

Introduction

1. I've been doing IT work for a LONG time (some 45 years) so I'm feeling pretty confident in my knowledge, skills and abilities:
 - a. I've exercised these things really diligently over the years and it's provided me with a certain amount of success
 - b. However, I also realize that I can't take credit for much of what's happened in my career; there have been way to many instances where I've seen God's hand at work, including times when I literally had to ask for God's help in solving an issue I just couldn't do on my own
2. One of the aspects I've always loved about my job has been helping others find more efficient ways of doing their jobs or helping them to be productive:
 - a. I can point to all kinds of ways that the company I work for, and the employees I serve, have benefited by what I do; as God has blessed me in my job, they have been blessed
 - b. Now, sometimes I've been rewarded for this, like through raises or bonuses
 - c. But, there have also been times when I've been mistreated in my job, and even times when I've been cheated
 - d. But, God has always taken care of me
3. Today we're going to see these things reflected in Jacob's service to Laban:
 - a. First, we'll see how God blessed Laban on account of Jacob, but how Jacob was also mistreated and even cheated by Laban
 - b. Second, we'll see how God blessed Jacob in spite of Laban's unfair treatment

A. God blessed Laban on account of Jacob (READ 30:25-36)

1. Jacob desired to return home after serving Laban for at least 14 years (30:25-26)
2. However, Yahweh had blessed Laban on account of Jacob so he begged him to stay and continue to work for him (30:27-33):
 - a. Laban knew that Yahweh had blessed him on account of Jacob (RE-READ 30:27-28):
 - b. Jacob also recognized that Yahweh had blessed Laban on account of him (RE-READ 30:29-30a):
 - c. But, there was a problem: while Laban's estate had grown tremendously, Jacob had not been able to do anything for his own family (30:30b): **"But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?"**:
 - 1) Jacob was referring to building his own estate that could be passed down to his children
 - 2) He had two wives and 12 children (11 boys, one girl) but had no wealth or possession of his own

- 3) It's important to remember that he had been working the past 14 years simply to pay off the dowry for Leah and Rachel; he was essentially an indentured servant to Laban
3. Jacob agreed to continue shepherding Laban's flocks under one condition: that he would get to keep the irregular (multicolored) sheep and goats as his own (30:31-33):
 - a. Earlier (30:28), Laban said to Jacob, **"Name me your wages, and I will give it"** and he repeats something similar here (30:31): **"What shall I give you?"**
 - b. Some commentators suggest that it was common for someone in Jacob's situation to demand as much as 20 percent of the flock as his own, but Jacob didn't appear to do that:
 - 1) Instead, he asked to go through Laban's flock and pick out **"every speckled and spotted sheep and every black one among the lambs and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and such shall be my wages"** (30:32):
 - a) Sheep were generally all white, and goats all black, but due to genetic mutation, some sheep and goats would be born spottle or speckled, and some sheep would even be born all black
 - b) There's no way to know how many of Laban's flock fit this description but most believe it was only a small number
 - 2) Based on v. 33, this also included any future sheep or goats that were born (RE-READ)
4. Laban agreed to Jacob's proposal, but deceived him once again (READ 30:34-36):
 - a. At first read, v. 35 suggests that Jacob went through Laban's flocks, separated out the stripped, speckled and spotted sheep and goats, and all the black sheep, and gave them to his sons to shepherd
 - b. However, the **"he"** in both 35 and 36 refer to Laban—he's the one who separated the sheep and goats and gave them to his sons
 - c. He also put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob—presumably with his sons and the flock of irregular sheep to prevent them from mating with the pure white sheep and pure black lambs that would remain in Jacob's care to prevent more irregular sheep and goats from being born and thereby going to Jacob
5. Takeaway (2):
 - a. The first is that when we serve others, God often blesses them on account of us:
 - 1) We certainly know this is true when it comes to serving other believers; in fact the Bible calls us to that (Galatians 5:13): **"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh; but through love serve one another."**
 - 2) But, what about when we serve non-believers? Does God bless them?
 - a) We're not exactly sure where Laban was spiritually, but God blessed him on account of Jacob

- b) When Joseph served the Egyptian official Potiphar by managing his household, Genesis 39:5 says, **“the LORD blessed the Egyptian’s house on account of Joseph, thus the LORD’S blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field.”**
 - c) When Daniel served the pagan King Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon, it led to the ultimate blessing for the King--salvation (READ Daniel 4:34-37)
- 3) I’m sure if we thought about it, we’d be able to come up with examples in our own life where God extended His blessings to those we’ve served on account of our faithfulness to Him (e.g. at work, volunteer opportunities, ministry, etc.)
- b. The second is that when we serve those who are unsaved, it may involve sacrifice and may cost us something like it did Jacob (not being able to build his own estate)

<p>B. God blessed Jacob in spite of Laban’s unfair treatment (30:37-31:16)</p>

1. Even though Laban had deceived Jacob and removed all the multicolored sheep and goats from his flocks, they continued to produce multicolored lambs under Jacob’s care which ultimately made Jacob wealthy (READ 30:37-43)
 - a. This is a controversial passage because it seems to suggest that Jacob engaged in some kind of superstitious hocus-pocus by making the animals stare at striped sticks so they would have multicolored offspring
 - b. However, let’s look at what the text actually says:
 - 1) Jacob gathered rods (branches) from three different types of trees—poplar, almond and plane—and stripped off some of the bark leaving the rods with white stripes in them and exposing the bare wood
 - 2) He then placed the rods into the water troughs in front of the flocks where they would come to drink
 - 3) What happened next is a bit unclear:
 - a) Some translations suggest that the ewes would simply come to the water trough and mate (NAU)
 - b) Other translations suggest Jacob would put the rods in the water when the ewes were in heat so they would mate (NET)
 - c) Still others, like the LXX, suggest that the ewes would go into heat when they came to drink at the troughs
 - 4) The text also tells us that Jacob only put the rods in the water when the **“stronger”** ewes came to drink, but not the more **“feeble”** or weaker ones (no time to get into this but likely a reference to the more sexually aggressive ewes)
 - 5) The result of all this was that the ewes conceived and gave birth to strong, multicolored lambs, which per his agreement with Laban Jacob would separate out for himself and add to his own flocks

- c. Jacob wasn't engaging in anything superstitious, but rather practicing good animal husbandry:
 - 1) Answers in Genesis has an excellent article on the medical benefits of the trees that Jacob selected for his rods
 - 2) Some of which include enhancing health, inducing heat, and increasing fertility in animals
 - 3) And, this lead to Jacob becoming **"exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys."**
- 2. If the story stopped here, we'd be left to think that Jacob's success was all due to his own skills and abilities, but we learn next that the LORD was behind it all the time (31:1-16):
 - a. God caused Jacob's wealth and possessions to increase and Laban's to decrease (READ 31:1-5):
 - 1) Laban's sons accused Jacob of wrongdoing but the passage doesn't indicate that he did anything wrong: **"Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth"**
 - 2) Later in v. 19 we read that God was the one behind this transfer of wealth (READ),
 - 3) Even Laban's daughters recognized that God was what occurred (READ 31:14-16)
 - b. God prevented Laban from cheating Jacob out of what he was owed (READ 31:6-9):
 - 1) Laban repeatedly changed the details of their agreement in an effort to cheat Jacob by reducing his wages...and he did this TEN times
 - a) The original agreement was that Jacob got to keep any of the spotted, speckled, or stripped animals born to Laban's flocks, but then he changed it to only the speckled, then only the spotted, etc.
 - b) However, each time Laban changed the agreement, the type of lambs that were born changed: when Laban decided that Jacob could only keep the speckled, then only speckled would be born; when he changed it to only spotted, then only spotted would be born!
 - 2) We learn in the next few verses that God was keenly aware of Laban's cheating ways and supernaturally directed the mating of the animals and birth of the lambs (READ 31:10-13):
 - a) Laban had removed all the multicolored animals from his flock, likely thinking it would prevent any multicolored lambs from being born and thereby avoid having to give Jacob what he promised
 - b) However, genetics are a funny thing: even all white sheep and all black goats can carry the recessive genes for producing multicolored offspring and guess Who controls the genetic?
 - If you remember back to your high school days you may recall learning about phenotypes and genotypes, dominant and recessive genes, heterozygous vs homozygous—all the stuff most of us have long forgotten

- You may also remember that someone with say blond hair can still have the gene for dark hair in their genetic code and can pass it along to their children
- You may even remember the exercises where you would put together a table with all the possible gene pairings for things like eye or hair color (two dominant genes, a mix of dominant and recessive genes, two recessive genes, etc.) and then calculate what the chances were that someone would be born with blond hair or blue eyes
- Well, some who know a lot more about sheep and goat genetics that me speculate that under normal circumstances no more that 25% of the offspring of Laban's white sheep and black goats would be multicolored
- And yet, the text indicates that all of their offspring were multicolored, and at times some were only speckled or spotted—that's SUPERNATURAL!

3. Takeaway (2):

- a. The first is that when we serve others like Jacob did Laban, even if it costs us something (like it initially did Jacob), or even if we're mistreated or don't get what's rightfully ours, God sees it all and will take care of us
- b. The second is that we should work diligently with the abilities, skills, and gifts God has given to us, but we should also recognize that ultimately any success we have should be credited to God:
 - I am reminded of something James warned the rich about in his letter (James 4:13-15 (READ))
 - Proverbs 16:9: **"The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps"**
 - But, the Bible also says, **"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve."** (Colossians 3:23-24)