



LIFE LESSONS FROM THE LADIES: Part Two

RACHEL AND LEAH: LESSON 18

Last week we met a beautiful lady named Rebekah, who had a fascinating story. We also met her son, Jacob, who tricked his father into giving him the blessing that went along with the birthright that he had already stolen from his brother Esau. Sadly, his mother taught him how to deceive and manipulate to get his way and fulfill God's promise instead of waiting on God. No bueno, Rebekah. We ended our lesson with Isaac and Rebekah sending Jacob away for two reasons; first, to escape Esau's wrath, and secondly, to find a wife from their own people. Sadly, his mom never saw him again because he was gone for about 20 years. This week we will pick up the story where we left off, meeting two sisters who had a father that was as much of a deceiver as Jacob. He had finally met his match, as they say.

We can learn a lot from these sisters. Although they may not have had much choice in the decisions their father made, they did have a choice in how to respond to the situation, to each other, and to Jacob. It's a classic story about the dangers of comparing ourselves to one another, of what envy and jealousy can do to relationships, how trusting God is ALWAYS the answer. The problems that can arise when two sisters fall for the same guy! Yikes!

First Day

1. Read Genesis 28 to get the story in context. Summarize it briefly and include the answers to the following questions: Why was Jacob told to leave? What promise did he receive from God? How did he respond? What commitments did he make to the Lord as a result?

The next chapters show us how God kept His promise and blessed Jacob abundantly, as well as how God disciplined him in the process. It's a classic example of "what a man sows, therefore, he reaps." (Galatians 6:7)

2. Read Genesis 29:1-14 and answer the following questions:

A. How did Jacob meet Rachel?

B. Who is Rachel's father?

C. How did Rachel respond to Jacob?

D. How was this meeting similar to the way his father and mother met? (Read Genesis 24 to refresh your memory if you forgot!)

3. How do you see God's providence in the story so far?

4. Read Genesis 29:15-30 and answer the following questions:

A. Whose idea was it for Jacob to work for Rachel's hand in marriage? For how long?

B. How is Leah described?

C. How is Rachel described?

D. Whom did Jacob love?

- E. How was Jacob tricked?

- F. How did Laban respond to Jacob's accusation? Did he admit any wrongdoing?

- G. How did Laban propose to fix the situation? Why did Jacob comply?

- 5. Read Genesis 29:31-35 and summarize the "situation."

- 6. Before we go any further, I'm interested in your initial thoughts. What questions does this story stir in you? Any comments or observations?

Interesting story, right? Like I mentioned before, Jacob the schemer met his match in his father-in-law and soon began to reap what he had sown. Hold on to your seats, ladies, the story gets even weirder.

Memory Verse of the Week: "Anger is cruel, and wrath is like a flood, but jealousy is even more dangerous." Proverbs 27:4

Second Day

Work on your memory verse.

Yesterday we met Leah and Rachel. Leah's name means "Impatient or Wild Cow" and Rachel's meant "Ewe." No one knows for sure what is meant when the text describes Leah's eyes as "weak" or "delicate," but some think it could mean she had poor eyesight, had a scarred face, or was just lacking the "twinkle" that her sister had. But Rachel was a beauty! It's interesting that the wives of each of the first three patriarchs were beautiful: Sarah (12:11), Rebekah (24:15-16), and Rachel (29:17).

Today we'll continue our reading in Genesis 30:1-43. (Yes, it's a long chapter!) Weirsbe wrote, "There are two major themes in this chapter: the building of Jacob's family (vs. 1-24), and the building of Jacob's fortune (vs. 25-43). There are so many details that we could talk about in this chapter, but I'd like to try to focus on the ladies, if possible. I don't mean to make light of the story or the significance of what God is doing in Jacob's life, but, after all, the name of the study is Life Lessons from the Ladies, right? 😊

1. Read Genesis 30:1-43. What was Rachel's "problem"? From this chapter, list some ways she tried to remedy the situation.

2. Let's put ourselves in Rachel's shoes for a minute. First of all, how do you think she felt about her father giving Leah to Jacob on what was supposed to be "her" wedding night? Do you think she had a choice? What could have been some of her emotions?

3. Rachel must have known that Jacob loved her more than he loved Leah, so why do you think she was so obsessed with having kids? Do you think she may have started to doubt that love?

4. Now think about Leah. How do you think she must have felt about the trick her father played on Jacob? Did she have to go along with it? Did she feel guilty that first night? Did she wrestle with the thought of telling him the truth before they slept together, or no?

Had she rationalized the lie? Why was “she” so obsessed with having more children than Rachel?

5. How did Jacob respond to all this attention?

Kathy Collard Miller wrote, “A mandrake is a stemless root that continually grows and is a part of the potato family. It has narcotic, habit-forming properties and can also be used as a laxative. Native to the Mediterranean region, the mandrake’s root resembles a human figure and has a very strong fragrance that may be the origin of its use as an aphrodisiac. The mandrake plant is sometimes called by the name ‘love apple.’”

The competition increased and takes a weird turn when Leah’s oldest son found some mandrakes. Rachel wanted them, and she had something that Leah wanted even more than mandrakes. She has reservations for a night with Jacob and trades that appointment for the mandrakes. After they “shake” on the deal, Leah announces to Jacob that she has “hired” him (Genesis 30:14-16). Jacob complies with their wishes.

When marriage starts in sin, there is usually division and unhappiness in the home. Rachel couldn’t help but envy her sister, creating bitterness, even between Jacob and herself. Jacob should have prayed about the situation instead of losing his temper or going along with their man-made solutions. Leah must have longed for the love of her husband, hoping that each child would strengthen their bond together. Both sisters longed for things that appeared to be out of their reach and out of their control. But they all tried to “control” the situation their own way. Talk about a dysfunctional home. The tension in their home must have been fierce.

6. How “should” each of them have handled the situation? How could the sisters have been a help to each other rather than a source of pain?

7. Each sister continued to compare herself with the other, turning the situation into a competition. Why is comparing ourselves to others so dangerous? What “kinds” of things do we tend to compare? How does it lead to envy and jealousy?

8. You knew this question was coming. Are you guilty of comparing yourself to anyone else? Your looks? Talents? Position? Gifts? What should you do about it?

9. How can social media play a part in this? How do you respond to everyone else’s “perfect” pictures? Are you guilty of portraying yourself in a way that causes others to be jealous, trying to create a façade of something you wish was true?

10. Have you ever found yourself in a situation that you feel you are “competing” with someone, in some way? Did you handle it right? What could you have done differently?

11. Naomi Rhode wrote, “Don’t compare your family relationships to ours or to others and devalue what you have. Often the family tree spreads its roots deeper into the soil and grows into an unusual shape. Enjoy your family regardless of the shape of your family tree.” What’s the “shape” of your family tree? Do you appreciate it or tend to devalue it? Thoughts?

Ann Spangler wrote, "Like her husband, the beautiful Rachel had been both a schemer and the victim of schemes. Tricked by her own father, she viewed her children as weapons in the struggle with her sister. As so often happens, the lessons of treachery and competition were passed from generation to generation. Rachel's own son, Joseph, would suffer grievously as a result, being sold into slavery by his half-brothers, Leah's sons." When sin enters the camp, it infects everyone. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." (Galatians 5:9)

Third and Fourth Day

Work on your memory verse.

I want to begin today by discussing the "longing" that Rachel and Leah were experiencing. Rachel longed for children, and Leah longed for the love of her husband. Longing for things is a normal part of life. We long for things like love, children, or happiness. Longing for things is not necessarily wrong. When does it turn from normal to wrong?

1. I read this question and thought I'd pose it to you. "Discontentment is insidious. It traps us into thinking what was enough is no longer enough. Yet it's normal to long for things like love and children. What do you long for that you don't have? How can you tell if your longing has crossed the line from a good desire to harmful discontent?"
2. Have you ever used your children as weapons in your marriage, or in any other ways? (Can you give examples of what that could look like?)
3. Have your children ever been the source of competition between you and other parents?

4. Leah seemed to feel “unloved” by Jacob. Many wives feel “unloved” by their husbands, or that they are “loved less” than many other things, such as money, jobs, sports, or whatever. Maybe you’ve felt unloved by someone else, like your parents or friends. Leah made wrong choices because of that feeling. Have you ever felt unloved by someone? Has that “feeling” ever caused you to react badly or make poor choices? (What you share in group stays in group ...)

5. How do the names of the sons reflect the on-going competition?

6. After eleven children had been born to Jacob, Rachel bears a son and names him Joseph. What are the two explanations she gives for the name she picked? How did they reveal her state of mind?

7. In the very moment of relief and the joy of finally giving birth, she is not satisfied; she wants more. She is not content with what God had given her. Would you say your life is characterized by contentment? Or, like Rachel, are you constantly looking for “more”?

The second half of the chapter lets us know how Jacob builds his fortune, becoming exceedingly prosperous (Genesis 30:43). In the next chapter, the Lord tells Jacob to return home and he talks to both wives to get their opinion. They both agree to leave their father, Laban, and set out for the land of Canaan. In verses 14-16, they both express their anger at Laban who had never given them any of the bride wealth earned by Jacob in his fourteen years of service for them.

8. Read Genesis 31:1-22. What did Rachel do according to verse 19? Why do you think she did that?

9. Summarize verses 23-55. How did Rachel deceive both her husband and her dad? What “oath” did Jacob make in verse 32?

10. Let’s hop, skip, and jump to the part where Jacob and his family finally get to Canaan and meet up with his brother Esau. Read Genesis 33:1-20. In what order does Jacob “line up” his family? Why? How do you think that made each sister feel, respectively? How could that have reinforced their original insecurities?

See you tomorrow, ladies. Lots to think about ...

Fifth Day

Write out your verse from memory.

1. In Genesis 35:1-8, what did the Lord command Jacob to do? Do you think Rachel’s stolen idol would have been included?

2. Who died according to 35:8? (Remember, she had been with them since Jacob met Rachel in Genesis 24:59.) How would this be yet another heartbreak for Rachel?

3. Now read and summarize 35:16-20. What happened to Rachel?

4. Rachel named her son Ben-Oni which means “son of my trouble,” but Jacob, whose name had been changed to Israel, renamed him Benjamin, which meant “son of my right hand.” Why do you think he changed it?

5. Where did Jacob bury his beloved Rachel?

Jacob set a pillar upon her grave (35:20), showing his great love for her. That grave, still marked just outside of Bethlehem, is the oldest single memorial to a woman mentioned in the Bible. (Edith Deen) Jacob had loved Rachel from the moment he saw her and he loved her until the day she died. She was the first woman in Scripture to die in childbirth. She was a loved wife and a loving mother. Rachel understood how hard it was to wait what seemed like a lifetime. First, she had to wait for her husband to work for fourteen years, then she had to wait for years until she had a son of her own. She acknowledges Joseph is a gift from God by the name she gives him.

6. Where was Leah buried, according to Genesis 49:28-33?

Leah also had her heartaches and troubles. When her family arrived to meet Esau, her daughter, Dinah, was defiled by Shechem, son of Hamor. You can read the horrible story in Genesis 34. From Leah’s son, Judah, came the tribe of Judah, from which came the line of Boaz, Jesse, and David, which produced Jesus (Luke 3:23-38). And from her son, Levi, came the priesthood. In Ruth 4:11, Leah is honored beside Rachel as one which “did build the house of Israel.” Leah seemed to live in the shadow of her beautiful sister. Our hearts break for her as many of us can relate to what she must have been feeling. But we can rejoice that God sees “the hidden person of the heart” (1 Peter 3:3-4) which is pleasing in His sight. Leah faced rejection, disappointment, and heartache for most of her life. But the Lord blessed her with a

husband, the privilege of being a mom of six of the dozen men who led the twelve tribes of Israel, being the mother of Judah from whom the Savior would come (Revelation 5:5), and being recognized as the “official” wife of Jacob (Genesis 49:31). God made beauty from the ashes in her life. “God is near to those who have a broken heart and saves such as have a contrite spirit” (Psalm 34:18-19). God took notice of her lowly condition and opened her womb. The names she gave her boys seemed to reflect her faith in her God. Leah seemed to be faithful to the end.

Jacob is the father of the twelve tribes of Israel and is a significant figure in Biblical history. God later changes his name to Israel (Genesis 35:10) meaning Prince of God, from which the nation finds its name. Rachel’s first-born son, Joseph, would end up being critically important for the people of Israel to survive after he would one day rule in Egypt, providing a refuge for his father and brothers in the midst of a severe famine. Although he was originally sold into slavery by his half-brothers (Leah’s sons), what “man meant for evil, God meant for good.” (Genesis 50:20)

I love these two paragraphs by Ann Spangler; “Step by step, in ways impossible to foresee, God’s plan was unfolding. A plan to heal divisions, put an end to striving, and restore hope. Using people with mixed motives and confused desires (the only kind of people there are), He was revealing His grace and mercy, never once forsaking His promise.

“The two sisters, Rachel and Leah, remind us that life is fraught with sorrow and peril, much of it caused by sin and selfishness. Both women suffered – each in her own way—the curse of Eve after she was expelled from her garden paradise. While Rachel experienced great pain in giving birth to children, Leah experienced the anguish of loving a man who seemed indifferent to her. Yet both women became mothers in Israel, leaving their homeland to play essential roles in the history of God’s great plan for His people.”

7. In these women, we again see examples of God using imperfect people to fulfill His purposes. What are your thoughts on that? (Does the testimony of these two ladies baffle you, frustrate you, challenge you, or inspire you?)

8. Have you ever felt rejected and disappointed like Leah? God never left her and continued to “remember” Leah. He saw her pain, and He had a purpose and a plan. How does that encourage you?

9. I love this quote by Jill Briscoe: "Trouble is a great growth hormone. It takes us from being spiritual dwarfs to spiritual giants-- if we respond rightly to it." What does Jill mean? Do you agree? (I wonder if trouble made Rachel and Leah grow ...) How are YOU responding to the trouble in your life?

See you next week!