

Lesson 13: November 25, 2018
God Blesses Jacob And His Family
Bible Background • GENESIS 30
Printed Text • GENESIS 30:22–32, 43 | Devotional Reading • PSALM 46

Obstacles and loss often block our efforts to accomplish something worthwhile. How can we overcome these setbacks in order to live lives that count for good? God intervened to help Jacob overcome seeming defeat by not only gaining many possessions but also escaping the wrath of a selfish and deceptive father-in-law.

Words You Should Know

- A. Supplant aqab (Heb.)— Take the place of another.
- B. Reproach cherpah (Heb.)—It also means shame, scorn, or disgrace.

Say It Correctly

- Laban. LAY-ban.
- Rachel. RAY-chel.

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: ANALYZE how God provided for Jacob and his family; IDENTIFY with Jacob's difficult family relationships; and PRAY for God's intervention in our own times of crisis.

In Focus

Judith was a lawyer who handled mergers and acquisitions litigation for an international firm. Eventually, the firm transferred her to the Brussels office, initially for three years. There was no promise of partnership, but there was the unspoken understanding that she wouldn't get on the track if she turned the transfer down.

She and the firm prospered in that time. But she felt a calling to do social justice work, one that had grown with every return visit to see her family and hometown. Judith felt now that she had done enough for the firm, and that it was time to go home, for good.

Mr. Kanigher, the senior partner, tried to dissuade her. "It's been wonderful having you here, Judith," he said. "I wish you wouldn't go. You've grown this office from a handful of people to millions in annual billables. It wouldn't have happened without you. What can I do to get you to stay? There's got to be something I can give you. Name it." Judith thought for a moment. "I'll tell you what," she said. "You commit to having each associate do pro bono cases for international legal aid groups, and give me the time to work any such case of my choosing."

Mr. Kanigher agreed! Judith returned to her office, sank back in her chair, and sighed. Now she could focus on her future.

Our service to others can take many forms. Are we using our talents as God would have us?

Keep in Mind

“And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb” (Genesis 30:22, KJV).

Focal Verses

KJV

Genesis 30:22 And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb.

23 And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach:

24 And she called his name Joseph; and said, The LORD shall add to me another son.

25 And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.

26 Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee.

27 And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake.

28 And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it.

29 And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me.

30 For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude; and the LORD hath blessed thee since my coming: and now when shall I provide for mine own house also?

31 And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock.

32 I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire.

43 And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.

NLT

Genesis 30:22 Then God remembered Rachel's plight and answered her prayers by enabling her to have children.

23 She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. "God has removed my disgrace," she said.

24 And she named him Joseph, for she said, "May the LORD add yet another son to my family."

25 Soon after Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Please release me so I can go home to my own country.

26 Let me take my wives and children, for I have earned them by serving you, and let me be on my way. You certainly know how hard I have worked for you."

27 "Please listen to me," Laban replied. "I have become wealthy, for the LORD has blessed me because of you.

28 Tell me how much I owe you. Whatever it is, I'll pay it."

29 Jacob replied, "You know how hard I've worked for you, and how your flocks and herds have grown under my care.

30 You had little indeed before I came, but your wealth has increased enormously. The LORD has blessed you through everything I've done. But now, what about me? When can I start providing for my own family?"

31 "What wages do you want?" Laban asked again. Jacob replied, "Don't give me anything. Just do this one thing, and I'll continue to tend and watch over your flocks.

32 Let me inspect your flocks today and remove all the sheep and goats that are speckled or spotted, along with all the black sheep. Give these to me as my wages.

43 As a result, Jacob became very wealthy, with large flocks of sheep and goats, female and male servants, and many camels and donkeys.

People, Places, and Times

Padan Aram. This is the region of Mesopotamia from south of the Amanus Mountains (in eastern Turkey) around the northern branches of the Euphrates River. This region comprised part of what is known as the Fertile Crescent, which stretches from the Persian Gulf to the Amanus Mountains back down the coast to Egypt.

Laban. He was the son of Bethuel, brother of Rebekah, and father of Leah and Rachel. Laban was a member of the segment of the family of Terah that remained in Haran when Abraham and Lot migrated to Canaan.

Background

After fleeing from Esau, Jacob would become well acquainted with God's discipline, at the hand of his uncle Laban. Laban repeatedly deceived Jacob. Ironically, Jacob, the "trickster" who supplanted custom by stealing the blessing and birthright from the firstborn, was fooled into marrying Leah, Laban's firstborn daughter, because of custom. Marrying Leah and Rachel, the daughter he loved, would cost Jacob fourteen years of labor—seven for which he volunteered to serve in exchange for Rachel's hand in marriage, and the other seven he was swindled into working.

However, an unintended outcome of Laban's deception was that it led to tension, envy, and competition between his daughters. Rachel was barren, but Leah was fruitful. Leah would personally bear six sons because "the Lord saw she was unloved, [and] He opened her womb" (29:31). In response to His grace, Leah would give her sons names that reflected her hope in and gratitude toward the Lord.

Rachel "envied her sister" (Genesis 30:1), using a Hebrew word here to describe an overwhelming sense of rage. After first demanding that Jacob "Give me children, or else I die!" she resorted to what was customary during ancient

Middle Eastern times. Rachel gave her slave, Bilhah, to Jacob as a surrogate, hoping she would produce an heir. She did. However, Leah responded by doing the same, giving over her slave, Zilpah. This competition would continue for years, with ten sons and one daughter being born by three women, before Rachel ever conceived her first child.

In what ways have you seen parents—your own or others—create sibling rivalry? How does it affect the entire family?

At a Glance and In Depth

At-A-Glance

1. Rachel Finally Conceives (Genesis 30:22–24)
2. Jacob's Increase (vv. 25–32, 43)

In Depth

1. Rachel Finally Conceives (Genesis 30:22–24)

After years of agonizingly watching Leah, Bilhah, and Zilpah give birth, God finally “remembered” and “listened to” Rachel, answering her years-long prayers by opening her womb. Rachel recognizes that her conception was a gift from God and names her son Joseph, which means “may He add,” and sounds similar to the Hebrew word meaning, “take away.” While she celebrated that God took away her disgrace by the birth of this son, she also boldly asked—by prayer and his naming— that God would grant her another son.

Joseph’s birth did not simply remove Rachel’s shame, but it firmly established her status in Jacob’s family. A barren wife, if not protected by her relatives, would often be shunned and discarded by her husband. Now that she had produced an heir, her relatives would have less cause for concern, which now provided Jacob with the freedom to move back to his homeland.

Many times, God does not answer our prayers immediately. In the midst of waiting for current ones, we forget what He has done in the past. What long-term prayers have you seen God answer in the past?

2. Jacob’s Increase (vv. 25–32, 43)

After years of shepherding Laban’s flocks and beginning his own family, Jacob was ready to establish his household and legacy. It was time to return to his homeland. His request to move on was met with resistance. Both Laban and Jacob recognized that Laban’s wealth increased as a result of God’s favor upon Jacob. Perhaps to add credibility, Laban claimed to have received this information through divination, which would later be recognized as a sin in Deuteronomy. Regardless of how he obtained the information, it is apparent that God revealed it.

Laban knew it was in his best interest to persuade Jacob to remain, so he selfishly sets out to negotiate wages with Jacob. It was customary for shepherds to receive 10 to 20 percent of livestock born in the flocks they cared for. Jacob requested the spotted, speckled and dark sheep, goats, and lambs, which were rare and less valuable than unblemished ones. His proposal would have given him fewer flocks, and made it obvious which animals belonged to him.

While this arrangement seems fair and appropriate and Laban agrees to the terms, the following passages reveal that Laban deceives Jacob (again). He removes those animals, decreasing the chances that more with those characteristics would be produced. But God would still bless Jacob. As time progressed, Jacob’s flocks were stronger and more plentiful. As promised, he became a rich man. The time to return to his home would soon come.

How have you seen God’s hand or blessing in your life in the face of opposition or challenges?

(Note: Remember that God’s blessings are not only financial.)

Search the Scriptures

1. Read Genesis 29:15 and 30:28. Why would Laban’s promise in the second verse have made Jacob cautious or distrustful?
2. In what ways do you see similar stories in the lives of the women in this family—Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel? How is Leah different?

Discuss the Meaning

1. Laban prospered because of the work Jacob did for him, but had to be told by an outside party that it was because of God’s favor. How are we blind to the ways God blesses us?
2. Rachel struggled with infertility which impacts many women today and can be a very difficult experience. How can we value women around us who cannot give birth? How can we affirm God’s faithfulness in the midst of such difficult situations?

Lesson in Our Society and Make it Happen

Liberating Lesson

Sometimes it seems that regardless of what a person or community does, they simply cannot get ahead. Opposition is ever present. The oppressed seem to never be able to rise above the oppression. But God tells a different story. Jacob’s story reminds us that it is impossible to thwart God’s plan. Neither Jacob nor Laban’s deception were capable of doing so. Yes, there were negative consequences, but God prevailed. Laban hid flocks, and Jacob used ingenuity to produce more. Jacob was tricked after seven years of labor, but worked seven more to get the wife he loved. And even the wife he was tricked into marrying would be the one to birth the leader of the tribe who brought us Jesus. God is firmly in control.

Application for Activation

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). A hallmark of the lives of these early patriarchs was that sooner or later they (and their wives) had to demonstrate faith—the belief that the God of the universe would keep His promises to make them into great nations, and bless them and others through them. Their faith informed their prayers. What things are you trusting God for that have yet to come to pass? Are there prayers that you have stopped praying because of disappointment or frustration? In what ways has your faith waned because of unanswered prayers? Meditate on Hebrews 11:1 and revisit those prayers, asking God to help your unbelief when you struggle.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light On The Text

Genesis 30:22–32, 43

Jacob had connived with his mother Rebekah to steal his father's blessing that traditionally belonged to his elder twin brother, Esau (Genesis 27:21–29). Esau is furious and plans to kill him. Aware of the plot, Rebekah advises Jacob to flee to her brother, Laban, in Haran until Esau's anger subsides. Furthermore, she did want Jacob to marry from the Canaanite women like his brother, making the flight even more crucial. Rebekah therefore convinces their father, Isaac, to send Jacob off to his uncle Laban's house. With a father's blessing and the specific instruction to take a wife from the daughters of Laban, Isaac sends Jacob to his uncle in Haran (Genesis 27:41–28:5).

Chapter 29 recounts what happened next. Jacob arrives in Haran and meets Rachel, his uncle's younger daughter, at the same well where the servant Eliezer met Jacob's mother, Rebekah, some years before (Genesis 24:15ff). Rachel introduces Jacob to her father (Jacob's uncle), Laban. Laban is excited and receives Jacob into his home. The older daughter is Leah. A month after Jacob arrived at his home, Laban asks Jacob to name his wages for his services. Because Jacob loves Rachel more than Leah, Jacob offers to serve his uncle seven years in order to marry Rachel. After the seven years, Laban tricks Jacob and gives Leah as his wife. But Jacob does not love Leah. So he decides to work seven more years for Rachel. After serving him for a week, Laban also gives Rachel in marriage to Jacob. Leah would have four children quickly after marriage, while Rachel had none.

Genesis 30:1–21 recounts how Rachel out of envy tries to manipulate the hand of God by giving Jacob her maid to have children for her. Leah does the same. Both maids had two sons each for their mistresses. Later Leah had two more sons and a daughter, Dinah. However, Rachel was still childless. Being a mother carried a high degree of honor in their culture, and barrenness carried dishonor. That is why Rachel said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die." At this, Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" (from Genesis 30:1–2).

22 And God remembered Rachel, and God hearkened to her and opened her womb.

23 And she conceived, and bare a son; and said, God hath taken away my reproach:

24 And she called his name Joseph; and said, The Lord shall add to me another son.

After all her human efforts to have her own children are exhausted, God remembers Rachel and hears her. It appears after Rachel could not get what she wanted because of her jealousy, anger, and manipulation (30:1–8), she then turns to prayer. She seems to have finally realized that children are a blessing that only God can give; it is to be received only by prayer through faith in God (e.g., Genesis 25:21; 1 Samuel 1:11). The Hebrew word *zakar* (zaw-KAR) means more than just “remember” as in “to bring to mind again”; it is also “to meditate on” and “to be mindful of or care for.” By implication here and earlier in the text (Genesis 29:31), God has shut Rachel’s womb (cf. 1 Samuel 1:6). The biblical use of the word “remember” is often used not just to recall a person, but to do so with concern and compassion. When God “remembers” his sons and daughters, it is with favor and care (Nehemiah 5:19; 13:31). Now God remembered Rachel and “hearkened to her” prayer.

The word “hearken” is the Hebrew *shama’* (shaw-MAH), that is “to hear with attention or interest,” “to listen attentively” or “to hear intelligently.” In other words, God listened with interest to Rachel or paid attention to her with the intent to answer her petition.

Consequently God “opened her womb.” The word “open” translates the Hebrew *pathach* (paw-THAKH), which paints a picture of something being untied. But here it appears God purposely shut her womb. Oftentimes, God uses a temporal infertility to demonstrate His sovereign authority over the affairs of His people (See Sarah, Genesis 16; Rebekah, 25; Hannah, 1 Samuel 1; Elizabeth, Luke 1:7). However, we cannot say for certain why God shut Rachel’s womb. After God allows Rachel to conceive and bare a child, she says that God has removed her reproach. The word “reproach” comes from the Hebrew *cherpah* (kher-PAW); it also means shame, scorn, or disgrace. That indicates that God’s giving her a child has removed the social stigma that barrenness had placed on her. Therefore she calls the son Joseph, (Heb. *Yoseph*, yo-SAFE), which means “may he add” from *yasaph* (yaw-SAHF), “to add.” There is a play on words here, as this verb and *’asaph* (Heb. *aw-SAHF*, take away) in the preceding clause (v. 23) sound so similar. The name presents the birth of this son in a two-fold light: removing the reproach of sterility and hoping for another son. While Rachel rejoices that God has removed the shame, she also prays, “May the LORD add yet another son to my family” (v. 24, NLT). This prayer was answered with the birth of Benjamin (“son of my right hand”). However, his delivery led to Rachel’s death (Genesis 35:16–20).

25 And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country. 26 Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served thee, and let me go: for thou knowest my service which I have done thee.

The birth of Joseph seems to mark the beginning of a new era in the life of Jacob and his family. Jacob’s agreement of fourteen years of service with Laban (his uncle and father-in-law) has been completed at the birth of his eleventh son, Joseph. His family has grown from one lone man who fled for his life from his brother (27:14–45) to a large family of two wives, two concubines, eleven sons, and a daughter (30:21). Although we don’t have record of his age at this time, Jacob is no longer a young man. Some have placed him at ninety-one years old at this time. But the most probable age would be seventy-four years (assuming he fled to Padan Aram at sixty years and served Laban for fourteen years). Whatever the age, Jacob felt it was time to return home to start a new life with his family in the country God promised him, Canaan.

Jacob approaches Laban after Joseph’s birth to ask for permission to move back to his people and country. The verse begins with the typical Hebrew word *wayehi* (wah-yeh-HEE), which is often translated “and it came to pass” (v. 25). This word connects the previous narrative with the next and signals its importance in the life story of this patriarch. It also gives the time frame of the events that follow. In other words, after Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob asks to go back to his own land and country, Canaan, where God’s promises to Abraham and his father Isaac as revealed to him would be fulfilled (Genesis 28:10–15).

Jacob had never regarded Haran as home. The Hebrew word Jacob used for “my own place” is maqom (maw-KOME); it means a standing place or place of abode. He wants to stand on his own and build his own home, not in Haran, but in the land where he was born and raised, Canaan. Until now he has been serving his father-in-law Laban. He now wants to branch out on his own and go home.

It is customary in Jewish and other cultures that after one has served for a number of years, his master will let him go with his blessings (Deuteronomy 15:12–18; Leviticus 25:39–55). Based on the cultural norms of the time, it appears Jacob is aware of his rights as an apprentice or servant. Therefore he asks Laban to allow him with his family “for whom I have served you” to leave. Jacob served Laban fourteen years, fulfilling his own part of the agreement with Laban, so it was time for him to leave with all his wives and children.

According to their tradition, the Jews regard Canaan as home regardless where they live. They always return to their homeland. Jacob requested that at death he should be taken back to Canaan and buried there, not in Egypt (Genesis 49:29–33). Joseph made a similar request from his brothers (Genesis 50:25). The Igbo of Nigeria have similar tradition. They always maintain connection with homeland and prefer to be carried home at death. Rarely would an Igbo regard a foreign land his “home”—they would use the cliché “home away from home” to describe their foreign place of abode. A similar idea is behind Jacob’s approach to Laban for permission to return to his country, and appropriately so because of the Lord’s covenant promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:7).

27 And Laban said unto him, I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry: for I have learned by experience that the Lord hath blessed me for thy sake. 28 And he said, Appoint me thy wages, and I will give it.

Laban is reluctant to allow Jacob and his family to go, though, not because he so much cares for them or would miss them. Rather it is because of what he can gain further from Jacob’s services and his God, Jehovah. He knows that the Lord God has blessed him and his flock because of Jacob. Laban is certainly

aware of God’s promises to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 12:3). So he asks Jacob to stay and serve him. He says to Jacob, “I pray thee, if I have found favour in thine eyes, tarry,” an appeal so strong that it would be difficult for Jacob to refuse.

Moreover, he tells Jacob that he had “learned by experience” that God blessed him because of Jacob. The word translated “learned by experience” here is the Hebrew nachash (naw- KHASH). It means to practice divination, observe signs or omens, or practice fortunetelling. All these are an abomination before the Lord and are strictly forbidden because it reflects pagan worship (Deuteronomy 18:10, 14). We can infer from this that Laban is not interested in the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he is interested in God’s blessings only. He worshiped idols (Genesis 31:19, 34–35). Nonetheless, Laban realized that it was because of Jacob that God blessed him. God will later use Joseph the same way in Egypt (Genesis 39:2–5). To make Jacob stay, Laban asks him to name his price and promises to pay it.

It is amazing how common it is that people would acknowledge the truth about God but still worship idols. It is equally interesting how the Lord could, because of one righteous man, bless other people. For example, He said if He could find ten righteous men in Sodom, He would not destroy the city (Genesis 18:32). It is also important to understand that the Lord often blesses people not because they are good or righteous, but because of who He is.

29 And he said unto him, Thou knowest how I have served thee, and how thy cattle was with me. 30 For it was little which thou hadst before I came, and it is now increased unto a multitude; and the Lord hath blessed thee since my coming: and now when shall I provide for mine own house also?

Jacob reminds Laban how faithful he had been to him and how his small flock has greatly increased since Jacob started serving him fourteen years ago. Reiterating Laban's earlier assertion, Jacob says, "and the Lord hath blessed thee since my coming." Jacob continues and rhetorically asks, "and now when shall I provide for mine own house also?" That is to say, "Isn't it time for me to find my way and build up my own family?" Notice while Laban attributes his blessing to the Lord using the practice of divination, Jacob credits it to the Lord through divine revelation (Genesis 28:13–15).

31 And he said, What shall I give thee? And Jacob said, Thou shalt not give me any thing: if thou wilt do this thing for me, I will again feed and keep thy flock: 32 I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire.

Desperate to get a direct answer, Laban repeats his question, "What shall I give thee?" He is prepared to give anything for Jacob to stay and continue serving him, so that the Lord would keep blessing him through Jacob. Laban is thinking only about himself. He wants Jacob to serve him in perpetuity so that he would be richer. The longer Jacob stays, the richer he would become because of God's blessing coming through Jacob. Only very few employers would like to see their good workers progress and let them go to stand on their own. Most would like to have their underlings in absolute servitude with no freedom, provided they themselves are enriched. They are afraid if they did, it would affect their business. They only think of the good they can get from their workers, and not the good of the workers. Here Laban epitomizes the selfish attitude of many rich employers and businesspeople toward their employees.

Although Laban always strives to get the upper hand, Jacob knows to be wary of him. It is because of Laban's trickery in breaking his initial deal with Jacob that his family is consumed with jealousy and rivalry. Jacob begins his reply saying, "Thou shalt not give me any thing." In that culture with strong family ties, the more Jacob accepts from Laban—even in the form of wages—the more indebted he will be to him. Hopefully, Jacob also realizes that just as the Lord blessed Laban since Jacob began to work for him, even so the Lord will continue to bless Jacob when he leaves Laban, even if Laban swindles him again. He is confident that the Lord is the one who will bless him, not Laban.

Jacob offers to continue to tend to Laban's flock on one condition. The kind of sheep that Jacob has been herding are normally all white and goats all black. The number of speckled and spotted animals would usually be few. Jacob offers to take only the speckled and spotted animals as his wages, while all the solid white sheep and solid black goats, which are greater in number, would belong to Laban. This way Jacob makes sure that Laban will accept his terms that seem generous, trusting in his own ingenuity and in the Lord to prosper him.

Laban accepts Jacob's proposal. He separates the animals accordingly. Laban hands over Jacob's animals to his own children; they took them to a three-day journey away from Jacob.

43 And the man increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses.

The narrator explains (vv. 33–42) how through wisdom and providence the Lord altered the course of nature in Jacob’s favor. Jacob’s flock greatly multiplies more than Laban’s to the envy of his children. Laban would repeatedly from time to time try to change the agreement, but each time Jacob’s flocks grew in number (Genesis 31:7). In the meantime, Jacob “increased exceedingly.” The verb “increased” is the Hebrew *parats* (paw- ROTS), which means to break out or to burst out. The adverb “exceedingly” comes from the Hebrew *me’od* (meh-ODE). It appears in double form in Hebrew here as *me’od me’od*, literally meaning “exceedingly, exceedingly,” to express how prosperous Jacob became. It expresses the intensity of Jacob’s wealth—he burst out exceedingly in exceeding wealth, not only in sheep and goats, but also in male and female servants, camels, and asses. As a result, he incurred the envy and anger of Laban and his family. But God was with Jacob and his family.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Jacob Marries Leah and Rachel
(Genesis 29:15–30)

TUESDAY

Leah Gives Birth to Four Sons
(Genesis 29:31–35)

WEDNESDAY

The God of Jacob Brings Victory
(Psalm 20)

THURSDAY

Jacob Steals His Family from Laban
(Genesis 31:1–9)

FRIDAY

Jacob and Laban Make Peace
(Genesis 31:43–50)

SATURDAY

Rachel Gives Birth to Two Sons
(Genesis 30:22–24; 35:16–21)

SUNDAY

Jacob Prospers at Laban's Expense
(Genesis 30:22–32, 43)