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The Family of Abraham: Part 19—Rachel and Leah

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Jacob encounters Rachel at the well and marries Rachel and Leah.

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Transcript

Welcome back to this, the 19th in my series on the story of the family of Abraham. We've reached chapter 29, which is the story of Jacob arriving at the house of his uncle Laban, and then marrying Leah and Rachel. The story begins with Jacob lifting up his legs, setting out on his journey and coming to the land of the people of the east.

Lifting up his legs. Within this chapter, what you may notice is that Jacob seems to have sprung limbs. He's this person who lifts up his legs.

He moves with alacrity. He's someone who waters all these flocks. He's someone who is able to remove a great stone from a well.

He's someone who works for seven years as if it were just a few days. He's a man of

strength, a man of vigor, a man of energy, in a way that starkly contrasts with the character that we met in chapter 27. A character who really seemed to show little initiative, and for whom his mother had to do just about everything.

In that particular encounter with his father, Rebecca does just about everything to set up and to take responsibility for what happens there. Whereas here, we see Jacob as a man of action. A man who's swift on his feet, a man who's able with his hands, a man who's strong, and a man who has energy and vigor.

Other things we might notice, some details that are peculiar that follow us throughout the story of Jacob's stones. Throughout the story of Jacob, we see stones mentioned. In the story of the previous chapter, I mentioned the stone that he sets up.

He takes up the stones of the place to put them around his head, and then he takes the stone that was at his head and uses that as a pillar. And it becomes a pillar for that spot. Later on, you have him setting up a pillar when he meets with Laban.

And all the people with him take stones and put them in a heap, maybe one per person. But what you have here is a gathering together of stones that I suggested that story of Bethel contrasts with and is juxtaposed with the story of Babel. This formation of the gate of God, and this is the gates of heaven that is arrived at at Bethel.

And what they tried to do at that point, what happened? The story seems to begin, if you read it just sequentially, it doesn't begin with the deliberation about forming a tower. No, it starts with the development of a new technology of firing bricks. And through this new technology of brick, of forming bricks, and the mortar that they use and other things like that, they decide to build this great city and tower.

Now, there are other ways to read it, but one way we could read this is that it is the technology of brick making that tempts them to form this great tower. The technology and this technological potential leads them to engage in this hubristic enterprise, building enterprise. It's something that we see within our day and age, that the technologies that we have tempt us to do certain things that are now open to us.

That when we have a new technological potential, it seems as if inexorably we are drawn to realize that potential. Even though we don't realize necessarily the degree to which the actualization of that potential may lead to us being brought into bondage. That our liberties can take liberties with us.

But within the story of Jacob, we see stories of stones, whether that's the gathering of stones later on at Gilead, or whether it's the stone set up at Bethel here or later on, whether it's the stone set over Rachel's grave, or the stone here drawn from the well. And we may see certain symmetries in these. The stone taken from the well here may connect with the stone placed over Rachel's grave later on.

The stone that's placed at the pillar in Bethel may be connected with the stone that we later on see set up in the meeting with Gilead, the meeting with Laban. And in that point, you have the gathering together of stones for the other members of the family. What Jacob is doing is he's gathering stones to form something new.

And he is gathering stones in a way that the people of Babel gathered and formed bricks. That contrast between stones and bricks is an interesting one and probably deserves closer analysis. I'm really not sure exactly what to make of it.

So if you have any good ideas, please leave them in the comments because I'd love to be enlightened on this. Matthew Pagiot raised some of these issues yesterday in a comment. And I thought I'd mention, just throw through a few remarks at the issue because it is an interesting one.

Within Exodus 20, 24 to 25, God tells his people that when they form an altar, it should be formed of earth and unhewn stones, that any fashioned stones are polluting it. Now bricks take things a step further. And in Isaiah 65, verse 3, we have statements, negative statement made about altars of brick.

Whether that's specifically because they are made of brick or whether it's associations with brick altars, I would suspect it's the former. But it could be the latter as well. Some have suggested it's because of the associations of those brick altars with pagan worship.

One way or another, we do have this instruction that altars should be formed out of unhewn stones. And these unhewn stones are being fashioned into a greater reality. If God is forming this great ladder between heaven and earth, he's forming a people in Jacob and his seed in which he will dwell.

And this great tower of people, this human tower, is one that will be formed of unhewn stones. Maybe that's one way to see it. And within this, God's name will dwell.

The other thing to notice is that Laban's name is connected with bricks, with brick kilns, with brick making and those sorts of things. Laban's name plays off a number of things. It's connected with white, it's connected with the poplar tree, it's connected.

And all these plays are at work within the narrative. The time in Egypt was associated with brick making. That was the work that really characterized them.

Building cities, store cities, and making bricks. And this time with Laban is another sort of Egyptian slave period of servitude. And those parallels have been really drawn out by David Dore within his work on the subject, the Exodus theme.

He discusses this in length and argues that we can see shadows of this within the law. This event plays out in the later commandments that are given. This event has an afterlife then.

The other thing to notice here is that the meeting occurs at a well. A well, as we've seen already, is connected with these themes of fertility, with life from the land, with rootedness in the land in certain respects. But rootedness with fertility for flocks, for land, and all these sorts of things.

It's also connected with women. The struggling over women and wells within the story of Abimelech, both of the stories of Abimelech in chapter 20 and chapter 26, 20, 21, and 26, are drawing upon similar themes. They're drawing upon the connection between women and wells, and drawing upon the connection between the water that comes up from wells, the livingness of wells, and the life, fertility of the land, and the fertility of flocks.

In Beersheba we see the association of sheep, seven ewes, with the well. Here you have other associations. You have a ewe at a well.

The ewe is Rachel. Her name means ewe. And you have the well that is closed up with a great stone.

And that stone has to be removed. And the removal of that stone by Jacob, as we've seen, the patriarchs will often meet these encounters at wells are significant associations. There's a type scene, as Robert Alter has talked about it, that women are met at wells by their future husbands or messengers of them.

So Eleazar of Damascus met Rebecca at a well. Here, maybe even the same well, he meets, Jacob meets Rachel. And that encountering of Rachel at a well is one that foreshadows the fact that they will marry.

We see later on Moses meets Zipporah and the daughters of Jethro, the priest of Midian, at a well. These themes, then, are repeated ones. And they help us to see something of the significance of this particular site.

What does it mean that it was closed up? The fountain sealed is my bride, or that sort of language that you find within the song. A garden enclosed, a fountain sealed, a covered spring. All these sorts of symbolism is associated with the woman that has not yet been married, the virgin.

And here, I think you have similar sort of themes. The womb is associated with the spring or the fountain. And the removal of the stone from the stone precedes, is maybe an image of Jacob having relations with Rachel.

And then also possibly associated with just the closed character of Rachel's womb. That that has to be opened up. And the struggle and the difficulty of removing the stone may be connected with the struggle that Jacob has to undertake to actually marry and have children through Rachel.

Rachel's story is a tragic one in many ways. And we'll be exploring that in the coming few days. He meets there three flocks of sheep.

And he is told that, or he asked them, my brethren, where are you from? They say they're from Haran. A few details worth paying attention here. Why three flocks of sheep? There are a few possibilities that we could mention, perhaps.

There is a general chiasmic structure within these chapters, perhaps, that would explain it. So you have, within the very beginning in chapter 28, you have the encounter with God at Bethel. Jacob goes somewhere.

He has an encounter. He notices that the place is special and angels are present. He names the place, things like that.

And at the end we have Mahanaim, a very similar thing takes place. He sets up a pillar and we have a setting up of a pillar after his encounter with Laban. We have the reference to giving a tithe to God, what he will give to God.

And it will be a tenth. And then you have a reference at the other end of this chiasmic structure to the fact that Laban has changed the wages of Jacob ten times. What Laban gives to Jacob has been changed ten times.

What Jacob gives to God is a tenth. And so maybe a tenth theme there. The fact that there are three flocks of sheep, could it be the fact that there are separated flocks of sheep at three days journey in chapter 30 verse 40? That's a possibility.

The references to wages in 29.15, another connection to wages at the other end in chapter 30 verse 28. Requiring, asking Laban to give him his wife in verse 21 of this chapter and then in 30.26, give me my wives. And then all these themes that cluster into the centre.

I wonder whether that's part of the connection, that the separation of the flocks of sheep at three days journey is connected. I'm not sure that's the primary connection, though. That's one suggested by Rabbi David Foreman.

I'm not sure that's the primary connection. My, what I think is the more likely connection is the connection between this and the story of the encounter with Esau. In the encounter of Esau, when he meets with Esau at the other end, his group is divided into four different flocks, as it were, with Rachel's being the last to turn up.

And so here you have three flocks of sheep that are already there. And then Rachel comes along with her flock of sheep. At the very end, as he meets up with Esau, he divides out his people.

He divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. He put the

maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children behind, and Rachel and Joseph last. Then he crossed over before them and bowed himself to the ground seven times until he came near to his brother.

But Esau ran to meet him and embraced him and fell on his neck and kissed him and they wept. And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and children and said, who are these who are with you, etc. And they each come near, wave upon wave.

The maidservants come near, they and their children bow down, and Leah comes near. And then finally, Joseph and Rachel. And in that count, maybe what you're seeing is four flocks, four flocks approaching this brother.

And so he introduces himself to the people that he meets at the well as, my brethren, where are you? Later on, where are you from? He later on meets Esau, his brother, at a similar sort of point. And there are other events that are similar. Jacob kissing Rachel, lifting up his voice and weeping.

It's the same encounter that we have with Esau at the other end. So maybe there's something associated here. Maybe there's some sort of theme of the opening of the womb I mentioned with the removal of the stone from the top of the well.

Later on, we'll see the removal as he crosses over and meets with Esau. There is a new coming out of the womb experience there. I'll get into that when I discuss that chapter.

I'm not sure what to make of that. Again, if you have any suggestions, leave them in the comments. But that is what I suspect is going on.

That we see the reference to three sheep, flocks of sheep, and then another flock of sheep just arriving. It's similar to what we see in the encounter with Esau, particularly since the final flock of sheep is that associated with Rachel. And of course, as we read through these chapters, we need to think about flocks and children.

The flocks and the children are very closely paralleled with each other. The stories play out in parallel. And if you're not reading the two alongside each other, you're missing part of what's taking place.

I've mentioned this in previous accounts, that the struggle over wells is similar to the struggle over wives. And the struggle over the fruitfulness of wells is also associated with children. And sheep are associated with children.

If he goes in there as a single person, as a single shepherd, he is going to come out with a great flock. Indeed, with four flocks of sheep. And there it is apt that Rachel is not just a ewe, she is also a shepherdess.

And so as a ewe, she will be part of Jacob's flock. But as a shepherdess, she will be one

who is the queen alongside him. The king of Israel will ultimately be a shepherd.

And here we have Jacob as the shepherd, who is met by a shepherdess. And together they will be the head of this, at the front of this new flock that is being formed. This new body of people that is going to be the flock of God.

And just as Israel is formed as a flock, so ultimately we'll have God leading out his people out of Egypt like a flock. Using Moses with a shepherd's rod and Moses called while keeping the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro. These stories then, I think, connect themes of sheep with themes of people.

Ultimately, you will have the sheep at the beginning replaced by flocks of people. The other fact is that the references to sheep here. The sheep of her father Laban.

You have that mentioned a few times. Ultimately, these will become Jacob's sheep as he gradually takes over the property of Laban, his uncle and later father-in-law. They meet up and he removes the stone from the well's mouth and he waters the flock of Laban, his mother's brother.

Read this story and you can see a lot of parallels with the story of Rebekah and her encounter with Eliezer. With that encounter, we see that he prays that God will give his mission success. And there's proof of that.

The person who will give him water and then water all his camels is the one. Here we see Jacob doing something similar. He waters all the flock.

He does this great act, energetic act of removing the stone and then watering all the flock. That is something that we see as very similar to something his mother did. Again, with an encounter between a messenger, in that case, of a future husband and the prospective bride.

Jacob kissed Rachel, lifted up his voice and wept. There are three key occasions where we see people lifting up their voice and weeping within this account. They are separated from each other and then brought back together.

We have the separate weeping of Esau once he finds that he does not get the blessing. We have the weeping of Jacob here when he meets with Rachel. And then the weeping of the brothers when they reunite.

And those three events should be read alongside each other. Those separated acts of weeping and then brought together in a shared act of weeping. There is a tragedy here as well.

Why does he weep when he meets Rachel? Now, presumably, joy at meeting this one that he finds extremely attractive. Someone who is his kin, someone who's the fitting

bride for him. And that God has given a sense of relief as well.

He's not being pursued by his brother. He doesn't think. And there's no sense of...it seems as if the clouds are being removed and things are going to go right for him.

But it's not entirely clear that that happens as the story progresses. But this meeting with Rachel also has a dark side to it. He will not be able to marry Rachel without great struggle.

Think about the story of Eliezer going to the house of Bethuel and Laban. When he went to that house, he came with great gifts and a lot to give to Laban and Bethuel as bride price for Rebecca. But in this occasion, Jacob comes empty handed.

Now, Laban might think that there are just around the corner, a few days journey, you'll have a caravan of treasures coming behind Jacob. But no, there are no great treasures coming behind Jacob. Because of the situation with his brother, he's not been able to take with him the riches that he would have to bring to have Rachel's hand in marriage straight away.

Rather, he has to serve for those seven years. And he'll always have...Rachel is always somehow out of his grasp. He never fully unites with Rachel.

There's always some sort of obstacle, that stone on top of that well. Whether that's the story of not having the riches that he needs to pay Laban for the bride price. Or whether it's the fact that she is barren.

Or whether it's the fact that she ends up...the events with the terrafeme and the things that arise from that. Or whether it's the fact that she dies in childbirth for Benjamin. In each of these ways, Rachel seems to be doomed.

And she ends up buried on the way to Bethlehem. She's not buried with Jacob as Leah is. And so the story of Rachel is a tragic one in many ways.

It's defined by tears. It's defined by struggle and sorrow. And here we see, I think, his tears may be tears of joy.

But they're also connected with the other tears that are shed around that time. The tears of Esau. The tears of Esau being tears of absolute desolation.

That he has nothing. He's been thoroughly defrauded by his brother and he's got nothing now. In the same way, I think, there is a way in which Jacob is in a similar position.

He is probably shedding tears of joy at this point. But reading it within the context of the text, we can see this ominous tone to it as well. That there is this separation of the two brothers.

And the two acts of weeping are acts of weeping that do not... They're both bereft as a result of what has happened. There's been a tragic occurrence. And neither of them are in a strong position at this point.

Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's relative and that he was Rebecca's son. She ran and told her father. Very similar to the account of Rebecca here running and telling Bethuel.

Or running and telling her mother in that case. Come to pass, when Laban heard the report about Jacob, his sister's son, that he ran to meet him. And embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his house.

So he told Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, surely you are my bone and my flesh. And he stayed with him for a month.

Again, think about what we know about Laban already from this story. I commented upon Genesis chapter 24. And the way that story is told is one that suggests that Laban is a fairly mercenary guy.

That Eliezer changes the way that he tells the story. He tells the story first of all to Rebecca and then he tells the story to Laban. And the account given to Laban is a rather different one.

It's an account that stresses the wealth of Abraham. The fact that all these things have been given into the hand of Isaac. That Isaac is this son who's a really eligible match for your sister.

In this case here, it's not the same. We have a very different tone to proceedings. That he does not come carrying great gifts.

Laban welcomes him as this great long-lost prospective son-in-law. But yet, you can imagine as Laban's... What... looking the days... as the days tick away and he's the next few days. And where is this great caravan of wealth that's coming behind this kid? Does he have anything to show for himself? No, he doesn't seem to.

His father came with... gave great riches for the hands of my... for the hand of my sister. What does he have to show for the hands of my... hand of my daughter? There may be that sort of thing going on. And Laban said to Jacob, Because you are my relative, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me what should your wages be? Now this could be read in a number of different ways.

And it certainly seems to suggest some sort of reduction in the status of Jacob. He's not being treated just as a kin's person. He's being treated as someone who's serving within the house.

And the way that that question is phrased, it may not be, Are you my brother that you should serve for free? The idea that he's not being treated now as a brother. He's being treated as more as a hired servant. And it's a decrease in his status.

He's no longer being treated as just a member of the house who chips in and works with the tasks. And looks after the farm and does the dishes, things like that. He's someone who now works as a hired hand, which is a reduction in his status.

He's no longer being treated truly as family. He's being treated as one who's enslaved in some sense. And as the story progresses, we'll see this borne out.

That the way that Jacob is treated, he's treated in an unfair way. His wages are constantly shifted. He's defrauded concerning Leah and Rachel.

His father-in-law tries to cheat him and make things difficult for him as he's serving for the flocks. Other things like that. And at every point, Laban is against him.

He's seeking to undermine him and frustrate him. But here, I think we see a parallel with the story of the Exodus. That there is a reduction in the status of Israel.

They go into the land of Egypt. Originally they're given the land of Goshen. Blessed in many ways and given a privileged status.

But gradually they're reduced to a sort of servitude. And a similar thing happens here with Jacob. Laban has two daughters.

The older is Leah and the name of the younger is Rachel. Leah might be weary. It's also suggested that it's connected with the name for cow.

And I think that's probably the more likely connection to draw from. Rachel is You and Leah is cow or heifer. And here you have cattle and sheep being built up within the house of Jacob.

As the story progresses, this is part of what we'll see. And Rachel and Leah are seen as the heifer and the You that are associated with Jacob. And eventually you'll see these great flocks flowing out from that.

Jacob is associated with the bull and the ram. And eventually it will lead to a great and mighty flock and herd. Leah's eyes were delicate.

Some have said they were weak. It's more likely that they were tender or beautiful or delicate. It's an attractive feature.

But Rachel was beautiful of form and appearance. Jacob loved Rachel and he said, I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter. Seven years is a full week of years.

He's working for seven years rather than six years and receiving his wife in the seventh. There seems to be maybe this is a theme of not receiving a Sabbath. He's a servant who's not being released in the seventh year.

Maybe there's something there that we need to recognize that something's off about this. Laban says it's better that I give you to her, her to you, than I should give her to another man. Stay with me.

So he serves seven years. It seems but a few days to him because of the love he had for her. That would seem to draw our mind back to what we see.

What we see Rebecca saying to saying to Jacob. Now, therefore, my son, obey my voice, arise, flee to my brother Laban and Haran and stay with him a few days until your brother's fury turns away, until your brother's anger turns away from you and he forgets what you have done to him. Then I will send and bring you from there.

Why should I be bereaved also of you both in one day? So just a few days. He's expecting to be gone from the land of Haran, returned to his father's house after his father has died and his anger, the brother of his, his brother's anger has subsided. Here we see the fact that it's just as if a few days, seven years, and it's just a short period of time because of how much he loves her.

So he doesn't really feel this sense of separation from his father's house in the same way. Now, we're thinking about the state this particular period in Jacob's life. Abraham had been told to leave his father's house and to go to a land that God has shown would show him.

Here we see that Jacob isn't really going to a land that he's been shown. He's been directed by his mother to go to the place of Haran to be with his father, his, her brother and to stay with him for a few days. But it's more a situation of exile than pilgrimage towards the promised land.

He's in a state of Egypt or Babylonian captivity and he's waiting to return to the land. And so he's outside of the land as Abraham was outside of the land when he went down to Egypt on occasions like that. So this is a different sort of journey away from the father's house.

Laban then gathers all the people together. At the end of this period of seven years, my days are fulfilled and he asked to go into his wife. It's the expectation at this point.

You've said that you will do this for me. And now this seems right. And what he did in serving for seven years for the hand of Rachel, it's a very substantial bride price to pay.

Far above the odds you'd expect. Seven years of labour. What he's doing with the bride price is giving, he will give the bride price to Laban.

And Laban will have that bride price as security for his daughter and now Jacob's wife. And so she has that money and security. If anything goes wrong in the marriage, that money is hers.

And Jacob can't touch that money. That isn't Jacob's money. Rather Jacob has to give that to his uncle and his prospective father-in-law so that he will be able to give some security to his wife.

Should something go wrong. Should he renege upon the terms of the marriage. Whatever it is.

This is her security. Later on in the story we'll see that Laban eats up that money. He doesn't actually preserve the money.

He just uses that money and treats his daughter as if as a stranger. So there is part of the background there that is worth paying attention to. Because we see it come up later again.

Laban gathers together all the men of the place and made a feast. Now it came to pass in the evening that he took Leah his daughter and brought her to Jacob and he went into her. And Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah as a maid.

So it came to pass in the morning that behold it was Leah. And he said to Laban, what is this that you have done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I served you? Why then have you deceived me? And Laban said it must not be done so in our country to give the younger before the firstborn. Now where have we heard this story before? There is this auspicious occasion.

A period of blessing etc. There is this encounter in the dark. And then a hidden identity.

And later on we will see a reference to the younger and the older being switched. And someone being tricked and defrauded. It's the story of Esau and Jacob and Isaac.

In that case it was the mother who switched the older and the younger. And in this case it's the father who switched the older and the younger. This time daughters.

Two daughters rather than two sons. And Jacob, in some ways it's what goes around comes around. Jacob gets back upon his own head what he has done to his father.

And the statement of Laban, it must not be done so in our country to give the younger before the firstborn. There is a bit of a dig there. Well you may do things that way but that's not how we do things in our part of the world.

You may have just adopted these perverse and barbaric customs. That you might trick and defraud your older brother of his birthright. But in these parts we do things by the book.

And that deceit is something that very much returns to Jacob what he has done to his father. It also spreads the consequences of that initial action. As you read the story that follows you'll see the shadow of that initial action.

In this event, in the event of the deception of his sons concerning the supposed death of Joseph. We see that event playing out over the generations. Here the deception that occurred in mixing up the place of Esau and Jacob.

Now comes into effect with these two daughters that are mixed up. And deceiving Jacob concerning those leads to the situation with two rival sister wives within his house. And the whole story of that then gets played out in the next generation.

As the sons of Leah and the sons of Rachel are at odds with each other. Rivals and violently opposed to each other. And there is favouritism within the family.

All these things get played out generation upon generation. When we're reading these stories it's very important to see these generational dynamics. When we read the Bible very often as Christians we're reading it as a story of individuals and their conversion stories.

But God is dealing with families. God is dealing with larger bodies of people. And if you look at any family in the world you'll see that there are family dynamics.

Things that play out generation after generation. The thing that went wrong in one generation then gets spread to the next generation. People pass on the dysfunctions.

And in the same way we see the dysfunctions of the family being passed on. A destiny that has gone awry. And that destiny until it is set right will not be something that departs from that family.

That misshapen destiny. And so within these stories we see these patterns being played over again and again and again until they're right. This is something that we see even within our own lives.

That we go through routines again and again until we get them right. We need to break through certain impasses. And certain impasses within our families.

Generation after generation. And in these stories what we are seeing is God dealing with networks of people over a generation. And the way that sins and actions have consequences that spread out.

And so the rivalry between Leah and Rachel is in many ways something that comes as a result of Jacob's sin. Concerning his father. And that is related to all these other sins.

The fact that Isaac preferred Esau over Jacob who should have been the son that he favoured. And each generation we see these dysfunctions playing out. So we need to

trace these things back.

To see that these sinful actions are not detached things. They're consequences of previous events. And they're playing out of consequences.

That show us that when we go wrong, when things go awry, other people will often pay the consequences. There are intergenerational effects of what we have done wrong. And God is in the business of setting these things right.

Not just individuals and converting them as detached individuals. But mending families in all their brokenness. That this family is going to be the family that is the means by which the world is blessed.

Is a light to the world. Is like stars in the heaven. It doesn't really look the most promising at this point.

Isaac is near death. Isaac is trembling because he gave the blessing to the wrong son. Esau has taken the wrong wives.

And he tries to mend that later on. But he's fallen out with his parents. He's in violent rivalry with his brother.

Jacob has had to flee his home. Rebecca's plan has completely failed it seems. And she seems to be almost lost.

To have lost two sons in a single day. Everything seems to be going wrong. And yet God is working at this family.

And he's going to set right all those things that have gone wrong. But the consequences are still playing out. And at this point we see some of those.

In the darkness just as Isaac was in the darkness. The mixing up of the first and the second born. And the coming back upon Jacob's head of what he had done formerly.

Jacob then is told that he must fulfil another week for Rachel. And then he will give that one also. It seems that Rachel is given at the end of the first seven years.

And then he serves for another seven years to pay the bride price for her. But he has already been given her as his wife. Laban also gives Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as a maid.

The giving of maids is an interesting thing. When we read the story of Abraham in Egypt. He's given many maid servants.

Among other things. Male and female donkeys. Other things like that.

And one of those maid servants seems to be Hagar. And here we have giving of Zilpah

and Bilhah. They're associated with the two wives.

And later on they will be taken as surrogate mothers as it were. For those two daughters. Those two sister wives.

Jacob goes into Rachel and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And Leah is in the position now of the unloved wife. He served with Laban still another seven years.

So 14 years. 14 years maybe that's connected with the story of the period from Hagar. In chapter 16.

And the birth of Ishmael to the birth of Isaac. Maybe there's some connection there. 14 years.

And then the birth of a child of promise. I don't know. I'll be interested to see someone flesh that out a bit more.

James Jordan has some interesting thoughts on the chronology of these passages. But for now I'll just leave that thought out there. And see if anyone has any further reflections upon it.

God sees that Leah was unloved and he opened her womb. But Rachel is barren. Her womb has not been opened.

And that might be connected back with the unopened well that we see earlier on. The other thing that we might think about. The four flocks.

They're associated with the four wives of Jacob. Maybe it's not Jacob and the flock of Leah, the flock of Bilhah and Zilpah together. But the flocks of them separately.

So he has four flocks. He has flocks associated with Leah. With Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.

And he has flocks associated with Bilhah, with Dan and Asher. And he has flocks associated with Zilpah. With, oh no, it's Dan and Nathaliah with Bilhah.

Gad and Asher with Zilpah. And then Joseph and Benjamin with Rachel. And so he has these four flocks.

Maybe that's a more likely interpretation. I think it probably is. I'm thinking about these things on the fly.

So at certain points I will have insights that may help me read things that I discussed earlier on in a bit of a more illuminated manner. The children's names are given throughout this. And the description of the children is given with explanations for why they are given the names that they are given.

Leah conceived and bore a son and she called his name Reuben. For she said, the Lord has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore my husband will love me.

And these themes of looking upon affliction, the turning of these narratives seem to shift at this point. The energy of the narrative. He's been tricked and then at this point the energy starts to move in a different direction.

And Jacob starts to ascend. And this may be similar to the experience in Egypt of God hearing the affliction of his people. Maybe there's a connection here.

The Lord has surely looked on my affliction. Now therefore my husband will love me. Then she conceived again and bore a son and said, because the Lord has heard that I am unloved, he has therefore given me this son also.

And she called his name Simeon. Think about the names of these characters and remember why they are called what they are called. In a number of these cases we will see that the names are of great significance.

In most of these cases perhaps. The names trace the feelings of the mothers and they're wrestling with each other and they're wrestling with God. In Leah's case she's wrestling with the state of being unloved.

And the fact that God is the one who will hear her. Even though she's in rivalry with her sister and even though her husband does not seem truly to love her, God has heard her. And God has paid attention to her in her distress.

And in the same way God will hear the distress of his people in Egypt. But here this story is playing out and God is hearing the distress of Leah. But then also the son bears something of that destiny.

Later on we'll see the fact that Reuben has significance. His name has significance in his later actions. Simeon's name also.

Then Levi is born and now at this time my husband will become attached to me because I have borne him three sons. And so Levi attached is named. And then she conceived again and bore a son and said now I will praise the Lord.

Therefore she called his name Judah. Meaning praise. And she stopped bearing.

This is the end of the chapter that we're looking at today. But as we continue in chapter 30 we'll see the story of the children being born playing out further. And the rivalry between Rachel and Leah fleshed out in more depth.

And how that is resolved in various ways. And then what happens with the flocks. There are a great number of things happening within these chapters.

We need to pay attention to the details. Within those details there are a great many mysteries and significant things that can emerge. Thank you very much for listening.

If you have any questions on this or anything else please leave them on my Curious Cat account. If you have any comments and any insights please leave them in the comments. Because I'm looking to discover more about these passages.

And I'm sure that many of you have insights that I don't have yet. If you would like to support this and other videos please do so using my PayPal or Patreon accounts. If you found these videos helpful please tell your friends and share them around.

And finally I look forward to being back with you again tomorrow. I'll be going through chapter 30. God bless.

Hope you have a great day.