

• Rachel's distress

Rachel has got the desire of her heart – Jacob. But now there is something that brings her great distress. Like Rebekah and Sarah before her she finds that she cannot have children easily.

The pressure of quarrels and conflicts

One part of the discipline of God is to teach us how to endure and overcome amidst quarrels and conflicts. At this stage of Jacob's life he comes under the most awful pressure. It is not so much a matter of danger to his life – although that will soon come as well. At first it is more the sheer ugly pressure that comes when a host of criticisms and quarrels thrust themselves upon us.

• Rachel expresses her problem unreasonably

First there is a damaged relationship with Rachel that arises because of her childlessness. She seems to be blaming Jacob. 'Give me children, or else I die,' she says ¹. It is a most unreasonable way of expressing her problem.

¹ 30:1

• An unreasonable illogical critic is extremely infuriating

There is one thing that is worse than having an enemy, and that is to have an enemy that one cannot reason with. What is the point of any kind of discussion with a childless wife who says 'Give me children, or else I die'? One can discuss an intelligent complaint, but not one put in the way Rachel puts it. Jacob does not react well – and nor would we. He is simply angry ¹; an unreasonable illogical critic is extremely infuriating. It tests Jacob to the limit of his self-control and he does not stand up well to the test.

¹ 30:2

• Facing unreasonable criticism is part of God's training

Yet **facing unreasonable criticism** is part of God's training and testing him. God wants us to get to the point where we can take the most unreasonable accusations and stay cool. It takes some of us a long time to get there. Jesus is our model. Amidst the most infuriating false accusations, He was able to keep silent ¹. When falsely accused He did not hurl back counter accusations. He did not return 'evil for evil, or insult for insult' ². God wants us to be Christ-like in this respect, and there is no way we can ever get to be like Jesus unless we are put into situations of false accusation sometimes even from those who are nearest and dearest to us.

¹ Mark 14:61

² 1 Peter 3:9

• Jesus is our model

Jacob has to face temptations to act impulsively

Amidst such pressure, Jacob has to face temptations to act impulsively. Years ago Abraham had been in a similar situation and he had turned to Hagar in order to get a son. It was a piece of worldly manipulation, and it did Abraham no good. It certainly did not hasten the birth of Isaac. Soon Rachel turns to the same remedy that Sarah had turned to years before, and suggests that her maid should be used to produce children for adoption ¹.

¹ 30:3–4

• Children for Jacob – but not God's way

It was possible among the pagans of those days for a man with a childless wife to make use of a slave-girl in order to produce a child. In such a situation the childless wife took the child as her own and the true mother had no rights in the matter. It had brought no blessing to Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael or Isaac, but we always seem to feel that we can make sin turn out good, even though no one else can! Bilhah gave birth to Dan ¹ whom Rachel treated as her own ². Then a second son was born, Naphtali ³. Leah seemed to be having a similar problem. She demanded that Jacob should have more children by Zilpah; two more children were born ⁴.

¹ 30:5

² 30:6

³ 30:7–8

⁴ 30:9–13

• But no peace nor happiness

It would soon teach Jacob that it was not the way to get God's will done. It would not lead to peace or happiness however much God might overrule it.

• *More children but not by Rachel*

Rachel was still desperate to have children of her own. Mandrakes were thought to promote fertility and so Rachel begged Leah for her mandrakes; Leah made use of the occasion to hire Jacob for the night! ¹ The result was a fifth son for Leah ² and later a sixth ³ and then a daughter ⁴.

¹ 30:14–16
² 30:17–18
³ 30:19–20
⁴ 30:21

• *Jacob was living in an atmosphere of intense jealousy, rivalry and quarrelsomeness*

The point of all of this is that Jacob was living in an atmosphere of intense jealousy, rivalry and quarrelsomeness. Even the sight of a few mandrakes in the hands of Leah was enough to make Rachel jealous and sneaky. Jacob has four wives who are wrangling for the privilege of his company. Two of them are ex-servant-girls desperate to find some respect and affection. One of them is an unloved wife. Another is a wife who has no self-respect because she has had no children. In the midst of it all is Jacob, who is at the mercy of these women arranging between themselves who has him for the night.

Jacob learns that a prayer delayed is not a prayer denied

Jacob learns that a prayer delayed is not a prayer denied. At long, long last Rachel herself gave birth to Joseph ¹. It was what Jacob and Rachel had wanted for many years. Rachel had long given up and had turned to all sorts of desperate remedies. She was thinking that there was no likelihood that this prayer would ever be answered. And yet it was. We should learn never to give up praying for something that is good and right. Unless God clearly says 'No' He wants us to persevere in our praying and not give up. He may answer at an unexpected time. Or He may answer in a different manner from what we were anticipating.

¹ 30:22–24


• *Unless God clearly says, 'No'*

The greatest lesson that Jacob must learn is that of persisting under pressure

But **the greatest lesson** that Jacob must learn **is that of persisting under pressure.** Four desperate women are causing him anxiety and strain. An employer who is oppressive and dishonest is haggling over his work with the sheep and goats. Children from four different mothers would all have their own rivalries and discords. And yet Jacob has to keep a cool head. His life is not all about women, and conflicts, and uncertain payments from a domineering employer. Jacob's life is about the promises of God. Where is the promise of Canaan in all of this? Where is the promise of land to be inherited and worldwide blessing for all nations? It is this that Jacob has to keep as the centre of his aspirations and hopes. He had once acknowledged that God had spoken to him ¹. He had given himself wholly to God ². He had determined to give God a tenth of his income ³. Now amidst a host of conflicts and responsibilities the question is: will he get '*choked with worries*' ⁴, or will he persist in inheriting the promises of God?

¹ 28:16–17
² 28:20–21
³ 28:22
⁴ Luke 8:14

• *The priority is to focus on the promises of God*

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