

The account of Jacob in Paddan Aram reveals how God kept His promises to Jacob in some extreme and doubtful situations. In particular this section reveals how God blessed Jacob with prosperity. The situation again serves to highlight God's faithfulness in doing what He has said He will do.

I. *No barriers to hinder God from blessing*

1. *Despite unfair treatment God enriched Jacob.*

- a. Laban cheated Jacob at the start. Laban had perceived that God had blessed him because of Jacob. Jacob suggested that he take only those sheep and goats that were not the dominant color (solid white sheep and solid black goats). But Laban still removed the animals from the flock that should have been the wages for Jacob. In the end this made the work of God in enriching Jacob that much more spectacular. He started with nothing and with a disadvantage but still became exceeding rich.
- b. Laban continued to cheat Jacob throughout his years of service, changing his wages 10 times (31:7, 41). Laban could not stop God from blessing Jacob with prosperity.
- c. Jacob also endured false accusation. Laban's sons, who were probably born after Jacob married Leah and Rachel, may have changed Jacob's status in the family and altered Laban's attitude toward Jacob (31:2). Those sons would not have known Laban's earlier poverty (30:30) but picked up their father's boast that the flocks were all his (31:43). As a result they were claiming that Jacob had gotten rich by stealing from their father (31:1). But false accusations did not influence God nor change His intent to enrich Jacob.

2. *Despite wrong methods God enriched Jacob.*

- a. Jacob resorted to the unfounded superstition that the experience of the mother during pregnancy affects the characteristics of the yet unborn offspring when he placed mating animals in front of striped branches. God explained in a dream the apparent success. The mating animals were directed by God and were actually striped, spotted and speckled. We understand from genetics that solidly colored sheep and goats can carry the recessive gene producing stripes and spots. God assured that they were the ones who mated. He was gracious to bless Jacob despite his feeble efforts and to reveal to Jacob the real reason for success.
- b. Rachel's attempt at gaining prosperity was worse than Jacob's for she stole the household gods (teraphim) of her father Laban. These largely small female figurines were thought to guarantee fertility and apparently represented symbolically the inheritance rights. By her theft Rachel seems to have been trying to guarantee that Jacob would get what she considered his rightful inheritance. But these wrongful actions and wrongful thinking did not hinder God from blessing Jacob.

Bad circumstances and bad actions do not prevent God from fulfilling His promises. But neither are wrong actions justified by later blessing. God is pleased to demonstrate His power and grace. If He does so when men act wrongly, it is not in approval of their actions, but despite their actions.

II. *No reasons not to acknowledge God's work of blessing*

Jacob fully acknowledged God's work of blessing him.

1. *Despite "scientific" methods Jacob acknowledged that God enriched him.* Jacob used good, "scientific" selective breeding to assure that the strong bred and not the weak. However, he did not boast of his success in increasing the flocks but acknowledged God as the one who prospered him.
2. *Despite his own toil Jacob acknowledged that God enriching him.* Jacob had been a hard, fair and conscientious worker over those 20 years (31:6, 38-42). He had worked with all his strength, bore any losses himself, and endured much. Laban could not fault him in this.

Working smart and hard like Jacob still does not mean that we accomplish anything.

God prospered Jacob. This appears to be a main emphasis in this passage. It was Laban's observation (30:27) and Jacob's observation to Laban (30:30). It is the explanation in the context for the concluding statement of Jacob's prosperity (30:43).

When Jacob talks with Leah and Rachel he identifies God as the one who has enriched him (31:9). He knew and acknowledged that God had been watching (31:12b). Even Leah and Rachel are willing to acknowledge God's work (31:16).

Jacob's final argument to Laban points to God's presence and provision (31:32). God did not let Jacob leave empty-handed. Though he had only asked God for protection, food to eat and clothes to wear (28:20-22), God had prospered him greatly.

This account is not a promise to prosper us materially. But it is further evidence of God fulfilling his promises to Abraham, Isaac and now Jacob. God keeps His promises.

God "has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Eph 1:3 NIV). Do we believe the promises to us that we find in Scripture? If we do, we will show it in our lives and acknowledge God's hand in our lives. We will not excuse God because of difficult circumstances but see His hand in them for our good. We will not claim credit because of smart and hard work. God is the one from whom all blessings come.