

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
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DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 24

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 31

INTRODUCTION

Jacob had served Laban for twenty years -- fourteen years for Rachel and Leah, and six years for an agreed wage. Moses, the writer, reported that Jacob had "increased exceedingly, and had much cattle, and maidservants, and menservants, and camels, and asses" (30:43). Without doubt, the LORD had blessed him. He was now determined to return to his native land. One of the spiritual lessons we can learn from this chapter is the principle of discerning God's will in our lives. Was it God's will for Jacob to return to Canaan? Why now and not earlier when he had told Laban to send him away so that he could return to his native land?¹

God's providential care of His people is illustrated in His dealings with

¹ KJV Genesis 30:25 And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.

Jacob. Jacob was no match for his cunning and conniving uncle, but in the end he was more blessed in many ways than his uncle. While we may not approve of Jacob as one who schemed and deceived his brother Esau, we must admit that his integrity and industry in Haran, where he worked for his dishonest and selfish uncle, was impressive. We do encounter people like Laban in our places of work but we must learn to trust our good LORD and to conduct ourselves in a manner befitting our calling as God's people.

OUTLINE

A. Jacob Obeyed the LORD'S Directive to Return to His Native Land (1-21).

1. The reasons to return to his native land (vv.1-3).
 - a. Jacob heard Laban's sons murmuring about his prosperity (v.1).
 - b. Jacob noticed Laban's attitude towards him had changed for the worse (v.2).
 - c. The LORD directed him to return to his native land (v.3).
2. The discussion with Rachel and Leah (vv.4-13).
 - a. Jacob discussed with Rachel and Leah concerning their father's unfriendly attitude towards him (vv.4-5a)

- b. Jacob acknowledged that God was with him (vv.5b-13).
 - God protected him from Laban (vv.6-7).
 - God blessed him with Laban's cattle (vv.8-12)
 - God in a dream told him to return to the land of his kindred (vv.13).
3. The response of Rachel and Leah (vv.14-16).
 - a. Rachel and Leah complained about their father's selfish actions (vv.14-15)
 - Laban left nothing for them.
 - Laban even took their share of the money.
 - b. They argued that what God had taken from Laban actually belonged to them (v.16a).
 - c. They supported Jacob all the way (v.16b).
4. Jacob left Haran and headed home (v.17-21).
 - a. Jacob got his sons and wives to leave (v.17).
 - b. Jacob took all his cattle and goods which he amassed in Padan-aram (v.18).
 - c. Jacob secretly left when Laban was away (vv.19-21).

B. Jacob was pursued and confronted by Laban (22-35).

1. Laban pursued Jacob (vv.22-24).
 - a. Jacob's departure was reported to Laban (v.22).
 - b. Laban caught up with Jacob at Mt Gilead (v.23)
 - c. God warned Laban not to harm Jacob (vv.24-25).
2. Laban confronted Jacob (vv.26-30).
 - a. Laban criticised Jacob for leaving secretly and taking his daughters away as captives (v.26).
 - b. Laban chided Jacob for depriving him of giving them a proper send off (vv.27-28).
 - c. Laban boasted that he could harm Jacob but was warned by God (v.29).
 - d. Laban charged Jacob for stealing his gods (v.30).
3. Jacob's response to Laban's charges (vv.31-35).
 - a. Jacob explained that he left secretly because he was afraid that Laban might take away his daughters from him by force (v.31).
 - b. Jacob denied stealing Laban's gods and told him to search among his entourage, not knowing that Rachel had stolen them (v.32).

- c. Laban searched but could not find the gods (vv.33-35).

C. Jacob counter-attacked Laban (vv.36-42).

1. Jacob became angry and reaffirmed his innocence (vv.36-37).
2. Jacob declared that he had honestly served Laban for twenty years (vv.37-40).
3. Jacob charged Laban for being unfair to him in his dealings (v.41).
4. Jacob acknowledged that God had vindicated and blessed him (v.42).

D. Laban made a covenant with Jacob (vv.43-55).

1. Laban remarked that all of Jacob's possessions were originally his (v.43).
2. Laban demanded that they made a covenant (v.44).
3. Jacob called his people to set up a memorial pillar of stone (vv.45-46).
4. Laban named the pillar *Jegarsahadutha* whereas Jacob named it *Galeed* (vv.47-48).
5. Laban stipulated the terms of the agreement (vv.49-53).
 - a. Laban invoked the name of the LORD in keeping the terms of the covenant (v.49).

- b. Jacob must not hurt Laban's daughters (v.50).

- c. Laban repeated the terms of the covenant (vv.51-53).

6. Jacob offered a sacrifice on the pillar and they had a meal (v.54).
7. Laban departed the next day (v.55).

COMMENTARY

Knowing God's Will

Six years ago Jacob had expressed his desire of returning to his native land. Laban succeeded in persuading him to continue working for him for a wage. But now Laban and his sons were hostile to him. Jacob heard Laban's sons complaining that Jacob "had taken all that was our father's" (v.1). Their statement was an exaggeration. Surely Jacob had not taken all of their father's cattle and wealth although Jacob had prospered exceedingly in the past six years.

Jacob saw that Laban no more treated him as "my bone and my flesh." The LORD directed him to leave Haran and return to his own country and people. As Jacob discussed with Rachel and Leah, he testified no less than five times that had it not been for the LORD he would not have been what he was (vv.5, 7). The LORD had protected and blessed him. The increase in his cattle and flock was because God had prospered his work (vv. 9, 12).

Rachel and Leah fully supported their husband for their father too had short-changed them. Laban was

supposed to give a portion of their dowry to them. Their dowry would be the equivalent of Jacob's seven years of labour for each of them. They charged their father for "eating up" all their money leaving nothing for them (vv.14-16). Hence they agreed that if God had told Jacob to leave, he should obey God. For the first time, the two striving sisters were united in spirit and mind.

Jacob then acted accordingly and began packing his belongings, and set his sons and wives on camels to leave. He left when Laban was out in the field shearing his sheep. Shearing sheep was a great occasion. It usually took a couple of days to do the work depending on the number of sheep. The reason why he went off without informing Laban was that he was afraid that Laban might use force to take his daughters from him and hence deterring him from leaving. This was what Jacob feared (v.31)². One can understand his fear, and Laban was probably capable of doing just that, but if he had more trust in the LORD he should not have gone away secretly. The LORD had directed him to leave Haran and had promised to be with him (v.3).³ Undoubtedly He would prevent Laban from doing harm.

One clearly defined principle of finding God's will for our lives is illustrated in this episode of Jacob's life. When we are not sure whether a course of action is God's will or not, we can follow three guidelines. First there was a strong desire in Jacob's heart to return

home. He had felt this after fourteen years of service (30:25)⁴. That desire became intense after another six years of working for Laban. The first principle in finding God's will for our lives is a definite conviction in our hearts that God desires us to take a certain course of action. David wrote,

"Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. (Psalm 37:4)."

Then circumstances play the next part. Jacob was perturbed by the changed attitude of Laban and his sons towards him (31:1,2)⁵. His desire to leave was the wisest thing to do. The second principle in finding God's will is the development of circumstances. Paul wrote,

"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. (1 Corinthians 10:23)."

Thirdly there was a clear word from God.⁶ God gave Jacob a clear directive and promised to be with him. The

⁴ KJV Genesis 30:25 And it came to pass, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said unto Laban, Send me away, that I may go unto mine own place, and to my country.

⁵ KJV Genesis 31:1 And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of *that* which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory. 2 And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before.

⁶ KJV Genesis 31:3 And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.

²KJV Genesis 31:31 And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me.

³ KJV Genesis 31:3 And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.

application of this principle necessitates prayerful care and diligence. Although God can if He wills to give us His directive just as He gave to Jacob, He has not chosen to do so because He has given to us His inspired, infallible and authoritative Word, the sixty-six books of the Holy Scriptures. It behoves us to prayerfully and diligently search the Word, waiting upon the LORD to speak to us through His Word. One given guideline is that while we are waiting on God for His guidance, “some special word from the Scripture which is suited to our case and which the Spirit bringing it manifestly to our notice is plainly a message from God to our individual heart.” As we do all these and wait upon the LORD to show us His will, we need to pray without ceasing. Tell the LORD our problems and our need for a clear direction from Him so that we can avoid making mistakes.⁷ Paul, writing to Timothy, exhorted,

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

One further observation is that both Rachel and Leah, who had been at odds, agreed with Jacob’s proposition to leave their father and go back to his native land!

Comforted by God’s Providence

When Laban was informed that Jacob had departed for Haran, he gave chase and overtook him at the foot of Mount Gilead. Laban was one of the meanest persons in the Bible. He had shown himself to be dishonest and selfish by deceiving Jacob in the matter of his marriage. His chief interest of keeping Jacob was for the increase of his own riches. And when he agreed on a wage package with Jacob, he made sure that the chances of Jacob procuring more speckled and spotted cattle were reduced to impossibility. He was greedy and unscrupulous in his dealings with Jacob. In the years that Jacob served him, he changed his wages ten times (vv. 7, 41). He himself boasted that he had the power to hurt Jacob. Jacob’s fear that Laban would “take by force thy daughters from me” (v.31) was not unfounded. Not once in his confrontation with Jacob did he refer to Rachel and Leah as Jacob’s wives but “my daughters” (vv.26, 28, 43, 50).

In the face of such a person, Jacob was glad and comforted that the LORD was with him. God personally told him that He would be with him. That promise was to assure him that he need not be afraid of Laban. Although Laban was hostile to him, Jacob shared with his wives that God (Hebrew, *elohim*, meaning the Almighty Creator) had been with me, and God “suffered him not to hurt me” (7). In tending the sheep, he observed that God intervened to cause Laban’s cattle to produce more speckled, spotted, and ringstraked ones. Thus God had taken away Laban’s cattle and given them to Jacob (9). Moreover God warned Laban to treat Jacob well when he caught up with him (v.24). Jacob remarked before Laban

⁷ A.W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis*, (Grand Rapids: Moody Press, 1922), 278. These three principles were propounded by Pink.

and all his servants that if God had not been with him, Laban would have sent him off empty handed (42). Finally, providentially God prevented Laban from discovering the teraphim stolen by Rachel. One cannot imagine what would have happened if Rachel had been found out. Jacob would have to carry out his word of putting the thief to death or Laban might have taken Rachel back to his home. This would have broken Jacob's heart. But the LORD our God knows our weaknesses. The methods that He employs may not always save us from pain and suffering. Sometimes He really chastens us and the experience can be bitter. But know this: God always has our best interests at heart. No good thing would he withhold from those whom He has bought with the precious blood of His Only Begotten Son, the LORD Jesus Christ.⁸ AMEN.

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⁸ Psalm 84:11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good *thing* will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

Romans 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? 32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Genesis 31:1-16; Matthew 6:25-34; Hebrews 13:5-6.

Tuesday: Genesis 31; 17-24; 2 Corinthians 1:8-11; Ephesians 6:11-18.

Wednesday: Genesis 31:25-35; Joshua 1:1-9; Acts 24:16.

Thursday: Genesis 31:36-42; Psalm 124:1-8; Psalm 128:1-6.

Friday: Genesis 31:43-55; Matthew 5:11-16;

Discussion Questions

1. What did God specifically promise Jacob?

2. How did Jacob convince his wives to go back to his native land?

3. What were the reasons why Leah and Rachel agreed to go back with Jacob?

6. How did Laban justify his actions when he caught up with Jacob? Comment.

4. Did Jacob do right in secretly leaving Laban without saying "good-bye" to him?

7. How did God protect Jacob against Laban's accusation?

5. In the context of verses 1-24, how are we comforted and encouraged when we are unjustly treated by someone?

8. How did Jacob defend his action of not informing Laban?

9. Schemers and cheaters reap what they sow. How is this truth manifested in the relationship of Esau and Jacob, and of Laban and Jacob?

12. What were the trials that Jacob went through and what did he learn?

10. How did Laban and Jacob resolve their differences?

11. How would you evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the covenant made between them?
