The children of Jacob

We read from the Bible (ERV):

Genesis 29:31-35

Genesis 30: 1-36

Jacob’s Family Grows  
31.The Lord saw that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah, so he made it possible for Leah to have children. But Rachel did not have any children.  
32.Leah gave birth to a son, and she named him Reuben. She named him this because she said, “The Lord has seen my troubles. My husband does not love me. So now maybe my husband will love me.”  
33. Leah became pregnant again and had another son. She named this son Simeon. She said, “The Lord has heard that I am not loved, so he gave me this son.”  
34. Leah became pregnant again and had another son. She named this son Levi. She said, “Now, surely my husband will love me. I have given him three sons.”  
35. Then Leah gave birth to another son. She named this son Judah. Leah named him this because she said, “Now I will praise the Lord.” Then Leah stopped having children.

GENESIS 30  
1. Rachel saw that she was not giving Jacob any children. She became jealous of her sister Leah. So Rachel said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I will die!”  
2. Jacob became angry with Rachel and said, “I am not God. He is the one who has caused you to not have children.”  
3. Then Rachel said, “You can have my maid Bilhah. Sleep with her, and she will have a child for me. Then I can be a mother through her.”  
4. So Rachel gave Bilhah to her husband Jacob. He had sexual relations with Bilhah.

5. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son for Jacob.  
6. Rachel said, “God has listened to my prayer. He decided to give me a son.” So she named this son Dan.  
7. Bilhah became pregnant again and gave Jacob a second son.

8. Rachel said, “I have fought hard to compete with my sister, and I have won.” So she named that son Naphtali.  
9. Leah saw that she could have no more children. So she gave her slave girl Zilpah to Jacob.

10. Then Zilpah had a son.

11. Leah said, “I am lucky.” So she named the son Gad.

12. Zilpah gave birth to another son.

13. Leah said, “I am very happy! Now women will call me happy.” So she named that son Asher.  
14. During the wheat harvest Reuben went into the fields and found some special flowers. He brought them to his mother Leah. But Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s flowers.”  
15. Leah answered, “You have already taken away my husband. Now you are trying to take away my son’s flowers.”  
But Rachel answered, “If you will give me your son’s flowers, you can sleep with Jacob tonight.”  
16. Jacob came in from the fields that night. Leah saw him and went out to meet him. She said, “You will sleep with me tonight. I have paid for you with my son’s flowers.” So Jacob slept with Leah that night.  
17. Then God allowed Leah to become pregnant again. She gave birth to a fifth son.

18. She said, “God has given me a reward because I gave my slave to my husband.” So she named her son Issachar.  
19. Leah became pregnant again and gave birth to a sixth son.

20. She said, “God has given me a fine gift. Now surely Jacob will accept me, because I have given him six sons.” So she named this son Zebulun.  
21. Later, Leah gave birth to a daughter. She named her Dinah.  
22. Then God heard Rachel’s prayer and made it possible for Rachel to have children.

23. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She said, “God has taken away my shame.”

24. Rachel named the son Joseph, saying, “May the Lord give me another son.”  
Jacob Tricks Laban  
25. After the birth of Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Now let me go back to my own homeland.

26. Give me my wives and my children. I have earned them by working for you. You know that I served you well.”  
27. Laban said to him, “Please, let me say something. I know that the Lord has blessed me because of you.

28. Tell me what I should pay you, and I will give it to you.”  
29. Jacob answered, “You know that I have worked hard for you. Your flocks have grown and been well while I cared for them.

30. When I came, you had little. Now you have much, much more. Every time I did something for you, the Lord blessed you. Now it is time for me to work for myself—it is time to do things for my family.”  
31. Laban asked, “Then what should I give you?”  
Jacob answered, “I don’t want you to give me anything! I only want you to let me do this one thing: I will go back and take care of your sheep.

32. But let me go through all your flocks today and take every lamb with spots or stripes. Let me take every black young goat and every female goat with stripes or spots. That will be my pay.

33. In the future you can easily see if I am honest. You can come to look at my flocks. If I have any goat that isn’t spotted or any sheep that isn’t black, you will know that I stole it.”  
34. Laban answered, “I agree to that. We will do what you ask.”

35. But that day Laban hid all the male goats that had spots. And he hid all the female goats that had spots on them. He also hid all the black sheep. Laban told his sons to watch these sheep.

36. So the sons took all the spotted animals and led them to another place. They traveled for three days. Jacob stayed and took care of all the animals that were left.

Jacob was deceived by his father-in-law Laban. He has worked for 7 years to marry Laban's daughter Rachel. But on the wedding night Laban brings to Jacob not Rachel, but his daughter Lea. When Jacob discovers this the next day, he immediately goes to Laban. Laban says, “You may also marry Rachel if you work for me for 7 more years. Jacob does so.

But God sees that Jacob loves Rachel more than Lea. And He sees her sorrow. He comforts Lea by giving her children.

Here, and in other places in the Bible, you see that God cares for the one who feels unloved. The one who is left out of the group. He looks out for the lonely, for people who are lonely. He wants to give comfort, closeness and protection.

When Leah gives names to her children, you can see what is in her heart:

- Ruben: “the Lord has seen that I am struggling. Now my husband will love me.'

- Simeon: 'the Lord has heard that I get no love, so He has given me children.'

- Levi: 'now my husband will finally love me, because I have given him three sons.'

- Judah: 'now I will thank the Lord.'

Rachel becomes jealous of her sister because Lea is having children and she is not. It causes an argument between Rachel and Jacob. Jacob says angrily, 'Am I God? He has not given you children; He is responsible for you being barren!'

Jacob is aware of God's role in this situation, but we don't read of him praying for Rachel, as his father Isaac did for Rebekah.

Rachel devises a plan: then my slave girl should bear children for me. So it happens: her slave Bilha gives birth to a son.

This may surprise us, but this custom was part of Middle Eastern culture as a solution to childlessness. Children of the concubine belonged to the first wife. Therefore, it is Rachel who names the child. She names him Dan and she says, “God has listened to me and given me a son.

Again Bilha becomes pregnant and she gives birth to a son, Naftali. Now Rachel says, 'my sister and I fought hard for love, and I won.'

Lea says, 'my slave girl must also have children for me' and she gives her slave girl Zilpa to Jacob as a concubine. Zilpa gives birth to a son: Gad. Lea says, 'now I will be happy'.

Again Zilpa gives birth to a son: Asher. Lea says: how happy I am! The women will be jealous of my happiness.'

Ruben, the eldest son finds love apples in the field. These were considered a fertility symbol in those days. When he gives them to his mother, Rachel sees them. She says, 'give me some too'.

But Lea says angrily, 'you have already taken away my husband, that's bad enough. Now you want my son's love apples too?'

'If I get some, you can sleep with Jacob tonight,' Rachel says.

When Jacob comes out of the field in the evening, Lea runs to meet him, telling him that he will sleep with her at night: 'I paid for it with my son's love apples,' she says.

Leah gets pregnant again and she gives birth to a son: Issachar. She says, 'God rewards me because I gave Zilpah as a wife to Jacob.'

Then she becomes pregnant again and gives birth to Zebulun. With him she says, 'God has given me a wonderful gift. Now my husband will want to live with me because I have already given him six sons.'

Then Lea becomes pregnant one more time and gives birth to a daughter, Dina.

God also thinks of Rachel; she also becomes pregnant. When she has her son in her arms, she says, “God has made sure that I no longer have to be ashamed. I hope God will give me another son.'

What a rivalry in this family. The sisters compete for Jacob's love.

Jacob longs to go back to his homeland. The years of having to work for his wives are over and he goes to Laban. But Laban says, “Please stay here.

He does not say, 'Please stay so I can see my daughters and grandchildren every day,' but he says, 'The Lord has made me rich because you are here. He blesses you and I get to benefit from that blessing.'

Jacob says, 'that's right, when I came here you had very few animals. But now you have a large herd. I worked hard for you and the Lord blessed me. But now I want to build something myself.'

'What do you want for wages?” asks Laban.

'You don't have to give me anything, but may I have your black sheep and your spotted goats? You can check tomorrow that I have been honest and that I haven't stolen another animal from you.'

'That's fine,' Laban says. But that same day Laban removes all the black sheep and spotted goats from his flock and sends them away with his sons. He makes sure there is a distance of three days of travel between them and the flock Jacob is to care for.

Again Jacob is deceived by his father-in-law.

But God takes care of him: all the strong animals born next are black or spotted and therefore for Jacob. All the plain animals are weak and for Laban.

Thus Jacob becomes richer and richer. He has many sheep, camels, goats and donkeys.

***Prayer, “Lord, You take care of Jacob in the land to which he has fled. He gets a large family, but not everything goes smoothly there. There is much strife among them and Jacob's father-in-law also deceives him time and again. But You are with him and You bless Jacob and his family.***

***Lord, You look after people who feel unloved, people who carry sorrow and people who are deceived. Thank You Lord.***

Questions:

- The names given by Lea and Rachel to their children indicate a lot of rivalry. This will have caused tension and the sons will also have felt and noticed the mothers' struggles. How do you feel about the way the sisters treat each other?

(Could Jacob have handled this differently?)

- God cares for Lea, who feels unloved.

God cares for Rachel, by giving her a child anyway.

God cares for Jacob, by giving him a large, strong flock.

How does God care for you?

- Laban's kind words are not consistent with his selfish actions. Do you also have such people in your life? How do you deal with them? In what ways does Jacob deal with Laban? Can you learn anything from Jacob?

- Laban sees that the Lord is blessing Jacob and that he gets to share in this.

- If God blesses you, do others share in this as well?

This Biblestudy was written by Carla Heuvelman and can be found on www.febebijbelstudies.nl