

GENESIS 30:29-36, 41-43 DUALING DECEIVERS

²⁹ Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. ³⁰ The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?"

³¹ "What shall I give you?" he asked.

"Don't give me anything," Jacob replied. "But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: ³² 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. ³³ And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen."

³⁴ "Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said." ³⁵ That same day he 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, and he placed them in the care of his sons. ³⁶ Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks.

⁴¹ Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches, ⁴² but if the animals were weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. ⁴³ In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys.

The story of Laban and Jacob is a story of deception and conflict. On the human level, there is little to admire in either character. In fact, what is remarkable about this story is that God stooped to be associated with it at all, let alone used it to form a people of his own. In retrospect it should be clear that God's salvation is based not on our character or the genetic pool from which we emerge, but rather on his sovereign will and grace. Laban works his deception in opposition to God's will and his purpose is thwarted. Jacob works his own deception, ignorantly thinking he is actually prospering his cause. In reality, as Jacob will later realize, he prospered not due to his machinations but by the sovereign will of God. According to God's timing, the lessons that needed to be learned had been learned, and the formation of a family had been achieved so it was time for Jacob to return to the promised land. The only thing missing was the resources necessary to establish his household in a new land. With this episode, God takes care of that need.

For both Laban and Jacob, each was the center of his game. But in their blindness they did not see that the true central actor was God. We are a people of privilege and wealth, and prone to rely on our own resources and influence. Since that is our condition we must be ever vigilant in seeking clarity of vision so that we might recognize the hand of God in our affairs. God's will cannot be thwarted, but our lives will be compromised as a consequence of our disobedience. Jacob would still sire a people, and King David in his adultery and murder would still establish a dynasty, but their disobedience resulted in chaos and conflict in their families and the resulting nation. We must seek God's deliverance and not our own in all circumstances and under all conditions, if we are to experience his kingdom in this life.

Father, may I always look for you and see you in all the events and activities of my life. Amen.