naming of Simeon (33)

1. Leah acknowledges God has heard her plight
 - a. She knows God has "heard" of her unloved state
 - b. She is obviously still unloved, so Reuben did not give her the result she desired
2. Leah names the son Simeon
 - a. Simeon is from the word "Shema" which means "hear"
 - b. Leah is still focused on Jacob's view of her

C. The Naming of Levi (34)

1. Leah desires her husband to join with her
2. Leah names the son Levi
 - a. She hopes that three sons will cause Jacob to love her
 - b. Levi – sounds like the Hebrew word for "joined" or "attached"
 - c. Notice that Leah's hopes are diminishing – she will settle with attachment now rather than love
 - d. This is the line through which Moses and Aaron will come

D. The Naming of Judah (35)

1. Leah now desires God's praise
2. Leah names the son Judah
 - a. Judah means "He will be praised"

- b. Leah has stopped seeking joy in Jacob and turned her affections to God
- c. This is the line through which David and Jesus Christ will come

E. Leah Stops Bearing Children (35b)

1. Did God close Leah's womb?
2. Did Jacob remove himself from Leah?
 - a. There is evidence in the text that Rachel stopped Jacob from continuing having relations with Leah
 - b. Later, Leah will have three more children and Rachel will make a deal to allow Leah to sleep with Jacob

III. Bilhah's Two Sons (30:1-8)

A. Rachel Deeply Envy's Leah (1-4)

1. Rachel's barrenness brings family strife (1-2)
 - a. Rachel is jealous of Leah's fertility (1a)
 - i. Rachel is the pretty one, no doubt she thinks she deserves to have Jacob's children
 - ii. Rachel has Jacob's loves but she wants children – Leah has children but wants Jacob's love
 - iii. Each wife wants what the other has
 - b. Rachel demands children from Jacob (1b)
 - i. Rachel is tired of seeing the ugly sister with all the benefits
 - ii. She demands Jacob to give her children
 - iii. She obviously knows that Jacob cannot make her have children, she is probably setting him up for her plan.
 - c. Jacob Responds to Rachel with Anger (2)
 - i. Jacob is not very "loving" to the wife that he loves
 - ii. Jacob deliberately jabs her by saying he is not God who has withheld children from "you"
 - iii. Notice Jacob doesn't say from "us"

2. Rachel devises a plan (3-4)

- a. Rachel suggests a surrogate mother (3)
 - i. Rachel proposes to give Jacob her maid, Bilhah to have surrogate children
 - ii. "She shall bear upon my knees" – the handmaid would give birth into the wife's lap so it would be as if the wife gave birth
 - iii. The child would legally be Rachel's
- b. Jacob complies with Rachel's request (4)

B. The Naming of Dan (5-6)

1. Rachel feels vindicated by God (5-6a)
 - a. Rachel names the child based on God "judging" or vindicating her
 - b. She names him as if God has chosen her side in this war with Leah
 - c. Notice that Rachel names the child not Bilhah – Dan is legally Rachel's
2. Rachel names the son Dan (6b)
 - a. Dan means "vindicate or judged"
 - b. Daniel means "God is my judge"

C. The Naming of Naphtali (7-8)

1. Rachel joys in prevailing over Leah (7-8a)
 - a. Rachel is now throwing her success in Leah's face
 - b. She has won the "wrestling" match with her sister
2. Rachel names the son Naphtali (8b)
 - a. Naphtali means "my wrestling"
 - b. The son's name will always reflect Rachel's strife with Leah

IV. Zilpah's Two Sons (9-13)

A. Leah Also Uses A Surrogate Mother (9)

1. Leah has stopped bearing children
2. Leah sees Rachel now having children through Bilhah
3. Leah will not be outdone by Rachel – She gives Zilpah to Jacob

B. The Naming of Gad (10-11)

1. Leah rejoices that God has given good fortune (10-11a)
 - a. The word may mean a troupe (or company) or good fortune (well being)
 - b. Either way Leah rejoices that God has blessed her again
2. Leah names the son Gad (11b)
 - a. Gad means "fortunate" or "troupe"

C. The Naming of Asher (12-13)

1. Leah exalts in her happiness (12-13a)
 - a. Leah is happy that she is again winning the race with her sister
 - b. She seems to be less focused on Jacob and more on Rachel
2. Leah names the son Asher (13b)
 - a. Asher means happiness

V. Leah and Rachel's Competition Escalates (14-16)

A. The Wives Compete For Position (14-15a)

1. Reuben finds mandrakes in the field (14a)
 - a. "The mandrake (*Mandragora autumnalis*) is a perennial Mediterranean plant that bears bluish flowers in winter and yellowish plum-sized fruit in summer. In ancient times, mandrakes were famed for arousing sexual desire (cf. Song of Solomon 7:13) and for helping barren women to conceive." – R. Kent Hughes



- b.
 - c. The Bible shows that mandrakes are not useful for fertility – Rachel gets them but still is infertile for many years
2. Rachel wants the mandrakes (14b)

- a. Rachel believes the root will give her the ability to have her own sons
 - b. She is clearly losing the baby war and wants an edge in the race
 - 3. Leah refuses Rachel's request (15a)
 - a. Leah refuses to give Rachel any aid. She still blames her for stealing Jacob's love
 - b. Leah does not want to give Rachel any advantage
- B. The Wives Deal For Jacob (15b-16)
 - 1. Rachel offers a night with Jacob for the mandrakes (15b)
 - a. This seems to suggest that Rachel is the one who cut off Leah's access to Jacob
 - b. Rachel thinks it is worth the price to give Leah a night with Jacob
 - c. Rachel prizes the possibility of the mandrakes enough to offer the very fertile Leah a night with Jacob
 - 2. Leah "hires" Jacob's services (16)
 - a. Leah runs out and informs Jacob that the wives have made a deal for his services
 - b. Without a word, Jacob complies
- VI. Leah's Three Other Children (17-21)
 - A. God Opens Leah's Womb Again (17)
 - 1. God heard Leah again – obviously Leah was still praying for children
 - 2. God granted her request
 - B. The Naming of Issachar (18)
 - 1. Leah rejoices in God giving her "wages" – He has rewarded her persistence?
 - 2. Leah names the son Issachar
 - a. Issachar means "hire"
 - b. His name will always remind them of the deal they made with mandrakes
 - C. The Naming of Zebulun (19-20)
 - 1. Leah again desires Jacob's love (19-20a)
 - a. Leah has returned to seeking her joy in Jacob's love
 - b. Because she has borne six sons, now her husband will dwell with her
 - c. The word can also be translated "honor" – Jacob will now honor her
 - 2. Leah names the son Zebulun (20b)
 - a. Zebulun means dwelling or honoring
 - D. The Birth of Dinah (21)
 - 1. Notice that nothing is said of the only daughter born to Jacob
- VII. Rachel's First Son (22-24)
 - A. God Remembers Rachel (22)
 - 1. Finally God blesses Rachel with a child
 - 2. Notice that it wasn't mandrake root but God who "remembered" her
 - B. The Naming of Joseph (23-24)
 - 1. Rachel thanks God for her conception (23)
 - a. Rachel now turns her attention to God's praise rather than winning the race against her sister

- b. Rachel thanks God for taking away her reproach – childlessness is a point of shame in the ancient near east
 - c. Rachel has given up all her devices and schemes and simply trusts God
- 2. Rachel names the son Joseph (24)
 - a. Joseph – means “adding” – this looks forward to the adding of another son (her other son will be named Benjamin)

Notice that God remembers and blesses the lowly – he blessed Leah in her low estate and he blessed Rachel when she gave up the pursuit of her own glory.

Notice the God is bringing his promise of a great nation and a multitude of descendants to pass – even through all this mess.

Notice the wives are committing idolatry by trying to find their joy and purpose in Jacob, the multitude of children, and their status in the family.