

Genesis 30-31

An Overview of Chapter 30

Rachel is jealous that her sister could give Jacob children and she was not. Following in the footsteps of Abraham and Sarah she convinces Jacob to give her children through her maid Bilhah. Jacob agrees and thus begins the offspring wars of Genesis 30.

Remember that in Genesis 29 Leah had given Jacob four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah.

Here in Chapter 30 Rachel's maid gives Jacob two sons on behalf of Rachel: Dan (vindicated) and Naphtali (wrestlings).

Leah sees what Rachel is doing so she copies her and gives Jacob her maid Zilpah as a wife who gives him two more sons on Leah's behalf: Gad (fortunate) and Asher (happy).

Rachel could not help being jealous about anything that Leah has, so when Leah's oldest son is seen giving his dear old mom some mandrakes (a plant that was thought to have an aphrodisiac effect) Rachel wants some for herself. Leah will not give them to her, but a deal is struck. Rachel pimps Jacob out for the night to Leah in return for some of the mandrakes. Jacob goes along with the deal, and the end result is a fifth child from Leah, Issachar (wages). Apparently, this wasn't a one time deal because Leah later gives birth to a sixth son, Zebulun (to dwell), and a daughter, Dinah (judge).

Rachel finally has a child of her own, Joseph (add), but is still hoping for more, and she will get another (Benjamin) in a later chapter.

Final score in the offspring wars:

Leah: 8 boys (6 from her and 1 from Zilpah) and 1 girl

Rachel: 4 boys (2 from her and 2 from Bilhah)

Jacob's been busy with his wives and has a lot to show for it, but he has also been working hard for his father-in-law Laban. Jacob decides that he has paid his seven years service and wants to leave. Laban realizes that he will be losing a great worker so he makes him a deal to keep him around. Laban gives Jacob all the imperfect sheep and goats in return for his work. Jacob then raises his imperfect flocks, and they make him rich.

An Overview of Chapter 31

The fact that Jacob is getting rich from Laban's undesirable livestock makes Laban cop an attitude with Jacob. Jacob is instructed by God to leave town. With the agreement of his wives he and his family take all their stuff and sneak out of town, but not before Rachel shoplifts daddy's gods (how sad that his gods could be stolen).

When Laban finds out Jacob and his family left; he followed in hot pursuit. When he finds them he wonders why Jacob and company would leave without saying bye. He also accuses them of stealing his gods. Jacob gives him permission to look through all their stuff and if he finds his gods then Jacob will make sure the thief dies. Laban searches everywhere except under Rachel who continues her cycle of deception.

When Laban comes up empty handed, he and Jacob have an argument about who is mistreating who. In the end, the two make a covenant that they will stay away from each other, with God being the witness between them they set up a border and agree not to cross it to do each other harm.

After the family squabble is somewhat patched up the two of them have a BBQ and then Laban goes home.

Reflection

Does your jealousy often cause you to lead others to sin? Do you think that following God will make you successful? Do you run away from your problems, or confront them before you proceed?

For Further Study

12 tribes of Israel: Genesis 49

Jealousy: Proverbs 6:34, Proverbs 27:4

Idols: Psalm 96:5, Psalm 115:1-8