

**Text:** Genesis 31:1-55

**Title:** Jacob Leaves Laban

**Truth:** God protected and guided Jacob, just as He said He would.

**Date/Location:** Sunday May 14, 2023 at FBC

## Introduction

In my study, I began to approach the text of Genesis 31 with a sense of anticipation. There must be something here of profit—for teaching, correction, for instruction, for training in righteousness so that we can know God better and live better for Him. I wonder what God wants us to know about Jacob and Laban, His dealings with mankind, or how God’s people should conduct themselves. We might find good exemplars here, or bad ones. We might find some new teaching that we did not realize before. We could learn that some view we hold is wrong, or that we have a sin in our lives that we did not realize before. We could see God’s grace in a new light, or at least be reminded of the grace of God that we already grasped. We could see some pointer to Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. We might see how the Spirit of God works in the life of a person. Who knows...

In chapter 28, Jacob fled for his life from Esau, and took very little with him. Now, 20 years later, he is fleeing again, this time from Laban, but with a very large family and much livestock.

### I. Jacob Leaves Laban, v. 1-21

A. Finally after 20 years, it was time for Jacob to leave the “Laban chapter” behind. Laban’s sons were upset at him because Jacob “took away” all that was their father’s. They seemed to look at his prosperity as if it came from thievery. They despised their cousin. I wonder why *they* were not as involved in helping their father. Laban had formerly been pleased to have Jacob with him, because “The Lord has blessed me for your sake” (30:27). It is quite possible that both Laban *and* Jacob’s flocks increased in those earlier years, but perhaps not as much as the sons would have liked in later years. Now, however, Laban’s countenance was not favorable to Jacob like it was earlier. Something had happened.

The political view that wealth is always accumulated by stealing it from others is obviously false. If I have 100 seeds and plant them, and in the fall I have 100 plants each bearing 500 seeds, I have had a 500-fold increase. I did not steal it from anyone. Rather, God gave the increase. The idea of *increase* is just that—God has made the world to be fruitful and multiply. The same can be said of other things besides agriculture—labor and capital among them—because those things can produce more useful things from simpler ingredients, and they can enhance productivity so that less produces more. These things come from God who has an infinite supply. Whatever He gives does not diminish Him in any way. Of course, it may diminish the total quantity of some resource, or that resource may be renewing itself through natural processes. He made a resource-rich earth on which we dwell. Many resources lie buried that we have not yet obtained through industrious effort.

Jacob had served Laban with great strength. Yet Laban had deceived him and changed his wages. Despite all his machinations, Laban was not able to take advantage of Jacob and gain the wealth that he wanted. Evidently, Jacob was gaining wealth faster than his uncle, and in fact the wealth had transferred in a sense because whatever wages Laban specified, God saw to it that there were more of those types of animals than the other type. Jacob was able to testify that God protected him. This was in accordance with the prayer-vow that Jacob had made earlier (28:20-21) and that God had promised at that time.

- B. God told Jacob to leave now that he had fallen out of favor with Laban and his sons. Leaving is sometimes the best way to keep the peace. Part of the situation was the vow that Jacob made to God, which consisted of a promise that if God remained with him and kept him and provided for him, and allowed him to return home again, Jacob would follow God (28:20-21). God did not forget that. He certainly kept His promise to Jacob.

It is interesting from a literary standpoint that Moses summarizes the situation in verses 1-3, and then reiterates with more detail in verse 4-13.

- C. So, Jacob fled without letting Laban know that was the plan. His wives saw no future where they were and agreed with the plan. The inheritance that would have become theirs later had become theirs *now* through their husband.
- D. The logistics of leaving quietly certainly would have presented some difficulties, but they pulled it off. Unfortunately, Rachel stole the household idols that belonged to her father. She exhibited sin not only of theft, but also of idolatry. For some reason, she could not cut the attachment to the pagan gods. Jacob did not know that she had done this, because she hid it.
- E. **Application:** Suppose Mr. Husband that you are the spiritual leader in your home. You see to the family coming to church, your wife professes faith in Christ, the kids are obedient, etc. Now, what would happen if you disappeared suddenly? Would the family still follow that pattern? Would your wife maintain the sound doctrine which she has been taught, or would more true colors come out?

The same applies in reverse, if you are a wife who is a great encourager to your family to be in the Bible and the like. What happens if you were to go to heaven suddenly? Would your children and husband be as sanctified as before? Or would their true colors come out?

The situation with Rachel shows that Jacob's spiritual leadership probably was lacking. Perhaps he was too busy with everything else that he did not invest in his wives' spiritual lives. Now, of course, good leadership does not guarantee good spiritual outcomes. But hopefully it will make some outcomes unlikely or untenable in the mind of the other person. Become a thief? Desire to hurt others by taking from them. Walk away from the faith? Convert to an entirely different religion? Turn to idols? Go back to your old ways, once you have tasted the good word of God?

We need to invest in our families so that if we disappear or are not around or aware of what they are doing, they do not fall off the wagon.

## II. Laban Goes After Jacob, v. 22-55

- A. Jacob and company made it as far as modern-day northwestern Jordan. It took seven days for Laban to catch up to Him.
- B. But on the way, God had told Laban by means of a dream not to speak to Jacob either good or bad. Clearly, he was not to harm Jacob, even though in chapter 29 he expressed the mindset of harm. God was not requiring Laban to praise him either. (Jacob was fleeing conflict; Laban was looking for it. Not good.)
- C. Laban criticizes Jacob for leaving without the proper formalities and makes an attempt to excuse him to some extent in that he understood Jacob wanted to go back to his father's house.
- D. But there was one thing that was bothersome to Laban—the stolen household idols. Any “god” which can be stolen is not a worthwhile “god” to worship. Their presence shoots down my hopefulness that Laban and the family line from Padan Aram was still somehow more connected to the true God than to regional idols. That whole thing is a bit of a mystery to me. How Isaac expected Jacob to find a good wife there I do not know. He found one who steals household idols and lies about them (see below). This is not a woman of great character.

Beauty cannot overcome problems in character. Beauty is passing, dear friends, but character remains. If you think you are “settling” for a spouse who is less than a perfect 10 in looks, but he or she has good Christian character, recognize that you got the way better end of that deal. Character outshines looks any day, and *that* is what you need to look for in a spouse.

- E. Jacob offered Laban to search for the idols and offers to punish the person who has them with death. Rachel cleverly conceals the idols so that Laban cannot find them, despite carefully searching.
- F. Jacob wrongly became angry—but understandably so because he did not know where the idols were. This gives Jacob an opportunity to rebuke Laban about his hard work on behalf of Laban, his taking it on the chin when there was loss, and all the wage changes. This allowed him to testify of the protection that God offered him. God

capped all that off with a night-time rebuke of Laban the previous evening to restrain further sin against his servant Jacob.

- G. Laban made a lame attempt to say that all Jacob's stuff belonged to him. He was implacable. He refused to be satisfied at what God had given him and demanded recompense. He was fine to deceive and manipulate others, but not to be treated in like manner. I am not suggesting Jacob used deceptive means, for God was with Him. But if Laban *thought* he used subterfuge, why would Laban excuse it in himself but not others?!
- H. They made an agreement (covenant) in which Laban expressed his concern that Jacob should treat his daughters well. Hopefully, Jacob already had a well-established and good track record on that point. I hope he treated them better than Laban did—like marrying the older one off in a deceptive plot. They memorialized their covenant by building a heap of stones as a landmark, boundary, and reminder. They ate a meal there to seal the deal. The boundary function of the stone pile was to protect each from harming the other one. They buried the hatchet, so to speak, not agreeing *per se*, but agreeing to peace instead of war.

Notice how Laban invoked God: “The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor (his grandfather), and the God of their father (Terah, his great grandfather).” Perhaps there was something to Abraham and Isaac seeking wives for their sons from that family! But just because a grandfather and father walks with God does not mean his sons will do so.

Jacob made an oath to confirm the covenant as well—to God the “Fear of his father Isaac.” Making an oath should not be necessary, and in fact the Lord forbids Christians to do so. A simple word of affirmation is all that is needed from a Christian person.

I want my sons to think of their God as the “Fear of my father” and the “fear of my grandfather.” We respect and fear God and want them to do the same because it is the *only* reasonable thing to do, and it is life itself to know God.

Is this one of the ways that you think of God?

I. Laban said his goodbyes, and Jacob parted from him on his way back to his home country.

## **Conclusion**

In your life, do carefully seek God's guidance by means of prayer and the Bible before you make any big moves, whether relocation or financial changes or relationships, etc. You will not get guidance like Jacob and Laban did via dreams, but you will receive wisdom as needed. But you must seek it (Prov. 2:4-5).

Trust in God's protection.

Always be honest in your dealings. Then you do not have to worry about what criticisms will come at you years down the line.

Do not be like Laban, highly possessive and unable to see other people prosper. We must constantly rebel against materialism in our hearts.

Watch out for your family members: train them in godliness so that they will not fall into idolatry when you are not watching.

Finally, count on God's faithfulness, and develop a character that is faithful like His.

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