

THE PRIVILEGE OF MOTHERHOOD

Gen. 29:23-30:2

Mother's Day 2018

INTRODUCTION

The story of Rachel and Leah, the wives of Jacob, reflect a problem that women have encountered throughout the course of time with regard to bearing children: Barrenness.

Women unable to bear children is often referred to in Scripture as barren. The modern term for a woman's inability to conceive is known as infertility. According to the Center for Disease Control, 12.1 percent of child-bearing aged women in America are unable to conceive. The inability to have children has long been an agonizing problem for many women. Women who could not have children were marginalized in earlier cultures. Jacob's wife, Rachel, exemplified this problem, as we will see today. The inability to conceive carries no less agony for many women, today. Says author Shuana Niequist, whom herself has been unable to have children:

"I became the person people don't want to tell they're pregnant. I hate that. A friend told me her happy, fantastic news, and just a second later she burst out crying, afraid for how this would make me feel. I hate that. I work really hard to arrange my face in such a way that approximates uncomplicated glee. And I am happy for them, or course. But sometimes just after the happiness is the desperation. Some days are easier than others."

As you can see, being a mother is not automatic. It is a privilege. There are many who long to be mothers and can't. Motherhood is seen in Scripture, not as a right, but a privilege; one in which those who are mothers should be thankful.

I. BARRENESS HAS PLAGUED WOMEN OVER THE COURSE OF TIME.

A. There are several "barren" terms used in the Old and New Testament.

1. The term barren (aquar) is used of one who is unable to conceive for various reasons -- "**to be sterile**" -- Bible Works cf. Gen. 11:30
2. Another term "shut up" is the Hebrew term "cagar" which means "**to close (describing another reason for the inability to conceive)**" -- Brown, Driver & Briggs cf. Job. 3:10
3. The Greek word steira which means "**the state of not being able to conceive and bear children.**" -- Louw-Nida lexicon

B. Some women in Scripture were "barren" before God intervened.

1. The Old Testament is ripe with women who were barren, but God intervened.
 - a) Sarai was barren. Gen. 11:30 cf. Heb. 11:11
 - b) Rachel, the wife of Jacob was barren. Gen. 29:31

- c) The mother of Samson. Judges 13:3
 - 2. Elisabeth, the wife of Zacharias is the lone New Testament woman listed as barren. Lk. 1:7, 36

- II. BARREN WOMEN OFTEN SUCCUMBED TO SATANIC AND FLESHLY RESPONSES.
 - A. Hannah was “provoked” by Elkanah’s other wives to the point of causing her to “fret” 1st Sam. 1:6
 - 1. “Provoked” is kaac -- (piel) **to be made angry**. Cf. Deut. 32:21 (of God being made angry over Israel’s idols)
 - 2. “Fret” to be in “**distress**”. -- Holladay lexicon cf. Gen. 35:3 (of Jacob referring to his condition when Esau sought his life)

 - B. Rachel was envious of Leah. Gen. 30:1
 - 1. “Envy” is the Hebrew word quana “**to be aroused to jealousy**” -- Holladay lexicon
 - 2. Joseph brothers “envied” him for his dreams. Gen. 37:11
 - 3. The Philistines “envied” Isaac because of his prosperity. Gen. 26:14

- III. GOD IS SEEN IN SCRIPTURE AS THE ONE CONTROLLING THE BIRTH PROCESS.
 - A. God prevented those of the house of Abimelech from conceiving due to the king desiring Sarah, Abraham’s wife. Gen. 20:18
 - 1. “Fast closed up” is the Hebrew word “atsar” which is defined as “**to close up, detain.**” -- Strong’s lexicon
 - 2. “**The plague brought upon Abimelech’s house, therefore, consisted of some disease which rendered the begetting of children impossible.**” -- Keil & Delitzsch Commentary

 - B. Pathach -- is a Hebrew word that means “**to open -- allow for conception**”. Cf. Gen. 29:31 (of Leah); 30:22 (of Rachel)

 - C. God used fertility to even an imbalance that existed between Rachel and Leah. Gen. 30:1
 - 1. Rachel was seen as:
 - a) “Beautiful” -- “**fair of form**” -- Young’s Literal Translation (translated by the Septuagint with kalos -- that which has a good outward appearance). Cf. Gen. 12:14 (of Sarah)
 - b) “Well favoured” -- (mareh yapheh) -- **beautiful in appearance; fair of face; countenance; the focus is upon what strikes the eyes**. Cf. Ester. 1:11
 - 2. Leah was:

- a) "Tender eyes" is the Hebrew word "rak" which is used in Scripture to describe **something that is undeveloped or lacking vibrancy**. Gen. 29:17
- (1) The adjective "tender" is used of children who are not fully developed) Gen. 33:13
 - (2) **"For the elder daughter, Leah, had weak eyes, and consequently was not so good-looking; since bright eyes, with fire in them, are regarded as the height of beauty in Oriental women."** -- Keil & Delitzsch
Commentary
- b) "Hated" -- (sawney) -- is used in the Old Testament of one who is **"unloved; not desired; unwanted"**. Gen. 29:31
- (a) God allowed for the offspring of such to be air over ones who are beloved. Deut. 21:15-17
 - (b) The marriage of such is seen as among three surprising things upon the earth. Prov. 30:23

CONCLUSION