

Rachel and Leah; Gen. 30:1-23; Rev. 7:1-12 ; I. The Sons of Israel Born II. The OT Church Established
Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, a familiar proverb of today is this- happy wife, happy life. The wisdom behind the provide is this- if your wife is not happy, the whole family will be affected. Thus far, we have seen what happens when a man takes two wives and the conflict that brings with Sarah and Abraham. But today we will find that one man not only has two wives- these wives are sisters! We are continuing to follow the covenantal line in Genesis- seeing the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and now Jacob. Each generation comes with its own hardships and conflict; but God is faithful and He continues His work of building His church. When we are thinking about the OT covenant people, we note that God has renamed Jacob to be Israel. So we are dealing with the sons of Israel this week- who are the people of God who will also take possession of the promised land. So today we consider this theme; Jesus Christ gathers His people from the sons of Israel.

I. The Sons of Israel Born

In our first point we are going to find the sons of Israel as they are born. Children, you remember that in Gen. 32 Jacob will wrestle with God and ask for a blessing. Part of this blessing will be in the renaming of Jacob to that of Israel- meaning one who strives with God and overcomes. So when we are considering the sons of Israel we are really considering the children born to Jacob. Now Jacob has been sent away by his parents to find a good wife. So Jacob travels to his mother's homeland and ends up staying with Laban- his uncle. While staying with Laban, Jacob is drawn to Rachel the youngest daughter of Laban. But because of Laban's tricks, Jacob ends up marrying both Rachel and Leah. Along with the maids of these sisters- Jacob will end up having children with 2 wives and 2 concubines- by way of 4 women Jacob will bring forth the 12 sons and tribes of Israel. This is a saga of love and deceit- but ultimately God is working through these families to build His church and bring about His will. So lets start with Leah. Now Leah was the oldest daughter of Laban. Leah was said to have weak or soft eyes- meaning that Jacob did not find her as attractive as her sister. As we find in Gen. 29:31- Leah was hated

by Jacob but loved by God- and the Lord opened Leah's womb and she brings forth children. So although not chosen by Jacob, Leah is chosen by God to be the one through whom Jacob will receive 6 sons and 1 daughter. So Leah alone brings forth half of the tribes of Israel! Of particular importance is that Leah is the mother of Judah. Now children, you will remember why Judah is so important. Judah will become the tribe of kings- King David will be the heir to Judah's throne- as Jacob will say- may the sceptre never depart from between your feet and your brothers will bow down before you- as stated in Genesis 49. So Leah will be the mother of kings- and even more than that- we will come to see that Jesus will be born as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah in Rev. 5. So it is very clear that God had blessed Leah- and over time Leah comes to bless the LORD and thank Him for the children and blessings she had received. God had pity on her and blessed her- even though her husband did not love her- God did as He blessed her and chose her to be the one through whom the covenantal line of kings would come.

But what about Rachel? Well, Rachel was the younger sister. Rachel was blessed with looks- beautiful in form and appearance as Gen. 29:17 says. Rachel was loved and desired by Jacob- chosen by Jacob over Leah. But Rachel was not blessed with children; which led her to become bitter and jealous of her sister. She actually accuses Jacob of wrong in 30:1- give me children or I shall die. Give me motherhood or give me death! And Jacob rightly states that it is the LORD who opens the womb, not man. Like her mother and grandmother in law, Rachel will need to learn humility and patience before children will be received. So in due time, as we find in Gen. 30:22, God remembers Rachel and listens to her cry. So the LORD hears the prayer of Rachel and has compassion on her in her time of sorrow. The LORD removes her shame and grants to her a child. Now Rachel will have two children. The first is Joseph whose life we will consider again in a few weeks. And the second son is that of Benjamin. Now the birth of Benjamin is very significant- we find it in Gen. 35:18. When Rachel was giving birth, she named her son Ben-oni meaning son of sorrow. But Jacob will rename him Benjamin- meaning son of strength or son of my right hand. So we have this child of Rachel born with two names- a son born near the city of

Bethlehem. A son with two nature- a man of sorrows and a man of strength! That brings to mind another son who will be born in Bethlehem! But Rachel dies in childbirth and she takes her place as a matriarch of Israel. In fact, Rachel will be a type of all Israelite mothers going forth. For when Herod kills all the baby boys born in Bethlehem in Mt. 2, we read that Rachel was weeping and refusing to be comforted because her child was no more. So as we take a step back and consider these two sisters who are the two wives of one man- we find a picture of rivalry, jealousy and conflict. Both fighting for the love and acceptance of Jacob. But both will eventually confess that it is the LORD who blesses them- both praising God for the gift of their sons. And through this all- the OT tribes of Israel are coming forth! The OT church is being established as the sons of the covenant are brought forth.

II. The OT Church Established

Now that we have considered these two wives and the following 12 sons or the 12 tribes of Israel, in our second point we will see how these 12 tribes carry on into the future. What is their place, not only the land of Canaan, but in the history of the church? Well, as we will see, the 12 tribes of Israel are not only a picture of the OT people of God! No, these tribes continue and carry on today! When the land of Canaan is divided up by Joshua, it is to these 12 tribes that it will be given. Now there will be a special provision made for the Levites- but let's not go into that today. But as the kingdom is first divided into two- a North and a South Israel- and later as both of these kingdoms are overthrown by oppressors- we might be tempted to think that this downfall marks the end of the 12 tribes. But not at all! In fact, the Assyrian and Babylonian captivity did not wipe out the 12 tribes of Israel! The Israelites continue even after they are carried away into a foreign land! So this concept of the 12 tribes of Israel is also found in the NT in reference to the church. We find these 12 tribes already mentioned in Acts 26:7. Here Paul says, I have hope in the promise made by God to our fathers, to which our twelve tribes hope to attain. So this truth remains, the 12 tribes still hope in the promises of God made to the fathers. And again in James 1:1- this book is written to the 12 tribes of the dispersion. This is a reference to those who

believe in the God of Abraham, even though they had been dispossessed and scattered to the corners of the earth. So although the 12 tribes of Israel were no longer in the land of Canaan, there is still an aspect in which God's people were called the 12 tribes. In order to reach clarity concerning the connection and the distinction between the 12 tribes and the church, Paul makes a helpful distinction for us in Rom. 9-10. Not all Israel is of Israel as Rom. 9:6. There are the physical descendants of Jacob and there are the spiritual descendants of Jacob. Not all the children of Abraham are really the children of Abraham- only those who are united to Christ by faith are really the children of Abraham. And this distinction applies to the physical descendants of Jacob as well. The fact remains, some of Jacob's sons are members of Christ and His people while others are not. There is a holy remnant that God has gathered- this is the true Israel- these are members of the 12 tribes. So we could say that everyone who believes in Jesus Christ and has been chosen by the Father is in fact a real Israelite- a member of the 12 tribes. It is interesting how interconnected our study of these "Sibling Rivalries" and election is! The choosing of a special people to be God's own has been a theme running through our series- and again today. But it is also true that there are some who are members of both- a biological member of tribes of Israel and a spiritual child of Abraham. Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of Hebrews. And Anna, she was from the tribe of Asher. Matthew was likely from the tribe of Levi. And even after the day of Pentecost, the gospel first went to the Jews as Acts 11 says- the gospel was first preached to those who drew their heritage from the 12 sons of Jacob. Only after that did the gospel start going to the Hellenist or the Greeks and Gentiles. As Jesus Himself said, He was sent to the lost sheep of Israel as He says in Mt. 15. So going back to what Paul said in Rom. 11, in this way all Israel will be saved. Those whom the Father loves and chose- those whom are gathered and saved by the Son and who come from the stock of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be saved! A remnant will be secured, and not one will be missing. This continues today with the Messianic Jews or the Jews for Jesus. Even now, the elect are being gathered from the 12 Tribes of Israel. But there is more that can be said- because this imagery of

12 Tribes runs through the book of Revelation as well. As we read in Rev. 7, on the last day each of these tribes will be well represented. A symbolic number of 12,000 coming from each of the 12 tribes will be sealed and saved on that last day. So God is still going to save His chosen ones from the literal sons of Jacob. And again in Rev. 4:4- we read of 24 thrones and 24 elders. Here we have the 12 tribes plus the 12 apostles- making 24 thrones. In this image, the OT church and the NT church are united as one. As you may have memorized concerning the church in the catechism- Jesus Christ gathers, protects and preserves for Himself a community chosen to eternal life from the beginning of the world until its end and out of every nation. So there is and remains only one, holy, catholic and apostolic church! The sons and wives of Jacob, the people of Israel, the apostles and the people sitting here today can and will only be saved if Jesus Christ dies for them and gathers them! These all- no matter if you lived in an OT tribe in the land of Canaan or in Indiana today- these are all true children of Abraham by faith in God's messiah! The true church is made of those chosen, elect, saved and sanctified by God- a community chosen and gathered by Jesus Christ! No matter your biological heritage- these are all made one in Him!

To conclude, the establishment of the 12 Tribes is a part of our spiritual history and heritage. Although not a biological child of Jacob- we are by faith children of Abraham and members of the true Israel! And one day, we will see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and Rachel and Leah- along with representatives of each tribe of Israel as well. As Psalm 87 puts it so beautifully- "Among those who know me I mention Rahab and Babylon. On that day it will be said- this one was born there- those who know me from Babylon, Philistia and Tyre- and of Zion- this one was born in her. The Lord records as He registers the people. This was one was born there." So we will be born in many different time and places, and yet known by God and gathered to Him! 12,000 from this tribe; 12,000 from that one. And when we are all gathered, we will be a great multitude from every nation and tribe- all standing before the throne and the Lamb- together crying out" salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to Lamb!" Glory be to our God forever and ever.