

INTERACTIVE TEACHING/LEARNING GUIDE
Week 14

SESSION TITLE: "Prosperity: How God Keeps His Promise"
FOCAL PASSAGE: (Genesis 29:31-30:43)

Central Teaching/Learning Aim: To help the learner acknowledge past fulfilled promises from God, identify current blessings and to live his/her life anticipating future blessings.

I. Creating Interest in the Series (Hook)

A. Share the following true account:

Taylor Ostergaard and Linsey Zellitti wanted to bless their neighbors. On July 31, 2004, the two teenage girls decided to bake cookies for their neighbors rather than attend a school dance.

After baking the cookies, the girls set out late that evening. They left the fresh-baked goods only at houses with the lights on. It was 10:30 p.m. when they pounded on the door of one home. The 49-year-old woman inside didn't answer the door, but she did experience an anxiety attack over the late-night visit. After a trip to the emergency room the next day, the woman decided to sue the girls. And she won.

The judge awarded the plaintiff \$900 to cover the emergency room visit. The woman said she wanted the girls to learn a lesson, because they should not have been out late at night running from door to door. "Something bad could have happened to them," she said.

After the story was published in the *Denver Post*, hundreds of readers were outraged that the girls were sued for dropping off a plate of cookies and a paper heart for their neighbors. Thousands of dollars poured in to help the girls pay their fine. Their story was reported on national news programs, and the girls appeared on the Saturday edition of *Good Morning America*. As a result of the publicity, a fund has been set up for the girls' college expenses. Interested donors have the option to contribute to the "Never Forgotten" Scholarship Fund for Columbine High School students.

The girls were rewarded many times over for their act of kindness.

Electa Draper, Denver Post (2-4-05 and 2-6-05)

Ask – How does this story compare to how God fulfills His promises in our lives?

How can our interpretation of being blessed sometimes differ from God's plan?

State - Today we are going to discuss how Leah and Rachel tried to manufacture God's blessing and how God blessed them anyway and how this happens today.

B. Optional Method – Share the following information:

Journalist James Glassman declares that "a culture of complaint" has infected American society. Some Americans file complaints against food companies, seeking to hold a corporation responsible for making them fat. Others seek litigation against banks for lending them money even though they were a credit risk. There are complaints about overcrowding in schools, low paying jobs, and cheap foreign labor. The truth is that some of these complaints are unfounded or else ignore offsetting blessings.

According to Glassman, there are many reasons not to complain:

- In 1955 the ratio of students to teachers was 30 to 1. Today it is 19 to 1.
- Adjusted for inflation, compensation has tripled since 1947, and the cost of necessities has plummeted.
- Food in 1950 represented about one third of a family's total expenditures; today, it's one seventh.
- The U.S. Gross Domestic Product is more than the total of the next five countries.
- The current U.S. unemployment rate of 5.7% is lower than the average rate over the last 30 years and lower than most countries, including industrialized countries.
- Americans work fewer hours, and have more cars, cultural institutions, and children in college than ever before.

James K. Glassman, "Whine, the Beloved Country!"

Ask – Do you agree or disagree with Mr. Glassman's premise that American's are the "culture of complainers"?

When the going gets tough do you typically throw up your hands and complain or do you trust God to provide?

How do we find a balance between work and trusting in God for blessings?

State - Today we are going to discuss how Leah and Rachel tried to manufacture God's blessing and how God blessed them anyway and how this happens today.

C. Optional Method – Movie Clip "The Terminal"

Start: 1:38:00

Stop: 1:40:45

DVD: Chapter 23

Synopsis: Amelia asks Viktor why he has been living in the terminal for nine months. He shows her the contents of his peanut can—signatures of 56 of the 57 jazz musician's pictured in a newspaper clipping. Viktor had promised his dad upon his death that he would get the final signature.

Viktor's willingness to fulfill his promise was a little extreme yet commendable.

Ask – How much more does God work to fulfill His promises in our lives?

What promises or blessings has God done, completed or is in the process of completing in your life?

State - Today we are going to discuss how Leah and Rachel tried to manufacture God's blessing and how God blessed them anyway and how this happens today.

II. Book

A. **Utilize** the discussion guide to examine the Scripture passages.

III. Look

A. **Distribute** the handout "Living in God's Promises" and ask members to complete it. (Note: This would make an excellent group exercise or in a couples class a couples exercise.)

IV. Took

A. **Share** the following account of a man who truly understands the source of his blessings.

As a long-time player in the National Basketball Association, Manute Bol stood out even among his giant peers. At an imposing 7-feet 7-inches tall, Bol rose from anonymity in his homeland of Sudan to international celebrity in the NBA.

Bol is now in poor condition, both physically and financially. On June 30, 2004, Bol was thrown from a car in a traffic accident. He suffered a broken neck, broken left wrist, shattered kneecap, a massive head wound, and several internal injuries. Four months later, he was still hospitalized and with no means to pay for his treatment.

Why is a man who earned millions of dollars in his career having trouble paying his hospital bill? One might assume Bol was simply another professional athlete who squandered his savings. But Bol is penniless for a much different reason. In a *Sports Illustrated* article, Steve Rushin writes, "He's given his life savings—his salary averaged \$1.5 million during his 10-year NBA career—to his countrymen."

Even when Bol participated in a celebrity boxing match, defeating William "The Refrigerator" Perry, Bol sent every dime of the \$35,000 proceeds to a fund for Sudanese orphans.

Still hospitalized from the car accident, lying in traction, Bol told *Sports Illustrated*, "God guided me to America and gave me a good job. But he also gave me a heart so I would look back."

Steve Rushin, "Broken but Blessed, Sports Illustrated (10-18-04), p. 15

State – Manute Bol although not a great financial planner realized where his blessings originated and vowed to give back.

Display – The last line in the article:

"But he also gave me a heart so I would look back."

Manute did not forget his countryman as the source of his blessing.

Ask – How can we give God glory with our lives this week as we look back at past blessings?

Close in a prayer of commitment.

B. Optional Method – Place members into groups. Ask them to discuss the following:

Share past promises/blessings that God has fulfilled in your life.

What future promises are you trusting God to fulfill?

How can your lifestyle exemplify a blessed life this week to a watching world?

DISCUSSION GUIDE
(Teacher's Copy)

- 1a. Why did God bless Leah with 4 sons? (Gen. 29:31)
(God knew that Leah was not loved.)
 - b. How does this speak of God's compassion?
2. What was Rachel's motivation for giving Bilhah to Jacob? (30:1)
(She was jealous over Leah's fertility and tried to manipulate the promise of God.)
3. How do people today try to manipulate the blessings of God instead of faithfully trusting in His promises?
4. What was Jacob's reaction to Rachel's manipulation? (v. 2)
(Jacob rebuked Rachel and reminded her that God was the one who had kept her barren.)
5. Why does God delay His blessings from His children from time to time?
6. How did Leah fall into the same manipulative pattern as Rachel? (v. 9)
(She gave Jacob her servant Zilpah so she could continue to provide children for him.)
7. Rachel continued to manipulate in (vs. 14-16) how did God repay her? (vs. 17-20)
(He blessed Leah with 2 more children.)
8. Rachel and Leah give poor examples of trusting patiently for God's promises, how patient are you in trusting in God to fulfill the promises in your life?
9. What is the evidence that Jacob was a blessed man in the following verses?
 - a. (v. 27) Laban acknowledged that he had been blessed because of Jacob
 - b. (vs. 32-43) God blessed Jacob's breeding process
10. How did God demonstrate the following in this account?
 - a. His compassionate mercy _____
 - b. His unmerited grace _____
 - c. His consistent justice _____
 - d. His covenant loving-kindness _____

DISCUSSION GUIDE
(Student's Copy)

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 - a. (v. 27) _____
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 - c. His consistent justice _____
 - d. His covenant loving-kindness _____

Living in God's Promises

Too often we are guilty of trying to manufacture and hurry up God's promises, work through the following handout to discover how to live in His promises.

*Remember God's past blessings-

When has God redeemed your "unloved" condition?

When has God redeemed your bad ideas?

When has God redeemed your shame?

*List God's current blessings-

*Trust in God for future blessings-

Are you trying to manipulate future blessings? How?

Make tentative plans – How does God want to bless you?

Work hard – What should you be doing to prepare for His blessing?

Give God the glory for fulfilled promises.

THE Word For The Week

April 18-22, 2005

Genesis 34:1-31

Defilement: Why leadership fails

Monday – Read Genesis 34:1-2

- Shechem's attraction to Dinah ultimately led him to sin. In the same way, how often do we follow our feelings even when they lead us to sin?
- Read Philippians 4:8 and in light of this verse take inventory of your thought life. What areas of your thought life do you need to change?
- Make a plan so that you can continually take captive sinful thoughts. Share your results with a member of your growth group or another spiritual confidante and hold each other accountable.
- Memorize Philippians 2:5.

Tuesday – Read Genesis 34:3-7

- What was the reaction of the sons of Jacob when they heard the news about their sister?
- When was the last time that you were grieved over news of sin? When was the last time that you felt a righteous anger over injustice that has been committed?
- Take a few moments and reflect upon the righteousness of God. Reflect also on the depravity of humanity and the injustice that results in the world.
- Ask God to make you an agent of justice in this fallen world. Ask God to bring about specific opportunities to model the justice of Christ today.

Wednesday – Read Genesis 34:8-12

- Israel was commanded not to intermarry with other peoples (Cf. Deuteronomy 7:3). It would have been a great temptation and the most reasonable thing to do in this situation.
- What areas have you been tempted to compromise in recently? Money? Movies? Relationships? Business? Marriage?
- Commit to integrity in all areas of your life. Ask the Lord to help you to be a witness of integrity to the world.

Thursday – Read Genesis 34:13-24

- How often do you do something where your motives are not pure? What things do you do so that you can benefit at the expense of others?
- How did Hamor lead his people astray (Cf. verse 22, 25-26)? Was Hamor a good leader?
- Read Heb 13:17.
- Pray for the godly leaders in your church. Pray that God would help you to be submissive to their spiritual direction. Pray that God would raise up spiritual leaders. Is God calling you to a position of leadership?

Friday – Read Genesis 34:25-31

- Many times poor decisions of their followers reflect negatively upon good leaders.
- Are any decisions that you are currently making reflecting poorly upon leadership under which God has placed you?
- Commit to making decisions that honor God and bless your leaders. Pray that your life would be a reflection of God in the world.

Ancient/Future - A Journey through Genesis
"Prosperity: How God Keeps His Promise"
Genesis 29:31-30:43

(Exegetical . . . What it meant to Israel back THEN)
THE LORD'S BLESSING JACOB WITH CHILDREN AND PROSPERITY
(DESPITE SHAMEFUL RIVALRIES AND HUMAN MANIPULATIONS)
DEMONSTRATED HIS WILLINGNESS AND ABILITY
TO FULFILL HIS PROMISES
(EVEN IF THROUGH FAITHLESS SCHEMES).

- I. Jacob's wives' naming of the sons of future Israel (conceived not by human devices, but by God's sovereign will in fulfillment of His promise to build a nation) acknowledged God's blessing despite the shameful rivalries within the family, (29:31-30:24).
 - A. Leah's naming of her four sons, which she conceived because YHWH had given her conception while Rachel was infertile, acknowledged God's blessing of fertility and anticipated the beginning of a loving relationship with Jacob, (29:31-35).
 1. The reason YHWH made Leah fertile, while Rachel was infertile, was because YHWH knew that Leah was "not loved", (31).
 2. Leah's naming of her sons reflected her desire to become loved by Jacob and her faith in YHWH who had given her the blessing of fertility, (32-35b).
 - a. Leah's naming of **Reuben** acknowledged that YHWH had seen her misery and anticipated that Jacob would love her now that she had given him a son, (32).
 - b. Leah's naming of **Simeon** acknowledged that YHWH had heard that she was "not loved" and had given her another son, (33).
 - c. Leah's naming of **Levi** anticipated that Jacob would become attached to her now that she had given him three sons, (34).
 - d. Leah's naming of **Judah** acknowledged that YHWH was worthy of praise (while she no longer anticipated that Jacob would love her), (35a, b).
 3. The birth of her fourth son marked an end to Leah's fertility, (35c).
 - B. Rachel's naming of her two sons, born to her maidservant Bilhah, celebrated her victory over her sister Leah in their struggle for dominance in the family and Jacob's love, (30:1-8).
 1. Rachel's jealousy over Leah's fertility, since she had given Jacob no children, provoked her unreasonable and faithless appeal to Jacob to give her children, (1).
 2. Jacob's angry rebuke reminded Rachel that God was the one who had kept her from conceiving children, (2).
 3. Desperation to establish a family of her own provoked Rachel's faithless plan of giving Bilhah, her maidservant, to Jacob as a concubine in order to give Jacob children in her name, (3).
 4. Rachel's naming of her two sons celebrated her, supposed, vindication by God and her victory over her sister Leah in their struggle for dominance, (4-8).

- a. Rachel's naming of **Dan** celebrated her supposed vindication by God to whom she had prayed, (4-6).
 - b. Rachel's naming of **Naphtali** celebrated her victory over her sister Leah in their struggle for dominance in the family and Jacob's love, (7-8).
 - C. Leah's naming of her two additional sons, born to her maidservant Zilpah, celebrated her good fortune and happiness (with no mention of God's role), (9-13).
 - 1. Leah's inability to conceive more children provoked her faithless plan of giving Zilpah, her maidservant, to Jacob as a concubine, (9).
 - 2. Leah's naming of her two additional sons celebrated her good fortune and happiness, (10-13).
 - a. Leah's naming of **Gad** celebrated her good fortune (with no mention of God's role in his conception or birth), (10-11).
 - b. Leah's naming of **Asher** celebrated her happiness (with no mention of God's role in his conception or birth), (12-13).
 - D. Leah's naming of her own two additional sons, after Rachel had faithlessly connived and bartered sex to attain fertility, witnessed God's grace in rewarding and gifting her once again and anticipated her being honored by Jacob, (14-21).
 - 1. God's response to Rachel, who was so discontented at being infertile and seeking the aid of aphrodisiacs and sex for sale rather than God's enablement, was to give Leah the ability to conceive again, (14-16).
 - 2. Leah's naming of her own two additional sons witnessed God's grace in rewarding and gifting her once again and anticipated her being honored by Jacob, (17-20).
 - a. Leah's naming of **Issachar** witnessed God's grace in rewarding her (for giving her maidservant to Jacob as a concubine?), (17-18).
 - b. Leah's naming of **Zebulun** witnessed God's grace in gifting her once again with a son and anticipated her being honored by Jacob, (19-20).
 - 3. Leah's naming of Dinah foreshadowed God's using Dinah in the future character development of the nation - see Chapter 34, (21).]
 - E. Rachel's naming of Joseph, her first son because of God's giving her fertility, acknowledged that God had removed her shame of infertility and anticipated YHWH's giving her another son, (22-24).
 - 1. God's remembering, in order to bless, Rachel caused him to give her fertility, (22).
 - 2. Rachel's naming of **Joseph** acknowledged that God had removed her shame of infertility and anticipated that YHWH would give her another son, (23-24).
- II. Jacob's growing into exceptional prosperity in just six years, despite Laban's opposition and his own manipulation, exposed the Lord's continued role in fulfilling His promise of blessing Jacob by building up and providing for his offspring, (25-34).
 - A. Jacob's agreement with Laban, who recognized the Lord's blessing because of Jacob's presence, to work for the odd-colored flocks (i.e. spotted or speckled sheep and goats and dark-colored lambs) anticipated the Lord's blessing as he built the means of caring for his family, (25-34).

1. Laban's request that Jacob stay and become a partner rather than a servant instead of returning with his family to his own land acknowledged the Lord's blessing because of Jacob's presence, (25-28).
 - a. Jacob's request to return with his family to his own land followed years of faithful service to Laban and the birth of Joseph (Jacob being motivated by a desire to establish the means of caring for his own), (25-26).
 - b. Laban's request that Jacob stay and become a partner acknowledged his recognition of the Lord's blessing him because of Jacob's presence, (27-28).
2. Laban's willingness to pay Jacob the wages he named acknowledged again Jacob's faithful service, Jacob's desire to establish the means of caring for his family, and the Lord's abundant blessing because of Jacob's presence, (29-31a).
 - a. Jacob's appeal before Laban testified of his faithful service, the Lord's blessing upon Laban because of him, and his desire to establish a means of caring for his family, (29-30).
 - b. Laban's willingness to pay Jacob the wages he named acknowledged again the Lord's blessing because of Jacob's presence, (31a).
3. Laban's agreement to give Jacob nothing, but rather allow him to keep all the odd-colored flocks born in the future from among Laban's flocks, anticipated the Lord's blessing if Jacob was to build the means of caring for his family, (31b-34).
 - a. Jacob's proposal to work, not for wages but for the odd-colored flocks born in the future from among Laban's flocks, anticipated the Lord's blessing, (31b-33).
 - b. Laban's agreement to give Jacob nothing but the odd-colored flocks anticipated the Lord's blessing, (34).
- B. Jacob's growing into exceptional prosperity in just six years, despite Laban's opposition and his own manipulation, exposed the Lord's role in fulfilling His promise of blessing to Jacob, (35-43).
 1. Laban's opposition to Jacob resulted in his own removal of the odd-colored flocks from the normal flocks that same day, giving his own sons charge of the odd-colored flocks, and putting three day's journey between the two flocks, (35-36).
 - a. Laban's opposition to Jacob resulted in Laban's own removal of the odd-colored flocks from the normal flocks that same day, (35a).
 - b. Laban's opposition to Jacob resulted in Laban's giving his own sons charge of the odd-colored flocks, (35b).
 - c. Laban's opposition to Jacob resulted in Laban's putting three day's journey between the two flocks, (36).
 2. Jacob's manipulation of the breeding processes demonstrated his characteristic conniving to get the Lord's blessing through human means, (37-42).
 - a. Jacob's manipulation of the breeding processes included conceptual influence, (37-39).
 - b. Jacob's manipulation of the breeding processes included maternal impressions, (40).

- c. Jacob's manipulation of the breeding processes included selective breeding, (41-42).
- 3. Jacob's growing into exceptional prosperity in just six years (too quick a time to benefit from selective breeding) exposed the Lord's role in fulfilling His promise of blessing to Jacob - see 28:15, (43).

**(Theological . . . What it means to believers ALWAYS)
 GOD'S BLESSING NEVER ORIGINATE OUT OF
 OR SUCCEED FROM HUMAN AMBITION
 BUT FROM HIS WORD (PROMISE).**

- I. God's work of blessing succeeds despite human ambitions and devices, (29:31-30:24).
 - A. God's compassionate mercy blesses the oppressed as He fulfills His promises, (29:31-35).
 - B. God's unmerited grace blesses His people despite their faulty human efforts, (30:1-13).
 - C. God's consistent justice blesses His people despite their jealousy and indecency, (14-21).
 - D. God's covenant loving-kindness blesses His people while sovereignly removing their shame, (22-24).
- II. The blessings of prosperity originate in the Lord's promises (not human devices), (25-43).
 - A. God's past blessing anticipates His future blessing, (25-34).
 - 1. The anticipation of future blessing motivates the believer's spiritual journey, (25-26).
 - 2. The acknowledgment of God's past blessing anticipates His future blessing, (27-34).
 - B. The blessing of prosperity originates in the Lord's promises (not human devices), (35-43).
 - 1. The blessing of prosperity does not originate in human schemes, (35-42).
 - 2. The blessing of prosperity originates in the Lord's promises, (43). (Psalm 67 - God blesses to accomplish his purpose).

**(Pedagogical . . . What it means to us NOW)
 SAY THAT GOD HAS BLESSED YOU
 EVEN AS YOU TRUST HIM FOR BLESSING.**

- I. If God has redeemed your failures, SAY SO. (Psalm 107:2 "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so.")
 - A. If God has redeemed your oppression . . . say so.
 - 1. God redeemed Leah in her "unloved" condition, (31-35).
 - 2. If God has redeemed your "unloved" condition . . . say so.
 - B. If God has redeemed your bad ideas . . . say so.
 - 1. God redeemed both Rachel's and Leah's bad ideas, (1-13).
 - 2. If God has redeemed your bad ideas . . . say so.

- C. If God has redeemed your obscenities . . . say so.
 - 1. God redeemed Rachel's and Leah's obscenity, (14-21).
 - 2. If God has redeemed your obscenities . . . say so.
- D. If God has redeemed your shame . . . say so.
 - 1. God redeemed Rachel's shame of infertility, (22-24).
 - 2. If God has redeemed your shame . . . say so.
- II. TRUST God to bless you.

(Not your parents, your employer, your children, your church, your government, and most of all . . . not yourself)

 - A. Remember God's past blessings.
 - 1. God has made promises.
 - a. God promised to bless Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, & Israel. (12:2-3; 26:3-4; 28:13-15; Deuteronomy 1:11)
 - b. God has promised to bless you.
 - 2. God has kept His promises.
 - 3. Remember God's past promises, (30:25-34 [27 & 30]).
 - B. Rely on God's future blessings.
 - 1. God is your source of blessing.
 - a. God blessed Abraham, (13:2; 14:22-23 - to accomplish his purpose).
 - b. God blessed Isaac, (26:13-14 - to accomplish his purpose).
 - c. God blessed Jacob, (27, 30, 43 - to accomplish his purpose).
 - d. God is your source of blessing.
 - 2. Give up your schemes, (35-42).
 - a. Laban manipulated the circumstances, (35-36).
 - b. Jacob manipulated the circumstances, (37-42).
 - c. Neither benefited from their schemes, (see 31:9).
 - d. Don't try to get ahead by controlling God's universe.
 - 3. Rely on God to bless you, (43).
 - a. Be honest.
 - b. Make tentative plans.
 - c. Work hard.
 - d. Trust God to bless you.