

# Jacob's Wives and Children

## *Problems Due to Polygamy*


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# What We Will Learn

- Effects of polygamy on relationships within Jacob's family
  - Rivalry and competition for husband's love
  - Family interactions appeared dominated by rivalry between Leah and Rachel
  - Having children with the maidservants likely made relationships more difficult
- Genesis 29:31–35; 30:1–24; and 35:16–18

# Birth of First Four Sons

- Jacob loved Rachel more
- He loved Leah less
- Leah gave birth to first four sons of Jacob
- She named the first three in reference to her rivalry with Rachel over their husband
- She named the fourth to praise God
- Genesis 29:31–35



## Genesis 29 (NIV)

31 When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.

32 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."


33 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.

34 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.

35 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.

## Birth of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Sons

- Rachel offered maidservant Bilhah to her husband as wife
- Jacob accepted
- Bilhah bore 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> sons of Jacob
- Rachel named them in reference to her rivalry with Leah over their husband
- Genesis 30:1–8




## Genesis 30 (NIV)

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!"

2 Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?"

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."

4 So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her,  
5 and she became pregnant and bore him a son.



## Genesis 30 (NIV)

6 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.


7 Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.

8 Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." So she named him Naphtali.

## Birth of 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Sons

- Leah was jealous and offered her maidservant Zilpah to her husband as wife
- Jacob accepted
- Zilpah bore 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> sons of Jacob
- Leah named them in reference to her rivalry with Rachel over their husband
- Genesis 30:9–13





## Genesis 30 (NIV)

9 When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.

10 Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son.


11 Then Leah said, "What good fortune!" So she named him Gad.

12 Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.

13 Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.

## Birth of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Sons

- Leah regained intimate access to Jacob in return for giving Rachel a share of mandrake plants that Reuben brought
- Leah bore 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> sons of Jacob
- She named them in reference to her rivalry with Rachel over their husband
- Leah also bore a girl
- Genesis 30:14–21




## Genesis 30 (NIV)

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."

15 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."

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.

17 God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son.



## Genesis 30 (NIV)

18 Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him Issachar.


19 Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son.

20 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.

21 Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

## Birth of 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Sons

- Rachel gave birth to the 11<sup>th</sup> son of Jacob
- She named him as prayer for another son
- Several years later, Rachel gave birth to the 12<sup>th</sup> son of Jacob
- She named the child in reference to her troubled delivery, but Jacob changed the name to express love instead
- Genesis 30:22–24 and 35:16–18




## Genesis 30 (NIV)

22 Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb.

23 She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace."

24 She named him Joseph, and said, "May the LORD add to me another son."



## Genesis 35 (NIV)

16 Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty.

17 And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't be afraid, for you have another son."

18 As she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.

# Concluding Remarks: Seeds of Discord

- Jacob sowed seeds of discord
  - Married two women
  - Could not love them equally
- Resulted in unhealthy rivalry between Rachel and Leah
- Made situation worse by having children with his wives' maidservants



# Concluding Remarks: Children's Names

- Of the twelve sons of Jacob
- Nine were named in reference to rivalry between Leah and Rachel
- Judah and Joseph were named in reference to relationship with God
- Benjamin, was named in reference to love

# Jacob's Children

Order of birth	Name	Meaning of name	Mother
1	Reuben	The Lord has seen my misery	Leah
2	Simeon	The Lord heard	Leah
3	Levi	My husband now will be attached to me	Leah
4	Judah	Now I will praise the Lord	Leah
5	Dan	God has vindicated me	Rachel's maidservant Bilhah
6	Naphtali	I won in my struggle with my sister	Rachel's maidservant Bilhah
7	Gad	Good fortune	Leah's maidservant Zilpah
8	Asher	The women will call me happy	Leah's maidservant Zilpah
9	Isachar	God rewarded me	Leah
10	Zebulun	My husband will honor me	Leah
11	Joseph	May the Lord add	Rachel
12	Benjamin	Son of my right hand	Rachel
Sometime after #10	Dinah [daughter]		Leah

# Concluding Remarks: Interactions Among Children

- Discordant relationships could affect children's interactions
- Leah-Rachel rivalry could extend to children
- Status of Bilhah and Zilpah children within such a large family
- Prophetic effects of children's names

# Concluding Remarks: Lessons Learned

- Cannot love two or more wives equally
- Co-wives compete for husband's love
- Unhealthy rivalry among co-wives could dominate family life
- Paul counseled Timothy to not appoint polygamists as overseers or deacons [1 Timothy 3:2 & 12]