

The Dueling Family

Genesis 30 – November 27, 2011

➤ **The Misery of ENVY** (Genesis 30:1-2)

➤ **A Cultures Godless CUSTOM** (Genesis 30:3-80)

➤ **Baby BATTLES** (Genesis 30:9-26)

The root of the problem

TREASURING the wrong things

➤ **QUESTIONABLE Husbandry** (Genesis 30:27-42)

➤ **GOD'S Superintendence** (Genesis 30:43)

The sovereign hand of God uses **FLAWED** human instruments, even superstition, to accomplish His purposes.

*God draws from the well of overwhelming **GRACE** to work through people just like **US**.*

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Intro: We are in the midst of a study of the Patriarchs, 3 key men in God’s kingdom plan – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Those who say the Bible is boring haven’t read it. Genesis 30 reads like a Soap Opera. The first part of chapter 30 could be entitled, *DESPERATE HOUSEWIVES*. I have never watched an episode, but have heard that each woman on the show is desperate for something.

- ✓ One for a **better career**.
- ✓ Another for a **more satisfying love life**.
- ✓ And another wants a **husband who will love her and accept her** for who she is.

In our story today we have two desperate wives: sisters who marry the same man within a week of each other.

But this is not a story on merely a human plain. There is a divine perspective we must not miss! The story centers around the promise God made to Jacob in Genesis 28:14, **DESPITE** the weaknesses and failures of these spiritually immature people.

Genesis 28:14

“Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

The control of God and the plan of God are behind the story.

This story is like watching a tennis match. We look at one player ... and quickly shift to the other. And back and forth the story goes. I picture God saying to all of us ... as if we’re in the bleachers, follow the story ... observe the bad attitudes and sins of these two women. I’ll stop play every once and a while and explain things from a Divine perspective, things Rachel and Leah are missing.

My friends, I don’t want you to lose sight that everything in Genesis is leading to the coming of Christ. It is important to see God moving to fulfill His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to bless the earth with a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. For the Lord Jesus will come from this family, a family that is an embarrassment!

God is working behind the scenes despite the foolishness and sins of His people. He will fulfill His promise through weak people. He will accomplish His plans through people who fluctuate between faith and utter depravity.

This family is about as dysfunctional as they come. And God, doing just as He pleases, allows the unloved Leah to have children.

➤ **The Misery of ENVY**

The story goes back to chapter 29 ...

- Leah the homely, unattractive girl, becomes Jacob’s first wife. She’s unloved.
- God opens her womb and allows her to conceive in a short time.

- God has mercy on her and she gives birth to four boys! We pick up the story in chapter 30.

Genesis 30:1-2

Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister; and she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or else I die.”

30:2 Then Jacob’s anger burned against Rachel, and he said, “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?”

Rachel is unhappy, not so much because of **her own barrenness** but by her sister’s fruitfulness.

Envy is grieving at the good of others

“Give me children, or else I die” is saying that life is not worth living if I don’t get what I want!

Rachel blamed Jacob for her infertility!

If you don’t trust that God is involved in every area of your life ... sin will follow!

How sad! She had her husband’s love, but that was no consolation.

The Bible does not hesitate to tell us the very worst about its heroes.

And one of the things this does is magnify the grace of God

But it was a sin on Rachel’s part to overlook the hand of God when infertility occurred.

Things are not well in Jacob’s home.

We are getting a glimpse of the misery of the wives of polygamists:

Leah desperately trying to **earn** Jacob’s love

Rachel desperately trying to **hold on** to Jacob’s love

Rachel valued herself by what others thought of her. Having children would bring acclaim and Rachel longed for that.

Rachel is not a model of spirituality.

- ✓ She based her happiness on having a child.
- ✓ To be bitter towards her husband was another sin.
- ✓ But the biggest sin was overlooking God in her affliction.

From the perspective of heaven

Jacob had righteous anger! It was justified.

He hits the nail right on the head when he said...

“Am I in the place of God?”

God is sovereign in conception. God opened Leah’s womb because she was unloved. Jacob’s anger towards Rachel puts God back into the picture.

Children are a gift of the Lord, and Rachel failed to realize this.

What we wish we had heard from Rachel ... the words of the song ...
*Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.
 Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
 Leave to thy God to order and provide;
 In every change, He faithful will remain.*

Transition: This would have been a good time to pray and trust God, but that is missing from our story.

➤ **A Culture's Foolish CUSTOM**

Genesis 30:3-5

{Rachel} said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees, that through her I too may have children."

30:4 So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her.

30:5 Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.

My friends, why doesn't Jacob step up and lead? Why doesn't he say, no, we're not going to go that route. Let's wait on God!

Instead ... he acquiesces.

Giving your husband your servant was a sanctioned custom. But God never intended this!

From the perspective of heaven

God had promised Jacob a large family and would provide in His time and in a godly way, had Rachel and Jacob prayed and waited on Him.

He will bring about His promise, but will not restrain the depravity of these wives.

From the perspective of man

The end justifies the means.

Transition: Leah has been trying to win the heart of her husband. Now she enters into competition with Rachel to see who can have the most kids. Both are desperate to find happiness. The sisters enter into ...

➤ **Baby BATTLES**

Verses 4-24 is a big baby making contest.

Rachel gets into the competition with the birth of two babies by her hand-maid.

30:6 – at the birth of Dan by Bilhah – Rachel feels God has come through ...

30:8 – at the birth of Naphtali – Rachel feels like she's won the wrestling match with her sister.

But Leah re-enters the competition ... she realizes she's not having children ...

30:9-11 – Her maid Zilpah is given to Jacob and has a son – Gad

30:12-13 – and Zilpah has a second son – Asher which means "*happy am I*" ... *women will call me happy.*

But now a new element in the competition begins ... mandrakes.

Genesis 30:14

Now 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.**”

30:15 But she said to her, “Is it a small matter for you to take my husband? And would you take my son’s mandrakes also?” So Rachel said, “Therefore he may lie with you tonight in return for your son’s mandrakes.”

30:16 When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, then Leah went out to meet him and said, “You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son’s mandrakes.” So he lay with her that night.

Mandrakes, some kind of a fruit, were superstitiously viewed in the ancient world as “love-apples,” an aphrodisiac or fertility-inducing narcotic. The forerunner of **Viagra** ...

Notice the irony

Rachel buys the mandrakes, but Leah gets to sleep with Jacob and without the mandrakes gets pregnant.

Despite all the manipulations of these two sisters ... notice who is at work behind the scenes

30:17 says ... **God gave heed to Leah and she conceived**

- ✓ Gave birth to two more sons and a daughter
- ✓ Leah is in first place in the competition.

Leah thinks she’s winning, but probably inspired the writing of the Beatles song – *CAN’T BUY ME LOVE*.

AND SUDDENLY AFTER ALL THESE BABY BATTLES ...

30:22 God remembered Rachel ... opened her womb ... and Joseph is born.

When Rachel finally conceived

It was by **GRACE** not **DRUGS** that brought about the birth of Joseph.

The root of the problem for Leah and Rachel ...

Highly **TREASURING** the wrong things

The meaning to life does not come from children. It comes from God alone!

We want to remind you of this often ...

Treasure Christ above all else.

The promise of a multiplying family is being fulfilled...

Born to Leah:

Levi

Judah

Born to Rachel:

Joseph

Transition: At the birth of Joseph (30:25-26) Jacob decides it's time to return to Canaan. So he asks Laban to let him go.

➤ QUESTIONABLE Husbandry

Jacob has been the best thing that ever happened to greedy Laban. And Laban knows it.

30:27 Laban said “the LORD has blessed me on your account.”

He's now a very rich man ... still greedy. He's looking for a way to get richer, and Jacob is key to his future.

Jacob is showing signs of honor

Laban says ... *name your wage and I'll pay it.*

Jacob reminds Laban how well he's cared for Laban's animals and how they've multiplied because of the Lord. But Jacob continues ...

30:31 “You shall not give me anything. If you will do this one thing for me, I will again pasture and keep your flock:

Genesis 30:32-34

let me pass through your entire flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted sheep and every black one among the lambs and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and such shall be my wages.

30:33 “So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come concerning my wages. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, will be considered stolen.”

30:34 Laban said, “Good, let it be according to your word.”

- What Jacob does next is suspect ... looks like superstition or almost like voodoo.

Jacob's pay would consist of animals not yet born.

Apparently most of the animals were solid in color – sheep were white ... goats were black and cattle were brown. Few were of the kind Jacob requested.

Undoubtedly, Laban loved the idea thinking Jacob could not succeed and his own animals would multiply.

I don't know what to make of this ... for there is no scientific evidence to validate this practice.

Genesis 30:37-39

Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white which was in the rods.

30:38 He set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the gutters, even in the watering troughs, where the flocks came to drink; and they mated when they came to drink.

30:39 So the flocks mated by the rods, and the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted.

Sounds like hocus-pocus to me. John MacArthur thinks that when the bark was peeled ... some stimulant was released into the water that stimulated sexual activity.

- ✓ When the stronger mated ... the rods were used.
- ✓ When the weak ones mated ... the rods were removed.
- ✓ Jacob's flocks multiplied and were healthy ... Laban's didn't do as well.

When it was all said and done ... Jacob had outwitted the master deceiver, Laban! Laban met his match!

But Jacob was wise to give credit to God!

Regardless of the role of the peeling of the poplar and almond trees ... Jacob is very strictly keeping to the agreement.

From the perspective of heaven ...

A message that resonates all through the Book of Genesis ... the Lord will provide for His people!

- ✓ In Genesis 1, the Lord provided us with this beautiful world.
- ✓ In Genesis 6, he provided Noah with an ark to save his family from the flood.
- ✓ In Genesis 22, God himself provided the lamb for Abraham to sacrifice in place of his son Isaac.
- ✓ In Genesis 37-50, the Lord provided for Joseph for all those years he was living in the land of Egypt.
- ✓ And 2000 years ago, God provided for us when He sent His Son to die on the cross for our sins.

Galatians 4:4

“When the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.”

No matter how worried we are about the future, no matter how troubled we are about our current situation, we can take comfort knowing the Word of God teaches us that the Lord provides for His people! We see this in our final point ...

Proverbs 3:5-6

- Trust
- with all your heart
- Do not lean on...hocus pocus...
- Acknowledge Him...
- And He will make your paths straight

➤ **GOD'S Superintendence**

Genesis 30:43

So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.

God overruled Laban.

God is behind all this.

On the one hand ... God is demonstrating He's in charge!

On the other hand God is demonstrating His grace by working with people weak in faith and questionable in character—but people of His own calling.

- **God is demonstrating** ... despite all the battles between wives ... despite all the manipulations of Jacob ... **He's sovereign!**
- God will fulfill His promise ... His eternal plan.

At first glance this story appears to be about two schemers. But in reality it is about God's sovereignty and small steps of faith on the part of Jacob.

Wrap Up

This story was a message to the nation of Israel about their origin.
It was not a story to inspire national pride.
It serves to remind Israel that their "roots" were in God's grace.

We are wise to understand what most Jews missed ...

We must not trust in our HERITAGE.

We trust in the GOD of our HERITAGE.

It is on God's mercy, not human effort, which the hope of the world's salvation rests.

Prayer is missing in this story ... but don't let it be missing in your life!

Philippians 4:6

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."

Applications

The purpose of asking God to meet our needs is not to manipulate Him into doing something He doesn't want to do.

- ✓ We ask because it teaches us to rely on Him rather than our own resourcefulness.
- ✓ It teaches us to see God as the source of all things.
- ✓ It teaches us to love Him and trust Him and to rely on Him every day.

I see myself here ... and I don't like it

Too often, **instead of asking God to provide** according to His riches and glory in Christ Jesus, I am negligent in prayer ... and by failing to pray I take matters into my own hands.

But I'm encouraged to remember and see ...

The sovereign hand of God uses **FLAWED** human instruments, even superstition, to accomplish His purposes.

Well said

*God draws from the well of overwhelming **GRACE** to work through people just like **US**.*