

Birth Wars: Leah Versus Rachel

Genesis 29.30-30.24

Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned: That old saying is a fitting backdrop for a *battle of wombs* between Leah and Rachel! Warring wives exhibit envy and desperation. Better to trust in God!

God Blesses the Unloved: Leah learns to trust in God (29.31-35)

- Reuben – *The Lord has seen my misery affliction*
- Simeon – *The Lord has heard I am unloved*
- Levi – *Now my husband will become attached to me*
- Judah – *This time I will praise the Lord*

Maid to Order: Bilhah and Zilpah bear sons (30.1-13)

- Dan – *God has vindicated me*
- Naphtali – *I have struggled with my sister, and I have won!*
- Gad – *How fortunate!*
- Asher – *Happy am I!*

More children for Leah; Rachel gives birth to Joseph (30.14-24)

- Issachar – *God has rewarded me*
- Zebulun – *God has given me a good gift*
- Dinah
- Joseph – *May the Lord give me another son*

Envy leads to bitterness and strife! Those who trust God learn that He bestows His blessings with wisdom, justice, and compassion.



1. Like a patriarchal ‘soap opera,’ Jacob’s wives Leah and Rachel compete for his love. Rachel is his favorite, but Leah is able to produce children. Rachel has ‘surrogate children’ by her maid Bilhah, and Leah responds by giving her maid Zilpah to Jacob, who also bears sons. Finally, Rachel gives birth to Joseph. The emotional tension that runs through this narrative is gripping. What are these two women feeling? How do they attempt to resolve their pain? While each credits God with enabling them to conceive, their selfish battle for Jacob’s affections destroy their home. How do Christians today similarly give God thanks for blessings, while selfishly seeking to get the most?
2. While any marriage with two wives (not to mention two sisters who had a sibling rivalry) will have problems, Jacob’s lack of prayer in this contentious time is notable. Though he might not have resolved conflicts, his spiritual impotence is inverse to his physical potency! Reflect on the societal effects of poor male spiritual leadership in the patriarchs, and today.
3. Reading the unfolding account of Jacob’s life, it would be easy to imagine the promises of blessing and a ‘great nation’ coming to naught. Envy, despair, and deception could have caused the family to implode. But it doesn’t. Instead, God remembers His promises. This dysfunctional episode lays the foundation for the tribal structure of the future nation! Do you see God’s persistent grace here? Perhaps you have anguish in your life. How is God providing hope even in your trial? (See Jn 10.10; Rom. 8.28.)
4. The spiritual evolution of Leah and Rachel is an important subplot in this narrative. The names of Leah’s first four sons show a progression in her faith. How does her focus change from the birth of Reuben to the birth of Judah? Rachel, unlike Leah, was loved by Jacob, but she clung to his love for security, and tried to resolve her infertility by human means (mandrakes; 30.14ff). Only after all else has failed does God enable her to conceive. Might this not reflect how God *waits for us to come to the end of our own means* before He is ready to pour out His blessings?