

**THE ORIGINS OF IT ALL!: A STUDY OF GENESIS
XXXII.) GOD'S SOVEREIGN REFINEMENT & PROVISION
GENESIS 29:1-30:24**

A.) GOD'S SOVEREIGN REFINEMENT (29:1-30)

Q: What do you think of when you hear/see the word 'refinement'?

Q: What does 'refinement mean'? What is it's purpose?

Q: What is necessary for the process of refinement?

1.) Providential Direction (vv. 1-6)

- Following His reception of God's revelation and purpose, Jacob follows God's direction.
- God, in turn, directs Jacob to *exactly* the time and place that he needs to be.
- At the providentially set time and place, he then encounters the precise people the LORD desires him to connect with and ultimately minister to.
- It is important, also, to remain and consider what we learned earlier about the wells being symbols of God's blessings.

Q: Even though Jacob's path has been providentially set, there remains the unresolved issues of his past and necessary areas of his character yet to be developed. How can God use such a person?

- Notice that, rather than disqualify or reject Jacob because of his past sins and failures or even present weaknesses and lack, God acts to refine His chosen one!
- So, He looks upon each of us.

2.) Refinement Begins With Service (vv. 7-14)

- Upon recognizing that he has indeed reached the spot and encountered the people the Lord planned for him, Jacob responded by identifying a need and serving accordingly.
- First, providing for Rachel's flock.
- Then, *voluntarily* serving his uncle in hard labor.

3.) Refinement Requires Painful Reminders of Sin (vv. 15-30)

- Of course, meaningful refinement is not possible as long as the object remains covered with dirt and grime.
- For Jacob to truly be refined so as to be worthy and capable of the service God desires from him, he must first deal with the painful reminders of his sin.

- Not only in fact, but to personally feel and understand it's sting and turn justification into hatred for that which is detestable to God!

Q: What parallels do you see between here and Chapter 27?

- An accusation of deception.
- The expectation of blessing for the firstborn.
- The motif of serving in order to receive the blessing.

B.) GOD'S SOVEREIGN PROVISION (29:31 - 30:24)

1.) God Blesses the Afflicted (vv. 31-35)

- Though Rachel seems to be the one chosen of God to carry the Promise, it is Leah who is first and most blessed.
- Even where God's Providence is concerned, He never overlooks the importance of heart and character.
- Rachel, though reserved a special role, exhibits haughtiness and impatience. Thus, she too – like Jacob – must be refined. Therefore, she is initially passed over and left impudent.
- Leah, on the other hand, represents the faithful afflicted. The LORD has compassion upon her and blesses her first.
- Because of God's blessing, Leah gives birth to four of Jacob's sons and heirs to the Promise.
- With each one, she recognizes and honors the Hand and blessing of God!
- **Reuben** = “The LORD *has seen my affliction*”
- **Simeon** = “The LORD *heard* that I am unloved.”
- **Levi** = “”my husband will become *attached* to me.”
- **Judah** = “*praise* the LORD”
- Notice that the first three sons are named in relation to recognition and appreciation for what the Lord has done for her. The fourth, however, is a simple expression of general, comprehensive praise. It is this fourth one, through whom the seed of the Promise will be carried and ultimately birth the Messiah!

2.) God's Provision Supersedes Human Jealousy (30:1-24)

a.) Despite Strife & Substitution (vv. 1-13)

Q: What does this scene remind you of?

- Sarah insisting Abraham sleep with Hagar.
- Nevertheless, God blesses Jacob and fulfills His promise through the birth of four more sons for Jacob.
- Notice, that while Bilhah conceived and bore the sons, Rachel exerts her power and authority to name them. Furthermore, in contrast to Leah, rather than name them according to her thankfulness unto the LORD, Rachel names the boys reflective of her competition and bitterness in her pursuit of the greater approval and renown.

- **Dan** = “*has vindicated*”
- **Naphtali** = “*my wrestling*”
- Following this, Leah falls into the same 'trap' and decides to join the 'competition' for approval and personal gain. She therefore counters Rachel by insisting that Jacob now sleep with her maidservant, Zilpah.
- Now Leah also changes her pattern for naming these sons. Rather than a focus on God, it is upon her own feelings and satisfaction.
- **Gad** = “*good fortune*”
- **Asher** = “*happy*”

b.) Despite Superstition (vv. 14-21)

- Mandrakes are small, orangish berry-like fruit. In ancient times, they were reputed to be aphrodisiacs and to have the ability of inducing a woman's fertility.
- The main attraction, then, was that Rachel thought eating mandrakes would be the answer to her barrenness.
- The LORD, however, once again demonstrated that such things are according to His providential Hand, and not our machinations and superstitions.
- Rachel got the mandrakes, but it was Leah who bore two more sons and a daughter.
- **Issachar** = “*God has rewarded me*”
- **Zebulun** = “*my husband will honor me*”

c.) Despite Shame (vv. 22-24)

- Through all of this, Rachel was shamed but never forgotten by her Lord and God.
- God's goal in keeping Rachel barren was not punishment so much as refinement.
- The lesson completed, God opens her womb and blesses her with a son.
- **Joseph** = “*may the LORD add another son to me.*”
- Is this an expression of faith or greedy expectation? I don't know, Scripture doesn't say.
- In the end, this is Rachel's one and only son. Jacob's only heir through his chosen and most beloved wife, Rachel. He is also the youngest of all of Jacob's sons. And yet, he proves to be the greatest, mightiest, most godly and savior of His family (and, thus, the Promise)!

Q: Does This Mean God Will Bless People No Matter What?

- NO!
- First, it is really Jacob who is being blessed through these sons, not the women.
- Second, while all of the competition for attention, power plays, jealousy and bitterness did not at all thwart God's Promise – it did come at a terrible and unnecessary price!
- As we will greater see, the twelve sons of Jacob and their respective descendents live in constant strife and tension up to this very day – reflecting the same spirit of competition for attention, power plays, jealousy and bitterness.

Dr. Allen P. Ross instructs:

“All Israel could look back to this tradition and see their ancestry in Jacob – and in the conflict between the women. They were brothers, sons of Israel, and should not, like their mothers, waiver in their faith and bitterly compete for God's blessing. Prosperity is dispensed to people by the sovereign will . . . We can learn the danger of favoritism in family relationships, a recurring theme in the patriarchal narratives. We can also learn about the danger of thwarting human affection. The tragedy comes when we, striving for love and recognition, either within the family or not, live our lives on such an earthly level that only temporal things mean much to us. . . *God's people must put away envy and strife, which lead to bitter conflicts, and accept the truth that God dispenses his blessings in sovereign wisdom, justice, and compassion*” (pp. 514-151).

How about us?