

Genesis 30:25-43 As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. ²⁶ Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you.” ²⁷ But Laban said to him, “If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you. ²⁸ Name your wages, and I will give it.” ²⁹ Jacob said to him, “You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. ³⁰ For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?” ³¹ He said, “What shall I give you?” Jacob said, “You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it: ³² let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages. ³³ So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen.” ³⁴ Laban said, “Good! Let it be as you have said.” ³⁵ But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge of his sons. ³⁶ And he set a distance of three days’ journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban’s flock.

Genesis 30:25-43 | Jacob’s Wealth

We’ve spent a long time with the patriarchs now and its time to talk about their wealth.

When Abraham is called by God and promised the land of Canaan he immediately acts in a faithless manner and in the midst of a famine heads to Egypt. This takes place in Genesis 12. In Egypt Abraham becomes a man of great wealth sheep oxen, male and female donkeys, male and female servants (Gen 12:16). But he had tricked Pharaoh regarding his wife Sarai, saying that she was his sister. The Lord defends Sarai where Abraham didn’t and sends plagues upon Egypt and Abraham and Sarai are driven out of Egypt with great wealth.

Abraham’s son Isaac settled in Gerar, north of Egypt back in the land of Canaan. He told King Abimelech the same lie that his father Abraham had told regarding his wife Rebekah. He said that she was his sister, and upon discovering the lie Abimelech is deeply offended by being tricked but does not send Isaac out of the land but instead gives him protection. Soon thereafter, Isaac sows and reaps one hundred fold. “and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him (Gen 26:13-14). He is asked to leave by King Abimelech.

And here we are in Jacobs story. He is up way up north in the mountains of Haran, working for his father-in-law, Laban for the past 14 years and what he has to show for it are his wives and children. But beyond that he has only served to make Laban rich. If we follow the story we know that wealth is coming, and the way it comes in this circumstance is no less strange or divinely

guided than that of his fathers. Jacob like his father's before him is in a sort of exile surrounded by other kings, and wickedness and danger. But unlike his fathers Jacob plunders without deception. And also unlike his father's he faces the cruelty of the authority he is under.

1. Request to Depart

Genesis 30:25-26 As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country.
²⁶ Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you."

Echoing forward from the start of his trip was that dream in Bethel, where God promised to bring him back from where he was going. The call of God was always on Jacob's life to return him from Laban. The call and the responsibility met after the birth of Joseph, and it became clear to Jacob that now was the time to depart. If he was leaving like he had entered he might have left with nothing. But now he has a family to take care of, so he must barter for what he is owed.

Unfortunately he must barter with Laban, his father in law. Laban is a liar, greedy, and has for years extorted Jacob. Christians, it's like that out there. God uses the world to give you what you need. There is nowhere else to go. We must engage and it is dangerous out there. Wicked, evil, conniving, scheming, liars who desire to take advantage of you. Abraham knew that, so he became a liar as well in order to survive. Isaac knew that as well, so he also became a liar. Jacob is no stranger to deception. But in this case, he deals with the most wicked and maintains his integrity.

This is our calling as Christians. Not to disengage, which is impossible. Not to engage only in places that are safe, which is also impossible. Not to protect ourselves by adopting the strategies of the wicked, which is too lose ourselves. But to engage with the wicked and maintain our integrity because of our trust in the Lord. Jacob makes a deal.

2. A Lopsided Deal

Genesis 30:29-30 Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. ³⁰ For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?"

The first step in the deal was that Jacob had served this wicked man faithfully. This faithful service has led to Laban's abundance, but Jacob knows good things come from God so he does not arrogantly attribute the success to himself. In John's sermon from before Easter we saw that God had used Laban's wickedness in a precise application of discipline for Jacob, and here we are seeing the fruit. Jacob gained his integrity.

Now Jacob enters into a deal with Laban which puts him into a vulnerable position before Laban but also in a sense guarantees Laban's agreement. It is difficult to uncover the particulars of the arrangement in the text which seems to have become a bit convoluted in its transmission although is resolved in the LXX. The just of the deal is that Jacob would be set to take watch over and receive as a reward the speckled and spotted sheep and goats which are the minority of the flock. The reasoning was simple;

Genesis 30:33 So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen."

But remember of course Jacob is making a deal with Laban. Laban is a con man. So what should he have done? Not made a deal with him? There was no where else to go. Sometimes it's like that.

Genesis 30:35 But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge of his sons.

Laban did what Laban does. He created a con and removed all the striped speckled and spotted of the sheep from Jacob and sets them with his sons a three days journey away. The deck is stacked against Jacob for receiving any sort of reward. But Jacob adheres to the posture of a faithful servant, trusting that God will provide even in an unjust world.

1 Peter 2:18-19 Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

There are two ways of dealing with the wickedness of the world that cause you to become conformed to it. The first is what we see demonstrated by Abraham and Isaac and a younger Jacob. You become deceptive just like the world. You use the wickedness of others to justify your own wickedness, or you set up your own wicked defenses to keep you safe from the wickedness of others. This is a way of enduring which denies God's coming justice and takes it only for yourself.

The second is to victimize yourself as a perpetual doormat so that you can be certain you will never gain in a world that is so wicked. Your victimization becomes a substitute for your righteousness, and you consider yourself justified because you always get pushed around and never advocate for yourself. This is a way of enduring which is not being mindful of God, but is rather being mindful of yourself. But there is another way, which Jacob here demonstrates, that depends on God while working for the what is good.

2. A Miraculous Provision

Genesis 30:39 the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted.

Okay this is weird. But Jacob carves some sticks to look striped and speckled and places them in front of the water where the sheep drink and mate. Then when the sheep breed, although they are plain colored, they have striped and speckled offspring, which means they belong to Jacob. And the result over 6 more years is the same as the prosperity of Abraham and Isaac.

Genesis 30:43 Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Did that work? Does that work? I don't know much about animal husbandry (I went to CU not CSU), but I don't think this is a very reliable method. But I do think that God attended the efforts of Jacob to make good for his family. And you know what Jacob thought that too. In Chapter 31 he describes the situation like this:

Genesis 31:7–8 God did not permit him to harm me. 8 If he said, 'The spotted shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore striped.

God was the one who protected Jacob in the midst of the dangerous world and in deals that were stacked against him, it was God who apportioned his outcome.

1 Peter 2:21-25 For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.