


Messy Life:
The Story of Jacob
 Part 9
A True Biblical Soap Opera

TALKING POINTS WALKINGPOINTS

Leader's Guide

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
 Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

Observation—*What do I see?*

- ① From Genesis 29:31—30:24, complete the following chart:

Birth Order	Mother ^s	Son	Mother's Exclamation (Motive for her Son's Name)
1	Leah	Reuben	"Because the Lord has seen my afflictions, surely now my husband will love me."
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			
11			

^sFor the children born to the maidservants, list the appropriate wife as well, so either "Bilhah/Rachel" or "Zilpah/Leah".

- ② Rachel ended up with the mandrakes (30:14-16), but who gave birth to the next two sons (17-20)?

Interpretation—*What does it mean?*

- ③ From the motives for the boy's names, what trajectory can you discern in **Leah's** spiritual development? (Remember to include the sons born to Bilhah as well, since they were accounted as being Leah's sons.)
- ④ Which names suggest desperation/discouragement and which ones suggest acceptance of God's plan? Where do you see hints of setbacks/resignation or bitterness and where do you see maturity and trust?
- ⑤ According to Genesis 29:31; 30:1-2 & 22-24, **what** determines fertility?

Application—*What do I do with this?*

- ⑥ When each struggled with infertility, both Rachel and Leah trusted in human solutions to conceive. What's wrong with that? What should they have done instead? (See 1 Samuel 1:1-20.)
- ⑦ In what situations (marriage, parenting, work, family relationships, health, etc.) are you tempted to trust in human solutions to get what you want (Jeremiah 17:5)? Would you be willing to tell us about it?
- ⑧ How can we help each other "wait on the Lord" in these difficult situations?

1 Birth Order	Mother	Son	Mother's Exclamation (Motive for her Son's Name)
1	Leah	Reuben	"Because Yahweh has seen my affliction, surely now my husband will love me."
2	Leah	Simeon	"Because Yahweh has heard that I am unloved, he has give me this son also."
3	Leah	Levi	"Now this time, my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons."
4	Leah	Judah	"This time I will praise Yahweh."
5	Bilhah/Rachel	Dan	"God has vindicated me , has heard my voice and has indeed given me a son."
6	Bilhah/Rachel	Naphtali	"With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and have indeed prevailed."
7	Zilpah/Leah	Gad	"How fortunate!"
8	Zilpah/Leah	Asher	"Happy am I! For women will call me happy."
9	Leah	Issachar	"God has given me my wages because I gave my maid to my husband."
10	Leah	Zebulun	"God has endowed me with a good gift; now my husband will dwell with me, I have borne him six sons."
11	Rachel	Joseph	"God has taken away my reproach...May Yahweh give me another son."

2 What a bitter pill to swallow! Rachel got the mandrakes—believed to be a fertility drug—with the expectation that she would now conceive. But the price of this “sure-fire wonder drug solution” was that Leah, who (it appears) typically does not get to sleep with Jacob, gets him for the night, and **she** conceives, while Rachel remains barren even after she gets Jacob back! Salt in a wound for both! Leah has the indignity of having to “buy” her husband’s services and Rachel paid dearly for a placebo!

3 1st (Reuben) Leah gains comfort from Yahweh—and hopes it will gain Jacob’s love.

2nd (Simeon) Leah sees a second son’s birth as proof God’s love—in the place of her husband’s love.

3rd (Levi) OK, “love” is too much to expect, so Leah now seems to settle for “attachment” with Jacob.

4th (Judah) Leah has decided to praise God—irrespective of what her husband does or doesn’t do.

5th (Gad) After Rachel’s ugly “victory”, Leah celebrates her return to good fortune. Her drought is over.

6th (Asher) Leah’s happiness is hollow—neither God nor husband are mentioned.
Other women’s opinions are sufficient! How sad. Leah’s desperation and degradation are deep.

7th (Issachar) The birth of a son is now seen in transactional terms: the wages she has earned by virtue of giving seven sons to an unappreciative husband. Note that she no longer uses God’s covenant (relational, personal) name, “Yahweh”. Now he’s referred to as “God” (position, not relationship).

8th (Zebulun) Leah’s given up on the hope of ever being loved—mere cohabitation will suffice.
Yet she recognizes that the child himself is a “good gift”. Notice that Zebulun is the 8th son **credited to** Leah (thanks to Zilpah), but she knows in her heart that really **only six** of them “count” as hers.

4 Review the answer to 3 to draw your conclusions.

5 **God** opens and shuts the womb.

6 Their sibling rivalry is sad; their trust in human solutions is futile. They should have prayed and trusted.

7 Be prepared to share your own example if needed to get the ball rolling, but give folks time to think (and to screw their courage up!) to share their own stories first.

8 Let your group generate this list. Obvious answers include: openness and vulnerability in sharing our hardships with others (as asking for prayer); prayer (for one’s self as well as for each other); reading quality biblical literature on the subject (such as Andrew Murray’s classic book, *Waiting on God*.)

Sermon Summary Genesis 29:31—30:24

We are continuing our study of Jacob's life as portrayed in the book of Genesis. The big idea we will see today is that God remains faithful to His covenant people in spite of their sin and the messes they produce. In the Biblical narrative we read, so far Jacob's feelings and responses take center stage. But how about Leah? Of the two daughters, physically speaking, she is the less attractive. In the marriage, she is the unloved one and she knows it. Leah's plight is truly sad. She is overlooked, unwanted and unloved. She is neglected and overlooked. You ever feel like Leah? Invisible, rejected, overlooked, taken for granted?? That is just the kind of person God sees and helps! While Leah may have been unloved by Jacob, she was not unloved by God. God saw her. He knew her pain. And He had compassion on her. In fact, God chose Leah to play a central role in His future plans. It is God's nature to help the neglected, the overlooked, the downtrodden and the mistreated.

I. God helps the neglected, the overlooked, the downtrodden and the mistreated (29:31–35). Leah lived her life consciously before God. In that regard, she is more spiritually sensitive than her sister Rachel. For her, Reuben's birth is no accident. She clearly sees God's intervention in it. But it seems that despite Reuben's birth, Jacob's heart towards Leah had not changed. Rachel was still his favorite. (29:33-34) Can you feel Leah's pain as we read through this narrative? Her words reflect the heartaches of a woman who is fertile, but otherwise unwanted. Finally, Leah named a son Judah, which means 'praise'. Despite Jacob's lack of affection, Leah chose to praise God. In doing so, she demonstrated great faith. Sometimes in this life, we don't get what we want. But that doesn't mean that God doesn't love us. It doesn't mean that He has forgotten about us, or that He doesn't care. God has a plan for each one of our lives, and He wants us to trust Him as that plan unfolds. Human sin does not thwart His purposes—whether that sin is mine or someone else's. Sometimes we must walk by faith and not by sight. We must choose to praise God as an act of faith. Such faith says, "God, although I don't know how you are going to do it, I know you are able to redeem this situation for good." And in Leah's case, God did just that. Rachel was hurting too. She was unable to get pregnant. She is jealous of Leah because Leah has given Jacob four children, and she has given him none! Jacob is unhappy with Laban. Laban's daughters were not happy with him either. This just adds to the tension in the home. Tensions were sky high in the family. Nobody was happy. And when people aren't happy, they look for ways to stop that pain, to find happiness, even if they have to sin to get it. (30:1)

II. Filled with envy over her sister's fruitfulness, Rachel complained to Jacob and then competed with Leah by bearing children through Bilhah, which she correctly recognized as God's blessing (30:1–8). Rachel was desperate and depressed. In her mind, life wasn't worth living if she couldn't bear children. When our goals are blocked, we often look for someone else to blame. Jacob was being blamed for something he was not at fault for. What do you do when you are blamed for something that's not your fault—that you have no control over? What is your tendency? It makes us angry (v.2). Where our initiative and responsibility end, prayer must begin. Do what you can and should do and then ask God to do what only He can do. That is the God honoring response. Rachel left God entirely out of the equation and plotted a way to get what she wanted. (vv.3-6) I do not believe that Rachel's actions met with God's approval. I think Rachel read God's approval into her sinful actions. We sin, and then we try to bring God into it. Despite Rachel's lack of faith, God did not abandon her. Which is kind of encouraging, because it reminds us that God works in and through us, despite our lack of faith, despite our sinful choices! It's called grace. Rachel liked the outcome and continues this strategy. (vv:7-8) Then Leah continued the competition between the sisters.

III. Responding to Rachel's use of her maid, Leah continued the competition by giving her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob and finding success in the births of two more children (30:9–13). Through her maid Zilpah, Leah added two more sons—literally "Luck" and "Happy". You give them a pleasant name and it helps quiet your conscience. All this rivalry only heightened the competition between these sisters as they tried to outdo one another in the child-bearing department – which led to what we'll call the "Mandrake madness."

IV. Rachel and Leah both expressed their discontent and continued to seek to outdo each other in having children; God responded to Leah by granting her two more sons and a daughter (30:14–21). Rachel proposes a deal. If Leah gives Rachel some mandrakes, she'll allow Leah to have Jacob in bed that night (v. 15b). And Leah felt rewarded by the birth of yet another son. (vv.17-18) This development led Jacob to spend even more time with Leah, and she soon had another son. Jacob now has ten sons. To get the promised nation underway required a large family of sons and that is exactly what Jacob had. At this point, Jacob's first daughter was born to Leah. (v.21) We know from the Biblical record that Jacob would later have other daughters. (Genesis 37:35; 46:7, 15) Finally, God ended Rachel's barrenness and gave her a son who would play a huge role in Biblical history.

V. God remembered Rachel and ended her barrenness with the birth of Joseph—which prompted her to pray for another son (30:22–24). While Leah may have been the unloved wife, she played a huge role in God's plans for the world. Levi became the forerunner of Israel's priestly tribe—and Judah the forerunner of the kingly tribe of which Jesus was a descendent. At this point in the Biblical narrative Rachel has one natural child, Joseph, who plays a huge role in Israel's history. We are beginning to see the fulfillment of the Covenant God first made to Abraham and later reaffirmed to Isaac and Jacob. The basis for a great nation is being formed as 11 of Israel's 12 tribes are now in place. God has recorded this sordid history in the pages of Scripture for a reason—it is for our edification. What does He want us to learn from this portion of Israel's history?

1. God fulfills His promises to His people.
2. God helps the neglected, the overlooked, the mistreated.
3. Don't allow envy and jealousy and petty rivalries to control your decision making.
4. Thank God that He deals with you in grace.

We are not only capable of great evil, but we also participate in it from time to time. If God did not deal with us in grace, where would we stand? While we are not saved by good works (God deals with us in grace), we are saved to engage in good works (Ephesians 2:8–10). That is something that Jacob's family needs to grow in, and I suspect that we do too!

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

*Isaiah 40:31 promises a blessing to those who "wait on the Lord".
Let's use the "Five Question Bible Study" method to learn how to wait biblically...*

Monday— Study Micah 7:7 and Psalm 5:3.

Tuesday— Study Psalm 130:5-6.

Wednesday— Study Proverbs 3:5-6.

Thursday— Study Psalm 37:7-8.

Friday— Study Psalm 27:13 and Lamentations 3:25.

Saturday— Study Colossians 3:1-3.

Need blank copies for doing more

"Five Question Bible Study"?

e-mail: Dan.Clement.TCC@gmail.com

Bible Text: _____

Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text? [and what was their response?]