

GENESIS

30:1-43

Genesis 30:1-43

Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 17th March 2024 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: James 3:13-18

Introduction

Previously in Genesis chapter 29, we saw Jacob — who had fled his own home after deceiving his father into blessing him, rather than his brother — now arrive at his uncle Laban's home in Padan Aram, with the intent of choosing a wife from his uncle's daughters. And he's successful, but, as we saw, it didn't turn out quite as planned, for his uncle deceived *him*, by first giving his eldest daughter, Leah, as Jacob's wife, rather than the younger, Rachel, whom Jacob loved. Indeed, Jacob got a test of his own medicine, so to speak.

Now Jacob was married to two women. Two sisters. And he loved Rachel, that was good. But Leah went unloved. And you can only imagine how she felt, especially the day after their wedding when Jacob was so upset at having married her. And what about the day that Jacob finally married Rachel, and all of a sudden Leah was doing well to come in second place as a wife. But God didn't overlook this matter, and He actually blessed Leah — and she bore Jacob's first for children. Four sons, called Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah. And that's as far as we got by the end of the chapter.

This morning, we're going to study all of chapter 30, and we'll now see the consequences of Laban's deceit, Jacob's polygamy, and lack of love toward Leah. But we'll also see more of Rachel's character. And none of these things will be pretty. When you think of it, what a contrast this is to the happy, perfect lives that are portrayed on social media!

Of course, we easily gravitate towards the photos and blogs that tell us how wonderful life is, and how the perfect home, perfect kids, perfect interior design, most stylish car, and most enjoyable job should look. But that's not very realistic, is it! And so in real contrast, what we have laid in front of us in Genesis are difficult people, messy families, deceit, envy, and even bitterness. Yet, in the midst of that, God works, He comforts, He blesses, He provides. If you want an honest picture of how life can look when we're left to our own devices, yet what God can do, then keep yourself rooted in *this* book. Not Facebook.

Another way of putting it; God used really flawed characters for His purpose. That doesn't mean their flaws were a good thing. In fact, much sowing and reaping went on, as we've already been seeing. But nonetheless, God worked in the lives of those willing to obey Him.

Overview of chapter thirty

This chapter, then, is easily divided into two — almost down the middle:

Overview of chapter thirty

- **v1-24** — Rachel's envy, sibling rivalry, and Jacob's children
- **v25-43** — Jacob wants to go, Laban wants him to stay

In verses 1-24, we see Rachel's envy lead to a real mess in the family unit, as these sisters compete for their husband's affection and for bearing children. And by the end of these verses we'll see 12 out of the 13 children that Jacob will father, are now born. In the second half of this chapter, from verses 25-43, Jacob tells his father-in-law that he wants to leave and return to his homeland, taking his wives and children with him, naturally. But Laban isn't so keen, and convinces Jacob to stay (at least, for a while) — and it actually turns out to Jacob's advantage. But the desire to leave wouldn't go away, as we'll read more about in chapter 31 next week.

Chapter thirty

As we get going then, it's helpful to remind ourselves that the background to verse 1, is that Leah has recently born Jacob 4 children. And no doubt she was enjoying this moment — for we *read* that she praised God following the birth of her fourth, Judah.

But meanwhile, Rachel, though loved by Jacob, is desperate to have children of her own. We read:

Genesis 30:1

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!"

What desperation we can see in her words here! And we might sympathise. And we should, when someone desperately wants children, but can't, for whatever reason. Imagine the pain Rachel would have felt when a family friend would say "when are you going to have children then, Rachel?!" — it's an insensitive comment that we would do best to steer well clear of.

And it's a pain that isn't exclusive to the married, either. For many unmarried folks, especially but not exclusively women have such a desire to have children, yet cannot, for they have no-one to have children with. And so similarly, we must be sensitive in our comments, not asking the faithful, single, obedient Christian, when they are going to get married. It's not as simple as just deciding that's what you're going to do.

So, Rachel has it hard here. She's seeing her sister with 4 kids, and she has none. So what does she do? Well, we read that first she looked at her own situation (understandable). But then, she looks at her sister's situation, and she envies her. Of course, seeing others happily married and enjoying family life is a *good* thing — indeed, that should *encourage* and not *discourage* us from wanting the same thing! Yet, Rachel looks with envy. The problem isn't with what she *wants*, but with her heart.

And sadly, our hearts are prone to do the same. Yet, as Christians we are not only *told* not to envy, but we are given the *help* we need, through the counsel of God's Word, His Holy Spirit in us, and the throne of grace that we can go to in time of need. And we must take God's counsel seriously, noting what we read in Philippians chapter 4:

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.

Therefore, I suggest that we must bear in mind how much time we spend watching TV, films and YouTube, or looking at social media. It's not that these things are the *source* of all evil. But there is so much broadcast or posted that draws our hearts and affections, it can leave us entirely unsatisfied with what we already have. And like Rachel we can think that we'll die without having what we want. Yet, the sad reality of Rachel's situation is that it would actually be the thing she wanted that would kill her — for she would later die in childbirth.

So, there is surely warning for us that sometimes the things we want so much, are the things that, in the end, will do us the greatest harm — either physically, or spiritually. And furthermore, we read in Proverbs:

Proverbs 14:30

A sound heart is life to the body, But envy is rotteness to the bones.

So let us resolve ourselves to not envy. Not by our own strength, but God working in us. And unlike Rachel, let us neither place the pressures of our desires on others who cannot satisfy us, but instead go to God, trusting in His goodness, His kindness, and His sovereignty.

Here, though, we see Rachel doesn't go to the Lord, but rather goes to Jacob, demanding "give me children!" — which of course he was essentially powerless to do, as we know that physically he was not infertile, having 4 children already. So we read:

Genesis 30:2

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?"

Rachel then, had exclaimed "*Jacob, why aren't you giving me children?!*" to which he effectively replied "Rachel, I've had no issue fathering children with Leah, so it's not me, it's you. I am not God, so can't do any more to give *you* children." Perhaps not the most sensitive of answers. So what is Rachel's response? We read:

Genesis 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."

So, if Rachel can't get what she wants herself, she'll use someone else to get it. And here, following a custom of the day, she ignores the lesson she *should* have learned from the consequences of Sarai's suggestion to Abram, that he sleep with her maidservant in order to produce a child. Indeed, *the one thing man learns from history, is that man learns nothing from history*. And we'll actually see that her maid's children will be among those who will later sell her firstborn into slavery.

But without regard for the consequences, she proceeds:

Genesis 30:4

Then she gave him Bilhah her maid as wife, and Jacob went in to her.

So, now Jacob is sleeping with 3 women. This isn't great, is it! Again a reminder that just because the Bible records something, that is not a guarantee that that action is OK. It is not permission for us to do the same!

Continuing on, we read in verse 5:

Genesis 30:5

And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.

So the plan is a success, it seems.

Genesis 30:6

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.

So, having taken matters into her own hands, Rachel attributes the outcome to God. And indeed, this boy was a blessing, as all children are. But we mustn't forget that she is now in a worse position, now sharing her husband with 2 other women, both of whom have had children of his. The note I think we should make is that we mustn't do the same, proceeding with our *own* plans, and attributing the outcome of those decisions to God being at work. Yes, we may have achieved our desire, but that is not an indication God was approving of that decision — for example, winning a bet is no indication that gambling is OK, or that God somehow engineered us to prosper through sin.

But that's exactly what Rachel was assuming — for she calls this boy Dan, meaning *judge* (Daniel of course meaning *God is my judge*) as if to say God had ruled in her favour. But continuing to share her husband with her maid, we see:

Genesis 30:7-8

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.

And so it seems that Rachel has turned childbearing into a competition, or even war, with her sister. Though she was loved so much by Jacob, that wasn't enough — for envy isn't interested in what it already has, only what others have. And she was desperate to have children like Leah did. And now we see, Rachel is not the only one who is discontented...

Genesis 30:9

When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife.

Well, of course. This is competition, right. Anything you can do, I can do better! And so now Jacob is in bed with 4 women, and surely none of them are really happy with the situation – especially Rachel, who is now sharing her husband with yet another woman, *and* perhaps worst of all for her, she is the odd one out, for we read:

Genesis 30:10

And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son.

So Jacob now has children by 4 different women. I'm not sure this is what Isaac had in mind when he said "go find yourself a wife"!

Genesis 30:11

Then Leah said, "A troop comes!" So she called his name Gad.

Indeed, Leah is amassing a small army here!

Genesis 30:12-13

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.

Culturally at that time, the more children you had, the more blessed people perceived you to be. And so she calls this son Asher, meaning *happiness*. Ironically though, she still wasn't happy, as we'll now see in a situation that arose one day:

Genesis 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."

Reuben then, Leah's eldest, goes out into the field, and he finds some mandrakes. What, you ask, are mandrakes?! I had to look this up myself. And turns out they are a dark green lettuce-like plant with purple flowers and red fruit (about the size of a small apple) with pleasant smell.

Why is that of any importance? Why does Rachel want them? Does she just like flowers? Is she working on her five-a-day? There's more to it than that, for this fruit was also known as "love apples" — that is, it was considered an aphrodisiac, while the root of the plant was believed to enhance a woman's fertility. So, now we can imagine why these were desirable to Rachel. The problem of course, is that it seems she was resorting to superstition to fall pregnant.

And Leah isn't in the mood for being generous.

Genesis 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."

That is, Leah felt cheated out of Jacob's love, care and attention. Even if he had fathered children via her, her marriage to him was not what it once was before Rachel married him also. And she feels he has been taken away from her. And so, Rachel decides they can both be happy – Rachel can get what she wants, at the expense of Leah spending one night with Jacob.

What a mad situation this is... Rachel is still so set on having her own children, that she is happy to cheaply offer up intimacy with her husband as some sort of bargaining chip to achieve that end! Evidently she was so used to sharing Jacob with 3 other women, that one night mattered little. Indeed, intimacy will be cheapened through polygamy. Just as it is through adultery and fornication. It's worth way more than something to be used as payment. It is not a currency to be traded with.

Of course, Jacob is not party to this conversation, and is happy to oblige. Moses is very matter of fact about this situation:

Genesis 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.

Is he a man of weak will, or character here? It certainly didn't take a lot to convince him. *But*, Leah was indeed his wife, so he's not doing anything wrong.

Remember, though, Rachel's intent? That she might conceive and bear Jacob a child. But what happens?

Genesis 30:17

And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.

So, Leah is the one who falls pregnant here — the opposite of what Rachel was hoping for! And reading this verse, it seems Leah had been speaking to the Lord. And He answered.

Genesis 30:18

Leah said, "God has given me my wages, because I have given my maid to my husband." So she called his name Issachar.

One meaning of the name Issachar is "my reward". And it seems Leah believes this son is her reward. But for what? She believes it is because she gave her maid to Jacob also. Was that the reason God blessed her with her fifth son? We don't know. All we can be sure of is that God used this son, as He did with all Jacob's sons, to be the foundation of the tribes of Israel.

Genesis 30:19-20

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.

Once again, Leah reaches the conclusion, as she had with her third-born, that surely now Jacob will love her and spend time with her because of the number of children she had born him. Yet again, we see no marked difference at this time.

Genesis 30:21

Afterward she bore a daughter, and called her name Dinah.

Leah even now gives birth to Jacob's only daughter, meaning more than half of Jacob's eventual children are from her. But still that seems to trigger no change in their relationship.

And rather, now, just as God had heard Leah's cries in the past, He now remembers and answers Rachel's prayers:

Genesis 30:22-23

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."

Not that God had forgotten about what she was asking, but rather, now, this was His sovereign timing to provide Rachel with a son. But what was her response?

Genesis 30:24

So she called his name Joseph, and said, "The LORD shall add to me another son."

Indeed, Joseph's name means "adding" or even "may God add". What is at the root of this? Rachel's desires. For God had *answered* her prayer in giving her a son, but she was *still* not content. And that's the way it is when we envy. No matter how close we get to what we want, or even if we get it, we find that it's not enough, that it really doesn't scratch where it itches.

So what's the solution? It's finding our contentment in Jesus, not anything else. Recognising we are complete in Him, as we read in Colossians. Not complete in finding the perfect job, perfect spouse, perfect children, and perfect number of children — or even the perfect house, perfect car, perfect phone, perfect TV or whatever. We are only complete in Him. That's what we were made for!

Rachel's discontent lasted her lifetime. For indeed, as she later gave birth to her second son, and was herself dying in childbirth, she named him *Ben-Oni*, meaning son of my sorrow (it seems her very last word was sorrow). Of course, Jacob changed his name to *Benjamin* (meaning *son of the right hand*). What a sad story of the pretty girl. We must learn from this, to set our affections rightly, keeping ourselves from envy, from jealousy, and from bitterness.

Now, as we reach verse 25, we begin the second half of this chapter that will talk about offspring of a different kind, as we see Jacob caring for Laban's flocks.

Genesis 30:25-26

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."

Jacob had worked longer than he had committed to. And we have the impression from other verses that his work ethic was good. He wasn't an idle man. But now, he has reached a point where he has decided that he doesn't want the future of his family to be in Laban's household, but rather, he wants to go back to the land of Canaan, where he had fled from. And he says to his uncle "*look, you know I've done above and beyond what was required - so, now, let me go with your blessing*" for indeed, he could have just left. But at this stage he's wanting to go honourably, with Laban having chance to say goodbye to his daughters and grandchildren.

Genesis 30:27

And Laban said to him, "Please stay, if I have found favour in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the LORD has blessed me for your sake."

Oh Laban! Always looking for what he can get out of the situation, right?! But the positive in this is that he has seen that it is God who had blessed him, and that He had done so because of Jacob. What a testimony! And may we have the same testimony, that those we work for are blessed in their business because of our relationship with God. How does that happen? Well, it starts with obeying what we read in Colossians 3:17...

Colossians 3:17

And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

When we do all things as if we are doing them for the Lord, it will change our approach. Sloppy, half-hearted work will go out of the window. Rather, diligent, faithful, and honest working will be the result. Not only in our homes, not only in ministry — but in our day-to-day jobs. So let us then, commit ourselves to working well — that God may be glorified in all we do!

Genesis 30:28

Then he said, "Name me your wages, and I will give it."

So, Laban says “tell me your price”. Now, Laban hasn’t got the best track record giving what he promised, and we’ll see that he won’t do anything to change that record here. But despite that, Jacob is interested in working for him longer... why? Well, we read:

Genesis 30:29-30

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?”

Jacob says “I’ve worked hard, God has blessed my work, and you’ve prospered as a result! But what have I got to show for it?” (Of course, other than his two daughters!). However, the point Jacob makes isn’t entirely unreasonable, for he has a large family, and if he is to leave Laban, then he needs some way to support, sustain, to feed them.

Genesis 30:31

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:

So Jacob says “I’m not asking you to *give* me anything, rather I’ll work for it. And here’s how”.

Genesis 30:32-33

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. 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.”

So, Jacob says that his wages will be the less desirable sheep and goats. I wonder whether that’s a dig at Laban, or Jacob is trying to be clever – for he once received the less desirable of Laban’s daughters (in a physical sense) yet through her received the greatest number of offspring. Either way, Jacob is making an attractive deal for Laban, saying he can have the better and more numerable sheep and goats – and furthermore, promising how he will be honest in his dealing with his uncle. And Laban agrees:

Genesis 30:34

And Laban said, “Oh, that it were according to your word!”

Laban, then, has no objection to this plan. But then we read:

Genesis 30:35

So he removed that day the male goats that were speckled and spotted, all the female goats that were speckled 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.

Remember, Jacob had said these speckled, spotted, brown and patchwork sheep and goats would be his wages – but before Jacob has chance to take them, Laban removes all of them from his flock, and passes them onto his own sons. That means the only way Jacob will earn his wages will be through the breeding of *further* sheep and goats. Laban isn't stupid. But Laban's not kind either!

Genesis 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.

So what is happening here? There are various explanations offered — from Jacob himself being superstitious (as it seems Rachel was with the mandrakes), to maybe trying to trick Laban (which I can't see how he is). Or it could just be that there was some known effect of doing this, that brought the sheep and goats into heat.

But regardless of Jacob's reason, we'll see that God chose to bless him, that is was God that gave the increase, for in the next chapter Jacob will say to Leah and Rachel *your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me. If he said thus: 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore speckled. And if he said thus: 'The streaked shall be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked. So God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.*

And that's what we read playing out here:

Genesis 30:40-42

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

Jacob can't lose, it seems, and God is continuing to bless him while here, just like He had prospered Abraham, and Isaac. We read:

Genesis 30:43

Thus the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks, female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Why did God bless him so much? Well, we know that God raises up whom He will, for His purposes. And the purpose He had for Jacob and his sons was to lay the foundation for the nation of Israel, that God might preserve and protect the line through to Christ. Another way of putting it is that the blessing that is going on here wasn't simply because God wanted Jacob to have a comfortable life!

And we might reflect on that, and consider how all that God has given us isn't for us to *merely* live a comfortable life, but to carry out *His* purpose, and do *His* will. That should change our relationship to our possessions. That we would know how to use them well, whether we have few or many.

We read in Philippians chapter four:

Philippians 4:12-13

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Paul isn't giving us a motivational verse to say we can do anything! No, he is saying that we are able to live rightly before God because of Christ — whether we are rich or poor. Now, on the surface we might think that being poor would be the greatest struggle, and I don't want to diminish the suffering that many face. But when it comes to walking with the Lord, riches (even modest riches) can cause us to lose sight of Him.

Commenting on this, Charles Spurgeon wisely said "*It needs more than human skill to carry the brimming cup of earthly joy with a steady hand.*" What we need, of course, is a close walk with Lord, being filled with His Holy Spirit, submitting ourselves to His will and purpose. Else, we'll find ourselves utterly distracted, even consumed by our possessions.

Spurgeon went on to write:

When we have plenty of God's providential mercies, it often happens that we have but little of God's grace, and little gratitude for the blessings we have received. We are full, and we forget God: Satisfied with earth, we are content to do without heaven. Rest assured, it is harder to know how to be full than it is to know how to be hungry — so desperate is the tendency of human nature to pride and forgetfulness of God. Take care that you ask in your prayers that God would teach you how to be full.

Charles Spurgeon

So then, if God has made you exceedingly prosperous like he did Jacob, ask yourself, and more importantly, ask God — *why*. It will be for a greater purpose than just having lots of stuff.

Conclusion

As I close this morning, I want to draw your attention back to Rachel. For I always had the impression that she was a *great* girl, based on how much Jacob loved her. And indeed, she is described as *beautiful of form and appearance*. But as we look more closely, we see that she is envious, superstitious, and treated intimacy with her husband as something to be traded. In the next chapter we'll also see her steal her father's idols, lie to him, and put Jacob in danger. This is not a woman with impeccable character!

So let us be warned again from Proverbs 31:

Proverbs 31:30

Charm is deceitful and beauty is passing, But a woman who fears the LORD, she shall be praised.


That is, the hidden man of the heart is of far more worth than a pretty face or handsome frame. Let us admire the better things. Let us teach what those better things are — in the pulpit, in our homes, in our times of fellowship, and in nurturing and mentoring from older men and women, from older believers to the younger. And let us build up our husbands and wives in the good things that don't fade, with at least as much intent as we complement their looks.

Application questions


As we go our separate ways, let us ask ourselves some questions, in order to help apply this passage to our lives:

- Are we pleased when others prosper, or do we envy them?
- Are we setting our minds on things that are praiseworthy?
- What will we do with all that God has given *us*? *Why* has God given us that which He has?

For the audio recording of this Bible study, and for additional studies, please see the DCF web site:



Deal Christian Fellowship
Simply teaching the Bible, simply

 <https://dcf.church>