

Jacobs Sons

Genesis 30

Exploring: what's the story about?

This story is about the Patriarch Jacob and his two wives, Rachel and Leah. There is a power struggle in this ancient time between the two women which is played out in having children (including by proxy). This domestic drama becomes the backdrop for explaining how the twelve tribes of Israel came to be established (11 in this story, Benjamin was born later). Each of the sons' names has a significance related to the same or similar sounding words in Hebrew (Dan= 'he judged', or 'vindicated'; Asher = 'happy' etc). The significance of the mandrakes is that these ancient people believed that mandrake plants were an aphrodisiac or an aid to conceiving children, because the roots were thought to resemble human children. Mandrakes also appear in the beautiful biblical love poem The Song of Songs (Song of Solomon) 7.13.

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 maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family."

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 maidservant 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 maidservant 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 opened her womb. **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."