

Jacob's Wages

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[0:00] And I want to invite you to turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 30.

! We're returning to Genesis this morning, going to pick up where we left off a couple of weeks ago. In the middle of Jacob's time, outside of the land of promise in a place called Paddan Aram.

The place where his kinsmen live. The place where the family of his mother, the family of his grandfather still reside. And he has been there now by the time we begin this passage this morning.

He has been there for some 14 years, serving, as we have seen, seven years for the hand of his wife in marriage. Being tricked and deceived, he had to serve an additional seven years to win Rachel.

And so now at this point in time, he has been there for 14 years. 14 long years. During those years, his wives have borne him many children. Just as God had promised, he is beginning to become the father of a multitude of people.

[1:18] Just as God promised to Abraham, his grandfather, to Isaac, his father. And then God passed those promises on to Jacob as he was on his way. Now these things are beginning to be fulfilled.

But we've also seen that these chapters in the life of Jacob and in the life of the book of Genesis, they are here to teach us a number of lessons.

But chiefly among those lessons is that God is providentially at work, both in and through our waywardness and our sins and the sins of others, to fulfill his promises toward us.

God does not simply step back and check out when we make sinful decisions or when other people around us make sinful decisions. He is still mysteriously and wonderfully accomplishing his plans and fulfilling his promises to us and for us.

And that's exactly what we have seen in the life of Jacob. In fact, we might think of this entire period of Jacob's life, not only a time in which God is fulfilling his promises, but also a time in which God is disciplining Jacob so that Jacob can actually see and begin to appreciate the great promises that God has been faithful to fulfill toward him, even in his waywardness.

[2:41] This is a time of discipline in his life. It reminds me of the passage in the book of Hebrews where the writer of Hebrews speaks to us about God's discipline toward us.

And he says in Hebrews chapter 12, it is for discipline that you have to endure. He says, God is treating you as sons, for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?

If you are left without discipline in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. So the writer of Hebrews is saying that God disciplines you because he cares for you.

God disciplines you for your good ultimately. And even though Jacob at this point in time is unaware of that reality, Jacob we have seen still thinks of God as the God of his grandfather and the God of his father, not yet his own God.

He has not yet personally, he has not yet himself received God as his God. In other words, we might say that he is not truly, truly, savingly trusted in the mercies of God, though those mercies are what keep him alive and help him to prosper throughout these chapters.

[3:58] He's unaware of it, but God is disciplining him and teaching him. And we are beginning finally in the second half of this chapter, and especially as we move into chapters 31 and 32, we finally begin to see some positive change and movement in Jacob.

Thus far, Jacob, we have not seen any real positive traits from Jacob himself. Even with the birth of his children, he's there as sort of a pawn.

He's in the background. We haven't yet seen Jacob progress. But now finally, we're going to get some glimpses of that this morning. And then as we move into the next two chapters, we're really going to begin to see Jacob beginning to at least understand what God is doing on some level, even if it takes until his wrestling with God in the wilderness before he is able to really claim God as his own God.

Because we're going to see continually he refers, even in this chapter and the next, he continually refers to God as the God of Abraham, the God of his father Isaac. God is not yet his God, but he is beginning to respond to these disciplinary actions of God, and he is beginning to have some cognitive, some level of understanding here.

And so let's jump in here into the life of Jacob. We're going to begin in verse 25 and read down through the end of this chapter, and I'd like you guys to stand to your feet as we read.

[5:27] We're told that as soon as Rachel had born Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, Send me away that I may go to my own home and country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you.

But Laban said to him, If I have found favor in your sight, I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you. Name your wages and I will give it. Jacob said to him, You yourself know how I have served you and how your livestock has fared with me.

For you had little before I came, and it has increased abundantly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also? He said, What shall I give you?

Jacob said, You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it. Let me pass through all your flock today, removing from it every speckled and spotted sheep and every black lamb and the spotted and speckled among the goats, and they shall be my wages.

So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look at my wages with you. Everyone that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen.

[6:42] Laban said, Good, let it be as you have said. But that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, everyone that had white on it and every lamb that was black and put them in the charge of his sons.

And he set a distance of three days journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock. Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plain trees and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks.

He set the sticks that he had peeled in front of the flocks in the troughs, that is the watering places, where the flocks came to drink. And since they bred when they came to drink, the flocks bred in front of the sticks, and so the flocks brought forth stripes, speckled and spotted.

And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks toward the striped and all the black in the flock of Laban. He put his own droves apart and did not put them with Laban's flock. Whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding, Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock that they might breed among the sticks.

But for the feeble of the flock, he would not lay them there, so the feeble would be Laban's and the stronger Jacob's. Thus, the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

[7:58] Father, thank you for recording these events from the life of Jacob. Teach us through them, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat.

Amen. We are still, as I said, in this period of discipline in Jacob's life. But as I said, we are now beginning to see some positive movement in Jacob's thought processes and the way that he sees things.

Everything is not positive in this passage in regards to Jacob. In fact, we're going to see a major misstep, we might say, on his part. A way of thinking that does not fit within a biblical worldview.

But we are beginning to see something positive. And there is something of that, I think, even in the opening verses of this particular passage, where Jacob says, send me away that I may go to my own home and country.

So he now has, after having been in the land of Paddan Aram for 14 years, he now is beginning to desire to return home, to return to the land that God had sworn to Abraham and to Isaac and indeed to Jacob himself.

[9:07] He wants to go home. Now, he's not going to get home for a couple of chapters. He's not going to actually arrive back in the promised land for quite some time. But now we see, finally, some indication that he wants to move back and he wants to return to where he came from.

He wants to go to the land where Abraham and Isaac have dwelt, the land promised to him by God himself. The problem is, is though, that after serving Laban for 14 years, Jacob does not have the means by which he might travel on such a journey and continue to support his own family.

And he emphasizes that fact. Jacob over and over refers to the fact that he has served Laban. He has been not a hired hand for Laban. No. He has been a servant for Laban.

And yes, he has in a sense received wages because he was serving for Leah and for Rachel, but he has not received any other compensation at all. He himself owns nothing, though he has brought great prosperity to the household of his father-in-law.

And so Jacob finds himself in the position of wanting to return home, but unable to return home. And so he makes a demand of his father-in-law. Verse 26, Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you.

[10:28] He's already done that. For whom I have served you that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you. But Laban said to him, If I have found favor in your side, I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you.

Name your wages and I will give it. He understands what's happening here. So Jacob says, You yourself know how I have served you. Again, I have served you. I've been your servant. And how your livestock has fared with me.

For you had little before I came and it has increased abundantly. And the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?

When is anything that I'm going to do going to begin to benefit me and my wives and my children? When am I going to have the means that I needed in order to actually pursue the things that I want to pursue?

My life of servitude is finished. I owe you no more time. But when will I have some way to care for this family that I have now received from you?

[11:29] And so Laban responds, What do you want? What should I give to you? And Jacob's response is telling, Don't give me anything. I don't want to receive a gift at your hand. Don't give me anything.

I will earn this. And then he proposes to him that Jacob should receive out of the flocks because that's been Jacob's primary occupation. He has been a shepherd tending the sheep of Laban.

And as Jacob has tended those sheep over the last 14 years, those flocks have grown tremendously, which has allowed Laban to increase his own wealth. He started with little and now Laban himself is a wealthy man because of Jacob's work of increasing the flock.

And so now Jacob has a proposal. Let me continue to tend to your flock. And some of the sheep that are born will of course be speckled and spotted. They will have some mixtures of black in them and some will be wholly black.

So let me have those and the rest of the flock will belong to you. But I will continue to tend for and care for your flock so it will continue to increase. All I ask for my wages is that you give me the speckled and spotted sheep.

[12:39] The speckled and spotted offspring. Now we think that seems a bit strange. But this is actually a good deal for Laban. Because typically a shepherd would receive if they weren't his own sheep if he were a hired hand he would receive somewhere around 20% of the income earned off of those sheep.

But the amount of sheep that would have been born in this instance that would have been speckled and spotted would have been significantly less than 20% of the flock. So what Jacob proposes to Laban on the surface is a good deal for Laban.

Now as we're going to see Jacob has another plan. Jacob is not yet he has not yet escaped his past. He still has within him this desire to get the upper hand.

He is still a schemer. But he's dealing now with someone that he knows is an equal if not greater schemer. Laban has already proven himself to be quite capable of deceiving Jacob and winning the upper hand with Jacob.

And Laban's going to attempt to do that again. He agrees to the deal. Why would he not? It's a great deal for Laban. But Laban wants more. Laban demands more.

[13:55] And so he himself concocts a plan. He removes all of the black speckled and spotted sheep from the herd that Jacob has been shepherding and he sends them way away off in the distance with his own sons about three days journey away to ensure that none of the currently speckled and spotted and black lambs or goats will be able to mate with the flock that Jacob is shepherding.

So that in Laban's eyes he has now reduced the possibility of Jacob having speckled and spotted sheep tremendously. If he has any it will be very few.

He has removed from our standpoint he has seemingly removed from the genetic pool those most likely to produce the spotted and speckled sheep.

And so he thinks that he has the upper hand. That's his plan. Continue to cheat his son-in-law so that he might retain his son-in-law for a longer period of time because he knows now that the only reason he has prospered is because of God's intervention in the life of Jacob.

In fact that's exactly what Laban said. It may seem strange to us that he would say it this way but he says in verse 27 I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you.

[15:14] Now we don't know exactly what Laban did to learn this. He may have gone and consulted with some sort of seer or sorcerer or sorceress that was not uncommon in the ancient world.

In fact we see King Saul doing that later on in Israel's history so that was one means by which he may have discerned that. Or it may be simply a way of saying that it's been made known to me by supernatural means.

And of course we learn later on in the next chapter that God does in fact at least on one occasion reveal things to Laban by means of a dream. Whatever the case may be Laban has learned by some extraordinary means he now knows God has made it known to Laban that the only reason that he is prospering is because God is with Jacob just as God promised from the very beginning.

God told Jacob I will be with you wherever you go I will be with you and God has proven that over and over and now even Laban himself is forced to acknowledge that reality.

So he knows that whatever Jacob does will indeed prosper. He just needs to find a way to make sure that the prosperity that comes to Jacob fills his own pockets rather than Jacob's pockets and he believes that he has found a way and Jacob so far as we know at this point in the story does not object.

[16:42] He simply receives this flock of only white sheep which it was not the day before. He receives this flock of only white sheep and he begins to plan and plot and scheme on his own to find a way to bring forth speckled and spotted sheep out of this particular flock and that's where the story gets weird to be honest with you.

That's where it gets strange and it gets for us especially a bit confusing. But it appears at least on the surface it appears that what Jacob is doing is he is entertaining some superstitiously held belief that if he places some object of a mixed color mixed with white and a darker color in front of the sheep as they breed that because they see those varying colors it will produce varied colored offspring.

Now we don't know if that's some sort of magical incantation or belief that he's taken on or if it's just common superstition of the day. We know that.

We can see in other ancient documents that that was a firmly held belief that whatever is present or visible at the time of conception influences the offspring whether it be of people or of animals that was a commonly held belief.

And so Jacob is relying upon that conviction upon that belief in order to be able to get speckled and spotted sheep out of a flock made up of entirely white sheep and goats.

[18:19] Now, there have honestly been a lot of attempts to explain what is happening here at the end of this passage. I've read a number of what you might call natural explanations.

Explanations that seek to try to explain away how this would actually work. And some of those make sense. Some of them make a little bit more sense than others. It's been proposed by some that since he laid these sticks in the feed troughs that perhaps some of them had some sort of toxic properties in their sap and that may have affected the timing in which these sheep went into heat, which would have had different effects upon the offspring that they had.

Perhaps that seems weird and far-fetched to me. There's been probably the most commonly accepted natural explanation is that it's common sense that some of the white sheep would have still carried the DNA for producing speckled and spotted sheep.

And that seems plain and obvious. That's probably true. Because the speckled and spotted sheep would have originated from at one time you would have probably had a white flock but they had these recessive genes for black wool.

And so they would have been able to produce if you have two white sheep that both have the recessive genes then they would have been able to produce speckled and spotted sheep. sheep. That seems logical.

[19:47] And that case is actually I think probably strengthened as you read through the story and you realize that Jacob wasn't only relying upon these sticks but he also does something else.

Take a look down at verse 41. It says that whenever the stronger of the flock were breeding Jacob would lay the sticks in the troughs before the eyes of the flock that they might breed among the sticks but for the feeble of the flock he would not lay them there so the feeble would be Laban's and the stronger Jacob's.

In other words Jacob is only using the sticks to produce the speckled and spotted offspring for the strongest of the flock. And the natural explanation says and I think probably rightly but we want to move beyond this it says that well those sheep that have a more sort of variegated genetic pool would have been the healthier and the stronger sheep.

I mean we see this with dogs all the time. If you have a purebred of almost any species it is much more likely to have health problems. Just much more likely. If you ever seen those pictures of people I've seen them on the internet where they show this is what this particular breed looked like 200 years ago and this is what it looks like after 200 years of isolating that genetic pool and there are some serious differences and usually some pretty serious health problems to come along with that.

So it is logical and it makes perfect sense that the stronger of the sheep would be the ones most likely to have the genes for speckled and spotted lambs.

[21:22] So that on one level helps us to say well this could happen I could see how you have a flock full of white sheep and I could even see how the stronger of the sheep would produce the ones that he wanted and the weaker probably would not produce the ones that he wanted.

We can understand that on some level but whether or not that natural explanation explains to us how it happened or not or perhaps it was something else that we have not even thought of whatever the case may be from Jacob's perspective it is the sticks that do it.

From Jacob's perspective he is the one accomplishing this. He has figured out a way that he can now cheat his father-in-law. His father-in-law has tried to cheat him he is going to get back not only by producing some speckled and spotted sheep but making sure that he gets the strong ones and his father-in-law gets the weak ones.

Schemer versus schemer. Deceiver versus deceiver. That is Jacob's perspective at this point in time. But as I said Jacob is beginning to make some positive movement.

He is beginning to see and beginning to understand that God's hand actually is at work in all of these things. So that when you move to the next chapter where Jacob looking back upon the success of his scheme in chapter 30 he attributes it not to his own plans, not to these sticks that he set up, not to anything that he himself actually did.

[22:52] Look in the middle of verse 7 of chapter 31 he says, God did not permit him, that's Laban, to harm me. If he said, the spotted shall be your wages, then all the flock bore spotted.

And if he said, the striped shall be your wages, then all the flock bore striped. Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.

That's how he now sees things. At least by the time we get to chapter 31, he understands and he sees this is God's hand, this is God's doing. Now what accounts for that change from the end of chapter 30 to here just barely a little ways into chapter 31?

I think time probably accounts for that. What we learn later on is that this time of him continuing to shepherd a flock and gaining for himself possessions was six years long.

What we're actually reading at the end of chapter 30 is a very compressed telling of the story here. And that's pretty typical of biblical stories. You see it especially in the New Testament for instance where in the book of Acts we will get an account of a sermon that Peter preached or that Paul preached.

[24:06] And as you read through that it takes you all of about 30 to 60 seconds to read their sermon and people think if Paul can do it in 30 to 60 seconds why does it take 30 to 60 minutes for Chris to get through a sermon?

Well my defense of that is that it's a very compressed version of what Paul or Peter actually said. And stories are told that way as well. They're compressed down.

Otherwise to include all the details would take forever. So six years worth of these breeding practices are compressed into one paragraph at the end of chapter 30.

And throughout those six years Jacob learns it's not because of his planning and his scheming that he prospers.

It is God's hand at work. Because apparently Laban had this propensity for changing the deal. At times it was oh only the speckled are yours.

[25:06] And then it was only the striped ones are yours. Jacob will say later on that Laban has changed his wages ten times. Which is really just a way of saying he's doing it all the time.

He's constantly changing the terms of our deal. And no matter how Laban changes the terms Jacob prospers. And he prospers because God's hand is at work in all of these events.

Which means that however strange the details of the end of chapter 30 might be and however odd we might think it that we have half of a chapter here devoted to explaining to us the breeding practices of one of the patriarchs with his animals.

However strange that might seem to us. The point of the text is very clear and not all that complicated. It is that God is providentially overruling the deceitfulness of Laban and the designs of Jacob to fulfill his promises.

And in a real way that's the story of the entire Old Testament and in a way of the entire Bible. You see, Jacob will have his name changed in a few chapters.

[26:32] Jacob's name will be changed to Israel. Israel. And Jacob is in a very real sense representative as the individual who is called Israel, representative of the nation that is known as Israel.

Jacob's life in a way prefigures and shows us beforehand what will occur in the life of the nation of Israel. Israel. So Jacob is given great promises by God.

But then soon after, Jacob finds himself in a foreign land as a servant or a slave to others. And yet, somehow God then intervenes to not only prosper Jacob during his time in a foreign land in slavery, but also to bring him out of that land so that he might enter into the promised land.

That should sound like a very familiar story to you. Because the other Israel, corporate Israel, the nation of Israel, will very soon find itself serving as slaves in the land of Egypt, where in the midst of their slavery, God will cause them to grow and multiply and prosper even to the point that as they leave, they're able to plunder the Egyptians, even as Jacob in his last years of service is able to, in a sense, plunder Laban.

Jacob, future Israel, represents the nation of Israel. But like the nation of Israel, he is slow in learning lessons.

[28:21] He is slow in arriving at the point to where the God who's been with him and has protected him, actually becomes his own God. It is not until Israel en route to the promised land, not until they encounter God and even there they are filled with rebellion against God, it's not until there as God thunders on the mountain and he then judges them that they finally nationally come to a point of recognizing this God is their God, not the golden calf, not the gods of Egypt that they long to go back toward, but finally at some point they began on some level to acknowledge the God of Abraham is our God.

And it is not until Jacob is on his way back to the promised land that God encounters him there in the wilderness. And he learns and he receives God as his own God and not merely the God of his fathers.

Jacob is a portrait of future Israel, but in many ways he is a portrait of their shortcomings and their failures.

If there is hope for the reader of the Old Testament that the nation of Israel will get right what the man Israel got wrong, that hope is dashed to pieces by the time you arrive at the end of the Old Testament.

They are exiled and kicked out of the land. God says, I will not be with you. I will not protect you. I will not guard you. And even as he allows them to come back into the land, it is never under his full blessing.

[30:03] It is always under the rule of oppressive foreign powers. The Old Testament does not end well for the nation of Israel. It's not any better for corporate Israel than it is for the man Israel.

which causes us to wonder then what is the hope of the life of this man Jacob who is to become Israel? The hope is twofold that God is faithful to his promises and providentially leading and guiding the life of Jacob.

But then secondly, God in his providence is moving it to a place to where not Jacob the man, and not Israel the man, not Israel the nation of Israel.

They do not by their own plans, by their own abilities, they do not place themselves under God's blessing. But there will come another man.

There is another Israel. Jesus in the New Testament is called the son of Abraham. Jesus in the New Testament goes through the same process.

[31:16] that Jacob goes through, that the nation of Israel goes through. Jesus is driven out into the wilderness where he faces great temptation. The entire life of Jesus is in a sense a kind of exile and removal from the land.

He made himself nothing when he came into this world. And yet this Israel never fails. This Israel never schemes, never plots, never plans, but he bends his knee and says, not my will, but yours be done.

And he doesn't seize hold of prosperity. He does not. He seizes a hold of the cross and the suffering that comes with it. the life of Jacob matters because this Israel is being blessed by God because a future Israel does all that is necessary for the blessings to come to this Israel.

A future Israel will take upon himself the curses that we keep waiting to fall down upon Jacob and all he gets is a kind of discipline that ultimately results in him prospering more.

We wait for a curse to fall upon him for his actions. He is a thief and a liar and it doesn't fall. At least not upon this Israel.

[32:50] It falls upon another Israel. He receives in himself and in his own body the curse that is rightfully due to Jacob for all of his scheming, for all of his plotting and planning and lying and deceiving, for all of that, Jesus receives the penalty.

Jesus receives the punishment. What does Peter say as he preaches on the day of Pentecost and thereafter? Peter tells the people of Israel that this man, Jesus, was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.

He goes on to say that God raised up both Herod and Pontius Pilate along with the Jews and the Gentiles to do whatever God's hand and purpose had predestined to take place.

In other words, God's providential hand is at work in the life of Jesus as well. Well, but not to discipline a wayward son, but to lay upon an obedient son the punishment that is deserved by all those who become his sons through faith in Christ.

This is what the story of Jacob is really teaching us. This is what we are reminded of once again as Jacob receives his wages in this chapter. You see, that's his concern.

[34:22] I want what's mine. I want what belongs to me. He demands his wages over and over. Three times in chapter 30, four times in chapter 31, the wages of Jacob are mentioned.

If only he knew that his rightful wages were for his sin, and another has already paid that. But we know. We see the bigger picture.

We know the story. We don't just see the life of Jacob. We see it in connection with the rest of the Old Testament moving into the New Testament so that Christ comes to do all that Israel could never have done and to do all that we could never do.

This is the good news of the gospel. That the life of a schemer and a deceiver and a trickster could be used by God to direct our eyes to Christ.

That's the whole point of this story. And it may well be that some of us are even right now where Jacob is throughout these chapters. Some insight beginning to see, beginning to kind of get it and understand even though you heard the promises many times before, only now you're beginning to see, but not yet at that point where you trust in Him.

[35:43] the exhortation of the apostles would be mine. Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved. Jacob needs desperately, not his wages.

He needs to trust in the God of the promises. And what we need is not our wages and not our due. What we need is to trust in the One who has fulfilled all of those promises.

So that as the scriptures say, God made Him who knew no sin to be sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God and receive ultimate prosperity.

The declaration you are righteous in Christ leading to eternal life. This is the point of the story of the life of Jacob.

And even though we get these strange details, and even though we grow frustrated at times with the biblical characters, wondering when they will finally and fully get it. The whole point of all of this is to say, look toward Christ, a better Israel, a better Son, who has not only paid the wages due for Jacob, but He's paid the price for us as well.

[37:05] Let's pray.