

Jacob's Agreement with Laban

30: 25-36

DIG: Why do you think ADONAI allowed Jacob to be cheated and mistreated by his uncle so many times? How did he make it through this tough time?

REFLECT: When did you do the right thing, only to be cheated? How did you feel? How did you react? When facing a demanding time in your life, what sustains you?

After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, the second seven years of service for Rachel had now been paid. Jacob (Hebrew: Ya'akov) still has no income because his efforts had been making Laban rich. So Jacob requested of his uncle: **Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland of Canaan. Give me my wives and children, for whom I served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you (30:25-26).** Jacob had paid his debt in full.

But Laban said to him, **"If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that ADONAI has blessed me because of you"** (30:27). The Hebrew word for **divination** is *nichashti*, and it has the same root as the word *serpent* (3:1). It literally means *to learn through a serpent*. Laban was a pagan idolater who dabbled in the occult. Therefore, through occult practices, Laban recognized that **Jacob's God** (whoever He might be), was blessing Laban because of his relationship with Ya'akov. What Laban had been experiencing the past fourteen years was the blessing aspect of the LORD's covenant with Abraham: **I will bless those who bless you (12:3a)**. So naturally, Laban does not want to lose Jacob, because he realizes he will lose God's blessing. Therefore, Laban offers to pay to keep him. He said to him, **"Name your wages, and I will pay them"** (30:28).

Ya'akov took this opportunity to give his own testimony: **You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and ADONAI has blessed you wherever I have been. But now it was reasonable that Jacob should be given an opportunity to provide for his own family. So he asks: When may I do something for my own household (30:29-30)?**

Laban said: **What shall I give you?** Ya'akov responded: **Don't give me anything. But if you will do this one thing I request, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them (30:31).** Jacob was learning to rely on **God**, and his plan put him in a position to do so.

Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages (30:32). **In the East, the dominant colored sheep were pure white and dominant colored goats were either pure dark brown or black.** *These were the dominant colors and by far the most plentiful.* However, **sheep** that were **dark-colored** (either dark brown or black) or even **speckled or spotted**, and **goats** that were **spotted or speckled** were *recessive colors and were scarce, probably no more than ten to twenty percent of the total flock.* **Jacob** was willing to begin with the very minimum and, in doing so, was seemingly putting **himself** at a great disadvantage.

And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Laban could tell if Ya'akov was being honest by merely looking over the flock. When Laban came to check on what **Jacob** had taken as his wages, **any goat in Jacob's possession that was not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that was not dark-colored, would be easily observed (30:33).** *So Jacob's proposal was to keep for himself all the recessive color animals and breed those. He would keep all the lambs and goats born from that time on with recessive colors, and give back to Laban all those lambs and goats born with dominant colors.* At first, this plan seemed too good to be true for uncle **Laban** and he eagerly **agreed** to it. **Let it be as you have said (30:34).** However, not surprisingly, **Laban** changed his mind as quickly as he had **agreed**.

Although **Ya'akov** had given **Laban** no reason whatever to mistrust him, it is hard for men who are themselves dishonest to trust anyone else. The deal was so unbelievably good from **Laban's** point of view that he felt there must be some catch to it.⁴⁸³ So after having second thoughts he **deceives Ya'akov** a second time. **Laban** reasoned that the recessive color animals would be *more likely* to produce the kind of animals that **Jacob** needed to build his own flock, so he isolated them and left **Jacob** with only the dominant color animals, that would usually only produce their own kind. **Laban removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs that same day.** Not only that, he placed them in the care of his sons so **Ya'akov** wouldn't have access to them (30:35).

But **Laban** wasn't through scheming; next **he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob**. This prevented any chance of crossbreeding and removed the recessive color animals from the breeding pool. So although **Jacob** entered into an agreement that would provide **him** with **wages**, **Laban** had stacked the genetic odds against **him (30:36a)**. Dominant color animals would produce few, if any, recessive colored offspring, thus, seemingly limiting **Jacob** from ever being able to build up **his** own flocks and **go back to his homeland**. Again this shows the character of the man with whom **Jacob** had to deal. But being a **righteous man (25:27)**, **Jacob continued to fulfill his part of the bargain and tend the rest of Laban's flocks (30:36b)**.