

“...the man increased...”

Though I have taught Genesis before, on this occasion I have been deeply impressed by a number of truths revealed to me. I do not mean they were previously not there, but that this time I saw them for myself. What did I see, and continue to see? That God loves those He has predestined, even though they may commit sin and error. Not only that, but He continues to bless them despite sins that we today would not accept (though we are ourselves sinners!).

The ongoing and further revelations (for that is what they are to my soul) have not arrived out of thin air. For the past year I have been studying in depth one of the most revered theologians of the Roman Catholic ‘church’, Thomas Aquinas*. This has led me along some surprising routes, including Aristotelian philosophy and Islamic academia, as well as Protestant errors. These routes have served to strengthen my understanding of predestination, and also my realisation of any misunderstandings I have accrued by sitting under bad exegesis. I have delved deeper into church history from often obscure sources. And all of this has had an affect on the studies in Genesis! (*Note: These comments were made in 2005*).[*See book: ‘Tom Got It Wrong’].

In particular, the sole responsibility for predestination being in God’s hands has been woven into my very being. I have been a hot contender when it came to predestination – but now my zeal is even greater. I have come to see the subtle inroads made by Rome upon Protestant minds, who imbibe the very-Roman Arminian gospel. And, without doubt, such inroads must affect all who read Genesis. I thank God that He has shown me a better way.

You will see remarkable facts in this chapter – that God increased Jacob’s wealth and status though he *seems*, to us, to have acted unfairly and even deviously. But, with God, things may *not* be as they seem! We must not interpret events and people in human terms. Especially, we may not do so if God has provided a totally different answer. For myself, who will not hesitate to point the finger if serious sin emerges (in myself as well as in others), this is also a revelation, and will temper my ‘ways of seeing’ others and what they do.

We must always mark those who sin publicly and continuously, and must always challenge them, but I have come to see that it is God Who will punish or cause change, not us. Also, I have come to see that God will bless whom He will, regardless of sins we perceive to be stumblingblocks.

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Written by K B Napier
Friday, 10 April 2015 14:13

I am not sure if I am truly putting over what I want to say; probably I fail to do so adequately. Yet, we must all remember and make known that God is in control of our lives (saved and unsaved). He loves us especially because we are the elect. Let us, then, see the world through His eyes, and not our own.

Verses 1-5

1.

“And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.

2.

And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?

3.

And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees that I may also have children by her.

4.

And she gave him Bilhah her handmaid to wife: and Jacob went in unto her.

5.

And Bilhah conceived, and bare Jacob a son.”

Rachel must have watched with increasing anxiety as her sister bore children, while she had none. This despair turned to an angry jealousy, *anq*, that would eat at her soul. Finally, she cried to Jacob to give her children, or she would die of despair. Rachel literally meant she would die of her anguish, *twm* – to die prematurely, such was her immense sadness.

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This is a mistaken way to respond to such a condition. Today, much is made by barren women of their state. But, Christian wives ought not to think the same way; if they do not have children and ordinary medical means are unable to help, then they should rest in the Lord, and not blame husband or self or even God. Children are God's gift, and are not a right to be demanded. In other words, the quiet trust in God is not upon Rachel and so her heart is not looking to God, but to self.

Jacob did not appreciate her comments; there was nothing wrong with his ability to father children. So, though Rachel was his first love, he felt driven to heated anger (*charah*) by her comments. It seems that his anger was something just under the surface, possibly because Rachel had complained before. Jacob retorted – 'Am I God? It is He Who has stopped you from conceiving, not me!' This kind of wrangling was inevitable. Even today in African and other countries where monogamy is not practised, wives hate the fact that they are not the only ones for their husbands. So, there is always family strife.

Rachel was overcome and said 'Take my maid, Bilhah, so that she will have children on my behalf.' The phrase "she shall bear upon my knees" is an ellipsis, or shortened form of language. It means that Bilhah would bring forth a child that Rachel could sit upon her own knee as her own son or daughter. Hence the qualifying remark: "...that I may also have children by her." But, how often could such a thing bring about harmony in a family, when the real mother happens to live in the same household? And when emotions may arise against the poor child, because of an underlying jealousy?

However, this kind of situation was fairly common in those days, where barren women used their servants as surrogate mothers, thus lessening any guilt or shame they felt in being without child, even if the emotional results were not so appealing. Jacob did as he was asked by Rachel and, Bilhah conceived. Nine months later, a son was born.

Verses 6-8

1.

"And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan.

2.

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And Bilhah Rachel's maid conceived again, and bare Jacob a second son.

3.

And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali.”

When the son was born, Rachel took this to be a gift from God, a sign that He had not forgotten her... but, can this view be upheld? What we have in Jacob's family is a very mixed group! Not only were there four different mothers, but there were children by those different mothers! Later, those same children (the sons at least) would turn against the very son who was in God's line, Joseph... so maybe the gift was only partially of God. Even so, that was how Rachel interpreted the birth, and she called the child Dan ('judge').

This should remind us all that in any situation there is God's way and there is man's way. Invariably, man's ways are usually wrong and mistaken, leading to other problems. God's ways are perfect, even though we might not understand what He is doing at the time!

Soon afterwards, Bilhah conceived again and bore another son, who was named Naphtali ('wrestling'). Though the name does mean 'wrestling' and can refer to Rachel's wrestling with her own emotions, another meaning could apply - to twist or be twisted... for this was the condition of Rachel's mind at the time, as she herself admitted.

She had been wrestling with her own sister, Leah, and the two sons she had by Bilhah appeared to her to be an answer to her troubled thoughts concerning Leah. "I have prevailed" or, 'I have won!' against Leah, is the sense of the words. But, it was not to be so. When we attempt to remedy matters in our own strength, the results are rarely good or true, and trouble can often follow.

Verses 9-13

1.

“When Leah saw that she had left bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob to wife.

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2.

And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a son.

3.

And Leah said, A troop cometh: and she called his name Gad.

4.

And Zilpah Leah's maid bare Jacob a second son.

5.

And Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed: and she called his name Asher.”

Watching all this with intense interest, and having stopped child-bearing herself, Leah was not going to let her sister get away with it! So, in like manner, she gave her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob ‘to wife’. The true sense of this is not so clear, for Jacob married two women who were his wives. Here, two maids were given to him for child-bearing purposes – but are they counted as true ‘wives’? I would not think so. It is therefore possible that the term “gave her... to wife” means that the two women were given to Jacob to *act like* wives, rather than *be* his wives.

Nine months later, Zilpah had a son, who was named Gad (‘troop’) because Leah said “A troop cometh”. The real meaning of this shows the darker nature of this battle between the two women, for the word ‘troop’ (gad) is based on the root, *guwd*, which means to invade or attack, i.e. to overcome with troops. Thus, Leah saw the birth of the child as a direct attack upon her sister, Rachel. She knew that every extra child born to her (whether naturally or through her servant) was like a knife in the heart of Rachel.

The rivalry between the sisters, then, was far advanced, and was eating at them like a cancer. There are many occasions when we want to naturally fight an enemy, but sometimes a tactical withdrawal is the better plan. In this way anger can subside and God can deal with the matter...

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or a more suitable answer can be found.

Not long later, Leah was overjoyed to learn that Zilpah was again pregnant: 'How happy I am – future women will call me blessed!' The resultant son was named Asher ('happy' – or, if we look at the root, *ashar*, it can also mean 'to righten'). And the rivalry was not yet finished.

Verses 14-21

1.

"And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes.

2.

And she said unto her, Is it a small matter that thou hast taken my husband? and wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also? And Rachel said, Therefore he shall lie with thee to night for thy son's mandrakes.

3.

And Jacob came out of the field in the evening, and Leah went out to meet him, and said, Thou must come in unto me; for surely I have hired thee with my son's mandrakes. And he lay with her that night.

4.

And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bare Jacob the fifth son.

5.

And Leah said, God hath given me my hire, because I have given my maiden to my husband: and she called his name Issachar.

6.

And Leah conceived again, and bare Jacob the sixth son.

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7.

And Leah said, God hath endued me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me, because I have born him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun.

8.

And afterwards she bare a daughter, and called her name Dinah.”

The intense anger or hatred between the sisters continued, even to the point of bartering Jacob's favours! Reuben, Leah's eldest son, went into the fields at harvest time, when the wheat was being gathered. Whilst there he “found mandrakes in the field” and took them to his mother. This was of great significance to the two sisters.

A mandrake was also called a 'love apple', (though the exact nature of the root is not known: often shaped like human figures, they were often used in magic rites and are poisonous, apart from the tomato-like fruit) which was believed to be an aphrodisiac with the power to help conception. Obviously, Rachel wanted any advantage she could muster, so she asked Leah to give her some of the mandrakes! Leah was indignant... 'What? Not only do you take my husband, but you even want my son's mandrakes?'

Obviously, if only by a week, Leah was the 'senior' wife in the odd relationship (though only by a week), and considered herself to have the biggest hold over Jacob. It seems from this exchange that Jacob must have spent more time with Rachel than with Leah. Indeed, this was an earlier complaint of Leah, for she seemed to feel left out.

That Jacob favoured Rachel more is seen in Rachel's retort: 'Okay – give me the mandrakes and Jacob can sleep with you tonight!' Was Jacob aware of the details of these familial wrangles? Did he know that he was being passed around like a piece of meat?

As Jacob finished his work in the field that evening, Leah hastened to meet him and told him the 'deal': he was Leah's 'prize' for Rachel getting the mandrakes. No doubt, this was a small price

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for Rachel to pay – she probably thought that if she ate the mandrakes, she would become pregnant and cause Jacob to be more interested in her than in Leah. Jacob dutifully slept with Leah that night... and the result was another child, this time by Leah. She saw this as ‘wages’ for previously hiring out her servant to Jacob, and so called the new son Issachar (‘there is recompense’).

Later, she again bore a son to Jacob, named Zebulun (‘exalted’) because she felt she was now in possession of a “good dowry” or ‘good gift’ from God. Is it not interesting that both sisters thought God was on their side, no matter what they did? We are all like this, are we not? No matter what we do, we think God favours us and not those we argue against.

And Leah was not yet finished, for, a while later, she had yet another child, this time a daughter named Dinah (‘judgement’ – ultimately based on the root, *diyyn*, meaning to plead a cause or to strive).

Verses 22-26

1.

“And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.

2.

And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach:

3.

And she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son.

4.

And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.

5.

Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee.”

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As you read this study, are you 'siding' with one woman or the other? Or, do you think God has judged both for their sins? Or, do you think He has favoured not just one, but both? Is He simply 'shining the sun' on the unrighteous as well as the righteous? In any situation we should try to seek out the godly principles behind the actions and words.

However, in this chapter we see God appearing to favour both women, but at different times. Why? We are not told, but it seems to support the idea expressed previously, that whilst we may sin, God looks to the inward parts. We might not like the way the women have been acting, but in which way are they that much different from modern day Christians? We all fail and fall! But, does God abandon us because of this? Thankfully, He does not.

God 'remembered' Rachel. Does this mean that He had forgotten her? Of course not. To say that God 'remembers' is not to use a human term, for God cannot forget. The word *zakar* simply means that He brought her to mind again; that is, in human terms, He made her His centre of attention. She had always been there, though she sinned, but we did not know that. And so Rachel became pregnant.

Rachel saw this as an end to her reproach before other women, especially Leah. The name of the child was to be remembered throughout the centuries – Joseph ('Jehovah has added') and is in the 'favoured' line of Christ.

A while after the birth of Joseph, Jacob thought about his own situation and asked Laban to send him away, so that he could return to his home country and family. He asked that he should finally be given all that he was owed by Laban, including his wives and children, because he had worked for them, as agreed. Laban was still mindful of the way Jacob's presence had a good effect on his own life. He said, please stay, for when you are here, God gives me His favours also!

This is something unsaved men (and even most believers) do not fully realise, especially employers... that Christians, simply by their presence, give them far more than they give back. This is true if only because a Christian will work hard, often above and beyond what is required, he is honest, he is loyal, and will do no harm to that person's business. It is also true that the

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employer will be 'blessed' simply for employing the Christian.

Verses 27-34

1.

"And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake.

2.

And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it.

3.

And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me.

4.

For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude; and the LORD hath blessed thee since my coming: and now when shall I provide for mine own house also?

5.

And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock:

6.

I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire.

7.

So shall my righteousness answer for me in time to come, when it shall come for my hire before thy face: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and brown among the sheep, that shall be counted stolen with me.

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8.

And Laban said, Behold, I would it might be according to thy word.”

Laban responded by asking Jacob to stay, if Jacob thought Laban had been good to him. (Clearly, in many ways he had not, for he tricked him. However, there is no record of any other reason to think the less of him). Then, he said ‘Tell me how much I owe you and I will pay it.’

Jacob responded: ‘You know that I have worked well with your flocks; you had few riches and flocks before I came, but now, because of my management, you have much riches and great flocks. It is now time for me to provide for my own family.’

Laban asked how he could repay him for this, and here we see how crafty Jacob really was: ‘Let me stay a while longer and feed your flocks. I do not want anything else from you, except for all the speckled and spotted cattle and goats, and the brown sheep. These will be my only reward, and I shall separate them out this very day.’

He continued: ‘In this way everyone will know that the flocks and herds are my own and not yours, taken by theft (for they would not be pure colours).’

Laban agreed to this arrangement. ‘Speckled’ means to brand the animals (in this case those which were not single colours), and ‘spotted’ refers to patches of colour. The whole terminology appears to suggest that when Jacob found animals with patches of other colours, he removed them and branded them with his own mark. ‘Brown’ can mean either brown or black. The ‘cattle’ may, or may not, have included such animals as cows, for the term may just apply to sheep and goats.

Verses 35-39

1.

“And he removed that day the he goats that were ringstraked and spotted, and all the she goats that were speckled and spotted, and every one that had some white in it, and all the brown

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among the sheep, and gave them into the hand of his sons.

2.

And he set three days' journey betwixt himself and Jacob: and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

3.

And Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chestnut tree; and pilled white strakes in them, and made the white appear which was in the rods.

4.

And he set the rods which he had pilled before the flocks in the gutters in the watering troughs when the flocks came to drink, that they should conceive when they came to drink.

5.

And the flocks conceived before the rods, and brought forth cattle ringstraked, speckled, and spotted.”

When they completed their formal requests and acceptances, Jacob immediately went out and separated the animals, starting with the rams that were 'ringstraked and spotted'. 'Ringstraked' is *aqod*, striped. 'Spotted' refers to those with coloured patches. He did the same with the nanny-goats. By his own definition, the animals could be white with coloured patches, or some other colour with white patches. He also took all animals that were fully brown/black. As he went through the flocks, Jacob's sons herded them into their own enclosures or spaces, by travelling with the herds for a period of three days. In this way both herds would be completely separate.

Meanwhile, Jacob continued as he had done for years, feeding Laban's flocks that remained... but this time with another agenda. As the flocks fed, Jacob gathered together "rods of green poplar, and of the hazel and chestnut tree". That is, sticks from those trees. 'Green poplar' means fresh new trees, whose sticks would be '*lach*', supple and easily broken off. Hazel refers to almond trees, *luwz*, and the chestnut tree was also known as the plane-tree.

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When he collected enough sticks, Jacob “piled white strakes in them”. That is, he peeled off the supple bark to reveal the fresh new wood underneath (strakes – stripes of white). He then hammered the sticks into the ground around the watering hole used by the flocks. When they came to drink they were prevented from leaving. This suggests that the sticks were placed in such a way as to be a fence or pen. Because they could not leave, and probably at the time when flocks mated, they mated within the compound Jacob had created, and many of the young were born striped, with patches, or brown/black. Jacob continued in this fashion, thereby substantially increasing his own flocks many times!

Verses 40-43

1.

“And Jacob did separate the lambs, and set the faces of the flocks toward the ringstraked, and all the brown in the flock of Laban; and he put his own flocks by themselves, and put them not unto Laban's cattle. And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger cattle did conceive, that Jacob laid the rods before the eyes of the cattle in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods.

2.

But when the cattle were feeble, he put them not in: so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's.

3.

And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.”

As each marked animal was born, Jacob separated them and put them into his own flocks. He continued to make sure Laban's male animals mated, so that even more marked babies were born.

What this shows is that Jacob was normally away from the city for very long periods, maybe the whole of the time that weather permitted it (i.e. except in winter). Thus, Laban would not have been suspicious if he was not seen for many months. In this project Jacob shows us that he

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was very clever indeed, and yet remained within the agreement! There are times when Christian must similarly act cleverly, even with an 'agenda', so long as it is not sinful, to bring about a desired good end.

In particular, Jacob knew the strong animals from the weaker ones, and continually allowed the stronger ones to mate, making his own animal stock strong. The weaker ones he let loose, so, in the end, "the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's."! In this text we cannot really see if this was Jacob's way of punishing Laban for keeping him in service for so many years and for his original trick, or if it was just a good business move. Whatever the reasoning behind it, we are told that he "increased exceedingly" and had a huge stock of animals, including camels and asses, plus many servants.

So, again we see that though a man just like us, with many flaws and sins in his life, God gave him blessings. This is not to say that we may sin openly and expect God to bless us. No, I am pointing out that when God predestines a man, nothing on earth – not even his own sins – can prevent God from giving him His blessings! For me this is an awesome fact. Indeed, this and previous chapters have served to reinforce the theology behind the Biblical truths, that centre on predestination and election. It is nothing of Man but everything of God!

We will all sin and we will all make mistakes; we will speak out of turn; we will do stupid things... but, God predestinates, and He looks upon our hearts more than upon our mistakes and sins. If our hearts are true, then all these outward manifestations of the 'old man' will always drive us back to repentance and the clinging to the Lord that is our genuine activity. (This is *not* a charter to sin or to do whatever we wish).

Those who are predestinated He loves! And those He loves He will both bless and test. We should, therefore, thank God for showing us, in the lives of the patriarchs, that these facts are so, for they give us tremendous courage and assurance in the face of so many evil men. His Love is as straked rods, meant to keep us surrounded until we complete our holy destinies, bringing forth the fruit that belongs to Himself!

In this chapter we learn that we increase not because of our own work or righteousness, but because God is gracious. He has determined to give us blessings, though we do not deserve it. Let us, then, drop the Arminianism in our souls, that tells us that if we are righteous God will give us everything. It is certainly true that God rewards righteousness, but His *reason* for doing

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so is *not*
the righteousness itself, but simply His own grace. If we not understand this single, vital truth,
then we will continue to be deceived by Arminian error.

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