

## Introduction

In 1970 Larry Burkett wrote a book called, “Business By The Book.” It was a book written for business owners to help them run their businesses according to Biblical principles. As I read through the introduction and the first few chapters I found myself saying, “yes, yes, yes.” I liked the things that I read. He talked about the importance of being truthful. He talked about hiring based on values. In our leadership training, I taught on Vision, Mission, and Values, so much we had a lot of things in common. I have not read the entire book, but I have ordered it so that anyone interested can read it.

Last year I went through Babson College’s Executive Program for small businesses. They devoted one whole session to Core Values. They have found that establishing and maintaining core values is a key to growing a successful business. I have found that it is not just important in business, but it is also very important to churches.

What does that have to do with our text today? In our text today, Jacob negotiates a contract with Laban. Then, he works six years with Laban, even though his contractual agreement gets violated and changed ten times. Finally, the relationship between Laban and Jacob has deteriorated to the point that Jacob and his wives re-evaluate doing business with Laban and decide to leave. Laban was not doing business by the book. Laban was not operating with the same core values as Jacob. When your core values and business practices differ, a long term working relationship is not often possible.

The Bible is our authoritative source for doctrine and all matters of life. In 2 Tim 3:16-17 Paul wrote that “*all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be equipped for every good work.*” Our passage today is profitable and teaches us about how to do business by the book. Our passage today equips us for every good work.

In Joshua 1:8 God tells us to meditate on His law day and night so that we will be careful to do according to all that is written in it, for then we will make our way prosperous and have success. God wants you and I to be successful. But, He wants us to make money according to His principles.

(Josh 1:8) “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.”

We will look at the contract that they negotiated. Second, we will look at the implementation of that contract, and third, we will look at re-evaluating the contract.

### The Contract

1. Negotiating The Contract
2. Implementing The Contract
3. Re-Evaluating The Contract

## 1. Negotiating The Contract (Gen 30:25-34)

(Gen 30:25-34) “Now it came about when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away, 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 depart; for you yourself know my service which I have rendered you.” {27} But Laban said to him, “If now it pleases you, stay with me; I have divined that the LORD has blessed me on your account.” {28} He continued, “Name me your wages, and I will give it.” {29} But he said to him, “You yourself know how I have served you and how your cattle 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 and spotted sheep and every black one among the lambs and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and such 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 and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, will be considered stolen.” {34} Laban said, “Good, let it be according to your word.”

Jacob did not go the land of Haran to spend the next twenty years. He went there to escape his brother and to find a wife. But, he fell in love with Rachel and agreed to work for seven years for the dowry to pay Laban. He worked seven years, only to marry Leah by mistake. He agreed to work another seven years to marry Rachel. Laban has already deceived him and changed his agreement with him once. Solomon wrote in Proverbs 26:11 that just *“like a dog returns to its vomit is a fool who repeats his folly.”* Jacob has been with Laban for fourteen years and should know him pretty well. It is important to know the character of people that we are doing business with. When someone cheats you, it is important to know if it was a one-time event or a pattern.

After serving his fourteen years for Leah and Rachel, Jacob is ready to move back to his own place and his own country. He asks Laban to give him his wives and children and let him depart. I think he is asking out of respect, because he has the freedom to just leave. But Laban asks him to stay. He says that he has divined that the Lord has blessed him on Jacob’s account. The word for divined is nachash (Strong’s H5172), and it means to hiss or whisper a magic spell. It was used in divination and witchcraft. The KJV says he *“learned by experience,”* but I believe the NASB is more correct in saying that he divined. Even though Abraham and Rebekah were relatives, it appears that Laban does not know God and is involved in occultic worship. This is later verified when Rachel stole his idols. Laban is worshipping idols and is practicing divination. One thing that is positive about his statement is the acknowledgement that he has been blessed by Jacob’s service to him.

For me, we have to be very careful about agreements that we make with unbelievers. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6:14-15, *“do not be bound together with unbelievers for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?”* That does not mean we can’t do business with an unbeliever, but we should not be bound together with them in a partnership. We can have unbelievers work for us, but we should not be partners with them.

Laban tells Jacob to name his wages and he will give it. Jacob answered and told him how Laban had little before he came and now it has increased to a multitude. He said that the Lord has blessed Laban because of his work for him. He also says that Laban knows how he has served him the past fourteen years. There is a reason that Laban wants Jacob to stay and continue working for him. Laban's response was, "what shall I give you?" This is the second time that Laban has asked Jacob to stay and that he will pay him whatever wages he asks for. He would not make that offer if he thought that Jacob would take advantage of him. He trusts Jacob.

Jacob has also indicated his motivation. He has served Laban for his daughters. Now, he has wives and children and he wants to provide for his own household. Every father should want to provide for his own household. In looking at jobs and opportunities, we should look at whether the job will meet our needs. There is nothing wrong with wanting to provide for your own household. That is not being greedy; that is being responsible. Recently I was counseling a man and he told me of an opportunity that he had. I told him not to consider it. I counted up his potential income and then discussed what the cost of living was. He would be living sub-poverty level. I told him it was an okay job for a part-time student at UNM and but not something that he should consider. This man had a college degree and working for \$10.00 an hour was not something that he could support himself with or a family.

Jacob then lays out what he is willing to work for. He said, "You shall not give me anything. If you will do this one thing for me, I will again pasture and keep your flock: let me pass through your entire flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted sheep and every black one among the lambs and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and such shall be my wages. So my honesty will answer for me later, when you come concerning my wages. Every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats and black among the lambs, if found with me, will be considered stolen."

Laban agreed by saying, "Good, let it be according to your word." (Gen 30:34) I found that agreements by word are not usually worth much. I have found that it is better to get these things in writing. When I took the job as the Head Golf Professional at a club in Florida, the owner of the club negotiated an agreement. I was supposed to get a \$3,000.00 raise at the end of the first three months. Because it was not in writing, he said that we never agreed upon that. But we had agreed to it.

I have had Christian book stores sell all of the booklets that I sold to them not pay me. I have had churches ask me to come speak and promise me an honorarium, yet they did not pay me. A little over a year ago a church in Albuquerque asked me to do a four-hour leadership training session, and they did not pay me. The pastor said he forgot the church check book and he would put the check in the mail, which he never did. So, it is better to put all agreements in writing.

At Murchison Drilling Schools, I have employment agreements or contractor agreements with everyone that works for us. All the wages and benefits are spelled out. All of the responsibilities are clearly stated. We have not had any problems like I personally have experienced because I use employment agreements. Jacob would have been much better off if he had used a written agreement. But, this is your father-in-law and you don't expect him to cheat you. I did not expect Christian book stores, churches, or pastors to cheat me either. It is better to get things in writing. When I went to work for Murchison Drilling Schools, I wrote up an agreement, and anytime there is a change we document it in writing. As a pastor, I have hired a number of other pastors, church administrators, and secretaries, and I use employment agreements with all of them.

## 2. **Implementing The Contract** (Gen 30:35-43)

(Gen 30:35-43) “So he removed on that day the striped and spotted male goats and all the speckled and spotted female goats, every one with white in it, and all the black ones among the sheep, and gave them into 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 and almond and plane trees, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white which was in the rods. {38} He set the rods which he had peeled in front of the flocks in the gutters, even in the watering troughs, 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 brought forth striped, speckled, and spotted. {40} 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 gutters, so that they might mate by the rods; {42} but when the flock was feeble, he did not put them in; so the feebler were Laban's and the stronger Jacob's. {43} So the man became exceedingly prosperous, and had large flocks and female and male servants and camels and donkeys.”

There is a lot of disagreement about who removed the striped and spotted goats. The agreement was that Jacob would remove them. Most scholars believe that Laban removed them, in violation of what they just agreed to. There is also disagreement about whether the agreement was that all the spotted or striped goats that Laban had would immediately go to Jacob or whether he would start with nothing. It says that he removed the spotted and speckled and gave them into the care of his sons and put a distance of three day's journey between himself and Jacob. So, it looks pretty clear that this he is referring to Laban. This is not what they had just agreed to.

In addition to putting things in writing, I have found that one of the primary purposes of contracts that I use with companies is to clarify the responsibilities of each party. We state the date, the time, the number of participants, the type of class, the topics to be taught, the instructors to be used, the reporting, the facility requirement, the WIFI requirements, the handling of shipping, travel, accommodations, cost per person, cancellation clauses, payment clauses, contact information for both parties, and even how disagreements will be handled. Contracts are a way to make sure that both parties have a clear understanding of what is going to be done. I send the agreements to the companies for review before signing. If there are questions, these are cleared up in advance, and the contract is revised and sent out for review again. In our contracts, theologians would not be wondering today who the “he” is talking about. They would not be wondering about whether Jacob was to start with nothing or all the spotted and speckled goats that Laban had.

We know in the Genesis 31:7 that Jacob tells his wives that Laban has cheated him and changed his wages ten times. So, it is likely that Laban began cheating him and changed his initial pay at the very beginning of the agreement. I believe that the biggest lessons to learn so far are to be careful about who you are doing business with. Second, use a written contract and clearly spell out all the expectations and requirements of all parties in the agreement. I believe that Laban and Jacob would have both been better served if they had used such an agreement before starting their venture.

So, it appears that Laban has started off by removing all the striped and spotted male and female goats, and that Jacob starts with nothing. It would be normal for spotted or striped goats to bear spotted and striped goats. It would also be normal for the solid-colored goats to produce solid-colored goats. Not only does Jacob start with nothing, it does not look very likely that he will be receiving many offspring from the herds that he is keeping. Laban is getting the upper hand of the deal from the very beginning. It looks like he is getting very cheap labor.

Jacob wanted to separate the goats and he was very concerned about maintaining his character and honesty. Laban is very concerned about getting the cheapest labor and making the most income. He is not concerned at all about cheating and gaining dishonestly. Honesty is a core value and if there is no honesty, there are going to be problems. A few years ago we had a very weak student at one of our classes. He failed his well control test and our instructor retested him several times without success. I spoke with the instructor and told him that we do not change test results to get people to pass. Other companies often do those things and cheat, but our company will never do that. The instructor disregarded what I said and passed the student. That instructor is no longer working for our company. Honesty is a core value.

Another one of our core values is respect. I expect all of our employees to treat one another with respect. I expect them to treat our customers with respect. We had an employee about ten years ago that was very knowledgeable and had lots of experience. He could be very courteous when he wanted, but sometimes he got impatient. One day he told one of the engineers taking our class to shut up and listen to him. I had a chat with the instructor afterwards and let him know that we would not tolerate that. That instructor left shortly after that and I did not have to take any further action. That kind of behavior is allowed at some places, but respect is a core value for us, so we will not allow that kind of talk. Successful companies know the value of creating the right culture in a company, and the core values are a big part of establishing that culture.

Jacob knew the ranching business. His father and grandfather were wealthy ranchers. God had blessed and multiplied their livestock. When Jacob arrived at the well in Haran, he told the shepherds that it was not time to gather them, and that they should be out grazing them. There were three different types of trees used and the results were three different types of goats. He knew the business inside and out. I have not been able to find any scientific evidence about the significance of taking fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane trees and peeling white stripes in them. But, Jacob did this when they came to drink and they mated. The flocks by the rods brought forth striped, speckled and spotted goats. He did this for the stronger animals but not for the weaker ones. So, the stronger ones had spotted, speckled, and striped offspring. Thus, Jacob became exceedingly prosperous and had large flocks, female and male servants and camels and donkeys. Jacob also maintained his end of the bargain. He separated the spotted and striped and speckled ones and kept his flocks separate from Laban. He was careful to follow the conditions of the contract and to maintain his integrity.

### 3. **Re-Evaluating The Contract** (Gen 31:1-16)

(Gen 31:1-16) "Now Jacob heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has taken away all that was our father's, and from what belonged to our father he has made all this wealth."  
 {2} Jacob saw the attitude of Laban, and behold, it was not friendly toward him as formerly.  
 {3} Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."  
 {4} So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field, {5} and said to them, "I see your father's attitude, that it is not friendly toward me as

formerly, but the God of my father has been with me. {6} You know that I have served your father with all my strength. {7} Yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times; however, God did not allow him to hurt me. {8} If he spoke thus, 'The speckled shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth speckled; and if he spoke thus, 'The striped shall be your wages,' then all the flock brought forth striped. {9} Thus God has taken away your father's livestock and given them to me. {10} And it came about at the time when the flock were mating that I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream, and behold, the male goats which were mating were striped, speckled, and mottled. {11} Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am.' {12} "He said, 'Lift up now your eyes and see that all the male goats which are mating are striped, speckled, and mottled; for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. {13} 'I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar, where you made a vow to Me; now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth.'" {14} Rachel and Leah said to him, "Do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father's house? {15} Are we not reckoned by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and has also entirely consumed our purchase price. {16} Surely all the wealth which God has taken away from our father belongs to us and our children; now then, do whatever God has said to you."

A number of years ago I entered into an agreement with another company. They would market and host our classes in the Permian Basin, and we would teach them. We would give them a percentage of the earnings from those classes. Initially it seemed like things were okay. But, as time went on, I saw that the attitudes of the owners of that company were not as favorable, and our goals did not line up. They wanted us to reduce our prices and compete with the lowest priced training provider in their area. We were not generating enough income and our classes were not full. The lowest price competitor had very different objectives and values. They would put one instructor with eighteen students while we tried to keep our student teacher ration to one instructor with eight students. They could keep their costs much lower than us, but the quality of their training was far inferior. Their pass rate with students was significantly lower than ours. The owner of the other company continually criticized our classes and approach. Finally, the initial term of the agreement approached and I decided not to renew our agreement. I leased a suite in an office building and we have been teaching classes there ever since. Contracts should have a specified time period and the agreements should be evaluated carefully. Contracts need to be mutually beneficial, not lopsided. Furthermore, the attitudes of the parties need to be favorable towards one another. I want to work with people that want to work with us, and have a respect for what we do.

The agreement that Laban and Jacob formed was an open-ended agreement; there was no specified time period to renew the contract. We know from Genesis 31:38 that it lasted six years. He worked seven years for Rachel, only to wind up with Leah. Then, he worked another seven years for Rachel. After Joseph was born, he wanted to take his wives and children and leave, but they formed this agreement and Jacob worked under this agreement for six years.

(Gen 31:38) "These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks."

The first thing that led Jacob and his wives to evaluate their agreement was Laban's attitude. When I say Laban, it was Laban and his sons. They were falsely accusing Jacob of taking their family wealth. Second, they were not acting very friendly. Most of the time it is pretty easy to tell if your presence is unwanted. You can see it in the countenance of people; non-verbal cues

are important. You can see it by the lack of interest that people show in you. Sometimes you can see it in the way you are excluded from conversations and activities. Sometimes you can see it in the words themselves. The only thing that we know is that Jacob is being falsely accused, and he is not being friendly towards Jacob.

Not only did Jacob hear the words of Laban, but God saw it also. The Lord told Jacob to return to the land of his fathers and relatives and that He would be with him. That was all Jacob needed to hear. He sent and called Rachel and Leah to his flock in the field and told them about their father's attitude. He tells them that God has been with him and that they know how he has served their father with all his strength. He also makes it very clear that Laban has cheated him by changing his wages ten times, but then he added a very important little phrase, "but God did not allow him to hurt me." Then, Jacob explained what he meant. When Laban changed the contract to give speckled, all the flock brought forth speckled. When Laban changed his wages to be only the striped goats, they only produced striped. God not only protected Jacob, but he blessed Jacob.

Then God spoke to Jacob in a dream. He told Jacob that He saw all that Laban was doing to him, and that He is the God of Bethel where Jacob had anointed the pillar and made a vow to God. In that vow, Jacob said, "*If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the LORD will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.*" (Gen 28:20-22) Jacob made the Lord his God, and he vowed to tithe to God.

Tithing is many things. The tithe belongs to God. God has given the tithe to his servants so that there will be food in His house. The tithe is a way of honoring God. He does not need our wealth, but He greatly desires us to honor Him. The tithe is also an acknowledgement that everything that we have comes from God. The tithe is also a statement that the Lord is our God. Jacob acknowledged that God was giving him food, clothing, and protection, and vowed that the Lord was his God. For the past twenty years, God has protected Jacob and has financially blessed him. Now, the Lord was telling him to return to his own land, and is reminding him that He is still with him.

Jacob shared this with Rachel and Leah, and they said, "Do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father's house?" When Laban cheated Jacob, he was also cheating his own daughters. They felt like foreigners in their own house. A foreigner is someone in a place that is not their own country. They did not feel like they belonged there any longer. They both told him to do whatever God has told him to do, which is to return to his own land. They were willing to break off the working relationship with their father because of the way that he has treated them. They were willing to leave their family and move on because of the way that their father had treated them.

## **Conclusion and Applications**

This morning, we have seen the need for a written agreement. When things are clearly spelled out and recorded, miscommunication and misunderstandings are minimized. Contracts should be used in all business dealings. Even though Jacob was dealing with his father-in-law, a written contract would have been far better. We should do what we can to be clear about contractual requirements, responsibilities and remuneration, and to prevent misunderstandings.

In addition to written agreements, it is important to establish and live by core values. This morning we saw a contrast in core values. Jacob wanted to protect his innocence, honesty, and reputation. Laban was not concerned about his reputation. It was okay to deceive and cheat others, even your own family members, to gain wealth. When two people try to work together but they do not operate with the same core values, there will be problems.

Finally, we saw that God provided for Jacob and protected him. He had come under God's care at Bethel when he made the Lord his God. Even though Laban tried to cheat him, God blessed him. In the world, people will try to take advantage of you and cheat you, but God watches over us when we come under His care. That does not mean that we will not go through some difficult or hard times, but He will be with us and help us get through those times.

In two more days, we will start a new year. A lot of people are setting their New Year's resolutions. Gym memberships spike at the beginning of the year because people set resolutions to lose weight, get in shape, etc. As you consider your resolutions this year, let me encourage you to consider a devotional and a reading program. In Acts 20:32, Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders to read God's word. He said, *"And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified."* God has given us the written word so that we will know what He has promised to do for us. He has written His word to us so that we know what we are supposed to do. He has written His word so that we know Him. In John 1:1, we find that *"in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* God reveals Himself in the Word. So, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace. Set aside time to meet with the Lord. You may want to take a small portion of Scripture to read, meditate, and pray over. I also encourage you to set aside some time to read the Word. There are some good reading programs on our website under Connection Tools. I am going to use my 2018 reading program again in 2019. I read through Proverbs 12 times, Psalms 2 ½ times, the gospels and New Testament 4 times, and the rest of the Old Testament 1 time. That is what God led me to do, and that may not work for you. Find a good reading program that will work for you. Try to read through God's Word this coming year.

Second, God watched over His word with Jacob. No matter what Laban did, God watched over His word to Jacob. He provided for Him. God blessed him. God watches over His word to perform it. Notice what He told Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:12. *"Then the LORD said to me, 'You have seen well, for I am watching over My word to perform it.'"* How do you know what God will do for you this year? Dig into God's word so that you will know He will do.

In Romans 4:20-21. God's word to you is full of promises and God promises to perform His promises. He said, *"Yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform."*

This morning, have you had a Bethel experience where God revealed Himself to you? Have you vowed to make the Lord your God? Have you come under His provision and protection plan? In Romans 10:9-10, Paul gives us what it takes to make the Lord your God. He says that we have to believe that God raised Him from the dead, and we must confess Him as Lord. Do you believe that Jesus is the Messiah and that He died and was resurrected from the dead? If yes, they you can receive Christ by telling God that you believe and that you want Jesus to be your Lord.

**Introduction** (2 Tim 3:16-17, Josh 1:8)

**1. Negotiating The Contract** (Gen 30:25-34, Pr 26:11, 2 Cor 6:14-15)

**2. Implementing The Contract** (Gen 30:35-43, 31:7)

**3. Re-Evaluating The Contract** (Gen 31:1-16, 38, 28:20-22)

**Conclusion and Applications** (Rom 10:9-10)