

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GENESIS 30-31

GENESIS 30:25-30 - JACOB PREPARES TO LEAVE LABAN

JACOB IS READY TO LEAVE LABAN'S HOUSE. HIS TRIP TO FIND A WIFE HAS NOW LASTED OVER 14 YEARS IN LABAN'S SERVICE. LABAN, UPON HEARING JACOB'S DESIRE TO LEAVE IS FACED WITH THE REALITY THAT JACOB'S PRESENCE IN HIS COMPANY HAS LED TO GREAT BLESSING FOR LABAN. REMEMBER, A CORE PIECE OF THE ABRAHAMIC BLESSING IS THAT GOD WOULD "BLESS THOSE WHO BLESS YOU, AND CURSE THOSE WHO CURSE YOU...AND THROUGH YOU (AND YOUR DESCENDANTS), ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH WILL BE BLESSED." IN THIS CASE, LABAN'S HOUSE IS BLESSED AND ENRICHED BECAUSE OF JACOB'S PRESENCE WITH THEM.

LABAN IS NOT TOO EAGER TO LET THAT BLESSING GO.

GENESIS 30:31-36 - LABAN TRIES TO PLAY JACOB

LABAN ASKS JACOB WHAT HE WANTS TO RECEIVE FOR HIS WAGES AND JACOB ASKS FOR THE "SPECKLED, SPOTTED OR BLACK" SHEEP OR GOAT FROM AMONGST THE FLOCKS. THIS WOULD BE A GOOD WAY TO DISTINGUISH WHICH SHEEP/GOAT BELONGED TO WHICH MAN AND ALSO WOULD LIKELY SEEM TO FAVOR LABAN, AS THE NON-SPECKLED SHEEPS WOULD HAVE APPEARED TO BE MORE DESIRABLE. LABAN AGREES.

YET, ON THE DAY THIS DEAL WAS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN, LABAN SECRETLY SEPARATES THE SPECKLED SHEEP AND GOATS AND GIVE THEM TO HIS SONS - WHO THEN TAKE THESE FLOCKS 3 DAYS JOURNEY AWAY. JACOB THEN DECIDES TO STICK AROUND FOR A LITTLE WHILE LONGER. FIRST LABAN DECEIVED JACOB WITH THE MARRIAGE OF HIS DAUGHTERS AND NOW WITH THE APPARENT GENEROSITY OF HIS PAYMENT TO JACOB FOR HIS SERVICES.

GENESIS 30:37-43 - A BETTER DEAL FOR JACOB

AFTER JACOB DECIDES TO STICK AROUND A BIT LONGER, HE DEVISES A PLAN TO GAIN THE WAGES THAT WERE ORIGINALLY PROMISED TO HIM - NOW WITH AN ADDED BONUS. THE DEAL WITH LABAN WAS THAT JACOB WOULD BE GIVEN THE SPECKLED AND STRIPED ANIMALS FROM THE FLOCK AND JACOB IS GOING TO MAKE OUT WELL IN THIS DEAL AFTER ALL. SOMEHOW JACOB ADDS A CERTAIN TYPE OF BRANCH TO THE WATER OF THE SHEEP WHICH IN TURN AFFECTS THE COLOR OF THE COATS WHEN THESE SHEEP BREED. THE END RESULT WAS THAT THESE ANIMALS MATED WITH SOME OF THE STRONGEST FROM LABAN'S FLOCK AND THEIR CHILDREN BECAME STRONG *AND* SPECKLED. LABAN'S SON'S KEEP THE SPECKLED THEY HAD TAKEN AND JACOB HAS HIS PAYMENT TOO - BETTER THAN THE FIRST OPTION.

THE CHAPTER ENDS WITH A SUMMARY OF JACOB'S STATUS - "AS A RESULT, JACOB BECAME VERY WEALTHY, WITH LARGE FLOCKS OF SHEEP AND GOATS, FEMALE AND MALE SERVANTS, AND MANY CAMELS AND DONKEYS. (GENESIS 30:43)

GENESIS 31:1-16 - GOD VISITS JACOB AND JACOB PREPARES TO LEAVE

TENSIONS ARE INCREASING AS WE BEGIN GENESIS 31. THE FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE THAT EXISTED BETWEEN JACOB AND HIS FAMILY AND LABAN AND HIS FAMILY HAS EVAPORATED. REMEMBER THERE'S A LOT OF PEOPLE INVOLVED - LABAN SEEMS TO HAVE HIS OWN CREW WHILE JACOB ALONE HAS 12 SONS, A DAUGHTER, 2 WIVES, 2 WIFE'S SERVANTS. (IF YOU HAVE EVER HAD YOUR IN-LAWS VISITS, YOU KNOW HOW THESE THINGS CAN GO.)

AND IT'S AT THIS TIME THAT THE LORD VISITS JACOB TO GIVE HIM SOME DIVINE DIRECTION. GOD CALLS HIM TO RETURN HOME AND PROMISES TO BE WITH HIM. JACOB INFORMS HIS WIVES AND RECOUNTS THE HAND OF THE LORD UPON THEIR LIVES DURING THE LAST FEW, AND TRYING, YEARS. APPARENTLY IN THIS VISIT FROM THE LORD, JACOB IS REMINDED OF HIS PERSONAL GOD'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD YEARS BEFORE AT BETHEL.

THE WIVES (LABAN'S TWO DAUGHTERS) AGREE THAT IT IS TIME FOR THEM TO GO. THEY SEEM TO SYMPATHIZE WITH JACOB'S CONCERN ABOUT LABAN'S BEHAVIOR AND FEEL LIKE THEIR FATHER NO LONGER HAS THEIR INTERESTS IN MIND.

GENESIS 31:14-16 (NLT) - RACHEL AND LEAH RESPONDED, "THAT'S FINE WITH US! WE WON'T INHERIT ANY OF OUR FATHER'S WEALTH ANYWAY. 15 HE HAS REDUCED OUR RIGHTS TO THOSE OF FOREIGN WOMEN. AND AFTER HE SOLD US, HE WASTED THE MONEY YOU PAID HIM FOR US. 16 ALL THE WEALTH GOD HAS GIVEN YOU FROM OUR FATHER LEGALLY BELONGS TO US AND OUR CHILDREN. SO GO AHEAD AND DO WHATEVER GOD HAS TOLD YOU."

AND SO THEY PREPARE TO LEAVE.

GENESIS 31:17-21 - JACOB LEAVES, RACHEL TAKES IDOLS

JACOB AND HIS FAMILY, AND THEIR FLOCKS LEAVE WITHOUT TELLING JACOB. HE PUT HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN ON CAMELS TO HELP THE TRIP MOVE QUICKER AND HE IS TRYING TO GET TO THE EUPHRATES RIVER, TO HOPEFULLY CREATE SOME DISTANCE BETWEEN HIM AND HIS FATHER IN LAW, WHO IS CERTAINLY NOT GOING TO DO WELL WITH THIS NEWS.

A QUICK DETAILS IS ADDED TO THIS STORY WHICH IS OVERALL ABOUT GOD CALLING JACOB TO LEAVE IS THAT OF V. 19 - "RACHEL STOLE THE HOUSEHOLD IDOLS THAT WERE HER FATHER'S." WHY DID SHE DO THIS? HERE'S SOME HELP FROM THE ESV STUDY BIBLE:

ESV STUDY BIBLE: THE NARRATOR DOES NOT EXPLAIN WHY RACHEL TOOK HER FATHER'S "GODS." PERHAPS SHE BELIEVED THAT THIS WOULD PREVENT HIM FROM USING THEIR POWER TO OVERCOME JACOB. POSSIBLY SHE THOUGHT THAT THEY WOULD BRING HER GOOD FORTUNE. MAYBE SHE WANTED THEM ONLY FOR THEIR INHERENT VALUE, GIVEN THAT THEY MAY HAVE BEEN MADE OF COSTLY METAL."

GENESIS 31:22-32 - LABAN PURSUES JACOB

LABAN FINDS OUT JACOB AND HIS COMPANY HAS LEFT THREE DAYS AFTER THEY TIPTOED OUT OF THEIR TENTS. LABAN AND HIS MEN WEREN'T TRAVELING WITH CHILDREN AND FLOCKS OF SHEEP AND AS A RESULT ARE ABLE TO CATCH UP WITH JACOB, EVEN AFTER THEY HAD GOTTEN A HEAD START. WHEN LABAN ARRIVES HE PREPARES TO CONFRONT JACOB BUT THE NIGHT BEFORE THE LORD APPEARED TO HIM IN A DREAM AND SAID "YOU BETTER WATCH YOURSELF LABAN..." THIS WARNING WILL NOT SPARE THE CONFRONTATION, BUT IT WILL TEMPER LABAN'S APPROACH.

LABAN WONDERS WHY JACOB DIDN'T TELL HIM HE WAS LEAVING SO THEY COULD HAVE CELEBRATED AND SENT HIM OFF WITH JOY. WHETHER OR NOT HE IS BEING GENUINE, IT SEEMS TO CONVICT JACOB TO ADMIT THAT HIS REASONING WAS BASED OUT OF FEAR OF LABAN. LABAN ASKS ABOUT WHY JACOB STOLE HIS "GODS" - CLEARLY INDICATING THAT THIS WAS A SORE SPOT FOR LABAN. JACOB, AS WE KNOW, KNOWS NOTHING ABOUT THESE MISSING FIGURES AND INVITES LABAN TO SEARCH HIS LUGGAGE, CONFIDENT LABAN WON'T FIND ANYTHING SUSPICIOUS.

GENESIS 31:33-35 - RACHEL HIDES THE IDOLS FROM HER FATHER

RACHEL USES THE "IT'S THAT TIME OF THE MONTH" LINE TO KEEP HER FATHER FROM SEARCHING FOR THE IDOLS SHE TOOK IN HER TENT. HER EXCUSE WORKS AND LABAN, AFTER SEARCHING ALL OF JACOB'S THINGS, FINDS NOTHING THAT BELONGS TO HIM. THIS SEEMS TO BE THE "LAST STRAW" FOR JACOB AND HE, AT LAST, STANDS UP FOR HIMSELF.

GENESIS 31:36-42 - JACOB CONFRONTS LABAN

DO YOU HEAR THE 20 YEARS OF PENT UP AGGRESSION EXPLODING IN THESE VERSES? AT LAST JACOB STANDS UP FOR HIMSELF AND DEFENDS HIS CAUSE AND CASE - AND IT SEEMS THAT HE IS AT LAST EMBOLDENED BECAUSE HE HAS REMEMBERED THAT THE LORD IS WITH HIM. PERHAPS JACOB HAS LOOKED AT LABAN AS HIS PROVIDER, AS HIS SUFFICIENCY UP TO THIS POINT, AND WITH MUCH RESENTMENT FOR IT. NOW JACOB HAS AGAIN PUT HIS TRUST, HIS FAMILY'S FUTURE, AND HIS LIFE IN THE LORD'S HANDS.

GENESIS 31:43-55 - JACOB AND LABAN MAKE A COVENANT

LABAN RESPONDS WELL TO JACOB'S CONFRONTATION. HE ACKNOWLEDGES THAT THINGS ARE THE WAY THEY ARE AND IT IS TIME FOR HIM TO ACCEPT THEM AS SUCH. THE COVENANT IS FOR PEACE BETWEEN THEIR FAMILIES AND A CHARGE THAT JACOB WILL NOT HURT LABAN'S DAUGHTERS (OR ADD ADDITIONAL WIVES, PERHAPS LEADING TO THE NEGLECT OF HIS DAUGHTERS). THEY ALSO AGREE TO NEVER PASS THE PILLAR THEY SET UP TO DO HARM TO EACH OTHER. IN OTHER WORDS, THERE WILL BE NO RETRIBUTION FOR FORMER OFFENSES.

LABAN LEAVES, AND JACOB AND HIS FAMILY MAKE THEIR WAY TOWARDS HIS FATHER ISAAC'S HOME. WE DON'T HEAR FROM LABAN ANY MORE AFTER THIS RECORD. IN THE CHAPTERS TO COME, JACOB WILL GET BACK TO LIVING HIS LIFE IN HIS HOMELAND. HE WILL BE HIS OWN MAN AT LAST, BUT WITH THAT WILL ALSO COME FACING SOME OF THE UNRESOLVED ISSUES OF HIS PAST. BUT FOR NOW WE WILL PAUSE.

IT SEEMS LIKE THIS CHAPTER IS A CHAPTER OF TRANSITION FOR JACOB. HE HAS SPENT THE LAST TWO DECADES OF HIS LIFE SERVING LABAN AND LIVING AWAY FROM HIS HOME. AND WHILE THE YEARS HAVE BEEN GOOD IN MANY WAYS, THEY HAVE BEEN TRYING. AND AT THIS POINT THERE IS BROKENNESS AND DYSFUNCTION, NOT JUST IN JACOB'S HOUSE, BUT IN HIS HEART. NONE OF THIS HAPPENED OVERNIGHT, BUT THE SLOW TRICKLE OF UNRESOLVED CONFLICT, UNFORGIVEN OFFENSES, AND UNSPOKEN HURTS LEAD ANYONE TO HAVE A BITTER, HARDENED AND DISTANT HEART.

LABAN HAD BEEN PRETTY NASTY TO JACOB. WITHHOLDING RACHEL FROM HIM AFTER HE PROMISED TO GIVE HER TO JACOB, WITHHOLDING HIS WAGES, SHIPPING OFF THE SHEEP, AND THE EMOTIONAL ROLLERCOASTER WE SEE JUST IN THE LAST THREE CHAPTERS IS ENOUGH TO EXPLAIN WHY JACOB IS WHERE HE IS.

THIS IS A CASE WHERE LABAN HAD BEEN MANIPULATING JACOB, TAKING ADVANTAGE OF HIM. JACOB IN TURN IS AFRAID OF LABAN. HE'S BEEN DUPED MULTIPLE TIMES BY LABAN AND YET JACOB IS NERVOUS ABOUT APPROACHING HIS FATHER IN LAW. ISN'T THAT INTERESTING. EVEN THOUGH LABAN WAS THE ONE WHO DID WRONG, JACOB IS THE ONE LIVING IN FEAR. JACOB FEELS HE HAS TO LEAVE LABAN SECRETLY. JACOB DOESN'T EVER CONFRONT THE WRONG, BUT BEARS UNDER THE WRONG AND GOES ALONG TO GET ALONG.

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO, BUT IF BITTERNESS AND UNFORGIVENESS REMAIN IN OUR HEARTS AS A RESULT, THEN GOING ALONG TO GET ALONG DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE THE CORRECT STRATEGY FOR DEALING WITH THE TROUBLE IN OUR LIFE.

AND HERE IS ONE ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT OBSERVATION FROM THIS SECTION. WE HAVE HEARD LITTLE TO NONE ABOUT JACOB'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD DURING THESE YEARS. IT ISN'T UNTIL GENESIS 31 THAT THE LORD SPEAKS TO JACOB. I WONDER, HAD JACOB BEEN SPEAKING TO THE LORD DURING THIS TIME? REMEMBER JACOB MET THE LORD FACE TO FACE AS HE MADE HIS WAY TO LABAN'S HOUSE AS A YOUNG MAN. IT WAS THERE, IN BETHEL, THAT

THE LORD BECAME JACOB'S GOD AND NOT JUST THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND ISAAC. JACOB BEGAN WALKING WITH THE LORD AS HIS OWN MAN, RESTING IN THAT GREAT PROMISE OF GOD "I AM WITH YOU..." (GENESIS 28:13).

JACOB NEEDED TO BE REMINDED BY GOD IN GENESIS 31 OF THIS SAME PROMISE. LABAN'S MANIPULATION AND CRUELTY HAD CLOUDED JACOB'S MEMORY. JACOB BECAME TOO CONCERNED ABOUT PLEASING LABAN, KEEPING LABAN HAPPY, GETTING WHAT HE WANTED FROM LABAN, THAT HE LOST HIS CONCERN ABOUT PLEASING GOD. FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, LABAN WAS JACOB'S GOD!

JACOB HAD ARRIVED AT THE PLACE IN HIS HEART AND SOUL WHERE HE FELT IT WAS LABAN WHO WAS HIS PROVIDER. JACOB HAD ARRIVED AT THE PLACE IN HIS HEART AND SOUL WHERE HE FELT IT WAS LABAN WHO HE SHOULD FEAR. AND AS A RESULT, HE ALLOWED LABAN TO DETERMINE HIS LIFE AND DESTINY AND FUTURE. UGH. IT SEEMS SO CLEAR FROM THE TEXT, AND YET OVER A PERIOD OF 20 YEARS, THIS IS A SLOW DECLINE.

JACOB IS REMINDED OF GOD'S POWER AND LOVE AND GOD'S PROMISE THAT 'I WILL BE WITH YOU...' (GENESIS 31:3) AND SUDDENLY JACOB AWOKE TO THE REALIZATION THAT HE HAD ALLOWED HIS FATHER IN LAW TO DETERMINE HIS LIFE AND CHOICES RATHER THAN THE LORD! HE LETS IT ALL OUT LATER IN THE CHAPTER WHEN HE CRIES OUT DURING HIS CONFRONTATION OF LABAN - "ENOUGH LABAN! I WILL NOT LONGER LET YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF ME, RULE ME OR SCARE ME! I AM THE LORD'S!"

GENESIS 31:42 (NLT) - "IN FACT, IF THE GOD OF MY FATHER HAD NOT BEEN ON MY SIDE-- THE GOD OF ABRAHAM AND THE FEARSOME GOD OF ISAAC-- YOU WOULD HAVE SENT ME AWAY EMPTY-HANDED. BUT GOD HAS SEEN YOUR ABUSE AND MY HARD WORK. THAT IS WHY HE APPEARED TO YOU LAST NIGHT AND REBUKED YOU!"

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR US TO CLING TO THE PROMISES OF GOD?! YOU SEE IF WE KNOW THAT GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF US AND PROVIDE FOR US, AND GUIDE US AND LEAD US AND LOVE US, WE WILL NEVER FALL INTO THE TEMPTATION THAT WE NEED TO GET ANYTHING FROM ANOTHER PERSON. SURE OTHER PEOPLE CAN POUR GOOD THINGS INTO OUR HEARTS AND LIVES, BUT IF WE HAVE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD RIGHT, WE WILL NEVER BE DEPENDANT ON THE OTHER PEOPLE TO GIVE US WHAT OUR HEART'S CRAVE. THAT WAS JACOB'S MISTAKE - HE LOOKED TO HIS FATHER IN LAW, RATHER THAN THE LORD OF ALL.

IT'S NOT YOUR SPOUSE, YOUR CHILDREN, YOUR PARENTS, YOUR EMPLOYER, YOUR PASTOR OR YOUR FRIEND THAT YOU NEED TO RELY ON...IT'S YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN, WHO KNOWS WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE YOU ASK AND PROMISES TO "BE WITH YOU" TOO.

A FINAL WARNING ABOUT THIS SEEMINGLY SIMPLE TRUTH...NONE OF THIS HAPPENS OVERNIGHT. WE ARE ALL SHAKING OUR HEADS NOW AS WE AGREE WITH THESE POINTS, BUT WE HAVE TO CONSTANTLY AND CONSISTENTLY BELIEVE AND GUARD THE PROMISES OF GOD OR ELSE WE TOO WILL TURN OUR LIVES OVER TO ANOTHER. THIS DIDN'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT BETWEEN JACOB AND LABAN - IT TOOK TWENTY YEARS. SO BE CAREFUL, AND BE VIGILANT. TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL OF YOUR HEART, AND LEAN NOT ON YOUR OWN UNDERSTANDING...OR ANYONE ELSE'S FOR THAT MATTER.