

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 30

30:1-2 *When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!" Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?"* (NIV)

God's Intervention

Jacob acknowledged that it was God who was preventing Rachel from conceiving.

30:3 *She said, "Here is my maid Bilhah. Consort with her, that she may bear on my knees and that through her I too may have children."* (TAN)

Social Custom

This is the same custom that Sarai suggested to Abram when she asked him to go in to Hagar so that she "could obtain children by her" (16:2). When a barren woman gave a surrogate to her husband, the barren woman would support the surrogate while she was giving birth, so that the child would be born on the barren woman's knees. The barren woman would then be considered the legal mother.

30:4-14 *So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, and she became pregnant and bore him a son. Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him Dan ["judged"]. Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." So she named him Naphtali ["my wrestling"]. When Leah saw that she had stopped having children [she had become barren again], she took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. Then Leah said, "What good fortune!" So she named him Gad ["good fortune" or "a troop"]. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher ["happy"]. During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."* (NIV)

Mandrakes

The wheat harvest for that area would have been around May. Although it is not known for certain what mandrakes were, it seems that they either helped conception, or it was a superstition that they did.

30:15 *But she said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" "Very well," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes."* (NIV)

Jacob's Favoritism

From this verse we conclude that Jacob generally slept with Rachel.

30:16-26 *So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night. God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him Issachar ["compensation," "hire"]. Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun ["cohabitation," "dwelling"]. Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah [the feminine form of "Dan", meaning "judgment"]. Then God remembered Rachel; He listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." She named him Joseph ["adding"], and said, "May the LORD add to me another son." After Rachel gave birth to Joseph [1724 B.C.], Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you." (NIV)*

"Send Me on My Way"

Even though Jacob had worked for Laban for 34 years, he still asks permission to leave.

30:27 *And Laban said to him, "Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience [NIV, TAN: "divination"] that the LORD has blessed me for your sake."*

30:28-35 *He added, "Name your wages, and I will pay them." Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?" "What shall I give you?" he asked. "Don't give me anything," Jacob replied. "But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages. And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen." "Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said." That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons. (NIV)*

Laban's Deceitfulness

Laban removed every animal Jacob described, so that Jacob would not have even one pair of breeding stock that he could use to produce any animals for himself. The sons of Laban must have been born after Jacob had been several years in the land.

30:36-39 Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks. Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches. Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted. (NIV)

Jacob's Reaction

Jacob either built pens around the watering holes, or laid the branches on the ground like a cattle-guard, preventing the animals from intermingling after Jacob separated them.

30:40 Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-colored animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's animals. (NIV)

The young of the flock were his animals, so he kept them separate from Laban's.

30:41-42 Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches, but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. (NIV)

He practiced selective breeding by separating the weaker animals from the breeding stock, leaving the stronger animals to produce offspring.

30:43 In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys. (NIV)