



BEGINNINGS

A Study of the Book of Genesis

Sanctuary Bible Studies – Woodbury Lutheran Church

Session 25: See Jacob Run – and Wrestle with God (Genesis 31-32)

1. KNOWING WHEN TO MOVE (31:1-16)

- Multiple markers point Jacob to his need to move on from Paddan Aram:
 - The grumbling of Laban's sons (vs. 1)
 - Laban's attitude (vs. 2)
 - A word from the LORD Himself (vss. 3, 13)
 - Agreement from his wives, Rachel and Leah (vss. 14-16)
- Vs. 7: Jacob had been cheated so often by Laban (Laban renegotiated Jacob's salary "ten times!") that he learned to hate treachery and to appreciate how God is in control, blessing those who have been cheated.
- Vss. 10-13: Despite Laban's attempts to cheat him, Jacob recognizes how God has been there for him, always blessing him. He recounts a vision in which God recalls Jacob's vow at Bethel and sends Jacob back to Canaan.
- Vss. 14-16: Rachel and Leah clearly realize that Laban has cut them out of their inheritance, treating them like "foreign women." Jacob's wealth, in turn, taken from their father, now belongs to them.

2. JACOB STEALS AWAY (31:17-21)

- Vs. 19: Jacob steals away with all of his family, herds, and accumulated wealth while Laban is out shearing sheep.
 - Rachel brings along Laban's household gods without Jacob knowing. As the historian Josephus indicates in the 1st Century AD, Rachel's taking the household gods may have been attempt to have bargaining power should they be found out.
 - It may be that Rachel has not yet given up her pagan ways.
 - These household gods ("teraphim") were small figurines which were supposed to bring prosperity. What's more, the one possessing the family gods could get the father's inheritance in court.
- Vs. 20, "deceived": Moses, the writer of Genesis, wants us to know that the last deception is Jacob's.
- Vs. 21, "Gilead": Gilead is a fertile area SE of the Sea of Galilee. The river they crossed was the Euphrates.

3. LABAN PURSUES JACOB (31:22-42)

- Vss. 22-29: It takes a week for Laban to catch up with Jacob's entourage. He claims he would have liked to have thrown a lovely farewell party for his children and grandchildren. He has the right to harm Jacob but has been warned by God to be careful what he says to Jacob.
- Vss. 30-35: Laban is after his household gods. Rachel has become a deceiver herself, using her period, a time of uncleanness and

weakness, as an excuse for not getting off her camel, where the gods were held in her saddle.

- Vss. 36-42: Laban's anger at not finding his gods gives way to Jacob's review of the bad treatment he had received for 20 years.

4. A TRUCE (31:43-55)

- Vss. 43-53: Laban and Jacob cannot be reconciled. So they build a stone marker and set a boundary which they will both respect. There at Mizpah they both take an oath and offer a sacrifice. "Gilead" (a pun on Gilead, the actual region) means "witness heap." Mizpah means "watchtower." The Mizpah Benediction in vs. 49 is actually a covenant, bringing God into their agreement as He watches over them in their separation.
- Vss. 53-55. The meal served by Jacob seals the covenant. Laban is quick to leave the next morning. Notice he kisses his daughters and his grandchildren but not Jacob. How different this parting from their first meeting in 29:13. God has used Laban so that Jacob can return to his brother Esau a changed man.

5. JACOB PREPARES TO MEET ESAU (32:1-21)

- Vss. 1-2: Even the sight of angels cannot allay Jacob's fears of meeting Esau
- Vss. 3-24: Fearing Esau's vengeance and pledge to kill him, Jacob's strategy for meeting his brother includes the following:
 - Vss. 3-6: A first message (answered with the distressing news that Esau's coming with 400 men)
 - Vss. 7-8: Dividing his people and animals so that one group might escape in an attack
 - Vss. 9-12: Prayer
 - Vss. 13-21: Lavish gifts

6. JACOB WRESTLES WITH GOD (32:22-32)

- Vss. 22-23: Jacob gets his family and possessions safe across the Jabbock River. He is now left alone, readying himself for the meeting with Esau tomorrow.
- Vss. 24-26. Jacob had wrestled with everyone else. Now he would have to wrestle with God, who comes in the form of an angel. He attempts to get the name of "the man," as a way of getting control of him. Clearly, though, he learns that he may appear to get the upper hand, but God can disable him at will. Here at Peniel in Canaan Jacob is transformed:
 - He gets a new name longer Jacob the Trickster but Israel, one who struggles with God.
 - He gets a limp.
 - He is a new man, humbled in the sight of God.

BE GINNINGS

1. God often provides a series of markers to help us discern His will.
2. God watches over the promises between us and others, holding us accountable.
3. Sometimes the best we can do in conflict is to agree to the boundaries between us.
4. In wrestling with God, God may prepare us for the most significant time of our lives.
5. For many of us, we'll never truly dance until we limp.