

The Journey Home

GENESIS 31 - 33

Opening Thoughts

- * We encounter larger blocks of narrative recording single events
 - ◆ The exodus from Haran gets a chapter, and ...
 - ◆ The reunion with Esau gets two chapters
- * There are many implications from these chapters — one of the more significant is instruction for [living in God's will](#) ...
 - ◆ Starts with a [conviction](#) — Gen 30:25-26 ... Jacob desired to return to his home
 - ◆ Continues with your [circumstances](#) — Gen 31:1-2 ... The change in Laban's attitude toward Jacob fuels his conviction

Opening Thoughts

- ◆ Waits for **confirmation** — Gen 31:3 ... Jacob had the right desire to return, he accurately assessed the situation, but did not act until he had confirmation
- ◆ And concludes with **consummation** — Gen 31:4ff ... once confirmed, Jacob acted on God's will reminding us that:
 - ☞ Many clear instances of God's will for our lives fail with our reluctance to take a step of **FAITH** in response — cf Ezra 7:10 [READ]
- * The journey home will force Jacob to confront two lingering fears and lean solely on God, namely ...
 - ◆ The wrath of Laban and the wrath of Esau

Structure of the Return

- * The exodus from Haran - Gen 31
 - ◆ The flight from Laban - vv. 1-21
 - ◆ Laban's pursuit - vv. 22-42
 - ◆ Laban's release - vv. 43-55
- * The reunion with Esau - Gen 32-33
 - ◆ Preparation for encountering Esau - Gen 32
 - ◆ The unexpected reunion - Gen 33

Flight from Laban

- * These verses record the galvanization of Jacob's return to Canaan
- * It's an interesting account that proceeds in six stages ...
 - ◆ Stage 1: Jacob's situational analysis - vv. 1-2
 - ◆ Stage 2: God's intervention - v. 3
 - ◆ Stage 3: Jacob's family conference - vv. 4-9

Flight from Laban

- ◆ Stage 4: God's revelation to Jacob - vv. 10-13
- ◆ Stage 5: United we stand ... Decision time for the "gals" - vv. 14-16
- ◆ Stage 6: The caravan departs - vv. 17-21

Situational Analysis

- * We ended last week with a report on the extent of Jacob's prosperity ...
 - ◆ Not only large flocks — but servants, camels and donkeys
- * As prosperity will do — it has not escaped the attention of others ...
 - ◆ Specifically here that of Laban's sons and Laban himself, reminding us that ...
 - ◆ Jealousy and greed are powerful & prevalent emotions

Situational Analysis

- * As is also the case, the early manifestation of jealousy & greed is "murmuring"
- * Two things are wrong with the son's complaints — what are they?
 - ◆ They suggest that Jacob has illicitly acquired his prosperity ... "he has taken it away"
 - ◆ They suggest that Jacob owes it all to Laban ... "he has made his wealth from what belonged to Laban"
- * What else do we learn about the nature of jealousy from the sons?
 - ◆ It distorts reality

Situational Analysis

- * Jacob “[heard](#)” the brothers grumbling, and now ...
- * He “[saw](#)” the countenance of Laban’s face
- * Seems “[Mr. Bon Ami](#)” was not too excited by Jacob’s prosperity either
 - ♦ Jacob saw the face of Laban, and behold, it was not toward him as formerly
- * So Jacob was able to observe that Laban’s attitude toward him had changed from one of camaraderie ...
- * To potentially adversarial

Situational Analysis

- * Jacob had the initial [conviction](#) to return back in chapter 30, verse 25
- * The [circumstances](#) following his prosperity served to put him on alert ...
- * Yet, he patiently waits for [confirmation](#) ...
- * Which comes in v. 3 — from God Himself

God's Intervention

- * What is so striking about God's intervention?
 - ◆ It has been 20 years since Jacob last heard from God!
- * Why does God need to intervene at all?
 - ◆ Jacob has grown comfortable and complacent
 - Big family, prosperous rancher, many servants ...
 - In short — LIFE IS GOOD for Jacob
 - ◆ Jacob had the right idea back in 30:25, but didn't follow-thru

God's Intervention

- * There are some powerful "spiritual lessons" here — what comes to mind?
 - 🕊 Sometimes God needs to thrust us out of our "comfort zone" to induce growth ...
 - 🕊 Because if we stay too long in a place we don't belong it can start to feel like home
 - 🕊 Which is why we should live like "sojourners"
 - 🕊 And recognize that our spiritual journey is not complete until God calls us home!!

God's Intervention

- * All of which means — if you find yourself in uncomfortable circumstances you should consider whether God may be nudging you
- * What is the content of God's message to Jacob?
 - ◆ A **command** to go ... i.e. RETURN!
 - ◆ A **specific destination** ... the land of your fathers and your relatives
 - ◆ A **renewed promise** ... I will be with you
- * So with this, Jacob seeks "buy-in" from the gals

Family Conference

- * This is a bit odd ... Why do you think Jacob seeks the opinion of his wives?
 - ◆ I think he expects trouble and wants "solidarity" at the outset
 - ◆ I think he is also displaying growth in his family leadership
- * Jacob's argument for leaving is comprised of three points ... What are they?
 - ◆ Your father is against me, but my FATHER is with me - v. 5

Family Conference

- ◆ Your father cheated me, my FATHER protected me - vv. 6-7
 - ▶ Jacob's faithful service was abused by Laban, yet God "kept him" as promised in 28:15
 - ▶ "10-times" (v. 7) is idiomatic for "repeatedly" or "time-after-time"
- ◆ Your father decreased, while my FATHER increased me - vv. 8-9
 - ▶ Note the parallel with v. 1 in v. 9 ("taken away")... rejecting the spurious accusation of Laban's sons
 - ◆ Different Hebrew verb than v.1 and a very emphatic form ... God **has caused** Laban's flock to be **snatched away** and given to Jacob
 - ▶ Also note that God's care for Jacob kept pace with Laban's ever changing terms!!

Family Conference

- * Now before his wives reply in v. 14ff, we have this very interesting little soliloquy in vv. 10-13
- * **What is going on here?**
 - ◆ First it is a "parenthetical pause" ... read v. 9 and then read v. 14
 - ◆ It is a supernatural revelation given by God to Jacob in the form of a dream — and perhaps a continuation of v. 3
 - ◆ The revelation is a "biology" lesson for Jacob — namely while homogeneous on the outside, the flocks are heterogeneous on the inside ... they carry the recessive genes to produce the striped, speckled, and spotted offspring

God's Revelation

- * These verses are a reassurance to Jacob that God was in control and the ultimate outcome will be regulated by His providence!!
- * Bottom line — God was going to bring about what was [genetically possible](#) in [miraculously excessive](#) proportion
- * Reminding us that while the Bible is NOT a science book it is accurate in all matters scientific when they are spoken of ...
- * **How does this section conclude in v. 13?**
 - ◆ With definitive affirmation of who is speaking to Jacob, and ...
 - ◆ With a three-fold command to return ([arise](#), [go forth](#), [return](#)) — the final imperative (i.e. return) connecting vv. 10-13 with v. 5

United We Stand

- * Picking up from v. 9, Rachel and Leah respond — in the affirmative — to Jacob's case to leave
- * They decide to stand united with Jacob with a little speech of their own
- * **What are their reasons for siding with Jacob?**
 - ◆ Two pragmatic assessments with "spirituality" thrown in
 - ◆ They too felt the same disregard from their father as Jacob felt through his years of service

United We Stand

- ◆ Their father has used them as negotiating pawns to serve his selfish desires
 - Leaving them with no inheritance ... or future in Haran
 - Even though women had few rights, Laban's disregard for his daughters is excessive!
- ◆ They view themselves as "strangers" in their own home ...
 - Because they have been **reckoned** as "foreigners" by Laban
- * Therefore, they consider Jacob's prosperity as their rightful due, and ...
- * Bid Jacob to do as God has instructed

The Caravan Departs

- * Upon his wives "buy-in," Jacob mustered the caravan and set out for Canaan
 - ◆ This must have been quite a feat of organization as the text tells us Jacob has become wealthy
 - ◆ Likely he had some key servants whom took charge of certain parts of his departure, but the text does not expound on the details ...
- * Except for 2 things — **What are they?**
 - ◆ Rachel "**stole**" the household idols — Teraphim

The Caravan Departs

- ▶ Teraphim are thought to be small idols (or “gods”) kept in private households and used for divination
- ◆ Jacob “**stole the heart**” of Laban (literal translation)
 - ▶ Interesting play on the same Hebrew word used in v. 19 (Rachel stole the teraphim) which most EV’s translate with the word “**deceived**”
 - ▶ Jacob “stole” everything Laban loved ... his daughters, grandchildren and prosperity ... by not informing Laban of his departure

The Caravan Departs

- * **What do you think of Jacobs departure ... should he have informed Laban?**
 - ◆ Sure seems like nit-picking Jacob to me
 - ◆ In v.15, God used three imperatives — that is **COMMANDS** — for Jacob to get going
 - ▶ Arise (קום) — go forth (צא) — return (שוב) ... communicating urgency
 - ◆ I think Jacob is primarily following orders — and to suggest that he was deceitful toward Laban seems to me to be gratuitous 20/20 hindsight
 - ◆ Nevertheless, there is room to suggest that informing Laban would have demonstrated spiritual growth in Jacob by trusting God for the outcome

The Caravan Departs

* What should we say about Rachel's actions?

- ◆ She has the family DNA
- ◆ She demonstrates syncretistic worship, reminding us ...

👉 It is easy for us to hold on to former idols, thinking they are innocent enough, but ...

👉 When we turn TO God, we simultaneously turn FROM our past affections — prompting me to ask ...

👉 What are you holding onto?

Laban's Pursuit

* This second act of the play records Laban's "hot pursuit"

* Like Jacob's flight, Laban's pursuit plays out in stages also — vv. 22-42

- ◆ Stage 1: The posse - vv. 22-24
- ◆ Stage 2: The browbeating - vv. 25-29
- ◆ Stage 3: The accusation - vv. 30-32
- ◆ Stage 4: The search - vv. 33-35
- ◆ Stage 5: The diatribe - vv. 36-42

The Posse

- * Laban learns of Jacob's departure three days after the caravan set out
- * He assembles his "brothers" and overtakes Jacob 7-days later in the hill country of Gilead
- * What is interesting about this opening section?
 - ◆ God speaks to Laban
- * What does He tell Laban?
 - ◆ BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SAY TO JACOB!
 - ◆ The Hebrew literally says — "watch yourself lest you speak with him from good to bad" ... meaning DON'T SAY A WORD
- * Does Laban heed God's warning?
 - ◆ "Sort-Of" ... let's take a look

The Browbeating

- * Seems Laban just can't help himself — His initial interaction is to "browbeat" Jacob
- * He paints Jacob in the worst possible light
 - ◆ A deceiver who led off his daughters like captives, who ...
 - ◆ Robbed Laban of the joy of a "proper send-off"
- * Laban hypocritically bathes himself as grievously wronged
 - ◆ "Oh that I might have had the joy to send you off with a feast and kissed my grandsons and daughters good-bye"
- * Laban brings his opening salvo to a close with an assessment of Jacob's actions ... What does he say?
 - ◆ You have done foolishly Jacob!

The Browbeating

- * Switching gears, Laban changes course from browbeating to “bluster” in v. 29a
 - ◆ You know I can harm you ...
- * But quickly adds that God told him “hands-off” in v. 29b
- * What is wise about Jacob's reply to Laban?
 - ◆ He keeps his mouth shut and let's Laban blow off steam
- * Why is Jacob silent?
 - ◆ Can't say for sure — but likely he and everyone else in earshot realizes this is an empty bombastic harangue

The Accusation

- * Laban switches gears yet again in v. 30 with a face-saving gesture and an accusation
- * What is the face-saving gesture?
 - ◆ Despite Jacob's “foolish actions,” Laban acknowledges his legitimate motive, and longing, to return home ...
 - ◆ Indirectly excusing himself of any culpability for Jacob's departure
- * What is the accusation?
 - ◆ Why did you steal “my gods?” ... i.e. the Teraphim

The Accusation

- * Now Jacob speaks up ... what is interesting about his response?
 - ◆ He goes back and answers Laban's opening question in v. 26 ... stating the obvious reason — you would have stopped me!
- * What is notably absent in Jacob's reason?
 - ◆ He doesn't say God told him to leave —which is REALLY ironic since Laban just told Jacob that God had spoken to him!!
- * Why does Jacob go back to the first question?
 - ◆ I cannot be dogmatic, but I believe it is because he simply dismisses the question of the Teraphim as outrageous ...

The Accusation

- * And instead commands a search be made of the premises to prove his innocence —
- * And declares that anyone found with Laban's goods will be put to death!
- * To which we reply along with Scooby Doo ...
"Ruh-Roh"

The Search

- * Laban — himself it seems — conducts a thorough search of the “tent compound” ...
- * Proceeding from Jacob, to Leah, to the two handmaids ... he arrives lastly at Rachel’s tent
- * Where he leaves no stone unturned, save the camel’s saddle upon which Rachel is seated
- * Waiting for the precise moment — and not too early so as to arouse suspicion ...

The Search

- * Rachel calmly asks forgiveness for not rising before her father, owing to the “manner of women” — She’s good!
- * Did Rachel lie?
 - ◆ We don’t know for sure — but it was a credible excuse
- * Was Rachel deceptive?
 - ◆ Most assuredly YES ... as she knew what a search of the saddle would reveal!!
 - ◆ Proving yet again that “the apple does not fall far from the tree”
- * Why do you think that God protects Rachel?
 - ◆ I’m not convinced He was — rather maybe he was protecting Jacob
