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Introduction

Rachel envies her sister, and chides Jacob, Genesis 30:1. He reproves her and vindicates himself, Genesis 30:2. She gives him her maid Bilhah, Genesis 30:3, Genesis 30:4. She conceives, and bears Dan. vv.5, 6; and afterwards Naphtali, Genesis 30:7, Genesis 30:8. Leah gives Zilpah her maid to Jacob, Genesis 30:9. She conceives and bears Gad, Genesis 30:10, Genesis 30:11, and also Asher, Genesis 30:12, Genesis 30:13. Reuben finds mandrakes, of which Rachel requests a part, Genesis 30:14. The bargain made between her and Leah, Genesis 30:15. Jacob in consequence lodges with Leah instead of Rachel, Genesis 30:16. She conceives, and bears Issachar, Genesis 30:17, Genesis 30:18, and Zebulun, Genesis 30:19, Genesis 30:20, and Dinah, Genesis 30:21. Rachel conceives, and bears Joseph, Genesis 30:22-24. Jacob requests permission from Laban to go to his own country, Genesis 30:25, Genesis 30:26. Laban entreats him to tarry, and offers to give him what wages he shall choose to name, Genesis 30:27, Genesis 30:28. Jacob details the importance of his services to Laban, Genesis 30:29, Genesis 30:30, and offers to continue those services for the speckled and spotted among the goats, and the brown among the sheep, Genesis 30:31-33. Laban consents, Genesis 30:34, and divides all the ring-streaked and spotted among the he-goats, the speckled and spotted among the she-goats, and the brown among the sheep, and puts them under the care of his sons, and sets three days' journey between himself and Jacob, Genesis 30:35, Genesis 30:36. Jacob's stratagem of the pilled rods, to cause the cattle to bring forth the ring-streaked, speckled, and spotted, Genesis 30:37-39. In consequence of which he increased his flock greatly, getting all that was strong and healthy in the flock of Laban, Genesis 30:40-43.

Verse 1

Give me children, or else I die - This is a most reprehensible speech, and argues not only envy and jealousy, but also a total want of dependence on God. She had the greatest share of her husband's affection, and yet was not satisfied unless she could engross all the privileges which her sister enjoyed! How true are those sayings, Envy is as rottenness of the bones! and, Jealousy is as cruel as the grave!

Verse 2

Amos I in God's stead - Amos I greater than God, to give thee what he has refused?

Verse 3

She shall bear upon my knees - The handmaid was the sole property of the mistress, as has already been remarked in the case of Hagar; and therefore not only all her labor, but even the children borne by her, were the property of the mistress. These female slaves, therefore, bore children vicariously for their mistresses; and this appears to be the import of the term, she shall bear upon my knees.

That I may also have children by her - $\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{a}}\text{x}^{\text{a}}$ $\text{x}^{\text{z}}\text{x}^{\text{z}}\text{x}^{\text{z}}\text{x}^{\text{z}}$ (veibbaneh mimmennah), and I shall be built up by her. Hence $\text{x}^{\text{b}}\text{x}^{\text{b}}$ (ben), a son or child, from $\text{x}^{\text{b}}\text{x}^{\text{b}}$ (banah), to build; because, as a house is formed of the stones, etc., that enter into its composition, so is a family by children.

Verse 6

Called she his name Dan - Because she found God had judged for her, and decided she should have a son by her handmaid; hence she called his name $\text{x}^{\text{d}}\text{x}^{\text{d}}$ (dan), judging.

Verse 8

She called his name Naphtali - $\text{x}^{\text{n}}\text{x}^{\text{n}}\text{x}^{\text{n}}\text{x}^{\text{n}}$ (naphtali), my wrestling, according to the common mode of interpretation; but it is more likely that the root $\text{x}^{\text{p}}\text{x}^{\text{p}}\text{x}^{\text{p}}\text{x}^{\text{p}}$ (pathal) signifies to twist or entwine. Hence Mr. Parkhurst translates the verse, "By the twistings - agency or operation, of God, I am entwisted with my sister; that is, my family is now entwined or interwoven with my sister's family, and has a chance of producing the promised Seed." The Septuagint, Aquila, and the Vulgate, have nearly the same meaning. It is, however, difficult to fix the true meaning of the original.

Verse 11

She called his name Gad - This has been variously translated. $\text{x}^{\text{g}}\text{x}^{\text{g}}$ (gad), may signify a troop, an army, a soldier, a false god, supposed to be the same as Jupiter or Mars; for as Laban appears to have been, if not an idolater, yet a dealer in a sort of judicial astrology, (see Genesis 31:19), Leah, in saying $\text{x}^{\text{b}}\text{x}^{\text{b}}\text{x}^{\text{b}}\text{x}^{\text{b}}$ (bagad), which we translate a troop cometh, might mean, By or with the assistance of Gad - a particular planet or star, Jupiter possibly, I have gotten this son; therefore she called him after the name of that planet or star from which she supposed the succor came. See note on Genesis 31:19. The Septuagint translate it $\text{ἐὶς τὴν ἀγαθὴν τύχην}$, with good fortune; the Vulgate, feliciter, happily; but in all this diversity our own translation may appear as probable as

any, if not the genuine one, בָּגַד (ba gad), for the keri, or marginal reading, has it in two words, a troop cometh; whereas the textual reading has it only in one, בָּגַד (bagad), with a troop. In the Bible published by Becke, 1549, the word is translated as an exclamation, Good luck!

Verse 13

And Leah said, Happy am I - בְּשׂוּרִי (beoshri), in my happiness, therefore she called his name אֲשֵׁר (asher), that is, blessedness or happiness.

Verse 14

Reuben - found mandrakes - דּוּדַיִם (dudaim). What these were is utterly unknown, and learned men have wasted much time and pains in endeavoring to guess out a probable meaning. Some translate the word lilies, others jessamine, others citrons, others mushrooms, others figs, and some think the word means flowers, or fine flowers in general. Hasselquist, the intimate friend and pupil of Linne, who traveled into the Holy Land to make discoveries in natural history, imagines that the plant commonly called mandrake is intended; speaking of Nazareth in Galilee he says: "What I found most remarkable at this village was a great number of mandrakes which grew in a vale below it. I had not the pleasure to see this plant in blossom, the fruit now (May 5th, O. S.) hanging ripe to the stem, which lay withered on the ground. From the season in which this mandrake blossoms and ripens fruit, one might form a conjecture that it was Rachel's dudaim. These were brought her in the wheat harvest, which in Galilee is in the month of May, about this time, and the mandrake was now in fruit." Both among the Greeks and Orientals this plant was held in high repute, as being of a prolific virtue, and helping conception; and from it philtres were made, and this is favored by the meaning of the original, loves, i.e., incentives to matrimonial connections: and it was probably on this account that Rachel desired them. The whole account however is very obscure.

Verse 15

Thou hast taken my husband - It appears probable that Rachel had found means to engross the whole of Jacob's affection and company, and that she now agreed to let him visit the tent of Leah, on account of receiving some of the fruits or plants which Reuben had found.

Verse 16

I have hired thee - We may remark among the Jewish women an intense desire of having children; and it seems to have been produced, not from any peculiar affection for children, but through the hope of having a share in the blessing of Abraham, by bringing forth Him in whom all the nations of the earth were to be blessed.

Verse 18

God hath given me my hire - שְׂכָרִי (sechari). And she called his name Issachar, יִשָּׂכָר, This word is compounded of יֵשׁ (yesh), Is, and שָׂכָר (sachar), Wages, from שָׂכַר (sachar), to content, satisfy, saturate; hence a satisfaction or compensation for work done, etc.

Verse 20

Now will my husband dwell with me - יִזְבֵּלֵנִי (yizbeleni); and she called his name Zebulun, זְבֻלֻן, a dwelling or cohabitation, as she now expected that Jacob would dwell with her, as he had before dwelt with Rachel.

Verse 21

And called her name Dinah - דִּנָּה (dinah), judgment. As Rachel had called her son by Bilhah Dan, Genesis 30:6, so Leah calls her daughter Dinah, God having judged and determined for her, as well as for her sister in the preceding instance.

Verse 22

And God hearkened to her - After the severe reproof which Rachel had received from her husband, Genesis 30:2, it appears that she sought God by prayer, and that he heard her; so that her prayer and faith obtained what her impatience and unbelief had prevented.

Verse 24

She called his name Joseph - יוֹסֵף (Yoseph), adding, or he who adds; thereby prophetically declaring that God would add unto her another son, which was accomplished in the birth of Benjamin, Genesis 35:18.

Verse 25

Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away - Having now, as is generally conjectured, fulfilled the fourteen years which he had engaged to serve for Leah and Rachel. See Genesis 30:26, and conclusion at Genesis 31:55

(note).

Verse 27

I have learned by experience - נִחַשְׁתִּי (nichashti), from נֶחֱשׂ (nachash), to view attentively, to observe, to pry into. I have diligently considered the whole of thy conduct, and marked the increase of my property, and find that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake. For the meaning of the word נֶחֱשׂ (nachash), See note on Genesis 3:1, etc.

Verse 30

For it was little which thou had before I came - Jacob takes advantage of the concession made by his father-in-law, and asserts that it was for his sake that the Lord had blessed him: Since my coming, לִרְגְלִי (leragli), according to my footsteps - every step I took in thy service, God prospered to the multiplication of thy flocks and property.

When shall I provide for mine own house - Jacob had already laid his plan; and, from what is afterwards mentioned, we find him using all his skill and experience to provide for his family by a rapid increase of his flocks.

Verse 32

I will pass through all thy flock - תִּסּוֹן (tson), implying, as we have before seen, all smaller cattle, such as sheep, goats, etc.

All the speckled and spotted cattle - שֵׁה (seh), which we translate cattle, signifies the young either of sheep or goats, what we call a lamb or a kid. Speckled, נֶקֶד (nakod), signifies interspersed with variously colored spots.

Spotted - טָלָה (talu), spotted with large spot either of the same or different colors, from טָלָה (tala), to patch, to make party-colored or patch-work; see Ezekiel 16:16. I have never seen such sheep as are here described but in the islands of Zetland. There I have seen the most beautiful brown, or fine chocolate color among the sheep; and several of the ring-streaked, spotted, speckled, and piebald among the same; and some of the latter description I have brought over, and can exhibit a specimen of Jacob's flock brought from the North Seas, feeding in Middlesex.

And all the brown - חֹמֶר (chum). I should rather suppose this to signify a lively brown, as the root signifies to be warm or hot.

Verse 35

The he-goats that were ring-streaked - $\text{הֶעֱזִים הָאֵלֶּם הַבָּרְזִים}$ (hatteyashim haakuddim), the he-goats that had rings of black or other colored hair around their feet or legs.

It is extremely difficult to find out, from Genesis 30:32 and Genesis 30:35, in what the bargain of Jacob with his father-in-law properly consisted. It appears from Genesis 30:32, that Jacob was to have for his wages all the speckled, spotted, and brown among the sheep and the goats; and of course that all those which were not party-colored should be considered as the property of Laban. But in Genesis 30:35 it appears that Laban separated all the party-colored cattle, delivered them into the hands of his own sons; which seems as if he had taken these for his own property, and left the others to Jacob. It has been conjectured that Laban, for the greater security, when he had separated the party-colored, which by the agreement belonged to Jacob, see Genesis 30:32, put them under the care of his own sons, while Jacob fed the flock of Laban, Genesis 30:36, three days' journey being between the two flocks. If therefore the flocks under the care of Laban's sons brought forth young that were all of one color, these were put to the flocks of Laban under the care of Jacob; and if any of the flocks under Jacob's care brought forth party-colored young, they were put to the flocks belonging to Jacob under the care of Laban's sons. This conjecture is not satisfactory, and the true meaning appears to be this: Jacob had agreed to take all the party-colored for his wages. As he was now only beginning to act upon this agreement, consequently none of the cattle as yet belonged to him; therefore Laban separated from the flock, Genesis 30:35, all such cattle as Jacob might afterwards claim in consequence of his bargain, (for as yet he had no right); therefore Jacob commenced his service to Laban with a flock that did not contain a single animal of the description of those to which he might be entitled; and the others were sent away under the care of Laban's sons, three days' journey from those of which Jacob had the care. The bargain, therefore, seemed to be wholly in favor of Laban; and to turn it to his own advantage, Jacob made use of the stratagems afterwards mentioned. This mode of interpretation removes all the apparent contradiction between Genesis 30:32 and Genesis 30:35, with which commentators in general have been grievously perplexed. From the whole account we learn that Laban acted with great prudence and caution, and Jacob with great judgment. Jacob had

already served fourteen years; and had got no patrimony whatever, though he had now a family of twelve children, eleven sons and one daughter, besides his two wives, and their two maids, and several servants. See Genesis 30:43. It was high time that he should get some property for these; and as his father-in-law was excessively parsimonious, and would scarcely allow him to live, he was in some sort obliged to make use of stratagem to get an equivalent for his services. But did he not push this so far as to ruin his father-in-law's flocks, leaving him nothing but the refuse? See Genesis 30:42.

Verse 37

Rods of green poplar - לִבְנֵי לַח (libneh lach). The (libneh) is generally understood to mean the white poplar; and the word (lach), which is here joined to it, does not so much imply greenness of color as being fresh, in opposition to witheredness. Had they not been fresh - just cut off, he could not have pilled the bark from them.

And of the hazel - לִז (luz), the nut or filbert tree, translated by others the almond tree; which of the two is here intended is not known.

And chestnut tree - אַרְמוֹן (armon), the plane tree, from אַרָּם (aram), he was naked. The plane tree is properly called by this name, because of the outer bark naturally peeling off, and leaving the tree bare in various places, having smooth places where it has fallen off. A portion of this bark the plane tree loses every year. The Septuagint translate it in the same way, ἐλάτη , and its name is supposed to be derived from ἐλάττω , broad, on account of its broad spreading branches, for which the plane tree is remarkable. So we find the Grecian army in Homer, Il. ii., ver. 307, sacrificing ἐλάττω , under a beautiful plane tree. Virgil, Geor. iv. 146, mentions, - ministrantem platanum potantibus umbras. The plane tree yielding the convivial shade.

And Petronius Arbiter in Satyr.: -

Nobilis aestivas platanus diffuderat umbras.

The noble plane had spread its summer shade.

See more in Parkhurst. Such a tree would be peculiarly acceptable in hot countries, because of its shade.

Pilled white streaks in them - Probably cutting the bark through in a spiral line, and taking it off in a certain breadth all round the rods, so that the rods would appear party-colored, the white of the wood showing itself where the bark was stripped off.

Verse 38

And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks - It has long been an opinion that whatever makes a strong impression on the mind of a female in the time of conception and gestation, will have a corresponding influence on the mind or body of the fetus. This opinion is not yet rationally accounted for. It is not necessary to look for a miracle here; for though the fact has not been accounted for, it is nevertheless sufficiently plain that the effect does not exceed the powers of nature; and I have no doubt that the same modes of trial used by Jacob would produce the same results in similar cases. The finger of God works in nature myriads of ways unknown to us; we see effects without end, of which no rational cause can be assigned; it has pleased God to work thus and thus, and this is all that we know; and God mercifully hides the operations of his power from man in a variety of eases, that he may hide pride from him. Even with the little we know, how apt are we to be puffed up! We must adore God in a reverential silence on such subjects as these, confess our ignorance, and acknowledge that nature is the instrument by which he chooses to work, and that he performs all things according to the counsel of his own will, which is always infinitely wise and infinitely good.

Verse 40

Jacob did separate the lambs, etc. - When Jacob undertook the care of Laban's flock, according to the agreement already mentioned, there were no party-colored sheep or goats among them, therefore the ring-streaked, etc., mentioned in this verse, must have been born since the agreement was made; and Jacob makes use of them precisely as he used the pilled rods, that, having these before their eyes during conception, the impression might be made upon their imagination which would lead to the results already mentioned.

Verse 41

Whensoever the stronger cattle did conceive - The word מְקֻשָּׁרֹת (mekushsharoth), which we translate stronger, is understood by several of the ancient interpreters as signifying the early, first-born, or early spring cattle; and hence it is opposed to אַתֻּפִּים (atuphim), which we translate feeble, and which Symmachus

properly renders לְבָרִי־שְׁנִי , cattle of the second birth, as he renders the word (mekushsharoth) by לְבָרִי־רִאשׁוֹן , cattle of the first or earliest birth. Now this does not apply merely to two births from the same female in one year, which actually did take place according to the rabbins, the first in Nisan, about our March, and the second in Tisri, about our September; but it more particularly refers to early and late lambs, etc., in the same year; as those that are born just at the termination of winter, and in the very commencement of spring, are every way more valuable than those which were born later in the same spring. Jacob therefore took good heed not to try his experiments with those late produced cattle, because he knew these would produce a degenerate breed, but with the early cattle, which were strong and vigorous, by which his breed must be improved. Hence the whole flock of Laban must be necessarily injured, while Jacob's flock was preserved in a state of increasing perfection. All this proves a consummate knowledge in Jacob of his pastoral office. If extensive breeders in this country were to attend to the same plan, our breed would be improved in a most eminent degree. What a fund of instruction upon almost every subject is to be found in the sacred writings!

Verse 43

And the man increased exceedingly - No wonder, when he used such means as the above. And had maid-servants, and men-servants - he was obliged to increase these as his cattle multiplied. And camels and asses, to transport his tents, baggage, and family from place to place, being obliged often to remove for the benefit of pasturage.

We have already seen many difficulties in this chapter, and strange incidents, for which we are not able to account. 1. The vicarious bearing of children; 2. The nature and properties of the mandrakes; 3. The bargain of Jacob and Laban; and 4. The business of the party-coloured flocks produced by means of the females looking at the variegated rods. These, especially the three last, may be ranked among the most difficult things in this book. Without encumbering the page with quotations and opinions, I have given the best sense I could; and think it much better and safer to confess ignorance, than, under the semblance of wisdom and learning, to multiply conjectures. Jacob certainly manifested much address in the whole of his conduct with Laban; but though nothing can excuse overreaching or insincerity, yet no doubt Jacob supposed himself justified in taking these advantages of a man who had greatly injured and defrauded him. Had Jacob got Rachel at first, for whom he had honestly and faithfully served seven years, there is no evidence whatever that he would have taken a second wife. Laban, by having imposed his eldest daughter upon him, and by obliging him to serve seven years for her who never was an object of his affection, acted a part wholly foreign to every dictate of justice and honesty; (for though it was a custom in that country not to give the younger daughter in marriage before the elder, yet, as he did not mention this to Jacob, it cannot plead in his excuse); therefore, speaking after the manner of men, he had reason to expect that Jacob should repay him in his own coin, and right himself by whatever means came into his power; and many think that he did not transgress the bounds of justice, even in the business of the party-coloured cattle.

The talent possessed by Jacob was a most dangerous one; he was what may be truly called a scheming man; his wits were still at work, and as he devised so he executed, being as fruitful in expedients as he was in plans. This was the principal and the most prominent characteristic of his life; and whatever was excessive here was owing to his mother's tuition; she was evidently a woman who paid little respect to what is called moral principle, and sanctified all kinds of means by the goodness of the end at which she aimed; which in social, civil, and religious life, is the most dangerous principle on which a person can possibly act. In this art she appears to have instructed her son; and, unfortunately for himself, he was in some instances but too apt a proficient. Early habits are not easily rooted out, especially those of a bad kind. Next to the influence and grace of the Spirit of God is a good and religious education. Parents should teach their children to despise and abhor low cunning, to fear a lie, and tremble at an oath; and in order to be successful, they should illustrate their precepts by their own regular and conscientious example. How far God approved of the whole of Jacob's conduct I shall not inquire; it is certain that he attributes his success to Divine interposition, and God himself censures Laban's conduct towards him; see Genesis 31:7-12. But still he appears to have proceeded farther than this interposition authorized him to go, especially in the means he used to improve his own breed, which necessarily led to the deterioration of Laban's cattle; for, after the transactions referred to above, these cattle could be of but little worth. The whole account, with all its lights and shades, I consider as another proof of the impartiality of the Divine historian, and a strong evidence of the authenticity of the Pentateuch. Neither the spirit of deceit, nor the partiality of friendship, could ever pen such an account.