

## Genesis 30

This chapter records the further growth of Jacob's family. He will eventually have twelve sons who will become the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel. The last paragraph of the chapter records Jacob shrewdly shepherding his father-in-law's flocks so that Jacob grows his own flock and becomes a very wealthy man.

### TRANSLATION - 30:1-8:

**1** Now Rachel saw that she was not giving birth for Jacob and Rachel envied her sister and she said to Jacob, "Hand over to me sons for if there are not, I [am] a dead [person]." **2** Then Jacob became angry at Rachel and said, "In the place of God, [am] I who has withheld from you fruit of the womb?" **3** She said, "Behold, my maid [is] Bilhah. Come to her and she will get pregnant on my knees and I will build even myself [a family] from her."

**4** So she gave to him Bilhah, her servant for a wife, and Jacob came to her. **5** So Bilhah became pregnant and she gave birth to Jacob a son. **6** So Rachel said, "God has judged me and has listened to my voice and gave to me a son." Therefore she called his name "Dan."

**7** Then she became pregnant again and Bilhah gave birth, Rachel's servant, to a second son for Jacob. **8** Then Rachel said, "Struggles with God I have struggled with my sister. Even I have been able." And she called his name "Naphtali."

### WORDS:

"To envy" (verse 1; 34 times) is used here for the first time. It can have a negative connotation (envy or jealousy) or a positive connotation (zealous). "To hand over" was first used at 11:3-4, and 7, but see comments at 29:21. "To become angry" (verse 2; 93 times) can mean literally, "to become hot or burn," but figuratively, "to become angry." It was used in 4:5-6; 18:30, 32. Here the verb is used with the noun "anger" so that, translated literally, the text says, "Jacob's anger burned." "To withhold" (29 times) means to "withhold, retrain, refuse, or restrain."

"Maid" (verse 3; 56 times) was first used in 20:17 and 21:10, 12-13. The concept overlaps with the word "servant" or "slave" in this same context. "To get pregnant on the knees" is an idiomatic expression to refer to giving birth *in the place* of someone else. It likely pictures the baby being laid on the lap of the mistress, with the connotation of an adoption. "To judge" (verse 6; 24 times) means to execute judgment or plead one's cause. "Struggles" and "to struggle" (verse 8; 4 times) are related words. The verb means to "twist, wrestle, be torturous, subtle." This is the only place the noun is used.

### COMMENTS:

Rachel was the wife whom Jacob loved most. In 29:31, God opened Leah's womb but Rachel was barren. The text does not say that God actively closed Rachel's womb. Her envy of Leah's child-bearing made her envious of her sister so, as humans often do, she took her anger out on the person closest to her: Jacob. "Give me sons or I will die!" If a woman finds purpose and fulfillment in bearing children, added to the need of an agrarian society that needed farmers, we can understand her exasperation at her barrenness.

Jacob responded, predictably, with intense anger at Rachel. He is not in the place of God whom, Jacob affirms, has restrained her from bearing "fruit of the womb," a beautiful description of children. Rachel suggests then, that Jacob take Rachel's maid, Bilhah, as a wife and have children "on Rachel's knees," suggesting the children would legally be Rachel's by adoption. Through Bilhah, Rachel might be able to "build" a family for Jacob, the same word and concept Sarah used at 16:2 when she gave Hagar to Abraham.

Bilhah has success, bearing a son. Rachel acknowledges God's role in the pregnancy and sees God as "judging," perhaps "vindicating" Rachel's decision to give Bilhah to Jacob. God has heard her voice and given her a son. "Dan's" name is a play on the word "to judge" (*dn*).

Bilhah gives birth to a second son. We are not sure what Rachel means by “with wrestlings of God,” for in the next statement, she says she is “wrestling” or “struggling” with her sister. “Wrestlings of God” can be understood in a superlative sense: “mighty wrestlings.” Through the latter phrase, she probably means she is fighting for the affection of Jacob which would come with bearing him sons. “Naphtali’s” name is a play on the word “wrestling” or “struggling” (*nphtul*).

#### APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - Dan does not have an active role in the history of the patriarchs. Jacob will bless him in 49:16-17, making another play on his name. Naphtali receives his blessing from Jacob in 49:21.

*Contemporaries of Moses* - One of the architects of the tent of meeting under Moses will be Oholiab, from the tribe of Dan (Exo. 31:6; 35:34; 38:23). An Israelite from the tribe of Dan will be stoned to death for blasphemy in Leviticus 24:11-16.

*Later Hebrew writers* - The city of Laish will be renamed Dan (Judges. 18:29), probably after their forefather. Located in the northern area of Israel, the phrase “from Dan to Beersheba” (1 Sam. 3:20; used 7 times) came to refer to the entire nation of Israel. In two passages, the phrase is “from Beersheba to Dan” (1 Chron. 21:2; 2 Chron. 30:5). Under King Jeroboam, the city of Dan became a location of pagan worship (1 Kings 12:30; cf. Amos 8:14). An architect who helped design the temple in Jerusalem was from the tribe of Dan (2 Chron. 2:13-14).

The tribe of Naphtali, with the tribe of Zebulun, would fight with Deborah and Barak in Judges 4 & 5. Hiram, from Tyre, who helped Solomon in his architectural endeavors, was the son of a widow from the tribe of Naphtali (1 Kings 7:14). The land of Naphtali will fit into a Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 9:1.

*NT writers* - Jesus will preach in the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2 (Matt. 4:13-16). Naphtali will be found in the list of tribes in Revelation 7:6, but Dan will be conspicuously absent from that list.

#### TRANSLATION - 30:9-13:

**9** Then Leah saw that she stopped to get pregnant and took Zilpah, her servant, and gave her to Jacob for a wife. **10** Then Zilpah gave birth, the servant of Leah, for Jacob a son.

**11** So Leah said, “Fortunate!” And she called his name, “Gad.”

**12** Then Zilpah gave birth, the servant of Leah, to a second son for Jacob. **13** And Leah said, “In my happiness that they make me happy, daughters!” And she called his name, “Asher.”

#### WORDS:

There is a marginal reading for “Fortunate!” “Fortune is coming!”

#### COMMENTS:

The “wresting” continues between Leah and Rachel. Leah gives her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob for a wife so Leah can continue to increase her number of sons for Jacob. When Zilpah gave birth, she exclaimed “Fortunate!” (*gd*) and named her son, “Gad.”

Zilpah gave birth to a second son and Leah reflected on the happiness the boys are giving her. “Daughters make her happy” refers to daughters of the land, the women in surrounding areas will see her and be happy with her. That idea of “happiness” gave her the idea of this boy’s name: “Asher.”

#### APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - Jacob blesses Gad in 49:19. The family of Gad, along with Reuben and half the family of Manasseh, will settle on the eastern side of the Jordan River (Numbers 32; Joshua 22). Asher’s blessing will be found in 49:20.

*Later Hebrew writers* - During the reign of King Hezekiah, after most of the northern tribes fell into apostasy and idolatry, some men from the tribes of Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun migrated to the southern areas of Judah, around Jerusalem, to remain faithful to God (2 Chron. 30:11).

*NT writers* - Gad is found in the list of tribes in Revelation 7:5. The prophetess, Anna, who lived to see baby Jesus was from the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36). Asher is otherwise only found in Revelation 7:6.

#### TRANSLATION - 30:14-21:

**14** Then Reuben went in the days of harvest of wheat and found mandrakes in the field and he brought them to Leah, his mother, and Rachel said to Leah, "Give, please, to me mandrakes of your son." **15** So she said to her, "A small matter [is it] for you to take my husband that you take also mandrakes of my son?" So Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie down with you tonight in exchange for mandrakes of your son."

**16** Then Jacob came from the field in the evening and Leah went out to meet him and she said to him, "You are coming because to hire I have hired you with mandrakes of my son." So he slept with her that night.

**17** So God listened to Leah and she became pregnant and gave birth to Jacob a fifth son. **18** Then Leah said, "God gave my wages which I gave my servant for my husband." So she called his name "Issachar."

**19** Then Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to a sixth son for Jacob. **20** So Leah said, "God has endowed me, even me, a good gift. Now, my husband will honor me because I have given birth to him six sons." And she called his name "Zebulun."

**21** Then afterwards, she gave birth to a daughter and she called her name "Dinah."

#### WORDS:

"Mandrakes" (verse 14) are found only in this text (five times: verses 14-16) and in Song of Solomon 7:13. Apparently, they were believed to be an aphrodisiac, yet the text is clear that God is the one who blesses the women with pregnancies. "To hire" (verse 16) is found twenty times while the noun "wages" is found 28 times (verses 18, 28; its first use was at 15:1). This is the first use of the verb.

"To endow" and "gift" (verse 20) are related words; the first is the verb, the second, the noun. This is the only text in the OT where each word is found. "To honor" is found only here in the OT; it means to "exalt, acknowledge, or honor." Here it carries the idea of recognizing Leah as a legitimate (if not favored) spouse.

#### GRAMMAR:

"To hire I have hired" (verse 16) is an emphatic construction, with the infinitive absolute and the perfect verb.

#### ARCHEOLOGY:

The mandrakes, which grow all around Israel, are *Mandragora officinarum*, which is a part of the potato and tomato family of plants. It was nicknamed the "love apple" by the Greeks who also named Aphrodite "Lady of the Mandrake." They have been known as a sedative, a narcotic, and a purgative. The fruit is yellow and looks like a tomato. They ripen in March and April.

#### COMMENTS:

Reuben, being the oldest, goes out to gather mandrakes. These look similar to apples and apparently were believed to have aphrodisiac qualities. Rachel desired some mandrakes, apparently for her own benefit, and negotiated with Leah to receive the mandrakes in return for sleeping privileges with Jacob.

The text is clear (verse 17) that God was the source behind the blessing of pregnancy for Leah, not the mandrakes. Rachel has the mandrakes but remains barren until God opens her womb (30:22); Leah who does not have the mandrakes continues to become pregnant. God heard Leah's thoughts, prayers, or words, and He caused her to become pregnant again and again. The biblical writers often report the events which happen without making divine comments on the wisdom of the decisions or their spiritual implications. The fifth boy's name is "Issachar," a play on the verb "to hire" (*skr*).

The sixth son, by Leah, is named "Zebulun," which sounds similar to the words "to endow" and "gift" (*zbd*) but it is a play on the verb "to honor" (*zbl*). With this son as well, Leah recognizes God's work and blessing in her pregnancy.

With the birth of Dinah (whose name is related to the name "Dan"), Leah's children number seven. Jacob will have other daughters (46:7; if "daughters" is not used generically for "daughters-in-law" or simply referring to Dinah alone). Dinah is significant for the role she plays in the events of chapter 34.

#### APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - Jacob blesses Issachar in Genesis 49:14-15. Zebulun's blessing is found in Genesis 49:13. Dinah will not have a major role except she is raped in Genesis 34, which motivates two of her brothers to kill the perpetrator and his people. She is not found outside of Genesis.

*Later Hebrew writers* - One judge, Tola, was from the tribe of Issachar (Judges 10:1). Kings Ahijah and Baasha, of northern Israel, were from the tribe of Issachar (1 Kings 15:27). Men from the tribe of Issachar came from northern Israel to stay faithful to God in southern Judah (2 Chron. 30:18). Zebulun would also have a judge named Elon (Judges 12:11-12). The tribe of Zebulun, with the tribe of Naphtali, would fight with Deborah and Barak in Judges 4 & 5. Men from Zebulun will migrate to southern Judah (2 Chron. 30:11).

*NT writers* - Issachar is found in the list of tribes in Revelation 7:7. Zebulun is found in the prophecy of the Messiah from Isaiah 9:1-2, fulfilled in Jesus' ministry in Matthew 4:13-16. Zebulun is also found in the list in Revelation 7:8.

#### TRANSLATION - 30:22-34:

**22** Then God remembered Rachel and God listened to her and He opened her womb. **23** Then she becomes pregnant and gave birth to a son and she said, "God has taken away my reproach." **24** And she called his name "Joseph," saying, Jehovah must add to me another son." **25** And it was just as Rachel gave birth to Joseph that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away and let me go to my place and to my land. **26** Give my wives and my children for whom I have served you for them. Let me go because you yourself know my service with which I have served you."

**27** Then Laban said to him, "If, please, I find favor in your eyes, I have divined that Jehovah has blessed me on your account." **28** And he said, "Determine your wages for me and I will give it."

**29** And he said to him, "You yourself know which I served you and what was from your cattle with me. **30** That a little which was yours, before me and it has increased to many and Jehovah has blessed you yourself from my coming. So, now, when will I make even myself, my house?"

**31** So he said, "What will I give you?" So Jacob said, "You will not give me anything except if you do to me this thing... Let me return. Let me shepherd your flock. Let me guard [them]. **32** I will cross over with all your flock today, to turn aside from there all the speckled kids and being spotted and all the brown kids among the sheep and being spotted and speckled among the goats and it will be my wage. **33** Then my honesty will answer me in the day. Tomorrow that you will come on my wages before you, all which there is not a speckled

and being spotted among the goats and brown among the sheep, being stolen that one [is] with me.”

**34** So Laban said, “Favor that will be as your word.”

#### WORDS:

“To remember” (verse 22; 235 times) means to “recall, remember, bring to mind.” When God is the subject, the verb carries the idea of God doing something on behalf of someone else. See its first use in 8:1 (as well as 9:15-16; 19:29). “To take away” (verse 23; 200 times) can be to “gather, take in, or take away.” “Reproach” (73 times) means “reproach, disgrace, shame.”

“To add” (verse 24; 213 times) means “to add, continue, or do again.” Observe the use of the word “serve” or “service” in verse 26: three times. “Favor” (verse 27) was first used of Noah in 6:8 (See the comments there). The word was also used in 18:3; 19:19. “To divine” (11 times) means to “practice divination, seek and give omens, or observe signs in order to foretell.” “Determine” (verse 28; 19 times) can mean to “pierce, bore through, stipulate, or specify.” “Coming” (verse 30) is the word for “foot,” but here it refers to the action of the feet, that is, to arriving on the scene. The verb “to increase” is found in verses 30, 43 and in Exodus 1:12, the only places in the Pentateuch.

“Speckled” (verse 32) is found in this text and in 31:8, 10, 12. “Spotted” is found only in this text and in Joshua 9:5; Ezekiel 16:16. “Honesty” (verse 33) is the word for “righteous;” note its first use in 15:6.

#### COMMENTS:

Notice that “God” is mentioned twice in verse 22. It was not the mandrakes that opened Rachel’s womb. God “remembered” Rachel and God “heard” Rachel (presumably crying and/or praying). When God remembers, He acts. In this case, He opened her womb. When Rachel became pregnant, she acknowledged God’s role in the pregnancy. He “took away” her “reproach.” Whether we agree or disagree, Rachel felt shame for not becoming pregnant. Rachel uses God’s particular Israelite name, “Jehovah,” as she names her son. “Joseph” is a play on the verb “to add.” The verb also sounds like the verb “to take away.” With her sister having had seven children in all six sons, “Joseph” is Rachel’s wish that God will give her yet another son. Ironically, Rachel will give birth to another son but die during the delivery (35:16-20).

Right at Joseph’s birth, Jacob decided it was time to return home. He has been gone from home for fourteen years. In referring to his place as “his land,” Jacob is likely recalling God’s promise to Jacob (28:4, 13). Observe how much Jacob emphasizes in verse 26 his service to his father-in-law. Jacob tells Laban to “give” or “hand over” his wives and children. In essence, he is asking Laban to graciously allow them all to leave. Laban asks that if he has found “favor” (or “grace”) in Jacob’s eyes, they should work out a deal for Jacob to continue serving Laban. When Laban claims to have learned through divination, we do not know what process he used since many peoples practiced many different rituals in order to “discern” the will of the gods. It could have been throwing sticks on the ground, examining the intestines (usually the liver) of dead animals, or other rituals. In this case, he determined that he was being blessed by Jehovah, which fulfills the promise God made to Abraham many years before (12:1-3).

Laban graciously allows Jacob to name his wage. Laban suspects that Jacob’s salary will be more than repaid if Jehovah continues blessing Laban on Jacob’s account. Jacob responds first by pointing out that Laban’s cattle have done well under Jacob’s service. Laban’s flock was little until Jacob arrived and they increased greatly because, Jacob agrees, Jehovah has blessed Laban since Jacob’s arrival. Yet if Jacob continues serving his father-in-law, he wonders (verse 30) when will he ever build his own home?

Laban offers again to give Jacob what he asks, yet Jacob has a bigger idea in mind. He does not want anything in his hands. He only wants to continue shepherding and watching

Laban's flocks. Jacob offers to search through Laban's flocks and remove all the speckled and spotted sheep with the spotted and speckled goats. Those would be his wages. We presume that these were considered the genetically inferior animals. Laban and Jacob did not have the understanding of genetics we have today, but for Laban to agree to the deal, we assume it would appear to benefit him.

Jacob is willing for his "honesty" or "righteousness" to be testimony to his service to Laban. His father-in-law can come, day or night, and check on the animals. If he takes any animal which was supposed to be Laban's, it would be considered stolen and Laban can do to Jacob as custom would dictate. Laban agreed to Jacob's proposal.

#### APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - Joseph is the son who will dominate the book of Genesis, beginning in chapter 37, continuing through chapter 50. He will save his family from a severe famine that will strike the whole earth. Out of 214 times, he will be mentioned in Genesis 156 times, from here through the end of the book but mainly from chapter 37. His blessing is found in 49:22-26. Jacob will pass on the right of the first born to Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (1 Chron. 5:1-2).

Joseph will claim to have practiced divination (Gen. 44:5, 15), but that claim was made in an atmosphere of deception, so it is not possible to know if Joseph was speaking the truth or keeping up a charade.

*Contemporaries of Moses* - Through the rest of OT history, Joseph will largely be eclipsed by his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. The use of divination will be forbidden under the Law of Moses (Lev. 19:26). It is hard to imagine a Jew, writing in the 300s B. C. affirming that Joseph would practice something that was clearly forbidden under the Law of Moses.

*Later Hebrew writers* - Practicing divination is not used in a positive sense in the historical books (2 Kings 17:17; 21:6; 2 Chron. 33:6).

*NT writers* - We will wait to comment on Joseph in the NT when we examine more of his life.

#### TRANSLATION - 30:35-43:

**35** So he removed in that day the male goats, striped and being spotted and all the goats speckled and being spotted all which were to Laban and all the brown among the sheep he gave in the hand of his sons. **36** Then he set a path [of] three days between him and Jacob so Jacob was shepherding the flock of Laban, being the rest. **37** Then Jacob took for him from the shoot of the moist poplar and almond and chestnut tree and he peeled from them white notches, an exhibition of the white which was on the rods. **38** Then he set the rods which he peeled in the watering troughs of water where the flock came to drink, opposite the flock, and they bred when they came to drink.

**39** So the flock bred at the trough and brought forth the flock, streaked, speckled and spotted. **40** But the lambs Jacob spread out and gave the face of the flock to the streaked and all the brown in the flock [was] Laban's and he put for himself flocks apart and he did not put them to the flocks of Laban.

**41** And there was in all the brown of the flock the stronger ones and Jacob put the rods before the eyes of the flocks in the trenches to breed among the rods. **42** But the weaker flock he did not put but they were the weaker for Laban and the stronger for Jacob.

**43** So the man increased very very much and there was to him many flock and female slaves and servants and camels and donkeys.

#### WORDS:

"To peel" and "notches" (verse 37) are related words. "Very, very much" (verse 43) translates the adverb "very" or "exceedingly" and the word is repeated for emphasis.

### COMMENTS:

Laban immediately sets about separating the different colored animals so that Jacob will have to start with weaker animals. Then he and his sons separate by a distance of three-days' travel from Jacob. Jacob, however, begins taking care of the flocks and working his selective breeding plan.

We do not know any of the details of Jacob's procedures here. We do not know why he used the three trees he used. It is reading too much into the text, assuming information we do not have, to say that Jacob was doing something superstitious. What is obvious from verse 38 is that Jacob knew the exposed parts of the trees would attract the animals and while they were together, they bred. It might have been the sight, smell, or taste of the rods that attracted the animals and, being together, they bred. It is not necessary to assume Jacob is guilty of some superstitious belief, although if he was, it would not reflect on Moses' writing nor on Israelite theology as it is revealed in the OT. As Jacob proceeded with his artificial breeding scheme, the stronger animals were mating with the stronger animals, which were Jacob's.

To put it simply, in verse 43, Moses writes that Jacob's wealth increased extraordinarily as he gained a larger and larger flock in addition to female slaves, camels, and donkeys. It would be safe to assume, with the emphasis in the text on God working in the life of Jacob, that He was actively working in this process as well. He came to Padan Aram without any dowry but he will leave, after a total of twenty years, a very wealthy man.

### APPLICATION:

*Contemporaries in the text* - Jacob, perhaps, learned how to breed stronger animals from his father (cf. 26:12-14). He had not deceived his father-in-law; he just out-maneuvered him. This event has no parallel in the OT.

*NT writers* - We have not yet been introduced to the last son of Jacob, by Rachel incidentally, but once he is born, there will be twelve sons, who will be the twelve patriarchs of Israel. Jesus will choose twelve apostles to correspond to the twelve patriarchs, as His church will be the "new Israel" of God (Matt. 19:28; Gal. 6:16). The twelve apostles and twelve patriarchs provide the imagery of the twenty-four elders in the book of Revelation (11:16).