

A Streaked, Speckled, and Spotted Story – *Genesis 30:25 – 31:16*

Introduction – Jacob’s story is streaked and speckled, like the flocks he produced. But something stands out about Jacob in this story with its twists and turns. Aristotle called magnanimity “the crown of the virtues.” He said a magnanimous person is a “great-souled” person. He knows his own worth, is patient and confident, is neither vain nor falsely humble. He is not petty, resentful, and he is steady in the face of injustice. The Christian virtue of magnanimity is described as one *“who does not shy away from the difficult good because it is difficult but pursues it with complete confidence in one’s standing before God in Christ. It is acting from this ‘self-knowledge’ that renders one indifferent to the honor and shame generated by others who seek to control how you think and behave”* (taken from Seldon College Mission Statement).

Overview of the Passage – After the 14 years of service and following the birth of Joseph, Jacob requested, “let me go” (vv25-26). But Laban knew by divination that the LORD had blessed him because of Jacob (v27) and sought to negotiate with Jacob a new working deal (v28). Jacob also noted how much Laban had been blessed by the hand of LORD through Jacob’s work (vv29-31). Jacob then offers a sweet deal to Laban, who bites. Jacob will continue to tend the flock, and his pay will be any of the speckled sheep and goats along with any brown lambs (vv31-33). Laban thought this was the deal of the century, but also carefully removed any of the flock that Jacob could claim or use for increasing his own flock (vv34-36). Jacob took rods of green poplar and almond and chestnut trees, and peeled white strips in them (v37). He set those rods in front of the flocks when they came to drink (v38) and when they conceived, they brought forth streaked flocks which he separated from Laban’s as his own (vv39-40). He continued this practice in front of the stronger livestock, and he was so prosperous that he traded for servants, camels and donkeys (vv41-43).

This occurred over six years (31:41) and by then Laban and his sons were angry (31:1-2). The LORD then told Jacob it was time to return to the land of his fathers (v3). He wanted to take his entire family with him as well and so he called his wives to the field and explained how all of this had happened (v40). *“God of my father has been with me”* (v5). *“God did not allow him to hurt me”* (vv6-7). *“God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me”* (v9). Jacob then explained that he knew this would happen because of a dream he had received from the Angel of God (vv10-12), who reiterated the promises given to Jacob at Bethel (v13). Rachel and Leah agreed that their father had estranged them, consumed all their money, and that the riches Jacob had accumulated were riches God had taken from their father and given to their husband (vv14-16). *“Now then, whatever God has said to you, do it”* (v16).

White Stripes and Speckled Sheep – We are not told how this worked but it is presented to us in such a way as to understand that it did work. Commentators are all over the place trying to make sense of this, and Moses certainly did not give us much detail to help. But then remember, it was Moses who held up a staff and parted the waters of the Red Sea. It was Moses who struck a rock and water came bursting forth. Later, Naaman will be told to go wash seven times in the Jordan River to be healed of leprosy. Jesus will put mud in a blind man’s eyes and tell him to go wash. He told servants to fill pots with water and then served the finest wine. God tells people to do some crazy stuff. In fact, he still does. He tells ministers to pour water over the head of a person in His name and their hearts are circumcised.

The white-striped sticks were signs of faith and public declarations of God’s favor upon Jacob. They may have been more than that, but they were certainly not less than that. In the Near East, sheep are generally white and goats are generally dark brown or black. So imagine what people observed. These white (*“laban”* in Hebrew) sheep and black goats mate and, over and over again, the flocks that come forth are speckled. The branches declared what the Lord had promised – *“all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you”* (31:12).

Bible Stories – The stories of the Bible are not to be read like Christian versions of Aesop’s Fables. Trying to find the moral of the story often misses the greater point. The Bible is the long story of the redemption of man to the glory of God, to the praise of His glorious grace (Eph 1:3-14). Some would say it is the story of the defeat of the dragon and the rescue of the girl. And this story is told over and over. It is our story, and it is the story that you are in – and this is why so many things go wrong in your life.

Another Prequel of the Exodus – Jacob has *“served, served, served”* Laban for fourteen years (v26). He has been as a slave and now cries, *“let me go.”* And not just himself, *“my wives and my children...”* – let my people go. But Laban, Pharaoh-like, will not. The work agreement is as hard as making bricks without straw, and yet Jacob prospers at the hand of God. In fact, when he departs, he will leave with the riches of Laban (31:1). God spoke to Jacob in a dream and Jacob said, *“Here I am,”* and God said, *“I am...the God of Bethel.”*

The Patterns of the Stories – The exodus comes at the end of the stories. They begin with a promise, followed by problems which lead to some form of exile. During the exile there is much unpleasantness, but there is protection from the Lord and often unusual prosperity. The exile is a kind of death (and sometimes it is real death) but is followed by an exodus (or a resurrection). This pattern follows the lives of individuals as well as peoples, nations, and of course, Jesus Himself. Born with the promise that He would be the Savior of His people, baptized into His ministry, Jesus is sent into the wilderness to be tested. Following this, His ministry consists of confrontations with Pharisees, unbelieving crowds, demons, and difficult disciples. And yet, many become followers, are baptized, and saved. Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah on the mount of Transfiguration where he discusses his upcoming “exodus” (Luke 9:31). Jesus is exiled – death by crucifixion, which it turned out was His great victory, declared with power in His resurrection from the dead. The dragon was crushed and the bride was rescued.

Magnanimous Jacob – While the previous sections emphasized the characters of Laban (in his deceptions) and the two wives (with their bitter rivalry), this section portrays something of the character of Jacob. There is something to see here about how to live in a world twisted against you, problems thrown your way, schemes to keep you from blessedness. Jacob remembered the God he had met at Bethel and so he believed he would return to the land of his father. And he knew God remembered him, even after all these years of servitude, of problems. He was confident, but not in himself. He was confident in God, and confident enough to make a crazy wager with the scheming Laban. This was magnanimity from trusting in the faithfulness of God – and that is offered to each one of us as we go through our stories. Put up your stripped and striped rods and branches in front of the world of unbelief, for your God has promised you –

Salvation – *“For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”* (Rom 10:13).

Vindication – *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”* (Rom 12:19-21).

Sanctification – *“being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Phil 1:6).

Blessings – *“He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water, That brings forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also shall not wither; And whatever he does shall prosper”* (Ps 1:3).

Assurance – *“For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead”* (2 Co 1:8-9).

The magnanimous man or woman is one *“who does not shy away from the difficult good because it is difficult but pursues it with complete confidence in one’s standing before God in Christ.”* Live your story this way.