

Genesis 30:25-43

Can We Really Trust God?

While the percentage of people in the US who identify themselves as having no religious belief is higher than it used to be, Americans still love the trappings of religion.

The dictionary defines trappings as, “the outward signs, features, or objects associated with a particular situation, role, or thing.”

They love the trappings, but they don’t always love the reality. Let me explain what I mean. MSNBC currently has a poll on their web site. The question is *Should the motto “In God We Trust” be removed from U.S. currency?*

Thirteen million people have voted in this poll and an overwhelming 86% say “No, we should keep it.”

I guess that’s encouraging, but I have a question. How many Americans really believe that God is trustworthy? It’s one thing to put the words on your currency. It’s another thing to really believe that you can trust God.

How many of those 11,274,885 people who answered “keep it,” actually trust God, and how many of them really just trust the money the words are printed on? I don’t know, at the rate our economy is going probably nobody’s going to be trusting the money soon!

But the fact is, most people find it easier to trust cash than to trust God. We find it easier to trust what we can see and touch, even if those things repeatedly fail us.

Can we really trust God?

Our study of Genesis has brought us to one of the most astounding accounts in the whole Bible. We’ve come to the life of Jacob. Jacob is a man appointed by God to be an heir of the promises of Abraham and a forefather to Israel and ultimately to Jesus Christ. He’s a man, as we saw last week, whose story literally spans half of the book of Genesis. This is definitely one important guy in the scope of the plan of God.

The Bible says if we really belong to God then we’re His child. Parents train and discipline their children. It’s part of what they do.

So to be a child of God means that we face the discipline and the teaching of our heavenly father. Proverbs 3:11,12 warns us:

My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction. For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.

To be a child of God means that we get the discipline of God, but that discipline is carried out in love. Last week we saw that discipline and discipleship are interrelated.

The New Testament Book of Hebrews picks up on this theme and says *God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness.*

No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:10-11 NIV)

Jacob is in the process of being trained by God. Along the way he's failed and faltered but finally that *harvest of righteousness and peace* is beginning to blossom.

This morning we have come to the last part of Genesis chapter 30, where we find the final phase of God's training period for Jacob.

Open Bibles to Genesis 30 page 29

Jacob had been promised by God that he would receive the blessing from his father Isaac even though his brother Esau was first in line. The blessing had to do with family privileges but it also had to do with who was in the line of Christ. There was a major spiritual dimension to this blessing.

Jacob doubted God and under pressure from his mother Rebekah he deceived his elderly, blind father into thinking that he was Esau and in a sense stole a blessing that really was suppose to belong to him in the first place.

This was tough on his dad but God used it as a rebuke in Isaac's life. Along with that though, it angered his brother. Esau just blew up. He said, "I'm going to kill my brother for stealing my inheritance."

Because of this, along with the fact of his father's concern that he not marry a Canaanite bride, a pagan woman from the area where they lived, Jacob left for Haran and the house of his Uncle Laban.

Laban, as it turns out is a selfish, dishonest, conniver who only cares for shekel and not for people.

But it's Laban that becomes a tool in God's hand to refine and purify Jacob. Laban becomes the fire that burns out the dross in Jacob's life. He's the chisel that God uses to knock off the rough edges and to smooth him out.

And if there's any encouraging message in the story of Jacob it is found in the New Testament book of Romans, chapter 8 verse 28. *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*

All things might not seem, so good as we go through them. But God causes all things to work together for our good.

Even Laban, as unscrupulous and dishonest a man as he was, could be used by God to bring good about in Jacob's life. Jacob ended up a better man, a more godly and spiritually sensitive man, because of his stay with Laban.

The total time that Jacob was with his uncle was 20 years.

During the first 7 years Jacob was tricked by his uncle into marrying Leah, when Jacob was actually in love with Rachel. He went ahead and married Rachel too, which caused a whole host of problems. Polygamy is not God's plan for marriage and reading through the first half of Genesis 30 will show you why.

By the end of the second 7 years Jacob has fathered 11 children by his two wives and their 2 handmaids.

And all this time God is using the events in Jacob's life to teach him to stop scheming and start walking by faith. Jacob's learned some hard, painful lessons. He's learned through the deception of Laban, the seriousness of his own deception of his own father, Isaac.

In the past 14 years he's learned to wait on God and to believe God's promises. Now, in the last 6 years of his time with Laban, Jacob is going to face one more test. Only this time he doesn't fail, but comes through strong.

I. When We Yield To God's Purposes For Life, We Develop Different Priorities

Verse 25 tells us... **Read 25**

When Joseph, the 11th son was born something happened to Rachel and Jacob.

Rachel finally called out in faith verse 24 to Jehovah, something she hasn't done up until this point, and Jacob finally thought seriously about his home.

He realized that Mesopotamia wasn't his real home. His home was 400 miles away in the land of promise. The birth of Joseph seems to have made him think of those messianic promises.

At last his convictions were stirred. He wanted to go back to the land that was rightfully his where God had put his name. So he approaches Laban. And I want you to notice the spirit in which he asks to go.

Read verse 26

Jacob has been maligned and put down by so many people, but that is usually because they're focusing in on his earlier exploits. There's no question, there was a time when he was immature in his faith and hadn't yet been disciplined by God.

The Jacob that we meet here is a different kind of man. He doesn't ask for a penny for himself. He just wants to leave. And he can point to the years of hard work he's put in with Laban as proof of his honesty.

Jacob's character, as refined by God, is finally starting to show. He's changed over the years, but Laban hasn't. And if there's ever been a doubt about Laban's true motives this passage ought to dispel it.

I. When We Yield To God's Purposes For Life, We Develop Different Priorities

II. When We Yield To God's Purposes For Life, We Face Opposition

Read verse 27

Two things about Laban's character stand out in verse 27.

First He's apparently not concerned about his daughters, just his retirement plan. He doesn't say "Stay, because I couldn't bear to leave my daughters or my grandchildren." He doesn't try to appeal to Jacob's emotions. His mind is on the money he'd lose if Jacob left.

You see, during the time that Jacob has been with Laban, Laban's flocks and herds have been multiplied many times over. Jacob's worked hard and God has blessed. Now Laban's about to loose his goose that is laying golden eggs and he doesn't want that to happen.

Laban isn't focused on the pain of loosing his daughters. His concern is with his pocket.

There is also a second thing in this verse that gives us insight into Laban

KJV and NKJ says, "I've learned by experience." The verb *nachash* actually means "I have sought an omen, I have learned through magic and divine action."

Interestingly the Hebrew word for "snake" is the noun form of the verb *nachash*. That old serpent the devil stands behind black magic and fortune telling and omens.

Even though Laban was Abraham's relative and had had some knowledge of Jehovah, he never really distinguished Yahweh from any of the gods and goddess he worshipped.

Laban had been perplexed by the fact that as soon as Jacob took over his flocks increased so much. So he says here, "I went out and learned by enchantment. I went to a soothsayer or some kind of oracle to find out the answer."

When he did it seems that God overruled his enchantments so that even through them he had gotten the message that Jacob was under the special care of Jehovah and that it was because of this that God had blessed him.

Laban didn't deny Jehovah, he just made him one of many gods and was usually careful to bring him up when he knew it would impress Jacob.

Well, Laban didn't want Jacob to leave and so he makes a proposition.

Read verse 28

Several of the commentaries come down hard on Jacob at this point. They see him giving in and sticking around to make a buck.

They see him being enticed away from leaving. I don't think that's the case because of the answer which Jacob gives.

And again Laban's greed is even shown in his offer. He says, "Name me your wages and I will give it." That sounds generous. But really it isn't. If he gave Jacob what he was worth, he'd lose a bundle. Jacob was a hard working, industrious man.

Laban let Jacob set his own wage because Jacob was modest and Laban knew he'd profit again. Once before, he had got the better bargain by letting Jacob name his own wages, so now he makes the same proposition again.

Jacob's answer is this.

Read verses 29 - 31 Through "anything"

I. When We Yield To God's Purposes For Life, We Develop Different Priorities

II. When We Yield To God's Purposes For Life, We'll Face Opposition

III. When We Yield To God's Purposes For Life, We Find Our Satisfaction In God Himself

Jacob knew why Laban's flocks and herds were doing so well. It was because of God. And yet Jacob never used that against Laban. He just kept right on working. Never asking for anything for himself.

Now, it is time to leave. All his commitments to Laban have been fulfilled, now it is time for Jacob to start providing for his own family.

Just to show you how far Jacob had come spiritually look at his answer to Laban's question, "What shall I give you?"

He says, "You shall not give me anything." He had learned that God would supply what he wanted him to have and he didn't want to be indebted to Laban in any way so Jacob made a proposition to Laban which would give God the opportunity to bless Jacob materially, like Laban had been blessed. And this would all take place without taking anything that belonged to Laban.

Now I'm sure Laban had expected Jacob to ask for some of his flocks and herds. And knowing Laban he would have been at least outwardly willing to promise him most anything.

Instead Jacob agrees to shepherd and supervise Laban's flocks, exactly as he had been doing, and his pay would consist of those animals that would be born who had undesirable markings.

This way it would be entirely up to God as to how many animals would become Jacob's.

He says in verse 31... **Read verses 31- 36**

In the orient in general, and especially in Mesopotamia, the dominant color traits are white for sheep, black for goats, and brown for cattle. Speckled and spotted animals, along with brown sheep were uncommon and looked upon as less valuable.

At first reading you get the impression that Jacob was asking for all the multicolored animals out of Laban's flock. But what he was really saying was this -

“Take all these differently marked animals out and let me tend those that are left. Out of those that are left I'll take all the offspring that turn out marked.”

Talking about an offer that Laban couldn't refuse. I'm sure he's thinking, “Dude, I'd be an absolute moron to turn this offer down.”

With the marked flocks out, it wouldn't be very likely that the solid colored animals would bear spotted offspring, so how could Laban lose.

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IV. When We Yield To God's Purposes For Life, We Learn What It Means To Really Trust Him

Laban must have thought Jacob was a fool to make this kind of deal.

Now, although Jacob hadn't given Laban any reason to mistrust him, it's hard for dishonest people to trust anyone else and the deal was so unbelievably good from Laban's point of view that he thought there had to be catch to it.

Maybe while Jacob was alone with the flocks Jacob would bring the two together and allow them to interbreed to try and produce more marked lambs and kids.

Just to make sure that didn't happen Laban takes out all the speckled and spotted and gives them to his sons and has them keep 3 days distance.

All of this is so foreign to the way we usually think of Jacob. Usually it's the shady side of Jacob that stands out to us. But here after 14 years of God's dealing in his life is a man committed to a life of righteousness. He's ready to walk by faith.

He's ready to say, "If God wants me wealthy, he'll increase the spotted animals, and if God wants me poor he'll increase the solid colored animals. But in the end it is God's decision."

There's a couple of things we need to take into consideration here when it comes to these animals that will help us to see this from Jacob's perspective.

#1. It seems that although speckled sheep were of a lesser value in Mesopotamia where Laban lived, they were of more value back home in Canaan.

In Amos 1:1 shepherds are called *noqed*, which means "speckled" or "marked," the same word that is used here to describe the marked sheep and goats.

So the rare markings made them of more value back home.

#2. Jacob had been a shepherd. For the past 14 years he'd tended Laban's flocks. He knew enough to know that even though a species of animal may have certain dominant traits like solid color there are certain animals in every generation that exhibit recessive traits like spotting.

He might not have been able to use genetics to explain it but he knew it was true. Beside that he believed he could trust God to increase the proportion of them and then use those for future breeding.

Well, that brings us now to the most difficult part of this chapter.

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V. When We Yield To God's Purposes For Life, He Blesses Us His Way

Read verses 37 - 42

I can remember the first time I read this chapter. I thought "Whoa, wait a minute. What's going on here?"

When Jacob took partially peeled branches and placed them in the watering troughs so that they would be in front of the flocks when they came to drink did he honestly believe that would cause the offspring to be streaked and speckled?

Did Moses, who wrote this chapter, believe it? Is this just some old wives tale that was believed by people who didn't know any better and it got thrown in the Bible? What happened to the inspiration of God and the infallibility of scripture? There have been 3 main approaches to this problem

1. There are commentators who believe that Jacob honestly thought this would happen and that God kind of humored him and blessed him in spite of his superstition. The blessing had nothing to do with the branches.
2. A second group of commentators say that there might have been some physical reason for the sticks. Jacob was no fool. He had spent decades tending and observing animals. He knew their breeding habits. If nothing else the chemicals in the branches may have had something to do with the animals mating. Remember he put the branches into their water troughs.

Henry Morris points out that one of the chemical substances found in one of the branches has been used as an aphrodisiac in the East for thousands of years.

3. The 3rd view, is that it was God's idea to set out the striped branches, not Jacob's. See, if God commanded Jacob to do this, then it wasn't a physical deal to produce striped or spotted offspring, but a symbol of Jacob's faith and obedience.

It would have been a lot like the bronze serpent that God told Moses to put up in the wilderness when the people had been bitten by snakes. The people were dieing, they looked and they were healed. But they weren't healed by the snake. They were healed by God through faith expressed in their obedience in looking to the snake.

In a parallel, but not identical way, Jacob's trust in God would have been rewarded too.

In fact, if you'll look at the next chapter, God did speak to Jacob in a dream about the animals:

Read 31:10 - 13 through “me”

It could have very well been during that dream that God gave him the command to set out the striped branches as a visible testimony to his faith.

I like to look at chapter 30 as a pictures of faith in action. It wasn't long before the flocks and herds began to multiply and the kinds of animals Jacob wanted began to show up in large numbers.

To ensure quality he separated out the strong from the weak and to ensure quantity he put all the marked ones together to bred among themselves.

Soon his portion of the flock began to increase greatly, but not because of tricks, but as he later told Laban, because God chose to bless him.

So back in chapter 30 and verse 43...

When we yield to God's purposes for life He blesses us His way. You say, “Hey, wait a minute, I believe that Christ died for my sins and rose again. I've trusted Him as Savior. Not only that, but I'm really trying to live my life His way by the power of the Holy Spirit. I'm not exceedingly prosperous.

In fact, I just got laid off and I don't know how I'm going to pay my bills.”

God's blessings aren't always physical and material. He will take care of us. Psalm 37:25 says *I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.* Philippians 4:19 says, *And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.*

So God will meet our needs, but that doesn't mean we'll end up “exceedingly prosperous.”

Jacob was promised tangible things as a forefather of Israel. God blessed him with stuff. But the Bible says that our citizenship is in heaven. The Bible says that God wants to bless us spiritually if we'll only walk in His way.

Sometimes the struggles and the hardships of this life are there designed by God to teach us faith, just like they were for Jacob.

Here's a man whose gone from trickster and cheat to a man of faith and commitment.

How are you responding to those tough times? How are you responding to what God is working in your life? Have you learned the joy of walking in faith? Have you allowed God and His sufficiency to truly meet your needs?

God is more than trustworthy. The question is, do you trust Him?