

The “Birthing” of a Nation ... and the Shaping of Its Leader

GENESIS 29:1-30:43

Opening Thoughts

- * These two chapters are going to span 20 years ...
 - ◆ Comprised of two 7-year marriage contracts and a 6-year “serve and release” agreement
- * There is a sad irony in these 20 years — Rebekah’s family wanted 10 post-marital days with her, but instead get 20 years from her son whom she never saw again
- * There are a lot of common threads with prior narratives, but the roles are reversed ...
 - ◆ Jacob does the watering for Rachel

Opening Thoughts

- ◆ Jacob (the younger) supplants the older, while Leah (the older) supplants the younger
- ◆ Jacob goes from “self-serving” to serving others
- ◆ The deceiver becomes the deceived ... twice over!
- * The “wife project” for Isaac was a quick process — why so long for Jacob?
 - ◆ He came with no dowry — But more importantly ...
 - ◆ Jacob had some serious “growin’ up” to do ... having some key life & leadership lessons to be learned

Opening Thoughts

- * What lessons come to mind?
 - ◆ Patience — how to wait on God’s timing
 - ◆ Providence — how to trust God’s sovereignty in matters more than his “ingenuity”
 - ◆ Competence — how to fend for himself having never left home
 - ◆ Character — how it feels like to be deceived and yet respond graciously

Structure of the Text

- * The providential arrivals - 29:1-6
- * The providential encounter - vv. 7-12
- * Good “ole” Uncle Laban - vv. 13-14
- * The marriage contract and fulfillment - vv. 15-20
- * The deception and aftermath - vv. 21-30
- * The Royal family - 29:31-30:24
- * God’s Prospering of Jacob - 30:25-43

Theme of the Section

The “formation” of the nation of Israel and the “shaping” of its patriarchal leader ...

Fulfilling God’s promises to Jacob!

Providential Arrivals

- * Vision and vow over ... Jacob sets out for Haran
 - ◆ Literally he “lifted up his feet” — so I guess he was “high-stepping” his way out!
- * The account fast forwards to his arrival — some 400 miles from Bethel ...
- * Where he “happens-upon” a well and some shepherds
 - ◆ Recognizing, of course, God’s providence in getting Jacob to the place where he will meet his “kin” and his “wife”
- * Verses 2-3 set the scene for what follows

Providential Arrivals

- * Verses 4-6 serve to confirm that Jacob has arrived at his intended destination ...
- * Sounding “the world over” like a typical guy conversation
 - ◆ Where are you from? — Haran
 - ◆ Do you know Laban? — Uh huh
 - ◆ Is it well with Laban? — Yup
- * And then in a fit of loquaciousness they add ...
 - ◆ And look — Here comes his daughter Rachel ... setting up a providential encounter

Providential Encounter

- * Providential arrival confirmed ... we now turn to the providential encounter with Rachel
- * **What is the point of v. 7?**
 - ◆ He wants to be alone with Rachel, because ...
 - ◆ Who wants the kid-brothers hanging around during courtship
- * They demur — citing their everyday practice of waiting to remove the stone, though ...
 - ◆ I'm sure they also wanted to see what happens next!

Providential Encounter

- * Verse 9 tells us that Rachel is a shepherdess ... so she's probably "pretty hardy"
- * **What is notable about v. 10?**
 - ◆ The 5-fold repetition of "his mother's brother" ...
 - ◆ Emphasizing the importance of the family connection
- * **What else is interesting about v. 10?**
 - ◆ The role reversal ... Jacob does the watering
 - ◆ He doesn't test Rachel's mettle — rather he seeks to prove his own mettle with an act of strength ... *Me Tarzan, you Jane!*

Providential Encounter

* How does the providential encounter end?

- ◆ With a “familial kiss” — which probably surprised Rachel ... because she does not yet know who Jacob is!
 - ◆ So while a customary practice — Jacob’s emotional glee likely causes him to reverse the customary order of events ... i.e. introduction, THEN the familial kiss
 - ◆ And, like her Aunt before her (i.e. Rebekah in Gen 24:28), Rachel runs home to tell her father ...
- * None other than — “Good Ole Uncle Laban”

Uncle Laban

* Why is Good Ole Uncle Laban significant?

- ◆ He inaugurates the “schooling” of Jacob ...
 - ◆ From here through the end of chapter 30 Jacob is going to get a “rapid-fire schooling” in life!
- * Surely remembering his last encounter with Abraham’s line — Laban hustles out to greet Jacob; likely with a mixture of affection and greed
- * The text continues saying that Jacob “related to Laban all these things” — **What do you think Jacob “shared?”**

Uncle Laban

- ◆ At a minimum — Jacob would have been expected to explain his “coming” ... so the “wife search” might have sufficed
- ◆ But, though I cannot be dogmatic, I lean towards a “full disclosure” of the events of Gen 27
- * What might lead us to this conclusion?
 - ◆ Logically, it had to be more than what Laban would have already heard from Rachel, or divined on his own ...
 - ◆ For me, then, the big thing that suggests a full-disclosure is Jacob’s “condition”

Uncle Laban

- * What about his condition would need explaining?
 - ◆ He arrived “empty-handed,” and ...
 - ◆ Seemed to be in no rush to leave like the former servant
- * Why do you think Isaac sent him away with nothing?
 - ◆ Can’t say for sure, but I suspect to express some degree of displeasure and to force him to “grow up”
- * Laban subsequently accepts Jacob as family (my bone and flesh) — and Jacob stays as a guest for a month

Marriage Contract & Fulfillment

* What do you make of Laban's question in v. 15?

- ◆ First off ... remember the question as we will see it again!!
- ◆ I'd say it's a mixed bag — with a “nod” towards self-interest
 - On the one hand he is saying you are not going to mooch off me or have “preferred” family status, while ...
 - On the other hand, Jacob has obviously “pitched in” and he has seen his facility with flock — so he want to secure his services

* How does Jacob respond?

- ◆ He rejects a “pay for hire” arrangement, instead ...

Contract & Fulfillment

* Proposing a marriage contract

* He will work **seven-years** for the hand of Laban's younger daughter Rachel

- ◆ An excessively fair offer even in light of having arrived with no dowry!

* What can we say about Jacob's choice of Rachel?

- ◆ Like Laban's question, I'd say it's mixed ...
 - On the one hand it is superficial — based on external beauty ... and he [leaves God completely out of the decision process](#) (relying solely on himself)
 - On the other hand it does seem to embody a genuine love — and as a capable shepherdess, Jacob knows she's more than just a “pretty lady”

Contract & Fulfillment

- * Whatever the true motive, Jacob does seem to have been infatuated with Rachel from the very start
- * Laban offers an apparently “cool” response, but clearly accepts the proposal in v. 19
 - ◆ Again demonstrating “high-context” communication
- * Nothing more about the next 7-years is reported other than they “passed quickly” because of his “love for her”
- * And ... the stage is set for the treachery that follows

Deception & Aftermath

- * What is “odd” and “telling” about v. 21?
 - ◆ Jacob has to pursue “payment” ...
 - ◆ He has to remind the Laban that he has fulfilled his side of the bargain — now give me my wife!
- * I’m sure Laban has not forgotten ... just dragging his feet
- * Laban then moves into action and prepares the customary wedding feast — likely spanning up to a week of “partying” ...
- * After which the bride is brought to the marital tent and the marriage is consummated

Deception & Aftermath

* Does the fact that Jacob doesn't recognize the switch seem far fetched to you?

- ◆ To our Western minds it would seem so, but ...
- ◆ Remember it was dark, dark
- ◆ And Leah would have been veiled when presented to Jacob
- ◆ And likely further disguised — clothing, perfume
- ◆ And ... Jacob had been “partying”
- ◆ So it is not “inconceivable!”

* What is more inconceivable than Jacob being fooled?

Deception & Aftermath

- ◆ The depth of the deception ...
- ◆ While Laban was devious — this is beyond any reasonable comprehension
- ◆ And further, it required the consent of both Leah and Rachel

* Why do you think they would have conceded to this plan?

- ◆ They had NO rights whatsoever ... what Dad says, goes!

* What motivates Laban to do this?

- ◆ “Unbridled greed” — despite his convenient excuse

Deception & Aftermath

- ◆ Seems like he would have explained this “custom” back in v. 18 at the initial proposal — don't you think?
- * What else might we note about Laban's character?
 - ◆ He is completely self-absorbed ...
 - ◆ Placing his daughters in an untenable situation — even taking into account women's lowly position in society!!!
- * Well — morning sheds light on the truth and then Jacob's response ...

Deception & Aftermath

- * What is surprising about Jacob's response?
 - ◆ He doesn't put up much of a fight
- * Why not?
 - ◆ I think somewhat akin to Isaac's response when he discovered being deceived ... cf. Gen 27:33 [READ]
 - ◆ Like his father, Jacob notes God's sovereignty in the matter and quickly accepts it, though ...
 - ◆ He does challenge Laban's duplicity before acquiescing to the proposed solution — fulfill Leah's “week,” and give me another 7-years service for Rachel

Deception & Aftermath

- * I think we might also note a hint of maturation in Jacob
- * ANE custom would have allowed Jacob to reject Leah and demand Rachel
 - ◆ Yet he seems to take Leah's feelings into account since he has consummated the marriage, and ...
- * He graciously allows Laban ... despite his deceit ... to save face
 - ◆ YET — we see the seeds of discord sowed in v. 30 ... Jacob loved Rachel MORE THAN he loved Leah

Deception & Aftermath

- * This whole imbroglio is dripping with parallels
 - ◆ Like mother like brother — seems “trickery” runs in the family DNA
 - ◆ Favoritism catalyzes deceit
 - ◆ The younger upstages the older ... Jacob in preeminence and Rachel in being given in marriage first
 - ◆ Poor “visibility” played a role in both deceptions
 - ◆ Father and son have similar responses when the deception is revealed

The Royal Family

- * Gen 29:31-30:24 is interesting — what is going on with this section?
 - ◆ A parenthetical break to record the births of the royal family ... what will become the 12 tribes of Israel
 - ◆ This is the centerpiece of Gen 29 & 30
- * What is the organizing principle of the birth parenthetical?
 - ◆ Proceeds in “mother order” — telling an ignoble tale of sibling rivalry
- * What is at the center of the struggle between Leah & Rachel?
 - ◆ Each one coveted what the other one had, reminding us that ...
 - ◆ **DISCONTENT** is a significant source of sin!

The Royal Family

- * Group 1: God initiates the action by showing mercy to the “unloved” Leah - v. 31
- * Does this mean that God intended for Jacob to marry Leah?
 - ◆ I don't see anything in the text that would lead me to believe this is the case ...
 - ◆ Rather, God sees our afflictions and acts according to his providential mercy, as well as ...
 - ◆ A lesson for Jacob on the pitfalls of partiality

The Royal Family

- * Leah gives birth to 4-sons in rapid fire succession
- * Note throughout how the names reflect the mindsets
- * Rueben — her firstborn ... means “see, a son”
 - ◆ ראובן a compound of ראה (to see) and בן (son)
 - ◆ God saw her affliction and responded
 - ◆ Now Jacob will love me — reflects Leah's desire
- * Simeon ... means “hearing”
 - ◆ שמעון from the Hebrew root שמע (to hear)
 - ◆ Suggesting perhaps that Leah had prayed to the Lord

The Royal Family

- * The names of sons 1 & 2 reflect Leah's belief that God both “saw” and “heard” she was unloved
- * Son #3 Levi takes another angle ... means “attached”
 - ◆ לוי from the Hebrew root ליה (to join)
 - ◆ How “unloved” Leah longs to “joined” with Jacob
- * Her fourth-born she names Judah ... means “praised”
 - ◆ יהודה from the Hebrew root ידה (to praise)
 - ◆ Finally she turns to praise the name of the LORD who has shown mercy to her instead of focusing on her condition

The Royal Family

* What is the significance of this 4th son?

- ◆ He is in the Messianic line ...
- ◆ Judah in Hebrew (יהודה) is very close to the Hebrew word for salvation ... (ישועה)
- ◆ Leah was unloved but she was one of the women in the Messianic line ... like cast-off Tamar who we meet in Gen 38

* And then Leah stops bearing ... leading us Rachel's response and group 2

The Royal Family

* Group 2: The children by Rachel's surrogate Bilhah

* In v. 1, we see the loved Rachel's jealous reaction to Leah's blessing, along with ... a little tantrum thrown in

* What is wrong with Rachel's demand?

- ◆ It is completely unreasonable & borders on sinful — suggesting she feels wronged in her barrenness

* Why is it unreasonable and sinful?

- ◆ She has forgotten the source of children effectively questioning the wisdom of God — cf. Ps 127:3-5 [READ]

The Royal Family

* What do you think about Jacob's response?

- ◆ I'd say it's mixed ... just like everything in this chapter ... both good and bad

* What is the good part?

- ◆ He rightly ascribes her barrenness to God's providence

* What is the bad part?

- ◆ He shows **little compassion** for Rachel — but more importantly, he exhibits a complete **lack of spiritual leadership** ...
- ◆ Instead of resisting and engaging the LORD in prayer — he accedes to her proposal

The Royal Family

* While an acceptable practice in her culture, Rachel shows little faith or patience — and Jacob shows he still has much to learn

* This is now the third generation of barrenness ... with three distinctly different responses

- ◆ Abram & Sarai responded with **disbelief and laughter** — followed by surrogacy and strife
- ◆ Isaac & Rebekah responded with **prayer and patience** — followed by God's blessing
- ◆ Jacob & Rachel responded with **jealousy and anger** — followed by surrogacy and strife

The Royal Family

- * Rachel has 2 children by Bilhah ... She names the first one Dan — means “vindicated”
 - ◆ דן from the Hebrew root דן (to judge)
- * What is wrong with her choice of name?
 - ◆ She ascribes the success of her plan to God ...
 - ◆ “Vindicating” herself of any improper action!
- * She names the second one Naphtali — means “wrestling”
 - ◆ נפתלי from the Hebrew root נפל (to wrestle, twist)
 - ◆ Rachel was wrestling with God and her sister at the same time
 - ◆ The name betrays Rachel’s heart attitude ... a desire for preeminence

The Royal Family

- * Not to be outdone — Leah offers up her maidservant Zilpah in response!
- * Leah clearly subscribes to ... “anything you can do I can do better”
- * Well this time, Jacob has learned his lesson ... Right?
 - ◆ Wrong — He goes “into” Zilpah and she bears two more sons to Jacob ... bringing the royal family to “8”

The Royal Family

- * The name of the first is Gad — means “good fortune”
 - ◆ גַּד from the Hebrew root נָגַד (fortunate)
- * The name of the second is Asher — means “happy or blessed”
 - ◆ אֲשֶׁר from the Hebrew root אָשַׁר (to pronounce happy or to call blessed)
 - ◆ In ANE culture a woman who produced many sons was deemed to be blessed in the eyes of society
- * Jacob is lost — being used as a pawn in his wives struggle ... Things can't get any worse can they?

The Royal Family

- * Just when you think things can't get any more sordid ... we encounter the “matter of the mandrakes”
- * A mandrake was considered to be both an aphrodisiac and promoting fertility
- * Little Rueben ... 4-5 years of age ... has wandered into the harvest field and was drawn to the colorful mandrakes
- * As a little child will do, he picks some for his mother and presents them to her — attracting Rachels interest & envy

The Royal Family

- * Rachel seems to ask politely enough only to draw a sharp retort from Leah
- * What is wrong with Leah's reply to Rachel?
 - ◆ She has things backward doesn't she ...
 - ◆ Wasn't Leah the one who did the husband stealing
- * So what is Rachel's solution to her desperation?
 - ◆ She "hires" out Jacob for the mandrakes, which is ...
 - ◆ A little ironic — Jacob commandeered the birthright for some stew ... now he is being commandeered for some fruit

The Royal Family

- * So Jacob comes home from work and Leah beckons him to her tent ... informing him he's been "hired for the night!"
- * And FINALLY Jacob puts his foot down and says "enough is enough" — Right?
 - ◆ Wrong again ... he acquiesces and Leah's "last stand" bears two more sons and a daughter
- * The first — her 5th — is named Issachar ... means "reward, or literally, 'a man of wages'"
 - ◆ יִשָּׂכָר formed from a compound of אִישׁ (man) and שָׂכָר (wages)

The Royal Family

- * The second — her 6th — is named Zebulun ... means “honor”
 - ◆ זְבֻלֹן from the Hebrew root זָבַל (to honor)
 - ◆ Finally ... after all these sons Leah expects to win Jacob's favor and honor (expressed particularly by dwelling with her)
- * Leah's final recorded birth is a daughter — Dinah
- * Why is a daughter recorded among all sons?
 - ◆ Because of her later significance in Gen 34
- * What is ironic about this whole affair?
 - ◆ Rachel gets the mandrakes ... Leah gets the children
 - ◆ Debunking the “myth of the mandrakes!”

The Royal Family

- * Finally this sordid affair comes to an end with God remembering Rachel's plight — giving her a son
 - ◆ Perhaps finally she has been broken and demonstrates the humility God seems to have been seeking in her
- * After all this drama, only 3 verses are given to Rachel's blessing!
- * She names her son Joseph — which has a double meaning capturing the two ideas of ...
 - ◆ Taking away her reproach - derived from the Hebrew root יָסָה and ...
 - ◆ May he add - derived from the Hebrew root יָסַף

Closing Thoughts

- * God will honor Rachel's request with another son — Benjamin — in Gen 35 ...
- * Though it will result in her death in child-bearing
- * This whole section is a sordid story — yet it is how God brings about the 12 tribes that will comprise Israel ...
- * And how he honors his promise of descendants
- * The children's names themselves tell a story — their mothers employing them to reflect their hurt and rivalry

Closing Thoughts

- * Imagine, for example, what a fight between the sisters might have sounded like ...
 - ◆ Rachel: *You're not loved!*
 - ◆ Leah: *I have two words for you Rachel : REUBEN (God sees me) and SIMEON (God hears me)*
 - ◆ Leah: *You're barren!*
 - ◆ Rachel: *Let me remind you Leah: DAN (God has vindicated me) and NAPHTALI (I have wrestled with God and you, and prevailed)*
- * And so on ...

Closing Thoughts

- * In the end, Leah gets the Messianic (Judah) and Priestly (Levi) lines ...
- * While Rachel got the "inheritance" line (Joseph)
- * Having fulfilled the "descendants" blessing, God proceeds to bless Jacob "materially" in Gen 30:25-43
