

Genesis 30:26-43 and 31:1-21

Jacob had arrived in Haran with everything on his side.

In spite of his schemes, he had left home in honour, his father's blessing ringing in his ears, and being now the possessor of the Abrahamic Covenant.

And if that were not enough, God had spoken to him in a dream, and assured him of His care.

Genesis 28:15 **"And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of."**

And then he met the girl of his dreams, the girl God would have surely given him.

However, with the power of Heaven behind him, he relied on his own cleverness, and on Laban's promises.

Yes, with stars his eyes, he bargained away the next seven years of his life.

His mother had only expected him to be away for a short time.

She had promised, **"I will send, and fetch thee from thence" when "thy brother's fury turn away."**

Had Esau continued to hold his grudge, or had Jacob simply been unable to answer his mother's summons because of his previous commitment to Laban?

We don't really know, but the bottom line was, Rebekah died without ever seeing her son again.

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Those 7 years stretched into 14 years, and all that time Jacob's labour and God's blessing were flowing into Laban's pockets.

And in return, Jacob was rewarded with strife and contention rather than a happy family.

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14 years later, when he had finally fulfilled his obligation, he decided to go back home.

Yes, it was time to return to Canaan, the place of God's blessing.

Genesis 30:25-26 **"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. 26: 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."

By this time, Jacob had a large family to support, and by now he should be concerning himself with his own wealth and the welfare of his sons.

And he should have been free to do so.

In spite of Laban's underhanded dealings, Jacob had faithfully served out his time.

Laban should have been satisfied with his ill-gotten gain and been quite willing to let him go.

But he was not to be so easily deprived of his best employee.

V 27-28 **"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.**

**28: And he said, Appoint me thy wages,
and I will give it."**

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Be careful now, Jacob!

*You've heard that old song before, haven't
you?*

Remember fourteen years ago when Laban said

"Tell me, what shall thy wages be?"

Look what a mess that got you into.

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But Jacob just couldn't resist his offer.

Immediately his wheels began to spin, and

his dreams of Canaan faded away.

Once again God's blessings had taken a back

seat to Jacob's cleverness.

V 29-31 **"And he said unto him, Thou knowest
how I have served thee, and how thy**

cattle was with me.

30: 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?

31: And he said, What shall I give thee?"

There's that old line again, and Jacob swallowed it hook, line, and sinker. He should have said, *I'll tell you exactly what you shall give me. Give me my freedom. I want to go home.*

But already dollar signs were spinning around in his head.

And you know what?

Jacob had come up with a deal to end all deals!

V 31-33 "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: (there goes Jacob's hope of Canaan)

32: 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.

33: 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."

Laban couldn't believe his ears!

That old line about "**What shall I give thee?**" had worked again!

You see, eastern sheep are predominantly white and rarely brown, and eastern goats are predominantly black and rarely spotted and speckled.

Yes, Laban was convinced that he had gotten the best of the deal again, but this time he had gone one deal too far.

You see, during those 14 years of labour and turmoil, Jacob had changed.

Oh, he still couldn't resist a deal, but he had grown in the Lord.

His words, "**Thou shalt not give me any thing,**" showed that he was operating on faith now.

No, he wouldn't ask for a set wage.

Certainly, as an expert stock breeder, he thought he had a few tricks up his sleeve, but, essentially, He was taking a step of faith.

By not taking a definite wage, Jacob had left the door open for God to bless him abundantly.

Yes, Laban would lose this time.

Although he didn't realize it, this time He was bargaining against *God*.

V 34-36 **"And Laban said, Behold, I would it might be according to thy word.**

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

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

And so the agreement was settled.

One flock was designated as Laban's, and the
other was set aside for Jacob.

And just to make sure there was no inter-
mingling, Laban separated them by
"three days' journey."

Certainly Jacob's flock would be much
smaller.

As we have already noted, white sheep and
black goats were the dominant breed.

And under normal circumstances, ringstraked
and speckled animals would always be in
the minority.

Jacob knew that when he made his bargained.

He knew he was flying in the face of nature,
but against all odds, he had determined
to trust God to maintain his cause.

However, he also did something to help the
cause--which is a bit of a mystery to
us.

If there is such a thing as a Christian
Cattle Breeders Association, I'm sure
these next few verses would be a hot
topic with them.

V 37-42 **"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.**

**38: 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.

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

40: 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.

41: 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.

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

I certainly can't explain what Jacob was doing.

However, it seems obvious to me, given his extensive background in livestock management, that he was experimenting with some kind of selective breeding.

Perhaps there was a chemical in the rods that he released into the drinking water when he peeled them that might have increased the production of offspring, but I don't see how it could influence the production of **"ringstraked, speckled, and spotted"** animals.

And since Laban owned the predominant strain, anything Jacob could do to increase production would benefit Laban more than himself.

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At the beginning, Jacob might have thought his methods worked, but actually only God's direct intervention could have been responsible for his success.

Yes, only God could see to it that the offspring were predominantly ringstraked and speckled.

And later on, Jacob readily admitted this to his wives. **"Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me."**

However, even with God's blessing, Jacob was doing what he could.

He certainly seemed to think his rods made a difference, and he certainly was concentrating on quality as well as quantity.

V 41-42 **"And it came to pass, whensoever the stronger cattle did conceive, that**

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So, relying on God's indispensable blessing and his own methods, Jacob set out to increase his fortune, and before long, the agricultural part of his father's blessing became very apparent.

Yes, Jacob became a rich man.

V 43 **"And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses."**

Having succeeded as a herdsman, Jacob probably branched out into other lines of commerce, for we now notice that his needs included camels and asses and

servants to handle his growing
business.

But as Jacob's wealth increased, so did his
enemies.

In fact, as we begin Chapter 31, we find
that Jacob was very much afraid that he
must flee again.

No, it wasn't safe to live in Padan-aram any
more.

V 1-2 **"And he heard the words of Laban's
sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all
that was our father's; and of that
which was our father's hath he gotten
all this glory.**

**2: And Jacob beheld the countenance of
Laban, and, behold, it was not toward
him as before."**

Apparently Laban's sons were cut out of the
same cloth as their father.

Laban's bargain had not worked out as they had anticipated, and their inheritance was slipping away.

At the time, Laban had loved Jacob's arrangement, and he had accepted it eagerly.

And certainly, down through the years, Jacob had always played by the rules.

Anyone could see that he had prospered legitimately.

That is, anyone but Laban's sons.

"Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory."

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During the 14 years that Laban enjoyed Jacob's labour in return for his

daughters, he had been all smiles, but now his manner was almost threatening. Yes, Laban was a sore loser, and Jacob couldn't help but be disturbed by his attitude.

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There was no time limit on their agreement, and Jacob didn't want to break his contract.

He had always honoured his agreements with Laban, and certainly it was to his advantage to carry on now.

But under the present circumstances, Jacob was afraid of Laban, and rightly so. Yes, he now knew the kind of a man he was dealing with.

And it wouldn't surprise him if his uncle took everything he had by force and sent him away empty.

And later on, Jacob told him exactly that.

We see that in V 42--"**Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty.**"

Yes, Jacob suddenly realized that his uncle was a dangerous man.

Not only were his sons much older than his own, but Laban was a native Syrian.

He could call upon his fellow countrymen to uphold his cause whether it was just or not.

On the other hand, Jacob was an outsider, a foreigner who had gained his wealth at their expense.

It was a familiar pattern that would plague the children of Israel down through the centuries.

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But what seemed like adversity to Jacob was
God's opportunity.

He had gained great wealth in Padan-aram,
but his soul could only be blessed in
Canaan.

No, God would never allow Jacob to
permanently settle in the very land He
had called his grandfather out of.

God's program was centred in Canaan, and His
purposes had not changed.

And not only did God need to change Jacob's
location, He needed to change his life
goals.

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For 20 odd years, Jacob had been motivated
by two goals, two goals that had been
all-consuming.

His first goal had been to marry Rachel, and
I believe that was in accordance with
God's will.

But because he did it his way, relying upon
his own cleverness and his uncle's
promises, he managed to channel 14
years of labour and 14 years of God's
blessing into Laban's pocket.

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His second goal was to get rich, and
certainly God blessed him in that
regard.

What he hadn't been able to do in 14 years,
God accomplished in about 6.

However, Jacob's own efforts to make good
had consumed him entirely.

How easy it is to immerse ourselves in the
pursuit of this world's goods.

Oh, it wasn't that Jacob didn't appreciate God. Indeed he did, but he was just too busy to enjoy Him.

Jacob had achieved both of his goals, but neither had really supplied his deepest need.

God knew that, and God knew that Jacob would never change, so He allowed things to turn sour.

Sometimes that's the only way God can move us, and apparently that was the only way He could move Jacob.

Yes, Jacob was a busy man, but God got his attention through tribulation.

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I heard about a farmer who just couldn't get his mule to co-operate.

When he said *Giddy up!*, the mule would just stand there, and when he said *Whoa!*, he kept right on going.

In desperation, the farmer called in a professional mule trainer.

After the man had examined the mule, he turned to the farmer and said, "Do you have a short piece of 2x4?"

Well, the farmer did, and before he knew what was happening, the man hauled off and whacked the mule right across the forehead.

While he was winding up for a second swing, the farmer yelled, "Hey! I want you to train him, not kill him!"

The man calmly turned to the farmer and said, "First you've got to get his attention."

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Well, God needed to get Jacob's attention,
and adversity did it.

Six years ago, Jacob had planned to go back
to Canaan, but he got himself involved
in another *deal*.

But this time, it would be different.

And now that Jacob was listening, God spoke
to him loud and clear.

V 3 **"And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return
unto the land of thy fathers, and to
thy kindred; and I will be with thee."**

That's all Jacob needed to hear.

V 4-6 **"And Jacob sent and called Rachel and
Leah to the field unto his flock,
5: And said unto them, I see your
father's countenance, that it is not
toward me as before; but the God of my
father hath been with me.**

6: And ye know that with all my power I have served your father."

Probably Jacob remembered that his father had been betrayed by the thin walls of his tent.

Rebekah had overheard his conversation with Esau, and had taken steps to deceive him.

Jacob wasn't about to make the same mistake. So he called Leah and Rachel out to the open field where there was no chance of being overheard.

Yes, this was a serious matter, and he needed to be sure that his wives were behind him.

After all, his complaint was against their *father*, and he had already decided that he could not be upfront with him.

No, he couldn't leave openly, or Laban would confiscate everything he owned.

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Possibly this was the first time that Jacob had openly discussed their father with them.

Over the years, he may have kept it all bottled up inside, but now he must tell them the truth.

V 5-9 "---I see your father's countenance,
that it is not toward me as before; but
the God of my father hath been with me.
6: And ye know that with all my power I
have served your father.
7: And your father hath deceived me,
and changed my wages ten times; but God
suffered him not to hurt me.
8: If he said thus, The speckled shall be
thy wages; then all the cattle bare

speckled: and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked.

9: Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me."

Certainly Jacob was justified in pointing out their father's deception.

However, he seems to have forgotten that he had deceived his old blind father and his impetuous brother.

Yes, it is easy to point out the faults of others and excuse our own.

Someone has wisely said, *When we point a finger at others, we are pointing three at ourselves.*

However, as far as Laban was concerned, Jacob had nothing to be ashamed of.

He had dealt honourably with their father,
and in return, Laban had used him
despitefully.

But Jacob's testimony was not just about his
ill treatment.

No, his main purpose was to testify to God's
faithfulness---"**Thus God hath taken
away the cattle of your father, and
given them to me.**"

Yes, it was absolutely necessary that his
wives have the same confidence in God
that he had.

They needed to understand that they were not
just fleeing adversity, but they were
going forth in God's strength and under
His direction.

It could be a very big decision for them.

Jacob was just going home, but they would be leaving the only home they had ever known.

So Jacob needed to strengthen their faith in God.

He must make them aware of God's special guidance that he had received over the last six years, a guidance that had provided the great wealth they now enjoyed.

V 9-12 **"Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me. 10: And it came to pass at the time that the cattle conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle were ringstraked, speckled, and grisled. 11: And the angel of God spake unto me**

in a dream, saying, Jacob: And I said,
Here am I.

12: And he said, Lift up now thine
eyes, and see, all the rams which leap
upon the cattle are ringstraked,
speckled, and grisled: for I have seen
all that Laban doeth unto thee."

Previously, Jacob might not have been
completely upfront about his success.
He might have even boasted about his
abilities at stock breeding.

But now it was time to give credit where
credit was due.

All these years, God had guided him by
dreams in the management of his stock.
And even though their father had changed his
"wages ten times," God had seen to it
that he always came out on top.

And this same God, who had abundantly provided for them in the past, was now guiding them into the future.

V 13 **"I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred."**

Yes, in the face of adversity, Jacob had gotten his priorities straight.

He wanted to follow God, and he wanted his wives to be *with* him in this new venture.

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So there it was.

He just couldn't see any future for them in Padan-aram, but there was a bright new future awaiting them in Canaan.

So, what was their answer?

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As it turned out, Rachel and Leah didn't have any trouble making a decision. They had come to the realization that their father had cheated them also.

V 14 **"And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?"**

By this time, they were quite certain that their father had disinherited them and given all his wealth to their brothers. And something else had driven a wedge between them and their father.

V 15 **"Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money."**

Yes, they still resented the scandalous way he had sold them like so much

merchandise, and not a penny of the profits that Laban had gained by their husband's labour had ever benefitted them.

They should have been given a dowry, but Laban had spent it all.

So under the circumstances, they had come to the conclusion that their riches, gained at their father's expense, were only their rightful dues.

They as much as said that in V 16: **"For all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that is ours, and our children's: now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do."**

These words were a great relief to Jacob. Not just because of their loyalty to him, but for once they were agreed.

Yes, after all the years of bitter competition, it was so refreshing to see them united.

Perhaps Jacob's decision to follow God with all his heart was already bringing peace to his home.

V 17-19 **"Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels;
18: And he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padan-aram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan."**

Now, it's not easy to mobilize such a large household without attracting undue attention.

But here again, God prepared the way before them.

V 19-21 **"And Laban went to shear his sheep:
and Rachel had stolen the images that
were her father's.**

**20: And Jacob stole away unawares to
Laban the Syrian, in that he told him
not that he fled.**

**21: So he fled with all that he had;
and he rose up, and passed over the
river, and set his face toward the
mount Gilead."**

Under the providence of God, Laban's absence
had made it possible for Jacob who
"stole away unawares," but it also
provided an opportunity for something
else to be stolen.

**"Rachel had stolen the images that were her
father's."**

These few words reveal a lot about Laban,
and, indeed, about Rachel.

Laban readily recognized Jacob's God,
especially when it concerned money.

Remember his words many years before--"**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.**"

Indeed, way back when he welcomed Abraham's
servant, he had said "**Come in, thou
blessed of the LORD.**"

However, all this time that he was giving
the outward appearance of a believer,
he was depending upon his idols for his
prosperity.

I suppose this shouldn't surprise us,
considering what a hypocrite he was.

But I think we are all surprised, and a
little saddened, by Rachel's confidence
in her father's gods.

I would like to have believed that she had rejected that part of her upbringing, and had completely trusted in Jacob's God.

Apparently that was not the case.

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When Laban returned from his sheep shearing, he got the shock of his life.

I'm sure he had planned to seize Jacob's holdings some day, but now it was too late.

His daughters were gone, his grandsons were gone, and the household gods, who could insure his prosperity, were gone also.

Laban was furious, and he took action immediately.

Gathering a force of men, he pursued Jacob, probably with the intention of destroying him.

Jacob had three days' head start, but
Laban's troop of men could travel much
faster than Jacob's company of women
and children and slow-moving cattle.
So there was no question that Laban would
catch up with him.

The only question was when.

As it turned out, it took him exactly one
week.

So that means we should arrive just in time
for the fireworks as we gather together
for next week's lesson!