



Frisco First

JACOB: THE STRUGGLE FOR IDENTITY, ACCEPTANCE, AND BELONGING. •

JACOB AND LABAN • GENESIS 29:15–31:55 • 3/13/2022

MAIN POINT

Keeping your head up when work has you down. (Gen 30-31) Succeeding in a difficult work environment. Jacob is taken advantage of by Laban—yet God blesses him anyway.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What is your favorite memory of a time with your father? What is your favorite memory of a time with your father-in-law?

If you are married, how would you describe your father-in-law?

Father/child relationships can be wonderful and painful. Family relationships in general can lead to the greatest joys and the most frustrating fights. This study we will look at friction with in-laws. For married couples, managing relationships with parents and in-laws can be a tricky deal. Jacob in Genesis 29–31 had a strained relationship with his father-in-law and learned the meaning of injustice.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 29:15-28.

From what you know of the story of Genesis, how would you describe Jacob in one word?

What did Jacob do when he was tricked and treated unjustly? How do you think you would respond in a similar situation?

What might have been Jacob's opinion of his father-in-law?

Jacob was not above plots and schemes to trick people. Esau knew this well. In chapter 29, Jacob became the victim of a trick masterminded by his father-in-law. Jacob married the wrong daughter and was forced to work seven years more in order to marry Rachel. Jacob's relationship with his father-in-law certainly got off on the wrong foot and set the tone for the future.

| HAVE A FEW VOLUNTEERS READ GENESIS 30:25–31:13.

What was Jacob's end goal with the sticks and flocks?

Jacob was splitting the flocks with Laban as payment for his work. Jacob used sticks at the watering stations to get the flocks to birth strong spotted, speckled, and striped children. Jacob kept the strong ones and, as apart of the deal, gave the unspotted animals to Laban. When Laban figured it out, he was not pleased and chased Jacob down.

How were Jacob and Laban similar? How were they different?

In what ways did Laban treat Jacob unjustly? Why did Jacob respond by breeding the flocks as he did? How do you think their actions affected the relationship between Laban and his daughters? Between Jacob and his wives?

Laban was not only a poor father-in-law tricking Jacob on his wedding day. He was an unjust boss as well. Laban changed Jacob's wages and Jacob, under the instruction of the angel of the Lord, bred the animals as he did. God was working in Jacob's life even amid unjust circumstances.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 31:51-55.

What led Jacob and Laban to make a peace deal?

Where did the two men put their faith? What false gods do families place their faith in today?

For the sake of their families Laban and Jacob made peace. They kept their pact based on their faith and trust in their gods. Jacob trusted in the Lord, the God of his forefathers, while Laban trusted in idols and the gods of his household. It was through faith in a just God that Jacob escaped the injustice of his family. Much like Jacob, Jesus came to the world, which was His family, and was treated unjustly.

What were some ways that Jesus was treated unjustly in his life?

Read 1 Peter 2:23. What did Jesus do when he was treated unjustly?

Jesus was reviled by men, He was treated unjustly by his family. Jesus was nearly stoned in His hometown and was crucified at the cry of the Jews. Jesus trusted in God who is just, not in men. When justice comes upon us we must trust in Christ who brought peace to us through His blood.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What should we do when we are treated unjustly like Jacob and Jesus?

In what area of your family life do you most need to place your trust in God? What does it look like to trust in a God who judges justly?

What are some ways that people can be treated unjustly in the church? How can our group guard against gossip and slander?

Who in your life needs to trust in God who judges justly?

PRAYER

Lead your group in prayer, asking God to provide strength and hope for those who are suffering injustice. Pray that your group would place their trust in God and respond to conflict in their families with justice and peace.

COMMENTARY

| GENESIS 29:15–31:55

29:15-20. Laban called Jacob my own flesh and blood and gave him the right to stay in the home permanently. Jacob was neither a son nor a slave, so it was appropriate to work out a suitable arrangement that compensated Laban for his provisions and Jacob for his labor. It was not appropriate for Jacob to work for nothing, so it was agreed that Jacob would work for seven years for the right to marry Rachel.

This arrangement is reminiscent of a provision in the law of Moses that permitted certain slaves to work seven years for their freedom (Ex 21:2). Men did not buy wives in the strict sense of the word; however, they did customarily pay a bride-price (Gen 34:12; Ex 22:17; 1Sam 18:25) to their future wife's family to compensate them for the care and protection provided to the woman prior to her marriage.

29:21-23. Jacob, now almost 50 years old (25:24-26; 26:34-35; 27:46) after working for Laban seven years, informed Laban that it was time for him to sleep with Rachel. Arranging a weeklong wedding feast, Laban proceeded to cheat the family member who had cheated other people in the past (27:12-25,36). Instead of the expected younger daughter Rachel, Laban gave Leah to Jacob. In the darkness of the evening and with his bride concealed behind a veil (24:65), Jacob did not realize what had been done to him. Accordingly, he slept with Leah.

30:24-36. Jacob, now with a dozen children and four wives but very little else, demanded release from his responsibilities in Laban's household so he could return to his homeland, where he would be the head of a wealthy clan. Though Jacob was poor, Laban's wealth had increased because the Lord had blessed him through Jacob, just as the Lord had promised (28:14). Laban, who had learned by the forbidden practice of divination (Lv 19:26) that God had blessed him because of Jacob, realized the great advantages of keeping Jacob around, so he offered to pay Jacob whatever wages his son-in-law would name.

Jacob asked for two things: the right to continue to shepherd Laban's flock, and all of Laban's sheep and goats that had rare and unusual markings. Laban readily agreed to the terms and virtually assured Jacob's financial failure by removing from the flocks every animal that possessed the traits Jacob had specified. To guarantee that Jacob could not use them, he drove them a three-day journey—40 to 50 miles—away and put his own sons in charge of them.

30:37-43. Jacob began a six-year effort (31:41) to increase his wealth at Laban's expense. During that time he used at least three different techniques to make the flocks produce sheep and goats he could keep: (1) he separated the strong animals from the weak, using only the strong ones for his breeding purposes; (2) he set peeled branches... in the water channels where the sheep bred; and (3) he made the flocks face the streaked and completely dark sheep in Laban's flocks. Though the latter two practices have no scientific value, God Himself (31:7-8,42) and the Angel of the Lord (31:11-12) caused Jacob to become very rich.

31:1-3. Jacob's overwhelming success created deep resentment in Laban's sons; their father's loss meant less inheritance for them. It also changed Laban's attitude to the point where Jacob no longer felt welcome. As the situation deteriorated, the Lord gave Jacob a command and a promise: he was to return to his clan and to the land promised to his grandfather (12:7), armed with the assurance that the Lord would be with him.

31:4-16. Jacob presented Rachel and Leah with three reasons for making a major move away from the only home they had ever known to a land they had never even seen: (1) their father Laban had an unfavorable attitude toward Jacob; (2) Laban was unethical in business, having cheated Jacob and changed his wages 10 times—almost every time a new generation of sheep

and goats was born (there would have been about 14 breeding cycles for sheep in six years); and (3) most important of all, the God who had taken their father's herds and given them to Jacob had now ordered him to return to his native... land. Rachel and Leah were agreeable to the idea, since their father had treated them like "foreigners" (outsiders).

31:44-55. To end the dispute, Laban proposed that he and Jacob make a covenant that would bring peace and a separation between the Israelite (Jacob's) and the Aramean (Laban's) branches of the Terah clan. In classic ancient Near Eastern treaty tradition, the covenant-making event consisted of building a sacred stone and a mound (Jegar-sahadutha, or Galeed ["Mound of Witness"]), the calling of witnesses (the covenant itself, the marker, and the mound), a preliminary ceremonial meal, expression of the covenant terms, invocation of deities that would oversee the covenant (the God of Abraham, and the gods of Nahor), and a concluding ceremonial meal.