

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 29:31-30:24

“More Problems in Jacob’s Family”

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(Genesis answers three basic theological questions. The first question is, “Whose world is it anyway?” The text answers the question by affirming that it is God’s world by right of creation. It is God’s world because God made it. The second question Genesis asks is “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way?” The answer is by trusting God and obeying Him. Family becomes the concern, and Genesis begins to answer the third question, “How do we get along in God’s world God’s way particularly with the members of our own family?” In Genesis 25, we visited the family of Abraham, and we have seen how Abraham’s family was fractured because Abraham did not trust God completely and did not follow the plan of God for marriage. We saw how the family of Isaac, Abraham’s heir, was divided by parental favoritism. So far, we have not seen a family that remained healthy and intact. This text continues by showing what happened in Jacob’s family.)

Genesis 29:31-30:24

Verse 29:31

³¹ When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless.

- Jacob now has two wives, Leah and Rachel. He was tricked into marrying Leah by her father, his Uncle Laban, and he resented her because of this. So his household was not built on God’s plan for marriage and was divided by his “not loving” Leah.
- Seeing Leah’s plight, God had mercy on her. Despite Jacob’s neglect of her physically, she conceived. But Rachel did not.

Verse 32

³² Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, “It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.”

- Leah bore Jacob a son. The child was named Reuben. In Hebrew the name means, “Look, a son.” Leah believed that having born Jacob’s heir, her status in her husband’s eyes would change.

Verses 33-35

³³ *She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.” So she named him Simeon.*

³⁴ *Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” So he was named Levi.*

³⁵ *She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “This time I will praise the Lord.” So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.*

- Leah bore Jacob three more sons. Her second son was named Simeon. The Hebrew word means “hearing.” Her third son was named Levi. The Hebrew word means “attached.” Her fourth son was named Judah. The Hebrew word means “praise.” Then she stopped bearing children.

Verses 30:1-6

^{30:1} *When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I’ll die!”*

² *Jacob became angry with her and said, “Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?”*

³ *Then she said, “Here is Bilhah, my servant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I too can build a family through her.”*

⁴ *So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, ⁵ and she became pregnant and bore him a son. ⁶ Then Rachel said, “God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son.” Because of this she named him Dan.*

- Rachel resented Leah because Leah bore Jacob children and she did not. She was so driven by her jealousy that she demanded that Jacob give her a child, declaring that if it did not happen, she would just as soon die.
- Jacob got angry with her and told her that she did not bear children because she was cursed by God.

- So Rachel suggested that Jacob sleep with her maid, Bilhah. Because Bilhah was Rachel's property, the child born to Bilhah would also belong to her. She could claim the child as her own child.
- Jacob agreed to her request without any hesitation. He slept with Bilhah and she conceived and bore him a son. Rachel claimed the child as hers and named him Dan. In Hebrew the word means "justice."

Verses 7-8

⁷ Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸ Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." So she named him Naphtali.

- But Jacob continued to sleep with Bilhah! She bore him a second son. Rachel claimed this child, too, naming him Naphtali, The Hebrew word means "wrestling." Rachel gave the child this name claiming that she had defeated her sister.

Verses 9-11

⁹ When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. ¹⁰ Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹ Then Leah said, "What good fortune!" So she named him Gad.

- Not to be outdone by her sister, Leah followed Rachel's example. She told Jacob to sleep with her maid, Zilpah, which he did without objection.
- Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Leah named him Gad which in Hebrew means "good fortune."

Verses 12-13

¹² Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. ¹³ Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.

- Of course, Jacob continued to sleep with all four women.
- Zilpah bore him another son. She named the child Asher. In Hebrew, the word means "happy." She declared that she was happy.

Verses 14-16

¹⁴ During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."

¹⁵ But she said to her, “Wasn’t it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son’s mandrakes too?”

“Very well,” Rachel said, “he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son’s mandrakes.”

¹⁶ So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. “You must sleep with me,” she said. “I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes.” So he slept with her that night.

- One day Reuben found some mandrake plants and brought them home to his mother, Leah. Mandrakes were believed to be an aphrodisiac.
- Rachel begged Leah to give her some of the mandrakes. Apparently, it was Rachel’s turn to sleep with Jacob. Leah refused to give the plants to her sister. So, Rachel agreed to let Jacob sleep with Leah that night in return for the mandrakes.
- That night when Jacob came home, Leah met him. She told him that she had bought Rachel’s turn and that he was to sleep with her that night. He agreed and slept with Leah instead of Rachel that night.

Verses 17-18

¹⁷ God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. ¹⁸ Then Leah said, “God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband.” So she named him Issachar.

- Leah conceived and bore Jacob another son. This one was named Issachar. In Hebrew it means, “reward.” She considered this child to be a sign of God’s favor because she had given her maid to Jacob.

Verses 19-21

¹⁹ Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. ²⁰ Then Leah said, “God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons.” So she named him Zebulun.

²¹ Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

- Leah conceived again and bore Jacob yet another son. She named this one Zebulun. It means “dwelling.” Again she believed that Jacob would love her because she had born him six sons.
- Sometime later, Leah bore Jacob a daughter, Dinah.

Verses 22-24

²² Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive. ²³ She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." ²⁴ She named him Joseph, and said, "May the Lord add to me another son."

- Rachel conceived. She gave birth to another son. She named the child Joseph. The name means "may the Lord add" or "the Lord has taken away." God added to her the blessing of another child and he had taken away the curse of barrenness.
- Jacob is blessed with many sons, but his family is entirely out of order!

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