



Finer Grounds Bible Study

Genesis (Part 2)

Lesson 4: Genesis 31:1-32:32

Hello again, ladies! I know that this particular series is a lot of material to get through in a few short weeks. The book of Genesis contains over 38,000 words in 50 chapters and spans more time in history than all 65 of the other Bible books combined. It covers over 2,000 years from creation to the death of the final patriarch, Joseph. I am proud of you for hanging in there! Don't forget to pray and let's dive in to where we left off.

Read Genesis 30:1-21

If you don't remember, we left off last time with most of Jacob's children having been born and Jacob making the deal with Laban in order to become financially independent. Some time has elapsed since Jacob and Laban's agreement as Jacob has accumulated large flocks and Laban seems to have been on the decline. Laban's sons are obviously not pleased with what has happened as their inheritance has probably shrunk. They are disgruntled and accuse Jacob of taking what belonged to their father. Laban's attitude has also changed. The Hebrew wording in verse 2 implies that Laban's facial expressions revealed a change in his attitude towards Jacob. In other words, Jacob saw it in Laban's face that he was against him, not with him, as he had been previously.

The text goes on to reveal that Laban has been cheating Jacob and changing his wages. Whether the text means Laban changed his wages literally ten times or just implies he changed it repeatedly, the point is Laban cannot be trusted.

He has resorted to cheating because of his greed. On top of all this, the angel of the Lord appears to Jacob in a dream and tells him to go back home. He even reminds him of what happened in Bethel, along with the vow he made, in verse 13. This change in Jacob's situation, along with Laban's cheating and the dream from the angel of God, prompts him to hold a family meeting with his two wives.

Jacob relays to Leah and Rebekah how God has protected and blessed him despite their father's sin against him. There is no doubt that Jacob labored hard for Laban for 20 years, but his hard work is not why he has become so wealthy. The text, and Jacob, make it clear that his success is from God. He has been faithful and has not retaliated against Laban when he has done him wrong. In verse 12, God tells Jacob, "I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you". One of the best things we can hear when someone has done us wrong is that someone has seen it. They validate the injustice. We have that someone always! The wording of what is said in that verse reminds me of when Hagar called God the "God who sees" in Genesis 16:13. I find that thought so comforting, just as I am sure Hagar and Jacob did as well.

The next best thing to hear when someone is doing you wrong is that the someone who sees it is powerful enough to bring justice to the situation. God has brought justice already to Jacob's injustice by changing the livestock



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production accordingly each time Laban changes the rules. This is a great reminder to us that God is to be the avenger, not us. This has always been God’s teaching. It was part of the old law that “you shall not take vengeance” (Lev. 19:18) and both Rom. 12:19 and Heb. 10:30 make it clear in the new testament when He says, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay”. May we believe God completely in this and find peace to obey it fully. After Jacob has expressed all the evidence for leaving, Leah and Rebekah agree whole heartedly. They even lodge some hefty accusations against their father themselves.

The last part of this section is their preparation to leave and Rachel stealing her father’s household idols while he is away shearing his flock. Laban would have been “out of town” so to speak to do this shearing and his time away could certainly have included days of celebration. This afforded Rachel the perfect opportunity to steal and Jacob the right time to flee. We are not told why Rachel wanted to steal the idols from her father, but many commentators have suggested their opinion. Among them include the idea that she wanted the protection of those gods or the fact that whoever had them was entitled to the father’s inheritance. We are not told why she stole them, but we will learn that it was dangerous and pointless.

Think about a time someone’s attitude changed from good to bad towards you. How did it affect you and your environment?

Can you think of some Biblical examples of greed that led to mistreatment of others?

Can you think of a time you were treated unjustly? How important was it for someone to “see” it?

What do you think Leah and Rebekah meant by saying that their father treated them like foreigners, sold them, and “consumed their purchase price”?

Read Rom.12:17-21 and reflect on your own walk. How have you put this into practice or how can you begin to?

Read Genesis 31:22-55

Jacob and his family get a three-day head start before Laban discovers they have fled. It takes Laban seven days to catch up with them. I imagine Laban was fairly worked up and angry, but God warns him in a dream which forces him to reconsider his actions. He says to “be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad”. God is warning Laban to not try and thwart Jacob’s departure. Remember this return



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trip is God’s plan. We should all take heed not to fight against God’s plans.

A lengthy discussion ensues between the two men. Jacob confesses that fear was the motivation for his secrecy and deception. Laban concedes he can understand why Jacob wants to return home, but he doesn’t understand why he would steal his household idols. Jacob, unaware of Rachel’s theft, makes the bold vow that anyone with his idols will be put to death. God spares Rachel for now even in her deception. We don’t know when or exactly how, but we know God is not mocked and we will sow what we reap. Perhaps the punishment was too great, God did not want Jacob to live with the guilt, or God simply did not want the punishment to come from Laban. We should remember this when we think someone has “gotten away with it” and doubt that God will repay. He is just in His punishment and merciful in His forgiveness. We will eventually have consequences, but we can also have forgiveness. I am grateful we serve a God that always does what is right at the right time.

When Laban is unable to find his idols, Jacob seems to let loose on his pent-up frustrations. He verbalizes all the mistreatment he has suffered at Laban’s hands and even states that Laban would have sent him away “empty-handed” had it not been for God who renders judgment. It is not recorded that Laban ever apologized to Jacob and even proclaims that everything is his, but he can do nothing about it. If God has taken something from you and given it to someone else, it is no longer yours. We may be a little hard on Laban because that may sound easy to do, but let’s make it personal. When your son or daughter marry,

they don’t belong to you anymore. Sorry, I know that’s a tough one. It doesn’t mean the love has changed, just your amount of influence and control. The truth is they belonged to God all the time and your turn is up. Don’t fight it, just embrace it knowing God has loved and will love them more than you will ever know how to.

Once again, the common practice of making a pillar of stones is utilized by Jacob and Laban to make a covenant. They name it “the heap of witness”, which is Jegar-sahadutha in Aramaic for Laban and Galeed in Hebrew for Jacob. Jacob offers a sacrifice and, as all get-togethers should end, they enjoy a meal together before Laban heads back home.

What does Laban say he would have done if Jacob had told him he was leaving according to verses 27 and 28? Do you think he would have responded this way?

Do you think Laban was justified at all in chasing after Jacob? Why or why not?

Do you think Jacob’s fear was a valid reason to deceive Laban? Why or why not?



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Have you struggled to let go of something or someone? What scriptures can you think of to help you?

What are the terms of Jacob and Laban's agreement at the end of chapter 31?

Read Genesis 32:1-32

Did you catch that in verse 1? "Now as Jacob went on his way, the angels of God met him." He saw the angels of God ascending and descending on the ladder in his dream twenty years ago at Bethel when he left home and now they meet up with him on his return home. We are not told why this happens, but maybe it was to reassure him of God's promise so long ago. He names it Mahanaim, which means "two camps" or "double camp" probably referring to his camp and the camp of God's angels being in the same place.

After this encouragement, Jacob prepares to meet his brother. He wisely sends messengers ahead to let Esau know he is coming and that he hopes the reunion will be a favorable one. I can only imagine his fear when his messengers say Esau is coming with four hundred men. Although Jacob really had no need to fear or be distressed since God had made a promise to be with him, it would be difficult to not fear when you considered the safety of your family. He divides his camp into two companies to prepare for the worst-case scenario and then he does the best thing he could ever have done. He prays.

His prayer acknowledges God's promise to prosper him, his unworthiness, and God's bountiful blessings. He ends with the request for God to deliver him from Esau and then he takes action. He sends presents to Esau in the hopes that he has done all he can do to incline Esau to accept him back. This is a good lesson for us to pray to God and then move forward doing all we can to help our situation. When we've done all we can do, then we wait upon the Lord.

That night, Jacob crosses a shallow spot in the stream called Jabbok. The Jabbok leads to the Jordan River. It was about fifteen miles north of the Dead Sea and forty miles south of the Sea of Galilee. He was so close to home after such a long journey! How he must have longed desperately to be received openly and lovingly from his family after so many years and so many miles.

The last part of chapter 32 details Jacob's wrestling encounter in the night with what appears to be God in a man's body. They wrestled all night. I cannot even begin to imagine how exhausting that must have been. Jacob has been on a physically and emotionally draining journey and he is not that young. Yet, he strives all night with this "man". Jacob must have been an extremely strong man. He knows this "man" is special and will not let him go until he blesses him. Now, we all know the "man" could have escaped as it only takes him a mere touch to completely debilitate Jacob, but he agrees to Jacob's request. We also know that God knew his name, but he asks him anyway. Maybe he wanted to emphasize the change in Jacob's mind. God was changing him from Jacob, "the supplanter", to Israel, "the one who strives with God". Israel



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comes from two root words meaning “God prevails”. Jacob indeed has prevailed with God.

I think it is important to note that even though Jacob declares that he has “seen God face to face”, there is a big difference between seeing God as a man and seeing God in all of His glory. We know from Exodus 33:20 that no one can see God and live and from 1 Timothy 6:16 no one has seen or can see God. However, there are a few instances where men have “seen” God as Jacob has here in our text. Again, these sightings are very different from the full “seeing” of God and all His glory. The closest anyone came was Moses and all he saw was God’s back side, not His face. It was known that you could not live if you truly saw God’s face in its true form. Nevertheless, it was still extremely rare to see God in any form and Jacob did. He knew he was blessed to live through his ordeal that night.

What does Jacob confess to God in his prayer in verse 11?

Take a few minutes to confess your fears to God like Jacob did and ask Him to help you trust Him with them. What actions can you take to help overcome these fears?

How many animals in total does Jacob send to Esau? Do some research and find out approximately how much that would have been worth.

What does verse 30 say is the reason God changed Jacob’s name to Israel and what do you think that means?

What new name could God give you to declare what great things He has done for you or with you?

We have once again come to the end of our lesson. As always, it has been an honor to spend time in God’s word. He has been very good to this unworthy servant and I know He has been to you as well. May you love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength this day.