

A WOMAN'S WORLD  
GENESIS 29:31-30:24

- NEED: TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S ROLE FOR A WOMAN
- PROPOSITION: THE EXPERIENCE OF LEAH ALLOWS US TO SEE THE CONFLICT BETWEEN MAN'S ROLE FOR WOMEN AND GOD'S ROLE FOR A WOMAN.
- OBJECTIVE: TO ENCOURAGE CHRISTIAN WOMEN IN THEIR WALK WITH GOD.

INTRODUCTION:

While reading Judge Robert Bork's book, *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* sometime ago, I became keenly aware of just how angry some women are in our world. Judge Bork quotes extensively from the core leaders of the feminist movement in this country. They have a clear agenda and it is an anti-man agenda. They are motivated by deep resentments and anger. You wonder how these sisters might have reacted if they had lived in the world of Leah, the wife of Jacob.

An overview of the Biblical material relating to Leah is very illuminating. It gives us helpful insight into the role that women played in that generation and how God responded to that role that had been consigned to women by men. This oldest daughter of Laban did not have an easy life. Many of the difficulties and sorrows of her life were imposed upon her by the role that men had consigned to her. It is very encouraging to Christian women to watch God react to the oppression that was being experienced by this good woman.

I want us to look at the inspired record that gives to us the situation in which Leah lived.

Then I want us to look at the response that God made to her and to her situation. There is help for us in this passage.

#### I. THE WOMAN'S WORLD AS DESIGNED BY MEN.

The situation in which Leah found herself as a woman in that ancient world should not be viewed as an exceptional case. The situation in which she found herself was one in which almost all women in that world found themselves. Indeed it is not that different in much of our world even to this day. In the Islamic world, which is a major portion of earth's population, her role would still be very similar to that of Leah in this old Testament chapter. Some of that legacy can be found in almost every culture of the world.

##### 1. She is viewed as a piece of property.

It is obvious from the way Laban and Jacob negotiated Jacob's marriage with Leah and Rachel that both men to some degree viewed these two women as pieces of property to be bought and sold. To be sure they were expensive pieces of property, but still pieces of property. Jacob entered into an agreement with Laban that he would work for seven years for the hand of Rachel in marriage. I'm not sure what the earning power of a man might have been in that agriculture economy, but whatever it was that was considered to be the value of a good wife. Jacob ended up working fourteen years for these two women that became a part of his life. The father viewed the daughters as having economic value and Jacob viewed them as being worth fourteen years of hard labor.

This view of woman has prevailed in many of the cultures of the world. She is still evaluated on the basis of economic worth rather than her worth before God as a person. You can imagine what this must have done to the self-esteem of women in that ancient world. It is remarkable that a woman like Leah had the strength of character that she demonstrates in this record.

2. The primary purpose of woman is to bear children.

Her value to her husband will be determined by her ability to bear children - especially sons. This is obvious as you read this record that women are in the home for the primary purpose of conceiving and bearing children. Leah delights in the way God enabled her to prosper in this role. Some scholars calculate that Leah actually bore seven children in seven years - or a child a year. The period involved may have extended for a longer period than this, but not a great deal longer. For at least this part of her life Leah was pregnant most of the time.

Rachel was so distressed that she was not able to bear children that she came up with the offer of giving her handmaiden to Jacob for the purpose of bringing forth children. It was considered under the legal system of that day that any child conceived by the handmaiden would be her child. So her handmaiden was allowed to become Jacob's concubine because her primary purpose was to bear children for her mistress if the mistress was not able to bear children.

When Leah found herself unable to bear children for awhile she too offered her handmaiden to Jacob so Jacob found himself living with four childbearing women. It is likely that the extended period in which Leah was unable to bear children was the result of pressure that Rachel had placed upon Jacob to not frequent the tent of Leah. It would seem to be some clear evidence in the text that she had been able to influence Jacob's behavior at this point.

Now it is true that one of the unique things about a woman is her ability to conceive and bear children, but it is not true that is her only mission in life. But that is the kind of world in which Leah lived. It is still the kind of world in which some women live today.

3. She was the greatest victim when God's plan for marriage is perverted.

Who suffers most when God's original plan for marriage is changed? It is obvious from the first chapters of this book of Genesis that God's original plan was for one man to be married to one woman for life. Somewhere in the early days of humankind changes were made in God's plan. Monogamy had been replaced by polygamy in the day of Jacob. It was acceptable for a man to have multiple wives and even concubines. This must have been a plan conceived by men - I doubt that women would have ever come up with such a plan.

Whenever changes are made in God's original plan, the one who suffers most is the woman. If you will just track the misery that this plan imposed both upon Leah and her sister Rachel - not to mention the two servant women who became Jacob's concubines. Each of these women had a God-given instinct to possess Jacob for themselves. Each of them desired his complete love and loyalty. Neither of them would

ever know the complete loyalty of Jacob. The result was the imposition upon their lives of hurt, pain, disappointment, frustration, resentment, and a dozen other negative emotions.

It is true that we have abolished polygamy from our society, but it does not mean that we are loyal to God's original plan. It is not proper in our society for a man to have more than one wife at the same time. We have come up with a system of serial marriages in which we move from marriage partner to another. The end result of this new system that we have is the same as that old system in the day of Jacob - the one who suffers the most is the woman. Statistics indicate that one of the primary reasons that so many women with children are living in poverty in our country is that they have been victims of divorce. Broken marriages put them in the untenable situation of having to raise children by themselves. It imposes upon them unspeakable problems and difficulties. The result is still the same anytime God's plan for marriage is perverted. Let Leah's experience be a reminder to us of this.

#### **n. GOD'S RESPONSE TO WOMAN IN HER WORLD.**

To see the activity and response of God as it relates to Leah is most encouraging, if you are a woman. It ought to be a warning to those of us who are men. Unlike the earlier part of chapter twenty-nine where there is no reference to God, this passage is filled with references to God. God is very much involved in the life of the women in the home of Jacob. There is no reference of Him speaking to Jacob or taking note of Jacob, but His

attention is surely focused upon these women in the home of Jacob who are the victims of this manmade system.

1. God regards her as a person.

Unlike the men of that world who saw woman as chattel to be bought and sold, God sees her as person. "When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, He opened her womb, Rachel was barren." In the eyes of God Leah is a person who is suffering unjustly. She has been placed in a position that has brought to her pain and disappointment. The Lord, Yeawah of the Covenant, takes note of this. He responds to her as a person and compensates her for the pain and suffering that has come to her. Rachel may have Leah's husband, but God will see that Leah has something that Rachel doesn't have. God enables her to conceive and to bear children. She did this again and again over the years until in the end she was the mother of six boys and one daughter. God saw her as a person.

This is a reminder to us of how Jesus related to women in the Gospels. It is no wonder that women are so quick to respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Never did womankind have such a friend. He always viewed them and related to them as persons, as persons of infinite worth before God.

2. God has compassion upon her.

God not only views her as a person, but He responds to her in compassion. It matters to God that Leah is getting the short end of the stick. It matters to Him that her life has been

made one of pain and misery. It matters to Him that her weak eyes have been filled with the tears of sorrow. So God intervenes on her behalf in compassion.

If there is a woman listening who finds herself in a horrible situation and finds her eyes filled with tears, the Lord of the covenant understands. He will have compassion upon you. He can be expected to act on your behalf.

3. God uses her in her redemptive purposes.

It is of special interest that God chose Leah to be the one through whom His redemptive purposes would be fulfilled. I'm sure that it was the desire of Jacob that it be Rachel who would bear a son who would be the channel for the fulfillment of the Messianic promise. It was not to be so. In his sovereignty God chose Leah.

There are a couple of interesting things in this inspired text. Did you notice how Jacob fades to the background in this particular passage? It is Leah and Rachel who become the persons in the spotlight. Now it is obvious that Jacob had a part in the birth of his sons but you would not know this from the Biblical record. It is the woman who has a primary role of bringing sons and daughters into the world. It is the woman that God uses to conceive and to bear children. It is through Leah that Judah comes into the world. And that Judah is the chosen son through whom ultimately the Lord Jesus would come into the world.

Another point of interest in this passage is that the women name the children. My impression from other texts and other points of history is that this was an exception. Jacob may have had a part, but there is no indication of this in the text. In each case either Leah or Rachel gives the name to the child. This in itself is a sign of the significant role that God has allowed woman to have in his redemptive purposes.

I suppose it would be proper to say that Jesus was a descendant of Jacob, but from reading the Biblical record it would probably be better to say that Jesus was a descendent of Leah. She had that primary role in bringing His grandfather Judah into the world and giving to Judah the name that He would bear. Society may impose upon women a secondary role, but the sovereign God of this universe will graciously grant to them an even bigger role in His kingdom.

As I personalize this text into my own relationship with Alice, I have always been quick to acknowledge to whomever it might be of interest that Alice has had a primary role in the development and growth of our sons. We have been blessed to have four fine young men to come through our family who have continued to be faithful to the Lord and to seek to do His will, but it would never have happened had it not been for a godly woman who was content to stay at home and to delight in the ministry of her husband while she invested herself in our sons. God works through women, godly faithful women to further His purposes in the world.

This study in the life of Leah should bring a sense of gratitude to every Christian woman. Every woman in our culture has been greatly blessed by the influence of Jesus of Lord. Her status in life has been transformed and her world changed through the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even those angry feminists who in some cases are enemies of the Gospel have still benefited from the Gospel. Our Lord has changed the world in which they live.

It should also be a tremendous encouragement to know that God has a purpose that He will accomplish through your life. It is in His grace that He includes all of us, women and men, in His redemptive purposes. The world may count you as a weak eyed nobody, but God can overturn the judgments of the world. God takes those nobodies in the eyes of the world and causes them to become somebody in His kingdom.