

SERMON APPLICATION GUIDE

The message this weekend is based on four scenes in Genesis 29-31. This guide will help you and your group study the two final scenes from Genesis 30:25 through the end of chapter 31.

GENESIS 30-31

PREVIEW

What happens when the schemer who schemed the other schemer tries to scheme the schemer as he leaves the schemer? If you think that sentence is a mess, just read this story.

Jacob and Rachel have finally conceived, and Joseph has been born. In so many ways, Jacob's original journey is complete. He's found the wife he wanted and started a family. But, as with everything between Jacob and Laban, it's not going to be quite that easy.

As we start this section of the narrative, Jacob tells Laban that the time has come for him to return back to the land of his father Isaac. There's a quick negotiation about what Jacob should receive as a reward for his lengthy and fruitful employment that results in a deal. Jacob will work the flocks a bit longer and take any of the speckled or spotted sheep and goats and any black lambs. Seems like everyone agrees. If only it were done there.

Laban quickly removes from his flocks all the animals that would go to Jacob and moves them to his sons' flocks. Imagine promising to give your son-in-law any car he can find in your garage and then moving all your cars to your actual sons' garages three states away. It's kind of like that.

Starting in Genesis 29:37, Jacob is going to do a rather bizarre thing to get the pure, unspeckled animals to produce speckled and spotted offspring. But not just that, Jacob breeds the stronger animals together for his benefit and the weaker animals together for Laban. And it works!

Was it Jacob that made that happen - or was it God? And how much is God involved in all this anyway? Who comes out ahead when Jacob and Laban scheme each other? And perhaps more importantly, why?

STUDY

Read Genesis 31:1 - 16. Look for God's involvement as you read. Who was it that enriched Jacob's efforts?

Given the whole scope of Scripture, how would you describe the interaction between our efforts and God's activity?

Read Genesis 31:17-55. Look for the motivation for each of these men. What is driving Jacob? What is driving Laban?

Where do you see God's involvement in the conclusion to this part of the story?

ASSESS + APPLY

Neither Jacob, Rachel, nor Laban come across looking great in this story. They're all trying to make it happen for themselves, but we see how much God was actively involved in making it happen. What do you think God was after in enriching Jacob and Rachel?

How often do you stop to thank God for how He has multiplied your efforts?

In what ways can you redirect your activity toward the glory of God and the fulfillment of His purposes and not just your own personal enrichment?

FOR FURTHER STUDY...

BEHIND THE SCENES

"When Jacob appealed to Laban for permission to go home, Laban bargained for him to stay (vv. 27-28, 31). Here was diplomacy - two leaders cautiously on their guard as they negotiated. Laban stated he had learned by that God had prospered him because of Jacob. He may have looked for omens or may have simply perceived. Dark-colored sheep were an omen for good, and perhaps an inordinate amount of them spoke of this (v. 32). Jacob agreed that God had blessed Laban (v. 30). Thus, Jacob proposed a plan by which (ostensibly) he would gain little. He would receive as wages for his work the black and multicolored goats—the rarer kind—and speckled and spotted sheep which would be born. Laban thought this over and quickly closed the deal (v. 34). He could see only advantages for himself. Jacob's plan was most risky. Nevertheless, he was looking out for his own interests, hoping to prosper from this. But Laban's ploy added to the risk. For greater security, Laban immediately removed all the animals of abnormal color, giving them to his sons and not to Jacob. And as an additional precaution he placed a three-day journey between them. Thus, he was seeking to ensure that Jacob would have a difficult time acquiring a large herd.

God chooses to bless Jacob in an unusual way. Here there is a wordplay on the name Laban for as Jacob peeled back the bark on the sticks and exposed the white (*lābān*), he saw his flocks grow. He played the Laban game and won. Clearly, as Jacob later admitted (31:7-12), God intervened to fulfill the expectations Jacob had in the branches. The peeled branches, placed in the watering troughs, appeared to make his animals reproductive as they mated in front of the troughs. In addition, Jacob used selective breeding by mating the stronger animals for himself and the weak female goats and sheep for Laban. But this was not the only time God's part in Jacob's success was much greater than it seemed to an observer.

So, Jacob was greatly prospered (30:43) in fulfillment of God's promise at Bethel, and at the expense of Laban, who now received in part the recompense due him. A fascinating struggle developed between Jacob and Laban. Laban's injustice and artifice preceded Jacob's project, just as Isaac's attempt to bless Esau had earlier prompted Jacob's deception. In both cases the attempt to defraud Jacob was actually overcome by Jacob. Afterward, however, Jacob viewed his real gain as divine blessing, though he had to accept the effects (fear and danger) of his craftiness"

Edited from the Bible Knowledge Commentary.

5 DAY READING PLAN

DAY 1

Genesis 29:1 - 30

*What does it say?
What does it mean?
How should I respond?*

DAY 2

Genesis 29:31 - 30:24

*What does it say?
What does it mean?
How should I respond?*

DAY 3

Genesis 30:25 - 43

*What does it say?
What does it mean?
How should I respond?*

DAY 4

Genesis 31:1 - 16

*What does it say?
What does it mean?
How should I respond?*

DAY 5

Genesis 31:17 - 55

*What does it say?
What does it mean?
How should I respond?*