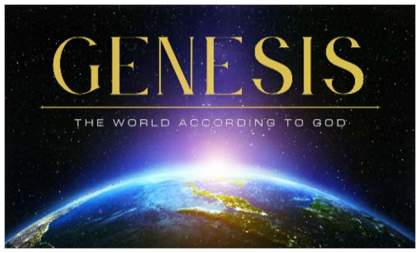


*Genesis 30:25-31:55*

# HARD TIMES ACCORDING TO GOD

*Invariably we want life to be easy and smooth. We pray and we plan as far as we can to make life go that way. We beg God to make our lives plain sailing. But sometimes the best way for God to get our attention and move us on to new levels of obedience is through a breakdown of our comfort…. How easy it is for us to trust in our clever ideas and strategies—some of which are even more far-fetched than Jacob's breeding sticks—and to give them credit for our prosperity and success. If we have invested well in the stock market or reared obedient children or developed a successful church ministry or program, we are easily tempted to take the credit for it. Christian bookstores are inundated with ideas and formulas guaranteed to develop your spiritual life and to grow churches…. Yet the Bible reminds us that all our labor and ingenuity and effort will be in vain unless the Lord builds the house (Psalm 127:1).*

—Iain M. Duguid, *Living in the Grip of Relentless Grace*

**A** Rebekah struggles in childbirth—Jacob named (25:19-34)
- **B** *Interlude: Danger in a foreign place (26:1-35)*
  - **C** Jacob's conflict with Esau intensified (27:1-28:9)
    - **D** Jacob encounters Yahweh and His angels (28:10-22)
      - **E** Jacob's arrival in Haran—Laban's deception (29:1-30)
        - **F** Jacob's children are multiplied (29:31-30:24)
          - **G** God remembers Rachel—Joseph's birth (30:25-26)
        - **F** Jacob's flocks are multiplied (30:27-43)
      - **E** Jacob's departure from Haran—Laban's depletion (31:1-55)
    - **D** Jacob encounters Yahweh and His angels (32:1-32)
  - **C** Jacob's conflict with Esau reconciled (33:1-20)
- **B** *Interlude: Danger in a foreign place (34:1-31)*

**A** Rachel struggles in childbirth—Jacob renamed (35:1-29)

**TWO PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS:**

1. God will accomplish His plan _____ or _____ us.

2. God looks for our _____ not our perfection.

## THE HEELCATCHER'S CHESS MATCH WITH THE CON MAN (30:25-36)

After Joseph's birth, Jacob decides to return home. He enters into one final negotiation with Laban in order to provide for his family. When Jacob only asks for all the "odd-colored" sheep and goats for himself, Laban accepts the terms of the agreement, knowing the rarity of such animals and his own shrewd plan to keep those flocks for himself.

*Jacob proposed a plan by which (ostensibly) he would gain little: he would receive the rare animals, the odd-colored and black goats. Laban agreed to this arrangement because he thought it would only work to his advantage.*

—Allen Ross

*Normally in the Near East, goats are black and sheep are white. His wages are to be the abnormally colored sheep and goats. Normally the hire of a shepherd is 20% of the flock, and rarely, if ever, would the speckled population be such a large percentage… Laban again cheats. As per the agreement, the unusually colored animals should have been Jacob's starting flock. Jacob begins with no abnormally colored flock, highlighting the supernatural blessing on him.*

—Bruce K. Waltke

**Divination** (30:27). Heb, *nachash,* "to hiss, whisper a magic spell."

*In Gen 27, Jacob is a deceiver; in Gen 29, Laban is a deceiver of a deceiver; in Gen 30, Jacob is a deceiver of a deceiver of a deceiver.*

—Jan Fokkelman

**THE HEELCATCHER'S SUPERSTITIOUS BREEDING STRATEGY** (30:37-43)

Jacob places striped rods in front of the flocks while they are breeding in order to facilitate the birth of more spotted and streaked animals. This practice seems to reflect the ancient belief in "maternal impression." If so, then Jacob is someone who continues to try to "help God out" in His promises (cf. 31:10-13).

**THE HEELCATCHER'S ESCAPE FROM LABAN-LAND** (31:1-21)

Jacob responds in obedience to God's commands, shares openly of his faith in God, and finally takes the lead in his family. Rachel and Leah are unified, identifying themselves with Jacob and his faith in God. The family decides to flee at an opportune time—Jacob stealing away Laban's heart and Rachel stealing away his household gods.

**THE HEELCATCHER'S COUNTRY SONG** (31:22-55)

When Laban the Syrian discovers Jacob's flight, he goes after him with a host of his men. Laban catches the odd-ball group about 250 miles down the road. On the way, God warns Laban in a dream not to harm Jacob.

Laban accuses Jacob of two crimes:

1. Leaving secretly.
2. Stealing his gods.

Jacob defends himself and challenges Laban to discover anything stolen in his possession. Rachel averts being discovered as the thief by deceiving Laban (and showing the worthlessness of the idols). Finally, in utter frustration, Jacob poetically recounts his hard times in Haran under Laban. Embarrassed, Laban asks for a peace treaty.

**TWO BASIC TRUTHS FOR LIFE**

1. Life is _____.

2. God is _____.

*Jacob and Rachel are two of a kind. Both tarnish their faith with superstitious practices: she uses mandrakes; he uses "white magic."*
—Bruce K. Waltke

*If a woman encounters a dog, her child will have an ugly dog-face. If she meets an ass, it will be stupid. If an ignorant lout, it will be an ignoramus.* —Rabbi Trachtenberg

**Deceive** (31:7). Heb., *talal,* "to mock, deride, make a fool of."

**Taken away** (31:9). Heb., *natsal,* "to rescue, snatch from danger."

*The ancient reader would not miss the sarcasm in this story, for here is a new crime—"godnapping"!*
—Victor Hamilton

**Idols**. Heb., *teraphim,* "human figurines, usually small…and of female deities, used as personal charms," often for fertility (Davis).

**Stole away** (31:20). Literally, "stole the heart of…" (cf. 31:26).

*[After Rachel's excuse], a woman would have simply checked; a man would not dream of trying.*
—Mieke Bal

**Searched** (31:34). Heb., *mashash,* "to feel, grope around" (27:12, 22).

**Fear of Isaac.** Or "the Awesome One of Isaac" (Waltke).

*Jacob's plea is actually formulated as poetry.* —Robert Alter

*Jacob's twenty years of trial…work a transformation in him. For the first time, he emerges as a man of public faith, and he takes the leadership of his home.*
—Bruce K. Waltke