

Genesis Bible Study 17

Jealous Competition – Recipe for Disaster

taken from

***Salvation for the Social Order: For Those Who Haven't Read the Bible
and for Those Who Think Religion is Merely a Private Matter***

by Philip E. Friesen

Reading: Genesis 29:31-30:24

Principal Question: Can this quarreling family survive?

Main Point: Ask each person to give a title or propose a main point.

Notes

When a new couple gets married, they begin a new life. Yet both husband and wife bring habits with them from their original families that need to change. Jacob, his wives, and his in-laws struggle with old habits that God wants to change. Look for the role God plays in the dialogue. You may wonder whether God is blessing Jacob or punishing him. You may feel God is unfair to everyone, but remember, the story is not over yet. Think of your own family as you read. Perhaps God will have a dialogue with you as well.

Definition

Mandrake: a potato-like herb of southern Europe and Northern Africa formerly believed to improve sexual powers. It has also been used as a narcotic.

Discussion

1. What did Leah say after Reuben was born?
2. What does Leah want from Jacob?
3. When Simeon was born, had her status with Jacob changed?
4. When Levi was born, was Leah happy or unhappy with Jacob? What does she want?
5. Do you think Leah's status in the family had changed by the time Judah was born?
6. Do you believe that God decides whether a couple have children or not, or is it all a matter of human planning and biological accident?
7. Do you think this family will be happy now that Rachel has a child to care for?
8. Why did Reuben bring this particular plant (mandrake) for his mother (see definition above)?

9. How do you think he felt after his mother traded it to her rival?¹

- Happy?
- Sad?
- Hurt?
- Regretful?
- Angry ?
- Proud?
- Confused?
- Afraid?

10. With his wives fighting over him, do you think Jacob felt like a king or like a slave? Why?

11. Are there any stories like this in the literature or political history of your country?

12. How are these stories interpreted in your culture?

13. Do you think God has been fair to Rachel? to Leah? to Jacob?

14. How does Rachel feel about her new situation? Is she satisfied with life now?

15. Are you satisfied with your life? Imagine your life 30 years from now. What do you think needs to happen so that you will be satisfied with your life then?

¹ If you have time, read Genesis 35:16-21. In this episode, Reuben molested his father's concubine, Bilah. The obvious political motivation was to guarantee his own mother her first wife status after Rachel died. Reuben is obsessed with protecting his unloved mother. By raping his father's concubine, he also challenged his father's authority. In a palace rebellion, the rebel who replaced the legitimate king would molest all the former king's wives to declare his conquest over the former king. This is what Reuben did.

Content Questions for English Comprehension

16. What did Rachel say to Jacob, and how did Jacob answer? (Genesis 30:1)

17. Why is she upset?

18. How does she feel about her status in the family?

19. How did Rachel solve her problem? (Genesis 30:3)

20. Tell what the oldest son did in this story.

Chart of Jacob's Family (numbered in order of birth)

Leah, Wife #1	Zilpah, slave	Rachel, Wife #2	Bilhah, slave
1. Reuben 2. Simeon 3. Levi 4. Judah			
	7. Gad 8. Asher		5. Dan 6. Naphtali
9. Issacher 10. Zebulon		11. Joseph	
(Daughter) Dinah		12. Benjamin	

Linguistic Notes²

The meaning of each son's name follows:

- Reuben: See, a son. Also sounds like "see my misery".
- Simeon: One who hears (God hears).
- Levi: Sounds like the word for "attached".
- Judah: Sounds like the word for "praise".
- Dan: He has vindicated (God has vindicated me).
- Naphtali: My struggle.
- Gad: A troop or good fortune.
- Asher: Happy.
- Issacher: Reward.
- Zebulon: Probably "honor".
- Joseph: May he add (this is a prayer, may God add another son). It probably means that Rachel's heart is still unsatisfied. She still feels inferior to her sister.

² From the notes in *The New International Version of The Holy Bible*, International Bible Society.