

• *Jacob wants to go back home to settle*

• *God wants him to grow in faith before he goes*

• *Laban presses Jacob to stay on*

1. Jacob follows the instinct of his faith

• *Spotted and speckled animals*

• *Jacob felt he had to trust God to work for him in a way that would make it quite clear that God was at work*

• *Trusting God rather than manipulating others – a new way for Jacob*

2. Jacob is letting God do the manipulating

• *A gigantic step forward*

Jacob now wants to be released from Laban ^{☞1}. He had only intended to go to Haran for a short time, but he has stayed for well over twenty years. He now has four wives, eleven sons and at least one daughter. God had told him many years ago that He would bring Jacob back to the land of Canaan, and now that Jacob has a son through his favourite wife he wants to go back home to settle. He is hoping that the troubles with Esau will now have ceased. He has not seen Esau for twenty years and he hopes that by now Esau's murderous intentions will have fallen aside. Yet there are some things he has to get clear before God will allow him to go home. At this point Jacob is learning new lessons in faith. He is not a great man of faith; so far he has been more of a manipulator than a believer. But God wants him to grow in faith before he goes home.

The offer of a rise in wages tempts Jacob to stay longer. Laban has profited from Jacob and is not eager to lose his easily manipulated worker. He presses Jacob to stay on ^{☞1}. But Jacob is ready to learn some things he never realised before.

1. **Jacob follows the instinct of his faith.** Jacob agrees to stay on if he will be allowed to take the spotted and speckled goats and lambs. Laban will have the animals which are uniformly one colour, while Jacob will take the smaller number that are spotted and speckled ^{☞1}. It is a difficult suggestion to refuse. The sheep are mainly all white. The goats are mainly all brown or black. Laban agrees, but is soon playing his old tricks and removes the sheep that would belong to Jacob. He is still determined to exploit Jacob as much as he can ^{☞2}.

What we have here is what I would call an 'intuition of faith'. Sometimes faith has to follow a kind of instinct. The Bible has many examples. Abraham's feeling that he should find a wife for Isaac in Haran was an example. 1 Samuel 14:6–14 is another example. Jonathan said 'Let's go... **Perhaps** the Lord will act...' ^{☞1}. He was not 100% sure but it seemed to him that that was the way God was leading him. Jacob felt he had to trust God to work for him in a way that would make it quite clear that God was at work.

It was a step forward for Jacob. It is a rare event in Jacob's life for him to be trusting God rather than manipulating. Jacob was taking a step towards a greater trust in God. He is making an arrangement the results of which will depend on whether God lets speckled and spotted sheep and goats get born in large numbers.

2. **Jacob is letting God do the manipulating.** He is willing to leave the matter entirely in the hands of God. The speckled and spotted animals will be his wages. 'My honesty will testify for me in the future,' he says ^{☞1}. This is a gigantic step forward for Jacob. Never before has he ever said 'My honesty will testify for me!' Normally he has been the very opposite of honest; he has spent a lifetime in deceit. Laban removes all the speckled and spotted animals to start with, so what chance does Jacob have to make much profit? Jacob follows his intuition. He lets the flocks of sheep and goats mate in the sight of patchy rods of wood ^{☞2}. There is no known technique for producing patchy animals in this way. It was probably just a representation of what he was trusting would happen. But since Jacob was trusting God, God honoured him and allowed the odd scheme to work!

^{☞1} 30:25–26

^{☞1} 30:27–30

^{☞1} 30:31–33

^{☞2} 30:34–36

^{☞1} 1 Samuel 14:6

^{☞1} 30:33

^{☞2} 30:37–43

Jacob also kept strong and weak animals separate and only let the strong ones see the multicoloured posts of wood; so the strong ones were patchy and the weak ones were of one colour ^{□1}.

^{□1} 30:42

• *Trusting God worked for Jacob!*

Whatever the scientific procedure might be, it worked! Soon Jacob grew prosperous with multicoloured flocks of sheep and goats. The lesson he was learning is that trusting God is better than manipulation. Manipulation does not allow anyone to say 'My honesty will testify for me.'

3. Laban's deceit fails

3. **Laban's deceit fails.** The herds of Laban are now small, and the animals are weak. Laban's sons began to get resentful and to accuse Jacob of stealing from Jacob ^{□1}. Laban himself becomes even more unfriendly ^{□2}.

^{□1} 31:1
^{□2} 31:2

• *A demonstration to both Laban and Jacob that faith and honesty are the best policy*

It is all a demonstration to Laban and to Jacob himself, that manipulation is not necessary, and that faith and honesty are the best policy. A weak strand in Jacob's character – his deceitfulness – is being thoroughly challenged.

• *Jacob is ready to go home*



Jacob is now ready to go home. And God is ready too. The great sin of Jacob which made him run from Canaan in the first place has been overcome on at least one occasion. Jacob never will be entirely free of it, and he shows his old deceitfulness even in the way in which he leaves Laban. But at least he has made a start. He has learned on at least one occasion that honesty is best. God is willing now that the call of Jacob's life should go forward, and that calling concerns Canaan not Haran.

• *God tells him to return after more than twenty years training*

Soon God appears to Jacob and tells him to return ^{□1}. Jacob explains the situation to his wives ^{□2} and tells them the story of how God has appeared to him. The wives do not reckon they any longer have a place in Laban's affections; they are ready to leave ^{□3} (31:14–16). More than twenty years training has gone by for Jacob. This is God's way. Some of us get quite old before the greatest work of our life appears before us. We need a long time, perhaps decades, before we get to the position of faith and purity and openness. When we get to that point the calling of our life begins to move forward more speedily.

^{□1} 31:3
^{□2} 31:4–13
^{□3} 31:14–16

• *Some of us get quite old before the greatest work of our life appears*

 <p>slices.org.uk</p>	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>		
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