

26. The time to return to the Lord

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During expository study of the Bible there are times we find ourselves wondering why God would put all these information and stories that do not give us any stunning theological discoveries or practical applications. We find a lot of these in genealogies, tribes of Israel and the descriptions of Solomon's temple in the Old Testament.

They seem so unimportant to us and we'd rather get into the meat of the Bible. However, for some reasons, God sees that we need to hear and learn from these seemingly-boring texts.

Chapter 30 and 31 are the case in point. We find Jacob's family starting their family feud from jealousy and uncontrolled carnal decisions. But we see that God still is moving in spite of Jacob's sin. We are not going to cover every verse in chapter 30 and 31. We will quickly scan through these two chapters and learn what God has stored for us.

A. THE BABY COMPETITION

Genesis 30:1-3 Now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister, and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or else I die!" 2 And Jacob's anger was aroused against Rachel, and he said, "Am I in the place of God, who has withheld from you the fruit of the womb?" 3 So she said, "Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her, and she will bear a child on my knees, that I also may have children by her."

A woman in that day was disgraced unless she had a child, and the more children she had, the better was her position.

We find here Jacob and Rachel reverting to the practice of that day. Remember that Abraham and Sarah had done the same thing. They made an awful mess by doing things according to their own will. God did not approve of it then, and He is not going to approve of it now. The Bible gives us an accurate record for everything, but that does not mean that God approved of all that was done. Jacob should have been a man of God to say, "No," to Rachel's ungodly idea.

From v4 to v24, we find a baby competition between two sisters who included two of their maids. The wives of Jacob are using their children as pawns in a power struggle within the home. Can you imagine how often their neighbors had to attend baby showers each time these four women get pregnant?

Here are the list of Jacob's children who became the head of the twelve tribes of Israel:

Born to Leah:

Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dinah-daughter

Born to Bilhah, Rachel's maid:

Dan, Naphtali

Born to Zilpah, Leah's maid:

Gad, Asher

Born to Rachel:

Joseph, Benjamin

At this point, no one would think this eleventh son Joseph would end up being the key character used to further God's redemptive purpose through this family.

Isaiah 55:8-9 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. 9 "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts."

B. JACOB'S SCHEME FOR LABAN'S FLOCK

Genesis 30:25-27 And it came to pass, when Rachel had borne Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may go to my own place and to my country. 26 Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know my service which I have done for you." 27 And Laban said to him, "Please stay, if I have found favor in your eyes, for I have learned by experience that the Lord has blessed me for your sake."

Though Jacob was in Haran with Laban and his daughters for more than 14 years, he knew that he belonged in the land promised to him by God.

From v 29 to v36, we find that Laban offered a new wage system, but Jacob refused it. Because the last time he accepted Laban's "offer" he was deceived. Jacob offered to work as Laban's shepherd, if Laban would give him the "rejects" of the flocks and herds. The oriental people preferred their sheep to be white and goats brown or black. By accepting the striped, spotted, and speckled animals, Jacob was apparently giving Laban the better deal. It was certainly an act of faith on Jacob's part.

From v 37 to the end of the chapter 30, Jacob went on his con-job again. Instead of trusting God to meet the need, Jacob used his own plan. The special rods and sticks at the troughs did not influence the sheep. It was God who determined what kind of sheep and goats would be conceived. However, Jacob did use "selective breeding" so that only the stronger sheep and goats can conceive. He became richer and richer.

C. THE CONFERENCE WITHIN THE JACOB'S FAMILY

Genesis 31:3-7 Then the Lord said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your family, and I will be with you." 4 So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field, to his flock, 5 and said to them, "I see your father's countenance, that it is not favorable toward me as before; but the God of my father has been with me. 6 And you know that with all my might I have served your father. 7 Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me."

We find three factors entered into Jacob's decision to leave Laban's home:

- 1) The changed attitude of Laban because of his envy toward Jacob
- 2) The need for establishing his own home
- 3) The direct leading of the Lord – God had reminded Jacob of his Bethel vow.

The backslider Jacob now had to return and fulfill his promises to the Lord who had blessed him. Rachel and Leah agreed to go, but their decision was based on material considerations, not the will of the Lord. We wonder if these wives knew anything about Jacob's Bethel experience with God until now.

This may be the first time in quite a while when the sisters Leah and Rachel agreed on anything and supportive to their husband Jacob.

How wonderful for your spouse to be supportive to you when you do the work of God or following the will of God! That is the reason why it is important for husband and wife to be in sync with God's will together.

D. THE ESCAPE AND CHASE

Genesis 31:17-32 Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels. 18 And he carried away all his livestock and all his possessions which he had gained, his acquired livestock which he had gained in Padan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan. 19 Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's. 20 And Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee. 21 So he fled with all that he had. He arose and crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead. 22 And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled. 23 Then he took his brethren with him and pursued him for seven days' journey, and he overtook him in the mountains of Gilead. 24 But God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, "Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad." 25 So Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains, and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountains of Gilead. 26 And Laban said to Jacob: "What have you done, that you have stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters like captives taken with the sword? 27 Why did you flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp? 28 And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have done foolishly in so doing. 29 It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.' 30 And now you have surely gone because you greatly long for your father's house, but why did you steal my gods?" 31 Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force.' 32 With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours and take it with you." For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

The devil will not sit on his hands to let you come back to God. He will do everything within his power to stop you and discourage you with his empty threat like this Laban.

God wants you to come back to Him and dwell in His presence and feast at His table of the Word, so that you may grow in Him.

All you have to do is to trust in the Lord and take that first step to come back to the Lord. You may say, "I have not backslidden from the Lord. So this message is not for me." That is not true. Because we all need to be reminded with this assurance from God because we are constantly tempted to slip away from Him by satan.

Let me put it this way. You know what the Word of God says about your current situation you are going through. But if you are finding yourself arguing with God to justify your action or decision, that means two things:

- 1) You are wrong.
- 2) You have backslidden from where you were with God.

The first step of returning to the Lord is that you give up whatever you've been insisting and do what the Word of God says.

Many Christians think that their spiritual conditions are OK with God. I don't believe so. A national survey of churches in the United States revealed the followings about church members:

10% cannot be found anywhere

20% never attend a service

25% admits that they never pray

35% admits that they never read God's Word

40% never contribute to the church financially nor physically

60% never read or study the Bible lessons

75% never assume any responsibility in their church

95% never win a soul to Christ

But, 100% expect to go to heaven

E. NOT SPEAKING IN SAME LANGUAGE

Genesis 31:44-48 Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me." 45 So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46 Then Jacob said to his brethren, "Gather stones." And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there on the heap. 47 Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. 48 And Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me this day." Therefore its name was called Galeed.

In v47, the two men did not even speak the same language. Both names mean "heap of witness" or "heap of testimony." It is truly sad when family members cannot trust each other. How much better it would have been had they forgiven each other and turned the whole thing over to God!

The majority of family problems can be solved with a simple and sincere apology and true forgiveness. If we hold the things that happened before against each other, there won't be any improvement in the situation. As a matter of fact, it will go from bad to worse. I guarantee it.

F. I WON'T GO TO YOUR SIDE

Genesis 31:51-55 Then Laban said to Jacob, "Here is this heap and here is this pillar, which I have placed between you and me. 52 This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. 53 The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us." And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac. 54 Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain. 55 And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

Do you remember when you were kids you drew a line between you and your sibling which was supposed to separate territories between you guys? Like in a back of the family station wagon, you put a tape measure as a border line? This is more than that.

The best solution for Jacob's in-law problems is for him to separate from Laban. In fact, they erected a pillar to be a barrier between them.

There is wisdom in having some separation from in-laws.

Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

You know what they say, "It is best if you can keep in-laws and outhouse far away from your home."

Laban represents the world Jacob is leaving behind. He is heading to the land God wants him to be in. It is a great reminder for us to put up a border line where the world starts, so that we may never go back.

When we stop our spiritual growing process, we will soon be a train wreck waiting to happen. We must recognize that deep in our nature we all have a natural tendency to wander. It is no mistake God compares us to wandering sheep. That is our carnal desire. And as an old hymn says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." Yes, we are prone to wander.

G. APPLICATION

1) If we make Jesus our first love, everything else will fall into its proper balance.

Do you remember the first love you had for the Lord Jesus when you got saved? What did make you to wonder away from Him, even a small amount? Our first love exists as the antidote to the wandering spirit we have. That passion is what keeps us engaged in our relationship with God.

Revelation 2:5 Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place--unless you repent.