

# The Dysfunctional Family That Resulted in the Birth of Israel

“So Jacob also had relations with Rachel, and he loved Rachel more than Leah and served Laban another seven years” (Gen. 29:30).

There are few ideal families in the Bible. Jacob’s certainly wasn’t. As if it was not bad enough to have two wives, they were sisters. Being married to the same man made them bitter rivals.

This made for such a dysfunctional combination that the Torah later legislates against marrying sisters (Lev. 18:18). The sisters added to the dysfunction by offering Jacob their maidservants, Bilhah and Zilpah, as additional baby-makers in their contest to bear sons. And you thought keeping the peace with one spouse was difficult. Try having four.

Jacob’s family was far from the ideal. Yet his children were the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. His children were, quite literally, the “children of Israel.” This teaches us that God is able to work (and chooses to work) out His purposes in less-than-ideal conditions. Have you ever felt as though your family is an embarrassment? “If only we looked like the smiling, perfect family on the cover of the homeschool magazine,” a frustrated mother sighs.

Today, broken families and second marriages are common. Obviously this is not the ideal, but God can work with even the worst of circumstances. He is the God who brings order out of chaos and shines light into darkness.

Jacob could have become bitter and complained to God, “I wanted one wife, and now I am stuck with four. How could You

do this to me?" But this less-than-ideal family situation he'd landed in was God's way of multiplying Jacob's seed and keeping the promises made to Abraham.

Jacob felt as though he was in the wrong place and his years were being wasted. People often find themselves in jobs, careers, homes and even family arrangements that make them feel as if they are far outside of God's plan.

The story of Jacob teaches us that God might place us in such situations specifically to bless us and work out His purposes. Jacob teaches us to be faithful wherever we find ourselves and to keep committing ourselves to the care of God. Jacob's term of service in Laban's household resulted in the birth of the nation of Israel. {eoa}

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