

CGYG & LIFE Bible Study – Genesis 29:1 – 31:55

Read Genesis 29:1-30

- Who was Laban, and why was Jacob going to live with him?

- Laban was Jacob's uncle (Rebekah's brother)
- Jacob went to live with him to get away from Esau (who had threatened to kill him) and to find a wife (Genesis 27:41-28:5)

-What kind of person was Laban?

- sneaky, deceptive; called Jacob his "own flesh and blood" but then deceived him and took advantage of him with respect to Leah & Rachel
- similar in many respects to Jacob (but even outsmarted Jacob)

-If God was watching over Jacob as He had promised in Genesis 28:15, why do you think He would allow Jacob to be so deceived by Laban? (cf. Galatians 6:7)

- Jacob had deceived Isaac to get the blessing his father had meant for Esau (Genesis 27)
- Jacob now reaping what he sowed, by being forced to flee under bad circumstances to Laban → would now suffer deception by Laban
- in His sovereignty, God was allowing Jacob to reap what he sowed
- but will see later that God would only let Laban go so far; He was still watching over Jacob

-Was Jacob's marriage to Leah a valid marriage? (you might also consider Exodus 22:16-17)

- yes, it seems that everyone thought so, and not even Jacob sought to have it annulled
- marriage a covenant relationship – not to be broken lightly
- also, weight of the one-flesh relationship of sexual intimacy; a man was later obliged to marry a virgin whom he had seduced (Exod. 22:16)
- would seem that because Jacob had entered this relationship with Leah (though deceived), he was obligated to consider her as his wife
- sexual relationship not to be entered into lightly; only in the context of marriage

Read Genesis 29:31 - 30:24

Jacob's children in this passage:

Name	Mother	Name means/sounds like	Name	Mother	Name means/sounds like
Reuben	Leah	See, a son/he has seen my misery	Gad	Zilpah (L)	Good fortune, or a troop
Simeon	Leah	One who hears	Asher	Zilpah (L)	Happy
Levi	Leah	Attached	Issachar	Leah	Reward
Judah	Leah	Praise	Zebulun	Leah	Honor
Dan	Bilhah (R)	He has vindicated	Dinah	Leah	?
Naphtali	Bilhah (R)	My struggle	Joseph	Rachel	May He add

-Describe Jacob's family life. In what ways did his marriage/family life fall short of God's design for marriage? (cf. Genesis 2:21-24; Ephesians 5:22-33)

- marriage to 2 + 2 wives; filled with strife & discord; Leah & Rachel in competition with each other for Jacob's love
- a 'dysfunctional family'
- polygamous, against God's design for 1 man-1 woman (Genesis 2)
- Jacob not loving Leah as he should (lack of loving headship, intended as per Eph. 5)
 - seems not to take responsibility for his wives or his actions (seems to be quite passive in all this, thus allows wives & their agendas to dominate (e.g. as seen in their naming of the children), and thus, the strife to continue)
- Leah & Rachel not submissive, but manipulative; almost treating Jacob as a commodity

-In spite of the problems, how was God nevertheless working in and through Jacob's family situation? What hope can this give to those in difficult family situations?

- Jacob continuing to reap what he had sowed in deceiving his father Isaac; caused discord in his father's family, now reaps discord in his own family
- God provided children through Leah, to shape Jacob's affections towards her
 - answered her prayer (30:17) even despite her faults
- God was providing children, in fulfillment of His promise to Jacob at Bethel (Gen. 28:14)
 - from these sons would come the tribes of the nations of Israel, through whom God would fulfill His promise to bless all nations
- He taught Rachel that children are from the Lord (30:2,24), and also gave her a son

Read Genesis 30:25 - 31:21

-Why did Laban want Jacob to stay with him, and why did Jacob agree?

- Laban had discerned (by divination) that God had blessed him because of Jacob; thus, wanted him to stay
- Jacob stayed because he thought he could finally get something for himself (in terms of possessions)

-How did Laban and Jacob each try to get the better of the other? Why did Jacob succeed?

- Laban tried to steal away and keep for himself the animals that he had agreed would be Jacob's wages; was constantly changing Jacob's wages
- Jacob tried to get the flocks to produce speckled/streaked young by using the striped/peeled branches (people in those days apparently thought that what the animals were looking at while mating would be imprinted on their young)
 - also tried to engage in selective breeding (mated the stronger animals to produce his offspring)
- in the end, Jacob succeeded not because of his actions, but because God was watching over him and caused the flocks to produce whatever Laban said would be Jacob's wages
- Jacob acknowledged God's provision for him in 31:10-13

-Why did Jacob ultimately decide to leave Laban?

- God commanded him to leave and to return to 'the land of his fathers' (i.e. the land He had promised to Abraham & Isaac)
 - reminded Jacob of His appearing to Jacob at Bethel, and of Jacob's vow there → seems like He is calling Jacob to follow Him (Jacob had promised that God would be his God)
- Jacob noticed that Laban & his family attitude towards him was no longer favorable; his wives felt the same & encouraged him to return

Read Genesis 31:22-55

Note on the 'household gods' (Lit., teraphim) – these were images or figurines of varying sizes that signified either special protection, inheritance rights, or fertility for the bearer; possession by Rachel may have called for Jacob to be recognized as head of the household upon Laban's death (source: MacArthur Study Bible).

-Why did Jacob deceive Laban by leaving without telling him (Gen. 31:20)? Were his fears well founded?

- Jacob was afraid that Laban would take away his wives (and presumably his children & everything else) (31:31)
- on one level, his fears were well-founded, given all that Laban had done to him in the past
- on a different level, though, his fears were not well-founded, given that God had told him He had protected Jacob from Laban's schemes
 - also, God appeared to Laban to prevent from harming Jacob; could have done so even if Jacob had told Laban he was leaving
 - God's appearing to Laban reminiscent of his appearing to Abimelech to protect Abraham (Gen. 20:3-7)

-What do today's passages teach us about God, and how can we apply these lessons to our lives today? (you might also consider Galatians 6:7; Hebrews 12:5-11; Psalm 37:1-9, 39-40)

- a man reaps what he sows – Jacob suffered 20 years under Laban and 13+ years with a bad family situation for deceiving Isaac
- yet, even so, God was using these painful circumstances to discipline Jacob and shape his character and to fulfill His promises to him
 - gave Jacob many children and great wealth, in spite of the painful road to get there
- God remained sovereign over the circumstances; allowed Laban to take advantage of Jacob, but only so far – was still watching over Jacob
- God is just - in the end, even though God had allowed Laban to take advantage of Jacob, He rebuked Laban for his wrongdoing
- God is merciful; did not discard Jacob because of his faults, but worked to shape his character
- applications for today: when we go through trials or suffer unjustly, to commit our ways to God and continue doing right (1 Peter 2:20-23)

Aliens and strangers in the world

We saw in our last study how Jacob conspired with his mother, Rebekah, to deceive his father Isaac. Today, we see Jacob reaping the consequences of his actions. Having been forced to flee to his uncle Laban, Jacob was himself deceived by Laban into marrying Leah, resulting in 7 extra years of hard labor and a home life filled with discord and strife. Through it all, however, God was faithful to the promise He had made at Bethel to be with Jacob and to watch over him (Gen. 28:13-15). In His sovereignty, God allowed Jacob to reap what he had sown, using Laban's schemes and Jacob's difficult circumstances to discipline and shape him. At the same time, however, God used these same circumstances to bring about fulfillment of His promise to make Jacob's descendants "like the dust of the earth" (Gen. 28:14). He also placed limits on how far Laban could go, enabling Jacob ultimately to prosper in spite of Laban's efforts to the contrary (31:11-12). In the end, when Jacob's time of chastening was complete, God called him to return home and rebuked Laban for his wicked deeds.

God's dealings with Jacob serve both as a warning and an encouragement to us today. When we sin, we open ourselves to God's discipline, because He disciplines those He loves (Heb. 12:6). Yet, even when He allows us to reap some of the consequences of our sinful thoughts and actions, we who know Him can have confidence that He does all things for our good, and that however difficult or painful our resulting circumstances may be, they are not outside the realm of His sovereign control, and He will not let us be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). Thus, when we face His discipline, we should not grow impatient nor lose heart, but rather submit ourselves to Him and to His shaping work in our lives. "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son." (Heb. 12:5-6)