

In The Beginning: Session 39: Sons of Jacob

בְּרֵאשִׁית

- Don't forget that our summer reading: *God Meant It For Good*, by RT Kendall.
- Anything you missed you can find at: www.htchurch.com/genesis

The Sons Of Leah: Genesis 29:31-35

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

- Leah names her first three sons with reference to her pain and disappointment.
- Reuben = "Look, a son!" We seldom think about the rejection that Leah received.
- Simeon = *hearing* because God had heard her.
- Levi = joining or alliance, because Leah thought Jacob would be joined to her.
- I think that as Leah began to seek God more and more, her aspirations became somewhat higher.

The fourth son was special. He was marked in the plan of God for kingship, for headship in the family, a very special anointing. Judah means *one who is praised*.

Rachel's Envy (Gen. 30:1-8)

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!" 2 And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"

3 So she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear a child on my knees, that I also may have children by her." 4 Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, and Jacob went in to her. 5 And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. 6 Then Rachel said, "God has judged my case; and He has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan. 7 And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8 Then Rachel said, "With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali.

- Moses says Leah's motivation was her feelings of rejection. When you feel rejected, you want people to see the good you've done, you want God to vindicate you, and you want those who spurned you to be joined to you. And that dynamic is revealed in the names of Leah's first three sons: Reuben, Simeon, and Levi.
- The way out of rejection is to praise the Lord and find your acceptance in Him.
- Rachel is central to Jacob's story, but God favored Leah in many ways. She gave the people all their priests, all their kings except one, as well as the Messiah.
- Moses makes no bones about the fact that Rachel became envious.
- "Give me children or I die!" is a picture of powerful, heartfelt intercession.
- It seems that there's a little bite to Jacob's words, perhaps even some accusation he is throwing against Rachel, even against God.
- Bilhah's name means troubled, and I'm sure she was. Having children like this probably gave Bilhah economic security. She would have a high place of honor among the women, and would be cared for in her old age.

- Rachel’s sons through Bilhah were deliberately and pointedly named with reference to the conflict she had with Leah, which is sad:
 - Dan means a judge, so she was saying God had judged her case.
 - Naphtali means wrestling, or my strife – not a pleasant name!

Sons Of Zilpah (Genesis 30:9-13)

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.

- *Zilpah* means a trickle, like a trickle of myrrh or precious ointment.
- *Gad* means good fortune, or a troop or an army.
- *Asher* is the Hebrew word for being happy or blessed.

More Children For Leah (Genesis 30:14-21)

14 Now Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.” 15 But she said to her, “Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son’s mandrakes also?” And Rachel said, “Therefore he will lie with you tonight for your son’s mandrakes.” 16 When Jacob came out of the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, “You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son’s mandrakes.” And he lay with her that night.

17 And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. 18 Leah said, “God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband.” So

she called his name *Issachar*. 19 Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. 20 And Leah said, “God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons.” So she called his name *Zebulun*. 21 Afterward she bore a daughter, and called her name *Dinah*.

- Mandrakes were thought to have aphrodisiac powers.
- Rachel still has Jacob’s affections, and so Leah reverts somewhat to her former pattern. Maybe she didn’t *continue* to praise the Lord.
- *Issachar* (*Yissaskar* in Hebrew) means *God brings wages* in this context.
- *Zebulun* = a dwelling place, and it’s sad as we see what Leah was going through.
- *Dinah* means judged or acquitted. So this may be a case in which Leah named a child with reference to her conflict with Rachel.

A Child For Rachel (Genesis 30:22-24)

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.”

- We see God’s love and the faithfulness of God here towards Rachel. This is how it is with those who are in covenant with Him.
- Rachel can’t see any of that, and so she names him the same way, referring to the reproach of her infertility. *Joseph* is related to the idea that God is taking away, and it also can express the hope that God will add.
- Rachel will later die in childbirth, giving Jacob one more son, named *Benjamin*. Rachel named this last son *Benoni*, meaning the son of my sorrow, another terrible name. But Jacob called him *Benjamin*, meaning son of the right hand. This is a name with a double meaning.
- Benjamin is also unusual and significant for other reasons.

What's In A Name?

Despite most of them being poorly named, God had a wonderful purpose for each of them, a purpose higher than anything they might have imagined. Their names are actually written on the twelve gates of God's heavenly city! Their names are also a prophetic picture of the greater Seed, the Messiah who was to come. And many have noticed that their names are a parable that reveals Jesus to us.

There are four mothers whose names speak of Messiah: their names are Leah, *the calf*, for the servanthood of Christ; Rachel, *the lamb*, for his sacrifice; Bilhah, *troubling*, for his sufferings; and Zilpah, *the trickling of myrrh*, for his death.

Then you have twelve sons. Twelve is the number of divine government. Put these names together and it's amazing:

The Incarnate Servant (Leah)

1. Look – a son! (Reuben)
2. God has heard us! (Simeon)
3. God has joined Himself to us! (Levi)
4. Let us praise Him! (He is received by the nation.) (Judah)

The Troubled One (Bilhah)

5. He is judged (rejected) by the nation. (Dan)
6. He has great wrestlings in His soul, but He does the Will of God. (Naphtali)

The Sorrowful One (Zilpah)

7. An army or multitude will be born through his travail. (Gad)
8. Blessing will come through his travail. (Asher)

The Suffering Servant (Leah)

9. He will see the reward of His sufferings; Isaiah 53. (Issachar) Remember also the mandrake story: Leah, the unloved woman, is the one who gets the blessing instead of Rachel. This speaks of Gentile salvation.

10. There will be dwelling places for all in God’s Kingdom because of what He has done. (Zebulun)

The Dying And Risen Sacrifice (Rachel)

11. His death has taken away our reproach. (Joseph) And God will give us another son by bringing Him back from death. (The other meaning of Joseph).

12. He is the son of our sorrow. (Benoni) This was the viewpoint of Rachel, who stands for Israel. But the Father, represented by Jacob, overrules that verdict and says, *He is the son of My right hand!*

Genesis is not just history, it’s a record of God’s faithfulness, and of God working behind the scenes, even in naming these men. Genesis is also about the future: a promise of land, a promise of descendants, and the promise of the Messiah!

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