

## Genesis Chapter 31 Summary - John Karmelich

One of the things that fascinates me is that God blesses and justifies us (saved despite all our sins). The other day I pondered that Jesus (God!) allowed John the Baptist to be killed, despite referring to him as the greatest (most favored) of all people prior to the church. Despite that title, Jesus didn't do anything to stop his murder! About the same time Jesus feed "The 5,000" so they could have sustenance while he taught the crowd! Here in Genesis, we see God bless Jacob and his family despite the tough ways they were treated and despite the sins we read Jacob and even his favorite wife Rachel commit. What I love about this chapter is it shows He blesses us despite our faults and sins! It isn't a guarantee of a long life as John the Baptist shows. At the same time, God desires we do His will! The main thing He wanted is for Jacob to raise the 12 boys that become the 12 tribes of Israel. That way God can lead them in & out of Egypt with a 400-plus year time frame in between! Since that's His will and he wanted them to trust Him, it shows God's still blessing their lives despite their sins. It's easy to say, "We're not Jacob". Still, we are called to use our lives to make a difference for Jesus. How long we live is His business. What is His desire is we use our lives for His glory.

Let me try to describe this long chapter in a paragraph first. The main character Jacob was literally the father of the 12 tribes of Israel (through 4 women) worked in Iraq (to make it simple!) During that time 11 of the 12 boys were born (probably daughters as well). He worked there 20 years, and now he wants to go home to see his parents. The oldest is probably 12 at this point in the story. A reason he's leaving is that his uncle, who he works for, sees how Jacob is doing well while "Uncle Laban" isn't. Given that, Jacob packs up the family and sneaks out of town as fast as possible. When Laban learned it, he left to chase after them. Laban's not a believer, yet God appears to him in a dream to say in effect, don't harm Jacob. He also received a dream in effect saying the God who Jacob encountered before he left for Iraq is one in the same! All that led to the two men encounter each other in the middle of nowhere. I'm sure Laban traveled with others to announce, "Everything you have belongs to me". Laban realized the God of Jacob (who he didn't believe in) told him to not harm Jacob. Then Jacob chews Laban out for the 20 years of service with no gratitude! They have a big goodbye scene where a pile of rocks is set up with both saying in effect, neither of us can cross this pile of rocks. Each goes on their way, and it ends their meeting, their relationship, and the chapter!

This leads to my favorite question, "why should I care"? Why is this whole story in the bible and what does God want me to learn from it? These chapters and the surrounding ones show us how God had to work in Jacob's life to mold him from someone who only trusted in his wits and dealt for 20 years with a man who was as underhanded and conniving as Jacob was. He was a man who the scripture indicated ran for his life at least three times. The first was when his brother tried to kill him, the second time here when most likely his uncle (and father-in-law) wanted him dead and coming up later when he faced his brother again! My point is we not only read of him sinning and paying the price for it, but also read of his family having sin issues of their own. My point is God considered all those people saved in spite of the sins they commit, there's hope for the rest of us! So as you read this story, don't be thinking too bad for Jacob and his family. Once we commit our lives to serving Him, no matter how badly we mess up, it's the realization that God never abandons us although He will allow us to go through trials to help us draw closer to Him by the lessons we learn. With that said, time for the chapter details:

The last chapter told us how 11 of Jacob's 12 sons were born (#12 comes in Chapter 35). Jacob married four women and thus the family. The last part of Chapter 30 told us how Jacob got his sheep to breed! I suspect that ties to a dream Jacob had early in this chapter. Despite his sins, God is still blessing Jacob

financially and with a big family. That jealousy shows up at the start of Chapter 31, as it states Laban's sons grumbled how Jacob is getting rich while Laban and his sons were getting poor. Recall that Jacob agreed to work for Laban (both his father-in-law as well as his own uncle) for 20 years. Now the time's up and God told Jacob time to return to where he grew up! To leave Jacob needed to gather the family. The 11 boys and at least one daughter ranged in age probably from 1 to 12! It had to be a challenge for them to travel hundreds of miles back to Israel with that group not to mention all the animals.

In this chapter we'll see a lot of grumbling. Jacob told his wives about how Laban changed his wages a total of ten times and what kind of sheep Jacob could keep. Jacob told the girls about the dream where God told him to go home. The wives (Laban's daughters and their servants) realized their father did not leave them a dowry, so the girls figured might as well travel with our husband as our father squandered our inheritance! By Verse 17 we're reading of the gang getting on camels for the long trip to Israel!

At leaving time, Laban was away shearing his sheep (how shepherds get paid). We then read of one of Jacob's wives (and Laban's daughters) stealing one of Laban's household gods: Symbols of what they'd worship. It shows that Jacob's influence wasn't as strong as father' on their lives that way! After they'd started their journey, Laban noticed everyone was gone and eventually caught up with them. Laban did have a "posse" with him and I'm sure he was seriously considering killing Jacob as most of his wealth's now "left the farm". The good news is God appeared in a dream to Laban (idol worshipper) to say he's not to harm Jacob.

Let's just say when they met it was time for "Grumble session #2". (#1 was about the wages changed a total of 10 times!) Laban accused Jacob of stealing one of his god statues! Jacob "laid into him" that he didn't do it and made another speech about how he didn't steal anything of Laban's now or ever! Laban searched for them and didn't find them. One of the wives, Rachel, stole them and lied to her father how she can't get off her camel as she's on her period. That way her father didn't check her camel bag! That also means Rachel got away with a lie (notice the pattern in that family)! Jacob and Laban agreed they would never cross a pile of stones they set up. It is the last time Laban saw his children and grandkids, as Jacob never returned!

OK John we get the idea we're dealing with a family that's big on deception and lacking trust in God or how to properly live. People instinctively know lying and stealing were wrong, yet these people did it a lot and it seemed like they got away with it. (Remember Jacob lied to his father's face about him being his older brother Esau). Laban tricked Jacob into marrying the older daughter first. Both daughters had to go along with this to make it work! We read of Jacob running for his life away from Laban. To top all of this off, we see Jacob's favorite wife steal his father's idol statues. I don't know if Rachel thought they were good luck charms or just did it to spite her father! In short, this is one messed up family!

My takeaway from this chapter is despite our sins as saved Christians, God is still willing to work with us to draw us closer to Him! I can hear many of you thinking of people who have walked away from a relationship with God and why hasn't God worked to draw them back? I can't explain all things. I just know He desires a close intimate relationship with us and no matter how much we mess up, we always can turn back to Him. God is looking for imperfect people to use to make a difference for Him. If God can use Jacob and his family, there is hope for the rest of us!

On the same page as this study is a more detailed study I wrote many years back. You are welcome to email me if you want or join my list to the get the latest lesson. Thanks for reading. John