

Flocks and Fortune – Genesis 30

GENESIS 30:1-22

I've often compared Rachel to Hannah (1 Samuel Chapter 1), two barren women who desperately wanted children, but today I looked at the two stories more closely. While sharing a common theme of barrenness, I found that they exhibit significant differences in their attitudes and responses to their situations, reflecting distinct lessons on faith and prayer. Lessons we can glean and grow by.

HANNAH'S ATTITUDE AND RESPONSE

Hannah's response to her barrenness is characterized by fervent prayer and a vow to God. Facing provocation and distress, particularly from Peninnah, her husband's other wife, Hannah does not lash out or seek to solve her problem through others. Instead, she turns to God in prayer, pouring out her soul before the Lord in the temple (1 Samuel 1:10). Hannah's prayer is a model of humility and faith. She makes a vow to God, promising that if He gives her a son, she will dedicate him to the Lord's service for all the days of his life (1 Samuel 1:11).

Hannah's approach is marked by patience, faith, and a willingness to let God use her situation for His purposes. When God answers her prayer by giving her a son, she fulfills her vow by dedicating Samuel to the Lord's service, demonstrating her gratitude and faithfulness.

RACHEL'S ATTITUDE AND RESPONSE

In contrast, Rachel's struggle with barrenness is marked by desperation and a sense of competition with her sister Leah, who was able to bear children for Jacob. Rachel responds to her barrenness by blaming Jacob. She misdirected her frustration towards her husband instead of seeking God. In Genesis 30:1, where she demands, "Give me children, or I'll die!" we see that she's longing for something that only God Himself can give. While the statement reflects a deep desire for children, it would seem that there's also a sense of entitlement or impatience. When she gets what she wants, Leah pulls ahead and has another child, leaving Rachel feeling empty again.

This cycle of desire and discontentment is relentless, and yet it's a common struggle that many of us encounter. We live in a culture that constantly bombards us with messages that more is better: more success, more beauty, more possessions, but success without holiness is nothing more than a heap of rotting ladders pointing to the sky. Anyone who's reached "the top" could tell you they're still longing to be fed. Without realizing it we find ourselves in a relentless pursuit, believing the next milestone will get us over the slump and fill the empty void in our hearts. Whether it's wealth or relationships we're looking for, the end result is often the same.

*Whoever loves money never has enough;
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their
income. This too is meaningless.
—Ecclesiastes 5:10, NIV*

Have you ever had a craving late at night when all the stores were closed? I have. Just recently I wanted chocolate and nothing else would do. Vanilla

cookies just don't cut it when you're craving chocolate almonds. In the same way, the things of this world won't satisfy when what we need is more of God.

The Bible challenges us to reconsider our quests, reminding us, "Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 6:9, NIV). This Scripture invites us to embrace contentment, underscoring the futility of endlessly chasing after desires that never truly satisfy.

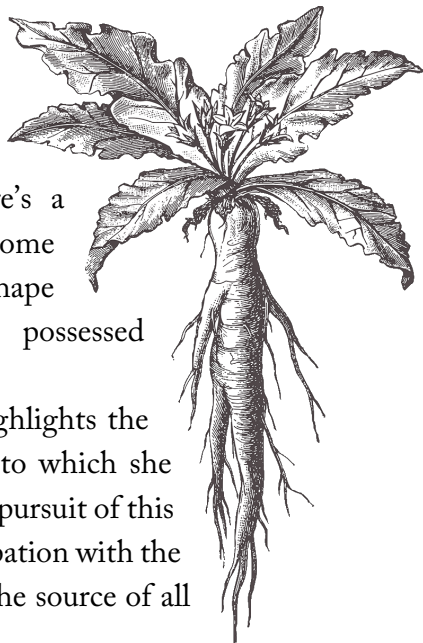
Furthermore, Rachel's actions suggest a sense of desperation and frustration, whereas Hannah's prayerful attitude reflects humility, faith, and a deeper spiritual submission to God's will.

In Philippians 4:12, Paul writes, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want." What is this secret that Paul is talking about? Elisabeth Elliot spoke from a place of deep spiritual understanding when she said, "The secret is Christ in me, not me in a different set of circumstances."

THE MANDRAKES

If you've never seen a mandrake root, go to Google images and take a look, they're quite interesting to say the least. There's a peculiar, human-like shape to the roots, some more than others, and because of their shape many people believed that this plant possessed properties that could aid in conception.

Rachel's fixation on the mandrakes highlights the intensity of her longing, and the lengths to which she would go to fulfill her heart's desire. In her pursuit of this blessing, we discover that Rachel's preoccupation with the means of a blessing leads her to overlook the source of all blessings—the Lord.



In the exchange with Leah, Rachel is willing to trade a night with Jacob for the mandrakes. This choice is a sad reflection of someone whose priorities are out of line with God's will.

Of course there's nothing wrong with wanting to have another child, but like anything else we need to consider the motive behind it. Rachel's declaration in verse 8, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won," indicates a competitive spirit that has overshadowed the deeper values of family unity and love.

If we're driven by jealousy or pride, we're only feeding the monster within us. We can buy another house, we can get another car, we can have another child, but if we're not removing the root of our sin, the weed will only grow stronger.

*For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there
you find disorder and every evil practice.*

—James 3:16, NIV



What are 2 or 3 contrasts between Hannah’s and Rachel’s responses to their barrenness in the Bible? And what can we learn from them?

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In Philippians 4:12 Paul says, “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation” what do you think that secret is?

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❓ Consider a time in your life when changing your circumstances wasn't possible. How did embracing 'Christ in you' rather than seeking a different situation help you find contentment in that challenging moment?

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GENESIS 30:23-43

After completing the 14 years for the right to marry Leah and Rachel, Jacob is ready to move on. Laban, however, asks him to stay, recognizing that he has been blessed through Jacob's work. Jacob then proposes a deal, stating that he will continue working in return for the speckled, spotted, and dark-colored animals from Laban's flocks. This seems like an unbalanced agreement in favor of Laban, and so of course Laban agreed.

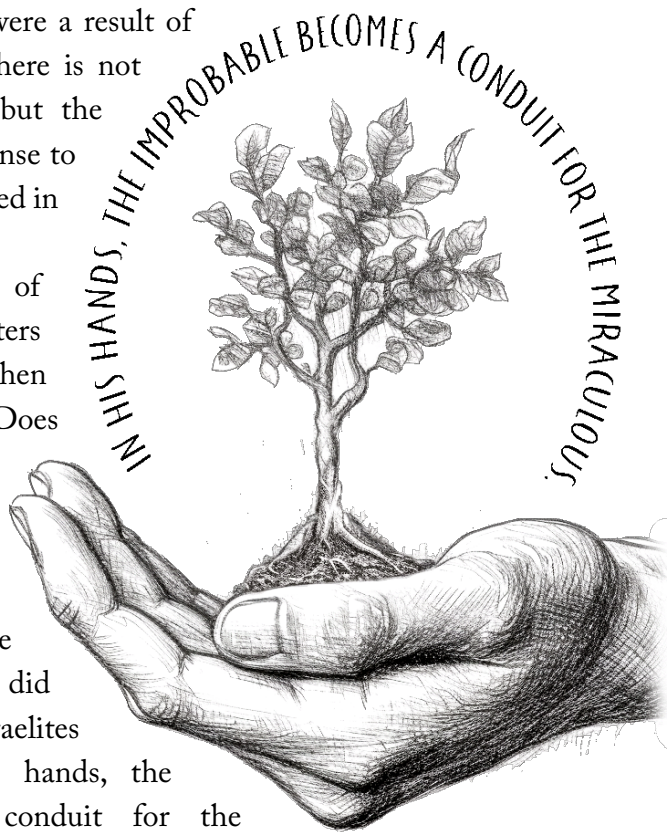
Jacob employs a selective breeding strategy to increase the number of speckled and spotted animals. The Bible tells us that, "he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted." (Genesis 30:38-39, NIV)

Why would Jacob do that? Did he really think that placing striped branches before the eyes of mating livestock would alter their offspring? Rather than attributing the success to ancient breeding techniques, it's more

likely that Jacob's actions were a result of God's guidance. The key here is not the branches themselves, but the obedience of Jacob in response to a vision from God, as revealed in the next chapter.

Does casting a piece of wood into bitter waters sweeten them? It did when Moses did so at Marah. Does mixing saliva with mud and applying it to a man's eyes grant him sight? It did when Jesus healed the blind. Can a shout reduce fortified walls to rubble? It did when Joshua and the Israelites encircled Jericho. In His hands, the improbable becomes a conduit for the miraculous.

The idea behind these stories is not about the actions themselves but in the authority of God behind them. In Genesis 31, we see that God's purpose was to prosper Jacob. No matter how unconventional the means might appear, it was a conduit for God's blessing. Our focus, then, ought to be on the sovereignty and power of God to work beyond our understanding. He honors faith and obedience with His provision, in ways that often defy human logic or expectation.



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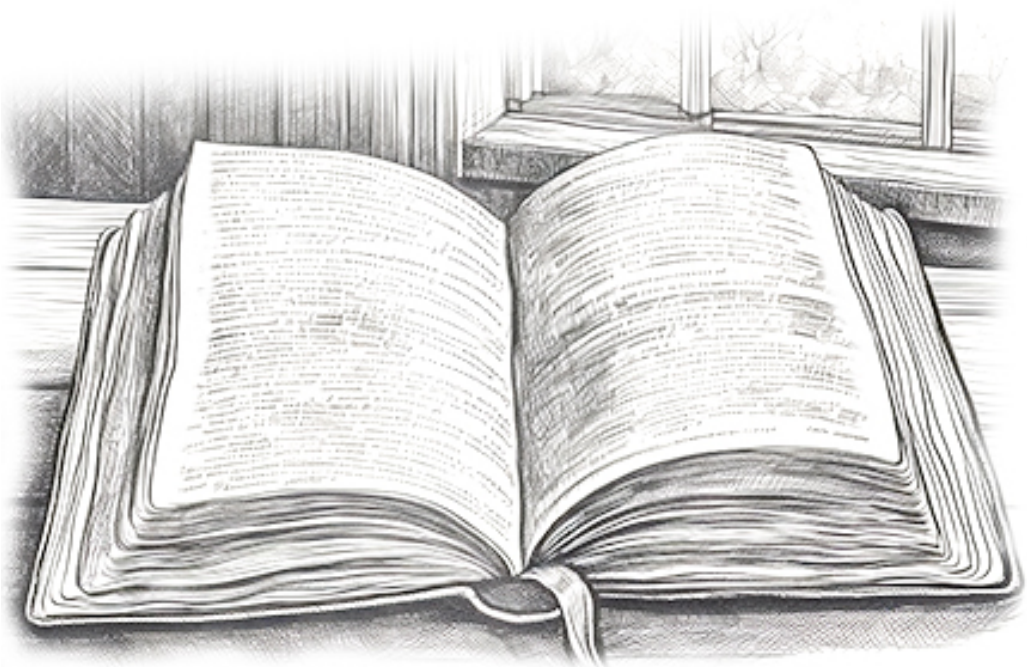
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Answer Key

Chapter 6 – Genesis 30

GENESIS 30:1-22

What are 2 or 3 contrasts between Hannah's and Rachel's responses to their barrenness in the Bible? And what can we learn from them?

Rachel demanding children from Jacob expecting him to solve her problem (Genesis 30:1-2).

Hannah turned to prayer, pouring out her heart to God in her deep distress, and making a vow to dedicate her child to the Lord's service (1 Samuel 1:10-11).

Rachel was jealous of Leah, who was able to bear children, which exacerbated her anguish and led to familial tension (Genesis 30:1).

Hannah displayed profound sorrow but maintained a dignified approach, seeking solace and intervention from God rather than lashing out at those around her (1 Samuel 1:10).

Rachel relied on human solutions like using her servant Bilhah to bear children on her behalf, reflecting a more manipulative approach to solving her problem (Genesis 30:3-4).

Hannah placed her trust completely in God, dedicating her future child to His service, showing deep faith and commitment to God's sovereignty (1 Samuel 1:11, 28).

We learn to turn to God in our time of sorrow and to trust in His timing and wisdom.

In Philippians 4:12 Paul says, "I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation" what do you think that secret is?

The secret of being content is found in his profound trust and reliance on Christ. Paul elaborates on this in the subsequent verse, Philippians 4:13: "I can do all this through him who gives me strength." This reveals that Paul's contentment, regardless of his circumstances, stems from his unwavering faith in Jesus Christ as his source of strength and sustenance.

Consider a time in your life when changing your circumstances wasn't possible. How did embracing 'Christ in you' rather than seeking a different situation help you find contentment in that challenging moment?

(This answer will be different for everyone)

GENESIS 30:23-43

What are some other unconventional actions that biblical figures have taken in obedience to God's will?

Everyone's answers will be different. Here are a few of mine:

God instructed Noah to build an ark in preparation for a catastrophic flood, even though such a flood was unprecedented. Noah's neighbors likely found his actions peculiar or unwarranted, but his obedience saved his family and the animals he gathered (Genesis 6-9).

Gideon reduced his army to just 300 men to face a vast Midianite army, following God's instructions to demonstrate that the victory would be attributed to divine power, not human strength (Judges 7:2-7).

Joshua followed God's unusual military strategy to capture Jericho. Instead of a direct assault, the Israelites marched around the city once a day for six days, and on the seventh day, they circled it seven times and then shouted, causing the city walls to fall down (Joshua 6).

What does 1 Corinthians 1:25 say?

1 Corinthians 1:25 says, "For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." This verse emphasizes that even what might seem like foolishness or weakness on God's part is infinitely wiser and stronger than the greatest wisdom or strength that humans can possess.

What are some ways that your obedience to God personally, might look foolish to the world?

(This answer will be different for everyone)