

## Chapter 8: The Increase of Jacob

*Genesis 30:25–43*

Ever since Laban tricked Jacob into marrying Leah before Rachel, Jacob's family has spiraled downward. The previous passage recorded all manner of strife, envy, paganism, and sexual sins in the birth stories of the men who eventually become the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. It is no wonder that Jacob wants to get out of this toxic environment. As soon as Rachel gives birth to Joseph, Jacob asks Laban to permit him, his wives, and his family go back to Canaan. Jacob only intended to stay with Laban for a few days (Gen. 27:44), but time continues to stretch further away from his original departure. So far, Jacob has served his father-in-law for fourteen years, and, in the course of this passage, he will end up serving Laban for still another six years (Gen. 31:41). At every turn throughout these twenty, Laban has cheated, tricked, deceived, and manipulated Jacob. How long can Jacob endure Laban's oppression?

The second half of Genesis 30 records still more of Jacob's suffering at the hands of Laban. More than that, this passage demonstrates that God fully knows Jacob's oppression. Up to now, Laban has plundered the blessings of the Lord toward Jacob (Gen. 30:30). Here, though, the Lord begins to enrich Jacob with blessings that Laban cannot touch. Importantly, this story employs several textual elements which foreshadow the oppression and eventual exodus of the descendants of Jacob out of Egypt. The nation of Israel will also be oppressed by a cruel master, and they too will come out of their house of bondage with great wealth that they receive from their oppressors. Both of these stories teach that *God plunders the oppressors of his people*.

### God Possesses Heaven and Earth (Gen. 30:25–34)

When Rachel gives birth to Joseph, Jacob immediately begins negotiations with Laban to return to his home country with his wives and children:<sup>1</sup>

[25] As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. [26] 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." [27] 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. [28] Name your wages, and I will give it." (Gen. 30:25–28)

Originally, Jacob only intended to remain with Laban for "a few days" (Gen. 27:44) until Esau's wrath subsided. Then at Bethel, God promised to bring Jacob safely back to the land of Canaan (Gen. 28:15). At this point, Jacob has remained with and served Laban for fourteen years—seven years of service for each of Laban's daughters (Gen. 29:27). Now that Jacob has his four wives and twelve children, he determines that the time has come for him to return to his homeland. Before he

goes, however, Jacob will engage in one more round of major negotiations with his father-in-law. Jacob wants to ensure that he and his family will not return to Canaan empty-handed. During the last round of negotiations, Jacob interacted with Laban in good faith and even blind trust; this time, Jacob knows Laban's character better, and he adjusts his approach accordingly.<sup>2</sup>

### Let My People Go

Jacob demands his departure directly, without so much as a “please” to soften his request.<sup>3</sup> The word translated as “Send me away” appears in multiple other important contexts, as Kenneth Mathews points out:

“Send me on my way” (*šallēhēnī*, v. 25b) expresses the desire of an underling for release from duty (1 Sam 30:29; 1 Kgs 11:21). The same language appears in Deuteronomy's description of the released servant who had sold himself into service (15:12–13,18). In the context of Genesis, “send me on my way” recalls Abraham's servant, who sought dismissal from Laban for the return trip with the betrothed Rebekah (24:54,56). Moreover, the exact verbiage appears in Jacob's struggle with the angel of the Lord, “Let me go” (*šallēhēnī*, 32:27).<sup>4</sup>

Additionally, this is the verb that the Lord instructed Moses to use when he demanded Pharaoh to “Let my people go” (Ex. 3:20; 4:21, 23; 5:1, 2 (x2); 6:1, 11; 7:2, 14, 16; 8:1, 2, 8, 20, 21, 28, 29, 32; 9:1, 2, 7, 13, 17, 28, 35; 10:3, 4, 7, 10, 20, 27; 11:1, 10; 12:33; 13:15, 17; 14:5). Jacob is seeking an exodus from a house of bondage not only for himself, but for the entire nation of Israel: “Give me my wives and my children” (Gen. 30:26). God will later change Jacob's name to Israel (Gen. 32:28), so that Jacob's children born to his wives will eventually become the heads of the tribes of Israel. Just as the Egyptians will be reluctant to free the people of Israel because of “all their service which they served” (ESV: “all their work”; Ex. 1:14), so Laban is reluctant to free Jacob in view of “my service which I served you” (ESV: “the service I have given you”; Gen. 30:26).<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, just as the Lord promised to bring the people of Israel into the land of Canaan, so also the Lord has promised to bring Jacob back to Canaan, “my own home and country” (Gen. 30:25).<sup>6</sup>

### The Slavery of Jacob

There is an important issue behind Jacob's specific request to take his wives and children with him. After his first round of negotiations for his wives, he wants to make sure that he does not leave any loopholes for Laban to exploit. Specifically, if Laban has treated Jacob as a slave, will Laban allow Jacob's family to depart with him? The law of Moses reveals that slaves did not always have the rights to take their wives and children with them when they were freed from slavery:

[2] When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. [3] If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. [4] If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone. [5] But if the slave plainly says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,’ [6] then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever. (Ex. 21:2–6)

It is difficult for us to understand life in an agrarian economy. Occupational options were not abundant and specialized; rather, most people invested nearly all of their work into growing their own food. Therefore, working (and eating!) required *land*, something that not everyone possessed. Furthermore, some Hebrews fell into so much financial distress that they had to sell their land. If their financial problems became worse, some eventually sold themselves into slavery. This is not the cruel chattel slavery that the United States abolished during the Civil War; this kind of slavery offered economic opportunity for the poor to make ends meet until the seventh year, when they could be released without cost. Additionally, the poor could receive back any land they sold away every fiftieth year, during the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–22). Slavery was a last-resort option that provided the most desperately needy with work to provide for themselves.

Some Hebrew slaves, however, grew to love the situation they had with their master's family, and they chose to remain in slavery in perpetuity. For some, this may have been their most viable career path, especially if they served in a godly household. The other factor that may have caused some Hebrew slaves to remain in servitude, though, related to their own families. If their masters provided them wives, and if those wives provided him children, the servant's family could not go free with him after his sixth year. This was simply part of the deal for how the six years of servitude was structured, and the slave understood these terms from the outset because the Law clearly spelled them out. Slaves took wives and had children at their own risk.

This background clarifies the nature of Jacob's request. Does he feel that he is a slave to Laban? He has served Laban fourteen years for his two wives, but he apparently worries that Laban will withhold Jacob's wives and children if Jacob wants to leave. When Laban and Jacob originally entered into the agreement, Laban observed that he and Jacob were kinsmen, so that Jacob should have his wages for his work (Gen. 29:15); however, Laban may still classify this work as slavery.<sup>7</sup> When Jacob eventually does leave, Laban does indeed insist that *he* owns Jacob's wives, children, and flocks, and he only begrudgingly allows Jacob to leave with them: "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day for these my daughters or for their children whom they have borne?" (Gen. 31:43). To avoid another last-minute crisis, Jacob wisely clarifies up front that he intends for his family to go with him when he leaves Laban.

Later, Moses will also negotiate with Pharaoh so that *all* Israel may depart from Israel "We will go with our young and our old. We will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, for we must hold a feast to the LORD" (Ex. 10:9). Precisely because the Israelites are the slaves of the Egyptians, Pharaoh refuses to let the children go: "'The LORD be with you, if ever I let you and your little ones go! Look, you have some evil purpose in mind. No! Go, the men among you, and serve the LORD, for that is what you are asking.' And they were driven out from Pharaoh's presence" (Ex. 10:10–11). Jacob's insistence that his wives, children, and livestock come with him not only closes one loophole that Laban might exploit, but Jacob also anticipates the objections of Pharaoh in Egypt to his descendants.

### Striking a Deal for Wages

Laban, however, does not want Jacob to go. Laban asks for "favor" in Jacob's sight in the hopes that Jacob will not leave.<sup>8</sup> Laban explains that he has learned by divination (probably, by studying omens) that the Lord has blessed him because of Jacob.<sup>9</sup> That all the families of the earth will be

blessed through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is at the core of the Lord's promises to the patriarchs (e.g., Gen. 12:3; 22:18; 28:14), and we see these blessings extended at many points in Genesis (Gen. 14:19–20; 21:22–23; 26:12–16, 28–29; 39:5, 23).<sup>10</sup> Thus far, however, Jacob has not benefited from the blessing, but only Laban.<sup>11</sup> It is no wonder, then, that Jacob wants to leave and Laban wants Jacob to stay! As in Genesis 29:15, Laban asks once again for Jacob to name his wages. In the first agreement, Jacob offered seven years of service for Laban's daughter (Gen. 29:18). Then, Jacob agreed to another seven years of service for Laban's other daughter (Gen. 29:27). Jacob has a claim to his wives, but not to any of the wealth (e.g., flocks, herds) that his labor has produced for Laban. To gain any wealth, Jacob must serve for a longer period of time.<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, Jacob will serve Laban for another six years—a total of twenty years in Laban's house of bondage (Gen. 31:41).<sup>13</sup>

### The Abundant Increase of Jacob

Jacob reaffirms and expands upon Laban's statement about the Lord's blessing during this time:

[29] Jacob said to him, “You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. [30] 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?” [31] 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: [32] 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. [33] So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages with you. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen.” [34] Laban said, “Good! Let it be as you have said.” (Gen. 30:29–34)

First, Jacob points out that Laban's livestock has “increased abundantly” (Gen. 30:30). At Bethel, the Lord promised to make Jacob's offspring to *increase abundantly* (ESV: “spread abroad”; Gen. 28:14), and the word will appear in Genesis 30:43 (“increased greatly”) in the summary verse for the passage. Both of these uses, however, refer to the abundant increase of *flocks*—first, the flocks of Laban, and then the flocks of Jacob. This word appears in only one other location in the Pentateuch, where it describes the abundant increase of the people of Israel in Egypt: “But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they *spread abroad*. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel” (Ex. 1:12).<sup>14</sup> Once again we see a direct foreshadowing of the experience of Israel in Egypt. The Lord greatly increases *Jacob* in his bondage to Laban just as the Lord will greatly increase *Israel* in their bondage in Egypt.

Oppressors believe that they have significant power over us. Because they control some aspects of our circumstances, oppressors believe that they control our lives. God, on the other hands, causes his people to prosper and increase abundantly (“spread abroad”) in spite of our circumstances. Ultimately, we see this paradoxical logic most clearly displayed at the cross of Jesus Christ. From the world's perspective, the cross is foolishness and a stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:21–25). From God's perspective, the cross is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). True glory, strength, power, and honor come not by the world's riches and honor, but by the power of God who strengthens us in our faithful suffering and,

ultimately, who will raise us up from the dead through faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, Jacob increases the intensity of the blessing that Laban observes. It is not merely that the Lord has blessed Laban, but that the Lord “has blessed you wherever I turned” (Gen. 30:30). The Lord’s blessing for the sake of Jacob has been generous, but Laban alone has benefited from it up to this point. So, Jacob now asks what he will gain from the Lord’s blessing: “But now when shall I provide for my own household also?” (Gen. 30:30). This question leads directly into defining the wages that Jacob will receive from Laban.

### The Lord Alone Enriches Jacob

Laban does not dispute Jacob’s statements. Instead, he responds by asking, “What shall I give you?” (Gen. 30:31). Surprisingly, Jacob rejects Laban’s offer to *give* Jacob something, saying, “You shall not give me anything” (Gen. 30:31). Jacob here echoes the words that his grandfather Abraham spoke to the king of Sodom many years before: “I have lifted my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, ‘I have made Abram rich’” (Gen. 14:22–23). Laban lives as though *he* were the Possessor of heaven and earth (cf. Gen. 31:43). So, Laban believes that he must *give* something if Jacob is to *receive* something. Laban does not consider that Jacob has another benefactor, the true Possessor of heaven and earth. Jacob, then, is not rejecting wages; instead, he is rejecting the premise behind Laban’s statement. Whatever he gains will come from God, not from Laban.<sup>15</sup>

The reason that God can prosper us in the midst of our oppression is that he possesses heaven and earth. Therefore, we do not live at the mercy of those who have temporal power over us. They cannot ultimately bless us, and they cannot ultimately withhold blessing from us. Regardless of appearances, they have limited power and influence. God is the one who possesses heaven and earth, and our blessing is in his hands. As Jesus reminded us, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). We should not fear our oppressors; rather, our oppressors should fear the judgment of God against those who would oppress his people!

### Jacob’s Wages

After this, Jacob makes a straightforward proposition to Laban, saying, “If you will do this for me, I will again pasture your flock and keep it” (Gen. 30:31). Significantly, the words Jacob uses for *again* (lit., “return”) and *keep* are the same words God promised about *bringing back* Jacob to Canaan and *keeping* him wherever he goes (Gen. 28:15).<sup>16</sup> The fact that Jacob echoes God’s promissory words make it clear that he is entrusting God to bless him, just as God has blessed Laban because of him. In the same way that Jacob offered to serve the maximum bride price at nearly minimum wages as a bride price for Rachel (Gen. 29:18), Jacob again makes an extraordinarily generous offer to receive as wages every every speckled and spotted goat, and every black lamb: “In a flock of sheep and goats, the sheep are mostly all white, the goats all black or dark brown. Multicolored sheep and goats are much rarer. Jacob suggests that all the multicolored animals be his wage and that the pure white sheep and the dark goats be Laban’s.”<sup>17</sup> Not only is this a very generous offer for splitting up the livestock, but Laban will also know immediately if Jacob steals any white sheep or dark goats (Gen. 30:33). Laban agrees to this offer at once (Gen. 30:34). Of course, Laban would never agree to any

plan like this unless he already had a plan in mind to maximize his reward at Jacob's expense.<sup>18</sup>

### **God Perceives the Oppression of His People (Gen. 30:35–36)**

Immediately, therefore, Laban gets to work to cheat Jacob out of as many sheep and goats as possible. This is one more reason that Jacob will “legitimately complain that Laban ‘changed my wages ten times’ across the six years (31:41)”:<sup>19</sup>

[35] But 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. [36] And he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, and Jacob pastured the rest of Laban's flock. (Gen. 30:35–36)

Although Jacob offered to sort out the flocks “today,” Laban instead acts on “that day” to segregate the striped, spotted, and speckled goats, along with the black lambs, putting them under the shepherding of his own sons with a three-days' journey away from Jacob (Gen. 30:35). Jacob continues to pasture the rest of Laban's flock with all the white sheep and dark goats that would ultimately belong to Laban (Gen. 30:36). If the multicolored goats and the black sheep have no opportunity to cross-breed with the dark goats and the white sheep, how will Jacob ever acquire any wages for himself?<sup>20</sup>

Jacob cannot be surprised by this turn of events. He has already experienced the deceitfulness of his uncle in a far more cruel moment when he awoke to Leah on the morning after his wedding (as he believed) to Rachel (Gen. 29:25). This time, Jacob turns his uncle's trick against him. With a three days' journey between him and Laban's sons, Jacob finds time to work secretly to breed multicolored goats and black sheep from Laban's dark goats and white sheep.<sup>21</sup> If we do not recognize the position Laban puts Jacob in, we may be inclined to believe that Jacob acts underhandedly in relation to Laban. In fact, Jacob simply works with what his uncle gives to him. As we will see, God can bless Jacob in spite of what Laban's schemes.

Given the fact that God eventually blesses Jacob in spite of Laban's trick, the implication is that God perceives what Laban does here. The parallel passage in the exodus story, then, is from Exodus 2:

[23] During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. [24] And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. [25] God saw the people of Israel—and God knew. (Ex. 2:23–25)

When God's people groan and cry out because of their oppression, God hears them, remembers them, sees them, and knows what they are going through. Satan tempts us to believe that God has forgotten us, but that is a lie. Let us not allow Satan's lies to ride the waves of each new circumstance. Instead, let us live with hopeful confidence in our God, even in the midst of the worst kinds of oppression.

## God Plunders the Oppressors of His People (Gen. 30:37–43)

Jacob's countermeasure is difficult for us to understand:

[37] Then Jacob took fresh sticks of poplar and almond and plane trees, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the sticks. [38] 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, [39] the flocks bred in front of the sticks and so the flocks brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. [40] 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. [41] 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, [42] 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. (Gen. 30:37–42)

This puzzling passage raises many questions for us. What exactly is Jacob doing here? More importantly, why does this method produce the desired results? Let's address both of these questions in turn.

### White vs. White; Red vs. Red

As a most basic explanation, Jacob practices selective breeding to bring forth multicolored goats and black sheep that are strong and vigorous. Jacob's method of breeding is to allow the stronger animals to see white streaks in peeled branches of almond and plane trees (Gen. 30:37). The basic idea seems to be that "the coloring of the lambs and kids is determined by what their parents see during intercourse. If they look at multicolored posts when they mate, their young will be multicolored."<sup>22</sup> While we do need to ask why this tactic works (especially in light of our modern scientific knowledge), we must set that question aside for the moment.

First of all, we should recognize that the Hebrew word for *white* is *lābān*—that is, Laban's name means *white*.<sup>23</sup> Jacob, therefore, is overcoming the disadvantages of Mr. White by exposing the sheep in his fold to streaks of *white* on the tree branches. We should recall, then, that the same play of color was also behind Jacob's first interaction with Esau. Esau came out *red* at birth (Gen. 25:25), and people eventually called him Edom, or Mr. Red (Gen. 25:30). Jacob, then, gained the birthright from Mr. Red in exchange for some of his *red* stew (Gen. 25:30–34). Jacob uses *white* to overcome Mr. White, just as he used *red* to overcome Mr. Red. The difference in these two situations, though, is that Jacob exploited Mr. Red's exhaustion (Gen. 25:30), while Mr. White is the one exploiting Jacob (Gen. 30:35–36). In the first interaction, Jacob came on the offensive; here, Jacob is mounting his defense.

### Superstitious Plans vs. Supernatural Provisions

Why, though, does this plan work? Genetically speaking, there is no reason to believe that exposing mating animals to the white of stripped tree branches has anything to do with the appearance of their offspring. Instead, the use of peeled tree branches seems to parallel the mandrakes that Rachel superstitiously sought after in order to conceive a child (Gen. 30:14–15).<sup>24</sup> In that story,

Rachel believed that the mandrakes could open her womb; however, it was not the mandrakes but *God* who eventually opened her womb. Rachel recognized that it is *God* who has taken away her reproach (Gen. 30:23) just as Jacob later credits *God* with providing multicolored goats and black sheep from Laban's flocks (Gen. 31:6–12).<sup>25</sup> Even if Jacob makes superstitious plans, ultimately God's supernatural provision is how Jacob acquires the blessing. Importantly, the text does not label Jacob's work with words like "deceit" or "cheat" or "trick" as we see in other places in the Jacob narratives (cf. Gen. 27:35–36; 29:25; 31:20, 26–27; 34:13).<sup>26</sup> The point of this passage is not to condemn Jacob, but to demonstrate God's blessing of Jacob

### Jacob Increases Greatly

Moreover, this story demonstrates how God blesses Jacob in spite of Laban's schemes. At the end of this passage, the word "increase greatly" (cf. Gen. 28:15; 30:30) appears again to describe the fulfillment of God's promises to Jacob at Bethel:<sup>27</sup> "Thus the man *increased greatly* and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys" (Gen. 30:43). Earlier, Laban *increased abundantly* because of Jacob, but now, "after retaining his nephew, Laban unexpectedly becomes the inferior of the two."<sup>28</sup> Jacob does not increase greatly because he schemes or deceives; he increases because God blesses him.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the list of Jacob's wealth echoes the list of Abram's wealth during his sojourn in Egypt: "and [Abram] had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male servants, female servants, female donkeys, and cattle" (Gen. 12:16).<sup>30</sup> To some degree, we also hear an echo of the description of Isaac's wealth: "[Isaac] had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants..." (Gen. 26:14).<sup>31</sup> Now, in the third generation, God greatly increases Jacob just as he blessed Abraham and Isaac.

Importantly, this summary verse offers us one last parallel to foreshadow Israel's exodus from Egypt. After serving Egypt as slaves, the Lord told Moses to instruct the people of Israel to ask their Egyptian neighbors for silver and gold jewelry (Ex. 11:2). The people of Israel obey this command and depart from Egypt with great wealth:

[35] The people of Israel had also done as Moses told them, for they had asked the Egyptians for silver and gold jewelry and for clothing. [36] And the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they plundered the Egyptians. (Ex. 12:35–36)

Like his later descendants, Jacob does not emerge from his slavery empty-handed.<sup>32</sup> Jacob plunders Laban just as the Israelites plunder the Egyptians. This story reminds us that when God promises to bless his people, no one—not Laban, and certainly not Pharaoh—can stand God's way.<sup>33</sup>

### God Plunders the Oppressors of his People

The New Testament teaches that God continues to care for his oppressed people. Once we were dead in our trespasses and enslaved to the devil, our Great Oppressor (Eph. 2:1–3). Because of God's great mercy, however, he sent his Son Jesus Christ to liberate us from our oppression by dying in our place, spilling his own blood for our freedom—a gift we receive by faith (Eph. 2:4–9). Furthermore, the conquering King Jesus has ascended in triumph, giving gifts from the spoils of his battle to his people to equip them for ministry in his kingdom (Eph. 4:7–16). Through Jesus Christ, God has



plundered what our Enemy held captive for so long, and he has given it to us as a gift. Even in our darkest days of suffering, the indescribable gift of Jesus Christ reminds us that we have nothing to fear. Even the Great Oppressor cannot harm those for whom God did not even spare his only Son (Rom. 8:31–39). Let us rejoice in our victory, and let us faithfully steward the gifts he has entrusted to us for fruitfulness in his kingdom.

## Discussion Questions

1. How does God prosper Jacob in the midst of his oppression (Gen. 30:30)? How does God prosper the Israelites in the midst of their oppression in Egypt (Ex. 1:12)? How does God prosper us in the midst of our oppression? Why do we ascribe so much power to our circumstances? Why does God use the paradoxical theology of the cross to bring glory out of pain and shame?
2. What does Laban believe about his power over Jacob (Gen. 30:31)? What does Jacob believe? How do Jacob's words echo Abram's words to the king of Sodom (Gen. 14:22–23)? Why do we believe that we live at the mercy of those who have temporal power over us? Why must we continue to remind ourselves that God is the Possessor of heaven and earth?
3. Does God really see, hear, remember, and know the oppression of his people? Does he care? What evidence do you see in this passage that God perceives the oppression of Jacob? What evidence in your own life do you see that God perceives your oppression? Do you live with confidence in God's providential care? Or, do your circumstances dictate your confidence?
4. How does God plunder Jacob's oppressor (Gen. 30:43)? How does God plunder Israel's oppressors (Ex. 12:36)? How did God plunder *our* oppressor at Christ's resurrection from the dead (Eph. 4:7–16)? What riches does the conquering King Jesus give to his people? How does he intend you to steward your gifts faithfully for the fruitfulness of his kingdom?

## Notes

1. Walton suggests that it may have been risky for Rachel to depart from her father's family before having a child: "It is not coincidental that Jacob requests permission to take his leave of Laban only after Joseph is born (v. 25). If a woman has not borne children, she can easily be discarded or demoted. The only protection she had came from her father's family, who then took responsibility for her. Prior to Joseph's birth, a request to leave would have been inappropriate from Jacob's standpoint and risky from Rachel's, for it would rob Rachel of her protection." (Walton, *Genesis*, 589.)

2. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Reprint: Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock; JSOT Press, 1991), 142.

3. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 254.

4. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 495.

5. Wenham observes that these are nearly identical expressions in Hebrew: "עֲבַדְתִּי אֲשֶׁר עֲבַדְתִּיךָ" (Gen. 30:26) compared to "עֲבַדְתֶּם אֲשֶׁר-עֲבַדְתִּי" (Ex. 1:14). (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 260.)

6. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 149. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.viii.i.html>>

7. “According to Exod 21:3–6, a slave who is given a wife by his master must leave her and any children behind when after six years he leaves his master’s service. If the slave did not wish to be parted from his wife and children, he had to remain a slave. It is not clear whether the law of Exodus was thought to apply in Jacob’s case. Despite Jacob describing himself three times as Laban’s slave, ‘I *served* you,’ ‘all the *service I did* for you’ (the word serve/service could as well be translated ‘slave’), 29:15 makes us tend not to view Jacob as a slave, because he was Laban’s nephew, who was offered wages. But there does not appear to be any reason why a poor man should not indenture himself to a wealthy relative; because he was his kinsman it was hoped he would treat his slave more kindly (cf. Lev 25:35–36). Certainly 31:43 could imply that Laban looked on Jacob more as a slave than as a son-in-law. But whatever Jacob’s legal situation, he wants to have his cake and eat it too; he wants his own freedom and to keep his wives and children. He reminds Laban of ‘all the service I did for you.’” (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 254.)

8. “Small wonder that Laban wants to keep this workman. He does his utmost to this end and asks for *ḥen*, ‘mercy’, benevolence. A nice contrast to 29.15 where Laban charmingly refused the ‘free’ (*ḥinnām*) services of Jacob so that he need not ask for ‘mercy’ (*ḥen*).” (Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 142.)

9. Kidner, *Genesis*, 174.

10. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 255.

11. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 142.

12. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 255.

13. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 499.

14. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 260.

15. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 195.

16. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 498.

17. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 255.

18. Kidner, *Genesis*, 174.

19. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 499.

20. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 256.

21. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 283.

22. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 256.

23. For the observations about white and red in this paragraph, see Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 149–50.

24. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 491.

25. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 284.

26. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 502.

27. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18–50*, 284.

28. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 503.

29. Calvin, *Genesis*, vol. 2, 156–57. Available online: <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom02.viii.i.html>>

30. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50, Volume 2*, 257–58.

31. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 196.

32. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 492.

33. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 522.