

# GENESIS

## Chapter 30

When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" 2 Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" 3 Then she said, "Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her." 4 So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. 5 And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. 6 Then Rachel said, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan. 7 Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8 Then Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali. 9 When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 10 Then Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. 11 And Leah said, "Good fortune has come!" so she called his name Gad. 12 Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. 13 And Leah said, "Happy am I! For women have called me happy." So she called his name Asher. 14 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." 15 But she said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" Rachel said, "Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes." 16 When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he lay with her that night. 17 And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. 18 Leah said, "God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband." So she called his name Issachar. 19 And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. 20 Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons." So she called his name Zebulun. 21 Afterward she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah. 22 Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. 23 She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." 24 And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the LORD add to me another son!"

**30:1-43** Christians today are often bothered by the fact that in OT times some of God's people practiced polygamy without being rebuked by God for violating His creation regulation regarding marriage. How do you answer that? (PBC)

Several truths of the Scripture need emphasizing here. Truth #1: The Scripture makes no attempt to hide the sins of God's ancient people. It is clear that they did things they should not have done. Truth #2: God does not approve of everything He tolerates. Genesis 30 points out the awful problems that resulted from the fact that Jacob had more than one wife. The loving relationship between sisters was destroyed. Closest friends became bitter rivals. Truth #3: God can overrule the evil intent of people and bend their wicked deeds to serve His good purposes. God actually used Jacob's polygamous marriage relationship to produce the twelve sons who fathered the twelve tribes of Israel. (PBC)

**30:1** *she envied her sister.* As Jacob was of his older brother. (CSB)

Presumably when Leah was pregnant yet again. (TLSB)

This page of the Bible makes it clear that polygamy brings out the worst in marriage partners. Unable to handle the truth that she was childless while her sister had given birth to four sons, Rachel took out her frustration on her husband. (PBC)

*Give me children, or I shall die!* She later died in childbirth (35:16–19). (CSB)

In her desperate desire for children, Rachel blamed Jacob for infertility, forgetting the Lord is the source of such blessing. (TLSB)

**30:2** *Am I in the place of God ... ?* Jacob was forever trying to secure the blessing by his own efforts. Here he has to acknowledge that the blessing of offspring could come only from God (see 31:7–13 for the blessing of flocks). Joseph later echoed these words (see 50:19). (CSB)

**30:3** *go in to her.* Rachel showed the same impatience Sarah had showed earlier when she gave Abraham her maid Hagar to bear a child for her. (PBC)

Like Sarah and later Leah (30:9-13), Rachel allowed a surrogate to bear a child in her place. The practice of having surrogate mothers is well attested in laws from the second millennium BC at Anatolian Kanesh, Babylon, and Nuzi. Although reported in Genesis, nowhere in Scripture does the Lord condone this behavior. (TLSB)

on my behalf. Lit. “on my knees,” apparently an expression symbolic of adoption (see 48:10–16) and meaning “as though my own.” (CSB)

**30:4** *as a wife.* As a concubine (see 35:22). (CSB)

**30:5–12** Jacob’s fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth sons were born to him through his maidservant concubines. (CSB)

**30:6** *heard my voice* – The Lord had given her justice by answering her prayer. (TLSB)

*Dan* – When Bilhah bore Jacob a son, Rachel named him Dan explaining “God has vindicated me: he has stood up for my rights.” There’s a certain irony in the fact that Rachel sidestepped God’s will in ordering her husband into an illicit sexual union and then praised God for blessing her disobedience with a child. (PBC)

In her competition to produce children, Rachel succeeded by a surrogate mother. Cf 32:28, “striven ... prevailed.” (TLSB)

**30:8** *Naphtali* – When Bilhah bore a second son, Rachel named him Naphtali (“my struggle”), explaining “In my struggle with my sister I have won. My sister’s fruitfulness seems to be at an end, and mine is just beginning!” What had been designed by God to be a loving relationship between two sisters had degenerated into a fleshly struggle between rivals. The Scripture surely is not silent about the evils of polygamy. (PBC)

**30:9** Rachel’s boastful words seem to have fired the competitive spirit in Leah. Not willing to be outdone, she gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob, and the man who had traveled to Haran to find a God-fearing wife now found himself instead with a fourth wed-partner. That relationship led to the birth of two more sons. (PBC)

After bearing four sons in close succession. (TLSB)

**30:11** *Gad* – Leah named the first one Gad “good fortune”), explaining: “What good fortune! Now my sister won’t get ahead of me after all!” (PBC)

**30:13** *Asher* – Zilpah’s second son was named Asher (“happy”). Leah explained: “How happy I am! Because of my fruitfulness the women will call me happy!” (PBC)

Reading the crude detail of the unholy competition between the sisters is not pleasant. It is good to remind ourselves that the petty jealousies and the family bickering Jacob had to put up with in his marriage were part of the mechanism the Lord was using to train Jacob, to make him more alert to sinful tendencies in his own personality, to assist him in putting down his sinful nature, and to shape him into God’s kind of man. (PBC)

**30:14** *give me some of your son’s mandrakes*. The mandrake has fleshy, forked roots that resemble the lower part of a human body and were therefore superstitiously thought to induce pregnancy when eaten (see SS 7:13). Rachel, like Jacob (vv. 37–43), tried to obtain what she wanted by magical means. (CSB)

By this time Reuben, Leah’s firstborn, was old enough to accompany the reapers out into the field at the time of harvest. We’re told he found some yellow berries and brought them to his mother. She recognized them as mandrakes, also known as “love apples,” thought to be a cure for barrenness and to promote human fertility. (PBC)

Roots used to make perfume. The ancients ascribed to them aphrodisiac qualities and fertility powers. (TLSB)

**30:15** *taken away my husband* – Perhaps Jacob was denying conjugal rights to Leah, the less-favored wife. (TLSB)

**30:16** *hired*. The Hebrew for this word is a pun on the name Issachar. (CSB)

Jacob became aware of this unlovely exchange when he returned from the harvest field and was informed that his evening schedule had been planned for by his two wives. (PBC)

**30:17–20** Jacob’s ninth and tenth sons were born through Leah, who was thus the mother of half of Jacob’s 12 sons (see note on 29:31–35). (CSB)

**30:18** *Issachar* – Means “reward.” Leah, who knew that Jacob was destined to be the ancestor of a great nation, explained her baby’s name. “God is rewarding me for the giving my maid to my husband,” to guarantee the fulfillment of God’s promise. The fact that she said this does not mean that the opinion she expressed about God was true. (PBC)

**30:20** *endowed me...good endowment*. The Hebrew terms for these words are puns on the name Zebulun. (CSB)

Leah hoped that in bearing Jacob many sons, he would prize her as a beloved wife. (TLAB)

Leah’s sixth son Zebulun means “honor.” The name expressed her hope that now her husband might treat her with the honor which he had so far reserved for his beloved Rachel. (PBC)

**30:21** After Jacob’s seven years of service for Rachel, or perhaps even later. (TLSB)

*Dinah.* See ch. 34. (CSB)

Dinah is the only one of Jacob's daughters named here, although we know from Genesis 37:35 that there were more. Moses's reasons for mentioning Dinah here may be to prepare the reader for the events recorded in Genesis 34. (PBC)

**30:22** *God remembered Rachel.* Around the time that Leah was pregnant with her sixth son, Rachel finally relied on the Lord instead of trying to take matters into her own hands. (Cf. vv.1-3, 15). (TLSB)

Enough time had elapsed for Rachel to realize the mandrakes hadn't worked. The words "God listened to her and opened her womb" indicate that she had prayed to the One who doesn't need love potions to grant the blessings of pregnancy and birth. (PBC)

We have met the expression "God remembered" earlier in the book of Genesis. In 8:1 Moses reported that God "remembered Noah" and caused the floodwaters to recede. By using the term Moses was not suggesting that God had temporarily forgotten about Noah, or in this case about Rachel. He continually surrounded them. But now He made His loving care evident. Rachel became pregnant and bore a son. (PBC)

**30:23** *reproach.* Barrenness was considered to be shameful, a mark of divine disfavor (see 16:2; 30:2). (CSB)

**30:24** *May the LORD add to me another son.* The fulfillment of Rachel's wish would bring about her death (see 35:16-19). (CSB)

**29:31-30:24.** As Leah and Rachel contend with each other regarding childbearing and Jacob's affection, they degrade the marriage relationship. As the sole giver of all good gifts, the Lord finally grants Rachel a child and thus removes her reproach (30:23). In many cases, modern technology allows people to turn God's gift of childbearing into a product they can obtain or refuse at will. Such manipulative attitudes are as old as Leah and Rachel. As Jacob suggests (30:2), we cannot stand in the place of God in these matters, but we must entrust them to His wisdom. In any case, the Lord has given us a child—His only-begotten Son (Is 9:6-7)—to save us and bring salvation to the world. • Lord, grant us patience and trust in matters beyond our control. Bless marriages and families with Your forgiving love. Amen. (TLSB)

#### *Jacob's Prosperity*

**25** As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. **26** Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you." **27** But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that[k] the LORD has blessed me because of you. **28** Name your wages, and I will give it." **29** Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. **30** For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?" **31** He said, "What shall I give you?" Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it: **32** let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages. **33** So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen." **34** Laban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said." **35** But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge

of his sons. 36 And he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock. 37 Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. 38 He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, 39 the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. 40 And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban's flock. 41 Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks, 42 but for the feebler of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feebler would be Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. 43 Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

**30:25** *send me away* – Jacob had now served out the seven years he owed Laban in return for Rachel; now he was eager to return to Canaan, his home. (PBC)

**30:26** *give me my eyes* – Jacob had served the contracted 14 years for the bride price, so the women are rightfully his wives. (TLSB)

Not only was he looking forward to leaving Haran, where he had tasted the bitterness of dishonesty and heartache, he was eager to return to his parents and to the land of promise. He therefore asked his father-in-law for permission to leave. (PBC)

**30:27** *divination*. The attempt to discover hidden knowledge through mechanical means (see 44:5), the interpretation of omens (see Eze 21:21) or the aid of supernatural powers (see Ac 16:16). It was strictly forbidden to Israel (Lev 19:26; Dt 18:10, 14) because it reflected a pagan concept of the world controlled by evil forces, and therefore obviously not under the sovereign rule of the Lord. (CSB)

Laban sought information by supernatural means, such as the interpretation of omens. Later, God forbade this practice in Israel because such practices arise from paganism and seek to access evil powers for aid. Cf. Lev. 19:26; Deut. 18:10, 14. (TLSB)

*the LORD has blessed me because of you*. Cf. 21:22; 26:28–29. The offspring of Abraham were a source of blessing (see 12:2). (CSB)

**30:30** *blessed you wherever I have been* – Literally, “at my foot,” upon which one steps and turns. The expression’s used here seems derogatory, making Laban dependent on Jacob’s foot. (TLSB)

*provide for my own household* – Although Laban had benefited from Jacob’s expertise in raising cattle, his greed had been evident in his unwillingness to share the profits with Jacob. (PBC)

**30:31** *what shall I give you* – Now he stood to lose this valuable man. It’s not surprising that he offered Jacob a blank check. (PBC)

**30:32** *speckled and spotted sheep* – Jacob’s answer seems to have caught Laban completely off-guard. To appreciate that, we’ll need to know that in the ancient Near East sheep were normally sold while in color, goats dark brown or black. (PBC)

To distinguish Jacob’s livestock from Laban’s. (TLSB)

**30:33** *my honesty will answer for me* – Jacob will be vindicated whenever Laban inspects his wages. Any sheep or goat outside the stated parameters would be considered dishonest gain. Through hard lessons, Jacob had learned the virtue of honesty and clarity. (TLSB)

Speckled or spotted animals were unusual, as were black lambs. Laban could hardly believe his ears when he learned that all Jacob was asking for were the uncommon animals, the “irregulars.” One would like to think that by making this offer Jacob was leaving his economic future totally in God’s hands. (PBC)

**30:34** *let it be as you have said* – Laban must have thought his son-in-law’s offer was foolish, but he agreed to it instantly, since he certainly stood to come out ahead. We might have hoped Laban would decline and instead offer a counter-proposal more favorable to Jacob. But again his greed surfaced here, as did his suspicious nature. (PBC)

**30:35** *he removed.* Secretly and without telling Jacob. (CSB)

Laban dishonestly removed the sheep and goats that would have been Jacob’s. (TLSB)

Laban was insinuating that he couldn’t trust Jacob to do it. (PBC)

*put them in charge of his sons* – He added insult to injury, by placing his own sons in charge of Jacob’s flocks. (PBC)

**30:36** *distance of three days* – As still a further expression of his suspicions, he put a three-day journey between the major flock (under Jacob’s care) and the Jacob’s irregulars. That would guarantee, first, that there could be no crossbreeding between the two flocks and secondarily, that Jacob’s share of the flock would remain small. (PBC)

**30:37** *poplar ... white.* The Hebrew terms for these words are puns on the name Laban. As Jacob had gotten the best of Esau (whose other name, Edom, means “red” by means of red stew (25:30), so he now tries to get the best of Laban (whose name means “white”) by means of white branches. In effect, Jacob was using Laban’s own tactic (deception) against him. (CSB)

Jacob resented the unloving and unwarranted suspicion his father-in-law showed toward him. Under Laban’s persistent provocation, Jacob’s old tendency to practice deception showed itself here. He yielded to the temptation to take matters into his own hands. Since his father-in-law was once again taking advantage of him, Jacob decided to give him a taste of his own medicine. (PBC)

To induce solid-colored animals to bear spotted young, Jacob cut branches and peeled off the bark to expose spots or stripes of white wood underneath. (PBC)

**30:38** At breeding time he would put these branches into the animals’ drinking troughs. Whether this trick actually had prenatal influence on the female sheep and goats and actually resulted in the birth of larger numbers of “irregulars” is really beside the point. Whether this technique is scientifically accurate or just country superstition doesn’t matter here. The point is that Jacob the “heel-grabber,” listened to the whispering of his evil nature, which urged him: “Don’t get angry; get even!” This was not Jacob’s new nature speaking; the shenanigans at breeding time was not evidence of a new life of faith. Jacob was not yet ready to graduate from the Lord’s training school. (PBC)

**30:39** The scheme worked—but only because of God’s intervention (see Jacob’s own admission in 31:9), not because of Jacob’s superstition. (CSB)

Jacob assumed that what the sheep saw while breeding would affect their offspring. This may have been the conventional wisdom of the day. This plan succeeded by a miracle of the Lord. (TLSB)

**30:40** Along with the use of the mottled sticks, Jacob seems to have understood the basic principles of selective breeding. He intentionally paired animals to breed for the desired traits. Jacob adhered to the agreement but also acted shrewdly. (TLSB)

**30:41** *stronger...breeding* – Jacob used his method among the strong, whereas the weak would mate without his care and continue to be weak. (TLSB)

Believing that his strategy had worked, Jacob added several refinements. When speckled or spotted young were born he separated them from their mothers as soon as possible and let them mingle with the rest of the flock, to encourage inbreeding. And he began to limit the use of his peeled branch technique, using it only when the strong animals were breeding. By this selective breeding he built a flock of strong animals for himself, leaving the weaker animals for Laban's flock. (PBC)

**30:43** *the man increased greatly*. Over a period of six years (see 31:41). While in Haran Jacob obtained both family and wealth. (CSB)

Jacob recognized that neither the sticks nor his methods alone could have produced such great wealth. He credited the Lord for his prosperity. Animals and servants are still a measure of wealth in herding cultures. (TLSB)

In the vision God had granted Jacob at Bethel years earlier (28:15) he had promised to bless Jacob, but he surely did not need Jacob's scheming to help him keep his promise. God later made it clear to Jacob that he blessed him not because of his scheming but in spite of it. (31:10-12). (PBC)

**30:25–43** Laban deceives Jacob by taking away the livestock he promised. Nonetheless, the Lord blesses Jacob by miraculously prospering his livestock and granting him shrewdness with honesty. In business, you will be tempted to act dishonestly, as Laban did. Instead, pray for wisdom and shrewdness. In all cases, remember and give thanks that the Lord daily and richly provides for your needs of body and soul. In His faithfulness, He gives us the blessings of His cross in Word and Sacraments and will set all things right at His second coming. • Come, Lord Jesus, and grant us Your wholesome wisdom. Amen. (TLSB)