

Genesis 30:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.

Analysis

And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, ... 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

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does this verse contribute to the biblical doctrine of creation, fall, or redemption?
2. What obstacles prevent us from living out the truths presented in this verse?
3. What connections can we trace from this verse to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּרְא	כִּי ל	ל א כ י	יִלְדָּה	יַעֲקֹב	א וַיִּתְקַן	
saw	And when Rachel	H3588	H3808	that she bare	Jacob	envied
H7200	H7354			H3205	H3290	H7065
כִּי ל	בְּאֵחָתָהּ	וַתֹּאמֶר	אֶל	יַעֲקֹב	הָבָה	לִי
And when Rachel	her sister	and said	H413	Jacob	Give	H0
H7354	H269	H559		H3290	H3051	
בְּנֵי יִם	וְאִם	אִין	מֵתָהּ	אֶנְכִי:		
me children	H518	or else	I die	H595		
H1121		H369	H4191			

Additional Cross-References

Job 5:2 (Parallel theme): For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one.

Genesis 29:31 (Parallel theme): And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren.

Genesis 37:11 (Parallel theme): And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.

2 Corinthians 7:10 (Parallel theme): For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

Proverbs 14:30 (Parallel theme): A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.

1 Corinthians 3:3 (Parallel theme): For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

James 4:5 (Parallel theme): Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

James 3:14 (Parallel theme): But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.

Psalms 106:16 (Parallel theme): They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD.

Job 3:11 (Parallel theme): Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?

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