

November 25

Lesson 13 (NIV)

## GOD'S BLESSING

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Psalm 46](#)

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Genesis 30](#)

### [GENESIS 30:22–32, 43](#)

[22](#) Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive. [23](#) She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, “God has taken away my disgrace.” [24](#) She named him Joseph, and said, “May the LORD add to me another son.”

[25](#) After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland. [26](#) Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I’ve done for you.”

[27](#) But Laban said to him, “If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you.” [28](#) He added, “Name your wages, and I will pay them.”

[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.”

[43](#) In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.



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## KEY VERSE

*God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and enabled her to conceive.* — [Genesis 30:22](#)

## GOD'S WORLD AND GOD'S PEOPLE

### Unit 3: God Blesses and Re-creates Regardless

LESSONS [10–13](#)

#### LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Recount the instances of God's blessing of individuals in today's text.
2. Compare and contrast the deceptive personalities of Laban and Jacob.
3. Acknowledge with gratitude one or more blessings from God.

#### LESSON OUTLINE

##### [Introduction](#)

[A. ASAP](#)

[B. Lesson Context](#)

[I. Increase of Family \(GENESIS 30:22–24\)](#)

[A. God's Sustenance \(v. 22\)](#)

[B. Rachel's Son \(vv. 23, 24\)](#)

[II. Increase of Flocks \(GENESIS 30:25–32, 43\)](#)

[A. Jacob's Proposal \(vv. 25, 26\)](#)

Decision Points

- B. Laban's Plea (vv. 27, 28)
- C. Laban's Prosperity (vv. 29, 30)
- D. Jacob's Pay (vv. 31, 32, 43)

Human Schemes or God's Help?

Conclusion

- A. Facing Labans
- B. Being Jacob
- C. Prayer
- D. Thought to Remember

**HOW TO SAY IT**

Asher*Ash*-er.

Bilhah*Bill*-ha.

Gad*Gad* (*a* as in *bad*).

Harran*Hair*-un.

Issachar*Izz*-uh-kar.

Laban*Lay*-bun.

modus operandi*mow*-duhs *ah*-puh-**ran**-dee.

Naphtali*Naf*-tuh-lye.

Simeon*Sim*-ee-un.

Zebulun *Zeb-you-lun*.

Zilpah *Zil-pa*.

## **Introduction**

### **A. ASAP**

In our fast-paced world where everything is required to happen ASAP (as soon as possible), delays can be especially frustrating. At the time this lesson is being written, the road I usually take to our church is under repair. Detour signs let drivers know they have to take an alternate route.

Delays seem to be a common part of God's *modus operandi* in Scripture. He appears to prefer operating by another kind of ASAP: as slowly as possible. Consider the patriarchs in the book of Genesis. Abraham entered Canaan at the age of 75 ([Genesis 12:4](#)), having received God's promise that he would be the source of a great nation ([12:2](#)). Yet his covenant son, Isaac, was not born until Abraham had reached age 100!

Isaac was 40 when he married Rebekah, but their sons Jacob and Esau did not arrive for another 20 years (lesson [10](#)). Jacob had to wait 7 years before he could marry Laban's daughter Rachel; even then he ended up married to her sister Leah. Laban allowed him to marry Rachel provided that he worked another 7 years.

Rachel also spent time in God's "waiting room" as she struggled with the disappointment of her inability to conceive ([Genesis 29:31](#)). It is hard to imagine the depths of her frustration at seeing the other women in her household bearing children while she remained barren. It is hard at times for us to explain or fully understand why God delays answering certain prayers or fulfilling certain promises. This is where faith provides another outlook (or "uplook"). We trust that God will do what he has said, by accepting another interpretation of ASAP: as sure as promised.

### **B. Lesson Context**

Following Jacob's dream at Bethel (last week's study), he traveled on to Haran. There he met Rachel, Laban's daughter (and Jacob's cousin) when she came to water her father's sheep. Rachel ran back home to tell her father about Jacob's arrival; and Laban hurried to meet Jacob, welcoming him with great excitement. Then followed the series of events that resulted in the master deceiver, Jacob, being deceived in turn by Laban. As a result, Jacob first married Leah, then Rachel (whom he truly loved).

The Bible then records how Jacob began to build a family that would grow to 12 sons and a daughter (Dinah), with the sons becoming the source of the 12 tribes of the nation of Israel. Leah gave birth to Jacob's sons Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah ([Genesis 29:31–35](#)). Then Rachel, who was barren, determined that she would build a family through her servant Bilhah, who gave birth to Dan and Naphtali

([30:4–8](#)). Leah’s servant Zilpah then gave birth to Gad and Asher ([30:9–13](#)). Later, Leah gave birth to sons Issachar and Zebulun plus daughter Dinah ([30:17–21](#)).

Rachel voiced her anguish to Jacob with great emotion ([Genesis 30:1](#)). She must have grown increasingly discouraged as she watched the three other women in her household provide children for Jacob while she remained barren. The sibling rivalry between Rachel and sister Leah ([30:7, 8, 14–16](#)) must have reminded Jacob of the friction that had developed between him and Esau back home. But circumstances were about to change.

## I. Increase of Family

### ([GENESIS 30:22–24](#))

#### A. God’s Sustenance (v. [22](#))

##### [22a](#). Then God remembered Rachel;

When Scripture says *God remembered* something or someone, that does not imply something that had slipped his mind now pops back to memory. God does not need to have his memory jogged as we do. He needs no reminders. Rather, when the text says that God remembers, the meaning is that he is about to act to fulfill a promise (compare [Genesis 8:1](#); [19:29](#); [Exodus 2:24, 25](#); etc.).

##### [22b](#). he listened to her and enabled her to conceive.

It is interesting to compare this statement with [Genesis 25:21](#). There the text says that God listened to the prayer of husband Isaac on behalf of his barren wife, Rebekah. Here, however, God responds to the barren wife’s own expression of anguish. Perhaps she has been praying about her condition, but the text does not specifically say that.

#### B. Rachel’s Son (vv. [23, 24](#))

##### [23](#). She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, “God has taken away my disgrace.”

Barrenness is a source of *disgrace* in biblical times (compare [Isaiah 49:21](#); [54:1](#); [Galatians 4:27](#)). When Elizabeth is allowed to conceive in her old age, she declares, “In these days [the Lord] has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people” ([Luke 1:25](#)). With the birth of a *son*, an especially heavy burden has been lifted from Rachel’s shoulders, and she is grateful.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What are some ways that the church can help alleviate the shame people feel about their circumstances?

#### *Digging Deeper*

How, if at all, should the church’s approach to the issue depend on whether the shame is due to voluntary or involuntary circumstances?

##### [24](#). She named him Joseph, and said, “May the LORD add to me another son.”

The name *Joseph* comes from a Hebrew word meaning “to add.” Rachel hopes and prays that her childbearing prowess is not limited to bearing him. Rachel will give birth to another son; however, the birth of that son, Benjamin, in Canaan will result in Rachel’s death ([Genesis 35:16–20](#)).

## II. Increase of Flocks

([GENESIS 30:25–32, 43](#))

### A. Jacob’s Proposal (vv. [25, 26](#))

**25. After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me on my way so I can go back to my own homeland.**

Joseph’s birth seems to serve as a signal to Jacob that it is time that he should return to Canaan, his homeland. A woman’s status is very uncertain if she has no children. A barren woman is probably in better surroundings if she remains among family members who will care for her; otherwise she risks being ostracized and possibly mistreated. But now that Rachel has a son of her own, Jacob seems to feel more at ease about making the request we see here.

**26. “Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I’ve done for you.”**

Another factor influencing Jacob’s desire to return home at this point is that the 14 years for which he had agreed to work in order to marry both Rachel and Leah have apparently been fulfilled. That work represents what Jacob has “paid” for both Leah and Rachel: 7 years initially for Rachel (only to be given Leah instead) and then 7 additional years for Leah, though Jacob was allowed to marry Rachel before his second 7-year obligation was carried out ([Genesis 29:18, 26–28](#)).

### DECISION POINTS

“Having children will bring a couple closer together.” Don’t believe it. It’s a myth! At least that’s what many psychological studies show.

On the other hand, even though research says marital happiness may decline with the birth of the first child, a couple is less likely to divorce at that point. Apparently, when that “little bundle of joy” comes along, the primary focus is no longer on efforts that reinforce the pleasure the couple experiences with each other. Rather, the new dynamic focuses on that innocent stranger that has come to live with them.

Parenting adds a dimension to the relationship that calls for selfless actions such as feeding, bathing, and diapering the baby. The emotional weight of being responsible for a little one can be a decision point in forcing a parent to realize that it’s time to grow up emotionally in accepting responsibility. This is often especially true of fathers.

Jacob already had 10 sons before Joseph—who would be his favorite son—was born. However, the birth of this son by the wife he loved seems to have resulted in a decision point: it was time for him to ponder anew his promised role in the nation through which God would bless the world.

An occasion, a precipitating event, may come to each of us that causes us to realize that it's time to take seriously our roles in fulfilling the Great Commission ([Matthew 28:19, 20](#)). But, of course, that time is not now because we have so much else to do. Right?

—C. R. B.

### *What Do You Think?*

What questions are helpful to ask ourselves when considering a major transition?

### *Digging Deeper*

How might issues of body and issues of spirit affect one another during such a transition?

## **B. Laban's Plea (vv. [27, 28](#))**

**[27](#). But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you."**

Laban has been as much of a deceiving "heel-grabber" as Jacob. This is seen in Laban's sister-swap of Leah in place of Rachel ([Genesis 29:23](#)). His deception has been rewarded by 14 years of labor from Jacob, and Laban is hesitant to let good help get away.

Laban's deceiving and manipulative ways cause us to be suspicious about the sincerity of his declaration that he has *learned by divination that the Lord has blessed him because of* Jacob. Is Laban merely "playing the Lord card" as a further attempt to manipulate Jacob?

Laban claims to have discovered what he knows about Jacob as the instrument of the Lord's blessing through *divination*. Elsewhere in Scripture this term refers to the attempt to discover hidden information by a means that is tied to pagan religious practices ([Genesis 44:5, 15](#); [Leviticus 19:26](#); [2 Kings 17:17](#); [21:6](#); [2 Chronicles 33:6](#)). This is the first time the term is used in the Bible; the practice will later be clearly spelled out as forbidden in the Law of Moses ([Deuteronomy 18:9–14](#)).

We do not know what rituals Laban has engaged in to determine what he says he knows. Even so, it appears that some elements of superstition or pagan religion are practiced in his household. This is seen by the use of mandrake plants to induce pregnancy ([Genesis 30:14–18](#)). It is also apparent given the presence of the "gods" that Rachel later takes from Laban and hides ([31:19, 30–35](#)).

This provides another example of God's guiding or superintending human efforts (as misguided as they may be) to accomplish his sovereign will. Just as God can use pagan rulers to further his divine program (as he used Pharaoh during the exodus), so he can use a sinful human practice such as divination (whatever it may have involved) to accomplish his ultimate plan. That plan is to return Jacob to his homeland as God promised he would ([Genesis 28:15](#)).

Of course, the real reason for Laban's being blessed has nothing to do with divination. The blessing that Isaac had given to Jacob (under the assumption he was Esau) included these words: "May ... those who bless you be blessed" ([Genesis 27:29](#)). Ultimately that promise is rooted in the Lord's covenant with Abraham ([Genesis 12:3](#)).

**28. He added, “Name your wages, and I will pay them.”**

Jacob’s presence has been very profitable for Laban; he is reluctant to lose that expertise. So he uses the promise of a blank check in an attempt to persuade Jacob to stay. The offer we see in the verse before us is the same as the one Laban made after Jacob had been in Laban’s household a month ([Genesis 29:14, 15](#)). The offer that had worked before may work again, or so Laban seems to hope.

**C. Laban’s Prosperity (vv. [29, 30](#))**

**29, 30. Jacob said to him, “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 the LORD has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?”**

Once again Jacob mentions the service he has already rendered Laban. Jacob repeats Laban’s observation regarding credit to be given to *the Lord* for the blessing that has resulted. Laban has indeed prospered well because of the Lord’s blessing after Jacob’s arrival. But Jacob adds that he needs to think about his family and what is best for them.

***What Do You Think?***

How do you know when you’ve met your responsibility to assist others given your responsibility to meet the needs of your own family?

***Digging Deeper***

What are some ways to determine if your motives are selfish?

**D. Jacob’s Pay (vv. [31, 32, 43](#))**

**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:**

Laban again offers Jacob a blank check, giving the appearance of being more than fair. *Jacob* responds with a proposal that will allow Laban to keep Jacob in his service for an unspecified amount of time.

This immediately makes us wonder why Jacob yields to Laban’s desire after Jacob has voiced his desire to return to his homeland. Does the “heel-grabber” see at this point an opportunity to enhance his own wealth by means of the plan (scheme?) he is about to propose? Is Jacob already thinking ahead to what he will do to outsmart Laban at his own game? It is tempting, with someone like Jacob or Laban, to try to discern some ulterior motive for his actions. Perhaps Jacob simply has had a change of heart.

**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.”**





Visual for Lesson [13](#). Ask your class members to discuss how this visual connects with [Genesis 30:22, 23](#) and incidents in their lives.

*Sheep* (and lambs) are usually all white, while goats are all black. *Speckled or spotted* animals (and *dark-colored* sheep) are far fewer in number. Essentially, Jacob is proposing to keep for himself the least numerous animals among the livestock for his *wages*; Laban is to retain all the rest.

In the verses that immediately follow those in our lesson text, Jacob further proposes that any unspeckled or unspotted livestock found among Jacob’s flocks will be assumed to be stolen. Laban immediately (and understandably!) agrees to Jacob’s suggestion ([Genesis 30:33, 34](#)).

**43. In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.**

The ultimate result—when Jacob uses a combination of selective breeding and superstitious beliefs ([Genesis 30:37–42](#))—is that Laban is outsmarted, and Jacob increases his holdings greatly at Laban’s expense. Laban’s desire to retain Jacob’s expertise proves the validity of the old warning, “Be careful what you ask for because you may just get it!”

*The man* (Jacob) later acknowledges to Rachel and Leah that God has been the source of the blessings and the abundance he has received ([Genesis 31:9–12](#)). It appears that the tree branches Jacob uses in [30:37–42](#) have an impact similar to mandrakes on the ability of females to become pregnant ([30:14–16, 22](#)). However such things work (or people believe they work), God is, in truth, the source of the desired fertility. Both Rachel and Jacob attest to this fact ([30:23, 30](#)).

The results God desires are obtained, above and beyond what Rachel and Jacob do or desire. Throughout all of this, God has been keeping the promise he made to Jacob in his dream ([Genesis 28:14, 15](#)). That increase will also apply to Jacob’s descendants, the children of Israel, while in Egypt ([47:27](#)).

#### ***What Do You Think?***

How can we determine if God is pleased with our plans and decisions?

#### ***Digging Deeper***

Consider [2 Corinthians 6:4–10](#) and the characters of [Hebrews 11](#) in your conclusion.

[Genesis 31](#) records how Laban's sons begin to complain about all that Jacob has obtained at the expense of their father. The relationship between Laban and Jacob becomes much more strained. [Genesis 31:3](#) includes a detail that is missing from Jacob's earlier plan to return home: the Lord's personal command for him to do so. Included with the command is repetition of the promise given to Jacob during his dream of last week's lesson: "I am with you" ([28:15](#)). Much still lies ahead for Jacob. He has a vow to keep ([28:20-22](#)) and a brother to encounter.

### ***HUMAN SCHEMES OR GOD'S HELP?***

Jacob's bargain with Laban shows us that animal husbandry folklore was part of ancient culture. But the custom has continued for centuries since. For example, changing the name of an animal will cause it to die, according to an old Pennsylvania belief. On the other hand, an Illinois proverb held that if you get a horse on trade, you *must* change its name to have good luck with it.

A North Carolina belief promised that nailing a horseshoe over the stable door will prevent witches from stealing your horses. Are you a chicken farmer? A Maryland proverb assured that eggs set in the morning will result in male chicks. But in Alabama, eggs needed to be set in the afternoon to get the same result. In Kentucky, your chickens would be protected from hawks if you put a round rock in a fire—causing the hawk's claws to draw up in that shape so it couldn't grab your chickens.

Animal husbandry folklore may have been in play as Laban and Jacob connived to outsmart each other when determining Jacob's wages. But we know from prior readings in Genesis that God planned to bless Jacob and his descendants. So it's far more likely that the real reason for Jacob's success in breeding his flocks was that God had his hand in the process.

The principle is still valid: Our blessings are due more to God's actions than to our own plans (however noble) or schemes (however devious).

—C. R. B.

#### ***What Do You Think?***

What guardrails can we put in place to keep our motives above reproach?

#### ***Digging Deeper***

Distinguish between guardrails that all Christians should adopt vs. guardrails that are specific to your own past and personality.

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Facing Labans**

We've all heard the quip "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade." That lighthearted advice offers perspective in surviving difficult circumstances that are not of our own making. The idea is to try to make the best of a bad situation.

What do we do when life gives us “Labans”? We have seen Jacob’s “heel-grabbing” ability on display in the previous lessons of this unit, but Laban was just as crafty as Jacob. Each man learned to live by his wits, to “do unto others *before* they can do unto you.” Having two “heel-grabbers” in such proximity to one another was bound to create a constant atmosphere of tension. Even Laban’s own daughters, Leah and Rachel, admitted that he had not treated them fairly in denying them what they were entitled to receive as an inheritance. They felt more like “foreigners” than daughters in the household ([Genesis 31:14, 15](#)).

We may come across people who remind us of Laban. We may meet them in the workplace, at school, or perhaps (sadly) even in the church. They are always looking to gain an advantage over others. They may even use the Lord’s name as Laban did with Jacob. We want to think the best of people, but the track record of some may cause us to be cautious.

When life gives us Labans, what do we do? Our main desire should be to maintain a God-honoring attitude and conduct. We do so as we are “as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves” ([Matthew 10:16](#)). Spiritual maturity and tact are important in knowing when and how to confront a Laban in a way that does not make matters worse.

It is easy to allow life’s Labans to sour our relationship with God and with other people. We may think that we have to become Labans in order to survive. We end up leaning on our own understanding rather than trusting in the Lord, contrary to [Proverbs 3:5](#). True, life’s Labans are not easy to face or easy to love. Perhaps a long, hard look in the mirror will remind us that at times we are not all that easy to love or deal with either. We all need God’s grace on a daily basis—grace to avoid being like Laban and grace to love the Labans who cross our paths.

### **B. Being Jacob**

Jacob would not seem to be someone to emulate as we face life’s Labans. But we should not allow Jacob’s massive flaws to cause us to miss what was right about him: his awareness that God was watching over him to fulfill his promises. The same is true for us.

### **C. Prayer**

Father, the manipulative people in our broken world discourage us! Keep us from becoming one of them. Let people see Christ in us. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.

### **D. Thought to Remember**

Count your blessings and thank the blesser.

## **INVOLVEMENT LEARNING**

## Into the Lesson

Lead a conversation about everyone's best and worst jobs. Ask participants to identify specifically what made certain jobs desirable and other jobs draining. Encourage them to explore what had the biggest impact on their attitude toward these jobs—the work itself, the wages and benefits, or something else.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “What Each Generation Wants from Work” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Form students into groups of no more than four to complete the activity as indicated. After about four minutes of sharing, have a spokesperson from each group share their conclusions.

After either opening, make a transition to Bible study by saying, “In today's lesson we're going to investigate an intriguing discussion involving wages and benefits. What will be different than such discussions as we typically hear of them in the news is the role of God and his blessings.”

## Into the Word

Use the Lesson Context to remind participants of how Laban had deceived Jacob, the result being more long years of hard work. Set the stage further by reminding the class that Rachel's inability to conceive was a barrier for Jacob to receive God's promise of uncountable offspring.

Read [Genesis 30:22–32, 43](#) aloud, then form the class into groups of four to six. After distributing index cards and pens, instruct groups to (1) identify, with one entry per card, the specific ways that God had blessed Jacob and then (2) group those blessings into two general categories and name those categories.

After no more than five minutes, have a reporter from each group share discoveries of specific blessings. (*Anticipated responses: God's provisions of healing for Rachel, the birth of a child, wages for livelihood, etc.*)

Next, call for groups' discoveries of the two general categories of those blessings. (*Anticipated responses: (1) the category of covenantal blessings [birth of Joseph to help fulfill the promises of [Genesis 28:13, 14](#); see last week's lesson] and (2) the category of material blessings [as summarized in [Genesis 30:43](#)].*) Be ready to add information that groups miss.

Collect the cards and shuffle them. Pick a card, read it, and pose this question for whole-class discussion: “Would this blessing have been obvious to Jacob as coming from God or not?” Have respondents explain their conclusions. If a disagreement is not quickly forthcoming, ask, “Does anyone disagree?” Play the two responses off one another to enhance the discussion.

Repeat this sequence with the remaining cards, discarding cards that list blessings already considered. Throughout this process, jot on the board the blessing under consideration and bullet-point summaries of participants' responses.

As a transition to the Into Life segment, pose this question for whole-class discussion: “Which of these blessings resonates with you most strongly?” Ask the follow-up “Why?” as appropriate.

### **Into Life**

To groups of no more than six, distribute handouts (you prepare) with the word *Gratitude* printed vertically down the middle. Have these instructions printed at the top: “Create an acrostic of ways that God has provided for those in your group.” After a few minutes, have group spokespersons present results for whole-class discussion.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “How Gratitude Changes Us” activity from the reproducible page to be completed as indicated by groups of three. Allow time for whole-class discussion.

After either activity, lead a time of prayer to thank God for all the ways that he has provided for you and members of your class.