

GENESIS 30:14-24 (GOD HAS TAKEN AWAY MY REPROACH)

Introduction: The word "reproach" can be used in a few ways. It can be something active, such as when someone reproaches another person or God. The king of Assyria sent messengers to reproach the name of the Living God and God turned around and destroyed 185,000 of them in a single night. Lesson there...don't reproach God!

The word can also mean that someone feels blameworthy about something or ashamed because they have done something wrong or because they are somehow deficient. I know that the Japanese people feel reproach over having entered into and then lost the second world war.

They carry the reproach of what happened, of the allegiance they put in a person they thought was a god, of the unconditional surrender and the subsequent occupation. Many still feel the reproach as they have to rely on the US as their defender. They are a nation with a complex, but they're not alone.

Rachel felt her own reproach. She was barren and felt the shame of her barrenness. It was a stigma which she longed to end. This is true with other women of the Bible as they perceived in themselves a lack of carrying out the command of God to multiply the race.

To some degree, many of us feel our own reproach. Maybe we have a physical or mental deficiency - real or perceived - that we feel ashamed of. I know a lady who is in her 40s that lives in a culture where being married is of paramount importance and yet she's never been married. She feels the reproach of this.

I know others who have never been married as well as some who have served time in prison, who have failed their spouse, who have failed their children, who have lost their job, their home, their wealth. All of them have indicated they feel reproach.

In fact, I'd guess that the larger part of all of us have something we feel ashamed about. The good news is that where we are deficient or where we fail, God can

shine through all the more brightly in our lives, if we will only allow Him to. In Him there is a release from the values of the world.

In Him there is no wealthy or poor, there is no intellectually smart or incredibly stupid. To Him we are all His handiwork and each one of us serves a good purpose in His plans. To the unmarried - there's a much better hope than a husband. Isaiah says to the widow, "Your Maker is your husband."

How much better is that than a man who will let you down, give you grief, and eventually wear out and die from years of life. The Lord is from ever-lasting to ever-lasting. He is a Father to the orphan, a Husband to the widow, the Caretaker of the downtrodden, and the Comforter of the sick and feeble.

He is the covenant keeping Lord who has His eyes upon His people at all times.

Text Verse: "But you, Israel, *are* My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, The descendants of Abraham My friend. ⁹ *You* whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its farthest regions, And said to you, 'You *are* My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away: ¹⁰ Fear not, for I *am* with you; Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.' Isaiah 41:8-10

Israel has borne their own reproach - both actively as the Lord has chastised them, and passively in the acknowledgement of their sins. The latter is far less than it should be, but one thing I know, when a Jewish person comes to the Lord, there is little else that is as incredible to see.

They understand the reproach they bore in an entirely new context and yet they can identify with His workings in their lives in a completely new way. It is a fantastic thing to see. The story of Jacob having children isn't yet through and today we will continue to see the formation of a people who will be set apart by God.

Understanding the past, how it came about and how it relates to the present, will also give us a better understanding of the future when Christ returns to dwell among His people once again.

Today's story includes more children and the taking away of the reproach of one of the four mothers of the children of Israel, Jacob's beloved Rachel. May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Mandrakes for Mom

¹⁴ Now Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah.

Reuben is a little boy at this time, maybe around five or six years old. It says that "in the days of the wheat harvest" he went out. This is the May time frame and is around the time of the Feast of Shavuot or Pentecost recorded in both Testaments of the Bible.

The wheat harvest is a picture of the gathering of the people in the church age. Pentecost is the time of the giving of the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter 2. While he is out in the fields, Reuben found some mandrakes and brought them to his mom.

A nice little boy with a special treat for his beloved. There is an enormous amount of speculation as to what mandrakes are. Some people claim to definitively identify them as this or that while others deny those claims.

The word here is only used in two other sections of the Bible. Once in the Song of Solomon and once under a different context in the book of Jeremiah. In the Song of Solomon, it says that the mandrakes give off a pleasant fragrance.

In May the fields are full of flowers and so this could fit one of a plethora of plants. Whatever a mandrake is, from the context of the passage, it's clear that they were thought to promote fertility.

There are several plants in the mid-east which are used in this way, so that doesn't help all too much, but one good candidate is the alraun or in its Latin form *Mandragora vernalis*.

These are common and are about the size of a nutmeg and they have a strong but pleasant smell. Apparently, the people of the area are known to still use these to

promote child-bearing to this day.

If you ever want to get off on a completely useless tangent, you can read commentaries by people who claim the mandrakes were used by Jesus in order to make Lazarus appear dead and so He faked bringing him back to life. And, because it worked so well He.... did it to Himself too.

This is the kind of stupidity I recommend you don't bother with. Whatever mandrakes are, they were well known enough as edible fruit for a little boy to pick some and take them to mom. He was doing what beautiful little children do around the world by bringing her home a special present.

¹⁴ (con't) Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me *some* of your son's mandrakes."

Rachel knew the supposed purpose of the mandrakes and asked Leah for some. The exchange they're going to have tells us that either mandrakes are very rare, or that the season for mandrakes wasn't a good one. If not, then what comes about between the two probably wouldn't have happened.

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?"

In Genesis 29:35, after having had her fourth son, it says that Leah stopped bearing. What may have happened is that Jacob simply stopped going in to her. Both Rachel and Leah gave their maidservants to Jacob and they both had two children each.

What is possible is that Jacob is now spending most of his nights with Rachel simply out of love and maybe because she wanted him to keep trying to give her children. This seems to be what's happened because Leah says that Rachel took away her husband. He isn't spending any time at all with her now.

The nightly argument could have been, "Well Leah has four children and I still don't have any." So when Rachel asks for some of the mandrakes, Leah knows that she's going to eat them in hopes of getting pregnant and that means that Jacob is going to still be spending all his nights with her. Leah will be left out in the cold.

Like I said, if mandrakes were in abundance, Rachel would have just gone out and gotten her own, but the fact that she's asking for them from Leah shows how rare they probably are.

Another thing to think about is that when Leah says, "*Is it* a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" She isn't comparing the value of her husband to mandrakes. She's saying that the mandrakes are all she has left since she doesn't even have him anymore.

A gift from Reuben has all the more meaning when she's not receiving the affection of her own husband. If she gives the mandrakes away, then she has nothing to comfort her unhappiness. Leah has forgotten the Lord who had so abundantly blessed her in the past and she is discontent with life as it is.

15 (con't) And Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes."

Once Rachel sees how unhappy Leah is about her own situation, she comes up with a plan to make them both happy. Leah gets a night with Jacob without any interference and Rachel gets some mandrakes that she thinks will help her get pregnant. And Jacob... Jacob is on the receiving end of the deal.

16 When Jacob came out of the field in the evening, 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." And he lay with her that night.

The Bible says that the worker is worthy of his wages. Jacob got hired for a job and he is going to earn his pay I guess.

With the bargain settled, Leah lets Jacob know what is what. There will be no argument from Rachel about the situation. More to the point, because mandrakes are involved, Jacob would understand the reason for the exchange and why Rachel would allow this.

A night off from trying to have children would be worth it if she had mandrakes to help with her conception. Whether Jacob believed any of this is irrelevant. It would keep harmony in the house and was probably even amusing to him.

He had enough decisions to make with wives and children and work. There would be no reason to interfere in this and all the reason to go along with it for the sake of peace and harmony. Jacob is a man with a duty and he is going to get it done.

II. Two More Sons and a Daughter for Leah

¹⁷ And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.

Once again, God shows that He is transcendent over His creation. Leah gave away her mandrakes which are supposed to help women get pregnant and yet she ends by having another child. Again, as we've seen before, God is in control of the details.

Children are a grace which He directs and apart from Him they don't come. And so now, after a time away from bearing, Leah has a fifth son and bears Jacob's ninth child. Leah obviously prayed for this to happen because it says that God "listened to Leah."

The cry of the afflicted is tender music to God's ear. He is patient and will wait as we ignore Him. He has all the time in the world to let us leave Him out of the picture, but when we call on Him, He is there - right then - working on a response.

The answer may not come as quickly as we'd wish, but no prayer from His people goes unheard. The nice thing about fulfilled prayers is that when they come, we can turn around and see that it was at the perfect moment.

Any earlier and maybe we wouldn't have been really ready. And any later and the purpose of the prayer might have passed away.

His timing is always perfect and each time we think the delay was unwarranted, we can see that in fact it made us more ready to handle the blessing when it did arrive.

Don't let delays in your prayers get you frustrated. Instead, keep talking to the Lord and waiting on His perfect will to be realized. In the end, we will all understand the wisdom which surrounds us and is working towards the fulfillment of a perfect plan.

18 Leah said, "God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband." So she called his name Issachar.

As continues to happen, the child is named by the circumstances surrounding the birth. Issachar means "He is wages." Leah openly speaks about the situation - *natan elohim sekhari* - "God has given me my wages."

Unlike the birth of her first four children, Leah only mentions the God of creation - elohim and not the God of the Covenant, Jehovah. But in the name of the child, Issachar - He is wages, she is saying that the child is the reward from the Creator God because she gave her maid to her husband.

It's funny that instead of tying the giving of the mandrakes to Rachel, which is the reason she got to sleep with Jacob, she ties it to the giving of her maid in order for Jacob to have two sons through her as well. She has an insight for us here to remember.

What Jacob has done by having four wives is not unbiblical. I heard a preacher speaking about this exact passage about a month ago and he felt that what Jacob did was wrong. This is at a time before the giving of the law. But even under the law, and in the New Testament as well, there is no prohibition about this.

In fact, the law makes provisions for multiple wives. And based on Leah's comment about being rewarded for what she did, it is both illogical and nearsighted to come to the conclusion that Jacob was in the wrong. The Bible makes no such charge.

19 Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son.

Apparently, the mandrakes didn't work for Rachel because another year later, she still hasn't had any children, but Leah bears a sixth time and now Jacob has 10 sons.

²⁰ And Leah said, "God has endowed me *with* a good endowment; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons." So she called his name Zebulun.

With the bearing of her final son, Leah exclaims, *zabadani elohim oti zebed tov*, "God has endowed me with a good endowment." And so she calls him Zebulun which means Glorious Dwelling Place. Because of six sons, she is certain that Jacob will now love her and live with her.

She is the mother of six boys which in the context of the times and of the Bible was a great blessing. Psalm 127 says it this way -

Behold, children *are* a heritage from the LORD, The fruit of the womb *is* a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So *are* the children of one's youth. Happy *is* the man who has his quiver full of them; They shall not be ashamed, But shall speak with their enemies in the gate. Psalm127:3-5

Jacob's quiver was growing all the time and the majority of his strength was through Leah.

²¹ Afterward she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah.

We saw in a previous sermon that Jacob will have other daughters that aren't even recorded. The Bible isn't attempting to diminish women in the Bible as feminists try to claim, but there are reasons why the males are highlighted.

The reckoning of a person's family is through the male, not the female. The male is the leader of the family and in the workings of God, the patriarchal family is the one which is properly aligned with His intentions. Societies which cast off this guideline invariably devolve into chaos, strife, and destruction.

God provides structure and order for us because He loves us and knows what is best. The matriarchal societies of the world are poorer, less educated, filled with far more crime, and are a sad example of disobeying what God has intended.

The move away from the traditional, biblical family in America has led to higher crime rates, lowering of expectations in education and in the workforce, and increased immorality.

The female's role is different than for that of the male. The male is highlighted in order to show what God ordained and intended for us, not to in any way diminish women or their value as people.

Although the majority of the important roles in the Bible are men, there are a large number of women who fill them as well. And even more are the many women who are seen behind the scenes, working their lives in harmony with God's intent and bringing glory to Him and stability or validity to the biblical narrative.

Of the daughters of Jacob, only Dinah is mentioned. And this is because she is relevant to the Bible's record. She is mentioned only 8 times, but 6 of them are in connection with an event found in chapter 34 which eventually cost Simeon and Levi, Jacob's 2nd and 3rd sons, the blessing of being the bearer of the Messiah. This honor instead was passed down to the fourth son, Judah. As I said, by introducing her and by highlighting her, we can see God's hand at work as the line leads from Adam to Noah to Abraham and eventually through Judah and David and finally to Jesus.

For this and another important reason, Dinah is mentioned when her other sisters aren't. Dinah means "vindicated" and it seems that Leah named her in response to the name Rachel gave to her son born through her maidservant - Dan.

The struggle between the women for the affections of their husband has been contentious. It has gone back and forth through the workings of God, both in Creation and in the keeping of the covenant made to Abraham and which is carried through Jacob.

III. Rachel's Joy

²² Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb.

What is probably after somewhere around 13 years of marriage the Bible says that elohim, the God of creation, remembered Rachel and that elohim listened to her and opened her womb.

Rachel had trusted in having children through a maidservant and then later in trying her hand at looking to the creation for children by eating mandrakes.

Eventually though, she found that neither of these satisfied and the second option certainly didn't work. Mandrakes might be yummy, but they don't bring about babies. So she finally did what she should have done many years earlier - she prayed.

She prayed just as Isaac and Rebekah did and as Leah appears to have done too. God responded to their prayers and He responded to hers also after about 13 years of being barren. Once again, prayer isn't a tool to get God to do stuff for us. It is a way for us to communicate our heart and our desires to Him and then to wait on His response. The response may be "yes," it may be "no," or it may be that we just have to keep waiting. The waiting may be the response all by itself.

God may be molding us and refining us through the wait. At the end of the waiting, we might find that the very thing we had been praying for isn't necessary because the wait changed us in a way which took away our need.

In the book of Lamentations, Jeremiah tell us this -

Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. ²³ They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. ²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!" The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him. ²⁶ It is good that one should hope and wait quietly For the salvation of the LORD. (3:22-26)

These words were written at the most difficult time in Israel's history up to that point. The people were suffering through the affliction brought about because of their disobedience. There was hunger, there was disease, and there was death all around.

If ever there was a man who should be able to claim his way out of the trials, you'd think it would be Jeremiah. But instead, he waited patiently on the Lord. He offered prayers and he waited. Rachel offered prayers and she waited; her prayers were finally answered.

²³ And she conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach."

As the Geneva Bible says about this verse - "Because fruitfulness came as God's blessing, who said Increase and multiply, barrenness was counted as a curse." They are right. Going back to the very beginning of man's time on earth, bearing children was considered a blessing.

To the women of the Bible, the reciprocal must have then seemed to be true - "If I am not a blessing then I bear reproach." Finally, after these many long years, God took this reproach away from her and gave her a son as a blessing.

²⁴ So she called his name Joseph, and said, "The LORD shall add to me another son."

There is a duality in the name of Joseph which not only looks backward, but also forward. The word for "has taken" used by Rachel in the previous verse is *asaph*. The word for "add" which she now exclaims in this verse is *yosef*. Both point to his name.

In taking away the reproach, Rachel now looks for the Lord to give her another son and so she names this one Yosef. He shall add, increase, repeat, or double. The name he receives is literally fulfilled in two ways. First, he will have a brother, Benjamin.

But Joseph himself will also have two children - Ephraim and Manasseh. In taking away her reproach, God has showered Rachel with His grace and now, for the first time in the biblical narrative, she invokes the covenant name of the Lord, Jehovah.

She acknowledges that He is the one who will accomplish these things. She has left the world of fighting, derision, superstition, and envy, and she has truly

entered into the covenant care of the Lord who directs all things for the fulfillment of His plans and purposes.

Now that we've looked at the surface of the story, the historical and cultural aspects of what happened, we need to ask ourselves, "Why is this story here? What is it that God wants us to see? The answer is, as always - Jesus." Here is the Light -

Reuben, a son born to Leah who pictures the law, gives mandrakes to his mom. His name means, See a son. He now pictures fallen man attempting to regain spiritual life by works. The mandrakes are something we use to try to receive eternal life - false religion.

The mandrakes pass from Leah to Rachel and yet Leah has the child, not Rachel. Leah names him Issachar, "He is wages." This is a picture of the hope of new life; the renewal of spiritual life to man lost at the fall. This is Jesus, fulfilling the law on our behalf.

Reuben gave the mandrakes to Leah, but Rachel, a picture of those outside of the law ask for them - they are searching for God in the wrong way. But, Leah bears the child, a child born under the law. This is Jesus born under the law as Paul writes in Galatians 4 -

⁴"But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

Leah names him, "He is wages." The Bible says that "the wages of sin is death, but the Gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus is the wages we need to move from death to life. After paying our debt, comes Zebulun the next to be born, again to Leah.

His name means "Glorious Dwelling Place." It is the place that Jesus went to present His blood after the crucifixion and the paying of the wages - the debt. Hebrews 9 tells us this - "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, *which are* copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us;" (v 24)

And once He appeared to His Father in the glorious dwelling place, we see the final part of this picture from Leah. It records, "Afterward she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah." The final child of Leah, who pictures the law, is the final point to show us the fulfillment of the law - Dinah means "vindicated."

Paul tells us the fulfillment in 1 Timothy 3:16 - " Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory."

He was "vindicated" by the Spirit - the proof is the resurrection. Jesus Christ prevailed over the law, He is our wages (Issachar) unto eternal life, He entered the glorious dwelling place (Zebulun) with His own blood, and He was vindicated (Dinah) by the Spirit.

All of this is pictured in the birth of these three by Leah, the law. But this leaves the last birth to be considered. Rachel's first child, Joseph. Why were children born to Leah, but not Rachel. What was it that kept her from bearing?

The answer is found in who she represents - people dependent on the grace of God. The law brought forth her Son to redeem those under the law. Only then could we too be children of God. Notice that the mandrakes did absolutely nothing for her, just as false religion does nothing.

Only when she called on the Creator was she able to bear. And indeed she did, Joseph. In one fell swoop God took away our reproach (*asaph*) and He added us to His fold (*yosef*). This is why she used both terms when she gave the reason for the child's name.

The Increaser, the Repeater, the Doubler - Jesus! He has brought forth sons from those under the law and those apart from the law; from Jew and gentile; from male and female. In Him is the embodiment of the law and in Him is the Grace of God.

If you remember way back at the beginning, this story occurred in the May timeframe, at the time of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was given at that time and

that is the time of the birth of the church - the grace of God poured out upon the sons of men - and the wheat harvest pictures that spiritual harvest.

This is why these children are mentioned, this is why they are mentioned in this order, and this is why God has given us this story. Once again, as it always is, it is all about Jesus. God is telling us, time and time again about His work in the stream of time and humanity, to restore us to Him.

This is where we end today, with the joy of a child for Rachel after many long years of waiting. For you, it may be the end of a time of waiting too. You may have been fighting the call in your own life - the call to come to Jesus. He is there and He truly wants you to share in the blessings which can only come through Him.

Closing Verse: “Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed; Neither be disgraced, for you will not be put to shame; For you will forget the shame of your youth, And will not remember the reproach of your widowhood anymore. 5 For your Maker is your husband, The Lord of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole earth. Isaiah 54:4, 5

Next Week: Genesis 30:25-36 (To Build a Flock) (72nd Genesis Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you and He has a good plan and purpose for you. Call on Him and let Him do marvelous things for you and through you.

Then God Remembered Rachel

Now Reuben went in the days of the harvest of wheat
And found mandrakes in the field
And brought them to his mother Leah, he was so sweet
Maybe with a special kiss the gift was sealed

Then Rachel said to Leah, for goodness' sakes
Please give me some of your son's mandrakes

But she said to her, Is it a small matter to you

That you have taken my husband away
Would you take away my son's mandrakes too
Would you do this to me in my sorrow today?

And Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight
For your son's mandrakes I'll make this deal, alright?"

When Jacob came out of the field, ready for bed
It was in the evening time
Leah went out to meet him and said
You must come in to me. Yes tonight you are mine
For I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes
And he lay with Leah that night, yes for goodness sakes

And God listened to Leah and she conceived
And she bore to Jacob a fifth son
Leah said "God has given me my wages as I believed
I gave my maid to my husband not to be outdone

So she called his name Issachar
These kind of wages aren't kept in a jar

Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son
"God has endowed me with a good endowment. I am number one

Now my husband will dwell with me
Because I have born him six sons, you see

So she called him Zebulun, this she did proclaim
Afterward she bore a daughter and Dinah was her name

Then God remembered Rach...el
And God listened to her and opened her womb
And she conceived and bore a son, how swell
And said "God has taken away my reproach none too soon

So she called his name Joseph and said

The Lord shall add to me another son in the days ahead

Jacob's family is almost complete as the story does unfold
And through these pages we see the genesis of Israel
Every word is given and every word is told
To teach us of the things that to us God does tell

Through this group of people will come the Savior
And to them He will return again someday
To Him we should direct our daily behavior
And to Him may we be pleased to say

O, Great and awesome Lord
Majestic in all Your ways
Thank You for Your precious word
May we search its pages all our days

And in You alone may we delight
Until at last You take us home
Some glorious day or maybe some night
We know for us someday you will come

Until then we shall walk in Your light for all our days
And to You alone we shall utter all our resounding praise

Hallelujah and Amen...