

# Whose Side Are You On?

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Let's turn to our Bible reading for this morning. We have plenty of visitor Bibles at the side, at the back. Please do grab one of those if you don't yet have a Bible with you. And we are in Genesis chapter 30 this morning.

So please turn there. If you have a visitor Bible, that's page 24. So Genesis 30, and we're picking this up halfway through the chapter at verse 25.

Genesis 30 and verse 25. 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 have fed with me.

[ 1 : 1 9 ] 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, 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. Laban said, Good, let it be as you have said.

And that day Laban removed the male goats that were striped and spotted, and all the female goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white on it, and every lamb that was black, and put them in the charge of his sons.

And he said, And he said, A distance of three days journeyed 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 whites of the sticks.

[ 2 : 5 6 ] 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 striped, speckled, and spotted.

And Jacob separated the lambs and set the faces of the flocks towards the stripes, 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 feebler of the flock, he would not lay them there.

So the feebler 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.

But Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth.

- [ 4 : 07 ] And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favor as before. Then the Lord said to Jacob, Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.
- So Jacob sent, and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was, and said to them, I see that your father does not regard me with favor as he did before.
- But the God of my father has been with me. You know that I have served your father with all my strength, yet your father has cheated me, and changed my wages ten times.
- But God did not permit him 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. In the breeding season of the flock, I lifted up my eyes, and saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled.
- [ 5 : 10 ] Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, Jacob, and I said, Here I am. And he said, Lift up your eyes, and see, All the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled.
- For I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land, and return to the land of your kindred.
- Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him, Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? Are we not regarded by him as foreigners?
- For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money. All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do.
- Well, amen. May God bless his word to us this morning. We'll do turn, if you would, to a passage we read there, beginning at the middle of Genesis 30.
- [ 6 : 24 ] And in today's passage, we have two complementary accounts side by side. You'll see that each of them begins and ends very similarly.
- The first begins at chapter 30, verse 25, with Jacob's expressed desire to return to his own land. And it ends in verse 1 of chapter 31, with the verdict of Laban's sons on Jacob.
- They say, he has taken all that our father owned. And many preachers and writers seem to agree with Laban's sons.
- Here's one evangelical great. It's absolutely inexcusable to excuse Jacob for this disgraceful plot against Laban.
- It was unworthy and corrupt. Well, that certainly was the view of Laban's sons. But Laban's daughters, however, seem to take a different view at the end of the second parallel account.
- [ 7 : 26 ] It begins at chapter 2 of verse 31, telling us that actually God expressly commanded Jacob to return to the land of his fathers. And it ends, you'll see in verse 16, very similarly with a verdict.
- God has taken away all his wealth. The one who sold us and devoured all we had. So Laban's daughters seem to see that all Jacob's enrichment was God's doing.
- And they decide to side with Jacob. And above all, of course, to side with Jacob's God. So who was right? Jacob and his wives, or Laban and his sons?
- Whose side are you on? It's a live question today, actually, because the household of Jacob today, that is all the true seed of Abraham, those who have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it is often met similarly with the verdict of Laban's sons.

In our society, the church is seen as an increasingly outdated institution full of bigoted people with bigoted views that have to be resisted. And in many parts of the world where the church is growing rapidly, again, Christians get blamed, don't they, for all kinds of ills, all kinds of things.

[ 8 : 41 ] They're often scapegoated, very often persecuted. They take away from us. They detract from our society. We must oppose them. With things like anti-conversion laws, as we see now increasingly in India and other places.

And may soon be seen here if our increasingly authoritarian government gets its way. It's easy, isn't it, to find pretexts to oppose the church.

I'm sure you've often heard people say, well, I have great respect for Jesus, but not for the church. The church is just full of hypocrites. They're as bad as the rest. Well, that may be so, but you need to be careful because Jesus himself said of his certainly very flawed followers, he said, whoever welcomes you, welcomes me.

And likewise, he said, if the world hates you, it hated me first. Jesus stands with his people. Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers, he says, you do to me.

And those who show great hatred, even to the least of these, Jesus says, they will go to eternal punishment.

[ 9 : 57 ] So, Jesus there is just confirming the words that God spoke to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob, isn't he? That I will bless those who bless you and those who dishonor you, I will curse.

And God's household today, his church, under the lordship of Jesus Christ, of course, is still full of flaws, just like Jacob's household was. But here's the thing, God stood with Jacob, not with his detractors.

And that's the message, really, at the heart of this passage in front of us today. And it poses the same question, really, to people today. Are you for the people of God? With all their faults, with all their imperfections, and therefore are you in touch with the blessing of God Almighty, the God of Abraham?

Or are you against them? And therefore, pitted against Almighty God. Well, keep that question in mind as we look at this story. As I said, it's important to take these two complementary accounts together.

Chapter 30, verse 25, to chapter 31, verse 1, is explained what's revealed in the following section. And we mustn't miss that. So we're going to look at it all together as one narrative, which focuses, first of all, on Laban's greed, then on Jacob's gain, but above all, lastly, and most importantly, on Jacob's God.

[ 11 : 22 ] So look first at verses 25 to 36 of chapter 30, where the focus is all on Laban's greed. Two words, I think, seem to sum up this section, and they would be exploitation and expectation.

Laban's persistent exploitation of Jacob is met by Jacob's patient expectation of God. I think what we're being shown here is Jacob showing patient faith in the face of great exploitation because Jacob is trusting his God.

Now, God has certainly been putting Jacob through the mill, a mill of testing and tribulation in all this enslavement to Laban.

And yet, as we've seen, God has blessed Jacob according to promise, hasn't he, with all these many sons. And Jacob now is learning to trust God. Yes, he's flawed, but he is learning real faith.

This section begins with Jacob's request, you see, to go back to his own home, to his land, as soon as Joseph is born. We're not told why, but it seems somehow that Joseph's birth is a signal to Jacob that he needs to go back to his land.

[ 12 : 38 ] And it may well be that he assumes that Joseph, you see, as the firstborn of Rachel, who he regards as his true wife, that this son will be the promised bearer of the seed, the seed of promise, the bearer of God's covenant blessing.

At any rate, all these words about his land, his home, echo God's promises to him back in Bethel. Do you remember, but this land in which you lie, I will give to you and to your offspring, he said.

And Jacob's seen his offspring multiply, hasn't he? He now has 11 sons. And now he's looking to God to return him to the land. But there's a problem because, effectively, he's a slave, isn't he, of Laban's.

And if the Aramean customs in this place were similar to the Hebrew customs that you read about in Exodus 21, then his only right would be to leave at the end of his time of servitude himself.

His wives and his children would still belong to Laban. And that's why in verse 26, you see, he has to ask Laban for a favor. Give me my wives and my children for whom I served you because you know the service that I gave you.

[ 13 : 49 ] Fourteen long years. But you see, Laban is still the same old exploiter. He is a model here of cunning despite his courtesy.

Verse 27, If I find favor in your sight, the Lord, your God, he has blessed me because of you. Otherwise, he's saying, no, no, no, please stay.

It's not in my interest for you to go. And he is saying also, nor is it in your interest, Jacob. That's the point, you see, in verse 28 about the wages. Literally, it says, name the wages that I owe you and I'll give them.

And it's a barb, you see, because they both know, don't they, that Jacob isn't owed any wages because he wasn't working for money, he was working for his wife. And so Jacob entreats him in verse 29.

He's saying, Laban, I've slaved for you and you know it. And you've said yourself, it's because of me that the Lord has blessed you abundantly. You had hardly anything when I came.

[ 14 : 53 ] But now you've increased abundantly, verse 30. You've spread abroad. That was the very promise that Jacob received from God, wasn't it? That he would increase greatly and spread abroad.

And he's giving Laban here the opportunity to act justly and rightly. And it seems in verse 31 as though Laban does relent.

Oh well, what shall I give you? But that carries ominous echoes, doesn't it? Of previous offers from Laban and Jacob certainly lived to regret those, didn't he?

So he's learned to treat Laban's offers with great caution. So, Jacob rather wrong-foots him. Do you see? He says, don't give me anything. But I will go on pasturing your flock if we just do this one thing.

Now look at verses 32 and 33. It can be quite confusing and it's especially confusing I think the way it's translated in the ESV. I think it's best to take it this way. This is what Jacob says. I'll remove today all the odd animals.

[ 15 : 58 ] That means the spotted and the speckled goats and the black and spotted sheep. Normally the sheep are white and the goats are black or brown.

So you only get a tiny handful out of this mixture, this odd color. I'll remove all of these today and then after today from now on later, verse 33, when I pasture your pure flock of white sheep and brown goats, only those that arise like that again, the spotted and speckled, the odd ones, they'll be mine.

So it'll be very, very clear then which animals are yours and which are mine. That's what Jacob's saying here. And Laban, you see, can hardly believe what a good deal this is.

That's why in verse 34 he agrees immediately, let it be so. And he does in verse 35 exactly as Jacob has said. He removes the speckled and spotted animals that are currently in the herd to leave Jacob with the pure colored herd to look after.

But notice that he does it himself. Doesn't let Jacob do it and he takes these animals off three days away just in case Jacob's planning some sort of secret crossbreeding or something.

[ 17 : 09 ] See, Laban can hardly believe his luck because it's a total win-win for him. It's a no-brainer. He knows that these odd sheep, these speckled and spotted sheep only arise very, very sporadically. A tiny, tiny fraction of the herds of pure colored animals.

And so he knows that if Jacob's going to prosper at all by gaining any of these sort of animals, it'll only be because his own flock has enlarged enormously and he'll get far, far more than Jacob. So either he'll get labor from Jacob for a pittance all over again, but if Jacob does find blessing from God and increase his animals, well, Laban is going to get even more of God's blessing.

That's his reasoning. And that's what's going on. The ESV here might suggest that Jacob expects to get the current batch of speckled animals and that the but in verse 35 there in the ESV suggests that Laban is somehow outwitting Jacob straight away, but that doesn't fit, does it, with verse 31 when Jacob says, no, give me nothing.

And so verse 35 is really better translated simply, and that day he went and did it. But why does Jacob suggest such an obviously bum deal for him and a great deal for Laban?

Well, I think it's because he's learning to trust God and trust the word of God because God has been speaking to Jacob. That's why we need the second half of our passage.

[ 18 : 36 ] Look at chapter 31 verses 10 to 12. You see, Jacob there is reciting to his wives a vision that God had given him sometime before, before this encounter with Laban.

When God said, I've seen all Laban's exploitation of you, Jacob. Now remember when God says, I have seen, that always means and I'm going to do something about it.

And he tells Jacob how. Look at verse 12 there in chapter 31. All the mating animals are striped and spotted and mottled. In other words, he's saying to him, all the normal ratios of things are going to be reversed.

God revealed to Jacob in advance exactly what he was going to do to Laban's flock. And Jacob believed God and he trusted God to do as he'd promised.

And Jacob was expectant. Just like we sang in Psalm 5, he was watching for an answer. I early will direct my prayer to thee and looking up an answer will expect.

[ 19 : 46 ] Jacob believed God and so he trusted God even when the odds seemed stacked totally against him. It's not at all that Jacob is being wicked and deceitful here.

It's quite the reverse. He is patiently expecting the blessing that God had promised to him. And God had proved utterly faithful thus far and would do again. And he wants it to be absolutely clear to everybody that it is indeed the Lord alone who gives blessing.

And he's already said that to Laban in verse 30 and Laban himself acknowledges it. That it's only the Lord who can bless. There's no question here of self-promotion or dodgy gain.

He says there in verse 33, My honesty, my righteousness is going to be clear to everybody. Everyone will know where my blessing comes from. That's faith, isn't it?

It's like Elijah on Mount Carmel, do you remember? When he set up the altar, not of wood, but of stones and drenched it with water so that it was absolutely plain to everybody.

[ 20 : 51 ] The only way that that could ever go on fire is if God himself does it. And God still reveals his way of blessing to his people, doesn't he?

He will build his church and he will bless his church however much the odds are stacked against it. and real faith responds to that promise of God with great expectation and looks to God to do what he has promised.

But that doesn't mean, of course, indolence and inaction. And that's what the next section makes clear. Look at verse 37 of chapter 33 to the first verse of chapter 31.

It's all about Jacob's gain and here we have a story of enterprise and enrichment. Jacob's strange enterprise with the flocks is met by God's sovereign enrichment of his household.

And what we have here is Jacob showing us the reality of a really practical faith as well as a patient faith. Jacob is testing God. He's proving that God is trustworthy and true to his word.

[ 22 : 02 ] John Calvin comments that at first sight the narrative here from verse 37 may seem absurd and it does seem absurd to many and it's given rise to all sorts of speculation as to what process was going on here with the sticks.

But let's not miss the wood for the trees if you'll pardon the pun. The main point is very clear, isn't it? First, somehow, from a totally monochrome flock, Jacob comes to possess all sorts of multicolored animals, spotted and speckled.

And secondly, those animals grow far, far greater in number and in vigor than Laban's animals. So Jacob's flock becomes disproportionately far bigger than Laban's.

Thus, verse 43, do you see, the man increased greatly. He spread abroad. That expression again, just as God had promised him at Bethel. In other words, this is all God's purpose being fulfilled through God's power and God's blessing at work.

God had blessed Laban because of Jacob's presence with him. He'd caused his flocks to grow and to spread abroad, but now he's blessing Jacob in exactly that same way.

[ 23 : 20 ] Despite all Laban's totally unfair oppression of him. God's blessing It's interesting actually that that phrase there again in verse 43 about increasing greatly, spreading abroad, it's used again.

It's actually the only place it's used again other than here in this story in Exodus chapter 1 about the Israelites in Egypt. Listen, the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread abroad, increased greatly.

So Moses, readers, listening to this, they would have absolutely no doubt at all what verse 43 here means. God is blessing Jacob and he's enriching him through his faithful enterprise despite Laban's exploitation of him.

So whatever may be unclear, this much is totally clear. The text is saying this is God's doing all this transfer of wealth from Laban to Jacob. God's doing. So we've got to be careful if we want to excoriate Jacob for his methods here.

Some are very quick to do because it's God that we're excoriating. Once again, I find William still is very on the button when he says this, sentimentalists in religion of whom there are many today will think Jacob's stratagem wholly immoral.

[ 24 : 37 ] But verses 10 to 13 of chapter 31 prove it is not so. This stratagem was from the Lord. It was God's sovereign blessing on Jacob.

But of course the Lord does use means. Some rather sanctimonious Christians don't believe that, do they? They say things like, oh, we just pray to a sovereign God and we'll see what happens.

Funny thing is, I often find that people who take that sort of view aren't actually seen that often at prayer meetings. Well, of course we pray. Jesus teaches us to pray. Give us this day our daily bread.

But then he expects us to get up and go out and earn our crust, doesn't he? Because the Apostle Paul tells us if we're not willing to work, we shouldn't eat. God uses means in normal circumstances to bless his people.

We pray, give us this day and we get out and we earn our crust. And here you see it was Jacob's wit and wisdom doing just that with selective breeding. It was Jacob's enterprise that God blessed.

[ 25 : 42 ] Now what exactly it's about is really, well, it's quite hard to fathom. Some people criticize Jacob here and they say, well, he's resorting to pagan superstitions from that land.

But the text does not criticize Jacob at all. And actually, if we were to think that, if these really were just local pagan methods, well, Laban would have known all about that.

Surely he would have done something to stop it. He didn't seem to think Jacob had any chance of getting one up on him here. Maybe there was some sort of scientific reason at work, something in the plant bark or the sap that would do something to the fertility of the sheep.

We don't know. It might have been some sort of folklore that was known in Canaan, but not here. The idea that what the animals saw when they were in heat somehow by the power of imagination made them more fertile.

I don't know. I mean, we get people today, don't we? Play music to their babies in the womb and they think it's going to make them a wonderful violinist when they grow up, so who knows? I don't know how this worked, but I think perhaps that's exactly the point, isn't it?

[ 26 : 50 ] It's quite a unique thing in Scripture. Maybe it was just a unique thing that God told Jacob to do, but the point is God told Jacob in advance. And whatever the exact process was, what we're being told is this was a response of practical faith.

Jacob knows and he's testified to the fact that it's God alone who blesses. And so he trusts the vision that God's given him and he uses his best endeavors and his best know-how, whatever it was, whether it was specially revealed or not, to pursue God's plan because he believes him.

And so miraculously, look at verse 39. The flocks of white sheep and brown goats bring forth striped and speckled and spotted as if from nowhere, quite contrary to what would be expected.

And Jacob says, well, praise the Lord. And he uses all his gifts of husbandry to the full. He puts the strongest animals to breed by the sticks that God was using to bless and he just leaves Laban's animals to get on normally.

And thus, verse 43, thus, the man increased greatly. Jacob's not breaking any agreement with Laban.

[ 28 : 09 ] There was nothing to preclude his enterprises. In fact, it was Laban's paranoia in moving his other flocks three days away and all his sons three days away that helped the whole thing to go on in private.

Laban dug a pit and fell into it himself, as the psalmist says. His own mischief and scheming returned right onto his own head. In fact, if you look at verses 7 to 8 of chapter 31, you'll see that Laban obviously saw Jacob's increase and he kept moving the goalpost ten times.

Not the spotted ones this year, Jacob, not only the stripy ones. Oh no, no stripy ones this year, Jacob, only the spotted ones. But whatever he said, God kept putting the ball right into the back of the net.

He was on Jacob's team the whole time to Jacob's great enrichment. And verse 43 shows us that that wealth turned into many servants and camels and donkeys and all these sorts of things.

Jacob's practical faith put God to the test and proved him true, proved him faithful to his promise as God blessed his enterprise abundantly. And friends, that is such an important lesson for us to remember today because we also have a covenant calling from God.

[ 29 : 29 ] We have a promise of blessing and we have a command, don't we, to bring the means of blessing to this world as we carry the gospel of Jesus Christ to this world. The Lord has promised, hasn't he, I will be with you, he says to his people, to the very end of the age.

I will build my church. But he calls us to believe that, doesn't he, with a practical faith, with an enterprising faith that will prove him true.

God uses means and we are to use all the means that God gives us with all our strength, with all our wit, with all our wisdom. We're not to imagine that we just have no part to play in God's sovereign mission.

That was William Carey's great insistence, wasn't it? Way back in 1792 against many people who said, oh, if God is sovereign, he can convert the heathen without any of our help.

No. No, said William Carey. Jesus said, all authority is given to me, but you go and preach the gospel to the nations. That's what we see in the New Testament in mission strategy.

[ 30 : 42 ] Paul used every means possible at his time at his disposal. He used his personal gifts of speaking and of writing, of travel, of language. He used every opening, every connection that God gave him.

He used all the strategic thinking he could to go to the great cities of the world, to the population centers and so on. And God blessed Paul's enterprises.

He wasn't wrong to use all of these things. God uses means. And nor is it wrong. In fact, it is practical faith and trust in God to use your best wit and wisdom when you're faced with opponents who are very devious and want to inhibit and hinder God's kingdom purposes.

That was Jacob here and that was Paul very often. He didn't hesitate, did he, to use his rights under the law to protect himself and to protect, even more importantly, the churches that he loved when he appealed to his Roman citizenship for his wrongful arrest.

That's not a Christian resorting to his own strength, as some sort of overpious people say. Nonsense. It's using all his God-given strength to utilize the gifts and opportunities that God has given him.

[ 31 : 59 ] And that's what Jacob did here. And that's what we're to do. It was in the context of mission, wasn't it, that Jesus said to his disciples, I'm sending you out as sheep amid wolves.

And so you've got to be wise as serpents as well as innocent as doves. And that's what Jacob's doing here. Laban's a wolf. And when God hands you a providential advantage in a situation where all the odds and all the enemies are stacked against you, it's not pious, it's not holy to just reject that.

Of course not. You say, thank you, Lord. The godly thing is to trust God and keep your powder dry as Oliver Crummel put it. And he was right, wasn't he?

Nehemiah said exactly the same thing. Remember the Lord. Pray to the sovereign Lord. Trust him. And fight to protect your families and God's house and God's people.

And that's what we're seeing here. You see, God sovereignly enriches Jacob. He blesses him through his trusting and enterprising faith. But, but, as verse 1 of chapter 31 should read, but, he heard that the sons of Laban were saying, Jacob has taken all that was our fathers and from what was our fathers he has gained all this wealth.

[ 33 : 27 ] You see, there's always a cost, isn't there, to blessing from God. There's always envy from God's enemies for one thing. And we see that, don't we, in personal life.



People always tend to envy and resist other people's blessing. See that in church life too when God is evidently at work to bless.

So often others in the wider Christian community see something suspicious at work because they're envious. They don't like it. And what Laban's sons here claimed was absolute nonsense, of course.

Laban had had very little before Jacob ever arrived on the scene. Everybody knew that. Everything that Laban had was down to Jacob and to God's blessing on Jacob with Laban. Far from it being Jacob who had taken anything from Laban, it was God himself who had seen to that.

Both to teach Laban a lesson, which I'm not sure he learnt, and also to make it clear to everyone that real blessing in life is to be found in one place and one place alone, in the God of Jacob.

[ 34 : 35 ] And you see, that's what this final part in chapter 31, verse 2 to 16 are all about. It's Jacob's God who is the focus in everything in these verses you can see.

And that is what explains everything that's gone before. This is all about explanation and endorsement. Jacob's God-centered explanation to his wives both confirms God's endorsement of Jacob, but it also leads to a wholehearted godly endorsement of God's call by Jacob's wives and therefore by his whole household.

Look at verse 2. It shows us a man who's very much in touch with the realities of life. Jacob saw that Laban's attitude had turned against him. He's a realist.

He understands people. But he's also very spiritually attuned because he had heard God's voice when God had spoken to him to confirm Jacob's instinct to go back to his own land.

Verse 3, return, says God, and I will be with you. And my goodness, what a different Jacob we're seeing here, aren't we, to chapter 29 and 30. No more is he the hapless victim.

[ 35 : 49 ] No more is he the pawn of Laban. No more is he just being bossed around in his own home. Here's a man at last showing some spiritual leadership. He calls his wife out, his wives, to the place where all his wealth is being displayed, the midst of the flocks in the field.

And in verse 5, he puts it to them very, very clearly. This has never been a context between your father and me, is what he's saying. It's a context between your father and the God of my father, the Lord.

And the Lord is one over and over again. Verse 7, I slave for your father and he cheated me ten times over but God did not permit him to harm me, you see.

Verse 8, your father moved the goalposts all the time but God has taken nevertheless all of his livestock and given it to me. Do you notice all the but God references there in verse 5, in verse 7, in verse 9, see it again later in verse 24, in verse 29, it's one of the great phrases of the Bible isn't it?

But God, you meant it for evil, Joseph would say many years hence, but God meant it for good. And Jacob's explanation, his testimony about all his gain is utterly God-focused here, isn't it?

[ 37 : 16 ] He shares the dream of verses 10 to 12 with his wives and he makes it absolutely clear, do you see there? He owes everything to God, it's God's grace, it's God's sovereign blessing. There's not a hint, is there, of him saying to his wife, look, I, clever Jacob, have outwitted your father at last.

No, no, no, no. What he's saying is, look how God has pitted me in my hopeless state, being exploited by your father. Look how he's reached down nevertheless and blessed me abundantly.

That's his testimony. And that's always the mark, isn't it, of a true believer's testimony. It's never about me, it's about God. He's done this.

There's no doubting the genuine nature of Jacob's public testimony to his wives here. In fact, again, Moses deliberately is using the language of the Exodus so that his readers would grasp it absolutely immediately.

Look at verse 12. I have seen, says God, all that Laban is doing. Verse 9, God has taken away the livestock and the word there literally is, God has delivered the livestock to me.

[ 38 : 25 ] And it echoes exactly God's words in Exodus chapter 3 where he says, I have seen my people's affliction and I'm come down to deliver them out of Pharaoh's hand.

There's no doubting it here. Jacob's explanation shows God's clear endorsement on Jacob's life. It's God who's been blessing Jacob.

It's all about what God is doing this story. And therefore, you see, Jacob must obey this God. He must serve God alone and go at his direction.

And that means no longer can he serve Laban. And it's a real challenge, isn't it, when he's speaking to his wives because what he's saying to them is, where do you stand?

Whose side are you on? And Jacob's entreating his wives not to choose their father, but to choose instead the God of his father.

[ 39 : 24 ] this God commands us to go with him to his place, to leave the comfort of everything that you've known, to come out into the unknown.

And will you choose life with me as I follow him? It's a repeat, isn't it, of the question that was made to Jacob's mother, Rebecca, back in chapter 24.

Will you go with this man? Far away to the place where God is calling his people. And like Rebecca, they do.

Verse 15, they say, we don't belong here. Our father's just devoured us, stolen from us. And no doubt part of the decision is just a disillusion with Laban.

Who would blame them? And that's the way so many people start seeking for more, isn't it, because of disillusion in life, disappointment in life, a hunger for more. But that's never enough on its own, is it?

[ 40 : 30 ] Because you see, what they recognize here is that what Jacob is saying rings absolutely true. It is God who has done all this. They say it themselves, verse 16. We can't deny the evidence of the reality right before us.

So they say to Jacob, whatever God has said, do it. And we're with you. We're on your side, Jacob. And that is because they say, we want to be on the side of the Lord, the God of your father, who's done all this.

Do you see how Laban's daughters, Jacob's wives, take the exact opposite view of Jacob, God's chosen seed, to their brothers? In verse 1, you see, the brothers only see Jacob.

They say what he was and they resist him. Jacob has taken away what was ours. But here in verse 16, you see, the wives, Laban's daughters, are seeing not just Jacob, whose shortcomings they knew better than absolutely anybody.

Just read the last chapter. But what did they see? They saw Jacob's God. And they saw what Jacob's God had done. The God who blesses his chosen seed.

[ 41 : 50 ] And the God who will bless only through his chosen seed. I will bless those who bless you. And those who dishonor you, I will curse.

That's God's promise. And so these women were not being sentimental. They were facing reality, weren't they? They chose the way of life and blessing. They chose to cleave to the chosen one of God and to belong to his family of faith because they saw that alone was the way of blessing.

Whose side are you on? Was the question. And that was a live question, wasn't it, for Moses and for his people. He was constantly putting it before them and calling them back to the Lord as he led them out of their exile back to their homeland, the land of Canaan.

See, said Moses to his people, I've set before you life and death, blessing and curse, choose life. Loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, cleaving to him because he is your life.

That was Moses' message. And there was always a great pullback, wasn't there, among the people. Rosy-eyed notions of, oh, how wonderful Egypt had been. Complaints about Moses, their shepherd.

[ 43 : 10 ] Oh, he's just out for himself. Let's choose another leader and go back to Egypt where things were so wonderful. He's taken away all that we had, they said. The wonderful life we had in Egypt, as if.

You see, just like Laban's sons all over again. And it was a live question in the New Testament church, too, exactly the same. Read Paul's letters. Read Hebrews.

Paul was always under attack, wasn't he? Always being maligned by first century sons of Laban who resented that God had chosen him to be the vehicle of blessing to the nations.

And many, many took that view, alas. Even in the churches. Read 2 Timothy. It's one of the most astonishing things that Paul can say. All in Asia, all these churches that I planted have deserted me.

But just like Jacob, the Lord himself never deserted Paul, did he? He stood by him, he strengthened him so that, through him, the message of his God would be fully proclaimed and heard and believed by many, many, many Gentiles.

[ 44 : 22 ] Just like here, Jacob's Gentile wives heard his testimony here and found a place forever among the people of God. And you see, friends, the encouraging thing is that for us, this is telling us that we don't need to fear today.

When we find that maybe, yes, in the midst of God's great blessing and God's work increasing greatly, spreading abroad his kingdom, when we find that blessing and adversity always seem to go together, when the sons of Laban suddenly appear to malign and to resent and to raise suspicions, and when the Labans of this world we quite see no longer regard us with favor.

But God's covenant promise to Jacob and his family to bless them and to bless through them was trustworthy then and it's trustworthy today.

And we have far, far more and far greater promises even than these that Jacob had back then because we are joined for our blessing not to Jacob with all his flaws but to Jesus, the ultimate seed of promise, our great Savior, the God of Jacob made fully known in the flesh forever.

And it's he, the risen Lord Jesus, who has repeated, hasn't he, to us that same word of promise, I will be with you even to the end of the age. I will be with you till the end of your exile, till you come home at last to where you truly belong in my eternal kingdom forever.

[ 46 : 03 ] You see, we don't need to fear as a church. Whenever God calls us out of our comfort zone, whenever he calls us in obedience to his command to do difficult things and make tough choices, we have his promise.

We can see all that God has done for us thus far. Now we can trust him for the future. As we close, just let me ask you this question again, the central question in this passage.

Whose side are you on? Whose side are you on? It's very easy, isn't it, to criticize the church today, including this church, because we're far from perfect.

We know that. Jacob had many flaws. He knew that too. His wife certainly did. But for all his flaws, you see, to side with Jacob, to be his people, was to side with Jacob's God.

It was to side with the God of blessing. It was to side with the only true God. And it was to trust, not in Jacob, but to trust in Jacob's God and in the promise of his saving seed through whom alone this world and its people can know the blessing of God Almighty and know the blessing of true life and true life everlasting.

[ 47 : 32 ] And that seed, you see, has now come at last in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he is building his church. And not even the gates of hell themselves can prevail against what he is doing.

And God will bless those who bless him. He will bless them abundantly and gloriously and forever. But he will curse those who dishonor him, his beloved son.

Jesus himself told another story, didn't he, about sheep and goats? Jesus, making exactly that point very, very clear. Read it in Matthew chapter 25. So don't side with Laban's sons.

Don't just see all the faults in the Christian church, real and abundant as they are. No, no. Listen to Laban's daughters and see not just the church's faults, but see the church's true savior and bless him and follow him.

And just like Jacob, you will find blessing in abundance both now but also forever and ever in his eternal kingdom.

[ 48 : 58 ] Whose side are you on? Don't make the wrong choice today. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, Father, we thank you that you are a God who is faithful to your promises that even as your people with all their many flaws and we are so conscious of our flaws and our failings, you have decreed that faith is to be found for your son alone and among those who bless your son alone.

So help us, we pray, all of us, to see him, to love him, to follow him and to trust him now and always. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.