

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS CHAPTER 30

In this chapter we have an account of the increase,

I. Of Jacob's family. Eight children more we find registered in this chapter; Dan and Naphtali by Bilhah, Rachel's maid, #Ge 30:1-8. Gad and Asher by Zilpah, Leah's maid, #Ge 30:9-13. Issachar, Zebulun, and Dinah, by Leah, #Ge 30:14-21. And, last of all, Joseph, by Rachel, #Ge 30:22-24.

II. Of Jacob's estate. He makes a new bargain with Laban, #Ge 30:25-34. And in the six years' further service he did to Laban God wonderfully blessed him, so that his stock of cattle became very considerable, #Ge 30:35-43. Herein was fulfilled the blessing with which Isaac dismissed him, #Ge 28:3,

"God make thee fruitful, and multiply thee."

Even these small matters concerning Jacob's house and field, though they seem inconsiderable, are improvable for our learning. For the scriptures were written, not for princes and statesmen, to instruct them in politics; but for all people, even the meanest, to direct them in their families and callings: yet some things are here recorded concerning Jacob, not for imitation, but for admonition.

Ver. 1.

We have here the bad consequences of that strange marriage which Jacob made with the two sisters. Here is,

I. An unhappy disagreement between him and Rachel (#Ge 30:1,2), occasioned, not so much by her own barrenness as by her sister's fruitfulness. Rebekah, the only wife of Isaac, was long childless, and yet we find no uneasiness between her and Isaac; but here, because Leah bears children, Rachel cannot live peaceably with Jacob.

1. Rachel frets. She *envied her sister*, #Ge 30:1. Envy is grieving at the good of another, than which no sin is more offensive to God, nor more injurious to our neighbour and ourselves. She considered not that it was God that made the difference, and that though, in this single instance her sister was preferred before her, yet in other things she had the advantage. Let us carefully watch against all the risings and workings of this passion in our minds. Let not our eye be evil towards any of our fellow servants because our master's is good. But this was not all; she said to Jacob, *Give me children, or else I die*. Note, We are very apt to err in our desires of temporal mercies, as Rachel here.

(1.) One child would not content her; but, because Leah has more than one, she must have more too: *Give me children*.

(2.) Her heart is inordinately set upon it, and, if she have not what she would have, she will throw away her life, and all the comforts of it.

"Give them to me, or *else I die*," that is,
"I shall fret myself to death; the want of this satisfaction will shorten my days."

Some think she threatens Jacob to lay violent hands upon herself, if she could not obtain this mercy.

(3.) She did not apply to God by prayer, but to Jacob only, forgetting that *children are a heritage of the Lord*, #Ps 127:3. We wrong both God and ourselves when our eye is more to men, the instruments of our crosses and comforts, than to God the author. Observe a difference between Rachel's asking for this mercy and Hannah's, #1Sa 1:10, &c. Rachel envied; Hannah wept. Rachel must have children, and she died of the second; Hannah prayed for one child, and she had four more. Rachel is importunate and peremptory; Hannah is submissive and devout. *If thou wilt give me a child, I will give him to the Lord*. Let Hannah be imitated, and not Rachel; and let our desires be always under the direction and control of reason and religion.

2. Jacob chides, and most justly. He loved Rachel, and therefore reproofed her for what she said amiss, #Ge 30:2. Note, Faithful reproofs and products and instances of true affection, #Ps 141:5; #Pr 27:5,6. Job reproofed his wife when she spoke the language of the foolish women, #Job 2:10. See #1Co 7:16. He was angry, not at the person, but at the sin; he expressed himself so as to show this displeasure. Note, sometimes it is requisite that a reproof should be given warm, like a medical potion; not too hot, lest it scald the patient; yet not cold, lest it prove ineffectual. It was a very grave and pious reply which Jacob gave to Rachel's peevish demand: *Am I in God's stead?* The Chaldee paraphrases it well, *Dost thou ask sons of me? Oughtest thou not to ask them from before the Lord?* The Arabic reads it,

"Am I above God? can I give thee that which God denies thee?"

This was said like a plain man. Observe,

(1.) He acknowledges the hand of God in the affliction which he was a sharer with her in: *He hath withheld the fruit of the womb*. Note, Whatever we want, it is God that withholds it, a sovereign Lord, most wise, holy, and just, that may do what he will with his own, and is debtor to no man, that never did, nor ever can do, any wrong to any of his creatures. The keys of the clouds, of the heart, of the grave, and of the womb, are four keys which God had in his hand, and which (the rabbins say) he entrusts neither with angels nor seraphim. See #Re 3:7; Job 11:10; 12:14.

(2.) He acknowledges his own inability to alter what God had appointed:

"Am I in God's stead? What! dost thou make a god of me?"

Deos qui rogat ille facit--He to whom we offer supplications is to us a god. Note,

[1.] There is no creature that is, or can be, to us, in God's stead. God may be to us instead of any creature, as the sun instead of the moon and stars; but the moon and all the stars will not be to us instead of the sun. No creature's wisdom, power, and love, will be to us instead of God's.

[2.] It is therefore our sin and folly to place any creature in God's stead, and to place that confidence in any creature which is to be placed in God only.

II. An unhappy agreement between him and the two handmaids.

1. At the persuasion of Rachel, he took Bilhah her handmaid to wife, that, according to the usage of those times, his children by her might be adopted and owned as her mistress's children, #Ge 30:3, &c. She would rather have children by reputation than none at all, children that she might fancy to be her own, and call her own, though they

were not so. One would think her own sister's children were nearer akin to her than her maid's, and she might with more satisfaction have made them her own if she had so pleased; but (so natural is it for us all to be fond of power) children that she had a right to rule were more desirable to her than children that she had more reason to love; and, as an early instance of her dominion over the children born in her apartment, she takes a pleasure in giving them names that carry in them nothing but marks of emulation with her sister, as if she had overcome her,

(1.) At law. She calls the first son of her handmaid *Dan (judgment)*, saying,

"God hath judged me" (#Ge 30:6), that is, "given sentence in my favour."

(2.) In battle, she calls the next *Naphtali (wrestlings)*, saying, *I have wrestled with my sister, and have prevailed* (#Ge 30:8); as if all Jacob's sons must be born men of contention. See what roots of bitterness envy and strife are, and what mischief they make among relations.

2. At the persuasion of Leah, he took Zilpah her handmaid to wife also, #Ge 30:9. Rachel had done that absurd and preposterous thing of giving her maid to her husband, in emulation with Leah; and now Leah (because she missed one year in bearing children) does the same, to be even with her, or rather to keep before her. See the power of jealousy and rivalry, and admire the wisdom of the divine appointment, which unites one man and one woman only; for *God hath called us to peace and purity*, #1Co 7:15. Two sons Zilpah bore to Jacob, whom Leah looked upon herself as entitled to, in token of which she called one *Gad* (#Ge 30:11), promising herself a little *troop* of children; and children are the militia of a family, they fill the quiver, #Ps 127:4,5. The other she called *Asher (happy)*, thinking herself happy in him, and promising herself that her neighbours would think so too: *The daughters will call me blessed*, #Ge 30:13. Note, It is an instance of the vanity of the world, and the foolishness bound up in our hearts, that most people value themselves and govern themselves more by reputation than either by reason or religion; they think themselves blessed if the daughters do but call them so. There was much amiss in the contest and competition between these two sisters, yet God brought good out of this evil; for, the time being now at hand when the seed of Abraham must begin to increase and multiply, thus Jacob's family was replenished with twelve sons, heads of the thousands of Israel, from whom the celebrated twelve tribes descended and were named.

Ver. 14.

Here is,

I. Leah fruitful again, after she had, for some time, left off bearing. Jacob, it should seem, associated more with Rachel than with Leah. The law of Moses supposes it a common case that, if a man had two wives, one would be beloved and the other hated, #De 21:15. But at length Rachel's strong passions betrayed her into a bargain with Leah that Jacob should return to her apartment. Reuben, a little lad, five or six years old, playing in the field, found *mandrakes, dudaim*. It is uncertain what they were, the critics are not agreed about them; we are sure they were some rarities, either fruits or flowers that were very pleasant to the smell, #So 7:13. Note, The God of nature has provided, not only for our necessities, but for our delights; there are products of the earth in the exposed fields, as well as in the planted protected gardens, that are very valuable and useful. How plentifully is nature's house furnished and her table spread! Her precious fruits offer themselves to be gathered by the hands of little children. It is a laudable custom of the devout Jews,

when they find pleasure, suppose in eating an apple, to lift their hearts, and say,

"Blessed be he that made this fruit pleasant!"

Or, in smelling a flower,

"Blessed be he that made this flower sweet."

Some think these mandrakes were jessamine flowers. Whatever they were, Rachel could not see them in Leah's hands, where the child had placed them, but she must covet them. She cannot bear the want of these pretty flowers, but will purchase them at any rate. Note, There may be great sin and folly in the inordinate desire of a small thing. Leah takes this advantage (as Jacob had of Esau's coveting his red pottage) to obtain that which was justly due to her, but to which Rachel would not otherwise have consented. Note, Strong passions often thwart one another, and those cannot but be continually uneasy that are hurried on by them. Leah is overjoyed that she shall have her husband's company again, that her family might yet further be built up, which is the blessing she desires and devoutly prays for, as is intimated, **#Ge 30:17**, where it is said, *God hearkened unto Leah*. The learned bishop Patrick very well suggests here that the true reason of this contest between Jacob's wives for his company, and their giving him their maids to be his wives, was the earnest desire they had to fulfil the promise made to Abraham (and now lately renewed to Jacob), that his seed should be as the stars of heaven for multitude, and that in one seed of his, the Messiah, all the nations of the earth should be blessed. And he thinks it would have been below the dignity of this sacred history to take such particular notice of these things if there had not been some such great consideration in them. Leah was now blessed with two sons; the first she called *Issachar (a hire)*, reckoning herself well repaid for her mandrakes, nay (which is a strange construction of the providence) rewarded for giving her maid to her husband. Note, We abuse God's mercy when we reckon that his favours countenance and patronize our follies. The other she called *Zebulun (dwelling)*, owning God's bounty to her: *God has endowed me with a good dowry*, **#Ge 30:20**. Jacob had not endowed her when he married her, nor had he wherewithal in possession; but she reckons a family of children not a bill of charges, but a good dowry, **#Ps 113:9**. She promises herself more of her husband's company now that she had borne him six sons, and that, in love to his children at least, he would often visit her lodgings. Mention is made (**#Ge 30:21**) of the birth of a daughter, *Dinah*, because of the following story concerning her, Genesis 34. Perhaps Jacob had other daughters, though their names are not registered.

II. Rachel fruitful at last (#Ge 30:22): *God remembered Rachel*, whom he seemed to have forgotten, and *hearkened to her* whose prayers had been long denied; and then she bore a son. Note, As God justly denies the mercy we have been inordinately desirous of, so sometimes he graciously grants, at length, that which we have long waited for. He corrects our folly, and yet considers our frame, and does not contend for ever. Rachel called her son *Joseph*, which in Hebrew is akin to two words of a contrary signification, *Asaph (abstulit)*, *He has taken away my reproach*, as if the greatest mercy she had in this son was that she had saved her credit; and *Jasaph (addidit)*, *The Lord shall add to me another son*, which may be looked upon either as the language of her inordinate desire (she scarcely knows how to be thankful for one unless she may be sure of another), or of her faith--she takes this mercy as an earnest of further mercy.

"Has God given me his grace? I may call it Joseph, and say, He shall add more grace! Has he given me his joy? I may call it Joseph, and say, He will give me more joy. Has he begun, and shall he not make an end?"

