

Chapter 31 – John Karmelich

1. As I read Chapter 31, I kept thinking of the expression: “The apples don’t fall from the tree”.
 - a) It is an expression that refers to the fact that the children often act like their parents.
 - b) You can often see good or bad personality traits passed on from generation to generation.
 - c) Notice this verse in Exodus:
 - i) “Yet he (God) does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”
(Exodus 34:7b NIV)
 - a) This verse does not mean that children get punished for the sins of their parents. God specifically states that fact in Ezekiel 18:20.
 - ii) This verse in Exodus means that the children will feel the effect of sins often to the 3rd and 4th generation. If a father is physically abusive, or an alcoholic, the damage to the children can be passed on for several generations.
 - iii) On a positive note, most of the pastors I have met in my lifetime are the children of pastors. I have seen the positive side of Christianity rub off on children.
 - iv) Unfortunately, bad traits are also past on. Children desire to emulate their parents and want to please them. They often take on parents’ negative characteristics, sometimes unknowingly. It never occurs to people that the way their parents acted is wrong, and take on some of the same characteristics.
 - d) I bring all of this up as we see this in Chapter 31.
 - e) If you remember Laban is Jacob’s father in law, and also his boss at work.
 - i) We will discover that Laban not only has two daughters, but also some sons.
 - ii) Those sons, are truly the sons-of-Laban, both physically and in terms of their character traits. We will also read of Laban’s daughters having some similar personality traits of their father.
 - iii) Laban’s “god” is money. Laban is the kind of guy more interested in making a buck than going to church. He is the kind of guy who would say today, “Why should I care about all of that religious stuff? I’ve got a family to support”.
 - iv) Always remember that everyone has a “god”. Look how someone spends their spare time or look at someone’s checkbook and you’ll find out what their “god” is. If you choose to ignore the true God, a substitute will always exist.
2. The other classic expression that comes into play in Chapter 31 is “If you point a finger at someone else, there is always three fingers pointing back at you”.
 - a) Stop and point your finger as if you are accusing someone of a crime. Notice the other three fingers are pointing back in your direction.
 - b) In this chapter you will read of Jacob’s anger lashing out at Laban. This chapter marks the end of a 20-year relationship between Laban and Jacob.
 - i) For seven years, Jacob worked to marry both wives.
 - ii) Jacob agreed to work for another 7 years as a “dowry payment” for both wives.
 - iii) Jacob worked another 6 years before God told him it was time to leave. (Verse 38).
 - c) One of the big picture ideas to get from this chapter is God is working on Jacob by trying to make him “see himself through others”.
 - i) Sometimes God puts in your life people who are a lot like yourself. You may ask yourself, “Why do I have to deal with this person?” What God may be trying to show you is that a lot of your own faults are reflective in those around you.
 - ii) Unfortunately, this is also true in marriages and family relationships. We easily see faults in our spouses or our parents or fill-in-the-blank, and fail to see that same fault in our lives. We are so busy concentrating on the “accusation finger” and fail to see the other three fingers pointing at ourselves.

3. This is where the two “cliché’s of the day” tie together:
 - a) “The apples don’t fall from the tree” and “If you point a finger at someone else, there is always three fingers pointing back at you”.
 - b) We often pick friends our spouses similar to our parents or ourselves. We fail to see our own character defects because we are too busy staring at those around us.
 - c) Remember that when someone who has turned their life over to God, He then wants to mature us and make us better people. One of the big-purposes of life is to prepare us for eternal life with Him. In order to accomplish this, God wants to mature us. Part of that maturity is to see our own faults in life. God allows people and circumstances to happen in our lives so we can eventually “get it” and see our own character defects.
4. Which, surprisingly, leads us back to Genesis 31. ☺
 - a) This is a chapter about Jacob wrapping up his 20-year relationship with Laban.
 - b) Jacob takes his wives, concubines and children and moves away.
 - c) This is the last we ever read of Laban.
 - d) There is no blunt verse where Jacob says, “I now realize that God put me through all of this for a reason”. There is no verse where Jacob confesses his own faults to God.
 - i) It is only after Jacob looks back over his life to date that he realizes how God’s hand was there all the time.
 - e) What God wants from us to see in this chapter is not just to see Jacob’s flaws, or those of Laban. God wants us to reflect upon our own lives, especially in how we deal with those around us. Many of the flaws of which we accuse others we are often guilty of ourselves.
 - i) Stop and think about the people around us. Instead of complaining about how they are treating you, stop and think, “What is God trying to teach me about my own life in this circumstance?”
 - ii) God is trying to get us out of “victim” mode. He doesn’t want us to have pity parties for ourselves, but to learn from our circumstances so we can move on.
 - iii) There are of course, times to grieve during rough moments, but there are also times to move on from that grief. This chapter is an illustration of these points.
 - f) With all that in mind, let’s start Chapter 31:
5. Verse 1: Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, "Jacob has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father." ² And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been.
 - a) Here we discover that Laban had sons as well as his two daughters.
 - b) Laban’s two daughters were influenced by Jacob and his relationship with God. The sons appear to be a lot like their father. The father was a money-first-God-second type of guy, and that influence carried on to their sons.
 - c) Notice the sons did not say, “Well, God has blessed Jacob, good for him!”
 - i) Notice the sons did not say, “Well, this god of Jacob must be powerful, maybe we should ask Jacob some questions about his God and change our lifestyle!”
 - ii) It is more like, “Hey, he’s getting rich off of dad and us”.
 - iii) The application is don’t expect nonbelievers to change just because God is blessing you at the moment. People will credit your happiness or your success to anything but God. They will say it is “random luck” or your circumstances, or your conniving, but to actually change their heart to God is another story.
 - d) It is God and God-only that changes people’s hearts toward Him. God asks that we be good witnesses to the outside world. God requests that we pray for others to turn their hearts toward God.
 - i) “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (1st Timothy 2:3-4 NIV)
 - ii) When we are being a good witness, some people act favorably and start the process of changing their lives and some resist. Laban’s kids resist!

- e) There is a “basic purpose” for their attitude change. God wanted Jacob to go back to the Promised Land to where he was born. God is behind the circumstances of the change of Laban’s sons’ attitude.
 - i) That alone is a reminder to us that God is often working in the background of our lives. We don’t always understand why “certain things are happening”, but never discount the possibility that it is God himself may be behind certain actions.
6. Verse 2: Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."
- a) Out of nowhere, God decides to speak to Jacob. ☺
 - b) The text does not say that Jacob turned to God in prayer because of the Laban’s attitude. It just says God spoke and said to Jacob in effect, “time to get going”.
 - c) The “big-picture” is that originally God wanted Jacob to leave his parents and go to this place, where he is currently living, get a wife and some kids. Jacob ends up with two wives, two concubines and 12 children to date (11 boys and 1 girl). This family, plus another son to come, forms the nucleus of the Israeli people. This family goes to Egypt and starts the nation that will eventually be the great Exodus out of Egypt.
 - d) Through the day by day circumstances of Jacob’s life, it was hard for him to see the big picture. Only after looking back can he see how God is working in our lives.
 - e) The great lesson of Jacob is that God chooses to use anyone He pleases. If God can use a conniving person like Jacob, God can use you and me. To anyone simply willing to turn their hearts toward God, God then takes over and controls our lives to his Glory. We may not see the results on a day by day basis, but we can look back at our lives and see how God’s hands were behind all the actions and circumstances of our lives.
 - f) Notice God said, “I will be with you”. It is not meant to say that God was not with him through the whole time frame with Laban. This verse is meant to convey the message, “Be obedient about going back home and I will continue to bless you”.
7. Verse 4: So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were. ⁵ He said to them, "I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me. ⁶ You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength, ⁷ yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. ⁸ If he said, `The speckled ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, `The streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked young. ⁹ So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me.
- a) Jacob’s next job is to convince his two wives it is time to go. God only spoke to Jacob, so Jacob needs to convey that message to his wives.
 - b) Both Rachel and Leah only know the life under their father. Even though they have been married to Jacob for 13 years now (Jacob states later he has worked for Laban for 20 years, and Jacob married both girls after 7 years). The only “life” these girls knew was here in the City of Haran under their father’s guidance.
 - c) There is a marriage principal that is important here.
 - i) Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Genesis 2:24 KJV)
 - ii) Biblical marriage is often nicknamed “leave and cleave”. It is an expression taken from the King James Bible referring to the fact a that when a couple gets married, not only do they cling to each other (“cleave”), but they shall leave the life of their parents (“leave”).
 - a) This does not mean when you get married, you are to immediately move 500 miles away from your in-laws! It refers to your mental attitude. You are no longer the “son or daughter of your parents”, but you are now the “wife or husband of your spouse”.

- iii) I mention “leave and cleave”, as it is important here. You can sense the mixed loyalty with Rachel and Leah between their father Laban versus Jacob. Jacob makes this speech here to show the superiority of God over their father Laban.
 - d) With that in mind, this is a good time to re-read Verses 4-9. Go ahead, I’ll wait! ☺
 - i) Jacob is showing the superiority of God to Laban’s actions. Notice how Jacob gives all the credit to God for his success and not himself.
 - ii) This is the same Jacob who got his father’s blessing by deceiving and lying to his father. This is the same Jacob who “black-mailed” his brother into giving him his birthright. Jacob-the deceiver is now Jacob giving God the credit for his success.
 - iii) Jacob is giving his “testimony” to his wives. He states that despite the fact that Laban has changed Jacob’s wages ten times, God has still blessed Jacob throughout these circumstances.
 - iv) Notice Jacob does not say, “Look, girls, you are my wives. God said its time to go, so let’s get packing!” Instead, Jacob uses this opportunity to teach them how God has been working in his life.
 - v) This is a great lesson in telling others about your relationship with God. People will deny the bible as the Word of God, but they cannot deny or challenge your testimony about how God has worked in your life. Sometimes the best witness is to simply tell how God has been working in your life to others.
 - e) The specifics of the verse are interesting to think about.
 - i) Jacob was a shepherd and was paid in lambs and goats.
 - a) His father in law would say something like, “I’ll pay you the spotted ones”. Then “ all of a sudden”, most of the babies would be born spotted.
 - b) Then his father in law would say in effect, “OK, this is not fair. Jacob, I’m changing your wages to stripped lambs.” Then most of the babies that were born would come out stripped.
 - ii) Notice Laban never said, “Well, God must be blessing Jacob, maybe I should ask Jacob about his God”. Instead Laban figures it must be a coincidence or some sort of trick. People refuse to acknowledge the hand of God in their lives.
8. Jacob continues this speech to his wives. Verse 10: "In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted.¹¹ The angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob.’ I answered, ‘Here I am.’¹² And he said, ‘Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you.¹³ I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.’ "
- a) If you recall in the last chapter, there was this strange contract made by Jacob where he told Laban in effect, “Tell you what Laban, I’ll keep working for you, and I’ll just take the odd-ball sheep (“streaked, speckled and spotted”) from the flocks. This was where Jacob encouraged the mating with branch rods placed in the watering trough.
 - b) Apparently that whole event was based on a dream Jacob had. That dream is mentioned here in Verse 11 of Chapter 31.
 - i) Based on that dream, Jacob had the ingenuity to propose to Laban a business deal. This deal, on the surface is very favorable to Laban. By statistical odds, the type of sheep that were produced should have been rare.
 - ii) I believed God blessed Jacob’s ingenuity. The whole section in the last chapter about “peeling almond branches and placing them in the watering troughs to encourage breeding” may have been a superstition on Jacob’s part. The truth is that God made a promise that He would bless Jacob in his wages and Jacob acted on that promise by agreeing to these wages and then watching his own flock grow.

- c) Remember the purpose of this whole speech is to convince his wives it is time to get moving. In a sense this is an “altar call” to convert his wives to his God. ☺
 - a) For those who don’t know, many Christian churches ask people at the end of a worship service to step forward to commit their lives to Jesus. It is nicknamed an “altar call”.
 - ii) Remember that Rachel and Laban still had some affection for their father, despite his faults. It was the only life they knew.
 - iii) For them to leave their home, Jacob wanted them to come out of their own free will and not just order them to go.
 - iv) Jacob explained to them how God was working. Despite the statistical odds being against Jacob getting wealthy, the girls couldn’t deny the fact. Jacob was trying to get the girls to put “two and two together” and figure out God was blessing Jacob. If Jacob could convince them of that fact, it would be much easier for the girls to leave with Jacob as “His God” was commanding Jacob to leave.
 - v) Again, it might be good to stop and re-read these verses with this perspective.
 - a) Go ahead, I’ll wait again. I’m in no hurry. ☺
- 9. Verse 14: Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? ¹⁵ Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us. ¹⁶ Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you."
 - a) It might be helpful at this point to remember what is a “dowry”. When a man wanted to get married in this culture, they would have to pay a fee to the father-in law. This fee is called a “dowry”. The concept is that if the husband ever divorced the wife and she had to go home to her parents, the parents would use the dowry money to provide for her.
 - b) Jacob didn’t come to Laban with any money. Therefore, Jacob offered to work for 14 years in exchange for the two wives. The 14 years wages were supposed to be the dowry.
 - c) What Jacob’s two wives are complaining about is the fact that their father Laban has spent their dowry money instead of saving it for the girls.
 - d) Notice what Rachel and Leah don’t say:
 - i) They don’t say, “Jacob, you are our husband. We are to be obedient to you. We will go with you because you say so.”
 - ii) They don’t say, “Jacob, we choose to be obedient to God. If God says its time for the family to pack up and go, who are we to argue?”
 - iii) They don’t say, “Jacob, you’re such a great husband, we can’t wait to move back with you and meet your father!” ☺
 - iv) Instead, the girls are angry over their father spending their dowry money.
 - e) There is a more “optimistic view” of the two wives one can argue:
 - i) Jacob needed their cooperation in order to travel.
 - ii) Remember the two wives didn’t get along at all. They were jealous of each other and both desired to be alone with Jacob. This is the first time we read of them agreeing upon anything. Their desire to follow Jacob is greater than the desire to stay with their father. The dowry-incentive made them realize that Jacob’s life following God is superior to their father’s money-oriented lifestyle.
 - iii) Their final statement was, “So do whatever God has told you.”
 - iv) They were still obedient to God, although their motivation was questionable.
 - v) Remember that God desires obedience above all other aspects. The “motivation factor” is a problem, but the end results is that the wives obeyed God’s command.
 - f) My opening thought of the day was “The apple does not fall far from the tree”.
 - i) Laban was a money-obsessive type of guy. Reading between the lines, financial success meant more to him than God did or even his family. If Laban cared about

his daughters more than his success, he would have had a savings fund as a dowry for his daughters.

- ii) Now here were his two daughters, who have grown up under Laban.
 - iii) Their motivation for leaving focuses on money. Like their father, they were motivated by financial reasons. They decided it was best to leave with Jacob, as their father didn't provide for them any dowry if they left Jacob.
 - iv) Rereading this paragraph, the women do give some credit to God, but you still see the mixed message of "We will leave partially due to God and partially due to the money issue". Their father's influence had an affect upon their life.
10. Verse 17: Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels,¹⁸ and he drove all his livestock ahead of him, along with all the goods he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.
- a) Verse 22 says that Laban didn't notice Jacob was gone for 3 days. I read that verse and I kept thinking, "How could Laban not notice that his 11 grandchildren and his two daughters were missing for 3 days? Even if Laban was busy, somebody from his household must have noticed.
 - b) This leads back to the principal of "where God leads, God provides". When God calls you to do something, God also works in the background to provide the means. In this case, everyone else in Laban's household "didn't notice" Jacob was gone along with all of the family, servants and possessions.
 - c) It's time to go back to Verse 2 of this chapter. It says, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you."
 - i) Notice what Verse 2 does not say: "Sneak out in the middle of the night and run for your life." It does not say, "Ignore Laban like he never existed and run for it!"
 - ii) We are going to read in the next several verses of Jacob's fear. Jacob trusted in the true God, but he still walked in his own fears.
 - iii) Remember that Jacob is an under-construction-maturity-project by God.
 - iv) God is trying to mature Jacob on an incident-by-incident basis to get him to trust God more and more. This is one of those cases.
11. Verse 19: When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods.
- a) We are going to read of two "sins" in Verse 19 and 20. In Verse 19, Rachel steals her father's household gods and in Verse 20, we will read of Jacob deceiving his father in law by sneaking out in the middle of the night as opposed to saying goodbye.
 - b) Why would Rachel steal her father's "household gods"?
 - i) Those "gods" were not necessarily little statues they bowed down and worshipped. They represented "title deeds" to their possessions. Further, they represented the god(s) that they worshipped.
 - ii) A similar idea might be one who has a little cross, or a Roman Catholic with a little statue of the Virgin Mary and then bowing down and praying before that icon.
 - iii) Laban's god was materialism, prosperity and wealth. Those "gods" are symbolized in little idol statues. When people of those days worshiped the god of prosperity, they needed a symbol for those gods, and therefore, had statues.
 - a) Laban's daughter Rachel "had some of her father in her". She believed in the God of her husband Jacob, but still had some trust in the false god of her father Laban. (Again, think about "leave and cleave").
 - iv) When the bible "first mentions" a word or topic it is often important. This is the first mention of a false-god. Those false idols have existed long before this incident. It is mentioned in context of someone from "God's chosen" stealing that idol. The origin of this god is uncertain. It is believed to be used in divination and is associated with material wealth.

12. Verse 20: Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away.
²¹ So he fled with all he had, and crossing the River, he headed for the hill country of Gilead.
- a) Let's go back to Verse 2. It says, "Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and to your relatives, and I will be with you.""
 - i) Notice what God did not say: "Sneak off in the middle of the night and don't say goodbye to anyone."
 - ii) If God said it was time for Jacob to get moving, you can trust in the fact that God would make it possible. I suspect that if Jacob had told Laban what God had said to him, there would be a nice going away party.
 - iii) Jacob had a combination of faith-in-God and fear-of-circumstances at the same time. Remember that fear is the opposite is faith. Jacob is being obedient to God, but Jacob is allowing his fear of Laban to sneak out as opposed to saying goodbye.
 - iv) Notice Verse 20 mentions the fact that "Jacob deceived Laban"
 - a) This leads back to what I stated earlier how Laban was "blinded" to the fact that Jacob had left. Nobody noticed Jacob and the gang were gone for three days. God wanted Jacob to leave and despite Jacob's deception, God "worked on Jacob's level" to accomplish God's will.
 - b) As we will read this does not excuse Jacob's deception. It just means that God allowed it to happen in order to accomplish God's purposes.
13. Verse 22: On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. ²³ Taking his relatives with him, he pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. ²⁴ Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream at night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad."
- a) Verse 24 gets me. God tells Laban in a dream not to saying anything "good or bad".
 - i) First of all, why would God speak to Laban in the first place? Let's face it God could have "zapped" Laban in his pursuit of Jacob. God could have prevented him from coming after Jacob in the first place.
 - ii) Notice what God does not say. "Laban, you idol-worshipping, conniving, money-obsessed low-life! I want to bless Jacob and so will you when you see him!" ☺
 - b) God does not say, "Go out and bless Jacob". Instead God tells Laban in a dream to go be "neutral" to Jacob leaving. Why would God do this and what is there to learn from this?
 - i) We get a clue in Verse 29 where Laban says, "I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.'"
 - ii) Therefore, part of the reason God spoke to Laban is to prevent Laban from harming Jacob. Laban was angry because he felt Jacob was "stealing" from him via his financial gains (Verse 1) and because his household "gods" which represented Laban's wealth were missing (Verse 19).
 - c) We now understand why God didn't want Laban to say anything bad. But why would God not want Laban to say anything "good" to Jacob as well?
 - i) My first thought is maybe God doesn't want nonbelievers to praise believers, but I can think of examples in the bible where nonbelievers have blessed the children of Israel (e.g., the prophet Balam in the Book of Numbers), so that can't be right.
 - ii) I believe the correct answer is given in Verse 20 where it says, "Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away."
 - iii) It may have been God's will for Jacob to leave, but it was not God's will of Jacob's running out in the middle of the night. God wants us to be a witness to the world, not to run from it in fear.

- iv) Jacob was a man of God, but he was also a man of fear. He deceived his father to get his father's blessing and then fled out of fear for his life. Here, Jacob feared the wrath of his father-in-law and didn't trust in God to provide a peaceful resolution between himself and Laban.
 - v) The application to you and me is that if God commands us to do something, we don't have to fear the results. If God wants to move us from "Point A to Point B", God will provide a way and no deception is needed. God does not want us to deceive people in order to be obedient to his commandments.
 - vi) That is why Laban was commanded not to speak "good" to Jacob. God tells Laban to be neutral as Jacob was still one of God's chosen, but at the same time God cannot tolerate sin, such as deception.
14. Verse 25: Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too. ²⁶ Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done? You've deceived me, and you've carried off my daughters like captives in war. ²⁷ Why did you run off secretly and deceive me? Why didn't you tell me, so I could send you away with joy and singing to the music of tambourines and harps? ²⁸ You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters good-bye. You have done a foolish thing. ²⁹ I have the power to harm you; but last night the God of your father said to me, 'Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.' ³⁰ Now you have gone off because you longed to return to your father's house. But why did you steal my gods?"
- a) You can just sense the insincerity in Laban's speech! Verse 30 gives it away.
 - i) The last verse tells of Laban's true motivation: "But why did you steal my gods?" Laban gives this whole sob story how he didn't get a chance to have a big goodbye party for his daughters. He mixed that with a mention of the fact, "I could have killed you" (Verse 29). He ends with the fact that his gods/idols were missing.
 - b) Let me paraphrase Laban's thoughts... "Ok, I'm ticked off that Jacob left and I'll never see my daughters again. What I'm really mad about is that Jacob took all my wealth and the household gods that I trust in to provide that wealth".
 - i) If Laban really cared about his daughters, why didn't he provide the dowry?
 - ii) If Laban really cared about his grandchildren, how come he didn't notice they were missing for three days when they lived in the same household?
 - iii) But now that his wealth was gone and his "gods", Laban pursues!
 - c) The interesting part to read from Verse 25 to the end of the chapter is just how much Jacob and Laban are alike. They both connive stories to get their own will accomplish. They trust in their own abilities to get what they want and not in God. One of the big-picture ideas to see is just that God put Laban in Jacob's life to make Jacob see his own faults.
 - d) The one word you see repeated over and over again in all the chapters concerning Jacob is the word for "deception". It is mentioned twice in Verse 26.
 - i) Jacob's name itself implies the word "deception". Laban correctly points out how Jacob has deceived him by sneaking out in the middle of the night.
 - ii) Jacob may be obeying God, but his old habits are not going away.
 - iii) Jacob may be accomplishing God's will, but he is still not maturing in a way that God desires. Remember that God could have accomplished a great family for Jacob without any of the deception. God's will is going to get done with us or without us. God is working on Jacob to get him to mature. God is putting people directly in front of Jacob in order for Jacob to see himself better.
 - iv) That is what God often does with us. We often cry, "God, why am I going through this situation? Or "Why are you putting this person in my life". Again it comes back to one of my opening premises about "point a finger at someone else and three fingers are pointing back at you!"

15. Verse 31: Jacob answered Laban, "I was afraid, because I thought you would take your daughters away from me by force. ³² But if you find anyone who has your gods, he shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.
- a) Three of the most tragic words in the English language are "I was afraid".
 - i) Almost all of the sinful actions that occur throughout the bible by believers are in cases where people get their eyes and hearts off of God and unto their circumstances. Often, fear of some outcome and a lack of trust in God is manifested in some of the sinful actions we read about in the bible.
 - ii) We all have fears. Letting those fears dictate our actions prevents things from getting accomplished. Most of life's failures come from fears and our unwillingness to act in defiance of our fears.
 - b) Remember it was God's will for Jacob to go home. It was not necessary for Jacob to be the "conniver" and leave in the middle of the night" if it was God's will for him to go!
 - i) One can say, "Yeah, but at least God spoke audibly to Jacob. How do I know when God is speaking to me? I'm still afraid because I don't have an audible voice telling me to go from Point A to Point B!"
 - ii) First of all, you don't have to strain or "try real hard" to hear God. I don't know where that myth came from. If God wanted to give you an audible message, God is very capable of speaking louder than any background noise!
 - iii) The simple answer is prayer for God's will to be done, daily bible reading (systematically work your way through the whole thing!) and then simply go about your day! If you are living by the principals the bible teaches and you desire to do God's will, God places those desires in your heart. God gives you certain gifts and desires. If you are doing God's will in that aspect, the details tend to "work themselves out".
 - a) Sometimes people do get special signs. They have happened to me as well as many other Christians. I am leery of "signs" especially when they can contradict God's word. I do find that God does give validations in many ways when you are accomplishing His will.
 - c) If this were a movie, I would love to see Rachel's face at this moment.
 - i) Here Jacob makes this vow that Laban is free to kill whoever is responsible. You can just visualize what the guilty-Rachel was thinking at that moment!
 - ii) I suspect Rachel knew enough of Jacob's God to know that stealing the idols was wrong. Here she becomes aware of the punishment for that action.
 - iii) The point of Rachel's deception is simply to show that God's will gets done despite the sinful actions of others.
 - iv) For whatever reason Rachel stole her father's God's, it didn't stop God's will for Jacob and his family to get back to the Promised Land.
16. Verse 33: So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two maidservants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah's tent, he entered Rachel's tent. ³⁴ Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them inside her camel's saddle and was sitting on them. Laban searched through everything in the tent but found nothing. ³⁵ Rachel said to her father, "Don't be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand up in your presence; I'm having my period." So he searched but could not find the household gods.
- a) The more you read this story about Rachel hiding Jacob's "household gods", the stranger it gets. Laban looked for his household gods, didn't find them, and that's it.
 - i) There is no mention whatsoever that Jacob ever discovers Rachel's secret.
 - ii) There is no mention of Rachel getting caught, or getting punished for this deed.

- b) I believe the point of this story is to focus on Jacob's behavior and Laban's behavior.
 - i) For Jacob, the "deceiver was being deceived". Just like Jacob "got away with it" as far as lying to his father and stealing his birthright, so Rachel "got away with it" as far as this crime and scene were concerned.
 - ii) Jacob harshly accused Laban of stealing his "gods" without knowing all the facts. It's hard to blame Jacob for this incident as he didn't know better.
 - iii) I believe the moral lesson from this story within the story is about Laban himself. He tried to deceive Jacob by "changing his wages ten times." And now, not only is Jacob walking away with the bulk of Laban's wealth (assumed), but even his "gods" are taken away.
 - a) This ties to what Jesus said, "Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him." (Mark 4:25, NIV)
 - b) Laban wanted material wealth. Laban turned his back on the true God. Now even what he "had" is taken away.
17. Verse 36: Jacob was angry and took Laban to task. "What is my crime?" he asked Laban. "What sin have I committed that you hunt me down?"³⁷ Now that you have searched through all my goods, what have you found that belongs to your household? Put it here in front of your relatives and mine, and let them judge between the two of us.
- a) From Verse 36-42, we read of Jacob lashing out at Laban.
 - i) Jacob's years of pent-up frustration at his father-in-law comes out in these verses.
 - b) Let's get back to one of my opening proverbs that "when you point the finger at someone else, three fingers are pointing back at you!"
 - i) Here's "Jacob the conniver" lashing out at Laban for false accusations.
 - ii) Jacob didn't know the truth. In fact, we don't read of Jacob nor Laban ever finding out the truth. The point of this section is to show Jacob's behavior toward the action. It was not Jacob's fault that Rachel stole Laban's god-statues. God put Jacob through this situation to help him see how deception "comes home to roost".
18. Verse 38: "I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks.³⁹ I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night.⁴⁰ This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes.⁴¹ It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times.⁴² If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you."
- a) Jacob in his anger (Verse 36) brags about how he has been a good witness:
 - i) He brags about how when one of Laban's sheep was stolen, Jacob took the price out of his own wages. (Verse 39)
 - ii) He brags about working in harsh weather conditions (Verse 40).
 - iii) He brags about the fact he has worked for 20 years for Laban (Verse 41)
 - iv) He brags about the fact that if the God of His father's didn't help him, Jacob would be broke today. (Verse 42) Notice Jacob never says "my God"!
 - b) So what is wrong with this speech?
 - i) Where is, "I loved my wives so much I was happy to serve those years"?
 - ii) Where is, "My God, who loves me so much, provided for me"?
 - iii) The emphasis is on "me, me, me" as opposed to "God, God, God" ☺
 - iv) I give Jacob some credit for the part about God. Jacob, does tell Laban about the aspect of the "true God" and why God spoke to Laban the night before.
 - c) Jacob lived a life of deception and "living by his wits" as opposed to trusting God. God made Jacob "look in a mirror" by making him work for someone just like himself.

19. Verse 43: Laban answered Jacob, "The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne? ⁴⁴ Come now, let's make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us."
- a) Folks, we're witnessing a battle of two big egos' here. Both people are so obsessed with being right that neither one is willing to give an inch.
 - b) Laban responds with saying "All you see is mine".
 - i) Laban forgot about the fact his daughters are now Jacob's wives.
 - ii) Laban forgot about the fact that he agreed to Jacob's terms for wages.
 - c) Jacob and Laban are good reminders about arguments.
 - i) When we get caught up in our own ego's, were too obsessed with being right than to care what the other person has to say.
 - ii) Jacob was hurt by the way Laban treated him. He lashed that "hurt" in the speech.
 - iii) Laban was hurt by the missing gods and the fact Jacob ran away. He lashed out that "hurt" in this speech.
 - iv) Neither of them realize how much they are alike as they are so busy arguing with the other.
 - v) The lesson for us is when we argue with our family, or our spouse, or whoever, is that God wants us to focus on our problems, not fix the other person. Ask yourself, why am I trying to fix that person? Is God big enough where He can handle this situation? Why am I letting that person(s) harm my relationship with God at this very moment?
 - a) Sometimes that anger requires "baby steps" in restoration. Sometimes you have to say, "OK God, for the next 1 minute, I'm not going to worry about that problem. You deal with it". I found that working in increments helps me to get over certain hurtful pains.
 - b) Jesus calls on us to "Pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matthew 5:44b, NKJV).
 - (1) There is a reason for that. If you can pray for those who hurt you, it helps you to 1) have compassion for that person, and see that person as one who needs God as well as you and 2) it brings God into the situation to alleviate that pain and the situation.
 - vi) Meanwhile, Jacob and Laban didn't follow my advice. ☺ Instead, they agree to make a contract with each other essentially, to separate from one another.
20. Verse 45: So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. ⁴⁶ He said to his relatives, "Gather some stones." So they took stones and piled them in a heap, and they ate there by the heap. ⁴⁷ Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸ Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." That is why it was called Galeed. ⁴⁹ It was also called Mizpah, because he said, "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. ⁵⁰ If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me."
- a) The pile of stones is called "Heap of Witness". Jacob used the Hebrew name and Laban used the Aramaic word. It is the same word in different languages.
 - i) Jacob also calls it "Galeed", which means watchtower.
 - b) This pile of rocks is set up as a border between the two groups.
 - c) In summary, this contract is saying in effect, "This pile of rocks is now a boundary between you and me. If you cross that pile, we'll kill you. If we cross that pile, you have the right to kill us!"
 - d) The funny thing is that some couples use Verse 49 out of context. There are love bracelets with the expression, "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other." While that is wonderful as-is, it is out of context of the text.

- e) I'm going to finish this section of the story and then stop and tie it all together.
21. Verse 51: Laban also said to Jacob, "Here is this heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me. ⁵² This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me. ⁵³ May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us."
- a) Jacob's solution to his 20-year struggle with Laban is "Let's agree to disagree". To paraphrase Jacob, "Look Laban, we can't stand each other (because we're too much alike!) so let's separate ourselves and draw a line and agree not to cross each other's borders.
 - b) At this point in Jacob's life, Jacob believes in the God of His Fathers, but Jacob still has a long way to go in his relationship with God. There is still the lack of "my God" in his speech. Jacob still trusts in his ingenuity and his honor (remember how he bragged about not stealing Laban's sheep (Verse 39) nor did he steal Laban's gods. Jacob lacked a healthy trust in God to get through the situation.
 - c) The main point of the story is God wanted Jacob and his family to get moving. Jacob, lacking the faith to completely trust God's commands, still relied on his wits, his deceptive personality and frankly, a big ego through this whole chapter.
22. Verse 53 (cont.) So Jacob took an oath in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac. ⁵⁴ He offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there. ⁵⁵ Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.
- a) Now that Jacob and Laban, "agreed to disagree", we read of a peaceful meal between the groups and Laban kissing his daughters and grandchildren goodbye.
 - b) This is the last we read of Laban. In the next chapter, God is going to work on maturing Jacob by getting Jacob to trust God more. In that sense, God no longer needs Laban as a "mirror" for Jacob to look at.
 - c) Laban himself is a tragedy in history. He sees God blessing Jacob for 20 years yet still refuses to acknowledge the God-of-Jacob. People can become so set in their ways and habits that even if the physical evidence was obvious, people refuse to change.
 - i) One has to wonder if Jacob's actions prevented Laban from being a better person. I suspect Laban saw Jacob as a conniver like himself, and possibly thought, "Why should I follow Jacob's God? Deep down, he's no different from me!"
 - a) First of all, don't forget that salvation begins with God and not us. There is both the "predestiny" aspect on God's part as well as the "freewill" aspect on our part. Laban doesn't have any excuse on judgement day as he saw God work through Jacob's life and further, God spoke to him directly.
 - b) My point is simply about being a good witness, and Jacob's tendency to trust in his own "wits" as opposed to God made Jacob a bad witness.
 - d) I wanted to talk about the "pile of rock solution" between Jacob and Laban.
 - i) While this solution does solve the problem of stress, it doesn't solve the problem of the relationship. Sometimes separation does work for awhile, especially to "cool things off" between two parties. Unfortunately, separation does not make hurt feelings go away.
 - ii) The separation idea is simply a "step in the right direction". Jacob still had to learn to trust God to get him through situations, and not get through life trusting in his ingenuity and "wits". That is what the next chapter deals with.
 - e) In a sense, "God's will got done" as Jacob and his family did leave in tact.
 - i) The tragic lessons of this section of Genesis is how God has to work "the hard way" to mature Jacob's (and our) lives. God puts people like Jacob into his own life to help him see his own faults. Instead of realizing his own sinful nature, Jacob is too busy yelling at Laban for his own faults!

23. I'll sum up some personal applications in our closing prayer: Heavenly Father, we know that you desire to mature us into a better relationship with you. Believing in you is an important first step. You desire to prepare us for an eternal relationship with you. In order to prepare us for that relationship, you desire that we learn to trust you with every aspect of our lives. As we go through difficult times, painful moments and stressful situations, help us to understand the lessons you want us to learn. Help us to see our parts and ourselves in these situations and not focus on the pain others have caused us. Help us moment by moment to turn over that pain and fear to you so that we can have a better relationship with you. Further, we pray for those who have hurt us. Those people are your problem, and not ours. Give us discernment in our decisions in dealing with them, and most importantly, help us to live as your witnesses as we walk through our life, all to your Glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.