

GENESIS 30:1-13 (TWO MORE WIVES AND FOUR MORE SONS)

Introduction: Leah, the older and less-loved wife of Jacob had four sons in a row and Rachel had none. When we want and we don't get, we can often act in a way which is contrary to what the Bible would have for us.

Envy and jealousy are torches which set our lives on fire and which quench any joy we might otherwise have. They are often the source of even greater troubles which lead us down all kinds of wrong avenues.

James 4 says, "Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures."

Coveting and envy aren't exactly the same thing, but they spring from the same place where discontent lies. When we envy what other people have, it becomes coveting. Although it's the tenth commandment, and so it may seem less important than some of the bigger ones, like murder, coveting actually breaks the greatest commandment.

When we covet, we fail to love God with all of our heart and we fail to trust that what He has given us is proper. When we do this, we place something above Him as our God. Coveting, as James notes, also leads to other sins, such as murder.

Today, we'll see how envy affects the lives of Jacob's wives in some of these ways. But we will also see, as we've seen so many times in the past, how God is able to take our wrongs and bring good out of them. Through a war of envy between sisters, comes another four of the twelve sons of Israel.

Text Verse: If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:25, 26

Living in the Spirit is synonymous with having been saved by the blood of Christ. When you put your faith in Him, you are sealed with the Spirit; you live in the Spirit. But this doesn't mean you walk in the Spirit. Paul tells us to also walk in the Spirit.

When we do, we will keep our eyes on the right things, have our lives directed toward proper goals, and we will have the Lord placed as the highest prize. Walking in the Spirit isn't just a thing we do on Sunday morning, but it's an attitude of our hearts and lives that can be found at any moment and in any situation.

Walking in the Spirit is being attuned to the things of God and trusting in Him each step of the way. Let's determine to do this. One way is to learn and apply His word to our lives and so...

May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. The Green Eyed Monster

"How all the other passions fleet to air,
as doubtful thoughts and rash embraced despair
and shuddering fear and green-eyed jealousy!"

The Merchant of Venice, Shakespeare

¹ 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!"

Rachel, Jacob's beloved, has seen her older sister bear four children. It's been at least five and probably more years since they were married and yet she's still not had a child. In the culture of the Bible, bearing children was the highest honor of a woman and having none is a point of shame.

This sentiment is found in both testaments and numerous times. It's not something inserted by reading it into the text, but rather it's open and plainly evident.

Bearing and raising children may not be seen as a great and noble role today, but the Bible teaches us otherwise. After these many years without bearing, it says that she envied her sister.

This didn't suddenly crop up after the fourth child, but it had festered, probably since the first. Hence, her statement to Jacob "Give me children, or else I die!" She is a lady at her wits end and has fallen to the point of blaming her husband for somehow withholding children from her.

But even she would know the problem lies with her and not with him. Leah has been having one child after another, so there's nothing wrong with Jacob. And he certainly spent time with her or she would have said what she said differently. In the end, God has withheld her from bearing.

The envy she has is a poison within her which will lead in various directions, but God will use it to establish His people who come from Jacob. As we see time and time again, God brings good out of our evil.

The Bible has a lot to say about envy and jealousy and it's something that we need to watch in our lives constantly. Proverbs 14:30 says -

A sound heart *is* life to the body,
But envy *is* rottenness to the bones. Proverbs 14:30

In the Song of Solomon words are written that might almost seem to point back to the life of Rachel who will eventually die while giving birth -

For love *is as* strong as death,
Jealousy *as* cruel as the grave;
Its flames *are* flames of fire,
A most vehement flame. Song of Solomon 8:6

Three other barren women in the Bible are directly tied to Rachel. The first is Sarah who was related to her through the family of Terah, her great-great grandfather. Sarah didn't bear a child after probably 70 or so years of marriage. By the time she did, she was a woman of 90 years.

The second is Rebekah who was her aunt. When she couldn't bear children, Isaac prayed to the Lord for her and she conceived. Although it took 19 years, the waiting ended.

Another barren woman who contrasts Rachel is Hannah, the mother of Samuel the prophet. Her story is given in 1 Samuel. Rachel is barren and envies; Hannah is barren and quietly weeps. Rachel says that she must have children or she'll die, and in fact she ends up dying when she has children.

Hannah on the other hand prays to the Lord for a child, receives him, and then has three more boys and two daughters. Rachel is aggressive in her speech and conduct toward Jacob, but Hannah remains devout and submissive to her husband and to the Lord.

And interestingly Hannah is from the tribe of Rachel's grandson Ephraim who was born to her son Joseph. It is as if the lesson was learned in Rachel, and Hannah wanted to be remembered differently.

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?"

As should be apparent to anyone who has been married awhile, we fall in and out of emotional love all the time. As our mood changes, we can get pretty upset at the very object of our affection. Jacob loved Rachel, but her accusations really upset him and so he cried out *hatakhath elohim anokhi* - "Do I stand in God's place?"

Speaking on this verse, the Targum of Jerusalem says that this is one of the four keys that God delivers not to an angel or a seraph -the key of barrenness. The others are the clouds, the heart, and the grave. These four things belong to sovereign hand of God alone.

Children are the gift of God, and His only, and therefore God, not man is to be reached out to for them. But unlike Sarah, Rebekah, and Hannah, Rachel blames Jacob and he in turn elevates the matter to where it belongs, which is in the providence of God.

Having said that, there is no birth which is a surprise to Him and He has, in His wisdom allowed them all - including those for which we try to find reason to abort. But the lesson of the Bible is that both barrenness and conception occur by His hand.

Therefore, we need to address the barrenness to God in petition and the conception to God in thanks, not murder. The Bible never makes a distinction between the validity of the life of a child in the womb and one which is already born. Maybe somebody can tell that to our president and those congressmen on the left.

There are other means of both having children and raising children, even in biblical times. Rachel turns to one of those means now and the Bible makes no comment on the matter in the negative. In other words, what we are now going to see is considered acceptable and normal, just as it was in Abraham's time...

³So 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."

Just as Sarah did for Abraham with Hagar, Rachel now suggests the same to Jacob. This takes us all the way back to a sermon I did long ago. I mentioned that despite most commentaries stating Abraham lacked faith and was wrong for sleeping with Hagar, this is a wrong conclusion.

There was nothing wrong with it then and the verses of Jacob and his concubines verify this. If it were wrong, Jacob would have known this from the lessons of the past and not followed suit, but this is an acceptable and normal custom of the times. There is nothing in this which violates nature or the tenor of Scripture.

Rachel offers her maid, who is her property, to Jacob. Her name is Bilhah and it means either foolish or timid. Rachel says is that "she will bear *a child* on my knees." There are two thoughts in this one concept.

The first is that Bilhah would literally sit in Rachel's lap as the child was being born, thus symbolizing that the baby belonged to Rachel. Secondly,

that because the child then belonged to her it would be dandled on her knees as her own. This sentiment is seen concerning Israel in Isaiah 66 -

Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river,
And the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream.
Then you shall feed;
On *her* sides shall you be carried,
And be dandled on *her* knees. Isaiah 66:12

When Rachel says, "that I may have children by her" she uses the word *v'ibaneh* which means that she would be "built up by her." It comes from the word *banah* which means "to build" and from which comes the word *ben*, or son. In other words, just as a house is built with wood or stones a family is built through children.

These words, *banah* and *ben* are spelled with the letters Beth and Nun. Beth means a house and nun reflects an "heir" or the continuance of a generation. This might seem like an unimportant lesson in Hebrew, but the mind of the people is reflected in the words they use.

Ultimately, these are the details that God has included in His word for us to understand what has happened and why. Although the New Testament is written in Greek, the same Hebrew mind is transferred over through the apostles so we can more readily understand Jesus' work when looked at from this perspective.

The New Testament building of God's house is seen more clearly when we understand that we are living stones, as Peter calls us, being built into a spiritual house. It's not good to separate the Old and New Testaments in such a way that we no longer understand this pictorial mindset.

We are sons (*ben*) of God being built into His house (*beth*). And we are heirs (*nun*) of God's promises along with Jesus. This is reflected in Rachel's words to Jacob so that by it we get a much better picture of what Jesus is doing and how it relates to us.

He is building a house, a spiritual house, out of sons not only from the Jewish people, but the Gentile people as well, all pictured by Jacob with four wives.

⁴Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, and Jacob went in to her.

The sons of concubines were normally not given an inheritance with the sons of the wives. However, when a son is born under the name of the wife, then it will be a son of that wife.

Ishmael was an exception because God told Abraham to excuse him from the house, but all of Jacob's sons will participate in his inheritance. The house of Israel includes all 12 sons.

Later in Jacob's life, Bilhah is going to bring some trouble to the family. Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, is going to go in and sleep with her. It doesn't say what, if anything, Jacob did to her, but because of what he did, Reuben will lose his birthright.

⁵And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.

As sure as children are the gift of God, Bilhah has a son. Rachel's words to Jacob were misplaced and unwarranted. Jacob is capable of having children and both Leah and Bilhah testify to that. Rachel's barrenness is from the Lord, not from Jacob.

⁶Then 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.

The name Dan means Judge. Later we'll see a book in the Bible called Daniel - God is my Judge. Rachel names the child based on an appeal to God and indicating that God ruled in her favor. And so she uses His name in the exclamation - *danani elohim* - God has judged my case.

But unlike Leah who invoked the name of the Lord, Rachel uses the general term of God - elohim. The Lord, Jehovah, directs the plan of salvation and

monitors the covenant and so it seems curious that He isn't mentioned now by Rachel.

But it seems understood that it will be through Leah that the Messiah will come, not through Rachel. At least the Bible record gives us this hint.

⁷ And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.

This is the sixth son of Jacob and the second born for Rachel by Bilhah. One half of the sons of Israel are found in the house now.

⁸ Then Rachel said, "With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali.

This name is a bit more difficult to determine than some of the others. Naphtali mean either "my wrestling" or "my twisting." If it is wrestling, then it is referring to the struggle she feels she's in with Leah - a struggle for being the preeminent wife of Jacob.

If so, her exclamation at his birth is, "With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed." They were in a battle and she is now on top.

But the name Naphtali comes from the word *patal* which means to "twist." And so one translator says, "By the twistings of God, I am entwisted with my sister."

The difference in the translation is important because in the first, it is her struggle against her sister and she has prevailed. But in the second it is God's designs that have allowed her to participate in building the family which previously was only by her sister.

If it is the first translation, she is showing an arrogance in condemning her sister even after God has been gracious to her through children. If it is the second, then she is showing gratitude to God for allowing her to be included in His plans as He builds up Jacob's home.

As you can see, differences in translation really do matter.

II. Another Wife, More Children

⁹ When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife.

It matters less what Rachel did, seeing as how she was barren, but what Leah does shows her own streak of jealousy. Leah stopped bearing for a time and Bilhah has had two children for Rachel. And so Leah decides that she can do the same.

I'm sure Jacob didn't mind any of this a bit, or he would have told Leah "No." Instead, he becomes the man with four wives. This one is Leah's maidservant who was given to her on the night of her wedding, Zilpah.

The name Zilpah comes from the Hebrew word *zalaph* which isn't found in the Bible, but it means to trickle or to sprinkle. She now takes the stage for a time...

¹⁰ And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son.

Like I said, Jacob is probably not at all unhappy about the arrangement. If he were, he would have told Leah to be content with her four sons. But he took Zilpah with no record of complaint. He has a fourth wife and now another son is born.

We should note that there could have been daughters born during this period. Only one daughter of Jacob is noted in the Bible directly, but on several occasions in Genesis it speaks of his daughters in the plural.

They aren't mentioned because the family line travels through the father, not the mother. Today in Israel it's exactly the opposite. A person's Jewishness is determined through the mother, not the father interestingly enough.

¹¹ Then Leah said, "A troop comes!" So she called his name Gad.

The name Gad is another interesting study and is difficult to pin down the exact meaning or what she was thinking. It could be, as some speculate, that Leah stopped bearing because Jacob stopped going in to her. If this is the case, then her giving Zilpah to Jacob was to her as much of a necessity as what Rachel did earlier.

She may have been desperate to find the love that had eluded her. Gad could mean either troop, meaning a large group, or fortune. If it's a troop, then she is excited about the large family which has come from her - a whole troop. Or if fortune, her exclamation would be that she has had good luck in her struggle.

It seems that either way the name Gad is a reflection of her sad state and unlike her other children, she never invokes the name of the Lord. He is completely left out of this struggle in either thanks or praise.

¹² And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.

This is Zilpah's second and last son, just like Bilhah. Between the two of them are four sons of Israel and any unnamed daughters.

¹³ Then Leah said, "I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed." So she called his name Asher.

There is no dispute on the meaning of Asher - it means happy. It comes from a verb which means "to go straight." For most of us, we tend to like the straight and quick path to where we are going, whether literally or in a project.

Leah is happy at the birth of this son and gives the reason by saying, "the daughters will call me blessed." Again, she doesn't mention her husband, nor does she include the Lord. This is a lady who has turned to the wrong place for notoriety.

Unlike her, Mary was given the news of a Son and her words were directed

to the Lord and to the future hope of blessing. In Luke 1, her words which contrast Leah's are given -

⁴⁶ "My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior.

⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant;
For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed.

III. A Lesson For Us

If we can simply be content with the life we've been given it will save us from all kinds of other troubles. I'm not saying that we shouldn't look for more of something or have desires for things. It's natural for humans to want to learn more, make things better, tinker with things, set and achieve new goals, etc.

The world has moved forward in great ways because people have not been content to sit and do the same things day after day, but instead have looked for new and inventive ways of doing stuff. Projects keep us busy and they keep us from being idle.

But these things usually happen in the life of a person who is already content with their life. A person who isn't content, will take shortcuts to get what they want. A person who is content will work for what they want. And even better than the content person is the content person who adds in prayer for the things he's lacking.

It's one thing to work for something you want and not get it and it's a different thing to work for something after you've prayed about it and still not get it. When God is in the equation, we tend to accept not getting it with an understanding that He is still in control.

Leah started out well, but when things turned for her, she began to get envious and took actions which didn't include God. After Asher was born, she said, "I'm happy" but it doesn't mean she was. There is no note of gratitude or thanks to the Lord.

Rachel on the other hand let herself get more and more envious of Leah until she made an unjust claim towards Jacob. There is no record that she ever prayed about anything, and there's no hint of including God in thanks or appreciation when her plan to have children through her maid worked out.

The fact that it's not mentioned is a good indication that she didn't. The Bible tends to record those things when they do happen. Eventually she will get what she wanted and have children of her own, but it will cost her life, dying while giving birth.

King Hezekiah was told by Isaiah that he would die from an affliction he had. When he heard this, he cried out to the Lord to live and the Lord gave him another 15 years of life. But during that time, he had a son who would be the downfall of Israel - a guy named Manasseh, a very wicked king.

Also during this 15-year period, he made a mistake by showing the Babylonians the wealth of His house and of the land, something which the Lord disapproved of and which resulted in Babylon coming back for it in war. If he had died as the Lord originally said, neither of these would have happened.

The thing we need to do is to accept what the Lord has for us as His will, whether we like it or not. But the good thing for us is that even when we don't do this, it may cost us, but in the end He will work it out for good.

We may suffer because of it, others may suffer because of it, but He has already figured it all into His overall plan. In the end, we're going to look back on our lives and see how masterfully He has woven them together.

He's going to take everything we've done - good and bad, and the things we will do in the future - right and wrong, and they will be so beautifully woven together that we will only see the marvel of the finished tapestry. There will be no sadness or tears. Just everlasting joy.

Life is a learning experience, but it's also something that we need to handle. There are choices to make, there are paths that we need to decide on. God

has included these stories for many reasons. One story can have many applications. But certainly each story gives us insights into right and wrong.

We can take them and use them to make our own choices based on what we've learned. This is the beauty and marvel of knowing your Bible. It is a doorway into understanding yourself and what you can do better because it was written by the One who fashioned you in the first place.

If He knows you, then He knows what is best for you. And because He loves You, He will also reveal it to you if you will just take the time to check. As I say again and again, if you want to know God, you must know Jesus; and if you want to know Jesus, you need to know your Bible.

This book, this beautiful book with these fascinating and often intriguing stories is given so that you can know what's right and then you can act on that knowledge. Keep reading your Bible and keep speaking to the Lord in prayer. Keep envy far from your eyes and be content in the life the Lord has given you.

You are here for a reason and you have a purpose. Walk in the Spirit, hold hands with the Lord, and keep your Bible close at all times.

Next Week: Genesis 30:14-24 (God Has Taken Away My Reproach)

Closing Verse: And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; 3 for you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? 1 Corinthians 3:1-3

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.

Two More Wives and Four More Children

Rachel saw that she bore no children though she did try
Rachel envied her sister and to Jacob she said
Words of distress, "Give me children or else I die!"
Would you rather have me living or find me dead?
And Jacob's anger was aroused and he did fume
And he said, "Am I in the place of God
Who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb
Be careful, your words on dangerous paths do tread

So she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her
And she will bear a child on my knees
That I may also have children by her for sure
Do this for me Jacob, won't you please?
Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife
And we learn that Jacob went in to her
And Bilhah conceived and brought forth new life
A son, and Rachel thought it was a good thing for sure

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 in that place
And she knew then that Leah's battle wasn't won
And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again
And we see that she bore Jacob a second son
Then Rachel said "With great wrestlings then
I have wrestled with my sister and indeed I have won

So she called his name Naphtali
His name means, My Wrestling, you see
When Leah saw that her bearing seemed done
She took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife
And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son
And in her was a newly gained vigor for life

And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son
Then Leah said, "I am happy, the daughters will call me blessed
So she called his name Asher, naming this one
Because of the straightforward accomplishment of her quest
Such is the continuing story of Jacob's life
And the sons born to him from the wives that he had
He went to Paddan Aram to gain a wife
And ended with four... Hey! That's not too bad

The sons of Jacob became the tribes of Israel
And in this group of people there is an amazing story
Their struggles with God the Bible does tell
And through them came our King of glory
These people brought in the Messiah for all
And to them He will return some day
Remember to pray for them that on Him they will call
These are His people as the Bible does say

But we too are His people because of His shed blood
And we are grafted into the holy olive tree
We share in the sap and the glorious flood
Of the Holy Spirit - given to us so abundantly
Thank you God, for You love all the people
Jew and Gentile alike, we are the children of God
Help us to shout out the word from every church steeple
Yes, may we do so wherever our feet do trod

Great and glorious God above
Thank You for Your wonderful love
Thank You for our Savior Jesus
Through whom You have given eternal life to us

Hallelujah and Amen...