

DHW

**LESSON 23**

*THE BOOK OF GENESIS*

*CHAPTER 30*

**INTRODUCTION**

Much of life's struggles and strife, which often result in pain and loss, is due to our own selfish, sinful thoughts and actions. When such negative actions and behaviour like jealousy, discontent and strife occur in the home between parents and children, husband and wife, and siblings there is no joy and peace. More often than not such negative intentions and feelings may manifest in a full-blown way. They happen in subtle schemes and sometimes are couched with sweet words.

Laban's family is far from being an example of a family of faith. There is much disgrace and shame. Nevertheless, God was in control. Hence, there was hope for Jacob, whose purpose of going there was primarily to be free from Esau, and to have a wife, make good in Padan-aram, and return to Canaan.

We will see Jacob being gradually changed by God. In His dealings

with Jacob, Laban, Leah and Rachel, God demonstrated His faithfulness to the covenant promises, which He made with Abraham and Isaac. He specially blessed Jacob, His chosen man. Jacob received some hard knocks in this chapter and was beginning to change his conduct and character to be in tune with God's will.

On the other hand, we will see that God always helps the unloved and needy. When Rachel was prepared to bend and give up her monopoly of keeping Jacob, God granted her children. The Lord God shows that He is fair and just. He cares for His people.

The following is a suggested outline of the chapter:

- 1) Rachel & Leah offered their maids to Jacob to become surrogate mothers to bear children for them (Genesis 30:1-13);
- 2) Leah hired Jacob for the night, when God blessed her and she conceived his fifth son (Genesis 30:14-21);
- 3) God remembered Rachel and she conceived and gave birth to Joseph (Genesis 30:22-24);
- 4) Jacob agreed to work for Laban according to a scheme proposed

by him and accepted by his uncle (Genesis 30:25-36); and

- 5) God increased the wealth of Jacob, who used his superior knowledge of raising cattle and sheep (Genesis 30:37-43).

### *STUDY THE WORD*

#### **Rachel Offers Bilhah to Become a Surrogate Mother for Her**

The chapter begins on a stormy note. Rachel realised that she was barren. She was envious of her sister Leah, who had borne four sons – Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah – for Jacob. Rachel confronted Jacob and told him to give her children, or *else I die*. Jacob was very angry with her and retorted: *Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?* Jacob was right for God opens and closes wombs. This is a fundamental truth that God is the giver and taker of life.<sup>1</sup> What Rachel and Jacob should have done was to earnestly pray to the LORD God for mercy and grace. However, one can understand Rachel's feelings of humiliation and discontentment. But that is not an excuse to act the way she acted.

Many a bitter conflict in the family is caused by envy and strife. We devour one another and it leads us nowhere. God's people must learn to accept God's sovereign wisdom, justice, and compassion in blessing His people. It is true that He blesses some with children and not others. When we lose control of ourselves over the apparent inequity of God's dealings with His people, we tend to stop minding the things above and crave for the things below. Frankly, she should be happy and satisfied that she had Jacob as he loved her most. That was not good enough for her.

Rachel's solution was to give Bilhah to Jacob to bear children for her. She commanded Jacob *to go in unto Bilhah*.<sup>2</sup> The phrase that *she shall bear upon my knees* is used symbolically to signify the legitimate adoption of the child as her own. In this context, Bilhah acted as the surrogate mother for Rachel. This was a common practice of the people in the Near East, when the wife of a man was barren. While it was permitted at that time before the giving of the Mosaic Law, this practice is obviously unacceptable in Christian tradition today. The teaching of the

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 127:3 *Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.*

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<sup>2</sup> This is a euphemism for sexual intercourse.

Word is one man one wife.<sup>3</sup> It is best to accept God's sovereign wisdom and judgment in such a case where a couple does not have a child. Of course, there is nothing morally wrong in adopting a child in the right way.

Jacob obediently *went in unto* Bilhah, who bore two sons. The first son, Rachel named him, *Dan*, which means "vindication." She felt that at last she was vindicated from the shame and disgrace she had endured from society and especially from her sister. The other she named *Naphtali*, which means "struggle." She saw all this bearing of children as a matter of struggle with her sister. She was fearful of losing her ascendancy with Jacob.

This spirit of striving was unhealthy and unwarranted. It caused Leah to retaliate likewise. Realizing that she could not bear any more or that Jacob *did not go in unto her*, she too gave her maid, Zilpah to Jacob. Zilpah bore two sons, whom Leah named *Gad*, which means, "a troop." She had given to Jacob five sons

compared with Rachel's two. Zilpah conceived again and gave birth to *Asher*, which means "blessed." Leah was happy for women folks would call her blessed. This kind of rivalry was not good for the family for it undermined the unity and happiness among the members of the family.

### **Leah Hires Jacob for the Night, and God Blesses Her**

One harvest day, Reuben returned with some mandrakes for his mother, Leah. What is a mandrake? It is a plant with dark green leaves and small bluish purple flowers. Its fruit is small and sweet to the taste. It is also fragrant. It is known as a "love apple" and considered to be a love potion – an aphrodisiac (a fertility fruit). The Hebrew word is *duda'im*. It is close to *dodim* (the Hebrew word for "love"). Solomon used these words in his courtship (Song of Solomon 7:12-13): *Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see if the vine flourish, whether the tender grape appear, and the pomegranates bud forth: there will I give thee my loves. The mandrakes give a smell, and at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I have laid up for thee, O my beloved.* Solomon could have been influenced by the folklore at that time to express

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Timothy 3:2 *A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;*

1 Timothy 3:12 *Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well.*

Titus 1:6 *If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.*

his love for his beloved. Did it really work?

Believing these “love apples”, Rachel was prepared to let Leah have Jacob for the night in exchange for the mandrakes. Leah retorted that Rachel had already robbed her of the pleasure of Jacob and now she would also take the mandrakes from her. Leah’s remarks at least revealed that Jacob had not been sleeping with Leah. However, Leah gave up the mandrakes in exchange for the pleasure of Jacob for that night. When Jacob returned from the field, Leah told him that she had hired him for the night. Jacob spent the night with her, and God blessed her. She conceived her fifth son for Jacob, and named him *Issachar*, which means “wages.” Leah conceived again and the sixth son was born whom she named *Zebulun*, which means “exalted”. Then Leah conceived again, and this time she gave birth to a daughter, whose name was *Dinah* (Hebrew, judgment). The LORD *hearkened unto her* (17), implying that she had been praying to the LORD. Hence, the LORD heard and blessed her with another two sons and a daughter. She did not need the mandrakes to conceive these children. So the belief of the potency of the mandrakes was not true.

### God Remembers Rachel and She Conceives

*And God remembered Rachel* (v.22). The word does not mean that God suffered from amnesia and now suddenly remembered her. But it means that God now looked upon her with compassion and kindness. Rachel was willing to give up Jacob to be with Leah for the night in exchange for the mandrakes. Rachel was willing to bend a little. Let Leah have the pleasure of Jacob not only for the night but subsequently for two more nights after each child was born. About three years later, God hearkened to her cry, and Rachel conceived and bore Jacob a son, whom she named *Joseph*, meaning “may the LORD add.” God had removed her “reproach,” that is her barrenness. She praised the LORD and expressed in faith that the LORD would add another son to her (23, 24).

We view with some sadness the poor relationship and strife between the two sisters and its impact on Jacob, who was caught in the middle. Leah had to bargain with Rachel for Jacob. Jacob, who loved Rachel, probably tried to avoid Rachel’s nagging by keeping away from Leah. This could possibly be the reason why Leah needed to “hire” him with the mandrakes. This sorry state of affairs

is the result of envy, strife and jealousy. We need to trust God and wait upon Him, for God is never too late. He is always on time!

### Jacob Agrees to Work for Laban

After the birth of Joseph, the time came that Jacob felt that he must leave Laban, take his wives and children and return to his native land. As a hired hand, he politely asked Laban to let him go and return to his native land. He asked for his wives and children and reasoned that he had faithfully served him for them. In other words Laban should not have cause for complaint. Laban did not want him to go. He had exploited Jacob for at least the past fourteen years. He replied by flattering Jacob, *I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes tarry (27a)*. And he added that *I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake*. The verb “learned by experience” (Hebrew *nichasti*) interestingly has as its root word *nachash*, which means “serpent.”<sup>4</sup> It implies that Laban had gained this knowledge about Jacob through

“close, subtle and insidious inspection.”<sup>5</sup> Laban no doubt had watched Jacob with the most jealous attention and had come to the conclusion that the LORD was with Jacob. He saw that his wealth had increased since the time Jacob served him. He was determined to have Jacob continue to serve him and was prepared to let Jacob name his wages. Jacob reiterated that since he had faithfully served Laban, he had increased his wealth, and Jacob attributed the successful result to the work of the LORD. He then confided in Laban that it was time for him to work for his own family. Laban was quick to seize the opportunity by asking Jacob what he could give him. Jacob quickly replied that he did not want Laban to give him anything at all. Knowing Laban, Jacob wanted nothing from him. He was being wise.

However, Jacob proposed a scheme. Jacob would keep his flock as he had done. He would pass through Laban’s flock that day. He would then separate the speckled and spotted cattle, sheep, and goats from the pure brown cattle, pure white sheep and black goats. All the speckled and spotted ones would be his, and the rest belonged to Laban.

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<sup>4</sup> Genesis 3:1 Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

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<sup>5</sup> George Bush, Notes on Genesis, vol. 2:134.

And in future, all the animals that were born and which were speckled and spotted would be his, and the pure coloured ones would be Laban's. And if any animal of the pure ones were found in Jacob's flock, he could charge him for stealing his flock (v.33)

Laban immediately jumped at the idea. He thought that he had a good bargain. The truth was that speckled and spotted cattle, sheep, and goats were in the minority. Later breeding would be the same. The pure coloured ones would outnumber the speckled and spotted ones. No wonder Laban quickly agreed to the scheme. And in order that the pure ones had no chance of mating with the speckled and spotted ones, he told his sons to take care of the speckled and spotted ones which now belonged to Jacob, and to keep them in a place which was a good three days journey away from Laban's flock. Jacob would take care of Laban's flock.

What was Laban's strategy? By separating the solid coloured animals from the speckled and spotted ones, he was sure that he would diminish the chances of Jacob having many sheep, goats, and cattle. This cunning move revealed that Laban was selfish, greedy, dishonest, and distrustful. By separating the animals, he not only

reduced the chances of the animals from producing spotted and speckled young ones, he was subtly insinuating that Jacob's integrity and trustworthiness were questionable. The truth of the matter is that he, who is dishonest and untrustworthy, thinks that others are like him. In this regard, Jacob had not once given him an occasion to doubt his integrity and honesty. He had faithfully performed all that was required of him. The fact that Jacob married both his daughters was not of his doing, but rather Laban's.

### **God Increases Jacob's Wealth**

God is not mocked. He blesses His own people. God could see how Laban had treated his nephew. Jacob was an expert shepherd-man. His fourteen years of tending Laban's flock were not wasted. He had learned many things, and one of them was how to induce the animals to produce spotted and speckled offspring. He selected three kinds of plants, stripped them, and placed the bare branches in the watering trough from which the animals come to drink the water. One view explains that when the animals came to drink the water and mated while looking at the bare branches in the trough, they would produce spotted and speckled offspring. However, there is no scientific basis

for it is unlikely that the mere looking at the peeled (bare) branches could determine the colour of the animals. A more plausible explanation is given by Henry Morris: *A better explanation is that there it is true that certain chemicals can and do have a significant prenatal influence if they can reach the embryo or, prior to conception, the DNA in the germ cells. It is possible that certain chemicals in the wood of these trees--peeled rods of which were actually in the water which the flocks came to drink were capable somehow of affecting the animals. If nothing else, water treat thus may have served as an aphrodisiac and fertility promoter among the cattle. At least one such chemical substance found in these trees has been used for such a purpose in both ancient and modern times . . . Jacob's method of rearing the animals were founded on sound animal husbandry. And with God's blessings he in no time became very wealthy and had to have many servants, both male and female, to help him.*<sup>6</sup> Jacob was using his superior knowledge which he had acquired when he was tending Laban's cattle and flocks. As a result, Jacob increased his wealth very much. He had a large number of cattle,

camels and asses. In addition, the number of male and female servants also increased. He was now a rich man.

### *PRACTICAL VALUE*

Envy, jealousy, and strife are attitudes and actions that undermine the peace and harmony of a family and also the church. These lead to unhealthy back-biting and unnecessary rivalry. God commands us to love one another, and to carry one another's burdens. If God should deem fit in His sovereign will to bless a brother more than another, we should humbly accept His wise judgment. So, do not be like Rachel and Leah. The trouble with them was that they were not satisfied with what they had. Rachel had the love of Jacob and Leah had children. We should adopt a healthier demeanour by counting our blessings instead of eyeing the blessings of others. Thank and praise God for the blessings we receive from Him. God calls us to provoke one another to love and to do good works (Hebrew 10:24).<sup>7</sup> Paul reminds young Timothy that godliness with contentment is great gain (1Timothy 6:6).

We observe that despite the weaknesses, as exemplified by Rachel

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<sup>6</sup> Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 476-477.

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<sup>7</sup> Hebrews 10:24 *And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:*

and Laban, God still blessed them. God is merciful and kind to people who are rejected – the downcast, the afflicted, the troubled, the oppressed and the despised (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).<sup>8</sup> God's loving-kindness and tender-mercies are purposed to move men and women to realise there is God, their Creator, and they need to repent of their sins and humbly accept His offer of salvation in Christ Jesus, who had paid the penalty of their sins, and risen on the third day to secure the certainty of their salvation.

God was kind to Leah. When Rachel was willing to bend a little to let Leah have Jacob for a night and subsequently for three years, God blessed her with a son. Jacob was blessed because he was cheated by Laban, and was almost helpless and at his mercy. But God was with him for he was the Lord's anointed. God was training him, and towards the end God blessed him immeasurably. AMEN

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:27 *But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.*