

We've spent our last five Sundays peering into the biblical character Jacob, and, Lord willing, we will continue to look at this interesting character's life for the rest of the summer. Jacob is a familiar name from the Bible. And not only in the Bible, but according to the United States Social Security Administration, Jacob was the number one male baby name for the year 2007.¹ And in the Bible itself, the name certainly is popular as well: God is referred to as the "God of Jacob" (or something very close to it) twenty-five times in the Bible; the nation of Israel, God's people, are constantly referred to with titles such as "the house of Jacob," or even as just simply, "Jacob" many, many times.

But why Jacob? Why is Jacob so well-known? Why is "God of Jacob" one of the most frequently-occurring titles for God in the Bible? Why is "Jacob" synonymous with "the people of God"? And why, after over 3,500 years is Jacob the most popular name in the United States? Of course, to that last question, we can, and probably should answer, tradition, or maybe it's just that "Jacob" has a nice ring to it. But certainly his notoriety in the Bible is what catapulted his name to such a lofty status, and so we're left with the question: "Why Jacob"?

This question becomes even more pronounced, more puzzling, when we look into the life of Jacob in the Bible. So far, we've seen Jacob swindle his brother out of his birthright, take advantage of his blind, bed-ridden father in order to deceptively gain the family blessing, we've seen him get cheated by his uncle into marrying a woman whom he did not want to marry, and we've seen him get passed around like a piece of meat between his two wives and his two concubines in a desperate contest over who can have the most children. Neither spiritually or worldly is there anything extraordinary about Jacob.

¹ "Popular Baby Names," n.p. [cited June 24 2008]. Online: <http://ssa.gov/OACT/babynames/>.

Now, those of you who have been really attentive to what I've been saying and who are fairly familiar with Genesis are probably thinking something right now. You're probably thinking, "Yeah, but you've left out all of the good stuff in Jacob's life. Don't forget his great encounters with God, such as the magnificent promise that God made to him at Bethel and the episode where he wrestles with God when returning the promised land; don't forget the fact that those children that come out of his crazy marriage are none other than the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel; and don't forget the noble end to his life that happens as a result of God's sovereignty in the Joseph story. Certainly these things count for something." And I would say to you, "Yes, they do," but notice the constant here. All of these things are the result solely of the sheer blessing of God on Jacob's life. The promise God makes to Jacob at Bethel, to give him offspring as the sand of the sea, and to give his offspring the land of Canaan, and to bless all the families of the earth through Jacob's offspring, and to be with him wherever he goes—all of these promises—are given to him in spite of, not because of, what Jacob has done. The twelve tribes that come from his very body are not the result of some really fabulous parenting skills. In fact, as you read on, you can observe Jacob's blatant favoritism that he showers on his youngest sons, Joseph and Benjamin, often to the detriment of the rest of his family. His sons flourish and become the great nation of Israel because God promised to do so, not because of anything Jacob did.

And so we have the answer to the question, "Why Jacob"? It is because the life of Jacob teaches us in a very powerful way that God is the Architect of the Blessed Life. Here in the pages of Genesis God takes a man who is a sneaky, deceiving, stumbling, and untrusting and builds out of him a people through whom all of the nations of the earth will be blessed. As the stars shine

brightest in the darkest skies, so does the glory of God show strongest in the life of a person whose faith is nothing to write home about.

And I'm happy that we have the stories about Jacob, because I'm a lot like him. I'm happy that the Bible's pages are not filled only with Noahs and Pauls and Marys, people who are terrific examples of faithfulness and steadfastness, but at the same time are difficult to identify with. I'm happy to know that God's hand can be seen working so powerfully in the lives of men like Jacob because he, not man, is the architect of the blessed life.

Please turn with me in your Bibles to this morning's text, Genesis 30:25–31:18.

Just to play a little bit of catch up, I'd like to briefly overview where Jacob's been by the time we meet him in these verses. Jacob has been living in Haran, also known as Paddan Aram, for fourteen years. He is there because his older brother wanted to kill him for deceiving his blind father into giving him the family blessing. While in Haran, Jacob met the love of his life, his cousin Rachel, and since he had no dowry to give her father, Laban, Jacob's uncle, he agreed to work for Laban seven years for her hand in marriage. Now Laban, as we all have seen, is a swindler; he would sell his own grandmother's false teeth for a nickel. And when the wedding night came, Laban took advantage of the darkness of night, and gave his older daughter, Leah, to Jacob instead of Rachel, the wife whom Jacob had agreed to work for. Jacob didn't know anybody there, he was far away from home and on Laban's turf. So what could he do? Well Laban, nice guy as he was, said, "Sure you can marry Rachel—but of course it'll cost you. How about another seven years. But because I'm such a nice guy, I'll let you marry her before the seven years." And so Jacob married Rachel also. As he worked the second seven years, his wives started having children, which, as we saw last week, resulted in a lot of family strife, primarily because Rachel could not get pregnant. But, eventually, the Lord opened her womb and she gave

birth to a son: Joseph. And it appears as if it couldn't be at a better time—just when Jacob's fourteen years of service were ending. And so, this morning we meet up with Jacob as he goes to Laban to hand in his resignation.

"As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, 'Send me away, that I may go to my own home and my land. Give me my wives and my sons, for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you' (30:25–26). But of course, we know that Laban doesn't just "send" anyone away. Years earlier, we first met a much younger Laban, when Abraham's servant came to his family seeking a wife for Abraham's son Isaac, after the arrangements had been set and the dowry paid, the servant said the same thing: "Send me away." But Laban did as much as possible to keep this wealthy man by his side, and it was only after much deliberation that he was able to set back out for Canaan. Not only this, but obviously Laban was intent on keeping Jacob. After all, it had been a pretty sweet deal for Laban; in his little power-play, he had married off both his daughters, including the less-attractive Leah, and had gotten a cool fourteen years of cheap labor out of his new son-in-law, Jacob.

And so Laban's response is not too surprising: (vv. 27–28) "If I have found favor in your eyes—I have learned by divination that the Lord has blessed me because of you—name your wages, and I will give it." Oh, he's so kind, and generous. No—not at all, so was that guy I bought my first car from in 97'. You see, Laban knows something that we are going to find out in the next two verses: Jacob's pretty much been working hand to mouth, for only room and board and his wives. That means that he doesn't have anything. What could he do, would he go back, 600 miles south to his family in Beersheba with nothing but the clothes on his back, his staff, and his wives and kids? For all he knew, Esau was still waiting for him to kill him, and his family had long-since figured Jacob killed by bandits or wild animals. He needed a flock of his own, so

that he could have milk from the goats and wool from the sheep. At least then he would have a reasonable means of existence, and maybe something to trade.

But as of yet, he had nothing. Look at verses 29–30: "And Jacob said to him, 'You yourself know how I have served you, and how your livestock has fared with me. For you had little before I came, and now you have increased abundantly, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I set my feet. But now when shall I provide for my own household also?'" Jacob's getting old. He's lost his inheritance and fourteen precious years partly because of his slimy uncle, and partly because his obsession with "getting the girl," and he has to do something, or else he'll either wind up working for Laban for the rest of his life, or he will die, doomed and destitute.

Laban is blessed because of Jacob. The problem is Jacob is not yet blessed. Sure, he's had numerous offspring, like the Lord promised him in chapter 28, but without any means to feed them, they might become more of a burden than a blessing. So Jacob proposes an idea. Reading verses 31 to 34:

"Laban said, 'What shall I give you?' And Jacob said, 'You shall not give me anything. If you will do this for me, then once again I will pasture your flock and keep it: Let me pass through all you flock today, removing from it every spotted and multicolored sheep and every dark lamb, along with the multicolored and spotted among the goats, and they shall be my wages. So my righteousness will testify for me later, when you come to look into my wages. Every one that is not spotted and multicolored among the goats and dark among the lambs, if found with me, shall be counted stolen.' Laban said, 'Good! Let it be as you have said.'"

Jacob, it turns out, has something up his sleeve. Now this part is a bit confusing, so I will try to explain it to the best of my ability and to the best of my understanding. Jacob is agreeing to shepherd Laban's flock for a few more years. Previously, the "wages" that Jacob received were his wives and room and board. Now that he has earned his wives, if he is going to work, Laban will have to give him other "wages." If you were a shepherd in the ancient Near East, you could expect to be paid in sheep, goats, or whatever else it was that you shepherded, and the standard going rate was 20% of all newborn animals born under your care. That means that one in every five animals born under a shepherd's care rightfully belonged to the shepherd. Jacob, however, doesn't propose 20%; he proposes that he be allowed to keep any animal born under his care that is born with irregular color. The sheep tend to be white, so sheep that weren't white—sheep that were either dark or multicolored—would be his. The goats tended to be dark, so any spotted or striped goat would be his. Thus, it would probably be the case that Jacob would end up with considerably less than the standard 20%.

But that's not all. Jacob proposes that they go through the flock before they even begin, and remove any animal that is already oddly colored, which of course, would make his chances of breeding oddly-colored animals even less. After hearing this proposal, we should almost want to slap Jacob upside the head and say, "Jacob, man, what are you doing! You're never going to breed a flock that way!" And Laban can't believe his ears. Maybe that son-in-law/nephew of his has lost a few brain-cells in the field with the flock all those years, but who cares—he said it, so he doesn't hesitate to quickly reply, "Good! Let it be as you have said."

Now Laban is no dummy. He knows a deal that's too good to be true when he hears it, so verses 35 and 36 tell us that he himself ventures into the flock and removes all of the oddly colored animals himself. Then, just to be sure, he puts them under the care of his own sons and

sets a distance of three days between himself and Jacob. Of course, such a far distance would prevent Jacob from maybe sneaking back into his flock and stealing some speckled animals—"Maybe that's what Jacob's got up his sleeve." Also, it prevents animals from perhaps wandering back from Laban's flock into Jacob's flock. Unfortunately for Laban, however, it also prevents him from seeing what Jacob is up to day after day with his flock.

Again, the following verses can be confusing, so let me tell you what Jacob does. He's stuck with a flock of only normal colored animals: white sheep and monochrome goats, and his task is to breed oddly colored animals. So he takes some sticks, from three kinds of trees, and he peels some of the bark off, leaving streaks. In other words, he makes the branches look like what he wants the animals to look like. Then he places the branches by or in the watering troughs, which is where the animals come to mate. He is apparently acting in accord with an ancient belief that what an animal or a person saw during conception influenced the characteristic of the offspring. And so, lo and behold, Jacob was able to produce oddly colored sheep and goats at will.

But that's not all, he only did this when strong animals were mating, and therefore only strong animals bore oddly colored offspring. He apparently did this for six years, and at the end of the six years, Jacob had a large flock of really weird-looking, but really strong animals, while Laban was left with a flock of normal-looking, but really weak and puny animals.

Verse 43 reads, "Thus the man [Jacob] increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys." At the beginning of the six years, Jacob had virtually nothing. But now the Lord had blessed him, he was apparently able to trade with locals, and we are told of the great wealth that he was able to acquire at this time.

We have Jacob, the one to whom God has given the promise of Abraham and Isaac. We know that, for these patriarchs, wealth was a sure sign of God's blessing. Genesis 26:12–14 strongly links material wealth to the blessing of God; it reads, "And Isaac sowed in the land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord blessed him, and the man became rich, and gained more and more until he became very wealthy. He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him." All this to say that the note in our text, that "he increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, camels and donkeys," should be interpreted as being connected to God's blessing. And just to get a little bit better picture as to how materially blessed Jacob had become check out how, only a short time after our passage, in 32:14–15, where, in order to pacify his brother Esau, he sends him "two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, thirty milking camels and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys." That means that our little note here is only an abbreviated list. Jacob's wealth is unreal. It is clearly the blessing of God, as it had been with his father and with his grandfather.

What do you do with a story like this? What are we to make of it? Jacob needs a flock of his own. Laban doesn't really want to give it to him. In order to secure a flock for himself, Jacob uses means that can be considered laughable, misguided, superstitious, or even magical—but at the other end, he receives God's blessing. In order to understand this correctly, I am convinced that we have to take note of Jacob's character. As I said before, Jacob, like all of us, wants to trust God, but he also wants to have a bit of security, just in case. After the fourteen years since God met him at Bethel and promised to be with him, Jacob had little to show for himself. Sure, he had acquired quite a few children, who could definitely be considered the beginning of God's fulfillment of his promise to give him offspring like the sand of the seashore, but, as we saw last

week, that had been a mixed blessing. Was God going to come through? Was he really going to be with him and help him? From where Jacob was standing, it didn't really look like it, and so he designed for himself a bit of an added insurance policy: His scheme with the sticks. But as we read on, we will discover that God confirmed to him that he was indeed the one who was causing Jacob's success. You see, in just a few verses we'll read about a conversation he had with his wives, where he tells them, in 31:10, that *in the mating season* he had a dream, and that in that dream the flocks were coming out multi-colored, striped, and spotted. Well if he had this dream in the mating season, that's after he made the deal with Laban; in other words, it was afterwards that Jacob found out that God was commandeering his little scheme. And we should also notice another thing. When he's recounting this dream of his to his wives, he doesn't say a word about what he did with the sticks—not a word. Jacob knows that his blessing is due, not to his awesome plan, but to God.

When Jacob decided to do his little trick with the sticks, he was doing what we all do when faced with similar circumstances: He got clever. His faith was getting weary, and so he quite literally clung to sticks, his clever little idea. But notice what God did not do. When Jacob started placing those sticks in the troughs, he did not say, "Oh, that's it. You want to cling to your little superstition, Jacob, like your wives clung to the mandrakes a few years ago, well then forget it, I'm out of here!" No, instead, God in his mercy did his work anyway, and blessed Jacob.

There are many examples of stories like this one in Scripture. One that especially comes to mind occurs in the one of the Gospels, Matthew 9. Jesus is going around, being Jesus, doing the work of God, healing the sick, preaching, and is on his way to raise a ruler's precious daughter from the dead. While he is going, a woman suffering from a discharge of blood for

twelve years comes up behind him and says, "If I only touch his garment, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and what did he say? Did he say, "You foolish woman, clinging to your superstitions and human wisdom, you can forget about that healing"? No, of course he didn't. Instead, he says to her, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well."

And that finally brings us to our first main point. God is at work all around us: At home, at work, when we interact with other people, and when we do ministry. And in all of this, we desire his blessing, we desire our ministries and our lives to be more than just life, more than just ministry—we desire the touch of God. And so in going about our daily lives we must heed the lesson we are taught here in this text: It is not about us being clever, it is about God being God. To be sure, some of the sticks we use in our daily lives may not be as fraught with superstition as Jacob was in this account, but nevertheless, sticks are there.

A life that desires God's blessing can be compared to "take your kid to work day." You know the routine. A boy wakes up early, excited to go with dad to take your kid to work day. They commute in together, dad does the driving. They get to the office, dad introduces his son to everyone and they all comment on how excited the little boy must be to be working with daddy today, and he is. And then work begins, and dad goes about the day pretty much as usual, but being sure to include his boy in as much as possible. So he lets him stuff some envelopes, lick some stamps, and maybe if he's really good run a few copies. But for most of the time, the boy pretty much sits at the end of the desk and colors. Then he comes home with all of the little crayon pictures he drew, and his mother asks him, "What did you do today, sweetie?" And the boy answers, "I helped dad at work today."

Now at the risk of sounding overly-sappy, at the end of every day, the most we can say is, "I helped dad at work today." Pastor Lee spends quite a bit of time putting loads of thought into the sermons every week—with the prayer that God will bless some of you with it. Others pick what they feel are just the right songs to sing—with the prayer that God would give some of you an authentic worship experience. We put our checks and our money into the offering plate—with the hope that the One who already owns the universe would be pleased to use our gifts to bless others. We are all just helping dad at work.

Sometimes, our little helps are good and noble and pleasing to God in the best way. God is honored when we do what he commands us to do. Sometimes, our helps are on a level similar to Jacob's waving sticks around. We do our clever little things. Sometimes they really are clever, sometimes, they're not so clever. Sometimes, we show Christ's love to others in beautiful, meaningful ways. Sometimes we do things that aren't so helpful. Sometimes we act in exact accord with what God has revealed in his Word. Sometimes our theological underpinnings are weak and uninformed. The list can go on forever, but the point is that we don't have to go around worrying that God needs us to get everything right in order to bless us. How wonderful it is that we have a God who uses people who wave sticks.

By this point in the story, Jacob has gotten a very large, very strong flock. But you can probably imagine that Laban was not too happy about this. "How did this happen? That Jacob!" And not only was Laban unhappy, but you can imagine how his sons, whose inheritance had now been reduced to scrawny little animals, must have felt. And you don't have to wonder; we read in 31:1–2:

"Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying, 'Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from that which was our father's he has gained all this wealth.' And Jacob saw the face of Laban, that he was not *with him* as he was before."

Yeah, it's safe to say that Laban was not "with" Jacob. But guess who was—verse 3:

"Then the Lord said to Jacob, 'Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and *I will be with you*.'" This promise, that we last heard uttered to Jacob twenty years ago in 28:15 now had quite a ring of authenticity. If it hadn't been clear in the past, it was certainly clear now—God was with him. But now Jacob had to find out if his wives were also.

Verse 4: "So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was." Jacob now needs to convince them that they would be better off with him than with their father. And so what does he do? He brings them into the middle of the field, which provided privacy, and into the midst of his goofy-looking, but overwhelmingly impressive flock. What better way to convince them that God was with them than to put them smack dab in the middle of his success.

Jacob's conversation tactics are going to be to compare Laban's attitude towards him with God's attitude towards him. "Laban did this; God did that. God did this; Laban did that. So whose side do you want to be on, you wives of mine—the side of the one whom God is with, or the one whom God is against?" Verse 5:

"And Jacob said to them, 'I saw your father's face, that is not as it was toward me before. But the God of my father has been with me. And you know that I have served your father with all my strength, yet your father has cheated me and has changed my wages ten times. But God did not permit him to harm me.'

By the way, notice that when he mentions that Laban changed his wages ten times, he doesn't mention the biggest wage-change of all: Leah instead of Rachel. That's a touchy subject, and he needs Leah on his side right now. After all, eight of his sons and his daughter Dinah are hers. Reading on from verse eight:

"If he said, 'The spotted shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flock bore speckled. Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and has given them to me."

And now Jacob's going to tell about the dream he had. Again, notice that (1) he has this dream *in the mating season*, which is after he originally came up with his scheme and (2) he does not mention what he did with the sticks. He did not get the idea to do this from God. That God was with him in it was something he learned in his dream afterward.

"When the flock was mating, I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream—and behold!—the goats that mated with the flock were speckled spotted, and mottled. 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 speckled, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban has done to you. I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to me. Now rise, leave this land and return to the land of your kindred.'"

Don't miss what God is saying to Jacob. Jacob has bred his flock, and has had enormous success in doing so. The fact that he had such success probably raised suspicion in his mind—"I wonder if God *is* with me after all." And then came the dream. First God reveals that he had indeed been the one who was blessing Jacob with the sheep, and that, despite the many years

when it seemed that Laban was just running roughshod over Jacob, God was watching, and was taking account of every wrong suffered by his blessed one. And now it is time to leave and to return home, and God reminds Jacob of the vow he had made at Bethel, twenty years earlier:

"If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you."

It was clear that God had fulfilled what he said he would: he was *with* him, he had kept him, he had provided for him, and now he was commanding him to return to his father's house, and, most importantly, to live with Yahweh as his God. In essence, God is saying to Jacob, "It is now your time to fulfill your vow to me." But how would his wives respond? Would they be compelled to follow Jacob, trusting in a God whose name hasn't appeared on Jacob's lips since he made his vow? We have their response in the following verses (verse 14):

"Then Rachel and Leah answered, and they said to him, "Is there still any portion or inheritance left for 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. For all the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. And now, whatever God has said to you, do.' So Jacob arose, and set his sons and his wives on camels, and he drove away all his livestock, all his property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-Aram, to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan."

For Rachel and Leah, the decision was not difficult. Their father didn't give a hoot about them, and here they were, standing in the midst of God's blessing with the man whom God has chosen to bless. For them to stay would be foolish. And though it will become clear that they are far from becoming devoted followers of the one true God, they have taken the first step by acknowledging what God was doing and choosing to be a part of it. And so we have our second main point: The blessed life is available to those who align themselves with God's promises. God has acted in very specific ways in human history, and his blessing is available to all who step onto his path.

But now we have come to a difficulty in our train of thought. I've spoken quite a bit this morning about how strongly God's blessing is evident in Jacob's life because he was prosperous. In fact, he was more than prosperous. He was prosperous in such a way that his material prosperity can only be attributed to God's hand in his life. And if we left it at that, it would almost seem as if the sum total of God's plan was to single out a single family and make them rich. But its not.

See, there was a little problem back in Genesis chapter three, when the first man and the first woman disobeyed God and sin entered into human race. From that point on, as human civilization grew and developed, so did evil, murder, injustice and violence. In fact, as the Bible tells us and anyone with eyes open today can see, it seems that mankind is doomed to persist in this state forever. This situation does not fix itself. And so God in his great wisdom and mercy steps into human history, and chooses one man: Abraham, and says, "You. I will make you into a great nation. Your offspring will be my people, and I will be their God. And it will be through your offspring that I will bless all the nations of the earth. And so the tangible evidence that God was indeed doing this, that he was indeed building a great nation was by giving Abraham and his

offspring what they needed to be a great nation, and this includes land, and it includes possessions. But that is not the end. How would God be answering the problem of evil in the world if he simply made a really awesome, wealthy nation and just told them, "Behave"? The reason God, the architect of all true blessing raised up the nation of Israel was so that from it would come a king, who would surpass all the other kings of the earth, a son of David whose throne would be eternal and whose rule would establish justice and righteousness forever. But King Jesus does not establish justice and righteousness by sitting on his throne and shouting to his subjects, "Behave!" He establishes justice and righteousness by shedding his blood on the cross of Calvary as an atoning sacrifice for human sin, that all who believe in him might enter into the joy of the Father, that the curse of the fall might come undone, and that God's good creation might be restored to a right relationship with its Creator. The reason God blessed Jacob was so the blessing of Christ might come.

And quite contrary to the patriarch Jacob, who was blessed with flocks and servants and camels, Jesus tells us "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. . . . But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry" (Lk 6:20–21, 25–25). This king, whose coming was the entire purpose of the blessing of Jacob, was the one who told one of the Jewish scribes, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mt. 8:20), and to his disciples, exclaimed, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (Mk 10:25).

And so we should not look at Jacob's wealth and say, "That's what I want! Why doesn't God bless me like that?" Not when the blessing of Christ, the one whose coming was the reason the nation was built in the first place, is held out to us. How do they compare?

"Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys" (30:43).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. . . In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph 1:3–4, 7–10).

We, like Leah and Rachel, who chose to align themselves with God's blessing, must step into what it is to be truly blessed. Jacob stood his wives in the field in the midst of his flock and said, "Come, follow me, back to the land of my father." Years later, Jesus would stand by the sea, and call his first disciples: "Follow me."

Thank God for Jacob, for God's wisdom was made manifest in his foolishness. Thank God for the lesson his life teaches us, that the blessed life is not about us being clever, but about God being God. And thank God that the blessed life, which is now secured for us through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, is available to all who align themselves with God's promises. God is the architect of the blessed life.