

Genesis 31:17-55

Introduction

Recent office move when the manager thought they could all keep working on the day of the move. I had to remind them, “WE’RE MOVING TODAY!”

1. It’s been a few weeks since we’ve been in Genesis so a quick review might be in order (quick summary from Jacob’s deception over the familial blessing to his time working for Laban, first for his wives and then to build his own estate)
2. In our passage today we’re going to see two things:
 - a. We’re going to see how God reminded Jacob of His plans and the vow Jacob made to Him
 - b. We’re going to see how God then worked to ensure the success of His plans

A. God reminded Jacob of His plans, and the vow Jacob made to Him as part of those plans (31:17-21)

1. After serving Laban for 20 years, God spoke to Jacob and told him to return home to the land of Canaan:
 - a. As we saw last week, as a result of Jacob’s success in building his own estate, Laban’s sons had become jealous, and Laban’s face was no longer friendly toward Jacob
 - b. So, God commanded him to go back home and reminded him of two things:
 - 1) The first was his plan and the promises He made to Jacob (READ 31:3)—the promise here to be with Jacob is a summary of the broader promises God made to him back in Bethel (READ Genesis 28:10-15)
 - 2) The second thing God reminded Jacob of was the vow he made to God (READ 31:13)—Jacob’s vow is found in Genesis 28:10:18-22 (READ)
 - c. Neither God’s plan for the world or for Jacob—would be, or even could be, fulfilled as long as Jacob stayed in Mesopotamia; why?
 - 1) God’s promises specifically involved Jacob and his descendants inheriting the land of Canaan and becoming a great nation
 - 2) Jacob’s vow was also based on the promise that God would not only be with him on his journey but would return him safely back to his father’s house in peace
2. Jacob obeyed God’s command, but apparently with a bit of trepidation (READ 31:17-21):
 - a. He was apparently concerned over how Laban would react:
 - 1) He left while Laban was away from home sheering his flock
 - 2) He “**stole Laban’s heart**” (translated as deceived) by not telling him he was leaving
 - 3) The words “**fled**” and “**fleeing**” indicate he was running away

- 4) Later in v. 31 we learn that Jacob feared that if Laban knew he was leaving that Laban would take his wives, Leah and Rachel, back **“by force”**
 - 5) And, in case there’s any question whether Jacob’s fears were justified, look at what Laban said later in v. 43: **“The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine...”**
- b. Something else that might have added to Jacob’s trepidation about returning to his family and the land of Canaan was concern over Esau’s desire to kill him (we see this later in chapter 31)
 - c. What’s important here, however, is that in spite of these fears or concerns, Jacob obeyed God and set out for home which suggests he trusted the LORD to do what He promised
3. Takeaway (2):
 - a. Since its inception, God’s redemptive plan has been accomplished through people:
 - 1) We see that here with Jacob; God’s intent was to work out His redemptive plan for the world through people like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Israel
 - 2) We see that today as well as God uses you and I—the Church—to bring salvation to the world through the Gospel and the Great Commission
 - b. However, like Jacob, sometimes we need to be reminded of God’s plan and the roll He expects us to play in it:
 - 1) God blessed Jacob while he was in Mesopotamia, but His plan wasn’t just to bless Jacob; it was to bless all the nations of the earth and Jacob needed to return to Canaan for God to continue His plan
 - 2) In the same way, God blesses us here in this life today and for eternity with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3), His plan isn’t to simply bless **US**; His plan is to seek and save the lost and bless them, too
 - 3) I think many Christians enjoy the first part of that (the blessings we receive), but forget the second part (sharing the Good News with others)

B. God acted to ensure the success of His plan (31:22-42)
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1. The first way we see God ensure the success of His plan was by warning Laban not to threaten Jacob with harm (READ 31:22-35):
 - a. Laban wasn’t happy when he discovered Jacob had fled so he and his relatives set out after him
 - b. However, God knew Laban’s intent and warned him in a dream not **“speak to Jacob either good or bad”** (24):
 - 1) This was likely a figure of speech called a merism which is where two opposites are joined together (e.g. good and evil) to form a single concept or idea
 - 2) Based on what we see in v. 29 it appears to refer to making a threat to harm someone, at least that’s the way Laban seemed to understand it (READ)

- 3) This is also the case the only other time it's used in the OT when it was said of Absalom after his brother Amnon raped his sister Tamar: **"Absalom did not speak to Amnon either good or bad; for Absalom hated Amnon because he had violated his sister Tamar"**(2 Samuel 13:22)
- c. Laban accused Jacob of two things:
- 1) The first was secretly carrying off his daughters like prisoners of war (RE-READ 31:26-28):
 - a) Boy, talk about melodrama! They were Jacob's wives and 31:14-16 make it abundantly clear that they were more than willing to leave with Jacob (RE-READ)
 - b) He even accused Jacob of depriving him of the opportunity to kiss his daughters and grandsons goodbye and send them away with a giant celebration **"with gladness and with songs, with tambourine and with lyre"** (31:27-28)
 - c) This was all nonsense and pure deception:
 - Jacob left secretly because he knew Laban and his character all too well, and believed that Laban would take his daughters back from him by force and he was right
 - All the evidence needed for this is found in 31:43 (READ)
 - d) According to 31:29, had God not intervened by warning Laban, he would have carried out his plan to harm Jacob (READ)
 - 2) The second thing Laban accused Jacob of was stealing his gods (RE-READ 31:30):
 - a) He was referring to the teraphim that Rachel stole when they all left (READ 31:19):
 - Most Bible translations translate teraphim as household idols, but they are often mentioned as distinct objects separate from graven or molten images (this is done repeatedly in Judges where the teraphim are mentioned alongside ephods, graven and molten images)
 - According to Hosea 3:4 and Zechariah 10:2, teraphim were used in the cultic practice of divination and Laban likely used his teraphim in this way (READ 30:27)
 - The text doesn't tell us why Rachel stole the teraphim from her father, but Jewish sources (including the book of Jasper) claim she did it so that Laban couldn't use the teraphim to divine their whereabouts
 - Other sources suggest that whoever possessed the teraphim had authority and ownership over the estate and Rachel may have taken the teraphim as a means of securing what was left of Laban's estate (doubtful)

- b) According to v. 32, Jacob was completely unaware that Rachel had stolen the teraphim so he gave Laban permission to not only search all his possessions but to take the life of anyone found with them
 - c) Due to some quick thinking on Rachel's part, Laban was unable to find the teraphim (READ 31:33-35)
- 2. The second way we see God ensure the success of His plan was by upholding justice for Jacob (READ 31:34-42):
 - a. While Rachel had indeed stolen Laban's teraphim, Jacob Himself was innocent of both of Laban's accusations:
 - 1) He had faithfully served Laban for 20 years, making sure his ewes were healthy and refusing to take his meals from Laban's rams (generally part of a shepherd's compensation)
 - 2) When Laban's animals were lost due to wild beasts or theft, Jacob covered the cost out of his own pocket
 - 3) He served Laban through consuming heat, the frost of night, and with lack of sleep
 - 4) He served Laban 14 years to pay the dowry for Leah and Rachel, and another six years with Laban constantly cheating him by changing his wages—TEN TIMES!
 - 5) Jacob was right to ask Laban back in 31:36: **"What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me?"**
 - b. God was aware of all this and made sure Laban wasn't able to cheat Jacob out of what was due him; God's warning to Laban not to harm Jacob was a declaration of justice for Jacob (RE-READ 31:42)
- 3. The third way God we see God ensure the success of His plan was by mediating peace between Laban and Jacob (READ 31:43-55)
 - a. Laban's response to Jacob was a mix of defiance and defeat (43):
 - 1) He was defiant in that he still believed that everything in Jacob's possession—his wives, sons, flocks, and belongings—were rightfully his, but they were not
 - 2) But, he also admitted there was nothing he could do about it: **"But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne?"**
 - b. God's warning had apparently motivated him to seek peace with Jacob rather than harm him and take all his stuff:
 - 1) Laban was the one who initiated the peace covenant
 - 2) He's the one who set the stipulations:
 - a) Jacob wasn't to harm Leah or Rachel or take other wives
 - b) Neither was to cross the established boundary with the intent to harm one another
 - 3) He's also the one who called on Yahweh to be the mediator of the covenant—the one who would act as **"witness"** and **"judge"**

- c. The overwhelming sense we get from this passage is that Laban initiated the peace covenant out of his own self-interests, but ultimately it put an end to his mistreatment of Jacob
- 4. Takeaway: All of this is a perfect example of what the Bible says in Romans 8:28: **“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”**:
 - a. There were times when it didn’t look like it was working out so well for Jacob—Laban repeatedly deceived and tried to cheat Jacob over the 20 years he lived in Mesopotamia
 - b. However, in the end God caused all things to work together for good for Jacob because He had been called according to God’s purpose
 - c. And while God often works out all things for good in our earthly lives like He did for Jacob, the real promise for us isn’t good here and now but good in the life to come (READ Romans 8:29-39)