

Jacob And The Work Ethic

by

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Like Israel's disastrous fiasco with the god, Baal-Peor, the social facts revealed in the Bible regarding Jacob "are written for our admonition" (I Corinthians 10:11). It is important, therefore, that we get the facts straight about the diligence of the patriarch, Jacob. Unhappily, there is a lot of confusion concerning Jacob despite the fact that over twenty-five chapters of Genesis are concerned with recounting the life of Jacob and of the early history of Israel. Indeed, the unparalleled track record of Jacob as a hard working supplanter of lazy complainers, is cited as evidence that our father Jacob was a liar and a cheat. Go Figure.

A diligent worker, by God's grace, can still supplant Esau who shirk work and break free of Laban's intent upon exploitation. Our Puritan fathers came to America with such a vision of work. They heeded the words of Solomon who said, "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings" (Proverbs 22:29). But, under the reigning confusions about Jacob, God's people are now unprepared to cope with envious attacks from angry, wicked men and we falter in our work. This retreat from work has become a rout in America. Obsessive watching of television "kills time" at the rate of over forty-five hours a week. It should come as no surprise that our country has become a debtor nation in international trade.

So, let us learn from Jacob how to push the "off button" on work avoidance. Laban sought to renew his contract with Jacob, saying, "I have learned by experience that the LORD hath blessed me for thy sake" (Genesis 30:27). So, what, in Jacob's words, was the secret of his success? "Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes" (Genesis 31:40). Any viable business still requires a man tend to business day and night, at all times, except when observing his Creator's Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11).

Was Jacob just bragging? No, these words were spoken loudly in a rare burst of anger calling Laban to account for his sin in changing Jacob's wages ten times (Genesis 31:41). "Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty" (Genesis 31:42). Jacob's angry denunciation took place in the presence of two bands of armed servants (Genesis 31:36-37). And, fratricidal war was only averted because everyone knew the truth of Jacob's charges and that God had just warned Laban not to entice or coerce Jacob into returning to Haran (Genesis 31:24,42). Jacob's honest, hard work for Laban is a biblical social fact. We had better believe it.