

Lesson 43**Jacob Meets God**

Genesis 31:1-32:32

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. These two chapters show God's providential dealings in the life of a believer to bring crisis into the life, which will cause a person to cast himself totally on God for deliverance.
- B. These two chapters show us how God's plans and purposes overrule the best-laid plans of men.

II. PARTING WITH LABAN 31:1-55

A. Jacob Prepares to Leave (31:1-10)

1. Tensions grew between Laban, the sons of Laban and Jacob, for God had greatly prospered Jacob (31:1-2). The Lord spoke to Jacob and told him to go back to the Promised Land (31:3). NOTE. The leading of God is obvious in Jacob's life. He had a desire to go home (30:25). Circumstances between Jacob and Laban made it impossible for Jacob to stay, and God gave him a direct assurance and message that he was to move westward to the Promised Land.

2. Jacob called his two wives together and told them his plans, for it was essential that they should agree with his plans (31:4-10); NOTE. The Lord must lead husband and wife alike if it is the Lord's will for a family to move.

B. The Angel of the Lord Tells Jacob to Leave (31:11-13). God calls Jacob back to Bethel. This was the place God appeared first to Jacob and promised to bless him. There Jacob made a half-hearted vow (28:19-22) and God holds him to this vow. NOTE. Vows to God should never be made lightly. They should be fulfilled.

C. Rachel and Leah Side With Jacob (31:14-16). The wives of Jacob who were the daughters of Laban agreed that Laban was a cheap swindler out for his own selfish ends. According to the custom of *mohar* the fiancé was bound to pay to the girl's father a sum of money or the equivalent in labor for the right to marry the girl. When a fiancé thus served for a bride, the bride's parents were responsible to lay up a trousseau (dowry) for her. The complaint of Rachel and Leah is that Laban used the money for himself and they were cheated.

D. Jacob Flees From Haran (31:17-21). Jacob takes his family and possessions and leaves Haran without notifying Laban. Rachel steals her father's images. These were important to Laban because the custom of that day was that the son who had possession of these household gods (images) had legal evidence that he held the inheritance prerogatives of the first-born. Remember, Jacob was probably adopted son and then was disinherited when he had his own sons. Therefore, Rachel steals the images so Jacob can also some day lay claim to Laban's wealth. NOTE. This may also indicate that Rachel is still attached to some form of idolatry. Later these gods seem to have been buried by Jacob with other objects of idol worship by the oak in Shechem (35:4).

E. Laban Pursues Jacob (31:22-24). Laban pursues Jacob with the intent to harm him, but God intervenes and tells Laban to do neither good nor bad to Jacob (31:24, 29). NOTE. God sovereignly intervened in Laban's life, who was an unbeliever, to keep him from hurting Jacob. God can and does

change the thinking of the unsaved. NOTE. Jacob feared Laban and this was all part of God's plan to teach Jacob not to live by his own wits but to trust in God.

F. Laban Overtakes Jacob and Rebukes Him (31:25-35). Laban pretends the reason for his wrath is that he was not able to have a goodbye party for his family (31:26-29), but the real reason is that someone had stolen his gods (31:30). Jacob admits that one of his motives for fleeing was fear and then tells Laban to put to death anyone who is found with his gods (31:31-32). Rachel had the gods but hid them. Laban searched everywhere but Rachel was sitting on them and made an excuse why she could not get up (31:35).

G. Jacob Releases His Pent-up Feelings of 20 Years Against Laban (36-42). Jacob "blew his top" with Laban and recounted his faithful service for 20 years. He told Laban that had not God been with him Laban would have sent him away with nothing (31:42). Jacob was calling Laban a shyster.

H. Jacob and Laban Make the Mizpah Covenant (31:43-55). Laban claims that Jacob's wives, family and possessions belong to him. These two men held hatred and distrust for one another and the only way to solve their differences is to make a promise, covenant or pact. NOTE. Genesis 31:49 is not a benediction for church groups but it actually is a truce between two crooks that each will no longer try to get the better of the other. Each would work their own territory.

III. PREPARATION TO FACE ESAU 32:1-32

A. Sight of Angels at Mahanaim (32:1-2). Jacob moved back towards the land and a host of angels appears to him. This was to assure him that God who appeared to him at Bethel and in Haran would bring him safely into the land. Jacob had a second problem. Having just faced his Uncle Laban, he now must face once again Esau his brother. Jacob must learn to trust in the God of hosts instead of the arm of the flesh. NOTE. Jacob has moved from one crisis to another.

B. Sending of Messengers (32:3-8). Jacob wavers in faith when he thinks about meeting Esau. He still tries to lean upon his own schemes and devices to maneuver his way out of a jam. The messenger was sent to soften Esau up so he will accept Jacob. This distresses Jacob and he immediately assumes that Esau is coming to fight him and he turns to his shrewd cunning. He divides his possessions into two parts, so that in case Esau fell on one of them the other might escape and something would be left.

C. Supplication to God (32:9-12). Jacob prays a wonderful prayer. He remembers the promises of God, and he reminds God of them. But he really fears what Esau will do to him. NOTE. Jacob used his cleverness to divide his possessions and people and then he prays to God. He called upon God to bless his own cunning schemes. His prayer was sincere but he felt as though he had to rest on his own resources ultimately. He leans on his plans more than his God.

D. Sending of Gifts (32:13-23). Jacob again resorts to his conniving ways and chooses to live by his wits rather than by faith in the living God. He sends gifts to Esau (32:20) with idea of appeasing him so he will be accepted. Esau's mind will be changed but not by Jacob's gifts but by Jacob's God. Just in case his plan does not work he sends his family over the Jabbok River and is left alone. Jacob is always making plans instead of trusting in God.

E. Struggle With God at Peniel (32:24-32)

1. Jacob was alone for he needed time for meditation. Perhaps he realized the great crisis he was in and needed time to think. He knew that in the morning he would have to face a showdown with Esau who had threatened his life. Perhaps he meditated on those days when he deceived Esau and lied to Isaac. Jacob was concerned about meeting Jacob but what he really needed was to meet God, for he could never meet his brother if he was not right with God.

2. While in quiet, a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. The man was probably the Angel of Jehovah (the pre-incarnate Christ) who is called God (32:30). God

wrestled with Jacob and it was not Jacob who wrestled with God. It was not that Jacob wrestled with God in prayer but that God wrestled with Jacob to break down Jacob's strong will and to bring him to an end of himself so that he would not trust in the arm of the flesh. Jacob had to learn that God would deliver and he did not have to trust his own cleverness and resources.

3. Jacob thought he was fighting for his physical life but he was fighting about his spiritual life (32:25). He was strong and God touched his thigh and put it out of joint, so as to make him powerless. God was breaking Jacob and he fought physically and spiritually to the last. NOTE. God had been in the process of breaking Jacob for years but Jacob resisted. All believers are at times like Jacob. We refuse to trust God, to put Him first, and then God has to get rough and break us, God did not leave Jacob alone and he will not leave any true believer alone. The Lord could have broken Jacob earlier in the night but He wanted him to voluntarily yield to the Lord.

4. The Lord says, "Let me go," for now Jacob has been broken and will not let go of the Lord until he has been blessed by God (32:26). NOTE. God had brought Jacob to the place where he couldn't cope with life without God. Jacob had a genuine experience with God and realized that God is the only source of power.

5. God changed Jacob's name from "heeler" or "supplanter" or "usurper" to "Israel" which means "a prince with God." (32:27-29). A new experience with God brought Jacob a new name. Jacob would now have power with God and with men (32:28). NOTE. God won this wrestling match because He was the challenger. Jacob had to be broken before God could use him.

6. This "face to face" experience with God causes Jacob to name this place Peniel or "the face of God." NOTE. The seeing of God does not contradict John 1:18 which says no man has seen God at any time. Certainly no man has seen God in His essence as spirit, but men have seen God in the sense of certain manifest glory. However, to say that every believer needs this same kind of experience creates an attitude of expectancy rather than dependency, and results in frustration and looking for experiences. However God does give crisis experiences to some believers.

7. Jacob was permanently marked by a limp. Whenever men saw Jacob they knew that he had been touched by God. NOTE: There are some groups of Christians who feel that after conversion a person must have a crisis experience in order to have real spiritual satisfaction, and they use Jacob as an example. Jacob had a crisis experience that changed his life, but not all believers need this kind of experience. After Peniel, Jacob is a man of God who came to the place where he let God lead him. Certainly he came to the place where he gave God the glory. However, to say that every believer needs this same kind of experience, creates an attitude of expectancy rather than dependency, and results in frustration and looking for experiences. However, God does give crisis experiences to some believers.