

# Unrequited Love

## *Jacob's Wives and Sons*

- <sup>31</sup> When the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren.  
<sup>32</sup> And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me."  
<sup>33</sup> She conceived again and bore a son, and said, "Because the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also." And she called his name Simeon.  
<sup>34</sup> Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, "Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." Therefore his name was called Levi.  
<sup>35</sup> And she conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah. Then she ceased bearing.

Genesis 30:1 When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she envied her sister. She said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!"

- <sup>2</sup> Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?"  
<sup>3</sup> Then she said, "Here is my servant Bilhah; go in to her, so that she may give birth on my behalf, that even I may have children through her."  
<sup>4</sup> So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife, and Jacob went in to her.  
<sup>5</sup> And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son.  
<sup>6</sup> Then Rachel said, "God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son." Therefore she called his name Dan.  
<sup>7</sup> Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.  
<sup>8</sup> Then Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali.  
<sup>9</sup> When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife.  
<sup>10</sup> Then Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son.  
<sup>11</sup> And Leah said, "Good fortune has come!" so she called his name Gad.  
<sup>12</sup> Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son.  
<sup>13</sup> And Leah said, "Happy am I! For women [daughters] have called me happy." So she called his name Asher.  
<sup>14</sup> In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes."  
<sup>15</sup> But she said to her, "Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?" Rachel said, "Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes."  
<sup>16</sup> When Jacob came from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, "You must come in to me, for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he lay with her that night.  
<sup>17</sup> And God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son.  
<sup>18</sup> Leah said, "God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband." So she called his name Issachar.  
<sup>19</sup> And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son.  
<sup>20</sup> Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons." So she called his name Zebulon.

<sup>21</sup> Afterward she bore a daughter and called her name Dinah.

<sup>22</sup> Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb.

<sup>23</sup> She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach."

<sup>24</sup> And she called his name Joseph, saying, "May the LORD add to me another son!"

## Genesis 29:31-30:24

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### **Unrequited Love**

Patrick Brunty was born March 17, 1777 in Raithfriland, Ireland. He became a Jack of all trades. As a young man, he had apprenticeships as a blacksmith, a linen draper, and a weaver. He eventually moved to England, where he changed his last name and began to study theology at St. John's College in Cambridge. Upon receiving his Bachelors degree, he was ordained a deacon in the Church of England in 1807, and later into its priesthood where he would serve as both curate (assistant to the Vicar) and school examiner.

In the infamous year 1812, he married Maria Branwell and soon thereafter began having children. Baby [Maria](#) was born the next year (1813), followed by [Elizabeth](#) (1815), Charlotte (1816), [Emily](#) (1818), and [Anne](#) (1820). These five sisters were graced with a brother, [Branwell](#), who was born between Charlotte and Emily (1817), thus giving Patrick and Maria a quiver full of children.

But tragedy would soon strike. His bride was stricken with uterine cancer, and died the year after Anne was born (1821). The oldest daughter was only eight when her mother passed on. But this was only the beginning of hardship. Four years later at age 12, Maria contracted Typhoid fever and in her weakened condition from tuberculosis, died in May 6, 1825. A mere six weeks later, on June 25, her ten year old Elizabeth followed her into eternity, having likewise contracted TB.

There would be a few years respite from the horrors of ravaging disease. These years would find Charlotte, Emily, and Anne each finding their way into the world of literature. Reading their works, one quickly comes to see the genius wit and charm of these girls. They were hopeless romantics who wrote tales of [unrequited love](#), love lost, and love never found. Yet, their stories come from the darkness of their own everyday lives and some need to escape them.

For example, 22 years after their sisters had died, the only brother Branwell, now just 31, contracted tuberculosis. Aggravated by bronchitis and Delirium tremens ("shaking frenzy") brought on by addiction to alcohol, on Sept. 24 of 1848, he died. This was followed just three months later by [Emily](#) who also died from TB. Brought on by the harsh climate and unsanitary conditions at home where their water was contaminated by runoff from the church's graveyard, this little bacteria attacked her lungs, causing a chronic cough with blood-tinged sputum, fever, night

sweats, and weight loss, and eventually, death. She would be buried in a coffin that measured only 16 inches wide. Yet, in her biography, it is said, “There never appeared to be any doubt that Emily died of grief for her brother. She was taken ill after his funeral and was dead within three months. It was as simple as that.”<sup>1</sup> She died of a broken heart. Emily was 30 years old.

Anne would die the next year at 29 years of age from this same horrible disease, leaving only Charlotte and her father yet alive. Charlotte would fall in love with her Belgian professor, an older man who was married and had children. She wrote him secret love letters which he tore up, but that were found by his wife who rather perversely sewed them back together. One reads, “I must say one word to you in English – I wish I would write to you more cheerful letters, for when I read this over, I find it to be somewhat gloomy – but forgive me my dear master – do not be irritated at my sadness – according to the words of the Bible: ‘Out of the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaketh’ and truly I find it difficult to be cheerful so long as I think I shall never see you more.”<sup>2</sup>

The professor could not love her, and she would eventually marry someone completely different, her father’s curate—Arthur Bell Nicholls. In 1854 they were wed. Soon thereafter, Charlotte found herself with child. But she got very sick during her pregnancy with perpetual nausea and faintness brought on by that now all too familiar disease. She too died, with her unborn child, in March of the next year. The oldest and last sibling, Charlotte was 38 years old.

Patrick would die at the good old age of 81, having seen his entire family precede him in death, but also having seen three of his young daughters become known the world over for their books. You know them as the famous Brontë sisters. Their works such as *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Agnes Grey* are classics of Victorian Romance and unrequited love.

Unrequited love is one-sided love or love that is not openly reciprocated or even understood as such by the other party. *Wuthering Heights* is filled with it, along with violence and passion such that the Victorian public and many early reviewers thought that it had been written by a man. One writer has said, “The vivid sexual passion and power of its language and imagery impressed, bewildered and appalled

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<sup>1</sup> Winifred Gérin, *Emily Brontë: a biography* (1971), p. 242.

<sup>2</sup> See Eleanor Harding, “Charlotte Brontë’s lost love letters to married professor were preserved by his wife,” Jan 27, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2092460/Charlotte-Bronte-Authors-lost-love-letters-married-professor.html>.

reviewers.”<sup>3</sup> The lives of these girls along with their surviving works remind me very much of the story before us today in Genesis.

### **He Loved Her Less...**

It is a story that begins with a profoundly unrequited love, which as someone has said, “Is the infinite curse of a lonely heart.” Or as Heathcliff says in *Wuthering Heights*, “You loved me-then what right had you to leave me? What right-answer me-for the poor fancy you felt for Linton? Because misery and degradation, and death, and nothing that God or Satan could inflict would have parted us, you, of your own will, did it. I have not broken your heart- you have broken it; and in breaking it, you have broken mine.”

The unit begins, “The LORD saw that Leah was hated” (Gen 29:31). Yet, the verse previous to this tells us what kind of hatred this was. For it was not malice, not malevolence, not meanness. It was, as the verse says, a hatred born out of love for another. “Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah” (Gen 29:30). Jacob could not help it. He had fallen in love with Rachel at the first sight of her. She was beautiful in form and appearance (29:17). She was a strong person, seasoned by her vocation as a shepherdess of the field. She was, as her name suggests, a Little Lamb herself, precious to all who gazed upon her.

He was so in love that serving her father for seven years seemed as but a few days to him (29:20). Yet, Jacob the Deceiver would himself be deceived by his uncle Laban on the night he was supposed to marry Rachel (23). Instead, when he woke in the morning, “Behold, it was Leah!” (25). Leah, whose name is a double entendre meaning “to be weary” or “wild cow,” was nothing to look at, and perhaps her personality followed suit. But now, Jacob was stuck in a marriage he did not ask for with a woman he did not want. To make matters worse, she was the sister of his true love. Can you imagine?

Rather than take Leah and return home to Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob decided to fight for Rachel. He demanded that his uncle give him Rachel as a wife. For this, he would work the next seven years, making a total of fourteen years of servitude to Laban for the hand of Rachel. Yet, Rachel was given to him as a wife after only one week with Leah, meaning that he and these two women had the next seven years to learn to live together before Jacob would finally be able to return home. Our story takes place during these seven years. It is a story which tells us about a dozen children that Jacob would sire, and indeed sire is a good word for it, as this is anything but a monogamous love story of a man and wife.

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<sup>3</sup> Juliet Gardiner, *The History today who's who in British history* (2000), p. 109. This biography is a compilation from the wikis on these different individuals.

In this story we will see how Jacob's hatred of Leah becomes the spark that starts what will soon turn into a wildfire. It is a fire that will shoot the flames of sin high into the atmosphere of Genesis and all of the OT's redemptive history. For in these—**Jacob's Troubles**, we find the source of much unrighteous **anger, envy, jealousy, covetousness, strife, enmity, rage, rivalry, retribution, posturing**, and all manner of **sexual immorality**—confusion of roles, withholding the marriage bed, and abusing of the bed for power and position. Let us look at how this sorted story unfolds.

### **Perhaps Now He Will Love Me?: The LORD and Leah**

The story begins (and ends, ironically enough), with the LORD looking upon one of Jacob's wives. "**The LORD saw that Leah was hated**" (**Gen 29:31**). So the first thing we see is **God's pity** and compassion for Leah. This woman—unloved by her husband—was in a sad condition. **Stuck in a marriage she did not want. But what of her thoughts for Jacob?**

We see that the **LORD's compassion** is directly related to **his plans** for the future. And so he opens her womb (**31**) so that she might have children. We have seen this before with both Sarah (**Gen 18:10**) and Rebekah (**25:21**), and both were instances of the Angel of the LORD doing a mighty miracle. In this verse, we also learn that Rachel is barren. While it does not say it directly, this too is from God, for he is the one who **fills the womb with treasure** (**Ps 17:14**). "**Children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb a reward**" (**Ps 127:3**). As we have seen with Abraham and Sarah, to Him belong the power to conceive or to remain childless.

So Leah conceives and gives birth to the first of Jacob's sons: **Reuben**. It is in the name Reuben that we learn more about Leah's thoughts of Jacob. When the lad was born she said, "**Because the LORD has looked upon my affliction; for now my husband will love me**" (**Gen 29:32**). The word she uses (*oni*) translated "affliction" can mean "great pain" or "misery." Such was the depth of despair this woman endured because she was loved less by her husband.

This brings me to **a warning** the likes of which people need to be keenly aware. For as we have seen with Isaac and Rebekah, so now we see with their son Jacob. Sometimes **people play favorites** in relationships that should be about equals. Isaac loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. A child should never have to strive to feel their parents love, and parents must be extremely careful about playing favorites with one child over another; even if they are drawn to one over another. The lessons learned from being loved less in this story are profound in how sin often wells up because of such feelings. When you play favorites, you are asking for

trouble. Loving one child above another (or one wife above another in the case of our story) will almost certainly have unwanted consequences, for **it creates great pain and misery in the heart of one less loved**. This pain creates a striving to be loved that often finds morality being thrown out the window.

In the same way, what terrible words these are, **“For now my husband will love me.”** How many wives have felt like this at one time or another, as they put upon themselves obligations from within or without. From within come unrealistic expectations that women often feel, that somehow if they will only give their man what they want, then they will be loved: a child, cleaning the house, getting a job, more sex. And how many husbands actually place such burdens upon their wives as they fail to love them unconditionally, but instead, treat them like property that exist for their own evil, selfish pleasures. It was not so in the beginning. But God made the woman for the man to be a helpmate, **an equal bearer of the image of God** in our God given task to take dominion over the earth, rather than over one another. When a person is not loved or is loved less, then behold what manner of sins spring forth? Leah believed that having a child would cause her husband to love her. How self-deceived she was.

Reuben, meaning **“Behold, a Son”** is followed by a second boy whom Leah names **Simeon** meaning **“Hearing with Acceptance,”** for she said **“the LORD has heard that I am hated, he has given me this son also”** (**Gen 29:33**). Clearly, Reuben’s birth did not have the effect on Jacob that she had wanted. Such things never do. It is sometimes a hard lesson for people to learn when they think that pleasing another person is what will gain them acceptance. Do not find your worth in the acceptance of another person. Find it in Christ, who loves infinitely.

Should it not have been enough for Leah that the LORD had seen her affliction? What about this second time? Will it now be enough for her that the LORD had heard that she was hated? Will the birth of two boys draw Jacob’s love to her? Of course not.

She gives birth to **a third son**. **“Now this time my husband will be attached to me, because I have borne him three sons”** (34). **Levi** was the product of their union together. Levi means “attached.” Now Jacob will love me! But three strikes and you’re out. Leah would not have Jacob’s love even after three sons were given to him from her by the LORD. Her striving was vanity.

Perhaps the birth of her **fourth** son tells us that Leah finally began thinking properly. For in the birth of Judah, there is no hint that she is trying to win Jacob’s heart through children. She names him **Judah** for **“this time”** she simply **“praised the LORD”** (35).

This first section of our story shows us about the spiraling despair of a woman who continues to feel unloved, even though God himself was with her to give her four boys. God in the midst of the despair was enough for her, but she did not feel it and did not realize it until, *perhaps*, the birth of her fourth son Judah. But by this time, the dye of their marriage had been cast. This kind of a condition is actually a great turn off to a man. What a pitiable condition that occurs to this woman even as God is himself preparing the way for Messiah to come. The section closes with Leah's womb closing, and Leah "ceased bearing" children.

### **Give Me Children, Or I Die: Rachel and Bilhah**

As all of this is taking place in the heart and body of Leah, something else is happening to Rachel. Rachel is the wife that is loved. This is all Leah wanted—to be loved. If she had been Rachel, she could have died happy and childless. Rachel, on the other hand, is not satisfied with the love of Jacob. Instead, "She saw that she bore no children" and thus "she envied her sister" (Gen 30:1). Oh how a lack of contentment is a root of many evils.

Notice that the previous section begins with the LORD seeing that Leah was hated. This section begins with Rachel seeing that she bore Jacob no children. And so even though she was loved, she seems to have at this point rather have been Leah—unloved and with children than loved without them. So she told Jacob, "Give me children, or I shall die!" (1).

How completely backwards the human mind is capable of thinking when caught up in sin. Indeed, sin *is* backwards thinking. Envy is a backwards, powerful, and destructive force. It is never satisfied in what it has, but only seeks that which it cannot and does not have. It is not content. It constantly worries. It seeks something that it will never find, because in order for it to exist, that which it seeks to find cannot. When it seeks it out, nothing will stand in its way. "Sheol, the barren womb, the land never satisfied with water, and the fire that never says, 'Enough'" (Prov 30:16).

The first thing Rachel's envy does is awaken her lover's anger. "Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel" (Gen 30:2). This is not exactly what she wanted. She longed to make her husband happy by giving him children. Her envy of Leah had the opposite effect from what was intended, in her own heart and in Jacob's. For her envy of her sister, she has now created a war with her own husband.

Jacob's own anger was undoubtedly not the sole fault of Rachel. He is the one that was tricked by his uncle. He is also the one that got himself into this situation with two wives. Now he has to deal with the consequences of two women that want only what the other has, all while trying to convince themselves that they

want it for Jacob's sake. His own frustration had be in overdrive. "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" (2).

What do you make of Jacob's statement? I find it, while true, a classic example of using theology as a weapon to wound another, rather than as a remedy to cure them of their hurt. Tit for tat. You blame me, I'll blame you back. But mine will sound pious, while I make you look like a spiritual fool. How many people have been destroyed because someone said the right thing at the wrong time, as that person uses the truth in an unlawful manner? The more proud you are of your theology, the more time you spend with it, the greater temptation it can be to take it up as a weapon. I have seen many Reformed people wield the sword of theology for the sole intent, it often seems, of proving their own mental superiority, all while making the other person feel like a fool. And they do it against one another! No, brothers, it must not be among us that we would do such a thing.

Jacob's anger does nothing to sooth his beloved. Instead, it only causes her to redouble her efforts to find a cure for her envy, and now, Jacob's wrath. She pulls out an old tricked used throughout the Ancient Near East and by Jacob's grandmother Sarah when she could not bear a son for Abraham. It is the custom of the surrogate marriage. Rachel would give her servant Bilhah to Jacob as a wife (Gen 30:3-4). In return, Jacob would lay with her, she would conceive, and the child would be considered Rachel's. Oh what wicked webs we weave...

The plan worked. Jacob now took on a third wife, though Bilhah would never be considered a full wife by law. Poor Bilhah. Did she ask to get in the middle of all this? Laban's wedding gift is now to be used as a weapon against Rachel's own sister. Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. The son would be Rachel's by law, but not by origin.

"God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son," she exclaimed, naming him Dan ("He That Judges") in remembrance of the event. But was Rachel correct? Had God really given her a son? Yes and no. Yes, the son would be considered Rachel's. Yes, God had opened the womb of Bilhah. Yes, it was even lawful at the time in that culture to do such a thing. But can we really suppose after all the strife that Ishmael would cause Isaac that this plan was from the LORD? This statement by Rachel is a half truth and now she uses bad theology to kid herself.

To think properly about it, we must understand that while God has a sovereign will that is always accomplished, he has a revealed will that is rarely kept. What do I mean? It is common among some Reformed groups to deny that there is a distinction between the revealed will and the secret will of God. Yet, this is the biblical teaching. The secret will of God is God's decree and it occurs just as God



desires it to occur, every time. The Apostle prayed to God on behalf of the Roman Christians “asking that somehow by God's will (*tō thelémati tou theou*) I may now at last succeed in coming to you” (Rom 1:10). For Paul, it was always God’s will that would or would not allow him to go to a particular place to preach the gospel (Acts 18:21; Rom 15:32; 1 Cor 4:19; 16:7; etc.).

Yet, the very same language is used not of the secret decrees of God that move king’s hearts like a watercourse, but to refer to God’s law. Jesus said, “If anyone's will is to do God's will (*tō theléma autou*<sup>4</sup>), he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority ... Has not Moses given you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law” (John 7:17, 19). In this case, the will of God is not a secret decree, but the revealed law, a law that is usually broken by men. Hence, I said this will is rarely kept.

The point in question is whether Rachel is correct that God had given her a son? Yes, in his secret will he surely did. God had a plan and a purpose in the birth of Dan. But in the revealed will, there can be no question but that Rachel used dubious ethics to bring about this result. Rachel should not have done what she did, and her actions will only cause more strife in future stories. Have we not already seen this with Ishmael? As someone has said, “Prayer, not protest, should have been Rachel’s reaction.”<sup>5</sup> She did not rely solely on God, but rather took measures into her own hands, the most common reaction of fallen people known in this world. The name of this child reminds those with ears to hear that one of the tribes of Israel is forever named after a seriously flawed theology of God’s will. The text nowhere says that God vindicated Rachel in the birth of Dan. This is purely and solely in the twisted imagination of a woman full of envy of her pitiful sister.

It did not stop here. Bilhah conceived again and gave Jacob a sixth son, the second from her via Rachel. “With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister and have prevailed” (8), Rachel said. “Mighty wrestlings” is difficult to translation. It is literally, “*Rahel naphtule elohim niptalti*.” Does she feel like she is wrestling with God himself?

The English word foreshadows a story that will occur a few chapters from now, when Jacob will wrestle with a mysterious man, and the Hebrew may lead to the same conclusion. But the Hebrew words are different. *Naphtulim* (wrestle) is here related to the word *pathal*, which means “cunning” or “astute.” Rachel

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<sup>4</sup> *Autou* is the genitive personal pronoun “his.” In this case, “his” refers to God. But note, the same word for “will” is used in both passages.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 244.

cunningly thinks she has won what is for her an all out war with her sister for the love of their husband. These two poor boys are caught in the middle of this war along with their biological mother Bilhah. Such is the shrapnel that begins to blow out of the grenade of Rachel's envy for her sister. Many lives will be affected by her sin. What seems clear is that she **named her child after a family feud**. But his name would not be Richard Dawson or Louis Anderson or Steve Harvey, the hosts of a game show by the same name. His name would be **Naphtali**.

### **Take This Woman: Leah and Zilpah**

At this point, Leah enters the war in a full frontal assault. The next section begins as the last two have. "**Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children**" (Gen 30:9). Like her younger sister, Leah begins to look at her circumstances, and what seemed like a declaration of faith in God in the name of Judah is quickly turned into an eye for an eye against her sister. "**She took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife**" (9). You couldn't write a piece of fiction that read more sordidly than this sad tale. Emily Bronte does not hold a candle to this, and this is non-fiction. It tells the beginnings of the history of an entire race of people, and the OT saints did not mythologize their origins. Zilpah means "**Flippant Mouth**." What will come from the lips of Leah will certainly bear this out.

Leah's wedding present from her father, her maid and helper similarly becomes pregnant and gives birth to yet **another son** (10). Leah exclaims, "**Good fortune has come!**" (11) and she calls the boy **Gad**. Another translation reads, "**What luck!**" Oh no. Leah has regressed from praising God to thanking Luck. It gets no better with Zilpah's **next son** (12). Leah says, "**Happy am I! For women [daughters] have called me happy.' So she called his name Asher**" (13). **Asher** can mean "**Happy**," but it can also mean "**Fortunate**." The latter has the same root English word as Fortune. Has Leah now found her fulfillment in Fate rather than an All Loving God? Recall, we talked about serendipity and karma in the previous sermon.

### **You Have Taken My Husband: Leah and the Mandrakes**

Apparently, **Leah is not as happy** as the name Asher leads us to believe. Because after this surrogate son is born, a most unusual event occurs. We read, "**In the days of wheat harvest Reuben went and found mandrakes in the field and brought them to his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, 'Please give me some of your son's mandrakes.'** But she said to her, 'Is it a small matter that you have taken away my husband? Would you take away my son's mandrakes also?' Rachel said, 'Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes'" (Gen 30:14-15). What is going on here?

Reuben is probably a young boy around six or seven, sent out on an errand by his mother. She wants him to go and get a plant known in the ancient world as both an aphrodisiac and to possess magical properties to help infertile women conceive. The Song of Solomon, “The mandrakes give forth fragrance, and beside our doors are all choice fruits, new as well as old, which I have laid up for you, O my beloved” (Sol 7:13). This is a woman who wants a child very badly.

But Rachel intercepts Reuben on his way to deliver the root (or fruit?)<sup>6</sup> to his mother. Why? Because Rachel is also desperate to bear a child, perhaps even more so since she has yet to give birth to anyone. And if she does not give birth, not only does she feel like she may lose Jacob’s love, it is quite possible that he could even divorce her, as there were in those days often time limits set after which the wife can be divorced should an heir not be provided.<sup>7</sup>

### Mandrake Root



### Mandrake Fruit



So when Rachel sees the treasure, she covets it for herself. She can use it to get pregnant! She asks her sister *very politely* if she can have some of the mandrakes. How do you suppose that went over? Leah becomes irate. “You have taken away my husband,” we learn in a moment, means that she no longer has conjugal rights in

<sup>6</sup> There is some question as to whether the mandrake is what was gathered by Reuben, as it is not known to grow in Mesopotamia. The Testament of Issachar says, “These were fragrant fruit produced in the land of Horan in the high country below a waterfall” (T.Iss 1:5). This reminds us more of the Garden of Eden fruit than of a mandrake root. But this point is hardly vital to the story. The fruit of the mandrake is is poisonous, but not in small doses. It's smell resembles an apple, hence the nickname Satan's Apple.

<sup>7</sup> Anywhere from two to seven years. John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 110.

the bedroom. Many think this would later also become grounds for divorce, according to the law of **Ex 21:10**. “**Would you take away my son’s mandrakes also?**” Leah is being treated as a non-wife, and if she now permits Rachel to have the mandrakes, and if she has a child, it will be all over for Leah and Jacob her love who does not love her back. No, Leah needs the mandrakes to seduce her husband and to hopefully conceive another child. These two poor women are absolutely caught up themselves.

But Leah knows she has to somehow find a way into Jacob’s bed. Simply arousing him with the mandrakes is no guarantee, especially with his love for Rachel over her. Then Rachel hatches a plan. “**Then he may lie with you tonight in exchange for your son’s mandrakes**” (30:15). This is where we learn that Rachel holds all the cards of the bedroom. She bribes her sister so that she might herself become pregnant. Look and see how twisted the knot of their sin has become. Rachel is willing to let her sister be with her husband, opening herself up to Leah having yet another child, all in a desperate attempt to use magic so that she can have a baby.

Though she already has four boys with Jacob, and two more through her concubine that supposedly made her happy, Leah is **so profoundly unsettled** in her own sense of self security that she too risks having her sister get pregnant just so she can have one night with Jacob. So, “**When Jacob came in from the field in the evening, Leah went out to meet him and said, ‘You must come in to me, for I have hired you with my son’s mandrakes’**” (30:16). She had to hire her own husband. It is like some kind of bizarre prostitution within a polygamous marriage.

Jacob understood the rules and “**so he lay with her that night.**” Then we read, “**God listened to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son**” (17). Notice how in the midst of all the scheming and conniving, the text points us this time to **God’s sovereign will**. It does so with the language of **God (Elohim) listening**. Leah names her son **Issachar** after this strange event saying, “**God has given me my wages because I gave my servant to my husband.**” The Serpent could not twist moral logic better than Leah’s warped mind has. She thinks that God has given her a son because she pulled a fast one on her sister by giving Jacob Zilpah, and how God is rewarding her for hiring her husband and giving Rachel the mandrakes! Is your head spinning yet? The Scripture only says that God listened to her, but it does not say why. I rather think it is simply because he had a sovereign plan that would eventually include twelve sons for Jacob. Issachar is one of them.

Leah will now give birth to **one more son**, a full half of the tribes of Israel come from her. Perhaps this shows that Jacob softened to Leah, when he saw that

she was still capable of having children, and especially since Rachel is not. Her final boy is named Zebulun for “God has endowed me with a good endowment; now my husband will honor me, because I have borne him six sons.” Poor Leah. After all this time, she still has not figured out that having children is not going to gain her Jacob’s sole affection.

Leah’s story ends here the way it began, with her incurable hopeless attempts to get Jacob to love her, but not before we learn of one more child: Dinah. Dinah is the feminine form of Dan, and her name thus also means “Vindicated” or “Judged.” Dinah is inserted into the story to round out the number of children to twelve (Benjamin is not in this story). She is the only sister mentioned. Her place here serves as foreshadowing for a crazy story that will take place a few chapters from now.

### **God Remembered Her: God and Rachel**

The passage ends the way it began, with God opening a womb (compare 20:22 with 29:31). We have seen Leah bear four children, Bilhah two, Zilpah two, and Leah three more. But what about Rachel? Is she to mourn all her days as the one woman who could not give Jacob an heir? Is she to be cursed of God though she is Jacob’s true love?

As we just read with Leah, so now we read of Rachel. “Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her” (30:22). God is not unmoved by the cries of his people. God is not aloof to the sufferings of his loved ones. God is present with them, and even through all their scheming and manipulating, their selfishness and their sins, God is present. When he decides to do something, not even a barren womb can stop him from acting. “And he opened her womb.”

Rachel, who has for these seven years watched eleven children be born to the man who loved her, all from other women, now has her turn. “She conceived and bore a son and said, ‘God has taken away my reproach’” (23). The name of her son is Joseph, and his is the story that Genesis will end with. None of the other sons get the kind of play time in the story that Joseph does. Joseph means, “May God Add” as Rachel said, “May the LORD add to me another son!”

The very name Joseph foreshadows the future. It foreshadows the birth of the last son of Jacob, Rachel’s second son Benjamin, who is not found in this story. It foreshadows the completion of the twelve tribes of Israel, via the sovereign will of God to create a nation from this man Jacob whose family is so very messed up. It, along with the other boy’s names, foreshadows Israel going down into Egypt where Joseph will one day see his brother again. Arthur Pink gets at this when he says:

What a remarkable illustration and demonstration of the absolute Sovereignty of God is found here ... What a showing forth of the fact that even in our smallest actions we are controlled by the Most High! All unconsciously to themselves, these wives of Jacob in naming their babies and in stating the reasons for these names? were outlining the Gospel of God's Grace and were prophetically foreshadowing the early history of the Nation which descended from their sons. If then these women, in the naming of their sons and in the utterances which fell from their lips at that time were unknown to themselves, *guided by God*, then, verily, God is *Sovereign* indeed. And so alarms His Word, "for OF HIM, and through Him, and to Him, are all things." (Rom 11:36)<sup>8</sup>

Finally, it foreshadows a person who more than most in the OT, is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ himself: firstborn of their mothers, shepherds, most loved by their fathers, prophesied to be rulers, sold by their brother, went down to Egypt, falsely accused, indwelt by the spirit, savior of their brothers (see chart below). In this tale of unrequited love for Leah, envy for Rachel, sibling rivalry, family feud, innocents brought in to suffer the consequences of sin upon sin upon sin, in this story of women vying for the love of another, remember that Jesus Christ loves you unconditionally and always. There is no need to work for his love. There is no way to hire his love. There is no way to scheme to get his love. Rather, he has condescended to this earth because God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever should believe upon him will not perish like Rachel claimed she would, but have everlasting life.

| Jacob's Family (Genesis 29:31-30:24; 35:18) |   |
|---|---|
| Jacob                                       | "Supplanter" or possibly "May El Protect"   |
| Leah  | "Wild Cow" or "Wearied"                     |
| 1. Reuben                                   | "Behold, a Son"                             |
| 2. Simeon                                   | "Hearing with Acceptance"                   |
| 3. Levi                                     | "Join" or "Cleave"                          |
| 4. Judah                                    | "Praise"                                    |
| 9. Issachar                                 | "He Brings Wages" or "My God Be Gracious"   |
| 10. Zebulun                                 | "Wished-For Habitation"                     |
| (1) Dinah                                   | "She That Is Judged/Vindicated"             |
| Bilhah (to Rachel)                          | "Languishing" or "Timidity"                 |
| 5. Dan                                      | "He That Judges"                            |
| 6. Naphtali                                 | "Wrestling" or "Struggle"                   |
| Zilpah (to Leah)                            | "Flippant Mouth"                            |
| 7. Gad                                      | "Good Fortune"                              |
| 8. Asher                                    | "Happy" or "Fortunate"                      |
| Rachel                                      | "Little Lamb"                               |
| 11. Joseph                                  | "May God Add"                               |
| 12. (Benjamin)                              | "Son of the Right Hand" or "Son of Old Age" |

<sup>8</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2005), 270.

**Joseph as a Type of Christ (<http://dtjsoft.com/joseph-a-type-of-christ/>)**  
(I do not necessarily agree with every point, but the chart is interesting nonetheless)

| Similarities   | Joseph   | Jesus  |
|--|--|--|
| Both are first-born.   | Gen 30:22-24<br>(of Rachel)                              | Matt 1:25<br>(of Mary)                               |
| Both are shepherds.  | Gen 37:2   | Matt 2:26, 26:31<br>John 10:11                       |
| Both are the most loved of their fathers.  | Gen 37:3   | Matt 3:17, 12:18                                     |
| Both were prophesied to be rulers.   | Gen 37:5-11  | Dan 7:13-14<br>Mic 4:7,5:2<br>Ps 2                   |
| Both Joseph's and Jesus' brothers were jealous of them, and did not believe them.  | Gen 37:4-5, 11   | John 7:3-5, 15:18-19                                 |
| The prophecies that Joseph would rule his brothers (the tribes of Israel), and Jesus would rule the whole world, including Israel.   | Gen 37:6-11  | Dan 7:13-14<br>Ps 2:1-12                             |
| Joseph was sent by his father to his brothers. Jesus was sent by His Father to Israel.   | Gen 37:13,18-20  | Matt 21:37-38, Mark 12:6-7, Luke 20:13-15, John 5:23 |
| Joseph was apparently put to death, and Jesus truly, by their own people to get them out of the way.                                 | Gen 37:18-28   | Acts 2:22-23   |
| Reuben wanted to rescue Joseph. Pilate wanted to rescue Jesus.   | Gen 37:21-22   | Matt 27:24   |
| Joseph was sold as a slave to Egypt. Jesus was betrayed for the price of a slave.  | Gen 37:26-28   | Matt 26:15, Ex 21:32, Zech 11:12-13                  |
| Both went to Egypt.  | Gen 37:28  | Matt 2:13-15   |
| Both were made slaves.   | Gen 39:1   | Php 2:7  |
| Both were falsely accused.   | Genesis 39:11-20   | Matt 26:59-61  |
| Yahweh was with them both.   | Gen 39:3,21, 23<br>Acts 7:9                              | Acts 10:38<br>Luke 2:52<br>John 1:1-2, 3:2           |
| Both were with two others condemned to die, one of which was pardoned and given life.  | Gen 40:1-3, 20-22  | Luke 23:32,39-43                                     |
| God's Spirit indwelt them both.  | Gen 41:38  | Luke 4:1<br>Acts 10:38                               |
| The king of Egypt exalted Joseph ruler over all to bring all under the king's rule. Jesus is exalted to bring all under God's rule.  | Gen 41:40-44   | Acts 2:32-33<br>1Co 15:27-28                         |
| All knees bowed to Joseph. All knees will bow to Jesus.  | Gen 41:43  | Php 2:10   |
| Both were given a name meaning Savior.   | Gen 41:45 ("Savior of the World" or "Sustainer of Life") | Matt 1:21<br>("Yahweh is Salvation")                 |
| Both were given a gentile bride by the King.   | Gen 41:45  | 2Co 11:2   |
| Troubled times come during their rule. 7 years of "tribulation".   | Gen 41:54-55   | Mark 13:8<br>Jer 30:7                                |
| The king of Egypt appointed Joseph to be the sole source of life for all. God appointed Jesus to be our sole source of eternal life. | Gen 41:55-57   | Acts 4:12<br>1Jn 5:11-12                             |
| Joseph's brothers did not recognize him. Jesus' own people didn't either.  | Gen 42:8   | John 1:10  |
| Trouble for Joseph's brothers. Trouble for Israel ("Jacob's trouble").   | Gen 42:21-22, 36   | Isa 40:1-2<br>Jer 30:7                               |
| Joseph was finally revealed to his brothers. Jesus to finally be revealed to Israel.   | Gen 45:3   | Zech 12:10<br>Matt 24:30-31<br>Rev 1:7               |

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| The evil Joseph's brothers intended God meant for good to save them. The same is true of the evil Jesus' own people intended to him...                                | <a href="#">Gen 45:5-8</a><br><a href="#">Gen 50:20</a> | <a href="#">Acts 3:12-18</a>                                      |
| ...therefore they are forgiven.   | <a href="#">Gen 45:5, 10-15</a>                         | <a href="#">Luke 23:34</a>  |
| Joseph's brothers shared Pharaoh's favor because of Joseph, not themselves. We share God's favor because of Jesus, not because we are worthy.                         | <a href="#">Gen 45:16-20</a>                            | <a href="#">Eph 2:4-8</a><br><a href="#">Php 4:19</a>             |
| Both are to bring all under rule of the King.   | <a href="#">Gen 47:19-20</a>                            | <a href="#">Eph 1:10-12</a>                                       |
| Both are Savior   | <a href="#">Gen 47:25</a>                               | <a href="#">Acts 13:23</a>  |
| Joseph's sons (Manasseh and Ephriam) come through his gentile wife and are given full tribe status. Gentiles who believe are considered full members of God's people. | <a href="#">Gen 48:5, 9</a>                             | <a href="#">Heb 2:13 (Isa 8:18)</a><br><a href="#">Acts 28:28</a> |
| While only Jesus was truly sinless, Joseph is one of the few people significantly written about in the Bible of which no sins are mentioned.                          | (silent)  | <a href="#">1 Pet 2:22</a>  |