

Genesis Chapter 30 - Commentary By Mike Wells

Chapter 30 Overview:

Chapter 30 continues with the record of the children of Jacob. The subdivisions of the chapter are: (1) the other children born to Jacob including Joseph by Rachel in verses 1-24. And, (2) Jacob's new agreement with Laban to work for him for cattle in verses 25-43.

Genesis 30 : 1-6 - 1 And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die. 2 And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb? 3 And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. 4 And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her. 5 And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son. 6 And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan.

- Rachel by now had become envious of her sister.
- In what perhaps was a time of duress, she bitterly complained to her husband, "Give me children, or else I die."
- That made Jacob angry.
- In effect, he said, "It's not my fault."
- It evidently was a middle-eastern custom for a wife to give her maid to her husband if she could not conceive by him. (Recall the similar case with Sarah and Hagar.)
- The reference to Bilhah, her maid servant bearing upon her knees, probably was a custom of the maid sitting or laying upon her mistress' knees while in labor so that the child seemingly was born of her mistress.
- Therefore, Jacob "went in unto" Bilhah."
- She accordingly conceived and bore Jacob a son.
- It is of interest that it was Rachel who named the new baby boy **Dan**.
- She acknowledged that God had judged her.
- Implied is that she knew God had judged her jealousy of her sister in preventing her from conceiving.
- The name *Dan* means 'judge,' or more likely in this context, 'judged.'

Genesis 30 : 7-8 – 7 And Bilhah Rachel's maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son. 8 And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali.

- Bilhah conceived again by Jacob and again *Rachel* named the baby boy **Naphtali**.
- The name means 'to wrestle' or, perhaps, 'wrestling.'
- She noted that she had wrestled (figuratively) with her sister.
- Though polygamy was a tolerated social custom of that time, insight into the internal rivalry and strife between multiple wives is herein evident.

- Monogamy has always been God's perfect will.

Genesis 30 : 9-13 - 9 When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife. 10 And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a son. 11 And Leah said, A troop cometh: and she called his name Gad. 12 And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a second son. 13 And Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed: and she called his name Asher.

- Leah in noting what her sister had done with Bilhah and realizing her own present infertility thus gave her maid servant Zilpah to her husband.
- She in turn bore them a son whom Leah named *Gad* which has the idea of a 'troop.'
- Implied is that Leah now considered her children to be a 'troop.'
- She had four natural children, and had used Zilpah as a surrogate mother for the fifth.
- Zilpah bore again another son whom Leah named *Asher*.
- That name means 'happy' for "Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed."

Genesis 30 : 14-18 - And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes. 15 And she said unto her, Is it a small matter that thou hast taken my husband? and wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also? And Rachel said, Therefore he shall lie with thee to night for thy son's mandrakes. 16 And Jacob came out of the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, Thou must come in unto me; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes. And he lay with her that night. 17 And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son. 18 And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband: and she called his name Issachar.

- Meanwhile, Reuben found mandrakes during the wheat harvest.
- These evidently were a type of fruit or flower of the mandrake plant.
- It was considered to be an aphrodisiac bringing both sexual desire and fertility.
- He brought them to his mother knowing her recent infertility.
- Rachel upon finding out about the mandrakes, requested them.
- The evident bitterness and rivalry between Leah and Rachel was still alive and well as noted in verse 15.
- Leah therefore bargained with her sister.
- She offered to give the mandrakes to Rachel in return for having Jacob sleep with her that night.
- Rachel agreed.
- That evening Leah told Jacob he was to sleep with her that night and they were intimate.
- She evidently had asked God to given her more children.
- God there "hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son."
- She named him *Issachar* which has the sense of 'recompense,' 'wages,' or 'hire.'
- She had 'hired' the affection of her husband through the mandrakes she had negotiated to her sister.

Genesis 30 : 19-21 – 19 And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son. 20 And Leah said, God hath endued me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun. 21 And afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name Dinah.

- Leah again bore another son whom and named him *Zebulun*.
- His name has the sense of ‘dwelling.’
- She hoped there- by her husband would thus ‘dwell’ more with her.
- She there- after also bore Jacob a daughter whom she named *Dinah* which is a feminine derivative of ‘Dan’ and has the sense of ‘judgment.’
- She may have implied that God had judged in her favor by granting her seven children either directly or with the aid of her maid.

Genesis 30 : 22-24 - 22 And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb. 23 And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach: 24 And she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son.

- Finally, “God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.”
- The idea is that God now turned his attention to Rachel.
- Though she had had the favor of her husband, God had prevented her from bearing children.
- He now granted her that privilege.
- She bore a son and called his name *Joseph*.
- The name means ‘Jehovah has added.’
- She perhaps prophetically or at least hopefully noted, “The LORD shall add to me another son.”
- It is of note that both Leah and Rachel on several occasions used the name Jehovah in naming their children.
- Implied is that Jacob had instructed them that Jehovah was his God.
- Their father Laban, however, did not appear to be a worshiper of Jehovah.

Genesis 30 : 25-28 - 25 And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country. 26 Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee. 27 And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake. 28 And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it.

- At about this time (after his twelfth child had been born), Joseph determined to return to Canaan land, his birth place.
- Though not specifically noted, it may well have been the completion of his agreed fourteen years of service to Laban.

- He therefore requested leave of absence along with his accumulated family.
- Laban was sorry for not only his daughters and grandchildren, but he had learned by experience that God had blessed *him* for Jacob's sake.
- Jacob perhaps had told Laban of God's promise to him and his forefathers.
- In any event, the blessing of God upon Jacob had a ripple effect even upon Laban, his father-in-law.
- Laban therefore coyly asked him to request his wages. The idea was of a severance payment.

Genesis 30 : 29-34 - 29 *And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me. 30 For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude; and the LORD hath blessed thee since my coming: and now when shall I provide for mine own house also? 31 And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock. 32 I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire. 33 So shall my righteousness answer for me in time to come, when it shall come for my hire before thy face: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the sheep, that shall be counted stolen with me. 34 And Laban said, Behold, I would it might be according to thy word.*

- Jacob reminded Laban that he had served him over fourteen years and that God had blessed the both of them.
- Laban's flocks had multiplied during that time.
- Jacob also reminded Laban how God had blessed him since his coming.
- Now it was time to provide for his own family.
- He therefore made a proposition to Laban.
- He offered to continue to work for Laban in overseeing his flocks.
- However, the deal would be that Laban agreed to allow Jacob to keep all the "speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats."
- That would be his wages.
- What is implied is that these would be the speckled and spotted offspring which would be born in the future.
- He only would take as his own the speckled and spotted which would be born to the livestock.
- Laban therefore agreed.

Genesis 30 : 35-36 - *And he removed that day the he goats that were ringstraked and spotted, and all the she goats that were speckled and spotted, and every one that had some white in it, and all the brown among the sheep, and gave them into the hand of his sons. 36 And he set three days' journey betwixt himself and Jacob: and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.*

- Laban therefore separated the speckled and ringstraked livestock and set them apart from Jacob a distance of a three day's journey.

- It seemed as though Laban took measures to keep the spotted livestock from Jacob thus depriving him of potential gain.
- This may well be one of the changing of his hire of which Jacob would later complain. (See Genesis 31:41)

Genesis 30 : 37-42 - 37 And Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chesnut tree; and pilled white strakes in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods. 38 And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink, that they should conceive when they came to drink. 39 And the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle ringstraked, speckled, and spotted. 40 And Jacob did separate the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the ringstraked, and all the brown in the flock of Laban; and he put his own flocks by themselves, and put them not unto Laban's cattle. 41 And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger cattle did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the cattle in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods. 42 But when the cattle were feeble, he put them not in: so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's.

- Explained is how Jacob took rods (sticks) or green poplar, hazel, and chestnut, stripped the bark back and made white strips or stripes in them.
- He placed these partially stripped, striped sticks in the midst of the watering troughs.
- For reasons unexplained, the intent of the rods (peeled sticks) was to put the animals in heat causing them to copulate.
- Moreover, also implied is that these striped rods would cause the animals to bear spotted, striped, and speckled offspring.
- That is exactly what happened.
- Whether Jacob knew tricks of animal husbandry not otherwise widely known, or whether God simply blessed his scheme is not clear.
- However, what did happen is that the herds of which he had charge multiplied and brought forth primarily with the desired markings.
- He continued to breed those animals which had the desired markings and set those animals in his personal flocks.
- Moreover, he saw to it that only the stronger animals were allowed to breed with the stripped/striped rods before them.
- Thus, his flock was increased with superior livestock.
- He would not breed the weaker animals.
- His herd therefore not only exceeded Laban's in number but also in quality.
- Again, whether God revealed to him a special way to breed desired characteristics or He simply blessed Jacob, in any event, that is exactly what happened.

Genesis 30 : 43 - 43 And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, camels, and asses.

- God was blessing the seed of Abraham as He had promised.
- Accordingly, Jacob became a wealthy livestock owner.