

Bi121 Old Testament

Lesson Bi121-13 Jacob Goes Home (Genesis 31-33)

Have you ever been really, really afraid? If you have, then you understand how Jacob felt in today's story. The last lesson ended with Jacob fleeing from the house of Laban to return to his home in Canaan. What he did not know was how Laban would respond, what he might do. All he knew was that the Lord had told him to leave Laban and return to the promised land of Canaan.

Three days later Laban learned that Jacob, his wives, and all their children were gone. He gathered up all of men of his household and set off find Jacob. It would take him seven days to catch up with Jacob. The night before they meet, God appeared to Laban and commanded him, "Watch out! Do not do anything to Jacob, either good or bad." The next day, Laban caught up with Jacob and scolded him.

"Why did you deceive me? You left like a thief in the night, and took my daughters and grandchildren like they were your prisoners. If you had just told me you were leaving, I would have held you a splendid party. Now you are disgracing me, and I could destroy you right here. But last night, the God of your fathers told me not to harm you. I can understand being homesick and wanting to go home. But why did you steal my family idols?"

In those times the person usually holding the family idols was the oldest son. With the idols he was guaranteed to receive a double portion of the inheritance. Rachel decided that she and Jacob deserved them. So she took them, not to worship them, but to guarantee this position for Jacob and hid them in her camel's saddle bags. She felt he deserved it after being so mistreated by Laban.

But Jacob did not know that Rachel has taken them. He said to Laban, "I did not steal your idols. Look for yourself. Go ahead and search our tents. If you find them, I will kill the person responsible." Poor Jacob. Even his beloved Rachel was deceiving him.

Laban searched the tents belonging to Jacob, Leah, and the two maidservants. When he entered Rachel's tent she was sitting on her camel seat, where she had hidden the idols. "Father, please forgive me for not standing, my time of uncleanness is upon me." She said as Laban looked throughout her tent

but did not find his idols.

At this point, Jacob became very angry. “You have chased me here like I am a criminal. You have searched everything I own. Have you found anything that belongs to you? No, you have not found anything! I have endured the extreme heat of the day and the frost at night. I worked so you could prosper. I endured hardships, and yet you still mistreated me. Then you made me bear the loss if anything went wrong. I had to pay you if a wild animal killed a lamb; for suddenly it was my lamb. God is now protecting me from you!”

“Everything you see belongs to me. Those are my daughters, grandsons, and flocks. But what can I do? Let us make an agreement that everyone here will be a witness to.” Laban grumbled. So the men gathered some stones and piled them into a heap. Jacob and Laban agreed that neither of them would ever go beyond the boundary. Laban added, “These rocks are witnesses between us that you will never mistreat my daughters or take other wives.” Jacob then made a sacrifice to God and everyone sat down to a meal. The next morning, Laban kissed and blessed his daughters and grandchildren, and returned home.

As Jacob and his family travel on the angels of God met him. He realized he was not alone, so he called the place “Two Camps.” He realized God was there to help him, as He had promised. From there he sent messengers to his brother Esau saying, “I am coming home with all my possessions, and I hope you will accept me.”

The messengers came back and reported, “Esau is coming with 400 men.”

Jacob’s heart was struck with fear. It seemed like he was about to reap the reward of his deception. So Jacob divided his household into two groups, saying, “If Esau attacks one camp, the other can escape.”

Finally in desperation he decided to pray; “Oh, God of Abraham and Isaac, You told me to come back to my country. You said I would prosper here. I am not worthy of the kindness you have shown me. I left this land with only my walking stick. Now I am two camps. Please remember your promises and rescue me from my brother. You said my descendants would be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.”

He then prepared gifts for his brother, which include herds of cattle, sheep, donkeys, and camels, more than 500 animals. He divided them into three groups

and sent them ahead of him. He told his servants, “When Esau comes to the first group, say to him, ‘Jacob your servant is sending these to you’.” He tells the second and third groups to say the same thing.

That night Jacob sent his family and all his possessions across the stream. He was left alone, trying to sleep. Out of nowhere a man grabbed him. Jacob fought back, and the two of them wrestled all night. At daybreak the stranger saw that Jacob was determined not to lose this fight. The prophet Hosea wrote that Jacob “struggled with the angel and overcame him...the Lord is his name” (Hosea 12:4). So the man he has wrestled with all night is Almighty God appearing in human form. He strikes Jacob’s side and dislocates his hip, then He says, “Let me go; it is daybreak.”

“I will not let you go unless you bless me.” Jacob answered.

“What is your name?”

“My name is Jacob,” he replied.

“Your name will no longer be Jacob, but ‘Israel,’ because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome.” When scripture says a person’s name was changed, this indicates a change in their character or their relationship with God.

“Please tell me your name.” Jacob insisted.

The angel said, “Why do you ask my name?” He then blessed Jacob and left.

Jacob called the place Peniel, “God’s Face.” He said, “I have seen God face to face, and yet my life was spared.”

The next day when Esau met Jacob he ran up to him and gave him a big hug. Both men cried and Esau asked, “Who are these people with you?” After Esau was introduced to Jacob’s family, he said, “Why did you send all those animals before you when you arrived?”

“I hoped to win your forgiveness,” replied Jacob.

So Esau accepted the gifts and he and his men went home. Jacob settled near a city called Shechem where he built an altar and called it, “Powerful is the

God of Israel.” This demonstrated his faith in a God who could change even a deceiver like himself. He became a new man with a new name. He testified that the God of Abraham and Isaac was also his God and that he knew this by personal experience in his own life.

This story is important because it shows that whatever our circumstances may be, if we commit ourselves to God and His ways, He will guide us and provide for us.

The main truth of this story is that God will be faithful to His promises even when His people go through struggles. God rewards the faith of His children.

To review this lesson, answer these questions.

1. Why did Jacob leave the house of Laban?
 - A. [Pause for 6seconds.] If you said, "The Lord had told him to leave, to return to the land God had promised," you are correct.
2. What did Laban accuse Jacob of stealing from his house?
 - A. [Pause for 6 seconds.] If you said, "his family idols" you are correct.
3. What did Jacob realize after fighting with the angel all night?
 - A. [Pause for 6 seconds.] If you said, "He said, 'I have seen God's face and lived'," you are correct.
4. What great truth did Jacob learn about God, recorded in the name he gave to the altar he built?
 - A. [Pause for 6 seconds.] If you said, "Powerful is the God of Israel," you are correct.

Your assignment for this lesson is to listen to the story at least three times. As you hear the story each time, imagine how it happened; see the events in your mind. Then tell the story in your own words as you remember it. Then listen to the story again and retell it until you feel sure you are repeating the circumstances and actions correctly. You should spend at least 45 minutes in learning the story. You may need to have someone check that you are telling the story correctly.

Tell this story of Jacob to someone who has already heard the previous story of Jacob's life (Gen 27-30). After the story ask this question, "By naming the altar, 'Powerful is the God of Israel,' what was the public testimony or truth Jacob was proclaiming in Shechem?" He testified that the God of Abraham and Isaac was also his God and that he knew this by personal experience in his own life.

