



Blessed

God is faithful to bless His people.

GENESIS 30:25-34,41-43

What do you mean when you say to someone, “God bless you”? The idea of blessing is a major theme in the book of Genesis. It means to bestow favor or to fill with benefits. Often, God’s blessing was bestowed upon people not only to be a blessing to them, but for God to use them to be a blessing to others. It is important to remember that God is faithful to bless His people, and that one of the reasons He does is so that they also may be a blessing to others.

How has God been faithful to bless you? How do you think He wants to bless others through you?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

GENESIS 29:1–31:55

Genesis 29 is an example of the principle that one reaps what one sows. After receiving God’s promises to give him the land of Canaan, to be with him, protect him, provide for him, and to use him as a blessing to “all the families of the earth” (28:13-14), Jacob continued his journey to Haran. Haran was the home of Laban, his mother’s brother (27:43). Upon arrival, Jacob met Rachel at a well. This could have been the same well Abraham’s servant met Jacob’s mother, Rebekah (24:11-33), demonstrating that God was providentially at work in Jacob’s life just as He was in the lives of Abraham and Isaac. Rachel was Laban’s younger daughter of

two, and Jacob fell in love with her. So he struck a deal with Laban to work for him seven years to marry Rachel. When the seven years were complete, Laban deceived Jacob and gave him Leah instead. Yet because of Jacob's love for Rachel, he agreed to work another seven years for Rachel (29:1-28).

The Lord gave Leah children, but Rachel was unable to conceive. In rapid succession, Leah had four sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah (29:31-35). Because of her jealousy, Rachel gave Jacob her maidservant Bilhah to give Jacob children in her place, and Bilhah gave birth to Dan and Naphtali. Then, because she believed she no longer could have children, Leah gave her maidservant Zilpah to Jacob, and she gave birth to Gad and Asher. Following that, God showed more kindness to Leah and gave her two more sons, Issachar and Zebulun, along with a daughter named Dinah.

Finally, God answered Rachel's pleas to have children and gave her a son, whom she named Joseph. Having kept his commitments to Laban and being blessed with a large family, Jacob was ready to take his family and return home to the land of his fathers, the land of Canaan.

Read Genesis 30:25-34,41-43. How do these verses add to your understanding of the ways that God's faithfulness to His people impacts their thinking and their lives?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PAST (GEN. 30:25-30)

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?"

VERSE 25

Jacob had fulfilled his fourteen-year contract of service to *Laban*. God had blessed him with a large family of four wives and a dozen children and had finally enabled Rachel to have a son of her own, Joseph. Now Jacob was determined to take his family and return to the land of Canaan and claim the promises that God had made to him at Bethel (28:13-15). Therefore, with some intensity in how he worded it, Jacob demanded of Laban literally, "Send me and let me go to my place and my land!" This is similar to the words Abraham's servant spoke to Laban when he also was ready to return to Canaan with Rebekah. Perhaps Abraham's servant and Jacob used such pointed language because they both perceived Laban was going to try to make it difficult for them to leave.

VERSE 26

Three times in this verse Jacob used some form of the Hebrew word meaning "service" or "to serve," emphasizing that he had faithfully rendered his service to Laban. One could argue Laban had stolen seven years of Jacob's life, which sounds as though Laban treated Jacob like a slave instead of family.

According to the law God would give to Moses, when a Hebrew slave who had received a wife from his master had fulfilled his obligated time of service to his master, the slave was required to leave his wife and children with the master if the slave decided to leave. If the slave decided to stay, then he had to remain a slave (Ex. 21:3-6). However, Jacob was no slave. He was family, a man who fulfilled a groom's traditional marital dowry to the family for his bride. The Mosaic law also dictated that Hebrew slaves were to be treated well by their masters. Jacob had learned he could not trust Laban to treat him honorably even though Jacob was family.

In fact, Genesis 31:43 implies that Laban actually thought of Jacob more as his slave than as his son-in-law. Jacob was certainly shrewd enough and experienced enough himself to know this concerning Laban.

VERSES 27-28

Laban realized Jacob had served him well—so well that he did not want Jacob to leave and, consequently, to lose Jacob’s service. Laban disregarded Jacob’s request by offering no direct response to it. Instead, he used his religion and flattery to try to convince Jacob that he should stay. *If I have found favor in your sight* is what people in their culture often said before making a request to someone who appeared to have the upper hand in a situation (Gen. 18:3; 33:10; 47:29; 50:4). Laban recognized he was at a disadvantage in this situation because he no longer had leverage over Jacob.

Laban claimed that *by divination* he learned that Jacob was the reason the Lord had richly *blessed* him. *Divination* was the practice of attempting to read signs and omens in order to tell the future or to gain insight when making a decision. Various types of divination included analyzing liver spots from a sacrificed animal, inspecting human corpses, astrology, reading the movements of oil in water, and reading the formation of arrows or sticks when cast on the ground (see Ezek. 21:21). It is unclear what form of divination Laban used, but God condemned its practice in the Law of Moses (Deut. 18:10).

It was clear to Laban that the Lord had *blessed* him because of Jacob. This is another occasion in Genesis when someone recognized God’s blessing on them because of their relationship with the patriarchs. (See Gen. 26:28-29; 39:5,23.) Considering the kind of man Laban had shown himself to be, it is interesting to note that he was willing to admit that his wealth was because of Jacob and not himself. This also is evidence of Laban’s desperation to find a way to keep Jacob with him. The way Laban looked at the situation, he literally could not afford to let Jacob go. Therefore, he made a bold and desperate offer to Jacob: *Name your wages, and I will give it*. True to form, not even mentioning his daughters and grandchildren and missing them should they leave, Laban wanted to talk money. Also, Laban’s statement here echoes what he said to Jacob when Jacob first arrived at Laban’s home, and that did not go as well for Jacob as he expected (29:13-27).

VERSES 29-30

Jacob recognized he had the upper hand. After emphasizing the service he rendered unto Laban (v. 26), Jacob repeated it and reminded Laban how he had faithfully served him for fourteen years. Jacob also declared that Laban’s herds flourished under Jacob’s diligent and competent watch. What’s more, Jacob pointed out that Laban had *little* before Jacob had come to him. Jacob then repeated what must have caused Laban difficulty to admit: *the LORD has blessed you wherever I turned*.

Now that Jacob had been a blessing to Laban and his family, he was ready to be a blessing to his *own household*. This is ironic because Jacob’s family also was Laban’s family. Moreover, Jacob was communicating that he had earned the right for Laban to make the offer, “name your wages.” This anticipates Jacob’s offer to Laban.

How did Laban’s flock change while Jacob was watching them? Why did both Jacob and Laban credit God with the change in the flock?

How does God’s past blessings raise a person’s expectations for the future?

PRESENT (GEN. 30:31-34)

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.”

VERSE 31

Once again, reminiscent of Laban’s first deal to employ Jacob, Laban asked Jacob, *What shall I give you?* (See 29:15.) This time, Jacob was clear that he did not want Laban to give him anything. He was ready to earn whatever he could without giving Laban an opportunity to claim that Jacob was somehow indebted to him. However, Jacob said he was willing to continue shepherding Laban’s flock if Laban would be willing to do one thing as payment for his services.

VERSE 32

Jacob proposed that he go through all of Laban’s sheep and separate for himself the *speckled and spotted* sheep and *every black lamb* from among Laban’s *lambs* and the *spotted and speckled among the goats*. They would be Jacob’s wages for having shepherded Laban’s flock.

This must have seemed like a deal impossible for Laban to reject; normally, the sheep were mostly all white, and the goats were either all dark brown or black. Multi-colored versions of both sheep and goats were rare. So Jacob was asking for the uncommon varieties of Laban’s flock. It must have appeared to Laban that Jacob was offering his services to continue shepherding Laban’s flock for very little in pay.

How did Jacob’s actions demonstrate trust in God?

VERSES 33-34

Jacob declared that he welcomed Laban’s inspection of his flock to make sure Jacob’s flock had only the uncommon varieties of markings on them and not the common ones. No doubt Jacob knew Laban would be checking out his flock, so why not welcome it. This would avert any later accusations that Laban might bring against Jacob. Given Jacob’s duplicity when he stole the blessing Isaac intended to bestow on Esau, the irony of Jacob’s statement that *my honesty will answer for me* surely was not lost to Moses’s original audience. Nevertheless, this shows that God was at work in Jacob’s life. The deceiver was now seeking to be a man of integrity and accountability.

Laban readily agreed to Jacob’s proposal, but reminiscent of his tricky treatment of Jacob in the past, Laban devised another plan in an attempt to take advantage of Jacob (30:35). This time his goal would be to keep Jacob poor and dependent on him while continuing to build upon the wealth that Jacob had already caused him to acquire. Laban instructed his sons to remove all the irregular-marked sheep and goats that were already in his flock and drive them on a three-day journey away from their present location. This would keep Jacob from having them. It also would prevent these sheep and goats from producing any more irregular-marked animals in Laban’s flock.

What are some ways people demonstrate integrity? Why is it important?

BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible concordance and Bible dictionary to learn more about a feature of Israel's religious life.

Jacob shepherded sheep for his Uncle Laban. Use a concordance to make a list of people in the Bible who were shepherds. Read the article on "Shepherd(s)" in a Bible dictionary. What were the duties of a shepherd? Other than herders of sheep, to whom does the term shepherd apply? Read Psalm 23. What does the imagery of this psalm suggest to you about the Lord's care for His people?

FUTURE (GEN. 30:41-43)

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.

VERSES 41-43

Jacob placed the striped *sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock* as they would breed (vv. 37-38). This may have been part of an ancient folk custom. It is possible God instructed Jacob to do this in a dream (see 31:10). The result was that Jacob found a way for white sheep to give birth to specked and dark lambs, and for dark goats to produce spotted kids. Furthermore, Jacob only used the strongest females in the herd to mate near the multicolored branches, and he left the weaker females to breed in Laban's flock. Consequently, Jacob's herd grew stronger as Laban's became weaker. However this happened, God was ultimately responsible for Jacob's prosperity with his herd (31:10-13). Jacob discovered that while he had reaped what he sowed back in Canaan, God is a merciful and gracious God, and His discipline does not last forever.

God prospered Jacob, and Jacob *increased greatly*. In Hebrew, the root for *increased greatly* is the same word translated "spread abroad" in 28:14, when God promised in Jacob's dream at Bethel to bless Jacob just as He had blessed his grandfather and father before him. Jacob experienced God's faithfulness to keep His promises.

In what ways should God's faithfulness to bless His people impact the thinking and lives of His people?

KEY DOCTRINE: Stewardship

God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. (See Psalm 50:10-12; James 1:17-19.)

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers can be encouraged by God's past blessings.
- Believers should demonstrate honesty in every area, including their business dealings.
- Believers can celebrate God's blessings in their lives.

As a group, discuss how God uses His people to be a blessing to others. How might God use your Bible study group as instruments of His blessing?

Why is it important for believers to have integrity in their business dealings? Name some opportunities you will have in the coming week to demonstrate honesty and integrity.

Memorize Genesis 30:30.

PRAYER NEEDS
