

## **THE WAYS OF A CARNAL MAN GENESIS 30:25-31: 55**

**God** intends for us to learn from the lives of the patriarchs. They stand on the pages of scripture to both instruct us and to warn us. We are to learn from their successes and their failures. Jacob is one of the more complex and interesting of the patriarchs. He is the one that many of us find it easy to identify with.

In the section of Genesis under our consideration, we see Jacob as a man “in between” in his commitment to God. Ever since he met God personally at Bethel, he has been in personal covenant with God. However, that relationship with God is not making much difference in his life at this point in the journey. He is not living as a man of faith like Abraham, but rather as a man of the world. He represents what I choose to call – **a carnal man**. A carnal person is a New Testament terminology, but Jacob is an Old Testament example of it. A carnal person is someone who is indeed a child of God but the person is not living like it. While the person is a citizen of the kingdom of God, the person is still living like a full citizen of this world.

Among the Old Testament personalities in this section of Genesis we could consider Abraham a spiritual man. He is a man who is making an honest and consistent attempt to walk with God as a child of God. There were glaring failures in his life but they always became stepping stones to a new victory.

Laban would be an example of the natural man. He was a gifted, middle- Easterner, who was strictly a citizen of this world. Laban had no covenant with God and made no claims upon God. He was a man of this world and lived like it.

The disappointing thing as you read this section of Genesis is that it is very difficult to see much difference between Laban and Jacob. Jacob is still living by essentially the same principals that governed the life of Laban. This is not the way it should a have been. I want us to take a careful look at Jacob at this point in his pilgrimage so that we can better understand what it means to be a carnal man. We need to take this look because living the carnal life is always a temptation to the children of God.

#### **I. THE CARNAL PERSON IS MOTIVATED BY SELF-INTEREST.**

The motivation of Laban and Jacob seems to have been the same. They did their maneuvering and their manipulation of each other with one thing in mind--What is in this for me? No matter what they may be saying with their lips we sense that in their hearts they are always looking out for self. This is surely true of Jacob in this period in his life.

1. The relationships of life are determined by self-interest.

At this point in time whether Jacob is relating to his wives or to his father-in-law, he is always looking out for Jacob. He wants to know what is in it for me. This is characteristic of the carnal life. This is a chief characteristic of the carnal life. It is predictable that any person who has become a child of God but who is still living under the control of the old sinful nature will manifest it in self-interest. This self-control will

affect every relationship in their lives. Their family life, their place of employment, their relationship to neighbors, their relationships to friends, all of these relationships will be controlled by and molded by self-interest.

So Jacob is a good servant to Laban for fourteen years, but it is because Laban has something that he wants—two daughters. He will continue to work for him because he wants his flocks and herds.

2. Decisions are made on the basis of self- interest.

You never sense at this point in Jacob's life that he is making decisions on the basis of eternal value. His decisions are not made on the basis of love or faith. His decisions are made on the basis of what will be best for me.

Even when he is leaving Haran to return to the land of Canaan you sense he still is looking out for Jacob. He leaves while Laban is away shearing his sheep because he knows this will be the best time for Jacob to leave. Sure, he had a word from God instructing him to go back to the tents of Isaac but his basic motivation in going back was not obedience to a word from God – but was rather this will be best for Jacob.

Anytime you are dealing with someone who is still living the carnal life you can expect to find them motivated by self-interest. Any time you slip down to that level of living in your own life, you will be motivated by self-interest. It is characteristic of Jacob at this point in his life and it is a characteristic of some of you at this point in your life.

## **II. THE CARNAL PERSON DEPENDS ON HIS NATURAL ABILITIES.**

Jacob was not without natural abilities. Apart from his relationship with God Jacob would have been successful at whatever he set out to do. He was gifted with a lot of natural abilities. You add to Jacob's natural abilities the favor of God and you have the formula for a very successful man.

As you read carefully this biographical section that deals with his relationship with Laban, you will find very little evidence that Jacob was depending upon God.

1. The person has great confidence in his coping skills.

Jacob believed that if he was given a level playing field he could out wit any opponent he might face. Even though he knew his Uncle Laban, who was also his father-in-law, to be a skilled man, Jacob was confident that he could out wit and out think and out maneuver Laban if given the chance. This is a characteristic of a carnal man. He is a carnal man in part because his confidence is misplaced. Instead of putting his confidence in the faithfulness of God and the resourcefulness of the Spirit he chooses to put his confidence in the arm of flesh. He trusted in himself rather than in God.

2. This person turns to God only in emergencies.

The carnal person is not an irreligious person. The person is not one who is disrespectful of God. Rather he or she is one who is simply seeking to live life on their own terms without calling on God. As you read carefully the record of Jacob's life at this point you

will discover that he was not above prayer. However, prayer was reserved for only times of emergency. He built no altars and offered no sacrifices during his years in Haran. Instead he was day by day maneuvering, working out things in his own terms.

If Laban has been taking advantage of him, Jacob will get even on his own terms. He will not seek the face of the God of all the earth who does things right. He will turn to God only when he is forced to turn to God.

Prayerfulness and carnality just do not go together. Building altars and running your own life just do not match. The person who is building an altar and seeking the face of God regularly will be able to live above the downward pull of the old carnal nature.

### **III. THE CARNAL PERSON IS A CONSTANT SOURCE OF CONFLICT.**

Before a covenant was established between Jacob and God at Bethel, as a natural man, conflict characterized his life. He was in conflict with his twin brother, Esau. He was in conflict with his father Isaac. It is not surprising that when he gets to the tents of Laban in the land of Haran that he is still a man whose life is characterized by conflict. Nothing really has changed that much even though God established a covenant with him at Bethel. People who live on the level of self-interest will always be experiencing broken relationships and shattered confidences. They will leave behind them a trail of conflict.

1. There will be internal conflict..

Even though this was a rather prosperous period in Jacob's life, I find no evidence that he was a man full of joy and peace. Indeed I find evidence that he was a man who was still at odds with himself. He was still a person who had conflict raging in his bosom. This is characteristic of the carnal Christian. He makes others unhappy primarily because he or she is unhappy with himself or herself.

2. There will be external conflict..

This is the passage that focuses on the conflict between Jacob and Laban. It was a conflict that finally led to the separation between the two. It is a reminder of that incident where the carnality of Lot led to the separation between Abraham and Lot. Carnality makes it impossible to build healthy, loving, and strong relationships with those about you.

It is helpful to remember that the troubled Corinthian Church, which had so much division in its fellowship, is the church that Paul characterized as being carnal. Division and carnality go together. Broken relationships and dominion of the flesh go together. If you are ever to escape a pattern of broken relationships, you must learn to walk in the Spirit.

#### **IV. THE CARNAL PERSON IS STILL THE OBJECT OF GOD'S LOVING PURPOSE.**

This is the encouraging thing. Even though it is obvious that Jacob is living very much like Laban, there is still something different. The difference between the two men is that

Jacob is the object of God's loving purpose. He has entered into a covenant with God that sets him apart in his relationship with God. There are things in this passage that indicate this.

1. God still speaks to the carnal person.

There are two instances at least in this passage in which God spoke to carnal Jacob. One was the instance in which He gave to Jacob the promise and the plan for prospering while he was working for Laban. The selection of the striped and colored sheep and goats came from God, not by the methods by which Jacob sought to accomplish this, but the idea itself came from God.

Then, at that critical moment when it was obvious that he was in the disfavor of Laban, the word of the Lord came to him saying, "Go back to Canaan and find your father, Isaac!" God is still speaking to Jacob. God does not give up on the carnal Christian but rather He continues by His providential word to bring that carnal Christian to the level of spiritual living.

2. God still protects him.

It is extremely encouraging to see God intervene on behalf of his carnal servant, Jacob, at this point. When Laban sets out on his seven day pursuit of Jacob with fire in his eye and anger in his heart and a sword in his hand, God intervenes. The God of Jacob came to Laban in the night in a dream to say to him, "Don't you speak an evil word against my servant, Jacob." It put the fear of the Lord on that man of the world. When he finally

overtook Jacob and his herds, there was heavy restraint on him that kept him from doing anything harmful to Jacob or his family. God was still intervening on behalf of his carnal servant, Jacob.

Did Jacob deserve such care? Obviously not! But God was simply being faithful to His covenant. When we are faithless and disobedient, God is still faithful. Oh the wonder of the patience of God in dealing with us during our periods of carnality.

### 3. God still prospers him.

While Jacob set out to make sure that he prospered while he was in the land of Haran, it was God Himself who brought about his prosperity. I doubt that Jacob was fully aware of the extent of the blessing of God upon his life, but it was there. This is evidence of the continuing grace of God upon the worldly child of God. While Jacob is still operating in self-interest, God is at work in the circumstance of his life working out his purpose in Jacob.

Laban recognized this at least in part. He acknowledged that he was aware that his own herds had multiplied because Jacob was overseeing his herds. He knew that the God of Jacob was making a difference in the life of Jacob. God made Jacob a witness by His blessing upon his life even when Jacob did not deserve to be made a witness.

You must not judge or misinterpret the prosperity of God upon your life. The prosperity of God upon your life may not be a sign of God's approval. It may simply be a sign of

God's faithfulness. Jacob was not under the approval of God at this point in his life but God was being faithful to the promise that He had made to Jacob.

Aren't you weary of living a self-centered life? Aren't you weary with so much of your energy being spent upon the pushing of your agenda? Aren't you weary of the conflicts that are constantly coming about because of your selfish behavior? Aren't you weary of living beneath your spiritual privileges in Christ Jesus? God wants to bring you to the place that you are walking in the Spirit enjoying your inheritance in Christ Jesus. It is when you are walking in the spirit as Jacob will demonstrate in the later period of his life, that you bless others and make a difference in the world. May God help us to learn the futility and the emptiness of the carnal life as we study the life of Jacob!