

SUNDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY
Genesis 29-30 – Jacob Gets Married (x2 or x4)

Genesis 29 (NRSV)

29 Then Jacob went on his journey, and came to the land of the people of the east.² As he looked, he saw a well in the field and three flocks of sheep lying there beside it; for out of that well the flocks were watered. The stone on the well's mouth was large,³ and when all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone from the mouth of the well, and water the sheep, and put the stone back in its place on the mouth of the well.

⁴ Jacob said to them, "My brothers, where do you come from?" They said, "We are from Haran."⁵ He said to them, "Do you know Laban son of Nahor?" They said, "We do."⁶ He said to them, "Is it well with him?" "Yes," they replied, "and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with the sheep."⁷ He said, "Look, it is still broad daylight; it is not time for the animals to be gathered together. Water the sheep, and go, pasture them."⁸ But they said, "We cannot until all the flocks are gathered together, and the stone is rolled from the mouth of the well; then we water the sheep."

⁹ While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep; for she kept them.¹⁰ Now when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of his mother's brother Laban, and the sheep of his mother's brother Laban, Jacob went up and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of his mother's brother Laban.¹¹ Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud.¹² And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son; and she ran and told her father.

¹³ When Laban heard the news about his sister's son Jacob, he ran to meet him; he embraced him and kissed him, and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things,¹⁴ and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

¹⁵ Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?"¹⁶ Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel.¹⁷ Leah's eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful.¹⁸ Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel."¹⁹ Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me."²⁰ So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

²¹ Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed."²² So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast.²³ But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her.²⁴ (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.)²⁵ When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?"²⁶ Laban said, "This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn.²⁷ Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years."²⁸ Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.²⁹ (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.)³⁰ So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban for another seven years.

³¹ When the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.³² Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben; for she said, "Because the Lord has looked on my affliction; surely now my husband will love me."³³ She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also"; and she named him Simeon.³⁴ Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be joined to me, because I have borne him three sons"; therefore he was named Levi.³⁵ She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the Lord"; therefore she named him Judah; then she ceased bearing.

SOURCE THEORY: J Source = normal; E Source = **bold**; P Source = *Italicized*; Redactor = **bold italicized**.

All of chapter 29 is said to derive from the J source.

CHAPTER 29 – WELL-DESERVED MARITAL PROBLEMS AND FIRST CHILDREN

Jacob continues his journey and meets his future wife, Rachel, by a well. She is Laban's youngest daughter. Jacob is smitten with passion and Laban promises to let her marry him, but in return for seven years of work. As biblical scholar Peter Enns writes, "What's seven years of hard labor compared to getting to marry your cousin?" Jacob agrees.

On his wedding night, however, Laban gives him a taste of his own medicine. He does the ol' switcheroo. He doesn't bring him Rachel, but her less attractive older sister Leah. And Jacob doesn't realize it until the next morning after it is already too late. The deed has been done. In many ways, it is poetic justice.

When questioned, Laban uses the excuse that according to custom, it's not proper to marry off the younger daughter before the older one, and so if Jacob will stick this out with Leah, he'll be given the opportunity to marry Rachel, but it will cost him another seven years of hard labor. And he agrees.

Now the story shifts to which sister can have more kids for Jacob. Knowing that Leah is unloved, God makes her fertile, but keeps Rachel barren. Leah has four boys right away (Reuben, meaning 'Behold, a son'; Simeon, meaning 'to hear'; Levi, meaning 'joined'; and Judah, meaning 'praised one'). And the chapter ends with the score being Leah 4 – Rachel 0.

Genesis 30 (NRSV)

30 When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, **she envied her sister; and she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!"** ² **Jacob became very angry with Rachel and 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 maid Bilhah; go in to her, that she may bear upon my knees and that I too may have children through her."** ⁴ **So she gave him her maid 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 named him Dan.** ⁷ **Rachel's maid 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 named him Naphtali.**

⁹ **When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.** ¹⁰ **Then Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son.** ¹¹ **And Leah said, "Good fortune!" so she named him Gad.** ¹² **Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.** ¹³ **And Leah said, "Happy am I! For the women will call me happy"; so she named him 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 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 heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.** ¹⁸ **Leah said, "God has given me my hire because I gave my maid to my husband"; so she named him Issachar.** ¹⁹ **And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son.** ²⁰ **Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good dowry; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons"; so she named him Zebulun.** ²¹ **Afterwards she bore a daughter, and named her Dinah.**

²² **Then God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her and opened her womb.** ²³ **She conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach";** ²⁴ **and she named him Joseph, saying, "May the Lord add to me another son!"**

²⁵ When 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, and let me go; for you know very well the service I have given you.” ²⁷ But Laban said to him, “If you will allow me to say so, I have learned by divination that 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 cattle have 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 feed 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 such 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 charge of his sons; ³⁶ and he set a distance of three days’ journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob was pasturing the rest of Laban’s flock.

³⁷ Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the rods. ³⁸ He set the rods 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 rods, and so the flocks produced young that were striped, speckled, and spotted. ⁴⁰ Jacob separated the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and the completely black animals in the flock of Laban; and 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 laid the rods in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the rods, ⁴² but for the feebler of the flock he did not lay them there; so the feebler were Laban’s, and the stronger Jacob’s. ⁴³ Thus the man grew exceedingly rich, and had large flocks, and male and female slaves, and camels and donkeys.

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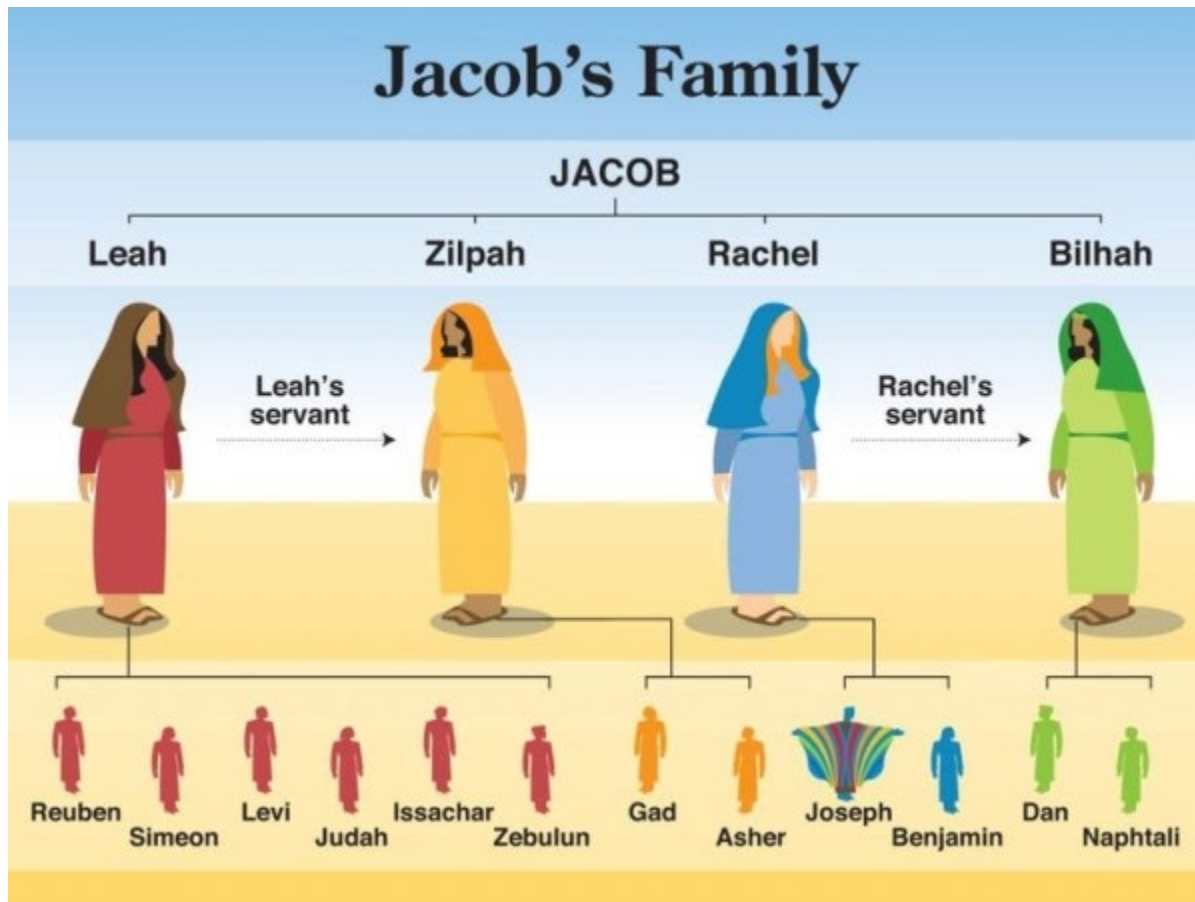
CHAPTER 30 – MORE WIVES AND MORE CHILDREN

Not wanting to be outdone by her older sister, Rachel says to Jacob “Give me children, or I shall die!” which makes him upset. He has no control over her fertility. So, she takes matters into her own hands and gives Jacob her maid Bilhah as a wife so that she can have children through her. Bilhah then has two boys (Dan, meaning ‘judgement or judged,’ because God has judged her; and Naphtali, meaning ‘my struggle, my strife’ because of her struggle with her sister). Leah, not wanting to be overtaken, gives Jacob her servant Zilpah, who has two more boys (Gad, meaning ‘Fortune’; and Asher, meaning ‘Happy’).

Then Leah’s older son, Reuben goes and finds some aphrodisiacs (mandrakes) and brings them to his mother. Of course, Rachel wants some. Not wanting to give them up for free, she barter a night with Jacob for them. That night, she sleeps with him, and as a result, bears him a son (Issachar, meaning ‘hire’ because she bought Jacob’s presence that night). Then she has another and names him Zebulun, meaning ‘honor’ (because she thought that now her husband would honor her). Finally, she has a daughter and names her Dinah, which means ‘judgment’. Score: Leah 6 (or 8 through Zilpah) – Rachel 0 (or 2 through Bilhah).

Then God remembered Rachel (just like God remembered Noah). She finally has a son of her own who becomes Jacob’s favorite son, the son of his old age. And she names him Joseph, which means “to add or increase” because she wasn’t satisfied with just one, she wanted one more. Later, in chapter 35, Rachel will give birth to Benjamin who she will name Ben-oni, which means “Son of my sorrow”, but Jacob will call him Benjamin, which means “Son of my right hand” or “Son of the south”.

Meanwhile, it is time for Jacob to get a little payback on Laban for his trickery. And chapter 30 ends with the story of how Jacob convinces Laban to give him great wealth through some magical mating ritual where animals that look at striped branches produce striped and spotted babies.



Who's missing in the image above? Jacob's only daughter, Dinah, born by Leah.

THE TWELVE SONS OF ISRAEL

There were four women in Jacob's life: two wives and two female servants. They gave birth to Jacob's 12 sons in the following chronology:

Leah (First wife): Reuben (רְאוּבֵן), Simeon (שִׁמְעוֹן), Levi (לֵוִי), Judah (יְהוּדָה)

Bilhah (Rachel's servant): Dan (דָּן) and Naphtali (נַפְתָּלִי)

Zilpah (Leah's servant): Gad (גָּד) and Asher (אָשֶׁר)

Leah (First wife): Issachar (יִשָּׂשכָר) and Zebulun (זְבוּלֹן)

Rachel (Second wife): Joseph (יוֹסֵף) and Benjamin (בְּנִימִן)