

Introduction

- Jacob finally decides to return to the promised land.
- Laban does not want to let him go because Jacob has made him rich.
- Jacob will be allowed to leave, but he can only take the rare spotted and striped sheep.
- Jacob engages in a weird stick ritual that results in lots of rare sheep being born.
- Jacob prepares to leave because of how God has blessed him.
- This strange story about sheep husbandry is about how human responsibility and God's sovereignty work together.

The Enemy's Work

- Jacob wants to return to the land of blessing, which is the right thing to do.
- Laban does not want to let him go and wants to keep the blessing for himself.
- Laban has deceived Jacob in the past with his daughters .
- Laban lied the last time Jacob asked for wages (30:28).
- Laban has changed Jacob's' wages 10 times (31:7).
- Laban culls the flock of all the spotted and striped sheep to cheat Jacob (30:35-36).
- Laban and his sons are angry Jacob has succeeded despite their opposition (31:1).
- Laban feels cheated and wants to harm Jacob (31:7).
- We face opposition from people, from the world, from the enemy.

Man's Work

- Jacob asks for a reasonable claim to some of the sheep, only the rare ones.
- Instead of trying to trick Laban, Jacob is willing for everything to be honest and transparent at personal cost to himself (30:31-32).
- Jacob goes to work trying to raise the kind of sheep he needs.
- The use of sticks during breeding is strange and what are we to make of it?
- The church fathers often interpreted it spiritually as foreshadowing the Trinity and baptism.
- Some secular scholars see it as a kind of old magic attempting to manipulate the sheep.
- I think there is some Hebrew wordplay going on here.
- Laban's name mean's "white." Jacob espouses the white (laban) flock of Laban to the rods of poplar (libneh) that Jacob peels white (laban) strips into. The words share the same three core Hebrew letters.
- Jacob instead gets the sheep that are "striped" (aqod) and "specked" (naqod) while Laban gets the white (laban).
- Jacob has changed and is now committed to obeying God.
- Jacob wants to return to the land because God commanded it.
- Jacob asks for the spotted sheep in response to God's command.

- This is one of Jacob's best moments. He humbly trusts God even while facing opposition and does the right thing.
- He is even submitting and asking Rachel and Leah if they are willing to go back to the promised land with him.
- How are we tempted to respond to the opposition we face?
- We can be tempted to fight back or to sin in order to win and overcome.
- We are tempted to rely on our own power to overcome.
- We can be tempted to do nothing and expect God to take care of everything.
- We should be faithful and do our part trusting that God will do His.

God's Work

- God is as in control of the wombs of sheep as he is of the wombs of women.
- God controls whether or not the sheep will be born with stripes, spots, or nothing.
- God has been blessing Jacob.
- God has been blessing Laban through Jacob (30:27, 30).
- Chapter 31 gives us the interaction through God's perspective and God's decree.
- God is the one who blesses Jacob and allows him to return to the promised land.
- God is blessing Jacob now as He blessed Abraham and Isaac (30:43).
- God protects Jacob from Laban's schemes and attempts to harm him.
- God was working all throughout chapter 30, not Jacob's hard work or magic.
- We should trust God even when His work seems imperceptible.

Our Work

- There is some natural tension between our human responsibility and God's sovereign control over the world.
- We are called to be faithful and obedient to God in every circumstance, while at the same time we acknowledge God is in control of the outcome of every circumstance.
- The Bible encourages us to be faithful in all things because we can trust God.
- The Bible warns us to be faithful in all things because we will be held responsible for our actions.
- My view is that God's sovereignty should encourage us to be faithful instead of give us anxiety or tension about the intricacies of our power in the universe.