Genesis 30:25 – 43 New American Standard Bible

Jacob Prospers

25 Now it came about, when Rachel had given birth to Joseph, that Jacob said to
Laban, "Send me away, so that I may go to my own place and to my own
country. 26 Give *me* my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and
let me go; for you yourself know my service which I have rendered you." 27 But
Laban said to him, "If it pleases you at all, *stay with me*; I have determined by
divination that the Lord has blessed me on your account." 28 He]continued,
"Name me your wages, and I will give them."

29 But *Jacob* said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you and how
your livestock have fared with me. 30 For you had little before I came, and it
has increased to a multitude, and the Lord has blessed you wherever I turned.
But now, when shall I provide for my own household also?" 31 So he said,
"What shall I give you?" And Jacob said, "You shall not give me anything. If
you will do this *one* thing for me, I will again pasture *and* keep your flock: 32 let
me pass through your entire flock today, removing from there every speckled or
spotted sheep and every black sheep among the lambs, and the spotted or
speckled among the goats; and *those* shall be my wages.

33 So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come concerning
my wages. Every one that is not speckled or spotted among the goats, or black
among the lambs, *if found* with me, will be considered stolen." 34 Laban said, "
Good, let it be according to your word." 35 So he removed on that day the striped
or spotted male goats, and all the speckled or spotted female goats, everyone
with white on it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and put them in
the care of his sons. 36 And he put *a distance of* three days' journey between
himself and Jacob, and Jacob fed the rest of Laban's flocks.

37 Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar, almond, and plane trees, and peeled
white stripes in them, exposing the white that *was* in the rods. 38 He set the rods
which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the drinking troughs, *that is*, in the
watering channels where the flocks came to drink; and they mated when they
came to drink. 39 So the flocks mated by the rods, and the flocks delivered
striped, speckled, and spotted *offspring*. 40 Then Jacob separated the lambs,
and made the flocks face toward the striped and all the black in the flock of
Laban; and he put his own herds apart, and did not put them with Laban's
flock. 41 Moreover, whenever the stronger of the flock were mating, Jacob
would place the rods in the sight of the flock in the drinking troughs, so that
they would mate by the rods; 42 but when the flock was sickly, he did not
put *them* in; so the sickly were Laban's, and the stronger *were* Jacob's. 43 So the

man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

We will use five tools on our expedition that are built around five questions
What questions were provoked within you?
Did anything confuse you?
Did anything move you emotionally?
Did God instruct you to do something?
Did you gain any insight into God's character?

Pauls Observations and insights

1. She prophesies over herself and says may the Lord give me another son. Have you ever done anything like this – spoke life into being?
2. Jacob having served Laban many years wants to go home to his own country, plus he also has a promise to fulfil to the Lord. Jacob is homesick – what does this mean?
3. Laban's deceptive nature schemes to keep Jacob with him because he knows God's blessing is upon Jacob.
4. Likewise Jacob schemes to steal Laban's property through the deceptive means of speckling and striping his livestock! Would this actually work?
5. Does prosperity and blessing follow all those who align themselves to the Lord?
6. Jacob collects his wages from Laban by deception and science.
7. Laban agrees with Jacob's suggested plan because he is unaware of what Jacob will do.
8. Is what Jacob did right or wrong? Was it God bringing Jacob this blessing?
9. Jacob pilfered the strong livestock and gave Laban the weak.
10. Is it possible for the sheep to become speckled in this way?
11. If you prosper unrighteously do you really prosper?
12. Why would Laban not let Jacob go?
13. Jacob knew Laban's blessing had come because of him, but is it right to steal from his uncle?
14. How did Jacob know about this form of deception?
15. Did he naively know what to do?
16. Are you carrying any outstanding promises to the Lord?
17. God was protecting Jacob from Laban ripping him off.

18. God, in a dream, had forewarned Jacob in order to protect him and the blessing on him.
19. Almonds have healing properties.

Further reading for those with inquisitive minds

Jacob's Odd "Breeding Program" of Genesis 30

A Bad Bargain?
It is evident from the text and Laban's reaction that this proposal appeared to be lopsided in favor of Laban:

most likely the majority of Laban's flocks were pure white sheep and pure white or black goats, with very few spotted, speckled, or striped animals. Since the majority of Laban's flocks had solid coat colors, he figured that his flocks would continue to breed true to their solid color coats. After removing Jacob's small flock (which he had his sons keep from Jacob), he believed they could not, therefore, influence his own remaining flock by breeding with them. To Laban, it looked like Jacob would leave with at best a few mottled, striped, and streaked sheep and maybe goats, while he would continue to gain flocks and pay extremely cheap labor rates for their care.

selective breeding of sheep and goats. This section (Genesis 30:37–43) is the one which is most heavily criticized as being superstitious folklore and "snake oil" medicine, "proving" that the Bible is full of fairy tales and that the writer (Moses) was ignorant of any real medical knowledge. The charge is made that these goat-herders in Canaan obviously knew nothing about genetics and so believed in an almost Lamarckian prenatal influence or even fertility magic.1

In fact, what is probably being alluded to is the fact that as the females drank water from the troughs, the males would come up behind them to mate. The lambs were likely placed in front of the watering troughs to keep the female animals focused in front of them while the males came up from behind and bred with them.

Now the issue which then arises is that since Laban took all the striped, speckled, and mottled animals out of the flocks, how could the pure-color coated flocks start producing nothing but spotted and striped animals? This is where providential direction, medicinal herbs, and actual genetics comes into play.

Jacob's Knowledge and Methodology
If things were to work out the way they did, Jacob needed to have those animals with the genetic traits for stripes, spots and mottling to outbreed the single-color coated flocks.

First of all, we must remember that the original spotted/striped animals did not come about in a vacuum. There obviously was the genetic information for at least some of the animals to have spotted/striped coats.

Taking the text at face value, it appeared to be a recessive trait compared to the number of pure-color coated flocks, which dominated the flocks.

2 If things were to work out the way they did, Jacob needed to have those animals with the genetic traits for stripes, spots and mottling to outbreed the single-color coated flocks. This would require three things, intricate knowledge of the animals feeding and mating behaviors, medicine to keep such animals healthier, and an understanding of which animals had the genetic traits he needed to produce. We'll tackle the medicinal herbs later, but for now, let's consider the genetics.

Fortunately for Jacob, he did not need to know anything about genetics, all he had to do was obey God.

We find out later in the extended narrative that Jacob benefitted due to visions from God. The whole context can be found in Genesis 31:7–18, but the basics can be found in Genesis 31:10–12.

"When the flocks were breeding, I saw in a dream that the streaked, spotted, and speckled males were mating with the females. In that dream the Angel of God said to me, 'Jacob!' and I said: Here I am. And He said, 'Look up and see: all the males that are mating with the flocks are streaked, spotted, and speckled, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you." (Genesis 31:10–12 HCSB).

Jacob was given advance knowledge of which animals would be born due to which animals were breeding. But wait, how could there be any spotted/striped animals to breed when they had already been removed by Laban? We need to keep in mind that this was a vision and that the striped/spotted animals were most likely God showing Jacob the underlying genetic makeup of some of the flock. All Jacob did to perhaps "help" God's providential breeding program was to ensure that either he gave certain animals herbal medicines to make them healthier and/or whatever animals seemed physically stronger were given the herbal remedies and extra feed (yes, the sticks could be consumed as feed by the animals) at breeding season and apparently solid animals (but which still contained the genetic information for stripes and spots) providentially produced more spotted ones.

God's Care for and Vindication of Jacob

The overarching answer to the questions about this passage is that there was a providential means by which God allowed Jacob to prosper, even though Laban was trying to cheat and defraud him (Genesis 31:7–8). Laban started to see that God was blessing Jacob's flocks and so he changed the terms of the bargain indiscriminately and repeatedly. As we read through this passage, we need to keep in mind that Jacob wasn't cheating Laban, God was counteracting Laban's cheating on him. Apparently, God had come to Jacob in a dream and told him what to do, and then God directed the birth of the sheep and goats to produce whatever Laban had forced Jacob to take out of the flocks. We are not told in Scripture if God miraculously changed the genetic makeup of the flocks or whether he just divinely guided those with the genetic information for stripes, spots and/or mottling to outcompete the other animals. But either way, this was providentially directed.

The method itself has often been characterized as nothing and therefore unimportant (but see the discussion on the natural properties of some of these things in the next section), except that it was probably a command of God to Jacob to test his obedience. Therefore, many

theologians make a point of advising not trying it as a selective breeding research project. Unless God supernaturally intervened, it probably would not have worked out the way it did. It was supernaturally produced (although it is not unreasonable that the process was aided by herbal medicinal properties). Since God sent the dreams to Jacob, it is possible that he also directed Jacob in the actual methodology itself.

The Science Behind the Sticks

Several sources claim the poplar and almond trees have medicinal properties for both humans and livestock. There are several scientific journal papers that mention that the particular trees from which Jacob peeled sticks supposedly cure urogenital problems, reduce fevers, work as anti-inflammatories and aid in reducing reproductive disorders. All of these would make an animal healthier, and more likely to produce healthy offspring.

Many of the chemical compounds would still be beneficial even by simply steeping in water.

Several studies have been done on poplar and almond tree bark, leaves, nuts, and twigs (small diameter branches, or what Scripture called "sticks"), and they mentioned that sheep would eat these and that ewes especially benefitted from them. Also, many of the chemical compounds would still be beneficial even by simply steeping in water. Some of those benefits are highlighted below.

Poplar

Better Reproductive Rates

It has also been proposed that willow and poplar trees provide forage for livestock of moderate nutritive value. Feeding of willow leaves or trimmings to ewes during mating resulted in reduction of live weight loss and increase in reproductive rates.3

[P]oplar supplementation increased ewe reproductive rate by approximately 20 and 30% units for the low and high treatment groups, respectively, compared to the control group. . . . The increase in reproductive rate in supplemented ewes was due to increases in both conception rate and fecundity, with a higher proportion of pregnant ewes, and a higher proportion of multiple pregnancies, in the supplemented groups.4

Enhanced Protein and Carbohydrate Diet Further Enhances Reproductive Rates

Increased concentrations of total N [nitrogen], CT [condensed tannin] and water-soluble carbohydrate (WSC) in the diet of supplemented ewes would also be likely to increase outputs of undegradable dietary protein and microbial protein from the rumen, per unit of CP [crude protein] consumed. A combination of these mechanisms, especially the likely increased absorption of protein, probably explains the increased ewe reproductive rate from poplar supplementation.5

The study showed that both the high and low rates of poplar supplementation (as compared to the control) raised the reproductive rate. The lambing percentage was increased in the high treatment group, with the increases being 41 and 34%, respectively, relative to the control ewes (which were not fed a poplar-supplemented diet). Even the lower poplar treatment increased actual lambing percentage by 20%, relative to the control group. These treatment effects persisted and the lambs were healthier even after being weaned.6

Better Conception Rates, Optimal Gestation, and Increased Multiple Births

Conception rate was higher for the high treatment group, compared to the control; 100% versus 92.9% . The proportion of ewes giving birth to multiple lambs was higher for both the high and low treatment groups, compared to the control. Poplar treatment had a significant effect on mean lambing date , with ewes in the high treatment lambing 4 days earlier than control ewes.7

Salicin and Condensed Tannins in Poplars Increase Protein Utilization and Birth Rate

Poplar trees are known to contain significant concentrations of the secondary compound salicin, and other phenolic glycosides, which may be a factor in the increase in reproductive rate in ewes supplemented with poplar tree cuttings.8

A major difference between the chemical composition of poplar and willow forage and summer pasture is the presence of secondary chemicals. The main secondary chemicals present in poplar and willow forage are phenolic glycosides (e.g. salicin) and condensed tannins. The effects of condensed tannins on sheep performance are beginning to become apparent, and include increased protein utilisation from the forage, and an increased lambing percentage in some circumstances.9

Almond

Sweet Almond has also been shown to have several benefits for ruminants in treating urogenital diseases and disorders.

Sweet almond is very effective in vesicle ulcer as well as in renal and vesicle [kidney and bladder] stone. Hence, it helps relieve dysuria, nephralgia, burning micturition [all painful urinary tract infections], and urinary retention. Bitter almond is also useful for these ailments. It is also useful in uteralgia [difficulty or pain in the urinary tract], inflammation and hardness of uterus. . . .10

The next reference also states that Jewish people have used almond tree bark to increase the production of mothers' milk and to decrease birth pangs in livestock.

Yemenite Jews used almonds externally to treat hemorrhages. And internally to treat kidney stones, spleen, sore throat, and cough. Traditional medicine among the Jews of Iraq makes extensive use of the almond tree and its products to treat eye diseases, dysentery, and earache; to relieve birth pangs and to increase mother's milk.11

The Plane Truth

One last tree is mentioned in Genesis 30:37, and is variously translated as Chestnut, Plane or Sycamore in English versions. It is almost certain that this is the *Platanus orientalis* or Oriental Plane tree. This tree also has some documented medicinal benefits, and incidentally, it is mentioned that its anti-inflammatory properties are best extracted by having the wood in water.

Anti-inflammatory and Gastrointestinal Benefits

Anti-inflammatory activity of *Platanus orientalis* showed that aqueous wood extract of *Platanus orientalis* showed maximum activity in contrast to other extracts. Conclusion: These finding provides some biological value of different extracts of *Platanus orientalis* for the use as antioxidant and anti-inflammatory agents.12

The plane leaves commonly known in Iran as "Barge chenar", have been used in concentrated aromatic liquids, herbal remedies and Iranian traditional medicine to treat several disorders. They are used in Iranian folk and traditional medicines for treating some dermatological, gastrointestinal, rheumatic and inflammatory diseases.13

In this study, it was found that it is the wood of *Platanus orientalis* which showed the whole activities in maximum, so it is to be concluded that most of the bioactive materials are concentrated in the wood whatever the solvent system.14

Health Benefits to the Males

In addition to the health benefits to ewes mentioned earlier, a healthier male animal is more likely to be seen as a potential mate by the female, and thus increase the likelihood of passing along his genes. So anything which is of medicinal benefit, such as an anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, and urogenital and gastro-intestinal aid (as in the almond and plane trees) would benefit any and all animals in the flocks kept by Jacob. Therefore, there may be something to this procedure which Jacob utilized. Many of the most common internal remedies were made by steeping the bark of poplars, planes, or almonds in water, which is exactly what Jacob did. He cut strips in the twigs, which exposed the tannins in the bark, then he put them in the

water troughs, and solar heat probably warmed them up enough to release the chemical compounds into the water.

True Science Corroborates Scripture

Would the methodology of Jacob work without the aid of divine providence?

So the methodology of Jacob, whether he was told by God directly or whether he had some herbal medicine knowledge, does seem to have some potential health benefits, and with God quite probably increasing the fertility of the flocks Jacob was given by Laban, the "breeding program" results were extremely beneficial to Jacob. Would the methodology of Jacob work without the aid of divine providence? It is difficult to say, but with any type of advantage given by the herbal remedies, it seems that some breeding success would have been inevitable (perhaps just not as rapidly or as numerically advantageous as it turned out with God directly intervening).

Rather than being an example of superstitious folklore and "fertility magic," the account in Scripture is backed up by botanical and pharmacology studies, is being practiced today, and is being studied in more detail. The benefits of herbal remedies compared to some antibiotics, which bacteria and parasites are becoming resistant to, is being looked into by many at in the animal husbandry industry as a welcome addition to veterinary practice. Once again, the critics find that Scripture teaches sound science and, more importantly, that the answers were in Genesis all along.