
Day 14 - January 14

Period of the Patriarchs (2100 -1525 BCE)

Jacob Leaves Laban

Jacob Returns to Canaan

Readings: *Genesis 31:1-33:20*

Reflections:

- There are a number of key statements we see in the decision for Jacob to leave and return to his father's land. God says, "Go...I will be with you." Jacob says, "...The God of my father has been with me...God has not allowed [Laban] to harm me." Rachel and Leah see how God has worked and say, "Do whatever God has told you." We see here the very personal nature of living in relationship with God and the assurance it gives to those in relationship with God.
- Jacob tries to sneak away because of his fear of Laban.
- Rachel stealing the pagan household gods means she really doesn't trust God. She has her own back up plan.
- Laban pursues but God still intervenes to protect Jacob. Jacob makes a rash vow about killing the person who stole the gods. Obviously this makes the reader wonder "Will he kill the woman he loves the most?" Rachel uses deception to cover up the fact that she stole the gods.
- This sets up the covenant between Jacob and Laban which will finally bring some peace to their relationship. It is interesting that God is called "Fear" in this text. It may be one of the only places where the fear of God is used for God's name.
- So Jacob returns to his father's land, the promised land of Canaan where Esau lives. Jacob is again afraid for his life. Angels appear again in apparently a very real form to give Jacob comfort of God's presence.
- When Esau comes with his men, Jacob is again overcome by fear and plans his own protection and way out. He is not trusting God but is still ruled by his own fear. He knows God's promise to him but he is still so afraid that his whole approach is to save himself. First he plans an escape and second he sends lots of gifts with the hope to pacify Esau. He uses many of the same ploys we use to try to bail ourselves out.

- Jacob is finally alone. One of the most significant events in the story of Israel takes place. God appears in human form, something that is very rare in the Hebrew Scriptures. In the darkness of the night, he jumps on Jacob and begins to wrestle with him. Jacob probably believes that he is being jumped by his angry brother. Jacob fights with all of his energy all night trying to fend off his attacker and save himself. God chooses not to overpower Jacob's strong will as he wrestles with him all night long but continues the battle. Yet as morning comes God touches Jacob's hip and breaks him physically by throwing his hip out of joint. This wounding is a symbol of God effortlessly breaking Jacob and his stubborn will. Jacob no longer fights against God but now clings on to him out of his pain and brokenness. He now cries out in desperation for God to bless him rather than wrestling and fighting against God in his own pathetic attempt to be his own savior. We all need to be freed from our independence and self-sufficiency. God often uses pain and brokenness to bring us to that place of complete dependence, humility and submission to God.
- God does bless this broken Jacob and changes his name. God redefines Jacob's core identity from "deceiver" to "struggles with God". Jacob's fearful, manipulating heart was healed by being broken. He walks away with a limp as a permanent sign of his weakness and submission to God. It is a great image of how God can heal us through our brokenness and complete dependence on him. We can ask ourselves, "Have I been broken? Do I walk with a limp?"
- Everything Jacob feared was not real. You would never have guessed that Esau would be so ready to bless and receive Jacob based on everything that we knew to be true about how things were in the past.
- It is interesting after seeing the face of God and God's grace, when he sees the radical grace of Esau, Jacob says it is like seeing the face of God. We can experience God through other people who love us deeply and through whom we receive God's radical grace. This should encourage us to catch a vision for showing others grace that they might see God in and through us.
- Jacob's key statement, "God has been gracious to me and I have all I need." (see Philippians 4:19)
- This account ends with Jacob settling peacefully in the land and worshipping God.