

Friction in Jacob's Family

Genesis 29:31-35; Genesis 30:1-24

Genesis 19:31-35 - *"When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. ³² So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "The LORD has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore, my husband will love me."³³ Then she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon. ³⁴ She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi. ³⁵ And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Now I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing."*

Genesis 30:1-24 - *"Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!"² And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"³ So she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear a child on my knees, that I also may have children by her."⁴ Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, and Jacob went in to her. ⁵ And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. ⁶ Then Rachel said, "God has judged my case; and He has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan. ⁷ And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸ Then Rachel said, "With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali.*

⁹ When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife. ¹⁰ And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹ Then Leah said, "A troop comes!" So she called his name Gad. ¹² And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. ¹³ Then Leah said, "I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed." So she called his name Asher.

¹⁴ Now Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest 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?" And Rachel said, "Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son's mandrakes."

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.

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 have given my maid to my husband." So she called his name Issachar. ¹⁹ Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. 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. 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 And she conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach." ²⁴ So she called his name Joseph, and said, "The LORD shall add to me another son."

Background Notes for Genesis 29:31-35

After Jacob left home and arrived in Haran, his life was divided into three periods: seven years, seven years, and six years - a total of twenty years. The first seven years he worked for Laban as a single man. During the second set of seven years, Jacob was married to both Leah and Rachel, Laban's daughters, and started raising his family of twelve sons and several daughters. The children were born to Jacob's two wives, Leah and Rachel, and to his two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah.

The last section of Genesis 29 is in the second seven-year period, and it is the record of the births of Jacob's first four sons, all born to Leah.

Doctrinal Points

1. God's eternal plans include compassion for individuals.

"When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren" (v31). Now isn't that interesting? God was carrying out His eternal plans to build the nation of Israel, and yet these eternal plans include God's compassion for Leah, because she was unloved.

On a number of occasions in our study of Jacob's life we've seen that God's eternal plans are not thwarted by human mistakes and human sin. God can overrule and work out his eternal plans. But notice that His eternal plans include compassion for individuals, because He is a God of compassion. Thus His eternal plans are bound to reflect that compassion.

Maybe you feel unloved, or oppressed, or despised, or stepped on. Maybe you think that God doesn't care - that His eternal plans are too complicated or too big - and you've been left out of the loop. That's not true! Learn the doctrine that's taught right here. God's eternal plans include compassion for individuals - and that includes you!

2. God's eternal plans include discipline for individuals.

In these chapters, God's eternal plans were being worked out for the formation of the twelve tribes of Israel. These plans included **compassion** for individuals, but these plans also included **discipline** for individuals.

Discipline is God's megaphone. There's a lot of discipline going on in this chapter. Leah was disciplined for her part in Laban's plan to trick Jacob at the time of their marriage. Rachel was disciplined for not respecting Leah's cultural rights to be married first. Most likely, by the way, Leah was God's choice of a wife for Jacob. If only Jacob had stuck to the divine ideal of monogamy! Both Judah, from whom came the Messianic line, and Levi, from whom came the priestly line, were sons of Jacob's union with Leah.

And God disciplined Jacob as well. Jacob had sown deceit and caused friction in his family life in the past, and now Jacob was reaping what he had sown. Galatians 6:7 says, *"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap."*

God's eternal plans include discipline for individuals. God overrules human frailty and human failings to work out His eternal plans, and He does it in such a way that on the one hand there is compassion for individuals, and on the other hand there is discipline for individuals. That was true then, and it is true now. How does God do it? It is beyond our finite human comprehension, but it is true. God's eternal plans include discipline for individuals.

Practical Applications

1. You can be sure that no one gets all the gifts and talents.

Genesis 29:17 says that Rachel was more beautiful than Leah. At the end of the chapter we read that Rachel was barren, and Leah was fruitful. God was in control of this situation, and no one person will get all the gifts and talents. Does it ever look to you like some people get all the gifts, and others get the short end of the stick? Look a little more closely, and you will find that there is the "Law of Compensation" that God has built into His moral universe. God has designed it this way, to prevent us from being lifted up with pride. When she was barren, Rachel couldn't be proud because of her beauty. So remember - look a little deeper when you feel jealous of some brother or sister in the Lord who seems to have received all the gifts and talents. You can be sure that no one gets all the gifts and talents.

2. Don't assume that God approves of what our culture approves!

After the birth of her fifth son Leah said: *"God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband"* (v18). Can you believe it? Leah actually believed that this fifth son was a reward or wages from the Lord for giving her maid Zilpah to Jacob! How wrong could she be? She was brainwashed by the culture of that day, which approved of polygamy and condoned the giving of maids as concubines for the purpose of bearing children. But God **never** approved of these cultural practices. Let's not make the same mistake that Leah made! Don't assume that God approves of practices that our culture approves.

Our culture does not, at this time, approve of polygamy, but it does condone divorce, and the Christian community is increasingly taking a light view of divorce. But God's standard, stated in Malachi 2:16, remains the same. *"For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence," says the LORD of hosts. "Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."*

In addition, American Christians are increasingly being swept up in our culture's obsession with money, materialism and consumerism.

We must wake up! Don't assume that God approves of what our culture approves!