

## Genesis Chapters 29-30 – John Karmelich

1. Most adults are familiar with the expression, “What goes around, comes around”.
  - a) That expression refers to the idea that what you do to others, comes back to haunt you.
  - b) Most Christians have also heard of the concept of “reaping what you sow”.
    - i) (Reference: Galatians 6:7-9, et.al.). It is the same idea as “what goes around, comes around”. We’re going to see that lesson hit Jacob in these chapters.
  - c) In the last lesson, we read about “Jacob the conniver”.
    - i) We read how he deceived his father in order to get the “special blessing” that his father Isaac intended to give to Jacob’s brother Esau.
    - ii) By the end of the chapter, Jacob had to run away to avoid his brother’s anger. His mother, who was part of the deception, told Jacob to flee to Haran, his mother’s hometown, and get a wife for himself. This was roughly a 500-mile journey from what-is-today Israel to what-is-today Northern Iraq.
    - iii) Along the way, Jacob encounters God. It is the first we read of God speaking directly to Jacob. In a sense, Jacob becomes “born-again” at that point. Jacob commits his life to serving God, albeit in very immature ways as Jacob tries to bargain with God in exchange for future blessings.
  - d) Chapters 29 and 30 are the “further adventures of Jacob”. Jacob gets deceived by another the same way Jacob deceived his father. We’re going to watch Jacob’s life “come home to roost” as he learns of his own mistakes by being deceived himself.
2. It is always important as a bible student to not just read the stories, but to get the personal application. To me the most important aspect of bible study is not to learn history lessons, but to learn how they apply to our live today.
  - a) In the last chapter Jacob dedicates his life to serving God. The next four chapters are predominantly about the lessons Jacob had to learn in order to mature his faith.
  - b) When God first called you to serve Him, God never says, “You’re now perfect, I’m through with you, you are now free to go about your life as you see best!” ☺
    - i) When we first commit our lives to Jesus, we are “perfect” in the sense that we accept Jesus payment of our sins, past, present and future. In that sense, we are perfect from God’s perspective.
    - ii) On the other hand, God is constantly working in our lives to make us a better person here on earth. Part of the reason is God wants a better relationship with Him. He wants us to trust him more and more and He wants us to realize just how dependant upon God we really are. Further, he wants us to be a good witness to others. A mature Christian who is fully dependant upon God for his or her life, is a “better witness” than one who trusts in God but still acts no differently than a person who doesn’t trust in God to begin with.
  - c) When we read of Jacob’s escapades over the next few chapters, don’t just sit there and wag your head in disapproval at Jacob! ☺ Stop and think about your own life and ask: What aspects of my life is God working on? God used events in Jacob’s life to remind him of past sins in his own life. What is God doing in my life now and what does God want me to learn from those lessons?
    - i) Sometimes the toughest moments in life are designed to teach us things. We tend to learn best from our mistakes. This is why God allows tragedies, deceptions, and pain in our life. It is to teach us to trust Him more. Often, it is also to remind us of past events or past sins that God wants us to deal with. I have seen God bring the same situation into someone’s life over and over again until they “get it” and learn what God is trying to teach us.

- ii) One of the best prayers I have ever heard someone pray in times of tragedy is the following: “Lord, please teach us the lessons you want us to learn from this situation. Then, give us the strength, courage and focus to properly get through it and the discernment to make the decisions we have to make”.
  - iii) Which leads us back to Genesis 29-30. These two chapters focus on the life of Jacob after being “born again”. We’re going to read of high’s and low’s in Jacob’s life over the next four chapters. The big-picture idea is to see how God is working to mature Jacob in his faith-based relationship with God.
  - iv) During these two chapters, there is not one mention of God speaking to Jacob. There is no mention of any prayer by Jacob. God working in our lives is primarily through events and circumstances. This is not to say that direct revelations and prayer is not important. Think about how much time of your day is spent in prayer versus how much time is spent “doing things”. My simple point is God uses the events of our lives to help shape us into better people. To put our trust in God means that we are a “construction project” that God then molds and shapes through the daily events of our lives.
  - v) I should also add that I am not anti-planning. Jacob did a lot of planning during these chapters. Some of his plans came to pass and some did not. The point is God works in our lives. Sometimes He works through our plans and sometimes he doesn’t. Our job is to keep moving forward so we can tell if God is “blessing or blocking” whatever we are doing!
3. Chap. 29, Vs. 1: Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern peoples.
- a) One has to remember that this is a continual story. The Hebrew word behind “continued his journey” can be literally translated “happy feat”. It is the idea of walking in trust of God, and full of joy as one walks.
  - b) The last few verses of Chapter 28 were Jacob making a vow to God. Jacob said essentially, “If (or since) God is with me on this journey, I’ll give God 10% of whatever I make”.
    - i) As I stated in the last lesson, you can’t bargain with God. As to the “10%” part, the bible teaches that first 10% of whatever we make belongs to God anyway as a sign of trust. (Ref.: Leviticus 27:30, et.al.)
  - c) Remember that God works with us on our level. The commitment by Jacob was sincere, but was not “theologically correct”. You can’t bargain with God. What did happen here, is that God “got a foothold” on Jacob’s life. It’s a start. God didn’t correct Jacob at this point, as God just wanted the commitment. Over the rest of Jacob’s life God will work on maturing his relationship with him.
  - d) For the same reason, I am never critical of how one first becomes “saved”. I am interested in the fact that they fully put their trust in Jesus, even though they don’t understand all of the biblical implications of that statement. One of the great mistakes made by Christians is we expect too much from new believers. It is God’s job to fix their lives, not ours. They didn’t dedicate their lives to serving us, just God. Let God fix them and mature them!
  - e) Meanwhile, back to Jacob! ☺
4. Verse 2: There he saw a well in the field, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. <sup>3</sup> When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.
- a) These verses set the scene of Jacob’s encounter with his future wife Rachel.
  - b) When we think of a well, we think of a 4-foot high brick cylinder with a crank handle and a bucket. A well in those days was an hourglass shaped hole used to collect rainwater. It was sealed with a rock to keep dirt from entering the hole.

- c) Next to this hole was a bunch of shepherds and sheep. They did not roll away the stone until “everyone” (i.e., all the shepherds who usually came there) was there together.
    - i) Why they waited is unknown. Maybe it was just a tradition that to be fair, they waited for everyone to gather. This was the biblical version of “everyone gathering at the water cooler” for the social event of the day.
    - ii) It is also suggested that it may be that the shepherds were older children, and they needed everyone’s strength to move the stone.
    - iii) We’re also going to read of the “beautiful Rachel” coming with her flock. If I know men, maybe they were all waiting for Rachel to show up first! ☺
5. Verse 4: Jacob asked the shepherds, "My brothers, where are you from?" "We're from Haran," they replied. <sup>5</sup> He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?" "Yes, we know him," they answered. <sup>6</sup> Then Jacob asked them, "Is he well?" "Yes, he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep."
- a) You have to remember that there are no road maps or billboards that say “100 miles to Haran! ☺ Jacob didn’t know where he was. He asked a few of the locals about Laban. Remember that Laban is the brother of Jacob’s mother Rebekah. Therefore, Jacob would know about Rebekah and her parents, but not about any daughters. Jacob’s mother Rebekah told Jacob to get a wife from Laban’s family. Jacob didn’t even know at this point if that family even had any women available to be a bride.
  - b) One of the things I pondered is why is so much text spent on this particular story. The bible could have simply said, “Jacob met his cousin Rachel by the well, and they went to go meet her father Laban”. Instead, we have all of these details recorded about how Jacob first encountered Rachel.
    - i) My reaction is, “You always remember the details of how you first fell in love”. After years of marriage, you forget a lot of things, but you always remember how you first met and when you first saw your love. Maybe that is why the details of this story were passed on to future generations.
6. Verse 7: "Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture." <sup>8</sup> "We can't," they replied, "until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep." <sup>9</sup> While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. <sup>10</sup> When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep. <sup>11</sup> Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. <sup>12</sup> He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father.
- a) In Verses 7-8 we have the local shepherds again saying “We can’t water the sheep until all of us local shepherds are here together”. Again, the reason is not stated.
  - b) Jacob takes matters into his own hands and says in effect, “Look, I’ll move the stone. Start watering the sheep and get moving”.
  - c) This is “Jacob the schemer” at work. He wanted Rachel to himself and get rid of the crowd. Some commentators suggested Jacob had “super-human strength” to move the rock over the well. Personally, I think that God is working in the background again. God arranges the circumstances for Jacob to be alone with Rachel (not counting the sheep! ☺).
  - d) The key moment is in Verse 11 where “Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud.”
    - i) Guys, if you are trying to make a good impression on your first date, don’t cry in front of the girl! ☺ Jacob was doing ok and being macho by moving the big rock, and then he started crying!

- ii) Actually, I think the crying was all the emotion sinking in of everything that has happened to Jacob so far. He traveled all of this distance alone. He realized God was with him and blessed this journey. Jacob “happens” to encounter Laban’s daughter, as per Jacob’s mother’s request. Jacob didn’t even know if he had a daughter at this point. Sometimes seeing God at work and realizing how God has fulfilled promises can overcome us with emotion.
- 7. Verse 13: As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. <sup>14</sup> Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood."
  - a) You have to remember that this is not our first encounter with Laban.
    - i) Laban is the brother to Jacob’s mother Rebekah.
    - ii) Back when Abraham’s servant went to go get a wife for Rebekah (Genesis 24), Laban and his father Nahor were the ones who greeted Abraham’s servant.
    - iii) We will discover that Laban, like Jacob are both the conniving type. The bible implies that Laban is very “money-oriented” in his life.
    - iv) Laban remembers that when Abraham’s servant showed up, he brought all sorts of gifts for Rebekah and for Nahor/Laban. Therefore Laban remembered that Abraham’s family was very rich. With that in mind, now read Verse 13b: “He (Laban) hurried to meet him.” Yes Laban did care it was family, but I suspect that a rich cousin just showed up and Laban was interested.
- 8. Verse 14b: After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, <sup>15</sup> Laban said to him, "Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be."
  - a) This is our first of many clues that Laban is money oriented. This is Laban’s subtle way of telling Jacob to stop being a freeloader! Jacob has now stayed at Laban’s house a month. Laban is saying to Jacob in a sense, “Look, how much should I pay you for working for me”. It was subtle way to tell Jacob to stop being a bum! ☺
- 9. Verse 16: Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup> Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful. <sup>18</sup> Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, "I'll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel."
  - a) “Leah had weak eyes”. Commentators vary as to what this means, but in summary, she was not as pretty as Rachel. Some say she was ugly, others say had a “lazy eye”. The main point is to remember she is less physically desirable than her sister Rachel.
  - b) What we are seeing here is a “dowry”. For a man to be married, he must pay a price to the father-in-law. The concept is that if he ever leaves her, dowry money is to be used to support the girl. Since Jacob traveled empty handed to Haran, he paid the dowry by working for Laban. Seven years is a very generous offer.
  - c) (I’m working my way pretty quickly through the this section of the text. It is mostly background for the key applications coming up. Stay tuned! ☺)
- 10. Verse 19: Laban said, "It's better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me." <sup>20</sup> So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.
  - a) Verse 20 is one of the most poetic love verses in the bible. It says that Jacob worked for 7 years for Laban, but it seemed like a few days because he loved Rachel so much.
  - b) I’m sure Laban made Jacob work hard. For seven years, Jacob had to wait to have Rachel as his bride. Every time life seemed tough to Jacob, he just looked at his wallet photo of Rachel and went back to work! ☺
  - c) Here is an application to keep in mind: If we are “God-focused” at any time, the “pain-of-the-moment” isn’t so bad if we have a God-centered perspective.

11. Verse 21: Then Jacob said to Laban, "Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her."
- a) The seven years may have "seemed like a few days", but believe me, Jacob kept a calendar of the seven-year period! ☺
12. Verse 22: So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. <sup>23</sup> But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her. <sup>24</sup> And Laban gave his servant girl Zilpah to his daughter as her maidservant.
- a) Here is where the plot thickens. For those who don't know this story, Laban, switched daughters on Jacob. In that culture, the bride was covered from head to toe, and the groom was not to see the bride until the wedding night.
- b) In the next set of verses, we read that Jacob and Laban arrange to work another 7 years to get both brides now. What commentators suspect is that money-hungry Laban was getting blessed by Jacob. There are hints of that in upcoming verses. Therefore Laban arranges the bride-switch in order to keep Jacob around another seven years.
- c) Based on this verse, it is a tradition in Jewish weddings for a groom to lift the veil to make sure the groom is marrying the right girl!
- d) You also have to remember that in this culture, women are very submissive to men, and especially to their fathers.
- e) You have to wonder what both daughters were thinking to go along with this deception.
- i) Rachel was patiently waiting for this wedding day, and her father tells her that her sister will marry Jacob and not her!
- ii) Leah, who was not wanted by Jacob, was ordered by her father to go along with this deception in order to be married!
- f) We are also introduced to one of two new characters in this plot: Zilpah
- i) As a wedding present Leah, Laban gives her a private servant named Zilpah.
- ii) In a few verses, we will read how Laban gives another girl, Bilhah to Rebekah when she marries Jacob as well.
- iii) It was from these 4 girls: Rebekah, Leah, Zilpah and Bilhah that Jacob gets his 12 sons. Those 12 sons become the founders of the "12 tribes of Israel".
- iv) More on this in Chapter 30, which we'll get to in a few pages.
- g) Remember there were no light bulbs. The only lighting came from torches, moonlight and the stars. It is conceivable how Jacob, who was so anxious to marry Rachel, got Leah in the dark and never looked closely enough to see it was the wrong sister.
- i) I keep visualizing Leah: She was unloved, "ugly" and going along with this deception during the night, even if Jacob was saying how much he loved Rachel!
13. When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, "What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn't I? Why have you deceived me?"
- a) Again, this is a male-dominated culture. Jacob didn't yell at Leah, just at Laban.
14. Verse 26: Laban replied, "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. <sup>27</sup> Finish this daughter's bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work."
- a) This is the key moment in the story, so pay attention! ☺ Laban stated that it was not customary to give the second-born daughter in marriage prior to the first-born.
- b) I am positive this verse hit home with Jacob.
- i) Jacob deceived his going-blind-father into giving him the blessing of the first born by pretending to be his brother Esau. (Reference: Genesis Chapter 27)
- ii) Jacob, in a dark room with Leah, was being deceived due to the "right of the first-born" daughter!
- iii) Notice once Jacob realized Laban's "logic", he didn't argue. I believe Jacob felt guilty about what he did to his father, and now it is "coming home to roost".

- iv) This verse gets back to my introduction of how God works in our life. He uses circumstances to remind us of our personality faults that God wants to correct.
  - v) God knew that Jacob was a deceiver by the way he lied to his father. God made Jacob aware of that sin by letting Jacob get deceived himself.
  - c) One bit of bible trivia, and then I'll move on. Notice the word "week" in Verse 27:
    - i) Laban tells Jacob to "Finish this daughter's bridal week".
    - ii) The Hebrew word for "week" can mean 7 years as well as 7 days.
    - iii) This is important when you get to Daniel 9, when God tells Daniel that from the day the order to given to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem until the time of the Messiah would be 62 + 7 "weeks". (Ref.: Daniel 9:25) When Daniel was given that vision, the walls of Jerusalem were in ruins. If you calculate 69 times a seven-year period (483 years), that comes to the time when Jesus was there!
15. Verse 28: And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. <sup>29</sup> Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. <sup>30</sup> Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.
- a) These verses say that Jacob had to wait another "week" (7-years) for Rachel. What this means is that Jacob could marry both girls now but he "owed" Laban seven more years.
  - b) This is a good spot to talk about polygamy, which is about marrying two or more wives.
    - i) God once told Adam, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife (singular!), and they will become one flesh." (Gen. 2:24 NIV)
    - ii) This implies that the ideal relationship is one man and one woman.
    - iii) The Old Testament is full of stories of men marrying multiple women. Every bible story involving polygamy is a negative experience!
    - iv) In fact, the bible says, "Neither shall he (a Hebrew man) multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; (Deuteronomy 17:17a, NKJV).
    - v) One has to remember that the bible is not just full of stories for us to model, it is also full of stories for us to learn, "Don't do like they did!" The way to tell which is correct is simply to look at the results, or read passages like Deuteronomy and read what are God's explicit instructions for our lives!
    - vi) The fact that Jacob takes multiple wives is nothing but trouble. Trying to make one woman happy requires a lifetime of work. I can't imagine two or more! ☺
16. Verse 31: When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. <sup>32</sup> Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." <sup>33</sup> She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon. <sup>34</sup> Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi. <sup>35</sup> She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.
- a) You had to feel sorry for Leah, the ugly-sister. She was married to a man who didn't love her. God knew that, and provided some happiness through children.
  - b) Here we read of Leah having 4 boys, prior to Rachel having any children. This means that despite the fact that Jacob loved Rachel more, he still kept his commitment as a husband to Leah and had sexual relations with her. In fact, one of the four children mentioned is Judah, through which the Messiah comes!
  - c) You can sense the seeds of jealously "brewing" in these verses:
    - i) I'm sure Leah felt that she was the "blessed of the two wives" and she was having children. I suspect that in subtle ways, she taunted her sister.

- ii) She may have also thought that, “Jacob will love me now that I have children”. Older adults know it doesn’t work that way, but many young women think they can win men’s hearts through children. Leah said, “Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons”.
  - d) These verses are good reminders of how much God loves us, especially when we are in situations where we feel unloved by those around us. Notice it says that God opened her womb! God knew Leah was unloved and provided for her.
    - i) When one is going through trials, one can either focus on the pain of how others are treating you, or one can have the joy of knowing that God loves you and cares for you despite the circumstances you are going through.
  - e) Each of the sons have names that are prophetic. We’ll discuss that more in Genesis 49 when Jacob gives a prophetic blessing on each of the four kids.
    - i) For example, Levi means “attached” as stated in Verse 11.
    - ii) Of the 12 sons, God picked the children of Levi to be the priests of Israel. There is a “pun” involved as the name Levi means “attached” and they are the ones that represent (minister) between God and the Israelites.
    - iii) Also, we have Judah, which means “praise”. It would be through Judah that the Messiah comes. The prophetic implication is “praise of the future blessing”.
      - a) By the way, this is the first time that “praise” is mentioned in the bible. Usually the first mention of any word or topic in the bible is significant.
17. Chapter 30, Verse 1: 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!"
- a) For those of you that think marrying more than one woman is a good thing, I present to you Verse 1 of Chapter 30: “So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!" ☺
    - i) You can just sense the rivalry between the one.
    - ii) They were both trying to win Jacob’s affection and favor through children.
18. Verse 2: Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?"
- a) When we read of Jacob through most of these chapters, it is usually in a negative aspect. He is usually trying to “out connive” someone to get his way. In this verse, may be one of Jacob’s true shining moments.
  - b) I do believe it is up to God if and when we have children. If it is not God’s will for you to have children at any one time, then God will shut up a womb no matter how hard you try. Jacob is only guilty if he is not “trying” in the first place.
    - i) A pet peeve is Christians who never take action and then blame things as being “God’s will”! God guides our actions. He can’t guide us if were not moving.
  - c) So what was God’s purpose in shutting up Rachel’s womb? I suspect it was about humbling Rachel. She knew she was the favored one over Leah. God gave her the gift of beauty was the favored wife over Leah. Eventually Rachel did have children, but I suspect God wanted to get her to submit her life first. Further, at this juncture, God wanted to give Leah a special blessing over Rachel because Jacob favored Rachel.
19. Verse 3: Then she said, "Here is Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family."
- a) Here we see a practice that was “culturally acceptable” for that time and place. If a woman couldn’t bear children, you had a slave girl bear one instead of her. If you recall, Isaac’s brother Ishmael was actually a half-brother as he was Abraham’s son, and the daughter of the slave-girl Hagar.
  - b) Notice the phrase “I too can build a family”. Rachel had a desire to have children of her own. I am convinced God placed that desire in women to want children. The human race would have been extinct a long time ago if that desire didn’t exist! Men do desire children, but as a general rule, it is not the same instinctive desire that women have.

- i) A lot of this competition between the women goes back to the curse placed on Adam and Eve after they sinned. Remember what God said to Eve:
    - a) "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children." (Genesis 3:16a) That curse is not just about labor pain, but it is also about a built-in desire to have and raise children.
    - b) This is a general-rule. I have met women who don't desire children as God has other plans for their live. On the other hand, I have also met women who went after the "feminist ideal" of giving up children in order to have a career, only to be miserable ten to twenty years later.
    - c) There was also another part of that same curse: "Your desire will be for your husband" (Genesis 3:16b). If God placed that desire to please her husband, and children pleased Jacob, then that desire is in Rachel.
20. Verse 4: So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, <sup>5</sup> and she became pregnant and bore him a son. <sup>6</sup> 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.
- a) In the last chapter, there was a mention that Rachel and Leah's father gave each of the girls a slave-girl as a wedding present. Now we see the purpose of those girls as God used them to help increase the size of Jacob's family.
  - b) If you recall the stories of Ishmael, you remember that he was born in a similar way.
    - i) God eventually told Abraham to "cast out Ishmael and his mother" as Ishmael's half-brother Isaac was the "promised son". In the New Testament Ishmael is compared to a "work of the flesh" because it was God's will that the promised son came through Sarah, which was Isaac. (Ref.: Genesis 21, Galatians 4:24-25)
    - ii) If you recall those stories, Ishmael was still blessed by God because he was a son of Abraham despite the fact he wasn't the promised son.
  - c) Here in Genesis 30 we have a similar story. Dan is not "cursed" the same way Ishmael was, because God had a "different plan in mind" with this story. It was God's desire that Jacob have lots of children in a short time span.
    - i) If you recall in Chapter 28, God specifically told Jacob that he would have a multitude of descendants. God's "method" of giving Jacob lots of children was to have a competition going between two wives and to get their slave-girls involved!
    - ii) One thing I pondered this week is why God choose to have 4 women to produce the 12 tribes of Israel (Rachel, Leah and each of their wives' slave-girls). Let's face it, God could have picked just one, or two and Jacob could have had the 12 children that way. I can't prove it, but I suspect God used this method in order to produce a large family quickly. Remember that Jacob was working a 7-year period as a contract-obligation for his wife Rachel. It was God's will that Jacob have 11 of the 12 children born in this 7 year period. In order to accomplish that goal, a bunch of women were needed!
    - iii) What's my point? My point is that God "allowed" Rachel's slave-girl to have children in order to accomplish God's will.
  - d) This child's name is Dan. It is an "interesting coincidence" that Dan has sort of black-mark in the history of the 12 tribes of Israel. Again, remember that Jacob's 12 children each became the leader of the 12 tribes of Israel.
    - i) Dan was the first tribe to go into idolatry (Judges 18:30).
    - ii) In the Book of Revelation, there are 2 places that list 144,000 Jews who will be Jesus' witness during the tribulation. These Jewish Christians are listed by tribe. The one tribe not listed is Dan. Dan gets a "slap in the face" because they were the first to go into idolatry. (Ref.: Revelation 7:4-8, 14:3).

- a) The interesting thing is that despite that, the descendants of Dan still have some existence in the end times. The end of the book of Ezekiel describes how God is going to divide up the Promised Land by tribe. This is a future event, after the tribulation. Dan is one of the tribes listed. (Ezekiel 48:1)
21. Verse 7: Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. <sup>8</sup> Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." So she named him Naphtali.
- a) This is now son #2 by Rachel's servant Bilhah. Remember that Rachel herself is still barren at this point. The score so far: Leah 4, Rachel 0, Rachel's Bilhah 2. ☺
22. Verse 9: When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. <sup>10</sup> Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. <sup>11</sup> Then Leah said, "What good fortune!" So she named him Gad. <sup>12</sup> Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. <sup>13</sup> Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.
- a) Now Leah's getting into the act. She takes her maidservant. You get the impression that both wives had lost their ability to conceive because of jealousy. I can get into a whole sermon here about God's will being blocked for your life because of sin. Yes the pain was real about "the other girl" being favored, but the danger is letting that pain interfere with your relationship with God.
- b) One thing you'll notice is that with each child being born, either Rachel or Leah makes a short statement about that child.
- i) That statement usually ties to the name. For example, Gad means "fortune". Verse 11 says, "What good fortune!" So she named him Gad." It is almost as if a "bad-pun" is used in naming each child.
- ii) The Life Application Bible<sup>®</sup> told a bad joke, which was a good illustration of this principle: "My wife and I had a baby. The hospital bill was expensive so we named the child "Bill". It's a bad joke, but it gives you a flavor of how each child was named based on the circumstances the wives were feeling at that moment.
- iii) When we get to Genesis 49, Jacob, gives a blessing to each of his children and predicts their future. We'll discuss the names more at that time.
23. Verse 14: 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." <sup>15</sup> 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."
- a) Here we have the story of the mandrakes: A mandrake is a berry-sized fruit that can be literally translated "love-apples". It is known as an aphrodisiac that stimulates sexual activity and makes women fertile. It is debated whether the power of this fruit is "real" or all in the mind, but either way, it was accepted.
- b) Here we read of the contact between the girls. In summary, one of Leah's kids finds the fruit. Rachel found out Leah had this fruit. Rachel asks Leah for the mandrakes, saying in effect, "Leah, you've got kids, I still don't have any. I only have kids through my maidservant". Leah responds in effect with, "Look, Jacob loves you (Rachel) and not me. I'm the one who is unloved. Why should I give them to you?"
- c) The last sentence was the bargain. The actual mandrakes went to Rachel, but Leah got to sleep with Jacob that night.
- i) Here's a wonderful little example of "Let go, let God". Remember that at this point Leah stopped bearing children. She thought this berry would help make her fertile again. Notice Leah actually gave up the mandrakes in exchange for actually sleeping with Jacob. Leah is figuring, "If God wants me to get pregnant, He will make it so, mandrakes or not. All I have to do is take the "footsteps" with Jacob."

- ii) The concept of “Let go, let God” is to stop worrying about a situation and letting God take over. Leah still “did the footwork” of sleeping with Jacob, but she didn’t trust in the mandrakes, she trusted in God’s ability to come through. We know this work, as Verse 17 said, “God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant”.
  - iii) Personally, I watch God do his best work, when we fully let go of the worries about a situation and let God take over. This is a great example of that concept.
- 24. Verse 16: 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. <sup>17</sup> God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. <sup>18</sup> Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him Issachar. <sup>19</sup> Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. <sup>20</sup> 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.
  - a) Leah just got two more sons. Here’s the scorecard to date:
    - i) Leah 6, Leah’s maid Zilpah 2, Rachel 0, Rachel’s maid Bilhah 2.
    - ii) Jacob himself now had his hands full. In less than a 7-year period, Jacob now had to deal with 10 young children from 3 different women. Jacob still had to work for a living and tries to make 4 women happy and watch out for 10 kids. Again, this doesn’t speak well for the concept of polygamy!
  - b) The girl that was hurting at this point was Rachel. She saw “everyone around her” having children and she didn’t have any. I’m sure she didn’t feel “connected” to her husband as he was busy with work, raising kids and trying to make 4 women happy!
- 25. Verse 21: Some time later she (Leah) gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.
  - a) Well, statistically, a girl had to happen sooner or later. ☺
  - b) The phrase “some time later” is important as we don’t know where she fit into the birth order. The story of Dinah is told in Genesis 34. It is a sad story as she is raped in Chapter 34 by an outside tribe. We’ll discuss her at that point.
- 26. Verse 22: Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. <sup>23</sup> She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." <sup>24</sup> She named him Joseph, and said, "May the LORD add to me another son."
  - a) One thing I noticed here is no further mention of the mandrakes. Although I can’t prove it, I suspect she used them and to no avail. After she “gave up hope” then she finally got pregnant. I only say this in theory, as that is how God usually works. God doesn’t like to share his glory with “human efforts” like mandrakes although he still wants us to “walk in faith” and she still slept with Jacob.
  - b) Notice that Leah’s statement is “God has taken away my disgrace.”
    - i) She felt disgraced by her lack of children. Reading “between the lines” is my personal theory that she gave up hope in having children and at that point is when God bless her.
    - ii) As to her son Joseph, well, the majority of the remainder of Genesis is about him.
    - iii) Genesis spends more space discussing the life of Joseph than any other character. We’ll get to Joseph in a few chapters.
- 27. Verse 25: After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. <sup>26</sup> 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."
  - a) Jacob now has 2 wives, 2 slave girl mothers of his children and 11 kids. It is also the end of his 7-year contract period with his father-in-law Laban.
  - b) Jacob served a total of 14 years for both wives. Remember that Genesis says the first 7 years “seemed like a few days” for his love for Rachel (Genesis 29:30). I suspect the next 7 years seemed like an eternity with 11 kids, and two feuding wives. ☺
  - c) Jacob knew the exact day the 7 years was over and he needed to get away!

28. Verse 27: But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you."<sup>28</sup> He added, "Name your wages, and I will pay them."
- a) Laban is one of those guys who gives God "lip service", but that's about it. You get the impression that money and financial success was his primary interest. Here we read of Laban learning from divination that he is being blessed because of Jacob.
  - b) Notice Laban does not say: "Hey, stay for the sake of my daughters and grandkids!" Laban's primary concern is that he has lots of wealth and Laban turns to divination to discover why. It is interesting that God uses divination to reveal the truth to Laban.
    - i) Divination is forbidden to believers in God. (See Exodus 22:18) God does not want us to use demonic powers to get his will accomplished. However, there are a few cases in the Old Testament where God allows people with this power to testify of God in order to get God's will accomplished. Examples include a diviner named Baalam in Numbers 22-24 and "A women of Endor" in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 28.
  - c) A positive thing to notice about this verse is Jacob's reputation has improved at this time.
    - i) Laban has enough trust in Jacob to tell him, "Make me an offer what I should pay you and I will honor that contract".
    - ii) This is an important principle about being "God's witnesses to the world." God cares about our reputation to non-believers, as we are God's representatives. We should have a reputation as being honest with others.
29. Verse 29: Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care."<sup>30</sup> 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?"
- a) Before Jacob names his wages, he first tells gives his testimony.
  - b) Notice Jacob gives God the credit for blessing Laban in Verse 30.
  - c) From a human perspective, there is nothing wrong with these verses. Jacob is saying, "Look, I've worked all of these years for you. God has blessed you during the times I have worked for you. But our 14-year term (7 years for each wife) is over and it is time you paid me an honest wage.
  - d) Note that Laban isn't dumb. He understood that he was getting rich off of Jacob and because of Jacob's God. Therefore, Laban wants to keep Jacob around as long as possible.
    - i) With that in mind, think back to when Jacob first gave his older daughter Leah in marriage to Jacob. Remember Jacob worked 7 years for Leah. When the 7 years were about over, Laban was worried Jacob would leave and Laban would no longer get the financial blessing. Therefore, Laban thought up this idea of the secret marriage to Leah and work-another-seven-years to keep Jacob around.
    - ii) Now that the 14 years is all done, Laban must figure out a fair-wage to pay Jacob in order to keep him around longer.
30. Verse 31: "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:"<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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."
- a) Let me paraphrase Jacob's proposal: Listen Laban, lambs and goats that have spots and streaks are less likely to be born than all-plain color lambs and goats. Therefore, I'll only remove those types of goats and sheep as my wages. This way you know I haven't cheated you because if you see any all-white or all-black goats or sheep in my section, you know that I have stolen from you.

- b) From Laban's standpoint, this was a bargain. The same way that working 7-years for each bride was a lopsided deal in Laban's favor, so was Jacob agreeing to take only the inferior animals for his own wages.
- c) Speckled and striped goats are inferior genes. A similar idea is "left-handed versus right handed". The majority of people are right-handed. It would be like Jacob saying, "tell you what, all the goats and sheep that are born left-handed will be my wages". Laban agreed to that knowing the majority of people are right-handed."
- d) To understand why Jacob agreed to this, we need to read ahead in Chapter 31...
  - i) "In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.'" (Genesis 31:10-12)
  - ii) To paraphrase this text in Genesis 31, Jacob understood that God was going to bless him despite the fact that Jacob took the inferior animals. When Jacob proposed his terms of wages here in Chapter 30, somehow, it had something to do with this vision as described in Chapter 31.
  - iii) What Jacob understood is that God was going to bless him even though he agreed to take only the inferior animals.
  - iv) With that said, it's time for a mini-sermon: ☺ God wants to bless us. He wants to bless us just because He wants to bless us and for no other reason. Sometimes in life we can accept to have less "stuff" than others because we can walk by faith that God is going to bless us and give us joy for all of eternity. This is not about being 100% passive and letting others abuse us. This is about being a good witness for God in all situations.
  - v) Jacob here had a good balance of stating how God is working in his life and at the same time trusting that God will provide for him despite the fact Jacob agreed to the inferior pay scale.

31. Verse 34: "Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said." <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks.

- a) The "three-day journey" is the equivalent of a fence. The 3-day distance between Jacob's flock and Laban's flock is so that none of the sheep and goats were accidentally mixed.
- b) As someone who loves Christian word-pictures, you can have a field day discussing the comparison of the 3-day journey to the fact that Jesus rose again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. It is a word picture of a "3-day separation of time" between believers and nonbelievers.
- c) Notice that Jacob still had to take care of Laban's flocks. Jacob's workload has not changed, just that he now gets his own wages as opposed to working as a dowry for Laban's daughters.

32. Verse 37: 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. <sup>38</sup> 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, <sup>39</sup> they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted. <sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> 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, <sup>42</sup> 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. <sup>43</sup> In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys.

- a) This last paragraph is one of the strangest in all of Genesis.
  - b) Jacob took tree branches, peeled the bark and exposed the inner white stripes. Jacob arranged so that whenever the animals were in heat, he put these peeled tree branches in front of them. This method produced lots more speckled & streaked animals for Jacob.
  - c) Just why Jacob used this technique is unknown.
    - i) Perhaps Jacob's years of being a goat farmer taught him that this visual site of a tree branch will cause the animals to breed. Maybe the tree branch gets the animals "in the mood". ☺
    - ii) Remember in Chapter 31 (next lesson) Jacob described the vision of streaked and spotted animals. There is no mention of this tree bark. Perhaps it was part of God's instructions to Jacob that was not revealed to us.
  - d) Here is the important part (pay attention! ☺): Jacob understood God was blessing him. By faith, Jacob agreed to the inferior wages because he knew God was going to bless him. Whether or not this "peeled branch" part was of God, or a folk-legend is irrelevant to the fact that Jacob was trusting in God to provide for him and bless him.
  - e) God wants us to step out in faith and trust him. My personal view is even if Jacob didn't use the peeled branch methods, Jacob would still get lots of goats for his wages because Jacob was trusting in his God. God was blessing Jacob because God wants to bless Jacob, not for the particular method of peeled branches. By using this peeled branch method, Jacob was "doing the footwork" so that God could bless his life.
33. It's time for a wrap up. I opened this lesson with the cliché: "What goes around, comes around".
- a) Laban took advantage of the fact that God was blessing Jacob and used it for his own gain. Now Laban was "being robbed" because the number of goats and sheep being born were mostly going to Jacob, despite the statistical odds against it.
    - i) Statistically speaking, most of the animals being born should not have stripes and speckles. But "somehow", most of the animals being born came out this way, and thus Jacob's flock was getting bigger and Laban's was getting smaller.
    - ii) The lesson to learn is that "There is a God". Laban treats Jacob unfairly, and eventually it does come back to haunt him.
34. The interesting thing to read about Laban in the next chapter is that he still worships his own gods despite the fact he sees Jacob being blessed.
- a) Jacob, despite his faults, was a good witness of God to Laban. Jacob agreed to low wages knowing God would bless him. Despite that Laban never turned to worship Jacob's God. Laban is the kind of guy more interested in making a buck than trusting in the true God. (You would think Laban would worship God just so he could be financially blessed on his own. It shows how people's hearts can be hardened and how they refuse to change despite the evidence around them.)
35. Let's pray: Father, We thank you for these lessons about Jacob and Laban. Help us, to fully trust in you, and at the same time keep moving forward in faith knowing that you want to bless our lives and do wonderful things through us. Help us to remember that the results of our lives are up to you and not us. Help us to be good witnesses to the world around us. Help us to have patience during our "seven years of labor for others". We ask this in Jesus name we pray, Amen.