

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“Waging Worldly Warfare”

Genesis 30:1-43

2003

Introduction

Everyday we are faced with the choice to either trust in the Lord with all our heart (Prov 3:5-6), or to trust in our own resources and ingenuity to get what we think we deserve.

Trusting in the Lord leads to peace, joy and contentment – it’s called the Spirit-filled life. Trusting in ourselves leads to anxiety, anger and disillusionment – I call it “Waging Worldly Warfare.”

2 Cor 10:3-4 “For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.

Some of you are facing significant challenges in your life today

1. A husband or wife who has failed to fulfill their calling as a godly spouse
2. A financial crisis that threatens to bring financial ruin
3. A conflict with a friend or a coworker who seems unreasonable and combative
4. An unfulfilled desire that you have become impatient over:
 - a. The desire for a husband or wife
 - b. The desire for material things
 - c. Or, as in the case of Rachel and Leah, the desire to have children

You are at a critical junction in life – a spiritual crossroads:

One fork leads to a life yielded to the loving and faithful care of God.

The other leads to an exhausting life marked by pain of “Worldly Warfare.”

I The Stage Is Set For Worldly Warfare

A. Rachel was not **bearing** children [Verse 1a]

You may recall from Genesis 29 that when the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, He opened her womb and she produced four sons for Jacob: Rueben, Simeon, Levi and Judah (Gen 29:31-32). And while all this physical reproduction was going on, Rachel remained barren.

Remember, that God’s covenant promises to Jacob included offspring that would be as prolific as the stars of the heavens and the sand of the sea. So for Rachel, the desire to have children was godly, but the motivation dramatically shifted from the glory of God to the untamed desire to crush her competition.

James 4:1-3 “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your

desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

B. Rachel became jealous of her sister [Verse 1b]

James 3:16 “For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.”

I find it interesting that despite their unique role in the kingdom of God, both Rachel and Leah were dissatisfied and unhappy with their circumstances:

Rachel: “If only I had sons like my sister!”

Leah: “If only I had my sister’s beauty and the love of Jacob.”

Application:

Have you ever met an “If only ...” Christian?

“If only I had a better husband or better wife.”

“If only I had a better job and more money.”

“If only I had a newer house and nicer furniture.”

“If only I didn’t have these kids!”

We would do well to remember the words of the Apostle Paul: “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation ... I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Phil 4:12-13

C. Rachel became **angry** with Jacob [Verse 1c-2]

Eventually, Rachel’s embarrassment, humiliation and jealousy spilled over into anger towards her husband, Jacob. Despite the fact that Jacob had already proved through the sons born to Leah that he was not the problem, Rachel lashed out at him.

“Give me children, or I die!”

James 1:19-20 “My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”

Application:

Jacob should have followed the example of his father, Isaac, when Rebekah had been barren. He prayed for his wife and God blessed her with children (Gen 25:21).

No such prayers are mentioned here, nor are we told that God answered the prayers of Jacob. *Instead ...*

1. Jacob in turn became angry with Rachel

Angry = 'anaph = “To breathe hard, be enraged, flare the nostrils”

“Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?”

Application:

Men, have you ever noticed that when we don't have answers and can't easily fix things, we can have a tendency to get impatient and angry?

I've had more than one occasion where my wife brings a problem to me and I immediately go into problem solving mode only to discover she doesn't want it fixed, she just wants me to commiserate with her. And I'm like, "WHY?"
Prov 15:1 "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

It quickly becomes evident that Jacob was not a very strong spiritual leader in his home. He was used like a pawn in the "Worldly Warfare" of his two wives. His passivity in these verses is an indictment of his lack of leadership and would cost him and his family the peace, joy and contentment of God.

II The Battle Of The Brides

A. Rachel gave Bilhah to Jacob [Verse 3]

This is the very same thing that Sarah did with her handmaiden, Hagar, in Gen 16:1-3.

History: Ancient documents reveal that when a woman could not provide her husband with a child, she could give her female slave as a wife and claim the child of this union as her own. But just because something is culturally or even legally acceptable doesn't make it right for the believer. For example: ABORTION

Jacob should have been an example of faith and godliness to Rachel. He should have immediately rejected her suggestion and turned to the Lord in prayer. Instead, with little or no protest, he passively agreed to Rachel's suggestion.

1. He failed by listening to his wife's ungodly advice

2. He failed to test his wife's counsel against the Word of God

If you wife, or anyone else for that matter, suggests something that is contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture, then you must reject that counsel and follow what the Word of God teaches.

Acts 5:29 "Peter ... we must obey God rather than men!"

3. He failed to pray for God's wisdom or guidance

Sometimes the prayerless decisions we make seem so insignificant and harmless.

But often these prayerless decisions come back to haunt us.

"Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear. All because we do not carry, everything to God in prayer."

1. Bilhah bore him a son: Dan [Verse 4-6]

Dan = diyn = "To rule, judge (as umpire) or vindicate"

Gen 30:6 "God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son."

Rachel viewed the birth of this child as God's vindication of her worldly method of achieving what she so desperately wanted!

Application: This is a classic example of “The End Justifying The Means.”

2. Bilhah bore him another son: Naphtali [Verse 7-8]

Naphtali = pathal = “To struggle or wrestle”

Gen 30:8 “I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won.”

Application:

One of Satan’s most effective strategies is to transition the believer gradually from battling the forces of darkness in prayer to focusing their attention on conquering the human agents of Satan’s attacks.

Eph 6:12 “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

Up until now, Leah has produced her own children. But now that she is no longer conceiving, she resorted to the same tactics as Rachel.

“If Rachel can use her handmaiden, then so can I!”

- B. Leah **gave** Zilpah to Jacob [Verse 9-11]

1. Zilpah bore a son: Gad

Gad = guwd = “To attack and overcome”

What’s amazing to me is that these two women, who are the forerunners of the Messiah, are using their children as pawns in a personal struggle for power.

2. Zilpah bore another son: Asher [Verse 12-13]

Asher = 'ashar = “To be happy, blessed or relieved”

Gen 30:13 “How happy I am! The women will call me happy.”

Leah’s focus is not the approval of God, but the approval of other women.

Application:

Jn 12:42-43 “[The Pharisees] loved praise from men more than praise from God.”

John 5:44 “How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”

- C. Leah **bargained** for a night with Jacob [Verse 14-16]

1. She twisted the truth

- a. “Wasn’t it enough that you took my husband?”

Leah’s accusation reflects just how absurd her thinking had become. After all, it was Leah, not Rachel, who had taken Jacob.

Jer 17:9 “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”

2. She **bought** a night with Jacob for mandrakes

Mandrakes = A yellow fruit with white and reddish blossoms that were believed to be an aphrodisiac and to increase fertility in women.

Leah was interested in the mandrakes for their Viagra-like qualities.

Rachel was interested in the mandrakes for the fertility-enhancing qualities.

Application:

Why is it that we are willing to trust in everything BUT the Lord? We'll spend hours on the phone with friends, but we won't spend 5 minutes on our knees before God. We'll read self-help books, but we won't read the Bible. We'll listen to Dr. Laura and Dr. Phil, but we won't inquire of the Lord.

3. God **listened** to Leah [Verse 17]

a. She bore another son: Issachar [Verse 18]

Sakar = "To reward"

Gen 30:18 "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband."

Leah interpreted this son as evidence of God's approval and blessing of her giving her maid Zilpah to Jacob (verse 18).

b. She bore another son: Zebulun [Verse 19-20]

Zebulun = Zabal = "To enclose, reside or dwell with"

Leah is still hoping that Jacob will one day love her and live with her. She mistakenly believes that the sheer quantity of sons will win his heart to her!

c. She bore a daughter: Dinah [Verse 21]

Dinah = Duwn = "Judgment or strife"

Finally, after ten sons, Jacob becomes father of a daughter through Leah.

Other daughters were born (Gen 37:35; 46:7, 15), but Dinah is the one who receives the greatest attention.

D. God **remembered** Rachel [Verse 22-24]

Wherever Scripture uses the phrase "*God remembered*", it doesn't mean that God forgot something. Rather, it is a Hebrew expression indicating God's renewed activity in the life of an individual or community.

1. He listened to her and opened her womb

The idea of God's sovereignty over the womb is a repetitive theme in the Bible.

God granted twins to Rebekah (Genesis 25:21); He opens and closes the womb of

Leah (Genesis 29:31), and closes and opens the womb of Hannah (1 Samuel 1:5).

a. She bore her first son: Joseph

Joseph = Yacaph = "To add or augment"

Gen 30:24 "May the LORD add to me another son."

Rachel feels she has been "vindicated" by the birth of one son, but wants more children because she is behind in the head count with her archrival, Leah.

III Jacob and Laban Battle In The Flesh

A. Jacob finished his 14 years [Verse 25-26]

He had weathered the 14 years of service to Laban in order to obtain Rachel and Leah.
But now he was ready to move on!

1. He asked Laban for permission to return home

Jacob obviously hasn't forgotten the covenant promises of God.

He must return to the land of Canaan – which he calls "My country."

He knows that he has a calling and a destiny to fulfill.

B. Laban recognized the blessings of Jacob [Verse 27-28]

He learned by divination that the LORD has blessed him because of Jacob.

Gen 12:3 "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Illustration: Joseph was a blessing to Potiphar's house – Genesis 39:2-6

Application: How would your family describe you? Your boss? Your neighbors?

As believers, we should be a blessing wherever we go and in whatever we do!

Col 3:22-25 "Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism."

1. He asked Jacob to name his wages

Question? What would possibly motivate Jacob to continue in a business relationship with a known deceiver and con artist? Greed and invested time!
Luke 12:15 "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

1 Tim 6:8-10 "People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs."

C. Jacob proposed a surprising deal [Verse 29-33]

1. He asked for the speckled spotted and dark sheep
Why the speckled and spotted?

1. It was a foolproof way to distinguish between the flocks of Laban and Jacob.
2. It appeared to favor Laban since goats in the Middle East are generally black or dark brown and the sheep were nearly always white.
3. It gave Jacob an opportunity to put his trust in God. And as we'll discover in Genesis 31, Jacob had a dream from God ensuring him that the Lord would protect him from the dishonesty of Laban.

D. Laban agreed but then **stacked** the deck against Jacob [Verse 34-36]

1. He removed the speckled and the spotted from the flock
2. He placed them in the care of his sons
3. He separated the flocks by a three-day journey

Laban obviously didn't want these animals to breed with the solid colored animals so he separated them

The spotted and speckled would be Jacob's property and would be cared for by Laban's sons – who were not nearly as skilled as Jacob and would likely do as little as possible to properly care for Jacob's interests.

Meanwhile, Jacob would be responsible to take care of Laban's flocks that were genetically speaking, very unlikely to produce speckled, spotted or dark offspring.

E. Jacob countered with a **plan** from God [Verse 37-43]

He took branches from poplar, almond, and plane trees; strips them of bark; and put them in the drinking troughs of the flocks. Apparently, this technique worked to increase the number of speckled and spotted offspring from the solid-colored flock.

1. The weak animals went to Laban and the strong to Jacob

He used selective breeding to increase the strength and vitality of his flock.

2. He became exceedingly prosperous

Prov 13:22 "A good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children, but a sinner's wealth is stored up for the righteous."

Ps 37:5-9 "Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret--it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land."

Question: Was Jacob's success the result of his shrewd breeding secrets? **NO!**

In chapter 31:9-13, we are told that God spoke to Jacob in a dream about these very matters. So there was nothing magic in the striped sticks. Jacob acted in faith by doing what God told him to do ... no matter how absurd it seemed to the natural mind.

This wouldn't be the last time God would instruct his servants to do unusual things:

1. Like putting a bronze serpent on a pole to heal people of snakebites

2. Like defeating Jericho by having the people march around the city 13 times
3. Like having men and women be forgiven of their sins simply by putting their faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross 2000 years ago to pay the penalty for sin.

Application:

1 Cor 1:20-21 “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.”

Conclusion

There are essentially two ways to approach life as a believer:

1. A superficial belief in God that requires you to take control of your life
2. A deep faith in God that permits you to yield absolute control of your life to God

Everyday we are faced with a decision:

The decision to enjoy God’s peace, joy and contentment ... or to experience anxiety, anger and disillusionment.

The decision to enjoy the Spirit-filled life ... or to be burdened by the overwhelming weight of “Worldly Warfare.”

Which will you choose?

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