

## The God Who Provides (Genesis 30:25-31:18)

### Introduction

Over the last few weeks, we've seen through the life of Jacob in the Book of Genesis. Although, on the surface, the lives of the Old Testament saints seem vastly different from ours, if we scratch beneath the surface, we see many similarities. We've seen, through the life of Jacob, that God *saves sinners by grace* (Genesis 28:10-22), that *he transforms sinners by grace* (Genesis 29:1-30), and that *he captures their hearts by grace* (Genesis 29:31-30:24). Today, we're going to see, through Genesis 30:25-31:18 that *he also provides for sinners by that same grace*. You see this section is an account of how Jacob becomes very rich as God blesses him, even while he's a servant in Laban's household.

Now, before we get into this text, let me give us a word of caution. When we look at the material prosperity of Jacob, and the other patriarchs like Abraham, we need to be very careful not to see them as *just* material blessings. To do so would be fall into the trap of the so-called "*prosperity gospel*", which paints God out to be some kind of a cosmic Santa Claus. We need to see that God's blessings on Jacob are bound up in *spiritual* realities. The reason why Jacob is being blessed here is because God had in **Genesis 12:1-3**, promised to bless his grandfather Abraham and his descendants, and to make them a blessing to the nations: the Abrahamic Covenant. But, the reason why God promised to bless Abraham and his descendants goes back to **Genesis 1-**

3. In **Genesis 1** and **2**, God creates the world and everything in it and “*blesses*” everything; he places his favour on everything. But, in **Genesis 3**, humanity rebels against God. As a result, instead of “*blessing*”, there is now a curse on us, and on all creation: our relationship with God, with one another, and with the created order is now broken because we have sinned against God. **Genesis 4** to **11** shows sin and the effects of sin plunging humanity and the world into greater and greater despair. That is, until we reach **Genesis 12**, where God makes a promise to bless Abraham, and through Abraham’s descendants, bless the world. And so, God’s promise to bless Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob and all their descendants, is nothing short of a promise to reverse the effects of the fall in **Genesis 3**, remove the curse, and restore humanity and the world to God’s original blessed state! So, we need to see Jacob’s material prosperity in the broader context of these spiritual realities. On the other hand, we must not shy away from the fact that there *is* a material aspect to these blessings. To not recognise that is to fall into the other extreme, not a “*prosperity gospel*”, but a “*poverty mentality*” that unconsciously sees God as stingy and miserly, rather than incredibly gracious, merciful and generous. Even in the New Testament, there are physical realities to the blessing of God. In **Matthew 6:33**, Jesus says, “*seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you*” and if you look at the context of **Matthew 6**, “*all these things*” includes food, drink, clothing and shelter. Again in **Mark 10:29**, Jesus says, “*there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with*

*persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life*". Jesus says if you leave all of that behind, I will *never* short-change you *"in this time"*. Peter says in **2 Peter 1:3**, that God's *"divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness"*.

No friends, God blesses spiritually *and* materially, but *never* to feed our greed. In order to see this Biblical balance, we come to passage like what we have today, and we see both *how* God blesses, but also *why* he blesses. Let's look at 4 things about God blessings in this passage: God blesses **abundantly, honestly, graciously, and missionally**. Let's look at these 4 things in turn:

### **1. Abundantly**

We pick up the story in **Genesis 30:25**, after Rachel gives birth to Joseph. After serving Laban for 14 years, Jacob tells Laban that he wants to go home. But Laban, **verse 27**, is reluctant.

Why?

Laban says to Jacob, *"I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you."* Laban, Jacob's pagan father in law, worshipper of false gods, practitioner of divination somehow comes to the realisation that he has become wealthy because of Jacob! Jacob acknowledges this, **verse 30**, *"you had little before I came and it has increased abundantly and the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned."* Even when Jacob didn't have a penny to his name, the pagans

recognised that God's blessing and favour was upon him, because they benefited from it!

In the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, the Roman emperor Julian (AD 331–363) feared that Christians might take over his empire. He didn't fear their military might. He feared their acts of kindness! You see the Christians were taking care of the poor, including the poor among the pagans. Julian decided to launch a "love offensive" against them. He started a food distribution system and hostels for poor travellers. However, these programmes fizzled out. Why? Because he could not motivate his priests and officials to keep caring for the poor! Christians, on the other hand, seemed to have this abundantly reservoir of love that spilled over into the care for others, even pagans!

And friends, God is still doing that today. He blesses us abundantly, so that we in turn can be a blessing to even a hostile watching world!

But *secondly*, God blesses honestly.

## **2. Honestly**

In a plight to make him stay, Laban asked him, **verse 31**, *"What shall I give you?"*. Jacob answered, *"You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it."* He says to Laban, **verse 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 goats, and they shall be my wages..."* Now, typically sheep in this region were white, and goats were hued black or

brown. So Jacob is asking for the rare ones, which have been very few. The point here is that he's asking not just a fair share but also an honest and reasonable share. In so doing, he maintains his integrity, **verse 33**, *"...my honesty will answer for me..."* By God's grace, Jacob, the deceiver had become an honest man! And he knew that God would bless him through honest means. He did not need to scheme to be blessed. God has made an honest man out of Jacob, the deceiver and the swindler! Does that not give us hope as we struggle with our own sins?

And friends, because of that, we come to see that honesty and integrity must mark out our lives as God people. Not only because we should not be dishonest and underhanded, but because we don't need to. You see, often times, the reason why we think we need to resort to dishonest means, is because we think that we are the only ones fending for ourselves. We don't really believe that God loves us and is committed to us. Jacob, during his 14 years of hard labour under Laban, came to see, that in spite of all that, God loved him, God was gracious to him, and God would be the one to bless him. He didn't need to be dishonest.

And *thirdly*, God blesses graciously.

### **3. Graciously**

Look at what Laban does to Jacob after this! **Verse 35** says he removes all the odd coloured animals from the flock that Jacob tends, and gives them to his sons.

And then, **verse 36**, he sets a *“distance of three days’ journey”* between them so that *none* of these odd coloured flocks can wander into the flock that Jacob tends. He’s doing all he can to make sure Jacob gets nothing!

But then, in **verse 37-38**, Jacob responds by taking *“sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees”*, peeling off bits of bark to expose the white inside, and then putting these sticks where the flocks mate. And lo and behold, **verse 39**, they *“brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted”* offspring. These then were his. Then, he does some natural selection: in **verses 41 and 42**, he places the peeled sticks at the troughs only when the stronger animals mated, but not when the weaker ones did. In so doing, *“the feebler (flock) would be Laban’s, and the stronger Jacob’s.”*

Now, some of you are hearing this, and you’re bewildered. You’re saying to yourself, *“This makes no scientific sense! It sounds like some superstitious practice. How could I possibly believe the Bible?”*

I want to suggest to you that there’s something much more elegant taking place here. Your conclusion is exactly right; this does not make sense! But that’s precisely the author’s point! Jacob really *can’t* breed odd coloured animals by himself through these means.

Later on, in **Genesis 31, verses 9 to 13** Jacob explains to Leah and Rachel what was happening here. And that fills in the gap to our story. Turn with me to **Genesis 31 verse 9**, *“God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.”* God is the one who has done this. He

acknowledges that this is not natural but supernatural. He tells them, that God had met him in a dream, and said to him, **verses 12 and 13**, *“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. **I am the God of Bethel**, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me.”*

See what he’s saying here?

The reason the peeling of the sticks thing works is because God was behind it! In fact, God was the one to told Jacob to do it as an act of obedience and faith.

How do we know this?

God says to Jacob in **Genesis 31:13** *“I am the God of Bethel.”* Bethel was the place where God had first met Jacob in a dream (**Genesis 28**). Do you remember what Bethel’s original name was before Jacob renamed it? **Genesis 28:19**, *“the city was Luz at the first”*. Now come with me to **Genesis 30:37**: notice that some of the sticks came from *“almond... trees”* Do you know what the Hebrew word for “almond” is? It’s *“Luz”*! It’s a play on words! So Jacob is now taking *“Luz”* and doing exactly what the God who had met him at *“Luz”* had told him to do!

So, there’s no scientific basis to this practice. That’s the whole point! Jacob cannot get blessed through his own ingenuity. He must trust God to act supernaturally, by obeying, what on the surface seems rather silly.

All that to show that God blesses by grace not works. The 16<sup>th</sup> Century Reformer Calvin, put it this way, “ *[God] purposed to connect his grace with the labour and diligence of Jacob...*”

And we see God doing this elsewhere, don't we?

In **Joshua 6**, God tells the Israelites to march around the walls of Jericho seven times, blow a horn, raise a shout, and the walls come tumbling down. Does that really bring down walls? Of course not! God brings down walls. That was simply their act of trusting in God.

**2 Kings 5**. Naaman, the Syrian commander has leprosy. He goes to Elisha the prophet, and Elisha tells him to wash in the Jordan. He's furious. How ridiculous! “We have better rivers and waters in Damascus!” he says. But, Elisha does not relent, and when he does wash in the Jordan, he is healed. Why? That's how God chose to “*connect his grace with the labour*”. Washing in the Jordan was simply his act of trusting in God.

How about for us today?

God has given two gifts to the church that simply don't make sense: **Baptism** and the **Lord's Supper**. In baptism, God says, wash in this water, and it will be a sign and seal that you belong to me. There's nothing special about the water. But when we obey in faith, God uses it to bless us. Or in the Lord's Supper, God says, eat this bread and drink this wine, and it will be a sign and a seal that you continue to be mine. Again, nothing special about the bread and wine. But, friends, when eat and



drink in faith, God uses it to bless us in ways we might not fully understand!

Finally, God blesses for the sake of mission.

#### **4. Missionally**

In **Genesis 31:1-18**, we finally see that the reason why God blesses Jacob. Look at **Genesis 31:2**. After Jacob has gained all this wealth, God says to him, *“Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.”* After Jacob relays this message to Leah and Rachel in **verse 13**, they say to him in **verse 16**, *“All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do.”* God has blessed you with all this wealth, and so we must follow him.

What does going back to the land signify?

It’s joining God on his mission to save the world!

You see, God blessed Jacob only because he first promised to bless his grandfather Abraham in **Genesis 12:1-3**. And God blessed Abraham, so that *“all the families of the earth will be blessed”* through him. But God wants to bless the families of the earth because they are not under the curse of the fall (**Genesis 3**). So, God’s mission to bless the world is nothing short of his promise to reverse all that has gone wrong in this world, and to restore all things!

And here in **Genesis 31**, God is saying to Jacob, and to his family, *“It’s time. It’s time that you take your place in my plan and mission to save the world. My blessings in your life are a sign that I am with you; so don’t need to be afraid. So step out in faith...”*

And perhaps friends, that is what God is saying to some of you here too?

## **Conclusion**

And friends, the thing that will truly propel us out to join God in his mission... is to set our eyes on the greatest blessing he has given to us. **Romans 5:8** says, *“while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* Through Christ, we see God’s abundant, honest, and gracious desire to save us and bless us both now and forever! That is God’s greatest blessing to you! And **Romans 8:32** says, *“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* If he’s already given you his Son, you can be sure that he will withhold nothing good from you! And so you can... no you must, step up and step out to join him in his mission to the world. Amen.