

GENESIS: Where Grace Begins

The Forming of Israel – Genesis 30, Part 1

³¹ When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. ³² And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, “Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me.” ³³ She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Because the Lord has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also.” And she called his name Simeon. ³⁴ Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, “Now this time my husband will be 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, “This time I will praise the Lord.” Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

30 When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I shall die!” ² Jacob’s anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, “Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?” ³ Then she said, “Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her.” ⁴ So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her. ⁵ And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. ⁶ Then Rachel said, “God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son.” Therefore she called his name Dan. ⁷ Rachel’s servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. ⁸ Then Rachel said, “With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed.” So she called his name Naphtali.

⁹ When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. ¹⁰ Then Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹ And Leah said, “Good fortune has come!” so she called his name Gad. ¹² Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. ¹³ And Leah said, “Happy am I! For women have called me happy.” So she called his name Asher.

¹⁴ In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went 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?” Rachel said, “Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son’s mandrakes.” ¹⁶ When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, “You must come in to me, for I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes.” So 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 gave my servant to my husband.” So she called his name Issachar.

¹⁹ And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. ²⁰ Then Leah said, “God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor 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.

²² Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. ²³ She conceived and bore a son and said, “God has taken away my reproach.” ²⁴ And she called his name Joseph, saying, “May the Lord add to me another son!”

Genesis 29:31-30:24

* ¹⁶ Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. ¹⁷ And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, “Do not fear, for you have another son.” ¹⁸ And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. ¹⁹ So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), ²⁰ and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel’s tomb, which is there to this day.

Genesis 35:16-20

An overview:

The account presents the amazing _____, _____ and necessary _____ of God on the one hand ...

And the tragic _____ and _____ of people like us on the other ...

The origins of Israel were _____, and God's people would forever be _____ upon Him ...

Some thoughts from the text ...

Chapter 29

v. 31 – “Hated” is best understood as _____. (see v. 30)

v. 32 – Note the sad longing for her husband's _____ in Leah's choice of names ...

v. 33 – Again, Leah credits _____ for the births

v. 34 – By now, Leah's expectations have lessened. She merely hopes for Jacob's “_____”.

v. 35 – It seems as if Leah has given up hope in Jacob's affections and would find her _____ in God.

Chapter 30

v. 1 – Rachel, the wife Jacob loved, is humiliated at her inability to have children. She now _____ her sister and _____ her husband.

v. 2 – Her blaming of him makes Jacob respond in _____ and attributes her barrenness to God.

v. 3, 4 – With no confidence in God, Rachel takes matters into her own hands and offers up her servant to Jacob (a custom that, though distasteful and immoral, predates the giving of the law, so there was no prohibition against it.)

v. 5-8 – Bilhah gives birth to two sons. The first is named for “vindication”, the second for “wrestling”. Rachel tragically is _____ with Leah.

v. 9-13 – The birth wars now go to another level. Leah now employs her servant girl, Zilpah. “Good fortune” and “happy” are born. You can also feel Leah's disdainful pride and sense of victory over Rachel.

v. 14-24 – Resorting to a sort of ancient legendary aphrodisiac, Leah and Rachel barter over “love apples”, hoping they will enable them to have more children. (You can't make this stuff up). Leah now has a fifth and sixth son (notice, not because of the ‘mandrakes’). She also gives birth to a daughter, Dinah. (More on her later).

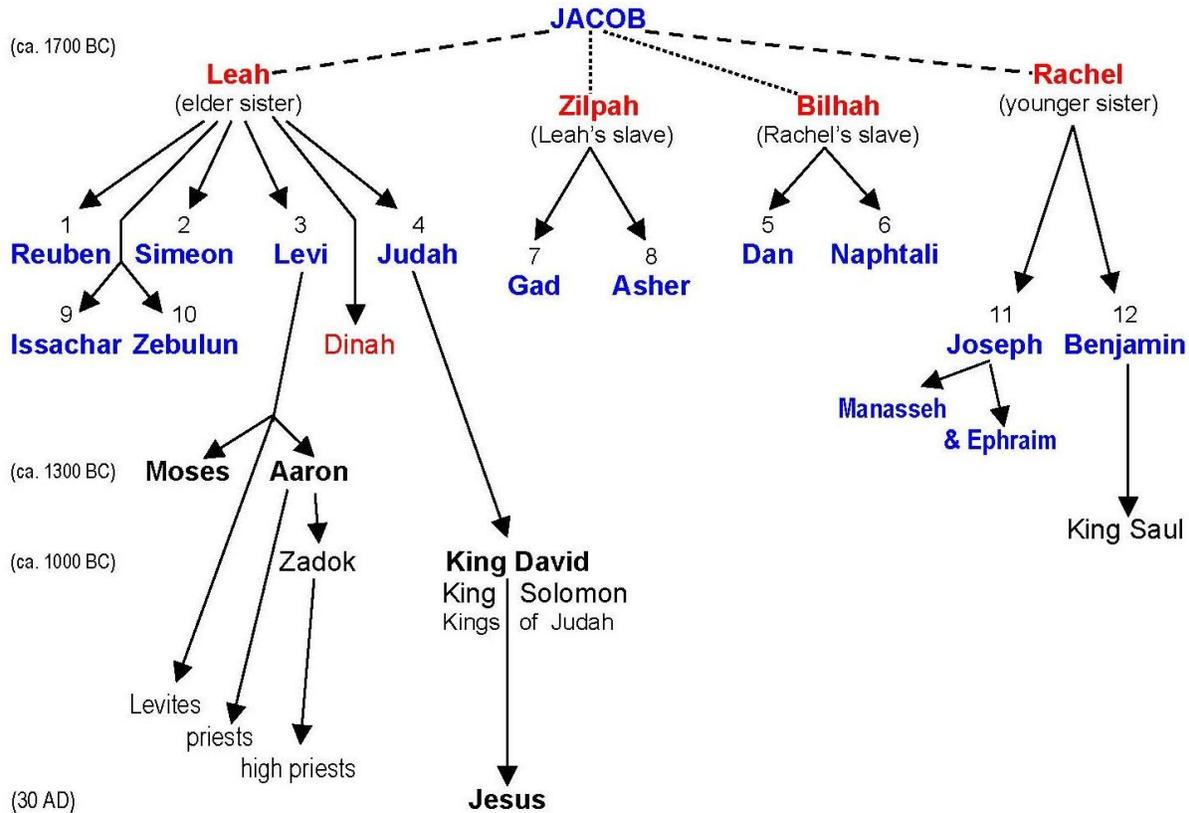
It's also clear that Rachel, being the favored wife, controls the household ...

Note that all Leah hopes for from Jacob now is _____. (She once hoped for love, then a sense of connection, now she just wants the honor she deserves. Once has to feel for Leah.)

Apparently, Rachel now, giving up hope in anything but the sovereign goodness of God, begins to _____. God, by his grace answers. Joseph is born and all credit goes to God.

The section ends with Rachel praying for another son (which she will have).

Sons of Jacob / Tribes of Israel



The 12 (13?) Tribes:

The following is adapted from the Faithlife Study Bible and Overviewbible.com by Jeffrey Kranz

1. Judah

The tribe of **KINGS**, and the most preeminent of the 12 tribes in the biblical narrative. Judah “prevailed over his brothers,” (1 Chronicles 5:2), and the tribe’s territory included the city of Jerusalem and the holy temple. King David was part of this tribe, and his royal line ruled in Jerusalem from around 1,000 BC until the city fell to Babylonian forces in 586 BC. Jerusalem was the capital of Israel and the capital of the Southern Kingdom after the nation divided. **Jesus** is of the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:1–2).

Notable tribesmen: Jesus, David, Mary, Solomon, Caleb

2. Reuben

Descended from Jacob’s firstborn, whom Jacob said was as “uncontrolled as water” (Genesis 49:4). The tribe chose not to settle in the Promised Land, and instead asked Moses for some of the territory that they conquered east of the Jordan River. Moses agreed to this, on the condition that they assist the western tribes in conquering Canaan (Numbers 32:28–32). They did so, but they did not assist the other tribes in battle during the period of judges (Judges 5:16), and the tribe falls into scriptural obscurity.

3. Simeon

The man Simeon (with his brother Levi) slaughtered the men of an entire city to avenge his sister (Genesis 34:25–31). The tribe’s portion of land was within the midst of Judah’s territory (Joshua 19:1); however, Simeon did not grow as rapidly as Judah and seems to have dispersed across multiple territories (1 Chronicles 4:38–43; 2 Chronicles 15:8–9). This is consistent with Jacob’s prophecy concerning Simeon and his brother Levi: “I will disperse them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.”

4. Levi

The tribe of the PRIESTHOOD. The tribe of Levi stood by Moses (a Levite) during the golden calf incident at Mount Sinai (Exodus 32:25–29), and later took their place as ministers to the tabernacle, and later the Temple. Levi had no tribal territory—the Lord was the tribe’s inheritance (Numbers 18:19–20)—though they did receive pasture lands for their cattle (Joshua 21). Levitical duties were extensive (read Leviticus!), but Moses gives a brief summary of their significance in his blessing for the tribe (Deuteronomy 33:8–11).

Notable tribesmen: Moses, Aaron, John the Baptist, Barnabas

5. Zebulun

Zebulun doesn’t get very much attention in the Bible. The tribe does boast a strong, loyal fighting force during the days of the judges and King David. In fact, Zebulun had the largest presence in the army that made David king of Israel at Hebron, and they served him with “an undivided heart” (1 Chronicles 12:33).

6. Issachar.

Issachar has even less biblical presence than Zebulun, but the tribe was loyal to Deborah and Barak (Judges 5:15). They’re also remembered as “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do” (1 Chronicles 12:32).

7. Dan.

We don’t read much about the man Dan, but we do see his tribe up to no good in the book of Judges. The tribe did not secure their original portion of land (Judges 1:34; 18:1), and instead migrated northward. In the process, they took for themselves other gods (Judges 18:14–17) and set up a new priesthood (Judges 18–20). The tribe later joins Jeroboam in idolatry when the kingdom of Israel divides (1 Kings 12:28–29).

Notable tribesman: Samson

8. Gad.

Little is said of Gad, the man or the tribe. They, like Reuben, settled east of the Jordan.

9. Asher.

Jacob prophesied that Asher’s tribe would enjoy rich foods (Genesis 49:20), and the tribe went on to possess a region of eastern Galilee which is still known for its olive groves.

10. Naphtali.

Naphtali, with Zebulun, is mentioned by the prophet Isaiah in a passage we read often during Christmastime: “For a child will be born to us . . .” This promise was given concerning the land of Galilee, specifically, the “land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali.” You can read the whole prophecy in Isaiah 9.

11. Ephraim.

This tribe is named after Joseph’s son. Joseph received the birthright from Jacob, and instead of just one tribe, he is the ancestor of two (Manasseh is the other). After the kingdom divides, the Northern Kingdom’s capital is in Ephraim’s territory, and the prophets sometimes refer to the entire nation as “Ephraim” (Jeremiah 31:9, Hosea 5:3).

Notable tribesmen: Joshua, Samuel

12. Benjamin.

This small tribe has played several important roles in Israel’s history. Benjamin stood against the rest of Israel in a national civil war (Judges 20:14–21:24). Saul, the first anointed king of Israel, was from Benjamin. The tribe was also loyal to David’s descendants when the northern tribes seceded (1 Kings 12:16–24).

Notable tribesmen: King Saul, Mordecai, Paul

13. Manasseh.

This tribe descended from Joseph’s firstborn son, and uniquely settled on both sides of the Jordan River (Joshua 17:5–6). The eastern settlement is often referred to as the “half-tribe of Manasseh.”

Why 13?

Levi didn't receive tribal territory like the other tribes. Also, Joseph's sons were considered heads of their own tribes—both of which received an inheritance of land. In some lists, Joseph is counted as one of the 12 (Genesis 49; Deuteronomy 33). In others, Levi isn't counted, and Ephraim and Manasseh are considered distinct tribes.

Here's the math:

12 tribes – 1 (Levi) – 1 (Joseph) + 1 (Ephraim) + 1 (Manasseh) = 12 tribes

A Summary:

“Certainly, the passage shows how God prospered Jacob and started to form his great nation. But it was sad that they could not adjust to unfavorable situations and avoid the hatred and the conflict, for that pressure only further split the family and the nation. All Israel could look back to this tradition and see their ancestry in Jacob — and in the conflict between the women. They were brothers, sons of Israel, and should not, like their mothers, waiver in their faith and bitterly compete for God's blessing. Prosperity is dispensed to people by the sovereign will of God.

We thus have the rivalry between the two women. Leah, a woman of strong faith, was earnestly longing for the affection of her husband but was being blessed by God in childbirth. Rachel does not appear so strong in the faith; she possessed the affection of her husband but anxiously desired the blessing of God in childbirth. In it all, the message was clear to Israel. God chose the despised mother, Leah, and exalted her to be the first mother. The kingly tribe of Judah and the priestly tribe of Levi were traced back to her, in spite of Jacob's love for Rachel and his later favoritism toward Rachel's son Joseph.

We can learn many lessons from this struggle in Jacob's family. Although having two wives was not immediately Jacob's fault (the law only later prohibited such a marriage [Lev. 18:18]), through it God taught the nation about his wisdom and justice and compassion. We can learn the danger of favoritism in family relationships, a recurring theme in the patriarchal narratives. We can also learn about the danger of thwarting human affection. The tragedy comes when we, striving for love and recognition, either within the family or not, live our lives on such an earthly level that only temporal things mean much to us. To sacrifice things spiritual for things physical—to trade things that are above trade value—is tragic in the long run. This loss may happen when we are filled with anxiety and envy over the apparent inequity of God's dealings with his people. *God's people must put away envy and strife, which lead to bitter conflicts, and accept the truth that God dispenses his blessings in sovereign wisdom, justice, and compassion.*

We learn that God's choice to bless is not made by human standards. In fact, God characteristically works for things or people that humans reject—the downcast, the afflicted, the troubled, the oppressed, and the rejected. Those who find themselves in such predicaments can by faith rely on God, who in his sovereign plan will bless them. His blessing, however, cannot be gained by bargaining or striving.

Whatever our lot in life—whether we are hated or ignored, oppressed or challenged, troubled or anxious—our attitude should not be one of jealousy, nor our efforts those of bitter rivalry. Rather, we must cultivate a wholehearted trust in God, waiting patiently for his blessing on us. Paul, in Romans 13:13–14, says, “Let us walk properly, as in the day ... not in strife and envy.... But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*, 514–515