

Abundant Blessings Amidst Afflictions

God blesses Jacob in spite of Jacob!

Text: Gen. 30:25-43

Introduction:

1. This next section concerns the details of Jacob's final 6 years working for Laban. Jacob worked 14 years for his two wives Leah and Rachel. Now he will work a further 6 years to build up his own livestock in order to be able to provide for his family independent of Laban.
2. We get further insight into the character of Laban and Jacob through this account. Ultimately however, it is the goodness and grace of God which is on display, working on Jacob's behalf to reverse Laban's dishonest and unjust machinations in relation to his wages.
3. We will consider the theme of God's blessings and provision in the life of Jacob under three headings.

I. THE MEANS OF GOD'S PROVISION FOR JACOB (VS. 25-36)

God would use Jacob's last 6 years working for Laban to abundantly and graciously provide for his future. Laban would do all in his power to outmanoeuvre Jacob and cheat him of any substantial material increase but God would sovereignly ensure Laban's wicked plans were thwarted. An agreement is made between Jacob and Laban that in theory would allow Jacob to earn a living.

A. The Circumstances of the Agreement (Vs. 25-28)

1. Jacob's Plea (Vs. 25-26)
 - a. The timing of his plea (Vs. 25a)
 - i. Jacob issues this plea to Laban upon the birth of Joseph. Jacob had to serve 7 years for Rachel and that time had now expired so evidently Joseph was born at the end of that 7-year period.
 - b. The longing of his plea (Vs. 25b)
 - i. There was a longing in Jacob's heart to return to Canaan country. Jacob knew that God's promises to him and his descendants were connected to the land of promise (Gen. 28:13-14) and therefore, Haran was a temporary sojourn for him.
 - ii. Note: We should view our earthly sojourn the same way Jacob viewed his sojourn in Haran – it is a temporary sojourn and we are living for that celestial land above and long to go there.
 - c. The reasoning of his plea (Vs. 26)
 - i. He had served honourably – he had fulfilled his end of the agreement and served 14 years for his wives (Vs. 26a).
 - ii. He had served diligently – his service had not been half hearted and haphazard. Jacob had served Laban's interests with distinction (Vs. 26b)

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2. Laban's Plea (Vs. 27-28)

Laban responds with a counter plea of his own to keep Jacob working for him.

- a. Laban is motivated with his request (Vs. 27)
 - i. Laban had learned that God had blessed him for Jacob's sake and this was why he was so desirous to have Jacob stay on and continue working for him.
 - ii. Laban himself was not a worshipper of the One True God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In fact, he was an idolater (See Gen. 31:19, 30). Laban was only interested in the material blessings he might gain from Jacob's God, not in submitting his life to God's rule.
 - iii. Note: There are many like this today who want the blessings of Christianity without submitting to the Lordship of Christ. They want relief from the consequences of their sin but not salvation from sin itself.
- b. Laban is manipulating with his request (Vs. 28)
 - i. Laban is cordial (Vs. 27). Laban uses respectful and endearing words to woo Jacob into an agreement. In reality, these just masked Laban's true desires.
 - "I pray thee".
 - "If I have found favour in thine eyes".
 - Proverbs 29:5 "A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet."
 - ii. Laban is calculating (Vs. 28). Laban had learned that Jacob had a tendency to err on the side of being generous and so he again asks him suggest his own wages. Laban was a man who did not hesitate to use someone's goodwill and generosity to his own selfish advantage.

B. The Conditions of the Agreement (Vs. 29-33)

1. The preamble to the agreement (Vs. 29-30)

Jacob sets the tone for the proposal that will follow.

- a. The reminder – Laban had been blessed through Jacob. Laban's flock, which was small, multiplied abundantly through Jacob's care and oversight with God's hand of blessing upon him. It would therefore be fitting and appropriate for Laban to allow Jacob some return on his labours.
- b. The request - Jacob expresses his concern that he now provide for his own family. Jacob may have had some character flaws but laziness was not one of them. Jacob was:
 - i. A hard worker. Jacob may have been a smooth man in comparison with his hairy, hunter brother Esau but he was no sissy. He was strong (Gen. 29:10), diligent (Gen. 29:15; 30:26, 29-30, 31:6), honest (Gen. 31:38-39) and tough (Gen. 31:40). Whatever your vocation may be as a man (office or outdoors), you should be a hard worker. Our generation is full of lazy, weak and effeminate men who have very little stickability, endurance and resilience. This is now how God intended you to be as a man! Lazy,

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weak men tend to approach spiritual service the same way they approach their secular job and are often unreliable. The slightest pressure in their pressure and they are on the bench! Ecc. 9:10 "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might;"

- ii. A responsible provider. Jacob clearly took his duty to provide for his family seriously. He did not look to his wives and children to provide the needs. He took responsibility and took steps to provide for the family. God blessed the labours of Jacob's hands abundantly and God will bless men of God who take their role seriously in this area, work hard and trust God. This is the husband's role! We need to constantly be reminded of the biblical roles for husbands and wives:

- The husband - Leader (Gen. 2:15, Eph. 5:23; 1 Cor. 11:3), Provider (Gen. 2:15; 1 Tim. 5:8), Lover (Eph. 5:25; Col. 3:19) & Protector (Gen. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:7).
- The wife - Follower (1 Tim. 2:12-13; Eph. 5:22; Col. 3:18), Helper (Gen. 2:18), Home-maker (1 Tim. 5:14; Titus 2:5; Prov. 31:10-31), Mother/Nurturer (1 Tim. 5:14) & Lover (Tit. 2:4).
- When husbands and wives embrace their God-given roles, they experience God's blessings and harmony in the home. Stay in your lane!

- c. Note: You would think that Laban would be in agreement with this. Jacob was his son in law after all, married to both his daughters and with eleven children born in 7 years. Sadly though, Laban was the ruthless kind who would not hesitate to use his own family for his own selfish advancement.

2. The proposal of the agreement (Vs. 31-33)

Jacob makes a simple request that his wages be as follows:

- a. The speckled, spotted and brown among the sheep.
- b. The speckled and spotted among the goats.
- c. The word 'ringstraked' means striped. So, Jacob's wages were the striped, speckled and spotted and the brown among the sheep. The solid colour animals would remain Laban's.
- d. Jacob is requesting the odd coloured livestock. These would be in the minority of Laban's herds. This simple plan would also keep Jacob's name clear of accusation as the visible markings would clearly identify which animals were Laban's and which were Jacob's.
- e. This represents, at least initially, a step of faith for Jacob at this point as under normal circumstances the sheep and goats would tend to reproduce in the dominant colours of the herd (solid colours). Jacob was consciously aware that God's hand of blessing was upon his life (Vs. 30) and was therefore confident that God would supply.

C. The Contravention of the Agreement (Vs. 34-36)

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1. Laban's verbal commitment to the contract (Vs. 34). Laban agrees verbally to Jacob's proposal but how dishonest and short lived this was. Words are cheap unless one follows through with honourable actions.
2. Laban's violation of the contract (Vs. 35-36)
 - a. When? – the very same day he made the deal with Jacob. Laban wasted no time in breaking his word to Jacob. You don't really know someone until you know something of their approach and attitude towards money and material things. Nothing reveals the heart more! (1 Tim. 6:10) This was an act of robbery on Laban's part. He basically stole the first part of Jacob's pay. This was also an act of mistrust on Laban's part. "Greedy and deceitful men like Laban are the kind who do not trust others. They know their own heart and think others are the same way. Therefore, in dealing with others, they want all deals others have to offer made very plain. But, of course, when these "Labans" make their offers, you can be sure it will not be that way. They will keep the details of their offers hidden in fine print in order to more easily deceive." (John Butler)
 - b. How? – by removing the very livestock he had promised to Jacob, giving them to his sons and putting three days distance between the stolen flock and the main flock. Undoubtedly this was to stop the spotted and speckled from interbreeding with the main herd and producing offspring for Jacob. He would go on to change Jacob's wages **10 times in 6 years** (that's almost twice a year!) in an attempt to thwart God's blessings upon Jacob (Refer Gen. 31:7; 41).
 - c. Laban provides a valuable lesson in how one should **not** conduct business. Laban's ways have no place in the child of God's life. As believers, we should be known for our generosity, honesty and integrity in money matters. There is nothing worse than a believer who has been on the receiving end of God's gift of salvation and a multitude of other blessings who is a miserly penny pincher and pack rat!
 - d. God's Word has a strong warning to those who unjustly withhold wages (James 5:1-6).
 - e. God blesses generosity, not selfishness and stinginess. "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor." (Prov. 22:9)

II. THE MISTAKES REGARDING GOD'S PROVISION BY JACOB (VS. 37-42)

How does Jacob respond to Laban's chicanery and trickery? He responded with scheming and self-reliance.

A. Scheming (Vs. 37-42)

1. Sadly, Jacob responds in kind, seeking to rectify the injustice through his own ingenuity. It appears Jacob commenced this endeavour in faith but quickly resorted to his Jacob ways when he was cheated by Laban.

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2. Jacob seeks to exert some kind of prenatal influence into the breeding process of the livestock. His primary method was to take rods of green polar, hazel and chestnut, peel strips off them so that the white would appear, and then lay them in the gutters and watering troughs of the livestock so that they would conceive among the rods.
3. There are two possible ways to interpret Jacob's actions:
 - a. Option 1: He was following a superstitious practice of the time where it was believed that livestock could be influenced to produce a certain type of offspring if they saw striped rods such as these.
 - b. Option 2: He had genuine knowledge from his wealth of experience with sheep and goats that we are not in possession of today. We should not be too quick to write off Jacob as practicing some kind of hocus pocus. Jacob was a very experienced herdsman who had spent years observing animal behaviours so it is possible that there was some rationality to what he was trying to do.
 - c. Creation Scientist Henry Morris writes, "It should not be overlooked that Jacob was over 90 years old at this time, that he was a very intelligent and careful observer, and that he had spent most of his long life raising and studying cattle, sheep and goats...There is a great deal, even today, that scientists have not been able to work out concerning the transmission of hereditary factors...It is possible that certain chemicals in the wood of these trees – peeled rods of which were actually in the water which the flocks came to drink – were capable somehow of affecting the animals. If nothing else, water treated thus may have served as an aphrodisiac and fertility promoter among the cattle. At least one such chemical substance found in these trees has been used for such a purpose in both ancient and modern times."¹
 - d. It does appear from what is described in verse 41-42 that somehow these rods stimulated the cattle to mate.
 - e. Whatever the case may be, Jacob would eventually learn that it was not his wisdom, ingenuity and efforts which had produced this result but the hand of Almighty God (See Gen. 31:9-13).
4. Jacob's actions may have been legal (they were not an official violation of the agreement with Laban) but they were questionable. As believers we need to remember to go the second mile to be above reproach. Illustrations: One worker made a comment in relation to the company he worked for, "They may not break the law but they sure give it a good bend". Personal experience with sales job and bonus.

B. Self-reliance

1. Jacob's actions again highlight his tendency to rely on self in such situations. No doubt at least initially Jacob thought that his schemes

¹ For Henry Morris' full discussion on this point, see "The Genesis Record" Pg. 474-477 (Commentary on Genesis 30:37-43)

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were the source of his success. He was learning in the school of faith to trust in God more but it was in the DNA of Jacob's Adamic nature to rely on his own plotting, planning and scheming. It is so easy for us to fall back into what is woven into the fabric of our Adamic nature.

2. How often we are tempted to rely on self in difficult situations, misplacing our trust in our own wisdom rather than God's!
3. How often our tendency is to attribute our blessings to ourselves rather than to the goodness and grace of God!
4. How desperately do we need to learn God-reliance rather than self-reliance! To learn the lesson "not I but Christ"!

III. THE MERCY OF GOD'S PROVISION FOR JACOB (VS. 43; 31:9-13)

Jacob would learn that God had blessed him in spite of himself and not because of himself!

A. The Largeness of God's Provision (Vs. 43)

1. God blessed Jacob abundantly and way above what he deserved. The phrase "increased exceedingly" has the idea of "to burst forth speedily". Jacob Enterprises expanded rapidly! God provided a rapidly expanding flock to provide for Jacob's rapidly expanding family. "Those that trust in God, in his providence and promise, though they have great families and small incomes, can cheerfully hope that he who sends mouths will send meat. He who feeds the brood of the ravens will not starve the seed of the righteous." (Matthew Henry)
2. In reality God blesses us way above what we deserve. Think of your salvation. You didn't deserve it otherwise it would be something earned by your own works. It was the free gift of God's grace. Think of all the spiritual blessings of the Christian life (Eph. 1:3) God has lavished upon us; none of them are deserved or because of who we are or what we have done. All are of God's goodness and grace. Think of all the material provisions of God in our lives as a part of his gracious and kind watch care of our lives.
3. Psalm 146:5-6 "**Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help**, whose hope *is* in the LORD his God: Which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein *is*: which keepeth truth for ever:"

B. The Lessons from God's Provision (Vs. 9-13)

God revealed to Jacob through a dream that it was His power that had worked on his behalf with the livestock, not Jacob's skill and schemes. Jacob learned that God's blessings were on account of:

1. The power of God – this was something God had done, not Jacob.
 - a. Jacob was teaching Jacob that it would not be through his talents and abilities that he would succeed in life but through living by faith in a miracle working God.
 - c. When God blesses us, we need to remove any thought that it is somehow because of us. It is all because of God's grace, love, compassion and mercy towards us as His underserving children.

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Our response to the blessings of God in our lives should be humility and thankfulness, not pride and self-congratulation!

2. The faithfulness of God – God was being true to His promises to Jacob (Gen. 28:3-4, 13-15). God always keeps His promises! Jacob was also a tithing man (Gen. 28:22) and God provides for those who honour Him in the area of giving (See Mal. 3:10). Those who fail to follow God's model for the needs of the home (with the husband being the primary provider and the wife the homemaker) may find they miss out on proving the faithfulness of a God in a special way.
3. The justice of God – God had taken note of Laban's mistreatment of Jacob (Vs. 12) and thwarted his evil plans to deprive Jacob of the wages that were rightfully his. God had promised to bless those who would bless Jacob and curse those who cursed Jacob (See Gen. 12:3; 27:29). Laban's mistreatment of Jacob brought the hand of God's justice into his life. Laban found out that you will never succeed at thwarting God's plan no matter how clever and cunning you may be!

Conclusion:

1. What kind of testimony are you in relation to money matters? Is there any of Laban's ways in your walk?
2. How do you approach the work God has given you to do? Do you apply yourself diligently in service for God both in the workplace and the church?
3. How are you approaching the Christian life? Are you self-reliant or God-reliant? Are you living by faith or by your own fleshly wisdom?
4. Do you acknowledge God and give Him thanks for His many blessings in your life?