

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.
Oakleigh, Vic, 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

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. These negative experiences occur in the homes between parents and children, husbands and wives, between siblings and in the community at large. These bad intentions and feelings seldom manifest in a full-blown manner. They are borne in subtle schemes and couched in the voice of sweet words. God has said in no uncertain terms: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?*¹ Yet there is hope for change. In spite of man's wicked heart condition, God is still in control. He has His plan of redemption and restoration. He has made the utmost sacrifice in providing the Way, the Truth, and the Life so that man might submit to Him and be transformed to walk in the way of peace

¹ Jeremiah 17:9.

and goodwill, and lead a life of joy and fulfilment.

In His dealings with Jacob, Laban, Leah and Rachel, God demonstrates His faithfulness to the covenant promises and His goodness towards those whom He chooses to bestow His special grace. His desire is that man will learn the hard lessons of life and change for the better in accordance to His will.

OUTLINE

A. Rachel was Envious and Sought to Outdo Leah (30:1-8).

1. Rachel complained of her barrenness to Jacob (vv.1-2).
2. Rachel gave her maid, Bilhah, to Jacob to bear children for her (vv.3-8)
 - a. Dan was born (vv.5-6)
 - b. Naphtali was born (vv.7-8)

B. Leah Responded in Like Manner (30:9-13).

1. Leah gave her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob to bear children for her (v.9).
2. Zilpah gave birth to two sons (vv.10-13).
 - a. Gad was born (v.11).
 - b. Asher was born (vv.12-13).

C. Leah and Rachel Intensified their Efforts to Bear Children for Jacob 30:14-24).

1. Reuben obtained mandrakes for her mother (v.14).
 - a. Rachel asked for the mandrakes (v.14b).
 - b. Leah complained that Rachel already had Jacob (v.15).
 - c. Rachel agreed to give up a night with Jacob for Leah's mandrakes (v.15b).
2. God blessed Leah with three more children (vv.16-21).
 - a. Issachar was born (vv.16-18).
 - b. Zebulun was born (vv.19-20)
 - c. Dinah was born (v.21).
3. God blessed Rachel with a son (vv.22-24).
 - a. God remembered Rachel (v.22).
 - b. Joseph was born (vv.23-24).
- b. Laban offered wages to Jacob (v.28).
- c. Jacob expressed his desire to provide for his family (vv.29-30).
3. Jacob stated the terms of his services (vv.31b-35)
 - a. Jacob wished to be paid with all the spotted and speckled cattle and sheep (vv.31b-32).
 - b. Jacob gave his reason (v.33).
4. Laban readily agreed (vv.34-36).
 - a. Laban set out to separate the spotted and speckled cattle from the white ones and gave them to his sons (v.35).
 - b. He then moved them a three days journey away (v.36).

D. Jacob Informed Laban of His Desire to Return to His Native Land (30:25-36).

1. Jacob informed Laban of his intention to return to his native land (vv.25-26).
2. Laban persuaded Jacob to stay longer (vv.27-31a).
 - a. Laban admitted that the LORD had blessed him because of Jacob (v.27).

E. Jacob was An Expert in Raising Cattle (30:37-43).

1. Jacob placed peeled off branches of three plants in all the watering troughs in front of the flocks during breeding time (vv.37-38).
2. The flocks produced the spotted and speckled animals (v.39).
3. He separated the lambs from Laban's flocks (40).
4. He differentiated the stronger animals from the weaker ones (41-42).

5. Jacob prospered exceedingly (43).

to stop minding the things above and crave for the things below.

Rachel Struggled with Her Sister to Vindicate Herself

COMMENTARY

God's People Must Put Away Envy and Strife

The chapter begins on a stormy note. Rachel realised that she could not bear her husband, Jacob, any children. Instead of praying to the LORD God to grant her the desire of her heart, she became envious and jealous of her elder sister Leah. With each passing day, Rachel's feelings of frustration increased and one day she burst out and charge Jacob unreasonably: *give me children, or else I die* (1).

Jacob rebutted in anger, *Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?* (2). Jacob declared a fundamental truth that the giver and taker of life is God only. The Psalmist declares, Lo, children are a heritage of the LORD: *and the fruit of the womb is his reward.*²

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

Rachel gave Bilhah to Jacob and commanded (the Hebrew is in the imperative mood) him to *go in unto her.*³ The phrase that *she shall bear upon my knees* is used symbolically to signify the legitimate adoption of the child as one's own. In this context, Bilhah acted as the surrogate mother for Rachel. This was the practice of the people in the Near East, when the wife is 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 Word is one man one wife.⁴ It is best to accept God's sovereign wisdom and judgement in cases where a couple does not have a child. Of course, there is nothing morally wrong in adopting a child in the right way.

Bilhah bore two sons. Rachel named the first one, Dan, and the other Naphtali. It is sad that Rachel should view the birth of Naphtali as a vindication of her struggle with her sister, who in the first place had no such intention, although she might have naturally felt proud that she bore Jacob four sons.

³ This is a euphemism for sexual intercourse.

⁴ KJV 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.

² Psalm 127:3.

This spirit of striving is unhealthy for it caused Leah to retaliate likewise. She too gave her maid, Zilpah to Jacob. Zilpah bore two sons, whom Leah named Gad, which means, “a troop,” and Asher, which means, “blessed.” With the addition of Gad, she surmised that she was stronger, having an army. As for Asher, she was happy because others would call her blessed. Is there a sliding of her godly spirituality? And what or who is the cause of it? All the struggle and strife had their spiritual toll.

The Strife Continues: Mandrakes in Exchange for Jacob

One May 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. The fruit is small, sweet to the taste and fragrant. It is known as the “love apple” and was considered a love potion, an aphrodisiac, and 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,

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.”

(Song of Solomon 7:12-13)

Solomon could have been influenced by the folklore then to express his love for his beloved. Does it really work?

Rachel was prepared to let Leah have Jacob for the night in exchange for the mandrakes. Leah who gave up the mandrakes bore Jacob another two sons, Issachar and Zebulun, and a daughter whom she named Dinah. Leah had stopped conceiving for a period. The LORD “hearkened unto her” (v.17). This implies that she had been praying to the LORD. Hence the LORD blessed her with two sons and a daughter. We note that this time she acknowledged and praised the LORD for her two sons. Nothing is mentioned about what she said at Dinah’s birth, apart from naming her (21).

Then God *remembered* Rachel. The word does not mean that God had forgotten about her but that God now looked upon her with compassion and kindness. God grant her a son. Rachel named him Joseph. She 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 (vv.23,24).

We view with some sadness the poor relationship between the two sisters and its impact on Jacob. 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. The 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!

Time to Leave

The time came that Jacob felt that he must leave Laban and take his wives and children back to his native land. He argued that he had faithfully served his uncle and had given him no cause to complain.

Jacob dutifully informed Laban that he wanted to return home. Laban persuaded him to stay. He said that he had *learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake* (27). The verb “learned by experience” (Hebrew *nichasti*) interestingly has as its root word *nachash*, which means “serpent.”⁵ It implies that Laban had gained this knowledge about Jacob through “close, subtle and insidious inspection.”⁶ Laban no doubt had watched Jacob with the most jealous attention and had come to the conclusion that the LORD was with Jacob.

Laban told Jacob to name his wage (v.28). Jacob proposed a scheme of payment. Every animal born from then on if it was spotted and speckled would be his, and those that were mono-coloured would be Laban’s. The fact that Laban jumped at the scheme showed that he thought it was a good bargain.

But cunning as he was, he then separated the speckled and spotted animals and gave them to his sons who were a good three days journey away. What was his 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, he was actually implying that Jacob’s integrity and trustworthiness was questionable. The truth of the matter is that he who is dishonest and untrustworthy thinks that others are like him. 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 Always Blesses His People

God is not mocked. He blesses His people. Jacob was an expert husbandman. 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 offsprings.

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 rods in the trough, they would produce spotted and speckled offsprings. It is unlikely that the

⁵ KJV 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?

⁶ George Bush, *Notes on Genesis*, vol. 2:134.

mere looking of the peeled 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.⁷”

PRATICAL VALUE

We reiterate that God's people must put away envy and strife, which lead to bitter conflicts in the home or in the church. If God should deem fit in His sovereign will to bless another brother or sister more than us, we should accept His wise judgement and praise God for His kindness and mercies. God enjoins us to provoke one another to love and

good works (Hebrew 10:24).⁸ Paul reminds young Timothy that contentment and godliness is great gain.

We learn also that we should not sacrifice things spiritual for things temporal. When we look up to earthly things, on seeking the love and recognition of man rather than the approval and the glory of God, we tend to slide downwards and walk in the ways of the world.

We observe that despite the weaknesses, as exemplified in Rachel and Laban, God still blessed them. God helps those whom people of the world reject—the downcast, the afflicted, the troubled, the oppressed and the despised (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).⁹

There are two effects of prosperity. It will either cause one to further trust God or make one trust in one's own personal power and prowess. The latter attitude of independence and self-sufficiency is damaging to one's Christian faith. It robs God of the glory and praise He deserves because all that we are and have comes from His loving and kind hand. AMEN

⁸ KJV Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works:

⁹ KJV 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.

⁷ Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 476-477.

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DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Genesis 30:1-8; Psalm 127:1-5; Proverbs 27:4, Romans 13:13-14.

Tuesday: Genesis 30:9-13; Proverbs 31:10-31.

Wednesday: Genesis 30:14-24; Romans 13:8-10; Acts 17:22-31.

Thursday: Genesis 30:25-36; Ephesians 6:5-8; Jeremiah 17:9-11.

Friday: Genesis 30:37-43; Psalm 84:5-12; Romans 8:31-39.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe the hardships caused by the triangle relationship of Leah, Rachel and Jacob.

2. What should Rachel do instead of giving her maid Bilhah to Jacob?

3. Write out the names of all the children of Jacob in order of their birth?

4. Why do we experience feelings of jealousy like Rachel and Leah?

5. What did the incident with Reuben's mandrakes tell us about Leah and Rachel's relationship with each other and with Jacob?

6. What could have prompted Jacob's desire to return to his native land? Why did Laban want him to stay?

7. In what way is Laban selfish and greedy?

8. What lesson can we learn from the relationship between Jacob and Laban?

9. Why did Jacob let himself be persuaded to extend his tenure with Laban?

10. How did Laban cheat Jacob this time? How did God repay Laban back for his deception?

11. What are the ways of God, which we can learn from this chapter?
