

## Genesis 30 - More Children Born to Jacob

### (Continuing the Lineage of What Would Later be called The Twelve Tribes of Israel)

#### A. Two sons born to Bilhah.

1. (1-4) Rachel, out of frustration, gives her maid Bilhah to Jacob in a “surrogate mother” arrangement.  
a. **Give me children, or else I die!** Despite Rachel’s great beauty, she also was near despair. No doubt, Leah often said, “If I only had my sister’s beauty and the love of my husband as she does.” And, no doubt, Rachel often said, “If I only had sons like my sister.” Beautiful or plain, we all have our problems. Stop looking to how God deals with others and set your eyes on Him!

b. **Rachel envied her sister . . . Give me children, or else I die . . . Jacob’s anger was aroused against Rachel:** The tension in this family is apparent. At least Jacob saw the hand of God in the matter, even though he stated it to Rachel cruelly.

i. Can you imagine how vain Rachel was, knowing Jacob worked 14 years with no pay out of love for her, and knowing Jacob would not have worked one day for Leah?

c. **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:** Much like Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham in a surrogate-mother type arrangement (Genesis 16), Rachel gives her maid Bilhah to Jacob.

i. **On my knees** refers to the custom where the husband impregnated the surrogate while the surrogate reclined on the lap of the wife, and how she might even recline on the wife as she gave birth. The symbolism clearly showed the child was legally the child of the mother, not the surrogate, who merely “stood in” for the wife both in conception and birth.

d. **She gave him Bilhah her maid as wife:** This does not mean that Jacob actually married Bilhah. It means Jacob did with Bilhah what a man should only do with his wife.

2. (5-6) The birth of Dan.

a. **She called his name Dan:** Jacob’s fifth son, born to him through Bilhah, the maid of Rachel, is named by Rachel **Dan** meaning, “judgment.” Because of her own envy, she viewed this child born of the flesh as a victory and a vindication for her.

b. **God has judged my case; and He has also heard my voice and given me a son:**

3. (7-8) The birth of Naphtali.

a. **She called his name Naphtali:** Jacob’s sixth son, born to him through Bilhah, the maid of Rachel, is named **Naphtali** by Rachel, meaning “wrestle.” Relationships in this home have broken down to the point where Rachel will openly acknowledge this “baby competition” between her and her sister by naming the new baby *wrestle*.

b. **With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed:** This seems strange. How do two sons prevail over four? Perhaps she meant it in the sense that now Leah seemed to have stopped having children.

#### B. Two sons born to Zilpah.

1. (9-11) The birth of Gad.

a. **She took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife:** Leah, who has stopped bearing children, figured she could use the same “surrogate mother” method to increase “her” number of children, so she gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob as Rachel gave her maid Bilhah to Jacob.

b. **She called his name Gad:** Jacob's seventh son, born to him through Zilpah, the maid of Leah, is named **Gad**, meaning "troop" or "good fortune"; the wives of Jacob are still using their children as pawns in a power struggle within the home.

i. Leah has apparently lost the peace she had when her fourth son was born; she no longer has the peace "praise" brings.

2. (12-13) The birth of Asher.

a. **So she called his name Asher:** Jacob's eighth son, born to him through Zilpah, the maid of Leah, is named **Asher**, meaning "happy"; Leah is more concerned about the status the child will bring her (**all the daughters will call me blessed**) than about the child himself.

C. Leah herself bears two more sons and a daughter.

1. (14-18) The birth of Issachar.

a. **Found mandrakes in the field:** The mandrake is a root, called "love-apples" in Hebrew. They were thought (and still are among some peoples) to increase fertility in women. Because Leah had the mandrakes, she knew Jacob would have relations with her, believing there was a greater likelihood she would become pregnant.

i. We don't know if the effect of the mandrakes was something biological, or if it functioned more as a placebo. But under the guiding hand of God, the mandrakes seemed to "work" in the case of Leah and Jacob. Whatever strange agencies God may allow to be used (such as mandrakes), the real factor is His sovereign will (**God listened to Leah**).

b. **You have taken away my husband:** The hostility between Leah and Rachel is as obvious as it is painful. It must have been terrible living in a home where one wife believed the other had stolen her husband from her.

i. This confirms the wisdom of God's original plan, as expressed in Genesis 2:24: one man to be joined to one woman in a one-flesh relationship.

ii. "Is it any wonder that this family had a history of strife and bloodshed? Children reflect the atmosphere of the home." (Barnhouse)

iii. Later, Leviticus 18:18 forbids the marrying of sisters, and this shows why!

c. **So she called his name Issachar:** Jacob's ninth son, born to Leah, is named **Issachar**, meaning "reward"; Leah saw this son as a reward from God because she was "generous" enough to offer her maid to Jacob.

2. (19-20) The birth of Zebulun.

a. **So she called his name Zebulun:** Jacob's tenth son, born to Leah, is named **Zebulun**, meaning "dwelling." In the pain of her heart, she still waits for her husband to truly love her and live with *her*, and she hopes the sheer quantity of sons will win his heart to her.

3. (21) The birth of Dinah.

a. **Afterward she bore a daughter:** Finally, after ten children, Jacob becomes father to a daughter through Leah, who is named **Dinah**, which means "vindicated," which applies later in Genesis 34.

b. The ungodly competition has, in one sense, ended. Leah and the two maids will have no more children.

D. Rachel herself bears a son to Jacob.

1. (22) God's sovereignty over the womb.

Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb.

a. **And opened her womb:** The idea of God's sovereignty over the womb is a persistent theme in the Bible; God granted twins to Rebekah (Genesis 25:21); He opens the womb of Leah (Genesis 29:31), and closes the womb of Hannah (1 Samuel 1:5). The purposes of God in opening one and closing the other may be completely unknowable, but God has His purpose.

2. (23-24) The birth of Joseph.

a. **So she called his name Joseph:** The eleventh son born to Jacob, through Rachel, is named **Joseph**, meaning "may he add"; Rachel feels she has been "vindicated" by the birth of one son, but longs for more children to continue the competition with her sister Leah.

b. At this point, none would think this eleventh son would end up being the key son used to further God's redemptive purpose through this family. Yet Isaiah 55:8-9 is true: *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."*

Children of <b>Jacob</b> by wife in order of birth (D = Daughter)							
<b>Leah</b>	<u>Reuben</u> (1)	<u>Simeon</u> (2)	<u>Levi</u> (3)	<u>Judah</u> (4)	<u>Issachar</u> (9)	<u>Zebulun</u> (10)	<u>Dinah</u> (D)
<b>Rachel</b>	<u>Joseph</u> (11)	<b>Benjamin</b> (12)					
<b>Bilhah</b> (Rachel's servant)	<u>Dan</u> (5)	<u>Naphtali</u> (6)					
<b>Zilpah</b> (Leah's servant)	<u>Gad</u> (7)	<u>Asher</u> (8)					

\*Benjamin is born later and is recorded in Genesis Chapter 35.

E. Jacob's agreement with Laban.

1. (25-27) Jacob knows it is time to go back to Canaan.

a. **Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country:** Though Jacob was in Haran with Laban and his daughters for more than 14 years, he knew that he belonged in the land promised to him by God, through the covenant made with his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac. After 14 years, Jacob still called the Promised Land **my country**.

b. **Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the LORD has blessed me for your sake:** Laban knows Jacob has been an invaluable worker for him.

2. (28-34) Jacob negotiates a deal with Laban to start building a flock of sheep and goats for himself.

a. **The spotted and speckled among the goats; and these shall be my wages:** Jacob will take the **speckled** and **spotted** offspring, but will separate the currently speckled or spotted animals from the rest of the flock, so the odds are set against him. Allowing the speckled and spotted sheep and goats to remain in the flock would increase the likelihood of more speckled and spotted offspring coming from the flock at large.

b. **Laban said, “Oh, that it were according to your word!”** This is an agreeable deal to both parties. First, it was a foolproof way to distinguish between the flocks of Laban and Jacob. As well, Laban liked the deal because the odds were stacked in his favor. Jacob proposed the deal because he was willing to trust in God.

3. (35-36) The agreement is made, and the flocks are separated.

a. **Jacob fed the rest of Laban’s flocks:** Jacob now will care for the large flock of his father-in-law Laban, made up of solid-colored animals, and Jacob will receive any speckled or spotted offspring of this flock. Obviously, if there was a way Jacob could encourage these solid-colored sheep to bring forth spotted and speckled offspring, it would greatly increase his personal wealth.

b. **He put three days’ journey between himself and Jacob:** So there would be no mixing of the flocks, Laban’s sons took care of all the existing speckled and spotted sheep and goats, keeping them a three-day journey from the main flock. Jacob himself would take care of the solid-colored flock of Laban, as well as their speckled and spotted offspring, which belonged to him.

4. (37-43) God blesses Jacob’s method of breeding, and he greatly increases in wealth.

a. **Jacob took for himself rods of green poplar and of the almond and chestnut trees:** When Jacob put these branches in the drinking troughs of the flocks it apparently increased the number of speckled and spotted offspring from the solid-colored flock Jacob managed on Laban’s behalf.

b. **So the feebler were Laban’s and the stronger Jacob’s:** Jacob also used selective breeding to increase the strength and vitality of his flock. We don’t know exactly how this method worked. It is possible Jacob knew more about animal husbandry than we do today; but it is more likely Jacob did the best he knew, and God blessed it.

c. **Thus the man became exceedingly prosperous:** The ancient Hebrew says, “the man burst out exceedingly, exceedingly.” God blessed Jacob, but it was not because Jacob was especially good. It was because of the promises God made to Jacob (Genesis 28:13-15) and the covenant made to Abraham. In the same way, blessing comes from the LORD to us, not because we are great or good, but because of the covenant God has made with us through Jesus, and promises He has given us in His word.

i. We may note Jacob’s principles for prosperity:

- Don’t make wealth your goal (Genesis 30:25-26)
- Don’t be afraid to work for others and try to increase their wealth before or as you work to increase your own wealth (Genesis 30:27)
- Work hard, dedicating yourself to your employer’s success (Genesis 30:26, 31:38-42)
- Trust God (Genesis 30:31-33)