

## JANUARY 15

### Genesis 31:17-32:12

This is an interesting story, but the drama was all unnecessary. Jacob had been told by God to return to Canaan and he knew of the promise to Abe, but being afraid and "helping God along" was just something Jacob did. Jacob could have prayed about this and could have sought God to "move" Laban's heart.

Genesis 31:17-55

Vs. 17-21 Road trip! Jacob "cleverly" waited until the right moment and grabbed everything and left. In this, both Rachel and Jacob were like Bonnie and Clyde. The word for *stole* in v. 19 and *tricked* in v. 20 is the same.

V. 19 The *household gods* had two purposes. First, they reminded you of a deity, like the old St. Christopher statues everyone used to have in their cars. This, of course, means they had idols. Jacob's kids will have them later.

Second, these statues were investments or heirlooms that were inherited. Rather than putting your extra savings in certificates or bonds, you made a statue of gold and put it up on the shelf for a rainy day. This is the real reason Laban was upset. Rachel's action was motivated by what she and Leah said yesterday, that their father had taken everything from them. It might also be her bitterness because of the famous "wedding night swap" Laban had pulled on her. In either case, this theft was "payback." Rachel's little trick to hide the thing in the saddlebag was a nice touch and she showed she was just like the "old man." If Laban had found out, he would have been proud...not.

Vs. 22-25 God saved the day by speaking to Laban, who, while not a spiritual man, was given the fear of God. Again, under more reasonable circumstances, God could have spoken to Laban back in Haran. It didn't have to be this way. God was allowing Jacob to be Jacob and Laban to be Laban, but made sure there was no injury.

Vs. 26-29 Although Laban wasn't a good guy, God could have made this work out to have been a celebration. Both men were responsible for their own ulcers. It is interesting that Laban relates the dream.

Vs. 30-35 Rachel outfoxed her dad.

Vs. 36-42 The indignation of the "false" claim launches Jacob into this very interesting summary of his 20 years of affliction.

Vs. 43-54 After Jacob's tirade in vs. 36-42, Laban answers in v. 43 with, "whatever." Notice that there are no apologies of any kind given by either side. As disciples, there is certainly a place to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," but the level of dishonesty and fear in this family has nothing to do with closely following Christ.

V. 44 Apparently one reason that Laban suggested this covenant was because of not finding the "gods." It might have been that after the death of Laban, if Jacob would have returned to Haran with that "heirloom," he could have claimed a part of the homestead.

V. 50 This is a very interesting condition, given that multiple wives was allowed in that culture. Laban didn't see that as an option, although this situation was kind of strange already. At least it was "family."

V. 52 This condition seems to be the one that would forbid Jacob from coming back to stake a claim in Laban's household.

V. 53 This gives the idea that although the promise of redemption was waning in importance in the family, there was still a remembrance of the line of faith, believing in the one true God.

Vs. 54-55 A happy ending of sorts.

Genesis 32:1-12

Jacob's next ulcer has to do with Esau.

Vs. 1-2 So, why do you think God did this? Apparently these were like the angels who visited Abraham. He must have known they were angels. It doesn't say this was a dream and it appears they met and talked with him. This would have been a great encouragement. This might be what finally gave Jacob the courage to do something right.

Vs. 3-5 Jacob could have snuck into the land, but chose to make contact with Esau.

Vs. 6-12 God drove Jacob to his knees. With Esau on his way with 400 men, Jacob got religion. This is God putting the fear of God in Jacob. Notice how Jacob appeals to God's promise and to all the encouragement He had given him. This was a very notable, good thing. After all of these years, Jacob finally claimed and clung to the promise.

If you had had the history with Esau that Jacob did, what message would you have sent to Esau? I love the surprise that is coming.

As disciples, it is easy to "cry out" when disaster threatens us. Even without an actual crisis, God encourages us to understand that our need is always desperate. We should always be crying out, always be knocking, asking and seeking. There is nothing that keeps the reality of this world and the sense of desperation in focus like working to reach lost people in the harvest. Our mission keeps our "eye sound" and it keeps us at our Savior's feet. You learn to take very little for granted, which also gives you more joy in appreciating the smallest of the blessings the Lord grants us.

### **Matthew 10:26-11:6**

As Jesus is sending out the Twelve, He is bracing them for the rejection of men and living securely in the Father's care.

Matthew 10:26-33

Vs. 26-27 This would be addressing the fear of lies, injustice and false accusation. God knows, and for a disciple that reality is the only one that counts. Interestingly, later, Jesus uses this same illustration to warn them about being hypocrites.

Vs. 28-31 Here, Jesus is addressing their fear of death. Some translations say "Father's will" in v. 29. It is implied in the context and it is an amazing thought. Jacob would have benefited from that. But then, we know it and do we benefit from it? You wonder if Jesus smiled when He said they were *of more value than many sparrows*.

Vs. 32-33 Since God was sovereign and there was no cause to fear, there was also no cause to deny Jesus. The acknowledging and denying before the Father should be understood as Jesus interceding for that disciple in that hour of trial. If we acknowledge Him, He will give us what we need in the hour of need. If we deny Him to save ourselves from harm, we've helped ourselves and we don't need His help. And neither will we see His provision and glory as we would have, had we acknowledged Him.

Vs. 34-36 This is a severe correction of their perspective, and ours too. The faithful expression of the truth will bring opposition.

Vs. 37-39 The cost of discipleship is everything. Jesus must be our first love. This is the flipside of what Jesus says in Luke 14:26 about a disciple having to hate his father and mother. The issue is who has the first and true love. The cross in v. 38 means the willingness to die, to give

everything. In the Roman world, if you saw someone walking with a cross on their shoulder, they were walking to their death. That Jesus is talking about the willingness to give one's life in v. 38 is underscored by v. 39.

Vs. 40-42 This is true today and it will be very important in the Tribulation when the earth will be judged for how it treats God's people. Notice that there is no emphasis put on the skill of the disciple. They were just to say that the kingdom of God was coming and that people needed to turn to God. The receiving of that message was wholly on the hearers. Those who received the disciples would be rewarded.

This was Jesus' pep talk to the Twelve as He sent them out. What does the Lord want you to learn from this? What gives you confidence or courage? The very fact that Jesus is saying this means He knows He is going to send us into some tough, sometimes dangerous, situations. The hard part for us is realizing He might choose to use us and graduate us to heaven in the same instance we are speaking for Him, like He did with Stephen in Acts. Stephen died, but what we don't see is that a minute later he was getting "high fives" in heaven and was totally fulfilled and OK and finally on vacation from this mess.

Matthew 11: 1-6

V. 1 This should really end chapter 10. Notice that after Jesus oriented the Twelve and sent them out, He also went on teaching. This doesn't mean Jesus was alone. The group of disciples might have been 100 or more.

Vs. 2-6 It may be that John spent more time in jail than he did in ministry. His disciples told him everything, and it appears that John was suffering in the waiting. Not only this, it could be that John was being fed misinformation. In those dark days in the dungeon, I'm sure some temptation to doubt was present, to be embarrassed or offended at what he "heard" Jesus had done. When you read Psalm 13 and David's sorrow below, you'll probably have an idea of how John must have felt.

Jesus' answer was sufficient for John. These were things foretold that the Messiah would do. Verse 6 is clearly a warning to John to hold on in faith.

As disciples we can get down regarding our church or the lack of fruit we are seeing. Nothing cheers the heart like babies, that is, seeing new believers. Get out and find a place where life is happening. If you can't drive or fly there, get online and find out where it's happening and what the stories are. God is working and lives are being saved and changed, so look beyond your church or dungeon, and keep focused on our mission as disciples following Jesus in the harvest. Personally, draw close to Him. Keep on making every effort He'll let you make, and don't give up.

Knowing Jesus means following Him in His harvest making disciples. But this all has to remain very simple. It all rests on our love for Jesus, the joy of our salvation and sharing what we've received, so that others can receive it too.

### **Psalm 13:1-6**

And having said that, isn't this a great psalm? Now, imagine that the thing you are totally longing for is to see Jesus' name lifted up and people saved and made disciples, and you want Him to do it through you. If you can desire all this, with the kind of longing expressed in this psalm, God will answer; and the forces working against you, spiritual and human, will be defeated.

Vs. 1-3 This psalm reflects a very dark night of the soul for David. Having received God's promise, it seems like God has turned His back on him. David couldn't understand the hardship he was facing, running for his life, living in total uncertainty, dwelling in caves.

Notice the three things David is hurting about, prefaced by the question *how long*. David was struggling not only with adversity, but with waiting.

Vs. 3-4 David needed an answer, some response from God that would re-ignite his hope. His fear is shown in v. 4. This reminds me of Paul's confidence in Philippians 1:20, *as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.*

Vs. 5-6 We have the benefit of seeing all the things God was doing during the time David was suffering. In particular God was teaching David the truth of these two verses.

### **Proverbs 3:16-18**

This is a great expression of what it means to seek and hold on to wisdom. So practically, as disciples, where do we seek this wisdom?

*He (God) is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made (that is, Jesus is) our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (1 Cor. 1:30, RSV - Parenthetical notes are mine.)*

Disciples seek and abide in Christ, following Him in the harvest.