

PATRIARCHS: Lesson Six, Jacob the Deceiver ***Genesis 27-31***

Subject: Deceitful Jacob fled Canaan, met God, married, had sons, and fled again.

Main Idea: God prepares the hearts of imperfect and unlikely people for His service by allowing us to experience certain discomforts.

Principles:

1. *Vulnerability prepares people to hear from God.*
2. *God exposes the ugliness of our sin.*

Introduction

Charles (Chuck) Colson was an unlikely candidate for service in the Kingdom of Christ. Driven, intelligent, and unprincipled, he blindly chose to serve and seek the kingdom of political power. Ultimately, his “disregard for truth... brought a great nation to the edge of ruin.”¹

Colson’s political involvements began when, at just seventeen, he learned “lessons in campaign dirty tricks,”ⁱⁱ helping to elect a Massachusetts governor. After serving in the US Marine Corps, he graduated with honors from George Washington University Law School and opened his own law firm, continuing his political involvements. All of Chuck’s great accomplishments were matched by an equally great darkness of heart. He became known for his vicious, self-serving tactics.

Chuck is largely credited for the election and re-election of Richard Nixon to the United States presidency in 1968 and 1972. At only thirty-eight years of age, he was appointed “special counsel” to the President. Within the White House, he helped foster an atmosphere of ruthlessness, self-deceit, and disloyalty. He was known as “the White House hatchet man.”

Eventually, Chuck’s ways caught up with him. The same “viciousness and ruthlessness [that] had characterized the way Chuck had dealt with his political enemies” characterized the way *he* was treated by the special prosecutor who sought to implicate him in the well-known “Watergate Scandal.” “He was reaping what he had sown.”ⁱⁱⁱ That fact was further confirmed when, even after refusing a plea bargain and voluntarily pleading guilty, a judge showed Chuck no mercy, surprising everyone by imposing a maximum penalty on him. Chuck went to prison.

But God had been at His secret work in Chuck’s heart during the year the scandal was growing, making it fertile ground for Christ to reign and work. He was preparing Chuck Colson to serve a new Master. By the time he went to prison, Chuck had turned his life over to Jesus Christ.

One day while reading his Bible in prison, Chuck realized (in the words of biographer Eric Metaxas) that if Jesus was “not ashamed to call human beings his brothers, perhaps the high-and-mighty Chuck Colson, who had had an office next to the president of the United States, was put here to do the same thing – to empty his pride and call his fellow prisoners his brothers...”^{iv} The result was that he started *Prison Fellowship Ministries*, which, within the first three years, employed 100 people and had 7000 volunteers in 23 states. Eventually, *Prison Fellowship International* was started. By his death in 2012 at age eighty, Chuck’s achievements for the kingdom of Christ were many beyond this. God chose and used a very imperfect and unlikely candidate for His service. But not for the first time!

This lesson and the next cover the portion of Genesis that is primarily about the Patriarch Jacob. While Abraham was a man who is known primarily for his faith, and Isaac is known as Abraham’s son and heir, Jacob was a troublemaker. Like many who appear to get away with causing trouble for a period of time, eventually Jacob, like Chuck Colson long after him, became a victim of his own wrongdoing.

The fact that the Bible presents its characters’ flaws straightforwardly is evidence that the Bible is true. Why would its writers have included incriminating information about their heroes and heroines otherwise? Revealing many of its characters flaws achieves another purpose though: it encourages people like you and me, since we are imperfect ourselves, that God can work through *us!*

In the next lesson, we will learn about a struggle Jacob faced, after which he learned to rely only on God. But in this lesson, we will learn about the first part of Jacob’s life, the part he attempted to live by his own methods. We see how *God prepared the heart* of this imperfect and unlikely man for His service. He did so by allowing Jacob, as He did Chuck Colson, to endure certain discomforts. Although their circumstances may be very different than ours, the nature of the discomforts God allowed is not so different. We discover what these discomforts are as we study Genesis 27-31.

I. **Jacob's Deceit and Flight** – Genesis 27-28

A. **Rebekah and Jacob's Deceit** – Genesis 27

- i. Isaac's Plan to Bless Esau – 27:1-4: We are told Isaac was old and increasingly blind when he called his older son Esau, intending to give him his blessing. He instructed Esau to prepare a meal of wild game in anticipation and in celebration of this event.
 1. *Age*: In chapter 35, we learn that Isaac lived to be 180 (35:28). Since his sons were born to him at age 60 and Esau's marriage at age 40 (26:34) preceded Jacob's flight to Paddan Aram (28:6-9), Isaac must have been at least 100 years old. Although he lived another 80 years beyond the time of this incident, he is portrayed as already failing. In fact he believed he was nearing death (27:7).
 2. *Nature of the Blessing*: The blessings given by the Patriarchs Isaac and Jacob were more than just prayers. They understood their blessings to be irrevocable prophecies (27:33, 37).
 3. *Isaac's Intention*
 - a. *Despite the Prophecy*: It is impossible to imagine that Isaac did not know the Lord had told Rebekah that their older son was to serve the younger (25:23). Why then would Isaac have called Esau to receive his blessing? This can only be explained by the fact that he favored Esau. Genesis 25:28 tells us he favored him, at least in part, because Esau enjoyed hunting and Isaac loved to eat wild meat.
 - b. *Despite Esau's Nature*: Esau had already proved to be unfit and uninterested in receiving God's patriarchal promises (by his marriages and his prioritizing of a meal over his birthright, 26:34-35, 25:34). Yet, if Rebekah was quoting her husband accurately, Isaac planned to bless him "*in the presence of the Lord*" (27:7). One way or another, Isaac must have rationalized his decision. Perhaps he decided to bless Esau despite the prophecy and Esau's nature, simply because blessing the firstborn was customary. (Although Jacob spoke a prophetic blessing over all twelve of his sons!)
- ii. Rebekah's Plan to Deceive Isaac – 27:5-13
 1. *Rebekah's Scheme*: Rebekah devised a scheme to ensure Jacob, not Esau, received the blessing. She planned to prepare a meal from their flock that Isaac would believe was from Esau's hunt. Then she planned to cover Jacob with his brother's clothes and some goatskins so that he smelled and felt as his older brother would have.

2. *Rebekah's Deceit*: We already have been told that Rebekah favored Jacob. Perhaps this resulted from the prophecy the Lord gave her, that the younger son would dominate the older, prior to the twins' birth. She must have been confident that God would ensure her success since she willingly put herself under the curse Jacob thought he might receive if their plan failed. Nevertheless, she sinned by taking matters into her own hands rather than waiting for God bring about the fulfillment of His prophecy.
- iii. Isaac's Blessing on Jacob – 27:14-29
 1. *Jacob's Deceit*
 - a. Although Isaac seemed to be stubbornly determined to bless the godless Esau (Hebrews 12:16) and Rebekah schemed to control the outcome, Jacob must take a large part of the blame in this ruse. Previously, Jacob had taken advantage of his brother in order to gain his birthright (25:33). He certainly did not have to participate in his mother's deceptive plan. When his mother explained her plan, he never questioned whether it was ethical. He only showed concern lest he be caught: "What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing" (27:12).
 - b. But Jacob chose to bring Rebekah's meal to his father, repeatedly claiming to be Esau (27:19, 24). Because of his blindness, Isaac was deceived into believing Esau was the son standing before him.
 2. *Isaac's Blessing*
 - a. Isaac unknowingly passed on the covenantal promises of God, first given to Abraham, to his son Jacob.
 - b. He blessed Jacob with prosperity (27:28), honor (27:29), dominance over his relatives (27:29), and the assurance "those who curse you will be cursed and those who bless you will be blessed" (12:3, 27:29).
- iv. Isaac's "Blessing" on Esau – 27:30-40
 1. *Esau's Surprise*: Isaac had scarcely left the room when Esau returned with the meat he had prepared for his father. In shock and anger, Esau commented on the appropriateness of Jacob's name. "Jacob" ("he grasps the heel") is a Hebrew idiom for "he deceives" or "he takes advantage of." Bitter over his brother's deceit, Esau begged his father for some remaining blessing.

2. *Isaac's Words:*

- a. It is obvious that Isaac understood that the blessing he bestowed on Jacob was irrevocable, regardless of how it was gained. It is also clear that Isaac had intended to fully bless Esau and leave no remaining blessing for Jacob. For now that the blessing to one son was given, the only “blessing” he could offer Esau was more of a “modified curse”.^v
- b. This “blessing” affirmed all Esau lost to Jacob: prosperity and family rulership (both of which assumed the loss of the covenant blessings, as well). However, Isaac foretold that Esau would eventually throw his brother’s yoke off his neck.
 - i. Throughout the history of the nations that descended from these brothers, Israel subjugated Edom time and again.
 - ii. Under King Ahaz, Edom completely freed themselves from Israel’s yoke.
 - iii. Although Esau’s descendants were again subjugated by Israel during the inter-testamental period, they established a dynasty within Judea, around the time of Christ, which lasted until the dissolution of the Jewish State in 70 A.D.^{vi} (After the exile of Israel, Edom was known as “Idumaea”.)
- v. Esau’s Grudge and Rebekah’s Plan – 27:41-46
 1. Esau resented Jacob so deeply that he planned to murder him as soon as his father died. He believed that would be soon.
 2. Rebekah learned of his plan and came up with her own solution. She used the burden she and Isaac shared over the local wives Esau had taken as a reason to send Jacob away to her brother. Her excuse for sending him away was legitimate since Abraham and Isaac’s successor must not marry a local woman. By so doing, she also ensured Jacob would be distanced from Esau until his fury subsided. She expected Jacob would “stay a while,” but she could not have known that he would be gone for 20 years! In fact, there is no Biblical record that she ever saw Jacob again.

B. Jacob’s Flight to Paddan Aram – Genesis 28

i. Isaac’s Instructions – 28:1-5

1. Rebekah approached Isaac with her plan, stating only her desire that Jacob find a more suitable wife than those Esau had taken. Isaac agreed and sent Jacob away with instructions to take a wife from his mother’s family, the family of Bethuel, Abraham’s brother, in Paddan Aram.

2. Isaac blessed Jacob a second time. This blessing echoes the language of the patriarchal blessings given by God directly to Abraham and Isaac even more closely than Isaac's previous blessing to Jacob. It includes the phrases "make you fruitful and increase your numbers," "give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham," and "take possession of the land."
- ii. Esau's New Wife – 28:6-9: Esau sought his parent's approval but, sadly, failed to seek God's approval. Once he learned his parents had sent Jacob to Paddan Aram to prevent him from choosing a wife from among the local Canaanites, Esau, realizing the depth of his parents' displeasure with his own wives, took a third wife, an Ishmaelite woman.
- iii. God's Will and Jacob's Manipulations
 1. All four family members are portrayed unfavorably in the account of Jacob stealing Esau's blessing. We may be confused by the fact that God's will and prophecy that Esau would serve Isaac was accomplished by such duplicity. The explanation lies in the facts "that God can accomplish his own designs by means of man's crimes, without either relieving them of guilt or himself being the author of sin."^{vii}
 - a. God *never* tempts us to sin (James 1:13), nor are His actions "forced" upon Him by human choices (Romans 9:11, 16, 18, 21).
 - b. Regardless of the good end achieved, each of the four family members remained accountable before God for their own sinful attitudes, schemes, and behavior.
 - c. God's will *would have* come to fruition *in His own way*, even if Jacob and Rebekah had not chosen to deceive and manipulate Isaac. Despite Isaac's plans, God could have stopped him from blessing Esau one way or another.
 2. Our manipulations will neither stop nor change God's ultimate, predetermined purposes. But they do determine the way in which God will deal with us. In this situation, all four family members suffered as a result of their wrongs.
 - a. Isaac and Esau did not achieve their goal.
 - b. Rebekah, presumably, never saw her beloved son Jacob again.
 - c. And Jacob not only further damaged his relationship with his brother, he spent 20 years away from home because of it! And, during those years, he became the victim of another person's deceit and manipulations.

iv. Jacob's Dream – 28:10-17

1. “Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran” (28:10). He had been the home-loving son (25:27). Now, estranged from his only sibling and forced to leave his father and mother, he found himself traveling alone to a foreign destination. To make matters worse, he was left to sleep outside. (Presumably, the sun set before he reached the next town.)
2. It was at this very vulnerable moment in Jacob's life that he personally encountered God.
3. Jacob had a vivid dream. He saw a stairway between heaven and earth with angels ascending and descending it. The Lord stood above the stairway.
 - a. In the dream, the Lord spoke directly to Jacob, introducing Himself as the God of his fathers. The Lord promised Jacob the land on which he was lying. He promised him descendants as numerous as the dust of the earth to inherit the land. He promised that all people on earth would be blessed through Jacob and his offspring. (All of these promises reflected those of the Patriarchal Covenant.)
 - b. But God also gave Jacob a very specific assurance that would have encouraged him in his present circumstances. He promised that He was with Jacob, would not leave him, and would watch over him wherever he went. And He promised to bring Jacob back to Canaan.
4. Jacob had to decide for himself whether he would make his father's and grandfather's God his own.
 - a. The ladder, or stairway, connecting heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending on it, seems to have been God's way of showing Jacob that *He was reaching down* to him and that *Jacob had access up* to God.
 - b. It also showed Jacob that an invisible world existed, broadening Jacob's perspective of his life.
5. God knew just what the lonely, vulnerable Jacob needed. His timing was perfect. He knew Jacob would be ready to embrace a relationship with Him.

v. Jacob's Vow – 28:18-22

1. Jacob awoke in awe and fear. These are the natural results of encountering God, since the presence of the Holy God always makes one aware of his or her own sinful condition.
2. He called the place he had the dream “the gate of heaven” and named it “Bethel”.

3. Jacob took the rock he had been using as a pillow and set it up as a memorial stone, pouring oil over it.
4. Then, in light of God's promises, he vowed that he would offer a tithe of his possessions to the Lord, a token of his commitment "the Lord will be my God" (28:21).

Summary Statement: God does not have grandchildren, only children. Isaac needed to embrace the promises of God for himself. At a most desperate moment in Jacob's life, the Lord revealed Himself and spoke to Jacob's need. Allowing Jacob to endure the vulnerable position in which he put himself is the first way we see God preparing the soil of Jacob's heart for His service.

Principle: *Vulnerability prepares people to hear from God.*

Application: You may have a loved one who is in a very bad situation right now. God certainly calls us to help the needy, rescue the downtrodden, and shelter the oppressed. In so doing, we demonstrate God's love, grace, and mercy.

- However, wisdom is needed to discern each individual situation. Parents need a special warning about this. Our immediate response may be to protect or rescue our children from any and every ill they face. But doing so may be unwise, particularly when the difficult situation is a *direct result of their poor choices*.
 - By removing the natural consequences of wrong behavior, we are not helping our children learn the reality of life: bad choices eventually lead to bad consequences.
 - But we may be inhibiting something more than that. We may be inhibiting the hurting person from seeking or listening to God. *A hurting person is a vulnerable person. Perhaps he or she is willing to hear from God in ways they otherwise would not be.*
- This is not to say that we should never extend grace. Many bad situations people encounter are *not* a direct result of their own decisions. Even when they are, there is a proper time to extend grace. Our loving Heavenly Father has certainly protected each of us from the natural consequences of our sins at times. Therefore, the call is for loving discernment.
- Will you ask God to give you wisdom to know the best way you can demonstrate love to a hurting, vulnerable person, whether it is to experience God's mercy and grace through you or whether he or she needs to be left in circumstances of their own making, with your prayers that they will seek and find God there?

There is a second application for us. Perhaps you, like Jacob, feel vulnerable at the present.

- In his book *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis wrote, "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."^{viii}

Illustration: I learned this when one of our daughters was five years old. We were devastated to learn that she had a large brain tumor in her cerebellum, right near her brain stem. The news was very unexpected.

- Because my young child was so vulnerable, I felt vulnerable along with her. I wanted to protect her but could not. During the days we lived in the hospital alongside her, my natural tendency might have been to grasp for security in the words and comforting presence of friends and family. Others, in such a situation, might attempt to drown out their pain in other ways.
- Very early in the trial, a friend who had recently come through a time of great difficulty herself gave me some very wise counsel. She reminded me that my strength would come in being alone with God. I did not want to leave my daughter for even a few moments. I did not want to withdraw from the comforting presence of friends and family. But it was not from them that I drew strength in the trial. My friend was right. I found strength when I crept into a small closet where I could be alone with God.

Are you attempting to “drown out” the pain of your circumstances in one way or another?

- Where have you sought comfort? In entertainment, in food and drink, in a friend, family member, or acquaintance? Do you drive yourself into your work or, if you can afford to do so, make purchases simply for pleasure?
- These things might mask our loneliness, pain, and vulnerability temporarily. But the emptiness inside us, the recognition that none of these can truly make us less vulnerable, is not healed by them.

Whether you are in a difficulty that threatens you as a result of your own poor choices or whether you are merely there as a result of life’s general hardship, will you allow God to speak to you?

- He wants to meet you in your time of need. There is no one who cares for you more than He does. There is no one else who understands your pain and your needs. There is nothing, nor is there anyone, who can offer you the lasting comfort, satisfaction, and security you seek.
- Are you willing to quiet yourself long enough to hear from Him?

Transition: Jacob put himself in a bad situation and yet, when he was most vulnerable, God met him. God was willing to work in the life of someone as imperfect as he! After Jacob’s encounter with God at Bethel, he continued northeast to find his mother’s family.

II. Laban's Deceit and Jacob's Return Flight – Genesis 29-31

A. Jacob's Marriage – Genesis 29:1-30

i. Jacob's Arrival – 29:1-14

1. When Jacob arrived at his destination, he went to a well, as his grandfather Abraham's servant had done, in the same country, when seeking a wife for Isaac. Jacob inquired about his mother's family, and learned his uncle Laban was well.
2. Laban's daughter Rachel, a shepherdess, arrived while Jacob was still talking with the other shepherds. (Again, the scene is reminiscent of Rebekah's arrival at the well while Abraham's servant was praying there.)
3. The stone on this well was so large and heavy that the shepherds waited until all were present to move the stone. Jacob was so overjoyed with the realization that he had arrived and that his relative was standing before him that, with a surge of strength, he single-handedly removed the stone. Perhaps his attraction to Rachel also enabled this unusual feat.
4. It was an emotional meeting for Jacob. He kissed Rachel, a normal Middle Eastern greeting, and began to weep before he was finally able to identify himself to her.
5. Rachel ran to tell her father Laban about Jacob. Laban greeted Jacob warmly, taking him into his home.

ii. Laban Tricked Jacob – 29:14-30

1. Jacob came to Paddan Aram to find a wife. However, he had no resources to pay the customary "bride price." After a month of assisting his uncle, Laban offered Jacob wages for his labor. Seeing this as an opportunity to earn a bride, Jacob offered to work seven years in exchange for Rachel.
2. Rachel, we are told, had an older sister, Leah.
 - a. A brief statement draws a physical comparison between the sisters. Leah had weak eyes, while Rachel was beautiful.
 - b. There is no clarification for us of exactly what is meant by Leah's eyes being weak (or delicate), whether it was a reference to her eyesight or the appearance of her eyes. But the second seems more likely since unlovely eyes (however that was defined in that day and culture) would be a natural contrast with Rachel's beauty.
3. Laban agreed to Jacob's proposal. However, at the end of the seven years, he deceived Jacob, by secretly switching Leah for Rachel on the wedding night! Jacob did not discover the deception until after the marriage was consummated.

- a. We may wonder how this trade could have occurred without Jacob knowing. However, the bride would have been heavily veiled, the giving of a feast implies the use of alcohol, and the consummation of the marriage would have taken place in the dark.
 - b. The story is full of irony. Jacob, the trickster, received the same treatment from Laban that he had given Esau and his father!
4. Laban explained the situation the next morning to the stunned Jacob, saying it was not customary to marry a younger daughter ahead of an older one. Whether or not this was true, since Jacob had already had sexual relations with Leah, he was not in a position to bargain.
5. Laban offered to give Rachel to Jacob, also, in exchange for another seven years of labor. Laban's only stipulation was that the bridal week with Leah be completed. Then, Jacob would immediately be given Rachel.
 - a. Rachel and Leah appear as mere pawns. In a patriarchal society, they were at their father's mercy. No doubt, it was a very undesirable situation for either of them.
 - b. Polygamy was a common practice in the culture, and although it was practiced by several of the heroes of the Old Testament (Genesis 16:2-4 and 2 Samuel 5:13), God never condones it. The Bible simply states the fact that it occurred. Furthermore, in each situation in which it occurred, it always resulted in heartache. God's plan from the beginning was that marriage would be between *one* man and *one* woman (Genesis 2:24).
 - c. Jacob agreed to Laban's outrageous terms out of love for Rachel.
 - d. As becomes obvious, God planned to give Jacob a family through Leah. Jacob could have accepted Leah as his wife and not been further encumbered by debt to Laban. Had he done so, he also would have returned to Canaan much earlier.
6. In anticipation of what occurs in the following verses, we are told that Laban gave Leah and Rachel each a maidservant at the time of their marriages.

B. Jacob's Children – Genesis 29:31 – 30:24

i. Spirit of Competition

1. The theme of favoritism continues. Jacob favored his second wife Rachel over her sister, his first wife Leah.
2. As a result, the Lord made the unloved Leah fertile and she bore Jacob four sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. During this time, Rachel remained barren.
3. A spirit of intense competition ensued between the sisters. Each gave their maidservants to Jacob to bear him children they could claim as their own.
 - a. Rachel's servant Bilhah bore Dan and Naphtali.
 - b. Leah's servant Zilpah bore Gad and Asher.
4. The battle between the sisters is depicted by an incident in which Leah's oldest son Reuben brought home to his mother a mandrake plant, believed to produce fertility. Even after Rachel bargained to gain the mandrakes from Leah, it was *again Leah*, not Rachel, who conceived. She bore Jacob two additional sons, Issachar and Zebulun, plus a daughter, Dinah.
5. The spirit of competition is also portrayed in the naming of each son.
 - a. Leah named her sons in ways that showed her heartache over being unloved and her great hope that her husband would eventually honor her for bearing him sons.
 - b. Rachel named her servant's sons in ways that indicated her struggle for superiority and vindication.
6. Eventually, the Lord granted Rachel a son, Joseph. She only bore one other child, Benjamin. He was not born until after Jacob and his family left Paddan Aram. And his birth was the occasion of Rachel's death (35:16-19).
7. The tension in Jacob's household over the rivalry of his wives was, unquestioningly, difficult to live with. This continued for at least twenty years! Jacob was, again, reaping the consequences of his poor decisions.

ii. Honored Sons

1. Although Leah could not have known at the time, she indeed was honored. It was she, not Rachel, who was buried with Jacob in the tomb of the Patriarchs (49:31, 50:13). And it was she, not Rachel, who bore the forefather of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, through her son, Judah. Her son, Levi, has the honor of being the forefather of Moses, Aaron, and the priestly tribe of Israel.

2. Rachel's son, Joseph, was also greatly honored. He was used by God to bring about the fulfillment of God's salvific plan, although in a very different way than Judah.

C. Jacob's Prosperity – Genesis 30:25-43

i. Laban Negotiated with Jacob over Family and Flocks – 30:25-34

1. After Joseph's birth, Jacob asked Laban to allow him to leave for Canaan with his family. Apparently, even after fourteen years in Laban's employment, Jacob was still reckoned as Laban's servant. Therefore, the wives he was given and the children from those marriages still ultimately belonged to the head of the household, Laban.^{ix} Therefore, he sought Laban's permission to leave.
2. Realizing that Jacob was the reason he prospered, Laban was in no hurry to let Jacob go. He negotiated a business arrangement in order to keep him in his employment.
 - a. Jacob asked to be given all the speckled or spotted sheep, the dark-colored lambs, and the speckled or spotted goats among Laban's flocks. These would have been the least common and the smallest portion of Laban's flocks.
 - b. Although Laban agreed, he immediately proceeded to remove all such animals from his flocks and herds leaving Jacob with nothing.
 - c. Jacob was to continue tending the larger portion of Laban's flocks, all of which were white sheep and uniformly colored goats. Laban's sons took the animals he had promised Jacob to a distant location.
 - d. Furthermore, Laban put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, ensuring that the speckled and spotted animals would not be able to breed with the animals Jacob tended. Laban's practices of trickery and deceit continued.

ii. Jacob's Flocks Increase – 30:35-43

1. Jacob used his own knowledge of shepherding and breeding to make himself prosperous. He placed multi-colored branches in front of the troughs where the animals mated. The young that were born ended up being streaked, speckled, and spotted!
2. Jacob took these spotted and speckled young and separated them from those he was tending that belonged to Laban. In this way, he gradually created his own flock.
3. While Jacob's method seems to be a superstitious one, Jacob properly gave God the credit for making him prosper (31:9-12). God honored Jacob's method, however unscientific it may have been.

4. In fact, God prospered Jacob so much that he not only owned large flocks, he was also able to purchase camels, donkeys, and male and female servants of his own (30:43).

D. Jacob's Flight to Canaan – Genesis 31

i. Jacob's Meeting with His Wives – 31:1-16

1. As Jacob's wealth increased, Laban's decreased. The tension in the family mounted and "Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been" (31:2).
2. The Lord instructed Jacob that it was time he left Haran for Canaan.
3. Jacob's wives were aware Laban did not want them to leave. It was necessary that Jacob convince them to do so.
 - a. In the course of Jacob's speech to his wives, we learn something we did not previously know but is not surprising. During the time Jacob was building his own flock, Laban repeatedly tried to defeat his progress by changing the terms of the agreement.
 - b. Rachel and Leah expressed their own resentment of their father and agreed to accompany Jacob.

ii. Jacob's Deceit of Laban – 31:17-21

1. Jacob acted deceitfully one more time. He fled from Laban without telling him of his plans (31:20).
2. Rachel also deceived her father by stealing his household gods. We are not told why she did this. Laban was clearly a polytheist.
 - a. Some have suggested, based on archaeological evidence, that possession of the household gods may have granted her the right to inheritance.^x However, this is highly debated and may not have been true in the time and place Laban lived.
 - b. Rachel may have been a polytheist like her father, believing having the household gods had power to bless her.
 - c. Or, she may have done so out of anger at her father's treatment of her, knowing the loss would greatly upset him.
 - d. At the very least, the idols would have been made of costly metals. Perhaps Rachel took them in the absence of a dowry (31:15).
3. Laban did not realize Jacob was gone for three days.

iii. Laban's Confrontation with Jacob – 31:22-43

1. *Laban's Pursuit*

- a. Laban pursued Jacob for seven days before he caught up with him in northeast Gilead, the area west of the Jordan River.

- b. During his travel, the Lord appeared to Laban in a dream, warning him not to cause Jacob trouble.
 2. *Laban's Accusations*: Laban did not fully obey God, for he met Jacob with accusations. He was angry that Jacob left without telling him and he was angry that his household gods had been stolen. Jacob, altogether ignorant of Rachel's theft and without realizing the potential consequences of his words, put a death penalty on anyone in his household found guilty.
 3. *Laban's Search*: Laban was permitted to search through Jacob's tents for the missing gods, but did not find them. Rachel, sitting on top of the gods, feigned illness and claimed she was unable to rise and greet her father.
 4. *Jacob's Defense*: Then Jacob turned his anger on Laban. He was angry, believing he had been falsely accused about the gods. And he was angry that in the twenty years he served Laban, Laban had repeatedly deceived and mistreated him.
- iv. The Covenant Between Laban and Jacob – 31:44-55
1. Laban conceded since there was nothing he could do to Jacob without bringing repercussions on himself, in view of God's warning. The two established a covenant between them, a peace treaty. Jacob agreed not to mistreat Laban's daughters and not to cross back past the stones they set up as a marker to harm Laban. For his part, Laban agreed not to transgress his side of the stone heap to harm Jacob.
 2. A sacrifice and meal accompanied the covenant.
 3. The next morning, Laban said goodbye and returned home.

Summary Statement: Jacob was a very imperfect man. Even after God appeared and promised to be with him, he still, at times, operated under his old nature. He knew he was leaving Paddan Aram with his wives and children at God's direction, yet he still chose to deceive Laban by running from him. He did the right thing in the wrong way. Jacob was not yet fully trusting God. He was still living by his own methods.

It is hard to miss the fact that Jacob, the deceiver, schemer, and manipulator, received the same mistreatment from Laban of which he, himself, had been guilty.

- We may find that the people by whom we are easily irritated are actually those who are most like us, sharing our faults. At first, we may not realize exactly why a certain person annoys us. (Less mature people may never discover the true source of their irritation.)
 - People who lie or steal are often infuriated when they are lied to or stolen from.
 - Arrogant people have trouble dealing with arrogance in others.

- Those who are controlling think they are wise in acting as they do but consider other controlling people offensive.
- It is especially common for conflict to exist among family members who share the same faults and weaknesses.
- God allows us this discomfort *that we may see ourselves for what we truly are.*
 - It is unpleasant to have a mirror held in front of our face when we are looking our worst.
 - For the very same reason, we revolt when we encounter someone whose weaknesses reflect our own! We do not like to see how ugly we can be!
 - Some people rebel against this so much that they harden themselves against the truth that they are really seeing themselves “in the mirror.”
 - None of us wants to believe that our “natural” self is so offensive. It hurts our pride! However, God loves us too much to allow us to remain ignorant of the destructiveness of our sin nature. Until we see ourselves as we truly are, we do not see our need of Him.

Principle: *God exposes the ugliness of our sin.*

Why does He do this? Because it is one of the discomforts He must allow in preparing our hearts for His service. As unpleasant as it is, we must face up to what we really are in our natural selves. Just as vulnerability prepares us to hear from God, exposing the ugliness of our sin nature also makes our hearts fertile ground for His work.

Application: Are you willing to allow God to show you yourself as you naturally are, apart from His sanctifying grace? It will, no doubt, be uncomfortable. The discomforts He allows are necessary to make our hearts fertile for His work.

Conclusion

There is a sense in which one reads these chapters about the first part of Jacob’s life and wonders whether they have left any good example we can follow! We see a family that is quite imperfect, even dysfunctional. But we can be encouraged that God chooses and works through the very imperfect and unlikely people, people like you and like me.

ⁱ Metaxas, Eric (2013). *Seven Men and the Secret of Their Greatness* (p. 164). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

ⁱⁱ Metaxas, Eric (2013). *Seven Men and the Secret of Their Greatness* (p. 167). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

ⁱⁱⁱ Metaxas, Eric (2013). *Seven Men and the Secret of Their Greatness* (p. 175). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

^{iv} Metaxas, Eric (2013). *Seven Men and the Secret of Their Greatness* (p. 180). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.

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- ^v Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 178). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.
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- ^{ix} Kissling, P. (2009). *Genesis* (Vol. 2, p. 325). Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing Company.
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