

READ

Genesis 31

REFLECT

Laban tried to scam Jacob out of what he was owed for working so many years for Laban, and that plan backfired – nearly all the animals that were born were of the pattern owed to Jacob, and it left Laban’s flocks severely depleted. Laban’s sons weren’t happy, feeling as though their father, and thus them, were getting ripped off. Jacob felt as though God had cared for him in a dream, announcing his plan of leaving Jacob with Laban’s flock’s offspring. Because of that spat, Rachal and Leah didn’t feel as though they’d receive anything from their father when they left, so Rachel stole their family’s household idols – a strange thing to steal since she had seemed to accept Jacob’s religious tradition. Jacob and his family left in the middle of the night, not exactly the way to leave by someone on the up and up, and when Laban discovered their disappearance he was furious. A chase ensued over the course of the next week, when God appeared to Laban in a dream warning him not to even speak poorly of Jacob when they met – God really was protecting Jacob as promised.

When Laban finally caught up with Jacob, you might expect some fireworks stemming from his anger, but there were none – Laban listened to God’s instructions. He did, however, question Jacob’s motives, complaining that he didn’t even get to say goodbye to his daughters, and then questioned him about the stolen idols. Jacob, apparently, was afraid Laban would take back his daughters, and considering Laban’s character, that doesn’t seem like a particularly crazy thought. Jacob refused to admit that he stole the idols, however, and promised to put whoever stole them to the death. When Laban searched for them, he didn’t find them, because Rachel sat on them and claimed she was on her period – a time when women did no work because menstrual fluids were seen as very unclean. Because he didn’t find them, Jacob believed the story to be a trick for Laban to have an excuse to take back what was rightfully owed to him. So settle their differences, they made a treaty and marked the spot with a sacred pillar, giving it three names,

including “Mizpah,” a reminder that God was watching them. Laban got to say goodbye to his daughters, and he and Jacob went their separate ways.

REACT

- Family drama, especially over inheritance, can be brutal. Have you ever feuded with loved ones over family heirlooms? What was the result? Or, has it been resolved? If it has, what did it take? If not, is there a way you could see it resolved in a mutually agreeable way?
- Rachel stole her family’s house idols and then lied about it to both her husband and father. Have there been times you’ve kept such secrets from your family, even lying to them about whatever you’re hiding? How has that made you feel? If that secret has come out – what was worse, it coming out or trying to keep the secret from getting out?
- Jacob and Laban established a treaty with one another by making a covenant and erecting a stone pillar. Though they made their peace, it seems as though neither was really happy, it was as though they drew a line in the sand and promised not to cross without fixing the problems at the center. But sometimes it’s easier just to promise not to interact because your differences are too severe. It’s never easy to end relationships, especially with family, but there are times it’s necessary. Can you imagine needing to make such a decision?

RESPOND

Learning Acceptance: *Genesis 31 plays out like a TV soap opera, though thankfully cooler heads eventually prevailed, ending what could have been a very nasty fight. We all need the ability to calm our own storms, let we face our own nasty fights. Reinhold Niebuhr’s well known serenity prayer is a great tool to help us keep our minds calm. Practice praying it this week:*

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference, living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; taking this world as it is and not as I would have it; trusting that you will make all things right if I surrender to your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with you forever in the next. Amen.