

Genesis – Lesson 23

The Family of Jacob

Read Genesis 29:1-30.

1. What *similarities* do you see between Jacob finding his wife and Isaac finding his (see Genesis 24)?

Like Isaac (at least through the servant of Abraham), Jacob finds his wife when she comes to bring the sheep to be watered at a well. Rachel, who is *also* from Abraham's family (as was Rebekah), comes to the well where Jacob immediately sees her as his love.

2. (a) What verses from Genesis 29 show that Jacob is now beginning to *reap* what he sowed?

In the first place, the very fact that Jacob has had to leave Canaan and come to the house of Laban to live indicates that he was now reaping what he had sowed with Esau. Secondly, after Jacob had served Laban for seven years in order to gain Rachel as his wife, Laban switches in Leah instead, robbing Jacob of what he truly wanted. This turn of events is very similar to the switch he himself had made before Isaac; his sin is coming back to haunt him.

(b) From Galatians 6:6-10, what does it mean to “sow to his own flesh?” What does it mean to “sow to the Spirit?” What are some of the *rewards* of doing so?

To sow “to his own flesh” (or to the “sinful nature”) is to *give in* to our base, fleshly, selfish, and sinful ways; to *willingly* give ourselves over to the temptations and lusts of the flesh, the desires of our sinful nature. It is to act in accordance with what our “body” desires, rather than in what our mind knows to be right. To sow to the Spirit, however, is to *both* turn away from sinful temptations *and* to do good as God prescribes. It is to act in the ways of the Spirit, doing the will of God and keeping holy in all things. The rewards of doing so include being loved as obedient children by God, learning how to overcome temptation, building up a life of holiness, and being a testimony to the world of the goodness of God.

Read Genesis 29:31-30:24 and 35:17-26.

3. (a) List the *names* of Jacob's sons (in order) with the name of their mother.

Jacob sons are: 1) Reuben (Leah; 29:32); 2) Simeon (Leah; 29:33); 3) Levi (Leah; 29:34); 4) Judah (Leah; 29:35); 5) Dan (Bilhah; 30:6); 6) Naphtali (Bilhah; 30:8); 7) Gad (Zilpah; 30:11); 8) Asher (Zilpah; 30:13); 9) Issachar (Leah; 30:18); 10) Zebulun (Leah; 30:20); 11) Joseph (Rachel; 35:24); and 12) Benjamin (Rachel; 35:18). Dinah was born to Jacob of Leah after Zebulun (30:21). Note: because the descendants of Levi never possess a specific tract of land (see 3b below), God passes the tribal inheritance from Joseph to his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (see Genesis 48:5ff), thus accounting for twelve tribes.

(b) What *special honor* was given to two tribes of Israel descended from Leah's sons? How might this *relate* to the promises of 17:15-19 and 25:23?

The descendants of Levi are given over by God to the *priesthood*; the duties of the tabernacle and temple would be given to them as a special privilege by God. They would not inherit any specific land for themselves, but would live amongst the other tribes working to serve God for the people. From the descendants of Judah would come the Messiah, the “*blessing*” to all the nations promised to the patriarchs. These two sons, were not the *firstborn* to Judah; the privileges of these two tribes did *not* fall to Reuben (the firstborn) or to Joseph (the firstborn son of Rachel to Jacob). God passed over these to raise up Levi and Judah (the reasons being given later in the narrative of Genesis).

(c) From Genesis 29:32, 35:19-20, and 49:31, what *one thing* did Leah want more than anything else? Did she *eventually* get her wish? How do you know?

According to these verses, Leah wanted to be *loved* by Jacob; she was jealous of the affection that Jacob had for Rachel that he never gave to Leah. Leah believed that bearing sons would kindle this affection in Jacob, even though Jacob had *first* loved Rachel and had worked 14 years to secure her as his wife. Although she never (seems) to have gotten this affection from Jacob during the course of her child-bearing, it would appear that she *eventually* received a place of prominence in Jacob's thinking. Rachel was buried by the side of the road on the way to Bethlehem, but Jacob *personally* buried Leah in the family plot at Mamre. So, in a manner of speaking, Leah (in the end) wound up in a place of greater affection, although she may never had experienced it *directly* herself.

(d) What *parallels* to past events do you see in 30:1-5 and 30:22-24? What is their *importance*?

Verses 30:1-5 (Rachel giving her servant to Jacob to bear her a son) parallels the events of Sarai giving Hagar to Abraham to bear her a son. Verses 30:22-24 (God opening Rachel's womb) parallels the time when God opened Sarai's womb and gave her a son. The importance of these two events is to show the *providence* of God over the circumstances: just as the long-awaited child of Sarai (Isaac) would go on to become the promised child and bring forth the promises of God, so the child of Rachel (Joseph) would go on to become the savior of the family of Jacob in Egypt.

Read Genesis 30:25-31:55.

4. (a) In what ways was Jacob a *good* servant to Laban? Did Laban *deserve* such service?

Jacob, it would appear, worked hard and made Laban prosperous. Laban, however, was *constantly* going back on his promises to Jacob and treating him unfairly (see 4b below). While Laban certainly did not *deserve* such service, Jacob worked hard for him anyhow.

(b) From 30:25-43, what *unfair advantage* did Laban take over Jacob? What did Jacob *do* about it?

When Jacob wished to depart from Laban and return to Canaan, he suggested to Laban that he take all of the speckled, spotted or black sheep and goats as his wages, and for making Laban wealthy. Laban agreed, but went and hid all of these kinds of animals with his sons three days journey away. Thus, Jacob would find no animals to take as his wages. So, he used a technique to cause the animals to bear young that had these characteristics, and then took them as his wages. Obviously, this technique was blessed by God to produce these sorts of animals (see 31:12ff) and Jacob benefited from it.

(c) What do we learn from Hebrews 12:1-4 about *struggling* through the "unfair" things of life?

The writer commands Christians to *persevere* through the difficulties of life (including those things that are unfair) in the same way that the saints of the past did, and in the same way that Jesus did when he endured the cross. We are commanded to put aside every sinful thing and *endure* the race that has been set before us. We are to be constantly reminded of the *injustice* that Christ endured and to continue to struggle against every temptation and evil of men without growing weak or fainthearted. Life is hard, and then you die! But, followers of Jesus are to *persevere*, just as those who went before us, and to run the race we have been given with patience and steadfastness.

5. Compare 31:14-16 to 31:19. List some reasons *why* Rachel stole her father's household gods.

Rachel may have stolen these idols for a number of reasons: 1) maybe she just wanted them, 2) maybe she took them because she believed that they rightly belonged to her family, since Jacob had spent so much time with Laban and had not received a fair wage (i.e. to punish him), or 3) maybe she took them to compel Laban to come after them and force them back to Paddan-aram, where she had spent her entire life.

6. What do you *learn* from Genesis 31:6-7, 9-13, 24, and 42? Why is this *important*?

Although the details of Jacob's life (i.e. his new family, his relationship with Laban, etc.) are numerous and daunting, it is clear that God is controlling the events and causing all of his purposes to be done through Jacob. True, Jacob is struggling with many things, but God is using these to form Jacob into the man he wishes him to be and to build the family that would be used by God as the basis of a nation. Laban may think that *he* is controlling Jacob, but it is clear (especially as God *directly* addresses Laban) that God is in control. As these chapters end, Jacob is ready to return to Canaan *after having spent so much time exiled from his father's land*. Just like Abraham in Egypt (and the Israelites in Egypt), the time of exile has been used to accomplish God's purposes, and Jacob is ready for the next phase of his life.