

Genesis

Creation, Covenants, All Grace — study 24



TRIAL, TERROR, TRIUMPH

BLESSINGS and BUFFETINGS (30:25-31:55)

30:25-36 How is Jacob's self-esteem at this point of his adventures?

(1) The procedure is not admirable on either side, but watching the movement as between two schemers, it is impossible to avoid a feeling of satisfaction that Jacob was one too many for Laban. Comparing Jacob through all this history with Abraham, it is perfectly clear that the faith of the former moved on a much lower level than that of the latter. Abraham for instance, had been content to let the scheming Lot choose, and to give him all the advantage. Jacob, always believing in God, was yet not willing to commit these matters of worldly possession to Him. -- **G. Campbell Morgan**, *Analysed Bible: Genesis* p.192

30:37-43 How does Jacob's scientific insight compare with his spiritual?

(2) Unbelievers have challenged the Bible's accuracy because there is no scientific evidence for such prenatal influence. But the Bible does not teach prenatal influence on animals; it merely records that Jacob believed it. - **Donald Grey Barnhouse**, *Genesis* p.101

(3) In displaying the striped rods at breeding time he acted on the common belief that a vivid sight during pregnancy or conception would leave its mark on the embryo; but this is apparently quite unfounded. No doubt some of his success came from selective breeding (40-42), but by itself this would have worked very slowly, as Laban reckoned it would. Clearly God intervened (see 31:9-12) to fulfil the hopes Jacob placed in the rods, using them as He used the arrows of Joash or the bones of Elisha, as the means (or the occasions) of working miraculously. -- **Derek Kidner**, *Genesis* p. 163

*Do we insist that
the Bible teach
science?*

31:1-16 Has Jacob learned any lessons from his detour in Paddan Aram?

(4) When we read of Jacob's plot against Laban our hearts sink within us; we remember that this was done by a man who had been to Bethel, had seen angels, and heard the voice of God. We may not be surprised at Laban's deception; but for one

*A contest of cheats,
a duel of schemers*

who had met with God to descend to the level of the worldling was indeed a deplorable revelation. Here are two men trying to outwit each other, and one of these two men is a professed believer in God. It is absolutely impossible to excuse and to exculpate Jacob. On no account was he warranted in following Laban's example. Just as it had been almost from the first, he was afraid to trust God with his affairs. He must take them into his own hands, and use all kinds of unworthy means to bring about ends that were in themselves perfectly right and justifiable. -- **W.H.G. Thomas**, *Genesis* vol. 2, p.79

31:17-35 What can we say for Rachel's spirituality? (cf. v.53, Josh.24:14)

(5) ... *teraphim* were thought by the ancients to guarantee fertility; a majority of *teraphim* were nude goddesses whose sexual features are accentuated. Rachel, then, wanted to guarantee that she would continue to bear children. -- **John J. Davis**, *Paradise to Prison*, p.251

(6) The true character of Laban is clearly seen from the fact that his daughters entirely sided with Jacob against their own father. Even though it was husband against father, they were evidently and heartily one with Jacob. They too had experienced their father's selfishness and greed, and were ready to approve of their husband's project and to go with him. While not laying undo stress on this acquiescence and approval, it is impossible not to regard it as a testimony to Jacob's general faithfulness, so far as the wives had the spiritual discernment to judge of it. -- **W.H.G. Thomas**, *Genesis* vol. 2, p.86

31:36-55 How does Jacob assess his 20-year trek?

TWO TYPES of TERROR (32:1-33:17)

32:1-22 Which now dominates Jacob -- fear or faith? (cf. 31:53)

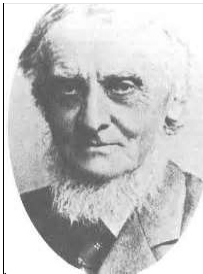
(7) Esau ... Esau ... The name beat like a pulse in his mind, making him feverish with fear. Forgotten was Bethel, forgotten the ladder to heaven, forgotten the host of angels. All that Jacob thought of was his own inadequacy. Will we never learn? It would have been sad if our Lord had said, "Without me you cannot do much." But Christ told no such lie; He was the truth, and He said, "Without me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). -- **D.G. Barnhouse**, *op. cit.*, p.113

(8) Jacob's intense fear and distress were evidently due to his conviction that Esau's coming meant hostility, that the past had not been forgotten or overlooked. But he soon recovers his balance, though, instead of at once casting himself on God, he begins his characteristic work of planning ... He calls on God, and so far well; yet is it not strange, after Bethel and Haran and Mahanaim, that he does not rise to the height of calling God his own God, but contents himself

with the thought of God as the God of his fathers? Then, again, his faith is clear and true in his reminder to God of His commands and promises about the return from Haran, but is it not curious that he does not see that after these promises God would surely take care of him? -- **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, *op. cit.*, pp.99,100

(9) Jacob's fright does not rob him of his ready wit; he goes to work at once to divide his party, so as to ensure safety for half of it. He schemes first, and prays second.

-- **Alexander Maclaren**, *Genesis*, p. 223



ALEXANDER
MACLAREN
Jacob schemes
first, prays
second

32:22-28 Why a new name for Jacob?

(10) When God appears as a *man* in the Old Testament, He is usually called the Angel of the Lord, a title interchangeable with 'God' or 'the Lord'. -- **D. Kidner**, *op. cit.*, p.170

(11) The one absorbing thought with Jacob was his meeting with Esau. It never seems to have occurred to him that there was a far greater need -- a meeting with God. Still less did he imagine that there could be any connection between the two meetings, that his meeting with God would prove the best preparation for meeting his brother. -- **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, *op. cit.*, p. 107

32:29-32 Is this incident primarily an encouragement to prevailing prayer?

(12) It is sometimes read as though Jacob wrestled with the man, and from it is derived the lesson of prevailing prayer. But this is to mistake altogether the point of the story. 'There wrestled a man *with him*.' The wrestling was an endeavour on God's part to break down Jacob's opposition, to bring him to an end of himself, to take from him all self-trust, all confidence in his own cleverness and resource, to make him know that Esau is to be overcome and Canaan obtained not by craft of flattery, but by Divine grace and power. -- **W.H. Griffith Thomas**, *op. cit.*, p.110

(13) How strange that preachers twist this to mean that Jacob wrestled with the Angel! The angel wrestled with Jacob to overcome him. This incident should never be used to illustrate prevailing prayer; instead, it reveals that God's love is so persistent that He will even cripple a man to get to his heart. ... Is it not strange that God must dislocate our plans, our lives, and even our bodies before we bow to His will? -- **D.G. Barnhouse**, *op. cit.* pp.122,123

33:1-17 Though he is conscious of the grace of God (vv.5,11), what of Jacob still resides in Israel? (Hosea 12:3-6)

(14) All kinds of shadows pass across the piety of the son of promise, so on the other hand is the energetic son of nature capable of noble impulses and emotions. The Divine grace, which ruled in the paternal house, had not been without influence upon him also. -- **Franz Delitzsch**, *New Commentary on Genesis*, Vol.2, p.208

(15) His faith, then, was real, but partial; true, but inadequate; and yet, though it is easy for us as we read the narrative to see where he failed, let us not forget that we are often doing the very same ourselves, with far greater light than Jacob had, and therefore with infinitely less reason. -- **W.H.G. Thomas**, *op. cit.*, p.100