



BAND of BROTHERS

SPRING SERIES 2023 – WEEK 3

### Genesis 31:1-33:20: Wrestling with God

*“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is useless for you to fight against my will?”*

– Acts 26:14 NLT

- **Before we get to the main event**

- A couple of preliminary bouts
  - Jacob versus Laban
  - Jacob versus Rachel
  - Jacob versus Esau
- It's time to go! – Genesis 30:25-30
  - Jacob finally decides to head home
  - More than 14 years have passed
  - The birth of Joseph was the impetus
    - Jacob had waited years for this moment
    - His favorite wife had finally given birth
    - Now it was time to go home

***“One day I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you **until I have finished giving you everything I have promised you.**”*** – Genesis 28:15 NLT

- Jacob had 4 wives and 11 sons
  - But little else
  - His labor had paid for his two wives
- **The flim-flam man gets fleeced** – Genesis 30:31-36
  - Jacob makes Laban an offer he can't refuse
  - But it borders on the bizarre
  - “Give me all your ‘damaged goods’”
    - The “speckled, spotted, and black” ones
    - They were considered anomalies

- Their wool was less valuable
- They made lousy breeding stock
- Jacob chose the **unwanted** and **undesirable**

*“Give these to me as my wages. In the future, when you check on the animals you have given me as my wages, you’ll see that I have been honest. If you find in my flock any goats without speckles or spots, or any sheep that are not black, **you will know that I have stolen them from you.**” – Genesis 30:32-33 NLT*

*But that very day Laban went out and removed the male goats that were streaked and spotted, all the female goats that were speckled and spotted or had white patches, and all the black sheep. He placed them in the care of his own sons, who took them a three-days’ journey from where Jacob was. – Genesis 30:35-36 NLT*

- **Jacob’s strange plan** – Genesis 30:37-43

- He peeled strips of bark from tree branches
- He placed the “striped” branches in the water troughs
- When the animals mated, their lambs would be “speckled” and “spotted”
- He separated those animals from the flock
- The next season, he re-introduced the spotted sheep into Laban’s flock
- The white sheep mated with them and produced more spotted and speckled sheep

*This is how he built his own flock instead of increasing Laban’s.... As a result, Jacob became very wealthy, with large flocks of sheep and goats, female and male servants, and many camels and donkeys. – Genesis 30:40, 43 NLT*

- **The wondrous ways of God**

- None of this was Jacob’s idea
  - It’s not witchcraft or black magic
  - Jacob hasn’t bought into shepherd folklore
  - He is simply following God’s orders

*“How does Jacob manage to succeed? Do one-colored animals produce bicolored young simply by looking at a bicolor object in their mating time? ...it is not Jacob’s rods that produce the right kind of offspring for Jacob. Jacob testifies that it was God, not magic, that brought about the desired results.” – Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis**

- God knew it was God’s doing – Genesis 31:1-13

*But God did not permit him to harm me. If he said, ‘The spotted shall be your wages,’ then all the flock bore spotted; and if he said, ‘The striped shall be your wages,’ then all the flock bore striped. **Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me.** – Genesis 31:8-10 ESV*

- Dream #2
  - For more than 14 years, God had been fulfilling His earlier promises

*“Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth.” – Genesis 29:14 ESV*

- Jacob was now the father of 13 children
- Thanks to God, Jacob was fruitful
- But thanks to Laban, Jacob was destitute
- After 14 years, he had no flocks or land
- But God’s 6-year breeding plan changed all that
- He would leave Haran a prosperous man

*So Jacob arose and set his sons and his wives on camels. He drove away all his livestock, all his property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. – Genesis 31:17-18 ESV*

- **Jacob goes to the mat with Laban – 31:31-56**

- Laban is furious
  - Jacob has absconded with his ill-gotten gains
  - He’s taken Laban’s daughters and grandkids
  - And Laban’s household god is missing
  - So, Laban pursued Jacob for 7 days
  - But Laban got a message from God in a dream

*But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.” – Genesis 31:24 ESV*

*...the previous night God had appeared to Laban the Aramean in a dream and told him, “I’m warning you—leave Jacob alone!” (NLT)*

- Laban can’t resist
  - He accuses Jacob of deceit and theft
  - He makes a search for his missing god
  - But he comes up empty handed
  - Because Rachel was sitting on it
- A family battle
  - Rachel was fighting against her own husband
  - She only made matters worse for him
- An uncomfortable covenant and departure – Genesis 31:44-55
  - Jacob finally leaves his father-in-law/uncle behind
  - He continues his journey to Canaan

- **The long-awaited rematch – Genesis 32**

- 20 years after leaving home, Jacob returns
  - Fearing his Esau’s anger, he tries to bribe him

- He sends messengers with an offer of riches
- But they return with news that Esau is coming
- Jacob prepares for the worst, then prays

*And Jacob said, "O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD who said to me, 'Return to your country and to your kindred, that I may do you good,' I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love and all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant, for with only my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. Please deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau, for I fear him, that he may come and attack me, the mothers with the children. But you said, 'I will surely do you good, and make your offspring as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'" – Genesis 32:9-12 ESV*

- **An unexpected battle** – Genesis 32:22-32

- Jacob asks God to deliver him from Esau
  - But Esau would be the least of his worries
  - He was going to have to answer to God

*"If God will indeed be with me and protect me on this journey, and if he will provide me with food and clothing, and if I return safely to my father's home, **then** the Lord will certainly be my God." – Genesis 28:20-21 NLT*

- God was going to hold Jacob to his vow
- And Jacob would learn that God was faithful

- Jacob wrestles with God

*And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. – Genesis 32:24 ESV*

- Opposed to God
  - Jacob had spent his entire life fighting God
  - He had tried to replace God's will with his own
  - But the battle was about to end
- Blessed by God
  - Jacob gets a new name: Israel ("Let God rule")
  - He also gets a permanent limp
  - A constant reminder of his "victory"
  - Jacob had not defeated God
  - He had demanded a blessing and received it
  - He had not forced God's hand
  - The blessing had been his all along

- **A fight to the finish**
  - It was really Jacob who ended up submitting
  - He had learned that Yahweh is in control
  - You can fight Him, but you'll never defeat Him
  - He had learned an invaluable lesson

*"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"*

***It is useless for you to fight against my will.*** – Acts 26:14 NLT

- **Discussion questions**

Why do you think we fight against God's will?

In what ways did Jacob's actions in these chapters reveal his ongoing battle with God?

What would it look like for you to "let God rule" in your life? What are you still holding on to?





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SPRING SERIES 2023 – WEEK 4 HOMEWORK

#### **WEEK 4 – Genesis 34:1-35:29: A Need for a New Identity**

This lesson will cover God’s decision to rename Jacob, and his new identity will come at just the right time as these chapters reveal his mishandling of his own daughter’s rape by the son of a pagan dignitary. His failure to defend his daughter’s honor leads her brothers to take matters into their own hands, which leads to the slaughter of an entire village of men. While Jacob doesn’t display the characteristics of a godly leader, God graciously and providentially provides him with a new name that is meant to signify his blessed future. And God reiterates the covenant commitment He had made to Abraham and Isaac, promising to turn Jacob’s descendants into a mighty nation and to provide them with the land of Canaan as their inheritance.

- Read this week’s passage. Write down anything that grabs your attention or anything you feel God is trying to teach you through the stories in these two chapters.
- Now read pages 87-102 of Ken’s Devotionalary™ on Genesis Part II.
- We didn’t have time in last week’s lesson to cover chapter 33. Go back and look at it again. What was Jacob expecting to happen when he met his brother again?

What actually happened and how does this reflect God’s sovereign will?

When Esau had been cheated by Jacob out of his blessing, he had assumed that he had lost everything. But how does this passage dispel that idea?

- Chapter 34 fast-forwards the narrative to a devastating event in Jacob's family. According to verses 1-5, what happened and how did Jacob respond to it?

What does Shechem's actions and later conversation with his father reveal about his character?

The conversation that Hamor and his son had with Jacob and his sons is uncomfortable and creepy at best. How would you have expected Jacob to respond to Hamor's request?

According to verses 13-17, what did Jacob's sons decide on as a solution to the problem?

How does Moses' description of their answer in verse 13 reveal that they were a lot like their father?

- Read the rest of the chapter and summarize what happened.

Read 2 Samuel 13, then write down any similarities you find between these two accounts?

- With Genesis 35, Moses puts the story of Dinah in the past and moves forward with a more positive narrative. But do you see in the first four verses that raises a red flag and shows that all is not well in Jacob's household?

Why do you think the cities around Jacob's family feared them (verse 5)?

What is significant about Luz (revisit Genesis 28:18-22)?

What does God tell Jacob in verses 9-15 and why is it important?

Verses 16-29 cover the birth of Benjamin and the deaths of Rachel and Isaac. Why do you think Moses included these three events at this point?