

However, we shouldn't ignore Jacob's years of experience. When he made this deal with Laban, he probably knew what he was doing. He knew that if non-speckled sheep were to mate, there was still a high chance that their offspring would be speckled.

But what about the branches? Well, modern science says that it's very unlikely that just the sight of the branches would have affected the animals in any way. However, it's possible that they released chemicals into the water, and perhaps this made the animals more likely to mate and conceive. It's unlikely that Jacob knew the science, but from years of experience he may well have known what the results would be.

Genesis 31:25–55: An idol problem

In Bible times, worshipping just one God was rare. Most people would worship a whole variety of gods. They believed that each god was responsible for a particular area of life (for example, health, family or farming). They would do whatever they could to keep these gods happy in order to ensure that they had good health, were able to have children and would harvest a big crop. It was common for them to have statues of these gods, which were called idols.

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the one true God that we read about in the Bible, wanted his people to be different. He didn't want his people to worship lots of different gods; he wanted them to worship only him. However, it took time for this message to sink in. Throughout the Old Testament we read of how God's people would often worship other gods alongside him, sometimes even rejecting the one true God in order to worship a man-made god instead.

God wanted his people to be different, but they found it hard to be different from all those around them, so they often chose to go along with what everyone else was doing. It can be difficult to be different, can't it?