

## *The Birthing of the Nation of Israel*

*Genesis 29:31-30:24*

“... we have here the genesis of the twelve tribes of Israel from one father and four mothers. Jacob did not know that he would father twelve sons. All he knew about his offspring was what he had heard the Lord say from above the angel-laden ladder at Bethel: *Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth shall be blessed*” (28:14). Certainly Jacob did not know that his children would come in three sets of four. Initially, four would be born to Leah. Next, four would be born to the slave maids Bilhah and Zilpah. And the last four would come from the sisters, two from Leah and two from Rachel. And, of course, Jacob had not the slightest intimation of the birth wars that lay ahead.

*Imagine the interest with which this account would have been scrutinized when it was first written some five hundred years later by Moses upon the exodus from Egypt. The freshly delivered twelve tribes of Israel learned both about their origins and the ways of God. And for people of faith today there is likewise much to be learned here—about ourselves and about God.” Kent Hughes*

- I. In the historical account of the birth of Jacob’s 12 sons, we are given a somber picture of a very dysfunctional polygamous marriage that was far from what God wanted for Jacob, Leah, and Rachel. So why didn’t God step in and stop such sinful, godless, nonsense in the choices they made. It’s a mystery in some ways as to why He lets sinful believers make the choices they do, especially when the outcome could keep the Lord from working in the hearts of those involved in fulfilling His good, perfect, and pleasing will. God allows us to disobey His revealed will, but never outside the confines of His Sovereign will to teach us to depend on Him. God allowed Leah to be a part of Laban’s deception knowing that Jacob would never love her. What Leah realized, as she tried to earn his love, was that there was one greater than Jacob whom she could depend on. So, she turned to the Lord, and He in turn blessed her and gave her the grace she needed to live in a difficult marriage.

Gen. 29:31-35

Leah = "weary"

**Reuben** = "behold a son"

**Simeon** or Shimeon = "heard"

**Levi** = "joined to" (Levi was the father of the priestly line of Israel)

**Judah** = "praised" (Judah was the father of the kingly line from whom the Messiah came)

*“Leah’s blood would flow in the veins of Moses and Aaron and David and Christ the Messiah.” Hughes*

**Psalm 3:3** *But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head.*

- II. God warns us to “*See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many*” (Heb. 12:15). Leah understood God’s grace and learned to rely on it, Rachel did not. In fact, Rachel had let a bitter root grow in her heart toward her sister and perhaps even toward God Himself. There are a lot of reasons why that happened. The sin of deceit, polygamy, jealousy, covetousness, self-centeredness, and pride had taken a toll on a family that was in the throes of problems they had created for themselves. Yet, God’s grace did not abandon them to their sin. He was still working in their lives despite themselves because of His **hesed love** (unfailing, loyal, steadfast, faithful love) toward them. There is much we can draw from their story, but I believe one of the biggest is the understanding that God’s grace is sufficient for us and that His power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).

Gen. 30:1-13

Bilhah (Rachel’s maidservant) bears two sons. Rachel = "ewe" Bilhah = "troubled"

**Dan** = “a judge, judged, vindicated”  
**Naphtali** = “wrestling” (a great struggle)

Zilpah (Leah’s maidservant) bears two sons. Zilpah = "a trickling"

**Gad** = “good fortune”  
**Asher** = “happy”

- III. How God brought about the nation of Israel seems rather bizarre and out of character for a holy and just God. Yet, “*Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him*” (Ps. 115:3). What should amaze us is how God accomplishes what He does through fallible mankind, especially through those who oppose Him. We must remember, that behind the scenes of Jacob, Leah, and Rachel’s marriage was Satan doing what he could to keep the nation of Israel, let alone the lineage of Christ, from coming about. It speaks of the power of God to accomplish His will no matter the circumstances. It is the same power and grace that raised us from spiritual death to spiritual life, and no matter what we might be dealing with, “*we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*” (Rom. 8:28).

Gen. 30:14-24

Ps. 103:8-17

(Leah’s children) **Issachar** = “there is recompense, reward”  
**Zebulun** = “exalted, honor”  
**Dinah** = “judgment”

(Rachel’s sons) **Joseph** = "Jehovah has added"  
**Benjamin** = "son of the right hand" (Rachel died while giving birth to him, Gen. 35:16-18. She named him Ben-oni = "son of my sorrow.")