

Genesis 31:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the cattle bare speckled: and if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked.

Analysis

If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the cattle bare speckled: and if he said ... This passage belongs to the Jacob narratives which demonstrate God's sovereign election overriding human merit and the transformation of a deceiver into Israel, the father of the twelve tribes. The Jacob cycle shows how divine purposes advance through flawed individuals whom God graciously transforms.

Key themes include God's sovereign choice ("the older shall serve the younger"), the consequences of deception and family dysfunction, exile and return patterns, wrestling with God leading to blessing, and covenant renewal across generations. Jacob's character development from manipulative deceiver to mature patriarch demonstrates sanctification's lifelong process.

Theologically significant aspects include:

1. divine election based on grace not merit (Romans 9:10-13)
2. God's faithfulness to covenant promises despite human unfaithfulness
3. discipline as evidence of divine love and means of transformation
4. generational patterns of sin requiring divine intervention to break
5. prayer and wrestling with God as legitimate expressions of faith.

Jacob's limp after wrestling God symbolizes how divine encounters leave permanent marks, transforming our approach to life and dependence on God rather than our own cunning.

Historical Context

The patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50) reflect the cultural, social, and legal customs of the ancient Near East during the Middle Bronze Age (2000-1500 BCE). Archaeological discoveries including the Mari tablets, Nuzi tablets, and Egyptian records confirm many details: nomadic pastoralism, covenant-making ceremonies, marriage customs, property laws, and international travel patterns described in Genesis.

The cultural practices reflected include: treaty/covenant forms (Genesis 15), bride-price customs (Genesis 24, 29), inheritance laws favoring firstborn sons (Genesis 25, 27), adoption practices (Genesis 15, 30), levirate-type arrangements (Genesis 38), and Egyptian administrative systems (Genesis 41, 47). These parallels confirm Genesis's historical reliability while showing how God worked within ancient cultural frameworks to accomplish His purposes.

For later Israelites, these narratives established their identity as Abraham's descendants, explained their claim to Canaan, justified their possession of Joseph's bones (Exodus 13:19), and provided models of faith despite imperfection. The patriarchs' failures and God's faithfulness encouraged Israel that covenant relationship depended on God's grace rather than human merit. The movement from Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt set the stage for the Exodus and conquest narratives.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What does this passage reveal about God's sovereignty and human responsibility?
2. How can we apply the principles from this passage to contemporary challenges in family, work, or church?
3. In what ways does this narrative foreshadow or typify aspects of Christ's redemptive work?

Interlinear Text

אֵם	כָּה	יֹאמַר	רָ	נִקְדָּיִם	יְהוָה	הַ	שְׂכָרְךָ	וְ	יָלֵד	כָּל
H518	H3541	If he said		speckled	H1961		shall be thy hire		bare	H3605
		H559		H5348			H7939		H3205	
הָצֹאן	נִקְדָּיִם	וְ	אֵם	כָּה	יֹאמַר	רָ	שְׂקָדִים:	יְהוָה		
all the cattle	speckled		H518	H3541	If he said		ringstraked	H1961		
H6629	H5348				H559		H6124			
שְׂכָרְךָ	יָלֵד	כָּל	הָצֹאן	שְׂקָדִים:						
shall be thy hire	bare	H3605	all the cattle	ringstraked						
H7939	H3205		H6629	H6124						

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 30:32 (Parallel theme): I will pass through all thy flock to day, removing from thence all the speckled and spotted cattle, and all the brown cattle among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats: and of such shall be my hire.