

Scripture Reading: Genesis 35:22b

“Now the sons of Jacob were twelve: 23 the sons of Leah were Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn, and Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun; 24 the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin; 25 the sons of Bilhah, Rachel’s maidservant, were Dan and Naphtali; 26 and the sons of Zilpah, Leah’s maidservant, were Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Padan Aram.”

I Corinthians 9: “24 Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

I Corinthians 10: “10 Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. 6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them.”

“Jacob’s Family : Our Family”

I read as our text this morning the later divine summary of the account of Jacob’s children to introduce the longer account that we will study this morning in Genesis chapters 29 & 30, and then turn our attention to the application from Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians.

As we move on into Chapter 30 we continue to have a challenging portion of Scripture but again we will see how God works through His people and also how they are examples for us: Both given that we might better serve Jesus today! Commentator Gordon Wenham put it well when he said: “This is a story of the triumph of God’s power over human sinfulness!”

➤ **Thus, how can this account NOT be full of great applications for our Christian walk today?**

Jacob left his appointed home in Canaan under a cloud of deception and betrayals and has now gone from the proverbial frying pan into the fire by marrying not one, but two women and sisters at that!

And yes, it will get worse as these sisters have their hand-maidens take part in their marital relationships as well! And while we will clearly see a lot of strife and jealousy, we also know from the divine summary we read, that the result is twelve sons for Jacob who later become the tribes or nations of Israel.

I want to say a word about those Twelve tribes and the similar group in the New Testament of twelve disciples or Apostles, because we know they are important, but the details are often a bit more muddled than they might first appear. When the family that Paul refers to in I Corinthians enters the promised land about four hundred years later, Levi has become a thirteenth tribe of priests and Joseph’s place has been taken by his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. By the time we get to the final list given in the Book of Revelation, Levi and Joseph are back again and Ephraim and Dan are gone.

With the twelve disciples you have a betrayer in their midst who later kills himself and is replaced by Matthias... Or is it Saul of Tarsus who takes that spot as the Apostle to the Gentiles.

We will not know for sure who is sitting on that twelfth throne until we get to heaven!

➤ **What we do know is that God works through fallen people to carry out His grand plan of Salvation.**

That is what we will clearly see this morning with the introduction of Jacob's children, whose descendants play a major role in that story for many years and who Paul says they are a part of our family.

- So let me take us through the text and then help us see how it all applies to us today!

Genesis 29:31 "When Jehovah saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb; but Rachel was barren."

Right from the beginning we see the strife that this polygamous relationship has caused and it does not escape God's notice.

- We of course should note right from the beginning that we see God as the one Who is truly in control.

"32 So Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, "Jehovah 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 Jehovah 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 Jehovah." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she stopped bearing."

As I have pointed out before, there are no characters in these accounts who are without sin, but here we see Leah finding favor with God and it will continue on for years. Not only will she bear half of Jacob's children, but her first four sons play a very significant part of the story to follow with Joseph and Egypt, which will take us to the end of Genesis. She did appear to leave her idols behind unlike her sister Rachael and in the end is buried with Jacob in the sepulcher purchased by Abraham where he and Sarah along with Isaac and Rebekah were buried. And of course her fourth Son Judah, whose name means praise or he will praise, is the Son of Promise to continue the line of Jesus! I think it is also significant that we see the covenant name of God, Jehovah or the Great I AM used here at the beginning, by both the author of Genesis and Leah herself.

We should note that this covenant name is not used again until the very end of this account. I think the major reason for this is that we move from God's perspective where He saw Leah's need and provided for her and all His people, to the human perspective and a series of very sinful actions.

Genesis 30: "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!"

Here we see with Rachael several problems that we might find quite convicting when we think back on how we may have handled various situations... First we have her seeing things from her perspective rather than the Lord's and of course this leads to what we often call a root of bitterness and in this case the sin of envy is the result. And finally as Mr. Wenham also rightly points out, rather than turn to God in prayer as she should have, she protests to her husband instead.

There may certainly be things in this life that we can rightly protest, but we must never do so without first seeking God's will and wisdom in prayer!

As would be expected Rachael's wrong actions bring about a wrong response from her husband:

"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?"

- Is it not interesting that the first major conflict with Jacob comes with the one who he was so in love with?
- As I pointed out in my teaching on marriage, passion and love are important, but must never be used as or expected to be the foundation of stone that a lasting loving relationship needs.

Thus the angry response to Rachael's hasty protest drives her to more sinful actions...

- **It should remind us how easily things can spin out of control when we take matters into our own hands?**

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.”

Now it could be easy to say, ‘well that worked out well!’ But we must remember that just because God can use our sinful actions to accomplish His purposes does not make them right. We will clearly see this with the actions of Joseph's brothers later in this book and of course the great example is Judas and his betrayal of Jesus.

I think what we see here is Rachael playing judge and jury, declaring that since a boy was born, God has judged her rightly and heard her protest which she seems to think of as prayer. Here we should carefully note that where Leah saw Jehovah, using God's great covenant name working in their lives, Rachael uses only the more generic name for God.

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.”

The strife in this family continues and we obviously see a very proud attitude here with Rachael who now gives the Lord no credit for the birth of this son.

- **And just as Jacob's angry response led Rachael into greater sin, her actions now cause a similar lapse of judgment by her sister...**

“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.”

- **Again we could be tempted to think ‘well that turned out nicely for Leah!**

However, please notice that God has disappeared from her thoughts... Here it is Leah who sees rather than Jehovah and after Leah takes the same sinful action that her sister did there is no mention of God in her response unlike she did with all four of her first sons.

And just when you think there could not be any more drama, it continues...

“14 Now Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah.”

Now commentators are pretty quiet when it comes to discussing these mandrakes, but they certainly appear to be linked with concerns about fertility, which fits the context of this chapter and their surrounding culture. It also relates to a BIG problem that runs through this account with regard to just how this whole child bearing stuff works...

- **Rachael first turned to her husband demanding a child and then both she and her sister brought in the handmaidens.**

Now a fertility plant will come into play...

- **But an honest reading of the text clearly demonstrates the Biblical truth that it is ultimately God who opens and closes the womb.**

In this family we see cries on all sides that there are not enough children and they work hard at trying to open the womb with human efforts.

Today in our world we more often see folks fearing too many children and working hard to close the womb. I would suggest that in both cases we see people who are protesting rather than praying, seeking to use their own wisdom rather than seeking the Lord's will.

So Rueben has found what is considered a vehicle for fertility and brought the fruit to his mother Leah and thus the drama continues...

“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?”

Obviously things are a bit tense between our sisters here and I am pretty sure it is just a small example of the strife that would have been present in this family. We have the strife & competition among the sisters and we can only imagine the tension caused by having the handmaidens bear children who are taken by their mistresses as their own!

- Rachael is still desperate to have a child of her own so she makes a deal to get some of the mandrakes.

“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.”

At last we near the end of the account of all this strife and we come to a major shift in our story...

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.””

Our attention is again turned to God's perspective and He blesses Rachael with a child...

- A child who plays a very significant role in the protection of God's people during their sojourn to Egypt.
- And as I pointed out earlier, it is here that we again see the use of God's covenant name, Jehovah or I AM that I AM!

As we shall see next week, it is also the point where Jacob again focuses on his call to the Land of Canaan and the beginning of his journey home.

So we see the promise to Abraham fulfilled as he becomes the father of many nations and we know the sons of Jacob will play a part in God's grand story of salvation...

- All the way to the end of the Bible when their names are written on the twelve gates of the New Jerusalem.

Now I made reference in my sermon title & read the text from I Corinthians so we could focus on the fact that we are to see this family as our family!

- We know from the teaching of the New Testament that we who are in Christ are all children of Abraham!

And yes, just as with our biological families that can include some crazy aunts and uncles, we have them here! We should never make excuses for them or make light of their sins...

- But we still do remember that they are family!

Now if you come from a troubled family, and most of us do in this life, then it should encourage us to know that God does triumph in the midst of our sinfulness!

Listen again to how the Apostle Paul relates us back to those who have gone before...

I Corinthians 10: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, [remember that the Apostle here is writing to a Gentile Church: We have been adopted into God’s family and these are now OUR ancestors!] “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ. 5 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. 6 Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. 7 And do not become idolaters as were some of them.”

We are to see ALL of the Old Testament Saints in this way:

- **They are our family and thus it is easy to see that God was often NOT well pleased with them.**

Now if you are part of a dysfunctional family today, it makes it easy to relate and sadly we see more and more of that as our culture breaks down. We should not accept these things as normal, but at the same time know that God is also not thwarted by our sin. [example of my own family]

Here we must always be careful to confess sin and also to rejoice in the work that we see God accomplishing just as Rachael did in the end of our account.

- **On the other hand, what if you have been raised in a faithful Christian home and have little first-hand knowledge of this kind of strife and sin?**

The Apostle Paul makes clear that we have these accounts from the lives of God’s people, not to embarrass them, but so that we can have examples of what must be avoided! And of course as difficult as these chapters have been, and yes we have a bit more to get through before Jacob is back in the promised land...

- **We will end the Book of Genesis with the life of Joseph who we will see stands out as a great example of a faithful man which we can follow!**

We are also pointed to many faithful Saints in the hall of Faith in Hebrews chapter eleven.

So again as Nate Wilson likes to say, since we are all a part of God’s story, it is good at times to ask whether we like the character we are playing in God’s grand story? We all have a role to play and we all make choices about how that character will act and we should remember that future generations of our family will look back at us as well...

- **Will they see an example to follow or an example to avoid?**

Will our lives be seen as that healthy tree planted by the waters or the dry chaff that blows in the wind?

Will our lives be homes built on the rock foundation which can weather all the storms of life or will they be ones that collapse in those storms because we used a foundation of sand.

- **These are simple and yet profound decisions that we must make and may God use all of His Word in our lives to help us make wise choices!**

Communion Meditation: I Corinthians 11

“23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” [or as my memorial] 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”