

GENESIS: Where Grace Begins

Jacob's Unusual Prosperity – Genesis 30, Part 2

Context:

20 years ago:

¹⁰ Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ And he came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. ¹² And he dreamed, and behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it! ¹³ And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." ¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Genesis 28:10-17

Present time:

Jacob is now the father a large family but still lives under Laban's dominance and in Laban's household. It was never his intent to serve under Laban indefinitely, but now having been in his service for some 20 years, Jacob seeks an opportunity to begin leading his own family apart from his uncle. Plus, Jacob realizes that though he has labored long and well for Laban, he has very little to show for it. Laban, on the other hand, rightly recognizes that his prosperity has been because of Jacob. So now he asks Jacob to stay and continue to manage his flocks, and Laban promises to allow Jacob to name his wages if he will. Jacob proposes a solution in which he will stay and manage Laban's flock for what seems like a small fee and one which is seemingly impossible to cheat on.

²⁵ **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 30:25-36

This looks – on the surface – to be a very *bad deal* for Jacob ...

- Majority of flock was presumably pure white or pure black; Laban assumes that will continue.
- After he removes Jacob’s small flock (which he had his sons keep), Laban thinks they cannot influence his flock.
- To Laban, it looks like Jacob will depart from him with small motley flock at best and he would continue to enjoy prosperity at little cost.

Is what happens next mere folklore? Myth? Nonsense? Or is there more to what Jacob does?

³⁷ Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. ³⁸ He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is, the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, ³⁹ the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. ⁴⁰ And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban’s flock. ⁴¹ Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock, that they might breed among the sticks, ⁴² but for the feebler of the flock he would not lay them there. So the feebler would be Laban’s, and the stronger Jacob’s. ⁴³ Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Genesis 30:25-43

Taken from <https://answersingenesis.org/genetics/animal-genetics/jacobs-odd-breeding-program-genesis-30/> by Troy Lacey:

“Most people tend to focus on verses 40–41 which (in English) use the phrases which are translated as “set the faces of the flocks toward” and “before the eyes of the flock” and conclude that Jacob’s breeding program relied on getting the flocks to look at the peeled branches (sticks). But they miss the importance of verse 38 which states that Jacob put the peeled sticks in the watering trough and that the flocks bred right near those troughs. In fact, what is probably being alluded to is the fact that as the females drank water from the troughs, the males would come up behind them to mate. The lambs were likely placed in front of the watering troughs to keep the female animals focused in front of them while the males came up from behind and bred with them. Now the issue which then arises is that since Laban took all the striped, speckled, and mottled animals out of the flocks, how could the pure-color coated flocks start producing nothing but spotted and striped animals? This is where providential direction, medicinal herbs, and actual genetics comes into play.”

What did Jacob know?

"... intricate knowledge of the animals feeding and mating behaviors, medicine to keep such animals healthier, and an understanding of which animals had the genetic traits he needed to produce. ... Fortunately for Jacob, he did not need to know anything about genetics, all he had to do was obey God."

Is there science behind the "sticks"?

"There are several scientific journal papers that mention that the particular trees from which Jacob peeled sticks supposedly cure urogenital problems, reduce fevers, work as anti-inflammatories and aid in reducing reproductive disorders. All of these would make an animal healthier, and more likely to produce healthy offspring.

Many of the chemical compounds would still be beneficial even by simply steeping in water.

Several studies have been done on poplar and almond tree bark, leaves, nuts, and twigs (small diameter branches, or what Scripture called "sticks"), and they mentioned that sheep would eat these and that ewes especially benefitted from them. Also, many of the chemical compounds would still be beneficial even by simply steeping in water."

How are genetics at work here?

"... the principles of Mendelian genetics are applied to show how quickly the colour of the flock could have been changed by an experienced shepherd. After fourteen years of working with sheep, Jacob must have understood the importance of using rams with the desired characteristics to pass on these characteristics to some of the lambs. It is shown below that with the assumptions given, the colour of the animals could be changed into the form desired by Jacob over the period of six years." (From: "A Mendelian Interpretation of Jacob's Sheep by J.D. Pearson)

We find out later in the extended narrative that Jacob benefitted due to _____ from God. The whole context can be found in Genesis 31:7–18, but the basics can be found in Genesis 31:10–12.

¹⁰In the breeding season of the flock I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled. ¹¹Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!' ¹²And he said, 'Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.

Genesis 31:10-12

"Jacob was given advance knowledge of which animals would be born due to which animals were breeding. But wait, how could there be any spotted/striped animals to breed when they had already been removed by Laban? We need to keep in mind that this was a vision and that the striped/spotted animals were most likely God showing Jacob the underlying genetic makeup of

some of the flock. All Jacob did to perhaps “help” God’s providential breeding program was to ensure that either he gave certain animals herbal medicines to make them healthier and/or whatever animals seemed physically stronger were given the herbal remedies and extra feed (yes, the sticks could be consumed as feed by the animals) at breeding season and apparently solid animals (but which still contained the genetic information for stripes and spots) providentially produced more spotted ones.” (Troy Lacey)

So, what is the point of all of this?

1) God is honoring His _____ He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

More than just protecting Jacob from har, he has caused him to be _____ and _____.

2) God is dealing _____ with Laban who has been a manipulative deceiver from day 1.

Everything Laban does is cleverly designed to benefit him at Jacob’s expense.

3) Jacob must -once again – _____ to God and _____ Him. This is called _____.

4) Jacob – once again – learns that it is His _____ God who cares for, protects, and blesses him. If God promises to bless, nothing can _____ that blessing. If He chooses to withhold His blessing, there is nothing you can do to _____ or _____ it.

Jacob’s schemes have not ultimately prevailed. They may have benefitted him temporarily, but with Laban, he was outplayed. Only God can provide.

5) God is _____ Jacob from Laban’s control and sending him back to _____ where he belongs and where he will ...

a) deal with his past (specifically Esau)

b) get on with God’s program for his life – this is a testimony to God’s _____.