

Genesis 29:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.

Analysis

And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.... This passage belongs to the Jacob narratives which demonstrate God's sovereign election overriding human merit and the transformation of a deceiver into Israel, the father of the twelve tribes. The Jacob cycle shows how divine purposes advance through flawed individuals whom God graciously transforms.

Key themes include God's sovereign choice ("the older shall serve the younger"), the consequences of deception and family dysfunction, exile and return patterns, wrestling with God leading to blessing, and covenant renewal across generations. Jacob's character development from manipulative deceiver to mature patriarch demonstrates sanctification's lifelong process.

Theologically significant aspects include:

1. divine election based on grace not merit (Romans 9:10-13)
2. God's faithfulness to covenant promises despite human unfaithfulness
3. discipline as evidence of divine love and means of transformation
4. generational patterns of sin requiring divine intervention to break
5. prayer and wrestling with God as legitimate expressions of faith.

Jacob's limp after wrestling God symbolizes how divine encounters leave permanent marks, transforming our approach to life and dependence on God rather than our own cunning.

Historical Context

The patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50) reflect the cultural, social, and legal customs of the ancient Near East during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 BCE). Archaeological discoveries including the Mari tablets, Nuzi tablets, and Egyptian records confirm many details: nomadic pastoralism, covenant-making ceremonies, marriage customs, property laws, and international travel patterns described in Genesis.

The cultural practices reflected include: treaty/covenant forms (Genesis 15), bride-price customs (Genesis 24, 29), inheritance laws favoring firstborn sons (Genesis 25, 27), adoption practices (Genesis 15, 30), levirate-type arrangements (Genesis 38), and Egyptian administrative systems (Genesis 41, 47). These parallels confirm Genesis's historical reliability while showing how God worked within ancient cultural frameworks to accomplish His purposes.

For later Israelites, these narratives established their identity as Abraham's descendants, explained their claim to Canaan, justified their possession of Joseph's bones (Exodus 13:19), and provided models of faith despite imperfection. The patriarchs' failures and God's faithfulness encouraged Israel that covenant relationship depended on God's grace rather than human merit. The movement from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt set the stage for the Exodus and conquest narratives.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does this verse contribute to the biblical doctrine of creation, fall, or redemption?

2. How does this passage challenge modern cultural assumptions about identity, purpose, or morality?
3. In what ways does this narrative foreshadow or typify aspects of Christ's redemptive work?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּרְא	יְהוָה	כִּי	שָׁנָא	הִ	לֹא	וַיַּפְתַּח	אַתָּה
saw	And when the LORD		was hated		that Leah	he opened	
H7200	H3068	H3588	H8130	H3812		H6605	H853
עֲקָרָה:	וְכֵן	לֹ	כִּחְתַּם	הִ			
her womb	but Rachel		was barren				
H7358	H7354		H6135				

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 10:37 (Parallel theme): He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

1 Samuel 2:21 (References Lord): And the LORD visited Hannah, so that she conceived, and bare three sons and two daughters. And the child Samuel grew before the LORD.

Psalms 127:3 (References Lord): Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.

1 Samuel 1:5 (References Lord): But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion; for he loved Hannah: but the LORD had shut up her womb.

Exodus 3:7 (References Lord): And the LORD said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

Genesis 29:30 (Parallel theme): And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

Deuteronomy 21:15 (Parallel theme): If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated:

John 12:25 (Parallel theme): He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

Genesis 30:22 (Parallel theme): And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.

Genesis 27:41 (Parallel theme): And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him: and Esau said in his heart, The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then will I slay my brother Jacob.