

Leah

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Introduction: why preach on Leah?

I have felt the importance of preaching on Leah for a long time, but was concerned about how to approach it. After all, Leah treacherously defrauded both Jacob and Rachael. She took her sister's place on the night of her wedding, pretending to be Rachael. That was an act of deception that was appalling and audacious in its sinful boldness. And this series is a series about women of faith. So why in the world would I preach on Leah?

Well, I am doing so for five reasons. First, the Lord has been prodding me to do so.

Second, God honors the faith of Leah. He does. And He says precious little about Rachael's faith. Though Leah didn't *start* from a position of faith, Leah definitely grows in faith as she gets older.

Third, Leah's story addresses many of the issues that people face today in our messed up world. And I am thankful that God includes the messed up stories of men and women because it gives people far more confidence and hope than if her life were a fair-tale perfect story. Leah's life *is* a powerful story, but it is a story of redemption where God brings untold blessing out of a wretched beginning. It was from Leah, not Rachael that God brought many great people such as Moses, David, and Jesus, the Messiah. It was Leah, not Rachael, who gave the best testimony of trust in God. And though God provided for both, God has a special heart for Leah. So yes, despite our prejudices against her, she *was* a woman of faith.

Fourth, Leah stands as a symbol of the disappointments that all of us have when we expect the things of this world (however good they may be) to satisfy our hearts. Only God can do that. And for many of us it takes years to figure that out. But life has a way of disappointing us on that score and of driving us to the Lord. Verse 25 says, "So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah." What understatement! I love the brief comment on that phrase by Derek Kidner. He says, "The words, behold, it was Leah, are the very embodiment of anticlimax, and this moment a miniature of man's disillusion, experienced from Eden onwards."¹ In other words, this fallen world constantly disappoints us by promising a fulfillment that only God can provide. We have great expectations from a job. It looks like the perfect job. But not too many weeks into it, behold it is Leah. It's not what we thought it was. And you complain and fight and hope that this job will change and bring you satisfaction. Jacob, Rachel, and Leah all faced these anticlimax experiences of disillusionment, and all of them finally had to find their satisfaction in God. That is an incredible lesson of life. It happened to Jacob after he wrestled with God. It happened to Rachel after she destroyed her physical idols. It happened to Leah much earlier.

¹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 1*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 171.

The fifth reason I am preaching on this passage is because it powerfully illustrates how idolatry has the potential of impacting *any* Christian - and it can do so quite easily. Jacob made an idol of Rachel. Rachel made an idol of children. Leah made an idol of Jacob. Where Rachel had literal idols, all of them had idols of the heart. And chapter 35 was the time when everyone finally recognized that they needed to make a definitive break with the idols that had crept into that home. We tend to shake our heads at this idolatry and fail to see the idolatry that has become deeply entrenched into our own lives. So I pray that for these five reasons, this sermon will be used by God for our own sanctification.

Leah's disadvantages (Gen. 29:15-20)

But let me start by giving a bit of background. I want to look first of all at the huge disadvantages that Leah faced. I want you to sympathize with her. These are not excuses for her sin. No one can excuse the sinful behavior of any of them. But I bring up her disadvantages to help you understand *why* Leah fell into the sin that she did in chapter 29. I believe she was a desperate woman.

A messed up dad - Laban

First off, her dad was a messed up dude. All the way back in chapter 24, Laban showed his manipulative ways with Jacob's mother, Rebekah. Rather than letting his dad, Bethuel, speak, Laban takes charge. He tries to manipulate the servant into having him stay longer (no doubt hoping to get more money out of him), but God providentially makes it possible for Rebekah to leave right away - *if* she agrees to it. Laban was probably surprised, but she immediately agrees without any hesitation. And the fact that Rebekah does not want to stay with her family ten more days when Laban offers that ten day delay shows us a lot about her desire to distance herself from her brother.

The key verses that reveal Laban's idolatrous love for money back in Genesis 24 are verses 29-31. Those three verses say,

Gen. 24:29 Now Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban, and Laban ran out to the man by the well. 30 So it came to pass [and here comes the key clause], *when he saw the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's wrists*, and when he heard the words of his sister Rebekah, saying, "Thus the man spoke to me," that he went to the man. And there he stood by the camels at the well. 31 And he said, "Come in, O blessed of the LORD! Why do you stand outside? For I have prepared the house, and a place for the camels."

He saw the gold nose ring and the gold bracelets, and he came running. Wealth was his main idol. And accumulation of wealth is what drove his relationship with Jacob, his relationship with his children, and his constant going back on his word concerning wages. Of course, God was using that to sanctify Jacob. God dealt with Jacob's cheating by introducing him to an even more masterful cheat - his uncle Laban. Laban constantly cheated Jacob, changed his agreements, manipulated, and tried to get more from Jacob. When Jacob finally ran away with his family and his stuff, Laban chased him down for seven days (that's a serious trip), and when he caught up with him, even though God had warned Laban in a dream not to dare touch Jacob or take anything, Laban still claims that if he

wanted to, he could take back his daughters as if they still belonged to him and as if he still had the right to control them. And he said that he could take his grandchildren back and that everything else belonged to him. His speech in chapter 31 is a good summary of what a piece of work Laban was. Let me read that. Genesis 31, beginning at verse 43.

Gen. 31:43 And Laban answered and said to Jacob, "These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and this flock is my flock; all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne? 44 Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me."

Even that covenant was a fake show. Laban never kept any of his covenants. If there was ever a male who had a Jezebel spirit, it would be Laban. He was manipulative, controlling, greedy, and willing to destroy anything that he couldn't control. I doubt any of the people who lived around him would have been foolish enough to marry into his family. They knew him too well. When you marry Laban's daughters, you are marrying Laban for all practical purposes. He sought to control you the rest of your life. And I feel sorry for people who marry into families like that.

So, what's a daughter like Leah to do? It's clear from the words of both Leah and Rachael in chapter 31 that they would love to leave Laban far behind. That's one thing they could both agree on. So right from the start, both Rachael and Leah had huge disadvantages. What man would touch either of them with a ten foot pole when they have a Laban in the background?

And there are women today with similar disadvantages. It has made some women run away. It has made others try to seduce worthy men, only to have it backfire on them horribly. Others have settled for less than God's ideal simply because the dad approved, and marrying anyone seemed better than staying at home. Marriage seemed like their only ticket to freedom. It's a tough spot to be in. John Calvin's session in Geneva faced men like Laban, and on behalf of those daughters their session threatened church discipline if the fathers continued their behavior that was depriving their daughters of their lawful marriage desires. But many Christian women nowadays don't have elders who are willing to confront their Labans. So you've got to keep Laban's control of his daughters in the background when examining Leah's story.

Laban's bad character likely chased away eligible bachelors

I've already alluded to the second disadvantage - that there were likely no eligible bachelors who were interested in Leah or Rachel. Why does Laban agree to settle on Jacob as a son-in-law in chapter 29? Jacob was already an old man. I won't settle the debate between Floyd Nolen Jones and most other chronologists on whether Jacob married the two sisters at the beginning of the first seven years of service or at the end of the first seven years (as Ussher, Faulstich, and others say). It sure seems like the text is against Jones. But if Jones is correct, then Jacob was 77 years old when he married the two sisters. If the other chronologists are correct (and I think they are) then Jacob was 83 years old at the time of the wedding. What's with that? You've got a beautiful eligible daughter and you are going to agree to let her get married when the man is 77 and you make them both wait till he is 83?! Maybe Laban was hoping Jacob would croak before the seven years were up and he could make money off of Rachel on another man. Who knows?

In any case, in verse 19, Laban says, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me.” For Laban, marriage was about wealth accumulation, and other wealthy men in the territory probably knew it. They knew they would have a hard time bargaining with Laban to their own advantage. But Jacob is new, and he is older and is obviously love-struck. Laban believes that he can take advantage of Jacob. They are both cheaters, but Laban is a better cheat. The point is that Leah (the older sister) and Rachel are getting on in years, and it doesn’t appear that any prospects are likely to come along - at least prospects who know Laban very well.

She was a plain Jane (Gen. 29:17)

A third disadvantage that Leah had was that she was a plain Jane at minimum, or somewhat ugly at worst. Everyone noticed Rachael. Who wouldn’t? Genesis 29:17 says that she “was beautiful of form and appearance.” In other words, everything about her was attractive. She caught your eye. In contrast, the only thing that people noticed about Leah was that she had strange eyes. There was something about her eyes that made you do a double take. The meaning of the Hebrew term for Leah’s eyes is uncertain. If it is somewhat positive, it means that she had delicate eyes. If it is negative, it means either that she was “dull eyed” (as one version has it), cross eyed, or had weak vision. Either way, she lacked the beauty of form and appearance that Rachael had. And in the story you can tell that it bothered her a lot. She was majorly insecure. And it is so important that we help each other through our insecurities and that we help each other to find our security in the Lord.

Personally, I think it sad that some men emphasize outer beauty over inner beauty. Even as a child I would shake my head when my classmates would describe who they thought was a gorgeous eligible single. For me, the outer beauty was completely robbed by the ugliness of character that I saw. It overshadowed the outward beauty. But obviously Jacob was enraptured by Rachael’s beauty. It’s nice when you can get both (like I did), but it is far better to marry a person with inward beauty than to marry a person who is gorgeous outwardly but hard to get along with.

Jacob only seemed to have eyes for Rachael (Gen. 29:18)

The fourth disadvantage was that Jacob only seemed to have eyes for Rachael. It is obvious from later passages that Leah had always loved Jacob and had always wished that Jacob would love her. And this too has been a heartbreak for many a girl who has given her heart away prematurely. It is so important that we not allow our emotions to blind us - or for desperation to make us do foolish things. It’s so important that we not give our hearts away before it is clear that we are heading to marriage. But it appears that both Leah and Rachael had done so.

If Ussher is correct, there were seven years for Leah to hope and pray that Jacob would see her good work ethic, her loyalty, her perseverance, and her other good characteristics - she had a bunch of good characteristics. If Jones is correct, then Leah didn’t have much time at all. But it is clear that Jacob was blind to anything but Rachael’s beauty. She was a looker. Genesis 29:18-20.

Gen. 29:18 Now Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel your younger daughter." 19 And Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Stay with me." 20 So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her.

What's not to like about Jacob's love for Rachel? A lot.

This is your typical American falling in love story. It was a case of being madly in love at first sight. What's not to like about this kind of romance?

Well, I would say that there's a lot to not like - the biggest reason being that Jacob was blind to Rachel's idolatry. He was about to be unequally yoked with a woman who worshiped different gods and would continue to worship different gods for another 24 years. I think it is part of what made Jacob eventually bury Leah with his ancestors, but not Rachel or the two maids. That's a huge huge factoid that most books overlook. For Jacob, it was a faith issue toward the end of his life, and he had come to recognize that Leah shared his heart. And I will try to demonstrate that later.

Anyway, turn to Genesis 31:30-31. This confrontation occurs twenty years after Jacob first laid eyes on Rachel - twenty years! Beginning to read at verse 29. Laban has caught up with Jacob after a seven day chase, and he is now speaking.

29 It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, "Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad." 30 And now you have surely gone because you greatly long for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods?"

Gen. 31:31 Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force.' 32 With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours and take it with you." For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

Gen. 31:33 And Laban went into Jacob's tent, into Leah's tent, and into the two maids' tents, but he did not find them. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. 34 Now Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. And Laban searched all about the tent but did not find them. 35 And she said to her father, "Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is with me." And he searched but did not find the household idols.

Gen. 31:36 Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: "What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me? 37 Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found? Set it here before my brethren and your brethren, that they may judge between us both! 38 These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. 39 That which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. 40 There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes. 41 Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. 42 Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night."

It is clear that Jacob was clueless about the fact that Rachel had secretly been trusting foreign gods. Otherwise he wouldn't have told them to kill whoever has the gods. He

doesn't think there are any gods there. He is clueless. Leah did not trust those gods. We will see that her testimony is consistently to pray to Yehowah God and to trust in Yehowah God. But Rachel trusts these gods, and when they don't come through for her, in chapter 30:1, she puts her trust in Jacob. It says that Rachel envied her sister and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die." Verse 2 says,

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?"

It was a rebuke that called Rachel to put her trust in God. She doesn't do so immediately, but instead comes up with a *different* solution in verse 3.

Gen. 30:3 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.

Now, I will say that Rachel does come to faith. Rachel begins to call upon the Lord for the very first time (at least that is recorded) in chapter 30, verse 22, and God begins to answer her prayers at that point. But sadly, it is not until Genesis 35:2 that Jacob finds and buries the foreign gods that Rachel had brought with them. They had been in her tent and the tent of her maid for a long time. Let's read Genesis 35:1-4.

Gen. 35:1 Then God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there; and make an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you fled from the face of Esau your brother."

Gen. 35:2 And Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Put away the foreign gods that are among you, purify yourselves, and change your garments. 3 Then let us arise and go up to Bethel; and I will make an altar there to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and has been with me in the way which I have gone." 4 So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods which were in their hands, and the earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree which was by Shechem.

This changing of clothing, washing, and putting away of all these occult symbols was the typical dedication process. And the instantaneous result of putting away idols is given in the next verse. Verse 5 says, "the terror of God was upon the cities that were all around them, and they did not pursue the sons of Jacob." God encamps around about them and others can no longer control, manipulate, or intimidate. Instead, the terror of God comes upon them. This was the result of putting away the idols.

But here is the sad reality: Genesis 35:2 is 24 years after Jacob first met Rachel! That's an astonishingly long time for Rachel and her children and for her maid's children to be having those idols with them. Maybe they no longer worshiped those gods, but they still had them for some reason. By allowing those idols to stay in their midst, she was giving demons legal ground to mess around with the whole family. Even after she first started trusting Yehowah, the idols were not dismissed. And the impact of the demonic can be seen in the bad character of the children, the rape of Dinah, the guilt of murder, and the seeds of later conflicts and problems that arose between ten of Jacobs's sons and his two pets, Joseph and Benjamin. I attribute most of the problems of that messed up family to two issues: the complications of the sin of polygamy and the demonic influence allowed by those occult artifacts. Interestingly, verse 4 doesn't just have Jacob getting rid of the obvious carved idols, but also the earrings. Apparently those earrings were in some way associated with

the occult as well, even though they were not idols. They are clearly distinguished from the idols, but Jacob still got rid of them. He got rid of anything that might in any way be associated with the demonic. It was a clear break.

And in the same way, there are many artifacts in Christian homes today, such as occult comic books, occult novels, games, and curios that have given demons strongholds in houses in the two churches that I have pastored. Sometimes the demonic comes into their homes through occultic alternative medicine. In my 34 years of pastoral ministry I have had several occasions where the head of a Christian home has come to me in tears because their home has been so demonized. Both of the parents have prayed for protection numerous times, but the demons continued to be at work in them and in their children and the ugly fruits were becoming more and more pronounced. And they couldn't figure out why demons would be bothering them. They said that they had dedicated their lives, their house, and their kids to God. So why were they being subjected to demonic attack?

Well, I would go to their house to pray over it. But before doing so I would explain that anything that would give demons a legal basis for staying would have to be removed. I would give them a theology of spiritual warfare and of how demons take advantage of God's legal covenantal framework, and if those demons find legal ground, they don't have to leave. No angel can force them to leave. They can stand their ground. Sometimes the family would remember and dispose of comic books that were demonic, or games that gave demons ground. But I can remember at least half a dozen occasions where they didn't think there was anything. I would be praying room by room through the house and I would get a strong leading from the Lord that there was something in a given cupboard that demons were claiming. And as they would empty out the cupboard, sure enough, there were. One time it was an occult book. Another time it was an occult game that they thought was innocent enough. And we would throw those away, confess, apply the blood of Christ, and cleanse of house of demons. And they would be permanently freed of the demonic. This is an issue that I think some of you young people need to take more seriously. Don't give demons any reason to stay in your home because of the games you play, the occult t-shirts you wear, or the books you read or the occult curios you collect. But back to the main point, I believe Leah was a true believer and Rachel did not become a true believer for several years into the marriage. Because of beauty, Jacob became unequally yoked.

Leah's audacious deception & betrayal (Gen. 29:21-25)

But Leah had her own sin in Genesis 29 - defrauding Jacob. So we are backing up in the story. In chapter 29 it is clear that Leah went along with Laban's deception. She could have easily spilled the beans on the wedding night and told Jacob, "By the way, I am not Rachel. Dad forced me to come here. Don't be mad at me. I had nothing to do with this." But she chose not to. Though Laban might have threatened her, it is more likely from later Scriptures that Leah loved Jacob and hoped this plan would work out. Surely Jacob will love me after he has sex with me on the wedding night. But no. Leah later realizes that Jacob sometimes hated her for what she had done. But let's read of her audacious deception and betrayal of her sister and defrauding of both. Verses 21-25.

Gen. 29:21 Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in to her."
 22 And Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast. 23 Now it came to pass in the evening, that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. 24 And Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid. 25 So it came to pass in the morning, that behold, it was Leah. And he said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me?"

This is so painful to read - Jacob's dreams are dashed to the ground. Where was Rachel? Did Laban have her tied up in a back room? Why was she not screaming? Did he threaten her? We aren't told, but what a mess it was. And by the way, chapter 30 gives us a clue as to how Leah thought. She accuses Rachel of taking Jacob away from her. Let's read chapter 30:14-16.

Gen. 30:14 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."

Gen. 30:15 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."

Gen. 30:16 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.

But notice the bitter words of Leah in verse 15 - "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband?" Woah, woah, woah! Wasn't it Leah who took away Rachel's husband? But this is the way bitterness and sibling rivalry can skew our judgment. But it is also one of several hints we have that Leah had always had eyes for Jacob. Even though he was older, he must have been good looking.

But back to that first night, in my books, what Leah did in chapter 29 is one of the most serious forms of defrauding you could think of. But on the other hand, all defrauding should be treated as sin. We tend to take some defrauding way too lightly. For example, the kind of sexual foreplay that 1 Thessalonians 4:6 condemns as defrauding.

1 Thessalonians 4:6 tells every couple that is courting to avoid defrauding in the area of sexual passions. Defrauding means to take something that is not yet yours to take. Paul said that with respect to "this matter" of sexual passions, the suitor must not take what is not yet his to take. And commentators say that this involves even things that fall short of sexual union. Petting, sexual kissing, and anything else that deliberately arouses desires that can't lawfully be fulfilled is defrauding. It's much less defrauding than what Leah did, but it is not yet yours to take until marriage. So even her defrauding has applications for today.

The tension in the one week "honeymoon" (Gen. 29:26-29)

Anyway, Leah may think that she has won because she gets her husband and she gets a one week "honeymoon," if you can call it that. Verses 26-28.

Gen. 29:26 And Laban said, "It must not be done so in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. 27 Fulfill her week, and we will give you this one also for the service which you will serve with me still another seven years." 28 Then Jacob did so and fulfilled her week. So he gave him his daughter Rachel as wife also.

Leah knew the love and passion that Jacob was capable of because she experienced it on the wedding night when Jacob *thought* she was Rachael. Every word he spoke to her, every caress, every hug, every longing of his heart, every description of her beauty was for her sister, not for her. The whole evening must have been an incredibly miserable experience. And I would not have wanted to be Leah when Jacob blew up in the morning. Oh, wow!

Well, the text indicates that Jacob fulfilled his duty as a husband and slept with her every night during that week. But it was not like the first night. Not at all. Jacob can perform, but there is no heart in it at all. There are the actions of love, but not the heart of love. And this is what Leah will experience for years - duty, but not with any zeal.

And this too is what many husbands and wives have experienced when there is not genuine confession of sin, genuine asking of forgiveness, and genuine granting of forgiveness, forsaking of sin, and a genuine desire to please the Lord in our marriage relationships. But there is hope. I have seen God changing even that to the point where duty gives way to full-orbed love. I believe this happened over the course of Jacob's marriage with Leah. It is only hinted at, but I believe the Scripture indicates that after Rachel died, the two became closer and closer and Jacob realized what a gem he had in Leah.

The pain of being unloved (Gen. 29:30-34)

But before that could happen, God was going to have to do a deep work of grace in Leah's life. He was going to have to change some expectations. Let's trace this through. First, it is clear that Leah had the pain of not being loved. Year after year, Leah longed for the love, affection, and security that Rachael obviously had in Jacob. Yet she was not able to find it. Look at verses 30-34 of chapter 29.

Then Jacob also went in to Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah. And he served with Laban still another seven years. 31 When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.

This is God doing both. This was not accidental. There were reasons why Rachel's womb was closed and reasons why Leah's was opened.

If you look at the margin you will see that the word for "unloved" is literally, "hated." Jacob blamed her for the mess they were in - and polygamy is a mess from start to finish. There is constant competition, vying for love, frustration, arguments, and friction, and kids playing one parent against another. It was not God's design. But God was going to work through this mess to produce several lines of remarkable people. God's redemption can help you no matter how messed up your life has become - if you are willing to do things God's way from that time forward. It's not automatic. We will see with Leah, it will take faith *and* work. God not only has ideal solutions, but He also has solutions for messed up lives. But this longing for acceptance continues. Chapter 29, verse 32:

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."

Notice that Leah expressed trust in the true God - Yehowah. Anytime the word LORD is in all capital letters it is the name, Yehowah. And repeatedly Leah prays to Him. But this child did not produce the love and affection that she hoped for. She had longings of the heart that only God can fill, but she is still looking to man to fill them. Verse 33:

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.

Though Jacob is willing to engage in occasional sex with Leah, it's not satisfying when the heart is not in it. It's not. There are husbands who feel this way about their wife - someone who does her duty, but without much enthusiasm. And I have run across wives who wish their husbands could fully embrace their conjugal relations with all their hearts, but the wife complains that the husband is just doing his duty. Such situations are heartbreaking. But they *can* be remedied. I have seen marriages restored to joyful relationships better than at their beginning, but it does take work, changes to attitudes, faith in God's methods, and the actions of agape love.

But there really is something else that *must* take place first - and that's the next point.

Leah begins to find her security and love in the Lord (Gen. 29:35)

In verse 35 of chapter 29 we begin to see a transition. Instead of making it her goal for her husband to love her, she begins to find joy in Yehowah. Verse 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.

Some translations translate that, "This time I will praise the Lord." This time as opposed to the previous times. Those are new words. She had faith earlier, but this is a major step of growth for her - to be able to praise the Lord despite her miserable situation; to be able to find joy in the Lord despite the miserable circumstances. God is filling the empty hole in her heart and she relates to her children *through* God first and foremost. Leah is finally able to find security, worth, acceptance, and love in the Lord rather than in her husband. It's not that a husband's love, praise, acceptance, and value is a bad thing. The Song of Solomon says it's OK to find delight in precisely that. But as Paul David Tripp points out in his book, *Lead*, (which I highly recommend that you read - it has brought great conviction to my own heart), but anyway, as Tripp says in that book - God's good gifts become idols when they are out of balance in our hearts. He says, "Idolatry is when things take on greater weight in our hearts than God does... Every good thing that takes on more weight than God intended becomes a bad thing, something disruptive and dangerous."² We can turn our husbands or our wives into idols. We can turn sex into an idol. We can turn our children's success into an idol. Anything good can become an idol if it is more important to us than God. And keep

² Paul David Tripp, *Lead*, (Wheaton, Crossway, 2020), pp. 89, 90.

in mind that God is in the idol destroying business. It's miserable to keep holding on to idols. You won't win in this contest with God. He's got all the time in the world; you don't.

So that's the interesting thing to note: while Rachael had *literal* idols that she stole from her father, Leah had idols of the *heart* that God was systematically breaking. Leah will later revert to this same thinking because habits are hard to break, but you do see a progressive security that she finds in God as over against in creation.

The struggles of faith in Leah (Gen. 29:32,33,35; 30:17-18,20)

Even the names of her children show a struggle of faith in Leah.

1. Reuben (her firstborn) means, look, its a boy. It was addressed to her husband. She said, "God has granted me children; now Jacob will love me." Well, Jacob is an idol who lets her down.
2. Simeon (boy #2), means "God heard." She said, "God knows that I am hated, so he has given me this child in consolation." She looks to the child. Since the husband has let her down, she looks to the child for fulfillment. But Simeon is an idol who lets her down too. He and Reuben are trouble.
3. So with the third child she goes back to hoping that Jacob will connect with her. Levi means, connect. She said, "Now Jacob will connect with me." But Jacob was not that interested in connecting with Leah. Little by little God was weaning her from finding her life in Jacob.
4. So the fourth child, Judah, means praise Yehowah. She said, "This time I will praise Yehowah." And interestingly, it was when the focus of her faith completely switched that God gave her the son through whom the Messiah would arise. Jesus came through this son, Judah.

This is the spiritual lesson that Jesus tried to teach in Mark 10:29-31. He said that if you put yourself first, you will always have disappointments; you will always be last. But if you give your wife, your husband, your children, your house, and everything else that you have to the Lord, and you put God first, Jesus says that God will give back those same things 100-fold. In other words, you will learn to enjoy those things one hundred times more.

Now obviously this spiritual insight did not mean that Leah no longer struggled. The messes of polygamy continued to sow bad seeds. But Leah seems to grow less dependent upon the attitudes of others. She is able to love without being loved. She seems to find her security in the Lord. And I believe Jacob and Leah found great comfort in each other in older years. I find it interesting that Rachel isn't buried in the family tomb - Leah is. Leah was buried with Jacob and his parents and grandparents.

Other lessons

Let me end with two more lessons.

Make God your supreme love (Matt. 22:7) and in light of that supreme love, love others in a manner worthy of God (Matt. 22:39; 3 John 6; Matt. 25:40)

The first lesson is that God must be our supreme love. This was the lesson that Leah was learning. When God is our supreme love, we can love others through thick and through thin - just like Leah did. In Matthew 22:37-38, Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment." But he doesn't end there. If we truly love God supremely, then we will relate to others in the way God calls us to relate to them, so that the next verse says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." That's not a poor standard for loving others; it's a high standard. As 3 John 6 words it, its loving in a manner worthy of God. Or as Matthew 25:40 indicates, it is loving Christ by loving others. So there is nothing critical in this sermon of Leah wanting to have higher love for Jacob and for Jacob to have higher love for her. It just wasn't high enough. The more we passionately love God, the more His love will supernaturally transform our love for each other. I believe Leah experienced that.

Love/Serve God by loving your spouse (1 Cor. 7:3-5)

So when 1 Corinthians 7:3-5 says that our bodies are not our own, but they belong to our spouse, and that we should render them affection that is due them it does not at all contradict the fact that God must be our supreme love and our bodies ultimately belong to Him. We keep improving our love for our spouses and our service for them as we draw closer to the Lord, because the Lord wants us to do that - and we want to please the Lord.

Love/Serve God by pleasing your spouse (1 Cor. 7:33-34)

The same is true in verses 33-34 of the same chapter. It calls husbands to think about how they might please their wife and calls wives to think about how they might please their husbands. Why? Because God is the supreme Lord of our life and we love Him by serving others.

Don't let another woman/man intrude into your marriage - even in thought or in wishes

The last application that I would make is that once we are married, we should not wish for a different spouse or in any other way allow a different spouse to intrude into the marriage whether it is a fictional spouse or not. Some couples bring another woman or man into their marriage via pornography or romance novels. Others are constantly wishing that their spouse looked different physically, or had a different personality, or had different gifts, or were more relational. Don't focus on the different person. For the Lord's sake just

seek to be the best spouse to your *real* spouse that you can be and leave the changes of your spouse up to God. Imitate Leah in her later years.

Leah's perseverance and tenacious following of the Lord enabled her to become more relaxed about results and more focused upon loving. And she did win her husband. If the story of Jacob's life was told by a novelist he would probably have Jacob buried side by side with Rachel. And if he had wanted to, Jacob could have done that. But he refused to be buried in any other place than where he had buried Leah. And he had previously gone out of his way to bury Leah in the tomb of the Patriarchs that is pictured in your outlines.

In chapter 49, verses 29-33 Jacob tells his sons that he buried Leah in the tomb where all of his other ancestors had been buried and he wanted to be buried in that same tomb when he died. That would have required an extraordinary trip for all of Jacob's clan. But they honored his wish. And both his burial of Leah and his solemn charge regarding his own burial had eschatological significance. It was a statement of faith that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan. Like Postmillennialists, he didn't see it yet, but he believed it. Machpelah (where the burial site was made) was their family's toehold in Canaan. And if God has only given you a toehold of future promise, claim it.

But back to Leah, she was a wife who had proved her loyalty to him, had overcome every obstacle, and had faithfully ministered to him - and she did so because she served Yehowah. And the fact that Jacob mentions Leah last - right next to the mention of his own death shows a change of attitude toward this woman of faith. His God-given faith lined up with her own God-given faith, and she continues to be an inspiration to women in tough situations. May she inspire us to be God-focused, God-loving, God-praising, and God-satisfied, and to give our all to Jesus. Amen.