

Genesis 31-32

February 27, 2011

31:1-2: What takes place in chapter 31 verses 1 and 2? Are you surprised by what happens? Why or why not?

- See what you get. Jacob has become wealthier than Laban. Laban and his sons are not happy about it. On one hand, this should not be a surprise: people are inevitably jealous of those who have more than they have. See [Ecclesiastes 4:4](#). On the other hand, Laban should not be jealous because God has blessed him financially because of Jacob's presence. See [Genesis 30:27-30](#).

31:3: What was the solution to this problem?

- God told Jacob to return to his homeland.

31:4-9: What takes place in verses 4 to 9?

- Jacob plans to leave with his wives, children, and livestock.

What do you think of when you read verse 7?

- Jacob, the cheater, has become the one cheated. We reap what we sow. Others tend to treat us the way we treat others. What goes around comes around. *Be sure your sin will find you out.* [Numbers 32:23](#)

31:8-9: What do you learn about Laban from verses 8 and 9?

- Laban's real problem was with God, not Jacob. He was jealous of being "less blessed" financially than Jacob. He was angry that God was giving Jacob more.

Who is our jealousy really about: the other person? Us? Or God? Explain your answer.

- Jealousy is not about the other person. Jealousy is about *us* feeling small if they are more popular or talented. It is about *us* being greedy and feeling entitled to more if they have more than we do. Ultimately, it is anger toward God for not giving us what we feel entitled to have (or be).

Note: worldly people get their self-worth from comparing themselves to others. Christians get their self-worth from God's love for them and from serving His purpose in their lives. Worldly people need to have as much or more than others to be "okay". Christians feel okay because they are becoming who God wants them to be and doing what God wants them to do.

31:10-21: What takes place in verses 10 to 21?

- God tells Jacob to return to the land of his birth. His wives agree that their father has cheated Jacob and believe that God has blessed Jacob (and their family) with the wealth that they now have. Jacob leaves without telling Laban he was doing so. Laban realizes that someone has stolen his "idols".

31:16: What do we learn from verse 16?

- God is the source of all that we have. See [Deuteronomy 8:18](#) & [1 Chronicles 29:12,14,16](#).

31:19: What do you make of what Rachel did in verse 19?

- It seems that Rachel, though being the "looker" of the sisters, is the less spiritual of the two.

31:22-42: What takes place in verses 22 to 42?

- Laban pursues Jacob. God speaks to him and tells him not to harm Jacob. When confronted about the missing “idols”, Jacob declares that the one found with them will die. Jacob was unaware of Rachel’s theft. Rachel deceives her father and keeps the “idols” hidden. Jacob recounts his faithfulness in serving Laban and Laban’s treachery in manipulating Jacob for his daughters and Jacob’s 20 years of service.

31:43-55: What takes place in verses 43 to 55?

- Jacob and Laban make a covenant that they will not harm each other.

What do we learn about Laban from verses 43 and 50?

- Laban is a “control freak”. He still assumes that his daughters, Jacob’s children, and all of Jacob’s wealth are actually his. He goes on to try to tell Jacob whom he can or cannot marry.

What might we learn about trying to control people from this story?

- People who try to control usually or eventually lose control. Laban’s own daughters lost respect for him (31:14-16). Had Laban been loving and gracious toward Jacob, Jacob might have never wanted to leave. Trying to *control* everything, he instead *lost* everything.

32:1-2: What happens in chapter 32 verses 1 and 2?

- Angels meet Jacob along the way. These are likely the angels he saw in the “ladder” dream in 28:10-12.

32:3-23: What takes place in verses 3 to 23?

- Jacob sends messengers to tell his brother that he is returning home and that he is hoping to find favor in Esau’s eyes. Jacob is told that Esau is coming with 400 men. Jacob is afraid and decides to split up his flocks so that half of them might be able to escape an attack. Jacob prays to God and asks for His protection. Jacob then decides to try to “purchase” his brother’s forgiveness with gifts. He intends to give Esau an enormous amount of livestock in “stages” (...*but wait...there’s more*), hoping that these “waves” of gifts will appease Esau’s anger over Jacob stealing his birthright and his father’s blessing. He sends everyone across the river and remains alone on the other side for the night.

32:23-24: Why do you think that Jacob spent the night on the other side of the river?

- It is likely that Jacob thought that if Esau attacked at night, he would see the attack and would be able to escape.

32:9-12: What do you think about Jacob’s prayer in verses 9 to 12?

- First, it’s sad that he seems to be praying out of fear. Our prayer to God ought to be because of who He is, not because *we’re* in trouble. On the other hand, it’s a great prayer. He reminds God of God’s promises to bless him and to make him a great nation. See 1 John 5:14-15. Jacob is expressing faith in God keeping His word. When we pray, we should use God’s promises to remind Him and ourselves of what God has declared to be true.

What is wrong with what Jacob does after he prays?

- Jacob prays a prayer of faith, reminding himself of God’s promises. He then immediately begins to try to manipulate the situation; now he is trusting in his gifts to Esau, not in his faith in God. This is the “old” Jacob acting like his grandfather Abraham who (in the flesh) produced a child through Sarah’s handmaid.

32:24-32: What takes place in verses 24 to 32?

- Someone jumps Jacob in the middle of the night. That “person” dislocates Jacob’s hip as they wrestle. At some point Jacob recognizes that this is not Esau, but rather that he is wrestling with *the* angel of the Lord. He refuses to let go until the angel blesses him. The angel changes his name from “Jacob” to “Israel”. Jacob awakes the next morning with a limp that will be with him for the rest of his life.

Who was Jacob wrestling with and how do you know?

- He apparently was wrestling with the pre-incarnate Christ (THE angel of the Lord). He says that he has wrestled with God and seen God face to face. He could only see the Son, not the Father (**Exodus 33:20; John 1:1; 6:46; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 6:16; 1 John 4:12**).

Did Jacob get blessed? And if so, how?

- God blessed Jacob by “breaking” him. Jacob would now move from “swindler” to prince. He would now submit to the Lord and His ways. His daily pain would be a reminder to submit to God.

Can pain and problems be blessings?

- See what you get. Yes! If they cause us to trust in the Lord and not ourselves, and to seek Him with all of our hearts, then our problems become our blessings. The truth is that we get to know God far better through problems than we do through our blessings.

The big lesson today is learned through Laban’s desire to control, Laban’s jealousy, and through Jacob wrestling with God. *Our greatest struggles are with God.* It’s not so much what is going on in our lives, but why isn’t God doing what I want Him to do? Why doesn’t He just fix my problems and take away my pain? We seek God best when we need Him most, and we need Him most when we are *not* in control and when life stinks. What we need most is to really trust Him and the assurance of His presence.