

GENESIS

²⁵ After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. ²⁶ Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you."

²⁷ But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you." ²⁸ He added, "Name your wages, and I will pay them."

²⁹ Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. ³⁰ The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?"

³¹ "What shall I give you?" he asked.

"Don't give me anything," Jacob replied. "But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: ³² Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages. ³³ And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen."

³⁴ "Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said." ³⁵ That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons. ³⁶ Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks.

Genesis 30:25-36 [NIV]

After working for Laban for fourteen years, Jacob is ready to move back to his "own homeland" with his family. And, as usual, we see Laban wanting to keep Jacob around as long as possible.

Regarding Laban's request that Jacob stay with him, respond to the following:

1. Why does Laban want Jacob to stay? See Genesis 30:27.
 - a. ANSWER: Laban has nothing but selfish motives for keeping Jacob tending his flocks. Laban's wealth and his flocks have increased dramatically while Jacob has been his shepherd. However, he is not satisfied with this dramatic growth in wealth, so he wants even more. Do we see this type of behavior today as well? Of course we do; it's amazing that a large percentage of wealthy people never have enough wealth. The more wealth they accumulate, the more they want.
2. Nevertheless, what is wrong with Laban wanting Jacob to stay in order to increase his flocks and his wealth? See Hebrews 13:5.
 - a. ANSWER 1: Laban is not content with what the Lord has given him, and in fact, "through divination," Laban knows that God was blessing him through Jacob. In spite of this knowledge, however, we do not see Laban giving up his idols and following God. More on this shortly.
 - b. ANSWER 2: We need to remember that what we have—our children, our possessions, our jobs, etc.—is from the Lord, and He tells us to "be content with what we have." Laban's problem is that he will never have enough. He is not content with the wealth that he has, so he negotiates with Jacob to try to get him to stay. Little does Laban know that Jacob is no dummy, and Jacob has a plan for getting most of Laban's flocks to become his own. Deception is once again afoot.

Jacob now plays on Laban's desire for wealth and his desire to keep Jacob herding his flocks, and Jacob offers Laban a deal—a deal that would provide Jacob with all of Laban's defective sheep (flaws in color only, it turns out). Not realizing what he is agreeing to, Laban agrees to Jacob's proposal. Accordingly, two groups of sheep were separated: the piebald (black and white speckled or spotted) sheep were kept separate from Laban's unspotted sheep. All the while, Jacob had been shepherding both

types of flocks. Using the knowledge he had gained over fourteen years of herding and raising Laban's sheep, Jacob knew how to gradually turn a majority of Laban's sheep into the piebald variety.

37 Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches. 38 Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, 39 they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted. 40 Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-colored animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's animals. 41 Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches, 42 but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. 43 In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

Genesis 30:37-43 [NIV]

Respond to the following question:

3. How long after the first fourteen years does Jacob continue to work for Laban? Accordingly, how long did it take Jacob to convert all of the strong and healthy sheep in Laban's possession into the piebald sheep that now belonged to Jacob? See Genesis 31:38-41.
- a. ANSWER: We learn that Jacob had worked for Laban twenty years when he took his family and all his possessions and headed back to Bethel. This means that it took Joseph six years (20 years minus 14 years) to increase his heard with the piebald sheep.

Jacob's plan works very well and over time (six years), and "the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys." Of course, his success was not celebrated by everyone. The process Jacob used to grow the piebald sheep resulted in smaller, weaker, flocks of sheep for Laban and a great loss of wealth. Eventually Jacob's ploy and his success can't go unnoticed, and Jacob is told by God that it's time to head home.

1 Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, "Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father." 2 And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been.

3 Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."

4 So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were. 5 He said to them, "I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me. 6 You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength, 7 yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. 8 If he said, 'The speckled ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, 'The streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked young. 9 So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me. 10 "In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. 11 The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' 12 And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.'"

14 Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? 15 Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us. 16 Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you."

17 Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, 18 and he drove all his livestock ahead of him, along with all the goods

he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

¹⁹ When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods. ²⁰ Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away. ²¹ So he fled with all he had, crossed the Euphrates River, and headed for the hill country of Gilead.

Genesis 31:1-21 [NIV]

Laban of course was furious with Jacob and pursued him for one week going across the Euphrates and into Gilead. God intervenes for Jacob and warns Laban not to be harsh with Jacob. Here we see a truth: that while we may not want to believe in Jesus, while we may want to turn our hearts away from God, as Laban had done, it does not prevent God from acting. Even though Laban was a man with questionable ethics and walked with idols, God came and spoke to him, and Laban obeyed. You would think that after that encounter with God, Laban would have had a change of heart towards God and followed him, but that never happened. We see this in the world around us today as well. Even though there is unmistakable proof that God exists and that God is real, man continues to reject him.

Laban and Jacob have a hard, but direct, conversation about how harshly and unfairly Laban had treated Jacob the past twenty years; but Laban asserted that Jacob's wives and children were also Laban's daughters and grandchildren, and that Jacob was literally taking everything away from him. In the end, they made peace between them and their families. Laban returned to his home in Paddan Aram, and Jacob continued on toward Bethel. (Genesis 31:22-55)

Have a great week everyone!

In Christ,

Wes