

July 28- Genesis 31-33 Jacob reconciles with Esau

Chapter 31

Even though Jacob's genetic engineering had caused him to prosper (in spite of Laban trying to limit his wages), Laban's family started to talk about Jacob as if he had conned the family out of all their sheep and goats. Jacob found himself at a crossroads in his life and once again heard the word of the Lord calling him to return to the country of his own family in Canaan, and God promised to be with him. Next, Jacob called both Rachel and Leah together for a private conversation about the family's future. While Leah and Rachel had consistently struggled against one another in bearing children, now the sisters are a united front wrestling against their own father and brothers who had so swindled their husband. As Jacob and his wives and children were counted among the household of Laban, their family leaving the larger family would have absolutely been met with conflict. Jacob was even afraid that the family would try to kill him and steal his wives and children from him to prevent them all from leaving (and thus making Laban poorer). The family together decides to leave in stealth while Laban is not around. Rachel secretly steals the household idols, which were statues which promised power, prosperity, and the legal claim to the family property. When Laban discovered Jacob and his family had left, they pursued them with many kinsfolk. When they caught up to them, Laban made it seem like he was the victim in all of this, not being allowed to say goodbye to his children and grandchildren, that of course he would have sent them off with a party, but judging Laban's character up to this point this seems unlikely. Laban then accuses them of stealing the household idols (which Rachel did without Jacob's knowing). Jacob is sure that no one would have done such a thing and promises death for anyone who did steal the idols. Laban doesn't find them anywhere because Rachel sits on them and says she can't get up because she's menstruating. Ironically, Jacob's pronouncement of judgment on the thief comes true as Rachel dies prematurely in childbirth when she bears her final son. Jacob and Laban make a covenant together once both get their grievances out in the air: Jacob promises never to take other wives and to always care for the wives he has from Laban's household, and Laban promises to pursue Jacob no further. They celebrated the covenant all night, and bid a proper farewell in the morning.

Chapter 32

Once again, Jacob sees God's messengers before him and follows those signs to make camp. Jacob sends a message of humility to Esau saying that he has returned, and repeatedly naming him "my lord" as a way of showing that he doesn't expect Esau to serve him (as their father's blessing had indicated). Jacob's message suggests that he has stayed away so long and amassed so much property as a way of finding favor with his brother, whom he knows he did wrong by. Word comes to him that Esau is hastily coming toward them with 400 men. The last words we heard from Esau were that he promised to kill Jacob. This is most ominous. Jacob is terrified that Esau is coming not

only to kill him, but to wipe out his wives and children and steal all his property. Even though God had been so faithful and made so many promises to Jacob, Jacob still fears the worst about meeting his brother. He immediately begins plotting, breaking up his animals, wives, and children into multiple groups to preserve some of them if Esau is coming to try to wipe them all out. Jacob spends so much energy on planning to prevent catastrophe, it never crosses his mind that Esau may be coming with good intentions. Jacob begs God to save them all, and during that prayer he gets an idea to appease Esau. He sends a wealth of animals as successive gifts to his brother to butter his brother up before he himself arrives. Overnight Jacob wrestles with God and has his name changed. Israel not only describes Jacob's life, but also the life of the nation he will found as well "wrestling with their relationship with God, and with their neighbors, and yet limping away with a blessing."

Chapter 33

Even though Jacob had seen God face to face in a wrestling match, he was still afraid. He sent his maids and their children, Leah and her children, and Rachel and her children to meet his brother, and he went ahead of all of them to face him with humility, but instead of coming for vengeance, Esau embraced his brother with love, they reconciled and wept. Jacob attributes all of his blessings to the goodness of God and he offers all of the gifts to Esau as a way of restoring the blessing which he stole from under Esau's nose. Jacob insists that Esau take his gift as a means of reconciliation, and Esau wants the whole company to come and stay with him, but Jacob is still a bit wary and makes an excuse to put distance between them "just in case." Instead, Jacob travelled slowly and camped outside the city of Shechem in Canaan, buying the plot of land on which his tent was located, so that he himself owned a piece of the land God had promised him.