

GENESIS
Week 29, chapters 30 and 31

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.

READ GEN 30 all

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 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.

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.

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").

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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, striped, 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.

GENESIS CHAPTER 31

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Here we witness history repeat itself. Jacob had a life in many ways similar to Abraham. He was a man without a country, a wanderer. Did he belong to Mesopotamia, or did he belong to the Land of Canaan?

And we are reminded of the situation between Lot and Abraham when Lot's wealth grew such that it caused tension between those loyal to Abraham, and those loyal to Lot; so the only solution was separation. Jacob and Lavan now find themselves in a similar situation.

It is rare in the Bible that we find division and separation occurring on happy terms; something unpleasant was usually at the heart of the matter to cause it. So, perhaps we should take heart that the divisions and separations that have happened in our lives resulting from bad judgment, selfishness, sin, or even something completely out of our control, are normal. It is a Christian cliché that God uses imperfect people to bring about His perfect will. In reality, what other kind of people are there than imperfect for Him to work with?

Just as Lot cut ties permanently with Abraham, and went on to form a new and separate family line that would result in the nations of Moab and Ammon, here we find that Jacob will.....due to circumstances that Yehoveh uses to achieve His purposes..... finally cut family ties with the land of Mesopotamia and his in-laws. Although Jacob will eventually lead his family to Egypt for the purpose of survival, it is now clear that the Land of Canaan is home, and no other.

In verse 1, Jacob overhears Laban's sons grumbling about how Jacob's herds and flocks really ought to be theirs. Boy, the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, does it? Laban's sons are just like him: jealous, selfish, and greedy.

When the ever-observant Jacob notices the distinct change in demeanor of Laban's family, he knows its time to leave. That notion is verified by God, who instructs Jacob that now is the time that he will fulfill His promise to bring Jacob back to his home: Canaan.

Jacob consults with his wives. They are MORE than ready to leave. In fact, here they reveal their hurt and anger with their father, Laban, for (in their eyes) he had shown them the greatest disrespect by virtually selling them to Jacob, instead of following the usual betrothal customs. I'd also like to point out something else here: there can be no doubt that Hebrew society was male dominated. However, Hebrew society greatly revered women, and any notion that the Bible promotes the idea that women were then, or are now, of less value than men is just uninformed. Notice here that the Holy Scriptures show that the first thing Jacob did after God told him it was time to leave, was to consult with his wives. And, it's obvious by the way they responded that Jacob greatly considered their feelings and thoughts on the matter. It's not that Jacob didn't lead; it's that he included his wives in the decision that greatly affected them...leaving their family, forever.

Jacob plans their escape and executes it. He puts his family on camels, separates his property from Laban's, and in an opportune moment while Laban is off shearing some sheep, they leave; but not before Rachel steals her father's set of household gods to take with her on their journey. Why would she do that? The verses just before this answer that question: in V14, the two sisters said to Jacob "do we still have any portion or inheritance

in our father's house?" This was a rhetorical question....in other words, they knew full well that their father had no intention of caring for them. Even more, this is an indication that they are breaking allegiance with their father; for in verse 16, they say all that Jacob's God took from Laban now belongs to "us and our children".

In Mesopotamia, it was the tradition that he who possessed the family gods was the owner of the family wealth and authority. By Rachel stealing these gods, it was her intent to assure a family inheritance for herself after her father died. Apparently, she planned on keeping them until Laban went to the grave, and then appearing before her family with what amounted to the will, the keys to the safety deposit box, and the right to be executor of the estate....all rolled into one. This was a MOST serious matter that went WAY above petty theft.

But, even more, Laban and his family....and likely Rachel as well.....believed these idols were real. That they actually represented real gods. And, those who adhered to this system prayed to these idols for rain, for healing, for children, for protection, and so on. Without his gods, Laban was in a fix.