

The Complexities of Love and Marriage
Genesis 29 & 30 – excerpts
Fairview Presbyterian Church
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The biblical ideal versus human reality

¹⁸Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.”

The rock singer Hozier, in his song, *Someone New*, sings:

*Would things be easier if there was a right way?
Honey, there is no right way.*

As Hozier sings these words, the video portrays a young woman moving from one random hookup to the next. The encounters are casual, there is nothing enduring about them. There is no real investment of one person into the life of another. The relational encounters are superficial. And, I would argue that the reason for the superficiality is captured in the question Hozier asks, and then answers. “*Would things be easier if there was a right way? Honey, there is no right way.*” But what if there is a *right way*? Is there an ideal of what family relations, the relation of man and woman, ought to be like?

Modern secular folk like to criticize the ancient world for its cultural practices. Modern secular elites look at Jacob’s words in this verse - “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” – and they are horrified at the concept of paying a bride-price for a wife. But think about it. In offering seven years of his labor, Jacob is declaring the great esteem and value he places upon Rachel as his wife. Rachel is not expected simply to hook up with Jacob. Jacob must prove his love and earnestness before he can have Rachel as a wife. I think this model is preferable to the modern romantic chaos of today’s world.

In one sense, the biblical ideal for the family is clear: mom and dad, married and happy, together with their children and, in some circumstances, extended family members, living under one roof or in close proximity to one another. This is what the modern world calls the ‘nuclear family.’ It is rightfully considered the norm, the ideal. It is the goal we aspire to in our own lives.

At the same time, ours is a fallen, broken world. The world about us is not ideal. The world is not as it should be. And, while the vision of the nuclear family is the norm, the ideal, the fact remains that we must learn to live in the world as we find it. Life is messy. This is the world as it is.

The Bible is a very realistic book. It is God’s word to us. God knows our circumstances. He knows that men and women make right and wrong choices, wise and foolish choices, mistaken choices, and sinful choices. God knows that parents make choices that have consequences for their children. The stories the Bible tells are

not the stories of ideal families. They are the stories of dysfunctional families, broken relationships, and errant people. Yet, nonetheless, they are stories of how God is at work in the lives of his people. These stories tell us that God meets us in less than ideal circumstances. They remind us that God is at work in our fallen world. And, he is at work in our far from perfect lives.

Let's meet the characters of our story: Jacob, Laban, Rachel and Leah

Jacob - Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother.

Jacob is the younger of the twin brothers born to Isaac and Rebekah. Jacob is a trickster, a conniver, a man of schemes and intrigue. Because of his brother Esau's shortsighted foolishness, Jacob obtained Esau's *birthright* – the privileges that come with being the firstborn in a family. For that, Esau is to blame. But later, when Isaac is old and unable to see clearly, Jacob, with the assistance of his mother, Rebekah, schemes to obtain a special blessing Isaac intended to give to Esau. For this act of deception, Jacob is guilty.

And, as a consequence of the deception, Jacob is on the run. He is penniless and has traveled quite a distance, to the home of his uncle Laban. There he meets Laban's younger daughter, Rachel, and falls madly in love with her.

One more thing to know about Jacob: he is not, at this point in his life, a particularly religious man. He is at the beginning of his spiritual journey, literally and figuratively. As we saw in our study last week, the vision God gave to Jacob is of a ramp between earth and heaven. From this Jacob begins to perceive that there is at work in our world unseen spiritual realities, overseen by God the Father. Until now, Jacob has lived by his cleverness. But Jacob is the son of Isaac, and he will inherit the mantle of the patriarchs. God intends to teach Jacob to be a man of faith. God is at a work in Jacob's life, in ways that Jacob as yet does not perceive or understand.

Laban - "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?"

Laban is the brother of Jacob's mother, Rebekah. Laban remembers, years earlier, that Abraham's servant came to his family, accompanied by a caravan of camels, carrying gifts of clothing, cloth, gifts, gold and jewelry. Laban notes that his nephew Jacob arrives with nothing but the clothes on his back. Laban senses that he can benefit from, he can exploit, his nephew's weakness and need.

Rachel - but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance.

Rachel is the younger of Laban's daughters. She has womanly curves and is beautiful. And, she knows the power of her beauty. Jacob is smitten by her looks. He quickly proposes a deal with Laban in order to obtain Rachel in marriage. Jacob has no

money or wealth, so he offers what he has, his labor, his time. He will work for Laban for seven years in payment of the bride price. From Jacob's perspective it is a small price. The seven years are nothing to him. They pass quickly. The wedding celebration is arranged.

Leah - Leah's eyes were weak,

We are told that Leah's "*eyes were weak*." The Hebrew behind these words is obscure. Translators debate at length how to understand what it is that we are being told about Leah. I do not think it matters. God does not intend for us to know what Leah's physical handicap was. What we know is enough: Rachel is attractive and beautiful; Leah is less so. Leah is the model for us for any time that we may feel inferior to the gifts, blessings and talents of another. Rachel has all the advantages. She is privileged. How will God be at work in the life of one who is not gifted, blessed or talented? This is what Leah will teach us.

On the night of his supposed wedding to Rachel, Jacob the trickster is himself tricked. He wakes the next morning and it is not Rachel beside him, but Leah! Maybe Jacob had had too much to drink. Certainly the womanly veils of Middle Eastern dress had deceived him. And he had been deceived by his uncle Laban **and** his betrothed, Rachel – for Rachel had to have, at least passively, participated in the substitution of Leah.

This sets the stage for the first observation this morning: God is at work in and through less than ideal circumstances.

God is at work in and through less than ideal circumstances

²⁷Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." ²⁸Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.

In good Middle Eastern fashion, negotiations are quickly reopened on the morning after his wedding to Leah and Jacob agrees to work for Laban for an additional seven years in exchange for **both Leah and Rachel**. After a week's honeymoon with Leah, a second wedding celebration is given, and this time Jacob is given Rachel, the woman his heart desires, and he is off for another week long honeymoon with her.

Jacob is now married to two women, two sisters. Later, in the Law given by Moses, (Leviticus 18:18) such a double marriage arrangement would be prohibited. As we shall see, there is great wisdom behind this law. The Chinese language uses pictograms to communicate Chinese words. The pictogram for the word "trouble" in Chinese is that of *two women under one roof*. Trouble is the world Jacob has inherited with his two wives, his two sisters. Jacob had not *intended* this outcome, but it is the outcome he is given. It sets the stage for the drama that will unfold. Now we watch how God will act. God is at work in Jacob's life. And, God will providentially determine that his will unfolds in the lives of this patriarch, his two wives, and their families. Jacob is

one man, married to two sisters. The particular nature of Jacob's marriage is so problematic that later Hebrew law would ban the Israelites from following Jacob's example. One man married to two sisters is neither a propitious formula for family happiness nor for the building of a successful family culture. Indeed, as we shall see, there will be a great deal of envy, heartache and disappointment for all concerned as the lives of these four people – Jacob, Laban, Rachel and Leah – unfold. The key thing to note is that the failure on Jacob's part to have an ideal background, or a model marriage, in no way prohibits God's hand from being at work in his life and purpose.

What this means for us practically today is this. When you look at your own family background and culture – when you take note of the in-laws and outlaws you are connected to by blood or marriage – such connections may not be a pretty sight. But the fact that things in your family are not what they should be, or what you wish they might be, or even what you know they ought to be: these facts do not prevent God from being at work in your midst, for your welfare and to his glory.

I like the premise behind the Percy Jackson stories. Percy Jackson and his friends are folk who are being raised in less than ideal family settings. Percy, like many of his friends, has an absentee father. He is being raised in a single parent household. What Percy, and we the reader discover, is that Percy's absentee father is one of the ancient Greek gods. This is fitting, the ancient Greek gods were not known for their sexual continence. The overarching message of the series is that the children of these lesser gods can, nonetheless, find meaning, fulfillment and satisfaction in life, even though they were raised in less than ideal circumstances.

That too is the message of these chapters from Genesis. Jacob's situation is difficult. His children will be raised in a household of half-brothers and half-sisters. There will be competition between each side of the family. They will all know heartache, disappointment, envy, jealousy, joy, anger, and sorrow. In the midst of it all, they will see God's hand at work. He will be at work, accomplishing his purposes, using Jacob and his wives and concubines to God's ultimate honor and glory.

This teaches us that while there are ideals we should strive to pursue, at the same time, there are no absolute formulas in life. Clearly, children are most likely to thrive and do well in an intact home with both a mom and a dad. But there are no guarantees. God has made it clear that there are some things we should do and there are other things we should avoid doing. We do some things and refrain from doing other things, because we know that doing so is what God expects of us. At the same time, we know that the past is past. We cannot change that. But we also know that God is at work in our lives in the present. We can repent, confess, and turn again to God and know with certainty, and great encouragement, that God will be at work in our midst. We may have sown a crop of bitterness, but even in the bitter consequences, God can meet us and be working his perfect will.

That is the first point: God is at work through less than ideal circumstances. The second is that social customs are usually worth observing and preserving.

Social customs are usually worth observing and preserving

²⁶Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn.

As a rule, there are usually good reasons why we observe the social customs that surround marriages. There are good reasons why the bride and groom should not see each other on the day of the wedding until the doors open and the ceremony begins. (Though I believe Jacob might disagree with me – noting that it was the *custom* of the bridal veil that tripped him up in his intent to marry Rachel alone! ☺) There are good reasons why the mothers and grandmothers are given the place of honor and why dad accompanies his daughter down the aisle. For most people, their wedding day will be the single most complex ceremony that they will take part in during their lives. Marriage is the means by which we recognize the establishment of lifelong unions between a man and a woman, the creation of new households, and, when the children arrive, new families. In a marriage, it is not just the couple who are being united, but two families. The custom of asking a father for permission to marry his daughter is a means for the groom to be sure that he has the support of his bride’s family in the marriage. It is possible to make a successful marriage without the support of both sides of the family, but it is much more difficult to do so if that support is missing.

Customs are there for our good. There is usually a reason for them. In our story, Leah is protected by the custom: the older daughter is to be married before the younger. This custom ensures that the family is interested in finding a suitable husband for each sister. In this story from Genesis, Rachel had to be complicit – at the very least in a passive way – for the deception of Jacob to occur. Rachel too understands the worth of the tradition and custom. In a similar way, Laban is looking out for his eldest daughter’s interests. Whatever Leah’s weakness may have been, Laban, as her father, still had an interest and obligation in seeking a suitable husband for her. At the same time, this is not to justify what Laban, Rachel and Leah do. They deceive Jacob, and that is not right. Jacob should have been wiser and smarter. Until now in the story of Genesis it has always been Jacob who had been the trickster, but now, in his infatuation with Rachel, he allows himself to be tricked. Jacob is so caught up in his desire for Rachel that his additional gaining of Leah as a wife is seen by him as a small thing.

In our story we learn that God works through less than ideal circumstances. And, that social customs usually have a good reason behind them. Thirdly, it teaches that what we want and what we need are often not the same thing.

What we want, and what we need, are often not the same

²⁵And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?”

I had a friend in seminary who, speaking of his wife, said to me one day, “I knew what I wanted, but God knew what I needed.” His words were an affirmation and blessing of his wife. He was saying that she was more than what he anticipated he

would want or desire in a marriage partner. He was saying that his initial desires were small, limited, and superficial.

The ancient Greeks used to say that “If the gods wish to condemn a man, they first answer his prayers.” What is meant is that often in life, we do not know really what we need, what is for our good. We know our wants. We know what we desire. But we do not know what is good, right and wise for us. We see this truth revealed in young children. Children do not know the dangers of life: *Do not cross the street without looking both ways; Do not stick objects in the electrical outlet; Do not touch a hot stove.* It is the parent’s job to watch out for the child, to anticipate the dangers, and take preventative measures.

It is sobering to think that God must do the same thing for us as adults. This is a truth that Jacob must learn. He is besotted in his love for Rachel. What Jacob must learn is that beauty alone is not a sufficient basis for marriage. Erotic love has its place in marriage, but it is not the firmest foundation for marriage. Eros is one thing: parenting is another. The clever and self-reliant Jacob is about to be humbled by love and the responsibilities of marriage. What Jacob wants, and what he needs, are not the same thing. And God, in his marriage to both Leah and Rachel, is in the process of revealing this truth to Jacob. Some truths and insights about life are available only over time. There are some things you cannot learn from a book. There are some insights that only come with maturity.

And this leads to the next point in our study: God uses men and women to educate one another.

God uses men and women to educate one another

When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I shall die!”

Men and women are different. The values and priorities of men and women are different. Men and women have different perspectives on life. And, because men and women are different, men and women often do not understand one another. Some years ago there was a rather silly movie entitled “*What Women Want.*” Its premise was the story of a man who, as the result of an accidental electrical shock, is given the ability to read the minds of the women around him. He knows “what women want.” Like I said, it is a silly movie. But, we enjoy the truth of the premise that in very important ways, men and women really are mysteries to one another.

What makes the situation for Jacob even more complex is that he is the head of a household comprised not of one woman, but two. Further, the two women are very different among themselves. Leah is fertile and takes easily to motherhood. She learns quickly that motherhood is its own reward, giving birth to four sons. In contrast, Rachel has trouble conceiving. Rachel wants children, but in her desire she is self-centered. She envies her sister. It is not the children that matter to Rachel, but her desire to remove the stain of barrenness. Rachel, the pretty one, is ashamed to be shown up by

her older, plain sister. She wishes more for the removal of the shame, and less the actual arrival of the child. However, the text makes clear that Leah is the one favored by God. Leah is giving Jacob sons. She is raising the next generation of the patriarchal family. Leah is preferred. Motherhood is preferred. Jacob desires Rachel. But Rachel demands what Jacob is powerless to give: 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?" Jacob can perform his husbandly duties, but it is God who gives life. In her desperation, Rachel makes a less than ideal proposal: she will give to Jacob her handmaid, Bilhah, as a wife and she, Rachel, will adopt the children that result from their union. As we noted at the beginning of this message: life is messy.

Culturally, this was an acceptable arrangement, but that it was acceptable does not hide the reality of Rachel's sense of desperation. And, presumably the family would have gathered and talked together around the evening campfires. I would assume that they would tell the stories of their parents and grandparents. I assume that they would have told the story of Sarah, Jacob's grandmother, - another woman desperate for a child - giving to Abraham her handmaid, Hagar, for an adoptable alternative child. Of course, that did not end happily. Jacob should have known the story. He should have known the danger and uncertainty. In the end, surrogate motherhood turns out better for Jacob than it did for Abraham and Sarah, his grandparents. But he must have known the risks involved.

And, I wonder if they told the story of Isaac and Rebekah. Rebekah too had difficulty conceiving. Rebekah and Jacob resist the temptation to resort to concubinage. They remain faithful to each other alone. We are told that Isaac prayed. God heard his prayers, giving them the twin sons, Jacob and Esau.

In these developments, God is pointing Jacob towards the virtue and example, the model of Leah. There are truths and insights Jacob must learn from the witness and example of Leah. Rachel is given the advantage of good looks, but God is teaching Jacob, and Rachel, that marriage is more than mere physical appeal, more than erotic desire.

One touching element of the story is Leah's unfading love and desire for her husband Jacob. What she desires is that that love be reciprocated. She wants Jacob to love her. Her hope is that with each pregnancy and successful birth that Jacob's heart would turn towards her further. It does not happen. But she hopes and prays that it will.

And this leads to our next point: adversity encourages spiritual growth.

Adversity encourages spiritual growth

³¹When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren

Here is what the text tells us regarding the birth of Leah's first four sons.

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.

Remember that Leah’s father, Laban, is a pagan. Leah has not been raised in the knowledge of the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and – presumably ☺ - the God of Jacob. (Jacob’s faith will come one day.) Yet, in the naming of her children, we see Leah turning to the God of the patriarchs. Three of the four names mention God. That is surprising. (It is also surprising that Leah names the children and not Jacob: but that is for another sermon.) Leah is turning to the God of Abraham. Her adversity draws her to God. She senses that she is being particularly blessed by God. She understands that children, sons, are a gift from God. She accepts Jacob’s God: and from her are born Levi – who will be the father of the priesthood of Israel; and Judah – who will be the father of the political leaders of the tribes.

I do not know if Leah ever won her husband Jacob’s heart. But I know that in the trial and adversity she faced, she came to rely on God and put her trust in him. When she names her fourth son, Judah, she stops naming her sons after her hope of winning Jacob’s love and affection. Instead she declares at his birth, “This time I will praise the Lord.” Whatever else happens or does not happen, the God of the patriarchs is now her God also.

And that leads to our final point. So far we have seen in our story that God works through less than ideal circumstances. And, that social customs usually have a good reason behind them. We saw how the text shows that what we want and what we need are often not the same thing. Next we noted how God uses men and women, in their shared humanity, but differing gender, to teach and educate one another. We saw how adversity encourages spiritual growth in our lives in the example of Leah. Finally, we note from this story how God superintends his purposes in spite of human intrigue and failure.

God superintends his purposes in spite of human intrigue and failure

²⁴ And she called his name Joseph, saying, “May the Lord add to me another son!”

I began by noting how the Bible lifts up as the ideal the vision of married life between one man and one woman, together with the children God provides and, in some cases members of the extended family. This is the biblical ideal. We also noted – at the same time – the absence of such an ideal in the story of Jacob. Jacob is on the run, hiding from the wrath of his brother Esau. He has arrived in his uncle’s land penniless. He has no family members to negotiate a bride price or to offer their wealth in

payment. He makes a deal for Rachel as his bride that he is happy to make, but on his wedding night, his uncle Laban provides a classic bait and switch. Jacob is given Leah, the older, homelier daughter. Annoyed, Jacob has no choice but to offer another seven years of his labor to Laban in exchange for Rachel, the woman he has desired all along. Jacob now heads a household marked by envy and competition between the two sisters. Leah is fertile Myrtle, giving birth to four sons in rapid succession. She hopes, in doing so, to win Jacob's love and affection, but fails in that end. Rachel grows envious of her sister's fertility. In desperation she gives her handmaid to her husband as a surrogate wife, intending to adopt as her own any children born of their union. Leah does the same with her handmaid, in order to keep up in the competition for child bearing. Finally, late in the game, Rachel herself becomes pregnant, giving birth to a son, a favored son, named Joseph. But the name reflects Rachel's dissatisfaction. She does not simply rejoice that she is finally a mother in her own right. She instead begins pressing God to give her another son. Rachel is not through with her competition with her sister Leah. She wants to match her, and surpass her, as she has always done in her good looks.

Life is messy. This has been a story about lust – Jacob's desire for Rachel. It is a story of deception – Laban's substitution of Leah on Jacob's wedding night. It is a story of rivalry between the two sisters. It is a poignant tale of Leah's desire to be loved by her husband, and her husband's apparent thick-headed indifference. It is a story of competition within a family. Genesis does not tell us, but I think we can assume that the two handmaids played their own roles in the competition between the sisters. There was great enmity in this household. And yet, truth be told, it was the competition, the rivalry, that enabled Jacob's clan to grow rapidly in size and number. The book of Genesis will now begin speaking of the twelve sons of Jacob. By the time we reach the next book in the Bible, the twelve sons have become the twelve tribes of Israel – the Jewish people. It is this competition within the family of Jacob, that God uses to birth the Jewish people.

This, my friends, is the great message of the Bible. God takes the foibles, failings, and sinful decisions of men and women, and turns them to his purposes. We make small decisions. We fail to live up to the standards God has established. We deceive one another. We enter into household competitions. We engage in family rivalries. We make our choices on the low down. But God is over us. He is superintending his will and purpose to unfold. He is sovereign. We choose. God makes straight our paths. This is the truth illustrated in this facet of the story of Jacob and his wives and sons.

This truth finds its greatest expression and fulfillment in the passion of Jesus Christ. It too is a story of human failure and corruption. Jesus is betrayed by one of his own. He is turned over to the authorities in the dead of night, betrayed by a kiss. Jesus is guilty of no crime, but he is mocked and beaten and condemned in a show trial by the religious authorities. He is brought before the governor, who declares that he finds no fault or guilt in the man Jesus. The governor releases a notorious robber and murderer, rather than release the innocent Jesus as he ought to do. He has Jesus whipped. He sends Jesus to his death ironically declaring the truth of who Jesus is: "The King of the

Jews.” In the agony of death, Jesus is accompanied by two criminals, who deserved their punishment. Jesus speaks words of kindness to those gathered with him about the cross, and then he dies. In his poverty he is buried in a borrowed tomb.

There is *nothing right* about the details of this story. It is wrong, from beginning to end.

But, this is not the end. On the third day, death is no longer permitted to hold Jesus. He had done no wrong. He had committed no crime. He had acted no sin. The cosmos itself acknowledged that death had no claim upon this righteous, innocent man. Yet, all of the wickedness of Friday is undone in the resurrection on Sunday. The resurrection does not make the wickedness of Friday less wicked. What happened then was wrong, sinful and corrupt. But even in the blackness of Good Friday, God was at work, superintending his purposes in the passion of Jesus Christ.

Whatever your failing. Whatever your past. Whatever your foolishness. God can overrule it according to his good and perfect purpose. For those who love God through Jesus Christ, all things work together for good.

I am calling you to faith today. I am calling you to turn to Jesus in believing trust. Ask God to be at work in your life. Ask him to redeem your past and to superintend his purposes even in the foolishness and sinfulness that is your history.

Say “Amen” Somebody.

Genesis 29:1 – 30:24 (excerpts)

29 Then Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the east.

⁹While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. ¹⁰Now as soon as Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, Jacob came near and rolled the stone from the well's mouth and watered the flock of Laban his mother's brother. ¹¹Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud. ¹²And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman, and that he was Rebekah's son, and she ran and told her father.

¹³As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he ran to meet him and embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house. Jacob told Laban all these things, ¹⁴and Laban said to him, "Surely you are my bone and my flesh!" And he stayed with him a month.

¹⁵Then Laban said to Jacob, "Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?" ¹⁶Now Laban had two daughters. The name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. ¹⁷Leah's eyes were weak, but Rachel was beautiful in form and appearance. ¹⁸Jacob loved Rachel. And he said, "I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel." ¹⁹Laban said, "It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me." ²⁰So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

²¹Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed." ²²So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. ²³But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. ²⁴(Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) ²⁵And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?" ²⁶Laban said, "It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. ²⁷Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years." ²⁸Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. ²⁹(Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) ³⁰So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years.

Jacob's Children

³¹When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. ³²And 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." ³³She 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.”

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!”