



# Restoring my Soul

HE RESTORES MY SOUL, HE LEADS ME IN PATHS

PSA 23:3

JANUARY 2023

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A FIVE DAY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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*A Five Day Devotional Guide*

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## Two marriages

Commitment to reformation in one's family and, where applicable, in their marriage, is a defining characteristic of those who are part of Jacob, the generation who seek the Lord. **Psa 24:6**. Accordingly, the familial and marital issues that every Christian couple must negotiate in order to obtain the blessing of the Lord, are detailed for us in the account of Jacob's pilgrimage and, in particular, in his relationships with his wives, Rachel and Leah.

Both of Jacob's marriages were affected by the dynamics of the Fall and required significant restoration. Jacob himself needed to forsake his 'cherub-like' expression toward his wives, which is typical of fallen men. Likewise, Rachel and Leah needed to be delivered from the sorcerous practices of seduction and manipulation within their marriages, stemming from the other law within their hearts.

After residing in Laban's house for a month, Jacob was asked what his wages should be for his service. Jacob offered seven years of service for Rachel's hand in marriage. She was a beautiful woman in form and countenance, while her older sister, Leah, was less appealing, being described as having 'weak eyes'. **Gen 29:17**. Jacob had quickly developed a romantic affection for Rachel, and his seven years of service seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her. **Gen 29:15-20**.

However, at the conclusion of these seven years, on the evening of Jacob's wedding, Laban deceived him. He gave him Leah, rather than Rachel. It is unlikely that Jacob's marriage to Leah happened against her will. It is more probable that Leah, as the firstborn daughter, demanded this of Laban, and that Laban deceived Jacob at her behest. Jacob was incensed when he realised that he had been deceived. However, he agreed to observe the ceremonial week pertaining to his marriage to Leah. Following this week, he married Rachel, for whom he served Laban for another seven years. **Gen 29:21-28**.

**Further Studies**    **GENESIS 29**

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## The fruit of feminine *eros*

*Eros* is the Greek word for sensual, or passionate, love. It is the romantic love that springs from desire. Feminine *eros* is not merely a woman's longing for a romantic relationship with a man. For her, romance has a much broader application. It describes her desire for identity verification through the realisation of a life that she has envisaged for herself. In relation to marriage, a woman directs this longing toward a man, expecting him to provide, or to be, for her, what is necessary for the fulfilment of the romantic life she is cultivating in her image and likeness. **Gen 30:1.**

The romance of being married, and of having a family, was the object of Leah's desire. Driven by this romantic ambition, she took the matter of marriage to Jacob into her own hands. Leah's exertion of control included the recruitment of Laban to her cause. Laban's support for Leah's agenda indicated that it was energised by a familiar spirit within his household.

Leah's love for Jacob, particularly in the early phase of their marriage, was unrequited. The emotional distress that this caused her was only exacerbated by Jacob's overt preference for Rachel. **Gen 29:30.** Moses, the author of the book of Genesis, noted that the Lord 'saw that Leah was unloved'. **Gen 29:31.** Notably, the Hebrew word that is translated as 'unloved' in this passage actually means 'hated'. Seeing that Leah was hated by Jacob, the Lord opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son whom she named Reuben, meaning 'see, a son'.

Leah knew that the Lord was aware of her anguish, for she said, 'The Lord [Yahweh] has surely looked on my *affliction*'. **Gen 29:32.** However, instead of turning to the Lord to receive the word of her sanctification from Him, she continued to seek identity verification through Jacob's affections. To this end, Leah believed that bringing forth a son would be pleasing to Jacob, increasing her appeal in his eyes. When she conceived, she said, 'Now therefore, my husband will love me.' **Gen 29:32.**

## Leah's deliverance

Leah's view of her life and marriage was driven by the void of fallen desire within her. **Gen 3:16**. Consequently, her thoughts and actions were fundamentally carnal. **1Co 3:3**. They were based in *trading*. Leah sought romantic favour from Jacob in return for bringing forth something from herself which she believed that Jacob desired or would appreciate. Leah's approach to him was a form of seduction that reflects Satan's own *trading* nature. **Eze 28:16**. This fallen endeavour to secure the favour of a man is conveyed, albeit crudely, by the colloquialism, 'the way to a man's heart is through his belly'.

Clearly, however, this approach to her relationship with Jacob did not have the effect that Leah intended, for when she conceived a second time and bore a son, she recognised that she was still unloved. She said, 'Because the Lord has *heard* that I am unloved, He has therefore given me this son also.' **Gen 29:33**. Accordingly, Leah named her son Simeon, meaning 'heard'.

The Lord heard Leah because her affliction was now a point of fellowship with the Lord. He had come alongside her in the suffering that was associated with her loveless marriage. Through His 'once for all' offering, Christ had tasted the sufferings associated with her grief. **Heb 2:9**. He was now inviting her to receive these sufferings as her fellowship in His sufferings. **Php 3:10**.

It appears that Leah joined the conversation of faith that belongs to fellowship in Christ's afflictions. **Heb 11:24-26**. In this fellowship, Leah was beginning to find deliverance from a way of life that was driven by self-centred desire, to a new way of living and relating with others. Instead of being driven by the desire for identity verification through Jacob's romantic interest in her, she sought connection with him on a new basis.

## 'Attached' through the Spirit

The change in Leah's orientation to her relationship with Jacob was reflected in the birth of a third son, whom she named Levi, meaning 'attached'. She said, 'Now this time my husband will become *attached* to me, because I have borne him three sons.' **Gen 29:34**. The Hebrew word for 'attached' means 'to twine; by implication, to unite'. To be entwined, or united, was the marriage connection to which Leah was now giving herself.

Leah's reorientation to Jacob exemplified the marriage culture commended by King Solomon. He said, 'Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. *And a threefold [or entwined] cord is not quickly broken.*' **Ecc 4:9-12**.

Leah was beginning to understand that the viability of her marriage was not found in the realisation of her romantic aspirations but, rather, that her marriage to Jacob needed to be established on a new foundation. The words of Solomon reveal that when a husband and a wife are, individually, connected to the lordship of Christ, their marriage can be like a *threefold*, or entwined, cord that is not easily broken. They are able to meet one another in a new way; that is, they can be united, or made one, by receiving a remnant of the Spirit. God gives a remnant of His Spirit to a believing couple because He desires godly offspring. **Mal 2:15**.



## An offering of praise

Leah conceived a fourth time and bore another son whom she named Judah, meaning 'praise'. Having personally come to something new in the Lord, and also in her relationship with Jacob, Leah declared, 'Now I will praise Yahweh.' **Gen 29:35**. The Scriptures teach that the Lord is enthroned in, or inhabits, the praises of His people. **Psa 22:3**. Leah's offering of praise marked her submission to the Lord and, by implication, to her husband, within the fellowship of headship. Judah, the seed brought forth from the one-Spirit marriage covenant of Jacob and Leah, was the son through whom Jesus Christ, the Son of God, would come in the flesh. **Rev 5:5**.

Significantly, the praise offered by Leah demonstrated that she feared the Lord. He became her fear as she embraced her participation in the fellowship of His offering and sufferings. Her testimony exemplified the confession of King David, who wrote, 'You who fear the Lord, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard.' **Psa 22:23-24**.

For a season, Leah ceased bearing children. During this time, she witnessed the births of Dan and Naphtali via Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant. Because Leah herself had stopped bearing children, she gave her maidservant, Zilpah, to Jacob as a wife, so that he might have more sons from her. Leah did this because she had been illuminated to Jacob's predestination as a great nation and she was supporting the fulfilment of this destiny.

We know this because Zilpah bore Jacob a son, whom Leah named Gad, saying, 'A troop comes.' **Gen 30:9-12**. In doing so, Leah revealed her understanding of God's plan for Jacob and his household. Gad's name indicated that this child was part of a firstfruits troop belonging to Jacob. It would become 'two troops', signifying a double-portion blessing which Jacob obtained as he emerged from his season of affliction in Laban's house. **Gen 32:7,10**.

**Further Studies**    **PSALM 65**

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## The blessing of fruitfulness

Zilpah conceived and bore a second son, whom Leah named Asher, meaning 'happy'. Leah proclaimed, 'I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed.' **Gen 30:13.** This confession marked her departure from a fallen mode of relating with her sisters, which was typified by comparison and assessments. Instead of viewing the other women in the context of this household of faith as *rivals*, Leah was able to rejoice with them in the blessing of fruitfulness which was for the sake of the elect.

Rachel, who presumed to be the head of the harem, traded the right for Leah to lie with Jacob, for a bouquet of mandrakes which the young lad, Reuben, had collected for his mother. **Gen 30:14.** While Rachel believed in the enchanting properties of these plants, Leah readily surrendered them to her. Such superstitious practices were no longer part of Leah's culture. Enchantment was not the basis of her relationship with Jacob, nor the source of her fruitfulness; she now engaged him face to face. When he came out from the field in the evening, she said to him, 'You must come in to me, for I have surely hired you with my son's mandrakes.' **Gen 30:16.**

Remarkably, as the Scripture recorded, '*God listened to Leah*, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son'. **Gen 30:17.** God was able to listen to Leah because her conversation with Jacob was, figuratively, at the tree of life! Leah called her son Issachar, meaning 'wages', saying, 'God has given me my wages [or reward], because I have given my maid to my husband.' **Gen 30:18.** Leah was confessing that she had given her maidservant to Jacob for his benefit. It was not motivated by a self-centred need to have her own children. She had given her maid to Jacob so that he would be fruitful through her.

## Leah's inheritance

Leah's marriage to Jacob was founded upon deception and manipulation. Nevertheless, the Lord had mercy on Leah. He met her in the season of her childbearing. As Leah responded to the Lord's initiative toward her, she found deliverance from the carnal expectations of life and marriage that motivate fallen women, and she was able to be joined in one Spirit with Jacob. **1Ti 2:15**. Instead of viewing her husband as a contributor to her romantic agenda, Leah was reoriented and submitted to Jacob's headship. **1Co 11:8-10**. Consequently, she was able to proceed from him to become a great multitude of elect sons of God.

The principle of envy, through the exercise of the other law, was no longer the basis of Leah's relationship with Jacob, nor with the other women in the house. *Agape* love at the tree of life was her culture. Her fruitfulness in bringing forth Issachar was the wages, or reward, of her labour of love. She ministered to Jacob by giving herself to him, and by laying down her life to reveal him. The apostle Paul drew our attention to this labour, writing, 'For God is not unjust to forget your work and labour of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister'. **Heb 6:10**.

Amazingly, Leah brought forth two more children: a son named Zebulun, meaning 'dwelling', and a daughter named Dinah. In total, Leah had personally given birth to seven children. When she delivered Zebulun, Leah confessed, 'God has endowed me with a good endowment [gift]; now my husband will dwell with me, because I have borne him six sons.' **Gen 30:20**. The gift that Leah had received was *entering Christ's rest*, as one who was now fully established on the ground of fellowship that belonged to her sonship. Leah and her marriage had been set upon Christ, the Rock, and He had built her house. She had not laboured in vain. **Psa 127:1**. Truly, this was a good endowment!

## Jacob's marriage to Rachel

The genesis of Rachel's marriage to Jacob was quite different from Leah's. Rachel's striking appearance and charming personality quickly captured Jacob's attention and drew his affection. She presented to him as being a source of fruitfulness and fulfilment. Jacob's grand undertaking for Rachel's hand in marriage was a gesture that conveyed his 'cherub-like' qualities. **Gen 29:27-28**. These were key ingredients in the establishment of their romance, and they came to define the chemistry of their marriage.

Under favourable circumstances, Jacob and Rachel's relationship appeared enviable. However, under the pressure and distress of unfulfilled expectations, the deficiencies in their marriage became readily apparent.

Unable to bear children, and being envious of Leah, who had already given birth to four sons (Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah), Rachel said to Jacob, 'Give me children, or else I die!' **Gen 30:1**. The demand that Rachel made upon Jacob, which was driven by envy, was the expression of desire that belonged to the curse on the woman, following the Fall. The Lord said to the woman, 'Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' **Gen 3:16**. Through this interaction, it was clear that fallen desire had always been Rachel's orientation toward her husband. Rachel's envy surfaced as she compared herself with her sister. Her response in this situation exposed the corruption and uncleanness of her heart. **Pro 14:30**.

It is important to recognise that desire, motivated by envy, is the fruit of the Fall within the heart of a woman. **Gen 3:16**. This basic drive within a woman has an unavoidable impact upon her relationship with her husband, and even in her interactions with other women. This was true for Rachel and Leah. For example, Rachel's demand for children from Jacob was driven by her envy of Leah's motherhood. Similarly, Leah's betrayal of Rachel on her wedding night was driven by her envy of Rachel's betrothal to Jacob. Both women needed to meet the Lord, individually, and to embrace His process for their deliverance from these basic fallen desires.

**Further Studies**    **PROVERBS 14**

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## Not in the place of God

The reformation of Jacob's culture happened in the season of his affliction as he availed himself of the mercies of the Lord and walked in the light of illumination that he evidently received during this time. **Gen 32:10.**

Jacob's transformation was demonstrated by his response to Rachel's demand, 'Give me children, or else I die.' He responded to her ultimatum, saying, '*Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?*' **Gen 30:2.** In contrast to his previous 'cherub-like' initiatives toward Rachel, Jacob did not attempt to placate her; nor did he seek wisdom and power from God to service her desires. Rather, he asserted that he was not 'in the place of God', and that Rachel was accountable for her own response to the Lord.

Jacob's refusal to comply with Rachel's expectation that he would serve her 'in the place of God' was also demonstrated some time later by his son, Joseph. Following the death of Jacob, Joseph's brothers were afraid that he would repay them for the evil that they had done to him. Motivated by fear, they sent messengers to Joseph with a fraudulent communication. **Gen 50:16-17.** Their deceit and their implied repudiation of his commitment to first love fellowship with them was a great grief to Joseph.

After sending their message, the brothers also went and fell down before Joseph's face, saying, 'Behold, we are your servants.' **Gen 50:18.** Although the Lord had set Joseph over them, he refused to assume a cherub-like demeanour toward them. He did not presume to take dominion over their faith. **2Co 1:24.** Instead, Joseph comforted his brothers and spoke kindly to them, saying, 'Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.' **Gen 50:19-21.**

**Further Studies**    **PSALM 37**

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## The culture of uncleanness

Rachel did not heed Jacob's rebuke. She continued to approach life and her relationships through her romantic desires. She was driven by this uncleanness and the oppression that it invited. First, Rachel followed the example of Sarai, and gave her maid, Bilhah, to Jacob as a wife. This initiative was not for Jacob's sake; Rachel did it to obtain a child for herself through Bilhah. She said to Jacob, 'Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear a child on my knees, *that I also may have children by her.*' **Gen 30:3.**

Jacob went into Bilhah, and she conceived a son whom Rachel named Dan, meaning 'judge'. Rachel believed that God had judged her case, heard her voice, and given her a son. **Gen 30:6.** In so doing, she mistakenly supposed that God's thoughts regarding her actions were the same as her thoughts, and that His ways were the same as her ways. **Isa 55:8.** Interestingly, Dan is the only son of Jacob who is not listed in the book of Revelation as part of the twelve tribes of the true Israel of God. **Rev 7:4-8.**

Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob another son, whom Rachel named Naphtali. Rachel asserted that she was prevailing in her jealous wrestle with her sister, Leah. She pronounced, 'With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and indeed I have prevailed.' **Gen 30:7-8.** This was a delusion. Her contention with Leah was in her own mind. Leah herself had been delivered from this way of relating and was by no means competing with Rachel. Rachel's reference to Leah served only to highlight that she was continuing to live by her own law, comparing herself with others and commending herself. She was not wise. **2Co 10:12-13.**

## Rachel's envy and sorcery

Rachel's uncleanness was on display when she traded time with Jacob for the mandrakes that Reuben had picked for Leah during the days of the wheat harvest. **Gen 30:14**. Rachel, of course, was the woman whom Jacob had chosen to marry. And, because of this, she presumed to preside over the harem and to moderate the access of the other women to Jacob. This assumed role, informed by the dynamics of envy, established a relational pecking order among the women. They should have been a community of faith, who were serving one another by love. **Gal 5:13**. Furthermore, Rachel exercised this authority without reference to Jacob, depreciating the expression of his headship within the household.

Mandrakes are a fruit-producing plant with dark green leaves and small purple flowers. The yellow fruit of the mandrake is small, sweet to taste, and fragrant. The root of the plant has hallucinogenic and narcotic properties. According to oriental superstition, the mandrake is supposed to possess the virtue of conciliating love and promoting fruitfulness. Interestingly, in some cultures, the root of the mandrake was sculpted into amulets, or charms, which were believed to endow a person with good fortune and to cure sterility.

It is not clear how Rachel intended to use the mandrakes – whether she viewed it as a natural remedy for infertility; whether she intended to supply it to Jacob as an aphrodisiac; or whether she deployed it as charm to enhance her chances of conception. Irrespective of her intent, her investment in this therapy marked her lack of faith. **Pro 31:30**. It was an expression of *sorcery* through which she endeavoured to secure Jacob's investment in the objectives associated with her romantic desire. This was a source of significant uncleanness that produced for her only further delusion and oppression. **1Sa 15:22-23**. **1Ch 10:13-14**.

## Rachel's delusion

Rachel's religious professions of God's favour toward her during this season were complete imaginations. God was not involved in her schemes; nor was He answering her demands. We know this because, after Leah, Bilhah and Zilpah had finished bearing children, the Scriptures recorded, '*Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb.*' **Gen 30:22**. Evidently, prior to the Lord's initiative to open her womb, Rachel had been *forgotten* by God.

Sadly, as Rachel continued in her religious uncleanness, perceiving herself and others through the dullness of an unsound mind, she was unable even to appreciate or to enjoy the miraculous birth of her son, Joseph. Instead of giving thanks for this provision, she named him Joseph, saying, 'The Lord shall add to me another son.' **Gen 30:24**. In other words, at the moment when she received her heart's desire, she was immediately looking toward the birth of her next child. Her inability to rejoice in the blessing of the Lord was a fruit of oppression, which remained a weight upon her because of her self-centred unbelief.

Rachel's uncleanness was epitomised by her worship of teraphim, or household idols. The teraphim were such an orienting influence in her life that she stole them from her father when Jacob and his household made their flight from Laban's residence. **Gen 31:34**. Although Rachel believed that her observance of these practices was 'of God', the longing desire and enduring delusion that tainted these years of her life reveal that she was, in fact, worshipping another god. That is, her employment of the teraphim was the worship of Satan and his spiritual host of wickedness. **Eph 6:12**. Paul highlighted the connection between delusion and the god of this world, writing, 'But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, *whose minds the god of this age has blinded*, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.' **2Co 4:3-4**.



## The repentance of Rachel

At the conclusion of her life, the weeping of Rachel for her children finally changed from the grief of envy to true intercession for her children. This happened as she laboured to bring forth Benjamin, just outside of Ephrath (the former name of Bethlehem). Rachel's labour was very difficult. In the course of this trauma, the attending midwife said to her, '*Do not fear*, you will have this son also.' **Gen 35:16-17**. Through this word, Rachel obtained the fear of the Lord that was necessary for her participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ. In this fellowship, she was made alive from the death of sin and was established, finally, in her sanctification as a son of God.

As Rachel was dying, following the delivery of the child, she named him Ben-Oni, meaning 'Son of My Sorrow'. **Gen 35:18**. Rachel did not name the child this way because he had caused her grief. Rather, having found deliverance from the fear that enslaved her to the flesh, she was lamenting the impact of her fallen nature upon her household and, in particular, upon her children. The statement 'son of my sorrow' was part of her *prayer of repentance*.

The Lord, through the prophet Jeremiah, answered Rachel's penitent prayer. First, He acknowledged her supplications, saying, 'A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping, *Rachel weeping for her children*, refusing to be comforted for her children, *because they are no more*.' **Jer 31:15**. Yahweh acknowledged that Rachel's grief was not for herself, but for her children who would be lost. She was grieving on account of the destruction among the children of Israel because of uncleanness and bitter envy, which she, herself, had exhibited in her marriage and family. **Lam 5:7**. To this end, Rachel wept for the loss within her family, which she was prophetically foreseeing. This prophecy was fulfilled at multiple points.

## The weeping in Ramah

The weeping in Ramah was first triggered by the annihilation of the whole tribe of Benjamin on account of the depravity of the citizens of Gibeah, a township belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. **Jdg 19-20**. The Scriptures recorded that Israel 'wept bitterly' near Ramah because one tribe was missing in Israel. **Jdg 21:2-3**.

The second great mourning occurred not long after the birth of Jesus. Herod the Great, seeking to kill Jesus whom he considered to be a threat to his kingship, sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years of age and under. **Mat 2:16**. Concerning this event, Matthew recorded in his Gospel, 'Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying: "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."' **Mat 2:17-18**.

Returning to Jeremiah's prophecy, we note that, having acknowledged Rachel's lamentation, the Lord said, 'Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says the Lord, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope in your future, says the Lord, that your children shall come back to their own border.' **Jer 31:16-17**.

Jacob also acknowledged the recovery of Rachel, setting up a pillar on her grave. **Gen 35:20**. This signified that Rachel, through repentance and faith, had been established on Christ, upon which Jacob's house had been established. Honouring his headship, she had become a pillar in the temple of God. **Rev 3:12**. Moreover, Jacob changed her son's name from Ben-Oni to Benjamin, meaning 'son of my right hand'. This name was prophetic of his role in the recovery of Rachel's children, according to the word that the Lord proclaimed to her as she found repentance before her decease.

## The nature of Benjamin

Benjamin's nature was *wolfish*. Jacob noted this character trait when he blessed Benjamin, saying, 'Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.' **Gen 49:27**. Because of his edacious nature, the tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped out from among the tribes of Israel through a war of annihilation and excommunication.

This devastating incident happened when a Levite and his concubine sought lodging in Gibeah as they journeyed to their home in the remote mountains of Ephraim. While they were being hosted by an old man of the city, 'perverted men' surrounded the house and beat on the door. They demanded that the Levite be brought out to them so that they might know him carnally and then kill him. **Jdg 19:22. Jdg 20:5**. Instead, they ravished his concubine, leaving her to die.

The phrase that is translated as 'perverted men' in this passage of Scripture, literally means 'sons of Belial'. 'Belial' is a term that designates a person as being godless or lawless (i.e. iniquitous). It is sometimes used as a name that is applied to a demon or to Satan. These 'sons of Belial' were unclean and iniquitous men who were subject to demonic spirits. They actively sought the destruction of the innocent.

Repulsed by the lewdness of the Benjamites from Gibeah, and provoked by the refusal of the rest of the tribe of Benjamin to deliver these ones up to death in order to remove such evil from the nation, the men of Israel were united together as one man against Benjamin. **Jdg 20:11-13**. They went up to Bethel, the house of God, to inquire which tribe should go up first to battle against the children of Benjamin. Yahweh replied, 'Judah first!' **Jdg 20:18**.

## The judgement of Benjamin

On the first day of battle, Benjamin's army, which numbered 26 000 plus the 700 select men of Gibeah, killed 22 000 men of Israel. Yet the Lord directed the Israelites to go up against them again. On the second day, the Benjamites slaughtered another 18 000 men of Israel. Again, coming before the Lord at Bethel with weeping, prayer and fasting, the people inquired of the Lord. On their behalf, Phineas asked, 'Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of my brother Benjamin, or shall I cease?' The Lord responded, 'Go up, for tomorrow I will deliver them into your hand.' **Jdg 20:28.**

On the third day, the Lord delivered Benjamin into the hands of his brothers. The number of Benjamite soldiers who were killed was 25 000. Additionally, the men of Israel turned against the rest of the children of Benjamin from every city, striking them down with the edge of the sword – men and beasts – and setting all their cities on fire. Moreover, they swore an oath that no tribe would give their daughters as wives to the surviving remnant of Benjamin. **Jdg 21:1.**

Following the rout of Benjamin, the children of Israel came to the house of God and remained there until evening. They lifted up their voices and *wept bitterly*, saying, 'O Lord God of Israel, why has this come to pass in Israel, that today there should be one tribe *missing* in Israel?' **Jdg 21:2-3.** Their weeping was the fulfilment of Rachel's prophetic grief. It was 'a voice heard in Ramah', a key city belonging to Benjamin, which was, for all intents and purposes, 'no more'. **Jer 31:15.**

However, the Lord declared that there was hope in Rachel's future, and that her children, through Benjamin and Joseph, would return and would obtain the blessing of an inheritance that belonged to them in Jacob. This blessing would be fulfilled in the church age.

## The conversion of Paul

The recovery of the tribe of Benjamin was, in part, realised through the conversion of the apostle Paul who was a Benjamite. **Rom 11:1**. Prior to his conversion, Paul exhibited the same wolfish trait as that of his forebears. In the book of Acts, Luke noted that Saul '*made havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off men and women, committing them to prison*'. **Act 8:3**.

Paul himself testified, saying, 'For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how *I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it*. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the *traditions of my fathers*.' **Gal 1:13-14**. The word that Paul used to describe his destructive intentions is *portheo*. According to Vine, it is another word for 'havoc', meaning 'to destroy, ravage, lay waste'.

Following his conversion, Paul was called by Christ to establish lampstand churches for the church age. Through the ministry of these churches, Jews and Gentiles are gathered into the true Israel of God as members of the body of Christ. We read in the book of Acts, 'Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first [the Jews]; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" ' **Act 13:46-47**.

From Jesus' perspective, as He is seated on the throne in the true tabernacle, the lampstand is at His right hand. To this end, the establishment of lampstand churches, through Paul, marked the fulfilment of the name that Jacob gave to Benjamin. **Gen 35:18**. Truly, Paul had become a 'son of the right hand'.

## Seven women

An essential condition of our citizenship in the heavenly Jerusalem is our participation in the process through which we are delivered from our sin and uncleanness. **Zec 13:1**. Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord revealed how the heavenly city is cleansed from her filth and bloodshed. He opened his address, declaring, 'In that day seven women shall take hold of one man, saying, "We will eat our own food and wear our own apparel; only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach"'. **Isa 4:1**.

The seven women identified in this prophecy are the seven churches to whom Jesus Christ directed His letters in the book of Revelation. **Rev 2-3**. We note the association of churches, with women, in the writings of the apostles. For example, the apostle John addressed his second epistle to 'the elect lady and her children'. **2Jn 1:1**. Similarly, the apostle Peter concluded his first epistle, writing, 'She who is in Babylon, elect together with you, greets you'. **1Pe 5:13**.

These seven women represent the fullness of what should be a chaste church, betrothed to one Man, Christ. However, their insistence upon 'eating their own food' and 'wearing their own apparel' reveals that they have been deceived by Satan in the same manner as Eve, who also presumed to eat her own food, and who fashioned together fig leaves to cover the shame of her nakedness and fear. **Gen 3:6-7**.

Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul expressed his concern regarding this church's susceptibility to such deception, stating, 'For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband [one man], that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ'. **2Co 11:2-3**.

## Our own food and clothing

Isaiah's prophecy reveals that, in the church age, there are many people who are deceived by Satan through alternative gospels. These gospels are epitomised by the expectation, 'only let us be called by your name, to take away our reproach'. **Isa 4:1**. Those who remain loyal to these doctrines spurn the word of the cross which invites our participation in the offering and sufferings of Christ as the means by which we are able to become the righteousness of God. **2Co 5:21**. They prefer, instead, a 'vicarious only gospel'. Accordingly, they live under the presumption that the reproach of God's judgement upon them because of their sin has been taken away and has been suffered, on their behalf, by Christ.

The desire of a person, household, presbytery or church to 'eat their own food' describes their fundamental belief in the freedom to choose, and even to generate, a word that appeals to them; and to interpret the implications of God's word according to their own understanding. **Gal 1:6-7**. When a person approaches the word in this manner, their food is not the fruit of the tree of life. Instead of hearing and receiving what the Spirit is saying to the churches, they live by a word that has been generated from, and mediated by, *their* knowledge of good and evil.

In the Scriptures, 'apparel' represents a person's mandate for a priestly service through which life is expressed. **Rev 3:4**. A person clothes themselves in an endeavour to be the source of their own life and Christian expression. Motivated in this way, their expression is not the communication of faith according to their sanctification as a son of God. Rather, their 'own clothing' is a projection of the idolatrous and shameful image that they have created for themselves. **Rev 3:17-18**.

## The glorious and beautiful branch

The prophet Isaiah declared, 'In that day the Branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious; and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and appealing for those of Israel who have escaped. And it shall come to pass that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy [sanctified] – everyone who is recorded among the living in Jerusalem.' **Isa 4:2-3.**

In the first instance, the Branch of the Lord is Christ. The prophet Zechariah declared, 'Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH! From His place He shall branch out, and He shall build the temple of the Lord.' **Zec 6:12.** Jeremiah described this branch as 'an almond tree.' **Jer 1:11.** Significantly, the lampstand of Moses' tabernacle was fashioned in the form of an almond tree. **Exo 25:31-40.**

Christ 'branches out' as we, who are living stones, are being built together into the temple of His body. **Joh 2:21. Eph 2:19-22.** His body is the church, which is depicted in the book of Revelation as seven golden lampstands. **Col 1:18. Rev 1:20.** Importantly, those in the seven churches who receive Christ's initiative to cleanse them from the presumption of eating their own food and wearing their own apparel, are obtaining their sanctification as those who are left in Zion and are remaining in the New Jerusalem. They are being established as part of a lampstand church. It is described as 'beautiful and glorious', manifesting the fruit of light, which is the sevenfold Spirit of God, in the whole world.

Notably, those who 'have escaped' the judgement of God, by choosing to participate in the offering and sufferings of Christ, are 'recorded among the living in Jerusalem'. Their names are recorded in the book of life, which is the tree of life in the middle of the heavenly city. **Rev 22:19.** The substance of their sonship is fed to them by the Spirit through the fruit of the tree of life as they participate in the Lord's *agape* meal.





Restoring  
my Soul