

JACOB BUILDS HIS WEALTH

The God of Paddan Aram (II)

Genesis 30:25-31:55

Lesson 13c

Key Verse: 31:13

"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."

Jacob had worked for 14 years for Rachel, the woman he loved. During that time, he did not give any thought to gaining material things. But after Rachel gave birth to Joseph, his thinking changed. Chapter 30:25 says: "After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, 'Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. 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.'" He had sought the woman he loved and God had given him 4 wives and 11 children. But still he was a hired hand in the house of his father-in-law. He had not thought about material things, but now, a desire to make money and become independent arose in his heart. Jacob was a man who got what he set his heart on getting. He had gotten honor by wresting the birthright from Esau; he had gotten the woman he loved by his persistence. Now, he wanted to become rich.

1. When may I do something for my own household? (30:25-43)

During the 14 years of hard work for Laban, he had asked for nothing more than the hand of Rachel in marriage. Now, he began to think about how to build up his own house. He told Laban, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. 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?" (30:29-30) God had blessed Laban because Jacob was working for him. Laban knew this. It was time for a new contract. Laban was loath to let Jacob leave. He had prospered because of God's blessing and Jacob's hard work. So he proposed a new contract. He agreed to pay Jacob wages from then on.

Jacob asked for the inferior animals, those that were speckled or spotted or dark colored sheep or goats as his wages. It would be easy to tell Jacob's flocks from Laban's. Since most of the flock was white, Laban agreed to this. But before Jacob had a chance to look over the flocks and claim what Laban promised him, Laban culled the flocks and placed the speckled, spotted and dark colored sheep and goats in the care of his sons, and sent them a three-day's journey away.

Jacob was not daunted. He took care of his uncle's flocks and herds and used all his wits and skill to increase his own flocks. He put stripped sticks in the water troughs of the strongest and best of the

flock at mating time. (He didn't want to breed the weak, small ones for his own flocks.) He believed that if the animals saw spots and stripes at that time, it would influence the lambs and kids they bore. The efficacy of this primitive method genetic engineering is questionable, but anyway, God blessed Jacob's hard work and he prospered.

In spite of Laban's efforts to deceive and cheat him, Jacob's wealth increased. Laban changed his wages 10 times. When the flocks began to bear speckled young, Laban said that only the streaked young would be Jacob's. When they bore streaked young, then Laban changed his mind and said that the spotted ones would belong to Jacob. (31:4-12) But Jacob's flocks increased anyway.

Jacob had worked hard for Laban for 20 years. He was a faithful shepherd. He cared for the flocks day and night, in cold weather and in the blazing sun. The sheep and goats did not miscarry, but bore healthy young. He spent many sleepless nights watching over the flock. Jacob took personal responsibility for the animals that were killed or injured by wild beasts. He knew, however, that his success was due primarily to God's blessing. (31:38-42)

2. Jacob flees from Paddan Aram (31:1-3; 13-37; 43-55)

Six more years passed. Jacob realized that Laban and his sons' attitude toward him had changed. They were not happy to see Jacob grow

more and more wealthy. Jacob was ready to listen to God's word to him. 31:3 says, "Then the Lord said to Jacob, 'Go back to the land of your father and to your relatives, and I will be with you.'" Jacob remembered his vow. Look at 31:13: "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." God was closing the door in Paddan Aram. He wanted Jacob to return to the land of God's covenant promise. Jacob had promised God that if God would be with him and would provide for his needs and bring him back to his father's house safely, God would be his God and he would worship God at Bethel and give him a tithe of all his possessions. (28:20-22) God had been with Jacob in Paddan Aram and had protected him from his wily uncle. He had blessed him. Now it was time for him to return and keep his vow. Jacob was a faithful man. He was faithful to his human commitments, and he was faithful to God. He would keep his vow. God accepted Jacob's vow and through it had attached a long rope to Jacob. Jacob wandered far away, but he never severed his connection with God. Now God was pulling him back to God and to the land.

Jacob had a family council meeting. He explained his situation to his wives and they agreed with him and supported his decision to leave. He was still afraid of Laban, however. He didn't trust him. He knew that Laban would do everything possible to prevent his leaving. So he waited until Laban was out of town, and one day seized the opportunity and fled with his wives and children and all his possessions. He

crossed the river and headed for the hill country of Gilead. (17-21)

Jacob would have failed in his plan to escape from Paddan Aram, but God was with him. Laban caught up with him and would have stopped him. He tried to find some handle to take hold of to keep Jacob from leaving. He searched through everything that Jacob had, using the excuse that he was looking for his missing idols. Actually, Rachel had stolen the idols, but she cleverly concealed them and Laban failed to find them. After Laban had failed to find anything of which to accuse Jacob, Jacob confidently rebuked Laban, and reminded him of his own hard work. Jacob concluded his speech to Laban with these words: "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you." (31:42)

So Jacob and Laban agreed to part. They ate a covenant meal together and agreed not to trespass on the other's land and not to harm each other. Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them and left, and Jacob continued his journey home.

We can learn much from Jacob's diligence and from his hard-working spirit. He defeated the crafty and deceitful Laban by hard work and by depending on God. God blessed Jacob, so he could return home a wealthy man. He knew that his family and his wealth were his because of God's

blessing. Jacob still had an important lesson to learn. Human glory--honor, love, wealth-- cannot satisfy his soul. Jacob had to meet God. He needed a spiritual blessing. Now he was ready for it. God was Jacob's shepherd. He was patiently training Jacob, and waiting on him to learn to depend on God's blessing and God's presence rather than on his human cleverness--or even on his hard work and human faithfulness.

God is faithful. He reminded Jacob: "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." (31:13) As Jacob was setting out on his life of pilgrimage, God met him at Bethel. He renewed his promise with Abraham--the promise to give him descendants and land and the promise to bless all peoples on earth through him and his offspring. Specifically, God promised Jacob, "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I promised you." (28:13-15) Jacob had responded to God's promise with a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the Lord will be your God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth." (28:20-22) God had indeed been with him and had protected him. Jacob couldn't settle down in Paddan Aram. It was time to continue his pilgrimage. It was time to go home. Life is a pilgrimage. We must also live as aliens and

strangers in the world. Our destination is our Father's house (Jn 14:1-5). Jacob made a commitment to God, and established a covenant relationship with God through his vow. We must also make a commitment to God through repenting of our sins and accepting the new covenant in the blood of Jesus. When we do this, we set out on our life of pilgrimage. We may be sure that just as God was with Jacob throughout all of his pilgrimage, so he will be with us. The God of Jacob is faithful to those who are faithful. (2 Samuel 22:26) He is faithful to us when we are too weak to keep our promises. He helps us keep our vows, as he helped Jacob.