



Genesis 31 - Answers

:1-3

1. What do you see in these verses which is encouraging for Jacob?

Jacob might have been discouraged when he heard the sons of Laban complaining about Jacob - and speaking untruthfully about him. He also might have been discouraged when he realized that Laban didn't like him that much any more, even though Jacob had worked hard for Laban.

What is encouraging in this deteriorating family situation for Jacob? The Lord spoke to him and told him where to go and what to do. If we have direction from the Lord everything falls into place. God was interested in Jacob - watching his life closely - and God had a plan for Jacob's life. I can't think of anything more encouraging.

Sometimes it's so easy to see the next move God would have you make...and then sometimes He seems to be silent. I prefer the times when I know God is showing me what to do next. I am learning to wait through the other times.

For Jacob, after 20 years of working for Laban and growing his not-so-little family, the time has come. God is speaking.

:4-13

2. Why did Jacob's "husbandry" work so well? Would that same technique work today?

Jacob had learned a lot about husbandry in his 20 years of serving Laban. He had become a very accomplished breeder of flocks. But in verse 9 Jacob makes it clear that he knows it is God who has blessed him. He doesn't give praise to his own abilities.

Any technique that the Lord wants to bless will be blessed. In all areas of our lives we must not be so much about knowledge and technique as we are about thankfulness to the Lord God for blessing us with unmerited gifts of love and protection.

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:14-16

3. Are Jacob's wives OK with Jacob's plan? Why?

Yes, they are. It looks like they are just as disillusioned with their father and his treatment of them as Jacob is. Also, they seem to have felt that the wealth which Jacob had accumulated while in Haran was their right. They felt like they deserved to inherit some money from their father anyway, so why not just take all the blessings God had bestowed on them and leave?

4. :17-21

- Why is Jacob sneaking away? Why has Rachel stolen her father's household idols?

Jacob sneaks away because he has learned not to trust Laban any farther than he can throw him. ☺ And Rachel...why is Rachel stealing household idols from her father? Maybe she sees them as a part of the wealth she feels she deserves and is also sneaking away because she doesn't trust her father. Or maybe she puts some belief in them. Either way, sneaking away and stealing before you leave are good indications that this 20-year relationship has eroded down to nothing.

:22-24

5. Is God protecting Jacob as he flees? Why?

Yes, again we see God's protection for Jacob - seemingly whether he deserves it or not.

:26 - 32

6. Why is Laban so angry with Jacob? What reason does Jacob give for running away secretly?

Laban accuses Jacob of running away before Laban even had a chance to say goodbye to his daughters and grandchildren. Laban would have treated Jacob violently for this running away, but the Lord Himself had come to Laban in a dream and warned him not to retaliate back at Jacob.

Jacob tries to justify his actions by telling Laban he feared the father would not let his daughters and grandchildren leave.

:33-35

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7. What would have happened to Rachel if she had been caught with her father's household idols?

If she had been caught she possibly could have been killed. Would her father have done that? I don't know. But Jacob, when he made that rash statement, surely had no idea that his beloved Rachel was the idol thief.

:36-42

8. What had caused this relationship to go so bad?

Deceit. Dishonesty. Keeping secrets. Unspoken anger. Jealousy. All the things that make relationships go bad today.

But - all those unspoken hurts and feelings and distrusts are getting voiced right now - Jacob is "telling it like it is" in these verses. Is it too little too late? Can Laban react to the truth and change? Can Jacob change?

Is there always a happy ending in relationships gone bad? No. Just because an honest conversation begins to take place doesn't mean the people involved are going to do the right thing.

:43-50

9. What is going to save this relationship? Is verse :49 a statement of love?

No, this isn't a sweet restoral of friendship. It's a boundary. It's these men's way of saying - "Here's the line...don't step over it." In verse :49 I think they are actually calling on the Lord to keep them apart. Safe from each other.

10. :51-55

What else is going to save this relationship?

Together these friends/enemies build an altar to the One, True God. They worship there together, and then leave the altar there as they go their separate ways. They are establishing a boundary - this land is mine, that land is yours - and also admitting to God and each other that living together will never work again for them.

Maybe this is not the happy ending sitcoms are made of - but to me it actually seems like a happy ending anyway. It looks like these two men have made a decision

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before God about how to protect themselves from each other and yet still stay in the will of God.

11. What can we learn from this chapter about relationships?

Sometimes friendships blossom and grow and give great pleasure. But sometimes friendships just can't happen. Sometimes circumstances or personalities or other things just stand in the way. In that case, I think it's OK to be kind, draw some boundaries, and get on with life. You have a responsibility to be loving and kind to other, but you don't have to be friends with everyone.

If you want to study a little more about your relationships, here are some verses which may help you look at your relationships with the eyes of God:

- Matthew 5:21&22
- Matthew 5:38-42
- Matthew 5:43-44
- Matthew 6:14&15
- Matthew 7:1-5
- John 13:13&14
- John 13:34&35
- Romans 13:7
- Romans 14:13
- Ephesians 5:19-21
- Philippians 2:3&4

Next week we'll see how Jacob finally learns what he must do to be the person God wants him to be.