

## Genesis 30

### Wrestling Matches

**Read Genesis 30:1-13:** This chapter and the next chapter detail the final events leading up to Jacob's spiritual transformation. He has been able to depend on his wit and his motivation until now. God has saddled him with Laban to give him a taste of his own medicine. Laban outtrades Jacob, just like Jacob outtraded Esau out of his birthright and his inheritance. They both seized the moment of vulnerability to their own benefit. God uses physical means and life circumstances to break us down and soften us for spiritual growth. Jacob is the main character in the bible used to compare to the average believer. He is compromised, with regrets and issues and stubbornness.

Jacob is getting his life and his plans turned upside down over and over. Our hearts are compared to hard soil, that are not open to the seed of God's word to grow and create new life. God compares hard life circumstances to the plow that turns the hard pan soil over. We need every hard spot in our hearts broken down and softened. Our world (like Jacob's) gets turned upside down over and over, just like a plow in hard soil, until we are suitable to receive God's word. Like us, Jacob sees himself as the victim; though he is still blind to his effect on others.

*"Break up your fallow ground, And do not sow among thorns. <sup>4</sup> Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, And take away the foreskins of your hearts, (Jeremiah 3)*

God uses all things to accomplish his will. He prefers that we do things for the right reasons, but he can convert sinful actions into ultimate blessings. It can take years of bible study and life experiences to really see that it does not matter if I fail or succeed. God's will is done. I just live in the blessing of obedience or the discomfort of sin. Jacob was destined to have many children, per God's promise to Abraham. This chapter has a lot of prophetic fulfilment, albeit through dishonorable means. Jacob's life also plays into God's promise to Abraham.

*I will make My covenant between Me and you, And I will multiply you exceedingly." <sup>3</sup> Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, <sup>4</sup> "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you will be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer shall you be named Abram, But your name shall be Abraham; For I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup> I will*

*make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. <sup>7</sup> I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. (Genesis 17)*

This chapter is all about unhealthy envy and competitiveness within a family unit. The value of a woman in that culture was based on child bearing and rearing. God blessed Jacob's unloved wife (Leah) with many children; leaving Rachel (his favorite) without children. These women turned childbearing into a competition to receive Jacob's attention and love. So much so, that they even resorted to using their maids as surrogate mothers. Ultimately, Rachel would bear children, but she did not wait on God's timing. The child produced between Rachel's maid and Jacob was a bad idea, and the resulting tribe of Dan became the worst tribe in Israeli history. The tribe of Dan was infamous for murder and idolatry.

All 10 of the northern Israeli tribes were carried away into captivity by the Assyrians. We have lost touch with most of these people groups as they assimilated into various cultures outside of Israel. The tribe of Dan is believed to have migrated to Ethiopia; where they have lived in isolation for centuries. These black Hebrews who are descendants from Dan have kept many religious observations, without being effected by Judaism's compromises over the centuries. They are called **Beta Israel**, and have been secretly returning to Israel since 1984.

- 1984 Operation Moses: Israel covertly rescues 8,000 from Ethiopia, and assimilates them into Israel. They secretly made a trek on foot to Sudan, where they were air lifted.
- 1985 Operation Joshua, the USA airlifts 500 more from Sudan
- 1991 Operation Solomon 14,000 Danites were brought to Israel over one weekend
- Today there are 150,000 of the Beta Israel (Danites from Ethiopia) living in Israel. They celebrate a special commemoration with their past as part of the combined Israeli culture. This celebration is known as **Sigd**.

Sigd (pronounced sihgd with one syllable) is celebrated on the 29th of the Hebrew month of Cheshvan, exactly 50 days after Yom Kippur (this year it's on November 19-20). The name "Sigd" means "prostration" in Ge'ez, an ancient South Semitic language. Sigd commemorates Beta Israel's desire

to return to Jerusalem that was originally expressed by the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah while exiled in Babylon. Sigd is also a time for renewing the Israelite covenant with God, preserving Jewish identity, fasting and praying in communal repentance, and creating unity.

Praying for the Great Temple in Jerusalem to be rebuilt is the central religious theme of Sigd. Upon the modern-day return of Jews to Israel, many Beta Israel questioned whether there was a need to continue celebrating Sigd if we already fulfilled the prophecy of returning to Israel. But because the Third Temple has never been restored, the religious mandates to observe Sigd remain, and the Beta Israel continue to recognize and observe the traditions of this special day.

Beta Israel folks traditionally begin Sigd in the evening with prayers and preparation of special food to be eaten after the fast. In the morning, it is traditional to bathe in a river before climbing the highest mountain around them, dressed up in traditional white clothing. Some carry stones on their head to signify the sins for which they are repenting. Once at the top of the mountain, the stones are placed where the *kesim* (spiritual and religious leaders) stand during the ceremonial prayers and readings.

*Kesim* carry beautiful, colorful umbrellas meant to create shade for the community. Once on top of the mountain, scriptures (which are called the *Octateuch*, the five books of Moses plus Joshua, Judges and Ruth) are read aloud. The community spends the day asking for forgiveness (much the same way as on Yom Kippur) and redemption to return to Jerusalem after being in exile for thousands of years, and expressing their love of Torah and God. The vibe is festive, humble, and communal.

Traditionally, members of the Beta Israel community fast on Sigd. The fast ends mid-day with a feast and lots of dancing. Sigd is also an opportunity for households to come together to make *injera*, a famous flatbread eaten with all meals. Other customary Sigd meals include lamb stew, and *doro wot*, a chicken stew. To wash it all down, bottles of homemade *tej* honey wine and beer are served with *dabo*, a thick wheat bread, delicious Ethiopian cheese, and honey.



Rachel compared her competition with her sister for Jacob's love to a wrestling match. Her surrogate solution went about as well as Sarah's similar solution for her infertility. On one hand it is a chapter about human envy and unhealthy competition. On another hand, it is about how God uses even these things to accomplish his will; thus creating 12 distinct tribes of Israel. The entire bible is about human failure and God's continual intervention and resuscitation.

Men wrestle with each other over conflicting goals. Men find themselves wrestling with God over the same kinds of things. In the next chapter, Jacob does physically wrestle with God.

*<sup>3</sup> And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive (contend/quarrel) with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." (Genesis 6)*

**Read Genesis 30 :14-24:** Leah has her son Ruben collect mandrakes for her to concoct an aphrodisiac for Jacob. There does not seem to be a limit to how many children she feels that she needs to win Jacob's affection. Sons were generally valued more than daughters in that culture. They carried the name, the inheritance, the priestly functions, and they could work hard. It is amazing that Jacob had 12 sons and one daughter. The odds of that happening are 1 in 630.

**Read Genesis 30:25-43:** Jacob had fulfilled his 14 years of servitude for Rachel and Leah, and he was ready to return home. Jacob has made Laban rich. Laban made another deal with him. Jacob would work another 6 years; and keep all of the brown and spotted and striped sheep and goats. Colored wool is not nearly as valuable as white wool. You need white wool to dye it in the desired color. Jacob was now managing two flocks. One white wool group and one spotted group, which were kept a three day's journey apart. In those times a day's journey was 20-30 miles. Jacob's flock was 60-90 miles away from Laban's flock.

Approximately 80% of a flock in that culture would be white, with 20% having spots. Jacob left some striped sheep (especially rams) in Laban's flock. He used an

unknown technique of adding peeled bark strips in the watering trough to induce ovulation and breeding to Laban's white ewes with Jacob's striped rams; resulting in a lot of striped lambs in Laban's flock...which were systematically transferred over to Jacob's flock. Over time, Jacob became wealthy with large flocks. We will see in the next chapter, that Laban changed the deal from all color variations to a specific type (striped versus spotted) ten times. So both Jacob and Laban were trying every trick in the book to get the best out of each other. God was still teaching Jacob who controls the outcomes.