

# Genesis 31-33

## He'll Never Walk the Same

After 20 years in Padan Aram, Jacob and his family return to Canaan.

### Genesis 31:41

Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times.

Genesis 31 -33 tells the story of their journey home

## I. Genesis 31:1-16

This first section explains the circumstances that led to their departure

Jacob had been instructed in a divine dream to choose all the spotted lambs as payment for his years of service to Laban. Over the next 6 years God would miraculously provide an abundance of speckled and spotted sheep despite the conniving's of Jacob

### Genesis 31:11-12

Then the Angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, 'Jacob.' And I said, 'Here I am.' **12** And He said, 'Lift your eyes now and see, all the rams which leap on the flocks are streaked, speckled, and gray-spotted; for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.

The seeming imbalance in the flocks infuriated the family of Laban and things between to two families began to heat up.

It is clear that Jacob's circumstances are speaking very loudly to him. It will become his challenge to determine what is the right course of action based upon the circumstances he is facing.

Jacob is certainly not alone in this struggle; it is one that we face regularly

Two verbs help describe the situation; Jacob HEARD and Jacob SAW

### Genesis 31:1

Now **Jacob heard** the words of Laban's sons, saying, "Jacob has

taken away all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has acquired all this wealth."

Jacob HEARD that Laban's children considered Jacob and embezzler and a thief

Genesis 31:2

And **Jacob saw** the countenance of Laban, and indeed it was not favorable toward him as before.

Jacob Saw Laban's demeanor change and he had seen that look 20 years before in the eyes of his brother Esau

Genesis 27:41

So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, "The days of mourning for my father are at hand; **then I will kill my brother Jacob.**"

**Although his circumstances are changing, Jacob has no real direction for dealing with it until he hears from the Lord**

Genesis 31:3

**Then the Lord said** to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."

- **No details are given regarding where Jacob was when God spoke**

There are many times in Scripture when God seems to interrupt the normal patterns of a person's life in order to speak to them. This happened to:

- Moses while caring for sheep
- Gideon while threshing wheat
- Peter while fishing
- Paul while horseback riding
- And many others

While God may interrupt our normal lives we also discover in Scripture that there are ways to **increase our chances of hearing from the Lord**

Psalm 91:1

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High  
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Dwelling in the secret place of the most high God will definitely increase your chances of hearing when He speaks. Many within Scripture found this to be true

**Daniel 2:19**

Then the secret was revealed to Daniel in a night vision. So Daniel blessed the God of heaven.

It seems that Daniel was willing to **forfeit sleep** in order to seek the voice of God

**Habakkuk 2:1**

I will stand my watch  
And set myself on the rampart,  
And watch to see what He will say to me,  
And what I will answer when I am corrected.

Hearing from God was so important to Habakkuk that he was willing to **set aside** not only his **time**, but his **emotions** and seek the Lord

The psalmist put it this way:

**Psalm 27:8**

When You said, "Seek My face,"  
My heart said to You, "**Your face, Lord, I will seek.**"

When our circumstance put us in a place where we require direction from God it is essential that we set aside time to seek His face and listen to His voice

- While we do not know exactly where Jacob was when God spoke to him we do know what God said:

Genesis 31:3

**Then the Lord said** to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you."

**The Lord takes Jacob back to the Word**

This is a quotation from a promise Jacob had previously received from the Lord at Bethel

**Genesis 28:15**

Behold, I *am* with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.”

If we want direction for our present circumstances we need to go back to the promises of the Word

Two more verbs help to finish the details of their departure; we read that Jacob CALLED and Jacob ROSE

**Genesis 31:4**

So Jacob sent and **called** Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock,

Jacob called his family together and explained the circumstances they were in and the word he had heard from the Lord.

**Their answer is priceless**

**Genesis 31:14-16**

**Rachel and Leah answered** and said to him, “Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father’s house? **15** Are we not considered strangers by him? For he has sold us, and also completely consumed our money.**16** For all these riches which God has taken from our father are *really* ours and our children’s; **now then, whatever God has said to you, do it.**”

This passage is a valid illustration of a person responding to the call of God.

Notice 4 components that led Jacob from Padan Aram to Canaan

- **First** – His circumstances changed

Those who once had favor among the inhabitants of Haran, were now looked upon as criminal.

Things don’t always have to be that drastic; sometimes God can change our circumstances by simply changing our hearts. Where we once seemed so settled, we begin to feel

as though God might be moving us on

- **Second** – He heard from the Lord

While we are waiting on circumstances to change we should give ample time to wait on the Lord

- **Third** – His call was confirmed by those closest to him

There is a danger when we do not trust the Lord enough to wait on the heart of our spouse or for a young person perhaps the heart of your parents to change.

I have seen too many men venture into ministry that their wives did not agree with them about. As time goes on they not only lose that area of ministry but it often has done what seems to be irreparable damage to the relationship

- **Finally** – Jacob went.

Ultimately every venture of faith is just that, a venture and will not be realized until we finally act upon it.

I am so thankful for men in my life who have exemplified what it means to trust God to do great things. It is not that they are the most talented, or gifted but they believe God wants to work and they step out accordingly.

I am reminded of the lepers that sat out of the city gate when Samaria was under siege. They realized that they had two courses of action; one they could do nothing and die, two they could step out in faith and see what happens. They chose the latter and the entire city was saved.

I wonder how many in our city God wants to save and is just waiting for those who will take ventures of faith after waiting on the Lord for direction

**Whatever he says to you, do it!**

This verse is also particularly special to me because it is

exactly what my wife said to me as I stepped onto the gate of United Airline flight 1228 en route to Orlando Florida from LAX. We had traveled to Vero Beach FL one time 2 months earlier to visit and pray about moving here but the Lord's voice seemed to have gone silent. As I boarded the plane my mind was filled with confusion and uncertainty, but I could hear her words echoing in my memory "Whatever He says to you do it"

It was during my the Sunday morning Bible study on May 10, 1998 that after 2 months of praying I finally heard His voice say GO. 3 months later we moved into our new home and began to pastor CCVB

**I am so blessed to have a wife that above all else wants me to listen to the voice of God**

## II. Genesis 31:17 – 33:17

This section focuses on their journey back to Canaan

### Gen 31:17 – 37 – Jacob's final encounter with Laban

**The first scene gives a little insight into the character of Rachel**

**Genesis 31:19**

Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's.

**Genesis 31:34**

Now Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. And Laban searched all about the tent but did not find *them*.

She stole her dad's idols! – At least 3 things are worth noting

- **First** – She was a thief
- **Second** – She was still struggling with idolatry. It may have

been the fear of leaving home, making the journey or facing the unknown that caused her to lose sight of God and cling to false hope in a carved image

- **Third** - Laban's gods could be stolen

There is something desperately wrong with your religion if it can be stolen and hidden in a saddlebag

Idols are an alteration of the true and living God. The very existence of idols is an evidence of the fact that there is one true God to whom we will all one day give an account. Stephen Charnock, a writer from the mid 1600's wrote regarding how idolatry is an evidence of the one real God:

**God in regard of his existence is not only the discovery of faith, but of reason.**

'Tis a folly to deny or doubt of that which hath been the acknowledged sentiment of all nations, in all places and ages. There is no nation but hath owned some kind of religion, and a Supreme Crea-tor and Governor.

Nor doth the idolatry and multiplicity of gods in the world weaken, but confirm this universal consent. Whatsoever unworthy conceits men have had of God in all nations, or whatsoever degrading representations they have made of him, yet they all concur in this, that there is a Supreme Power to be adored. Though one people worshipped the sun, others the fire, and the Egyptians, gods out of their rivers, gardens, and fields; yet the notion of a Deity existent, who created and governed the world, and conferred daily benefits upon them, was maintained by all. All the Dagon's of the world establish this truth, and fall down before it.

Man's fondness to set up others in the place of God, evidenced a natural knowledge that there was One who had a right to be worshipped. If there were not this sentiment of a Deity, no man would ever Have made an image of a piece of wood, worshipped it, prayed to it, and said, "*Deliver me, for thou art my God.*"<sup>p</sup>

The worship sprung from a true principle, though it was not applied to a right object. **A blind man** knows he hath a way to go as well as one of the clearest sight; but because of his blindness he may miss the way and stumble into a ditch. No man would be imposed upon to take a Bristol stone instead of a diamond, if he did not know that there were such things as diamonds in the world: nor any man spread Forth his hands to an idol, if he were altogether without the sense of a Deity. Whether it be a false or a true God.... all their mistakes were grafts inserted in this stock, since they would multiply gods rather

than deny a Deity.

Idolatry is as common today as it has ever been and is even a stumbling block for many Christians who like Rachel also cling to that which is not God in times of stress

Idolatry often takes the shape of a Christian who adds or takes away from how God is described in Scripture because it baffles our limited understanding. The result we have created a God who comfortably fits into our saddlebags but who is powerless to help in times of need

## Gen 31:38 – 55 – Jacob’s final encounter with Laban

Standing before Laban, Jacob recounts his 20 years of service. What seems to stand out above all else is his faithfulness.

### Genesis 31:38-40

*These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock. 39 That which was torn by beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. 40 There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes.*

This passage serves as a good illustration of pastoral ministry.

- Jacob viewed the lambs as belonging to another
- He spent many a night hungry, cold and without sleep.
- Paul spoke of ministry as being like that:

### 2 Corinthians 11:23-28

*Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. 24 From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own*



countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; **27** in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— **28** besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches.

**Because this is the calling Paul also spoke of the character of those who were called:**

#### **1 Corinthians 4:1-2**

Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. **2** Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

- Servants of Christ
- Stewards of the mystery
- Faithful

Laban and Jacob make a covenant. What may seem like an amicable parting is really a strong warning against either attempting to deceive the other again

#### **Gen 32:1-21– Jacob prepares to meet Esau**

The scene now shifts from Jacob facing his present troubles to having to face his past. Going back to Canaan would mean encountering Esau who he had ripped off 20 years before.

**God will often bring us face to face with our past before we can move ahead.**

#### **Notice how Jacob faced his past**

- 3-5 - Sends word to Esau – **tackles the problem head on**
- 6-7 - When he learns that Esau is coming with 400 men he is filled with fear and divides his wealth.

This is either an attempt to handle the problem on his own or a picture of his preparing for whatever may come his

way.

Faith is often moving ahead with something and preparing for anything

- 9-12 - **Jacob prayed** – His prayer consisted of:
  - Praying the promises of God (32:9 & 12)
  - Praying in humility (32:10)
  - Praying specific petitions (32:11)
- 13-21 – **Jacob made restoration** for how he had wronged Esau.

Instead of focusing on all that his brother had done wrong (and there was a lot) Jacob only looked at his wrongdoing and sought to make amends.

This became part of the Law of worship that governed Israel

Jesus tells us to do the same thing

#### **Matthew 5:23-24**

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

### **Gen 32:22-32 – Jacob gets alone with God**

**The final step was for Jacob to get alone with the Lord, and it will be here that God will confront him head on**

We read that after departing from his family that he had the second of his most dramatic experiences with God. The first was when he met God at Bethel and may be a picture of a person coming to Christ for it is there that the God of Abraham and Isaac becomes the God of Jacob.

Here, Jacob will be confronted by God who will make some drastic changes in him that will result in him never walking the same way.

Two other Bible writers comment on this text

#### Hosea 12:3-4

He took his brother by the heel in the womb,  
And in his strength he struggled with God.[a]  
Yes, **he struggled with the Angel and prevailed;**  
He wept, and sought favor from Him.  
He found Him *in* Bethel,

#### Hebrews 11:21

**By** faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, ***leaning on the top of his staff.***

**Two things seem to stand out to the authors of Scripture about this event:**

- **First** – Jacob won a wrestling match with God  
  
That is only possible when we surrender
- **Second** – this event forever changed the way Jacob walked. For the rest of his life he would walk with a cane remembering his encounter with God when he final surrendered

## Gen 33 – Jacob meets Esau

The final step in this long journey was for Jacob and Esau to meet

33:1-3

Perhaps out of fear, manipulation or simple pragmatism, Jacob divides his family up into waves that would confront Esau as he approached.

33:4-9

Esau reacts much differently than Jacob had anticipated

Genesis 33:10

"And Jacob said, "No, please, if I have now found favor in your sight, then receive my present from my hand, inasmuch as I have seen your face as though I had seen the face of God, and you were pleased with me."

I am sure that we have all been complimented at one time or another for how we looked or what we were wearing. Of all the compliments I have received none has been quite like what Jacob said to Esau. After not seeing his brother for 20 years Jacob said, "**you look a lot like God.**"

Jacob is not saying that God is a six-foot tall man with red hair, but that the actions of Esau were in some way reflective of the character of God.

**What was it that Esau was doing that was so godlike?**

**The answer is forgiveness.** After being deceived time and time by his brother, Esau had finally resolved to let it go. He was no longer haunted by his hurt, anger or bitterness but had freed himself by letting it go. Instead of bringing an army to attack Jacob he brought a welcoming committee and extended an arm in forgiveness.

Sadly many of us carry around a heavy weight of unforgiveness not realizing that it is like a poison that robs our joy. We think ourselves justified in holding a grudge instead of looking at the cross and realizing that we too are guilty of the most heinous of sin. Instead of harboring bitterness and hurt it is time that we reflect the face of God and forgive those who have wronged us.

The chapter concludes with Jacob and Esau parting ways and promising to see each other again

When the chapter ends we find Jacob settling in Succoth