

## Genesis 30 – Jacob and Laban negotiate over wages, as Sister Wives continue.

**THEME:** *Birth of Jacob's sons; birth of Joseph to Rachel; Jacob prepares to leave Laban.*

When we come to this chapter, we see that God is moving in spite of Jacob's sin. God is not moving because of it, but in spite of it. The theme of the chapter is the family of Jacob and the birth of his sons. Jacob longs to leave Laban, and Jacob makes a shrewd bargain with him. - McGee

**Gen 30:1-2** *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!" 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?"*

**Give me children, or else I die**—either be reckoned as good as dead, or pine away from vexation. The intense anxiety of Hebrew women for children arose from the hope of giving birth to the promised seed. Rachel's conduct was sinful and contrasts unfavorably with that of Rebekah (compare Ge 25:22) and of Hannah (1 Sa 1:11). – Critical Commentary and Explanation on the whole bible - JFB

You see, a woman in that day was disgraced unless she had an offspring, and the more children she had, the better was her position.

We find here Jacob and Rachel reverting to the practice of that day. Remember that Abraham and Sarah had done the same thing. God did not approve of it then, and He is not going to approve of it now. The Bible gives us an accurate record, but that does not mean that God approved of all that was done. In fact, it is quite obvious that He disapproved of this. My, the strife that we have already called to your attention in Abraham's family. It was also in the family of Isaac. Now it is in Jacob's family already—and he is in for a great deal more trouble. – McGee

**Was Jacob's response appropriate or Christ-like to Rebecca's outcry?**

**Gen 30:3-6** *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." Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, and Jacob went in to her. And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. 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.*

Bilhah ... Zilpah—Following the example of Sarah with regard to Hagar, an example which is not seldom imitated still, she adopted the children of her maid. Leah took the same course. A bitter and intense rivalry existed between them, all the more from their close relationship as sisters; and although they occupied separate apartments, with their families, as is the uniform custom where a plurality of wives obtains, and the husband and father spends a day with each in regular succession, that did not allay their mutual jealousies. The evil lies in the system, which being a violation of God's original ordinance, cannot yield happiness. – Critical Commentary and Explanation on the whole bible – JFB

Dan – sounds like the Hebrew word for Judge.

**Gen 30:7-13** *And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, "With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali. When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife. And Leah's maid Zilpah*

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**bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, "A troop comes!" So she called his name Gad. And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, "I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed." So she called his name Asher.**

Bilhah bore two sons, Dan and Naphtali. Not to be outdone by Rachel, Leah gave her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob, and two more sons were born, Gad and Asher. – Believers Bible Commentary

**Gen 30:14-21 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." 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." 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. And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Leah said, "God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband." So she called his name Issachar. Then Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. 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. Afterward she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah.**

20. And Leah said, God hath endued me with a good dowry—The birth of a son is hailed with demonstrations of joy, and the possession of several sons confers upon the mother an honor and respectability proportioned to their number. The husband attaches a similar importance to the possession, and it forms a bond of union which renders it impossible for him ever to forsake or to be cold to a wife who has borne him sons. This explains the happy anticipations Leah founded on the possession of her six sons.

21. afterwards, she bare a daughter—The inferior value set on a daughter is displayed in the bare announcement of the birth. - Critical Commentary and Explanation on the whole bible - JFB

**Gen 30:22-24 Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. And she conceived and bore a son, and said, "God has taken away my reproach." So she called his name Joseph, and said, "The LORD shall add to me another son."**

This is the boy who will go down into the land of Egypt. We will follow him later in the book, as he is quite a remarkable person. Later on Benjamin will be born to Rachel. We will conclude this chapter by listing the twelve sons of Jacob because they are important. The twelve tribes of Israel will come from them and finally the nation of Israel.- McGee

**Gen 30:25-27 And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done for you." And Laban said to him, "Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the LORD has blessed me for your sake."**

when Rachel had born Joseph—Shortly after the birth of this son, Jacob's term of servitude expired, and feeling anxious to establish an independence for his family, he probably, from knowing that Esau was out of the way, announced his intention of returning to Canaan (Heb 13:14). In this resolution the faith of Jacob was remarkable, for as yet he had nothing to rely on but the promise of God (compare Ge 28:15). Critical Commentary and Explanation on the whole bible - JFB

This is quite interesting. You may recall that Abimelech, king of Gerar, found that he was blessed when Isaac was in his midst. Now Uncle Laban has discovered that God is with Jacob and has blessed him for Jacob's sake. So Uncle Laban says, "My boy, don't rush off; don't leave me. I've been blessed, and I want to raise your wages."- McGee

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Laban said ... I have learned—His selfish uncle was averse to a separation, not from warmth of affection either for Jacob or his daughters, but from the damage his own interests would sustain. He had found, from long observation, that the blessing of heaven rested on Jacob, and that his stock had wonderfully increased under Jacob's management. This was a remarkable testimony that good men are blessings to the places where they reside. Men of the world are often blessed with temporal benefits on account of their pious relatives, though they have not always, like Laban, the wisdom to discern, or the grace to acknowledge it. - Critical Commentary and Explanation on the whole bible - JFB

**Gen 30:28-30** *Then he said, "Name me your wages, and I will give it." So Jacob said to him, "You know how I have served you and how your livestock has been with me. For what you had before I came was little, and it has increased to a great amount; the LORD has blessed you since my coming. And now, when shall I also provide for my own house?"*

**appoint me thy wages, and I will give it**—The Eastern shepherds receive for their hire not money, but a certain amount of the increase or produce of the flock; but Laban would at the time have done anything to secure the continued services of his nephew, and make a show of liberality, which Jacob well knew was constrained. - Critical Commentary and Explanation on the whole bible - JFB

Jacob knows by now that, any time Uncle Laban makes a deal, he is the one who will come off the winner. Jacob has learned this lesson, and he wants to leave. Listen to Jacob complaining. He is singing the blues! He is saying, "All I've got out of all this service for you are two wives with their two maids and a house full of boys." In fact, he has eleven boys at this point. What in the world is he going to do? How is he going to feed them? He says, "God has blessed *you* and He has prospered *you*, and I don't have anything." - McGee

**Gen 30:31-31** *So he said, "What shall I give you?" And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep your flocks: Let me pass through all your flock today, removing from there all the speckled and spotted sheep, and all the brown ones among the lambs, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and these shall be my wages.*

In other words, the pure breeds will be Laban's, but the offbreeds, those that are not blue-ribbon cattle, will be Jacob's. Jacob said, "You just let me have these, and that will be my wages." That sounds like a pretty good proposition for Laban. - McGee

31. Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing—A new agreement was made, the substance of which was, that he was to receive remuneration in the usual way, but on certain conditions which Jacob specified.

32. I will pass through all thy flock to-day—Eastern sheep being generally white, the goats black, and spotted or speckled ones comparatively few and rare, Jacob proposed to remove all existing ones of that description from the flock, and to be content with what might appear at the next lambing time. The proposal seemed so much in favor of Laban, that he at once agreed to it. But Jacob has been accused of taking advantage of his uncle, and though it is difficult to exculpate him from practising some degree of dissimulation, he was only availing himself of the results of his great skill and experience in the breeding of cattle. But it is evident from the next chapter (Ge 31:5–13) that there was something miraculous and that the means he had employed had been suggested by a divine intimation. - Critical Commentary and Explanation on the whole bible - JFB

**Gen 30:33-35** *So my righteousness will answer for me in time to come, when the subject of my wages comes before you: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the lambs, will be considered stolen, if it is with me." And Laban said, "Oh, that it were according to your word!" So he removed that day the male goats that were speckled and spotted, all the female goats that were speckled*

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***and spotted, every one that had some white in it, and all the brown ones among the lambs, and gave them into the hand of his sons.***

They would not be able to breed with the others. Jacob would take the off-breeds so that only the full breeds would mate and bear offspring, and those would belong to Uncle Laban. The others would be his. Jacob is making a very interesting deal. – McGee

***Gen 30:36-39 Then he put three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks. Now Jacob took for himself rods of green poplar and of the almond and chestnut trees, peeled white strips in them, and exposed the white which was in the rods. And the rods which he had peeled, he set before the flocks in the gutters, in the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink, so that they should conceive when they came to drink. So the flocks conceived before the rods, and the flocks brought forth streaked, speckled, and spotted.***

There have been various explanations of this. There are those who say this is nothing in the world but pure superstition. Others say it is an old wives' tale and is certainly something which ought not to be in the Bible record. It is my judgment that it is important that this record appears in the Word of God. Of course, there were genetic factors involved, but I don't feel that we should rule out this as being a superstition. The point is that both Laban and Jacob *believed* that the white streaks in the rods caused the offspring to be ringstraked. That is the important part of the story. Maybe you are too smart to believe it, but these two boys believed it. Regardless of whether or not there was value in it, Jacob is using trickery. He had been quite a trickster, but he has met an uncle who is a better trickster than he is, and now Jacob is trying to make a comeback.

This is all I will say about it at this point, and we will see that the next chapter will throw new light on this entire incident.

Now here is the list of Jacob's twelve sons who will eventually comprise the twelve tribes of the nation Israel.

Born to Leah:	Rachel	Billah, Rachel's maid	Zilpah, Leah's maid:
1. Reuben	1. Joseph	1. Dan	1. Gad
2. Simeon	2. Benjamin	2. Naphtali	2. Asher
3. Levi			
4. Judah			
5. Issachar			
6. Zebulun			
7. Dinah, daughter			

Believe me, Jacob had his hands full with these twelve boys! Also, we find that there was a girl, and her name was Dinah.

We will see in the next chapter that God has called Jacob to leave Haran and return to the land which He has promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I am sure that God is thinking of Jacob's children—He doesn't want them to grow up in the environment of Laban's household. - McGee

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**Gen 30:40** *Then Jacob separated the lambs, and made the flocks face toward the streaked and all the brown in the flock of Laban; but he put his own flocks by themselves and did not put them with Laban's flock.*

**Gen 30:41** *And it came to pass, whenever the stronger livestock conceived, that Jacob placed the rods before the eyes of the livestock in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods.*

**Gen 30:42** *But when the flocks were feeble, he did not put them in; so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's.*

**Gen 30:43** *Thus the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks, female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.*

When breeding Laban's herd, Jacob put rods that he had peeled in front of them, whether they were of solid color or marked. The lambs or kids were born streaked, speckled, and spotted. This, of course, meant that they belonged to Jacob. Did these rods actually determine the markings on the animals? There may or may not have been a scientific basis to the method. (New genetic evidence suggests that there might have been.) How else might the animals have been born with the markings Jacob desired?

First of all, it may have been a miracle (see Gen\_31:12).

Or it may have been a clever trick on Jacob's part. There are indications in the narrative that he knew the science of selective breeding. By careful breeding, he not only produced animals with the markings he desired, but he was also able to produce stronger animals for himself and feeble ones for Laban. Perhaps the peeled rods were just a trick to hide his breeding secrets from others. Whatever the explanation, Jacob's wealth increased during his final six years of serving Laban. – Believers Bible Commentary

**37. Jacob took rods, &c.**—There are many varieties of the hazel, some of which are more erect than the common hazel, and it was probably one of these varieties Jacob employed. The styles are of a bright red color, when peeled; and along with them he took wands of other shrubs, which, when stripped of the bark, had white streaks. These, kept constantly before the eyes of the female at the time of gestation, his observation had taught him would have an influence, through the imagination, on the future offspring.

**38. watering troughs**—usually a long stone block hollowed out, from which several sheep could drink at once, but sometimes so small as to admit of only one drinking at a time. - Critical Commentary and Explanation on the whole bible - JFB