

Danger of Comparisons
Lesson 3– The Story of Rachel and Leah
June 14, 2015

Key starter questions for our lesson today:

- Do you have a sibling rivalry that exists to this day?
- Are you envious of your spouse for success?
- Have we ever manipulated a situation to our outcome as the expense of others?
- Have “lorded” something over someone trying to show our supposed superiority?

Our goal for this lesson is to study a classic biblical story of Envy and Jealousy through Rachel and Leah behaviors. As we read the scriptures and study, look for the following behaviors and character traits:

- *Unloved spouse*
- *Favoritism*
- *Forever dissatisfied, Never content*
- *Immature spirit shown through actions to punish others*
- *Competition and drive to win against a person at all costs*
- *Manipulation and control of situations and people*

A. Scriptures for Lesson:

Genesis 29

9 While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep, for she was a shepherd. 10 When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his uncle Laban, and Laban’s sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle’s sheep. 11 Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. 12 He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father. 13 As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister’s son, he hurried to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. 14 Then Laban said to him, “You are my own flesh and blood.”

After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, 15 Laban said to him, “Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.” 16 Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17 Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. 18 Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, “I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.” 19 Laban said, “It’s better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.” 20 So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. 21 Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to make love to her.” 22 So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. 23 But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and Jacob made love to her. 24 And Laban gave his servant Zilpah to his daughter as her attendant. 25 When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn’t I? Why have you deceived me?” 26 Laban replied, “It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. 27 Finish this daughter’s bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work.” 28 And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. 29 Laban gave his servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her attendant. 30 Jacob made love to Rachel also, and his love for Rachel was greater than his love for Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

B. The Story of Rachel and Leah – Classic Biblical Example of Envy and Jealousy:

Jacob was fleeing the wrath of his brother, Esau. When he reached Paddan-Aram, where his mother's family lived, his cousin Rachel was the first person he met. For him, their meeting was love at first sight. He was warmly welcomed into his Uncle Laban's home and began helping him shepherd his flocks.

Jacob asked Laban for Rachel's hand in marriage and volunteered to work seven years in return for her. Laban agreed, but then he deceived Jacob by secretly marrying him to his older, less attractive daughter, Leah. Laban agreed to give Rachel to Jacob, too, but he would have to work seven more years.

It is not difficult to understand why problems would arise in this family situation. Can you imagine the conflicting emotions Laban's cruel deception produced? He ended up doing seven more years of hard labor without pay for a woman he didn't want in the first place. This was not a great start for the marriage and relationship between two sisters, and now wives.

There was a physical difference between Leah and Rachel. Leah was older, had weak or delicate eyes, and apparently was not attractive. Rachel was younger and had a beautiful face and figure. Scripture simply states the sad truth: "And Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah." This would create immediate jealousy married to the same man. Almost no human emotions could control this problem, only God could relieve. We will find that through the actions of these two women, their intense jealousy and envy drives every decision in their whole lives. They never mature and spiritually grow out of this sinful behavior.

An Unloved Spouse and Favoritism

Can you imagine how difficult it was for Leah to see Jacob's passionate love for Rachel, knowing that he didn't feel the same way about her at all? This was living in daily pain. She must have experienced both jealousy and envy.

Genesis 30

1 When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!" 2 Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?" 3 Then she said, "Here is Bilhah, my servant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and I too can build a family through her." 4 So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, 5 and she became pregnant and bore him a son. 6 Then Rachel said, "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son." Because of this she named him Dan. 7 Rachel's servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8 Then Rachel said, "I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won." So she named him Naphtali. 9 When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 10 Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. 11 Then Leah said, "What good fortune!" So she named him Gad. 12 Leah's servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. 13 Then Leah said, "How happy I am! The women will call me happy." So she named him Asher. 14 During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, "Please give me some of your son's mandrakes." 15 But she said to her, "Wasn't it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son's mandrakes too?" "Very well," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes." 16 So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night. 17 God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. 18 Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my servant to my husband." So she named him Issachar. 19 Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. 20 Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun. 21 Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah. 22 Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive. 23 She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." 24 She named him Joseph, and said, "May the Lord add to me another son."

Rachel had what Leah wanted—Jacob's love. But now she was jealous of Leah because she wanted what Leah had—children. In that day, it was a great reproach upon a woman if she did not give her husband sons. Jacob put the blame where it belonged, on God.

The rivalry between these two sisters increased as they tried to build their families. Both of them were in this battle to the bitter end. But the difference in the characters of the two women is revealed in [Genesis 30:14-16](#):

Forever Dissatisfied

Apparently, Rachel even used her power over Jacob to orchestrate his sex life and keep him from sleeping with Leah so she wouldn't have any more children! In essence, Leah had to "hire" Jacob from Rachel for a night. She did so in exchange for some mandrake roots that Rachel supposed would make her fertile. But God continued to give children only to Leah. She had six sons and one daughter of her own before Rachel had her first son.

Nothing was ever enough for Rachel. Instead of thanking God for her one son, she had to have more. She had to catch up with her sister. That's a classic symptom of envy—it is insatiable.

Rachel's Immature Spirit

We see further evidence of Rachel's lack of maturity when God told Jacob to go back to his homeland. After thirteen years, the two women were still bitter toward their father for the way he had exploited. But there was a difference in the spiritual quality of the two women. One particular thing Rachel did demonstrates, after twenty years of knowing and living with Jacob, that his faith in God had made little impact on her spiritual understanding.

Rachel was both a liar and a thief; she deceived her father and her husband. Rachel was lovely on the outside, but her character wasn't very beautiful. Still, her husband's passion and preference for her lasted all her life.

Notice also how Jacob arranged his family in order of preference when he thought Esau still wanted revenge: "Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men; so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants. He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear" ([Gen 33:1-2](#)).

How do you think Leah felt? No matter how many children she had, Jacob would never love her as much as he loved Rachel. Meanwhile, Rachel could have been gracious and generous to her unloved older sister, but she wasn't. We don't read of her doing a single kind, unselfish act. Jacob's favorite wife was buried by the wayside. Leah was eventually buried by Jacob's side in the cave at Machpelah with Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah. What havoc jealousy and envy wrought upon this family!

C. Questions for Small Group Discussion:

1. Discuss how Rachel and Leah's whole life seemed consumed with jealousy and envy toward their sister?
2. With Jacob being a man of God, discuss why it appears that he could not control or influence this bad situation in his own family? It does not seem to improve through the years through his spiritual influence as the husband of both, why?
 - a. Do you think that the inability to change the family jealousy was actually condoned or maybe encouraged by Jacob since he only loved Rachel?
3. Discuss how favoritism in your family can be so destructive? Do you have any examples you can share that were essentially based on jealousy?
4. With Jacob's very obvious favoritism for Rachel, was it even humanly possible to Leah to live in this family situation without being jealous?