

January 31, 2021 - The Matriarchs

Read the following from Genesis 29 and 30. Underline in red all the places where God involves Godself with the Matriarchs. Underline in blue all the places where the Matriarchs try to take things into their own hands.

³¹⁻³² When GOD realized that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb. But Rachel was barren. Leah became pregnant and had a son. She named him Reuben (Look-It's-a-Boy!). "This is a sign," she said, "that GOD has seen my misery; and a sign that now my husband will love me."

³³⁻³⁵ She became pregnant again and had another son. "GOD heard," she said, "that I was unloved and so he gave me this son also." She named this one Simeon (GOD-Heard). She became pregnant yet again—another son. She said, "Now maybe my husband will connect with me—I've given him three sons!" That's why she named him Levi (Connect). She became pregnant a final time and had a fourth son. She said, "This time I'll praise GOD." So she named him Judah (Praise-GOD). Then she stopped having children.

³⁰ When Rachel realized that she wasn't having any children for Jacob, she became jealous of her sister. She told Jacob, "Give me sons or I'll die!"

² Jacob got angry with Rachel and said, "Am I God? Am I the one who refused you babies?"

³⁻⁵ Rachel said, "Here's my maid Bilhah. Sleep with her. Let her substitute for me so I can have a child through her and build a family." So she gave him her maid Bilhah for a wife and Jacob slept with her. Bilhah became pregnant and gave Jacob a son.

⁶⁻⁸ Rachel said, "God took my side and vindicated me. He listened to me and gave me a son." She named him Dan (Vindication). Rachel's maid Bilhah became pregnant again and gave Jacob a second son. Rachel said, "I've been in an all-out fight with my sister—and I've won." So she named him Naphtali (Fight).

⁹⁻¹³ When Leah saw that she wasn't having any more children, she gave her maid Zilpah to Jacob for a wife. Zilpah had a son for Jacob. Leah said, "How fortunate!" and she named him Gad (Lucky). When Leah's maid Zilpah had a second son for Jacob, Leah said, "A happy day! The women will congratulate me in my happiness." So she named him Asher (Happy).

¹⁴ One day during the wheat harvest Reuben found some mandrakes in the field and brought them home to his mother Leah. Rachel asked Leah, "Could I please have some of your son's mandrakes?"

¹⁵ Leah said, "Wasn't it enough that you got my husband away from me? And now you also want my son's mandrakes?"

Rachel said, “All right. I’ll let him sleep with you tonight in exchange for your son’s love-apples.”

¹⁶⁻²¹ When Jacob came home that evening from the fields, Leah was there to meet him: “Sleep with me tonight; I’ve bartered my son’s mandrakes for a night with you.” So he slept with her that night. God listened to Leah; she became pregnant and gave Jacob a fifth son. She said, “God rewarded me for giving my maid to my husband.” She named him Issachar (Bartered). Leah became pregnant yet again and gave Jacob a sixth son, saying, “God has given me a great gift. This time my husband will honor me with gifts—I’ve given him six sons!” She named him Zebulun (Honor). Last of all she had a daughter and named her Dinah.

²²⁻²⁴ And then God remembered Rachel. God listened to her and opened her womb. She became pregnant and had a son. She said, “God has taken away my humiliation.” She named him Joseph (Add), praying, “May GOD add yet another son to me.”

Think about it:

1. Genesis tells us that Leah was unloved by her husband; how do you think that felt? Have you ever felt unloved by someone?
2. Rachel wanted a baby so badly that she attempted several times to take matters into her own hands. She even tried to make a love potion, of sorts, with mandrakes. Keep in mind that, in the Patriarchal period, if a wife didn’t bear her husband a child, she could have legally been sent away to fend for herself. How do you feel about Rachel’s attempts? Does God reward resourcefulness?
3. What do you think it means when the Bible says that God “remembered” Rachel?
4. In Jewish *Midrash* (ancient Jewish commentary), some rabbis suggest that, rather than Laban tricking Jacob into marrying Leah (in Genesis 29), it was Rachel who did so. Ponder this possibility. For what reason might Rachel have done this?
5. Look at all that you’ve underlined in red. How does God interact with these women? Does it surprise you that God involved Godself in the lives of these Matriarchs?

