

(51) "See this pile of stones," Laban continued, "and see this monument I have set between us. (52) They stand between us as witnesses of our vows. I will never pass this pile of stones to harm you, and you must never pass these stones or this monument to harm me. (53) I call on the God of our ancestors—the God of your grandfather Abraham and the God of my grandfather Nahor—to serve as a judge between us." So Jacob took an oath before the fearsome God of his father, Isaac, to respect the boundary line.

- Since neither man trusted the other, the **stones** became a boundary that would not be passed for any harmful purpose.
- **Laban** then invoked **God's** name again, being very specific to identify who **God** is.

(54) Then Jacob offered a sacrifice to God there on the mountain and invited everyone to a covenant feast. After they had eaten, they spent the night on the mountain. (55) Laban got up early the next morning, and he kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.

- **Jacob** agreed to the covenant and ratified it with a meal for both parties.
- Both family groups stayed in the same vicinity that **night** and next day **Laban** said his goodbyes and **left** for **home**.

GENESIS CHAPTER 31

31 Gen NLT-C

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Genesis Previously		
Mankind Created	Nations Formed	Abram Covenanted
Abram at War, is Honored, Land Boundaries Specified		
Sarai substituted, then Rejected Hagar; the Lord supported Her Expanded Names given to Sarai and Abram.		
Abraham was Visited and Warned about Sodom Sodom Was Destroyed, but Lot and Daughters Were Saved.		
King Abimelech takes and quickly returns Sarah		
Isaac is born, then Hagar and Ishmael are dismissed		
The near-sacrifice of Isaac and the death of Sarah.		
Isaac Marries Rebecca		
Isaac prays for a son and received two. God blessed Isaac.		
Jacob acquired both the family birthright and family blessing.		
Then Jacob left Canaan to Marry. He saw a stairway to heaven.		
Jacob Married Leah, then Rachel. He acquired property.		

History is repeating itself. Jacob had a life that paralleled Abraham in some ways. He was a man without a country, a wanderer. Now he will move to the land of Canaan, much like his grandfather.

Just like elsewhere in Scripture, the Lord will use imperfect people to accomplish His perfect will. The dispute in this chapter is based on wealth with family love as a secondary matter.

Just as Lot cut ties permanently with Abraham, and went on to form a new and separate family line that would result in the nations of Moab and Ammon, here we find that Jacob will finally cut family ties with the land of Mesopotamia and his in-laws.

LABAN'S SONS COMPLAIN OF JACOB'S GROWING WEALTH

(31:1) But Jacob soon learned that Laban's sons were grumbling about him. "Jacob has robbed our father of everything!" they said. "He has gained all his wealth at our father's expense." (2) And Jacob began to notice a change in Laban's attitude toward him.

- **Laban's sons** grumbled about **Jacob's** new-found wealth. They saw their inheritance diminishing. Dad had been selfish and greedy and the **sons** are the same way. The apple does not fall far from the tree. When they saw **Jacob** became rich, Laban's sons viewed **Jacob's** wealth as essentially stolen, despite the fact that:
 - a) **Laban** asked **Jacob** to name a price for his many years of service and
 - b) that service resulted in great prosperity for **Laban**.
- There was social strain when the greater family got together. Verse 2.
- **Dennis Prager** remarks: "The subject of envy comes up often in Genesis because Genesis is about the human condition, and envy is all too human—as is exaggeration and arguing dishonestly: Laban's sons said, "Jacob has taken all that was our father's. . . ." (emphasis added). When people do not have facts on their side, they often resort to inaccuracy and outright distortion. As a well-known lawyer's adage puts it: "If you have the law on your side, argue the law; if you have the facts, argue the facts; if you have neither, pound the table." Prager, Dennis. *The Rational Bible: Genesis* (pp. 388-389). Regnery Faith. Kindle Edition.

THE LORD ORDERED JACOB BACK TO CANAAN

(3) Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your father and grandfather and to your relatives there, and I will be with you."

- The **LORD** communicated to **Jacob** that it was time to go back to the **land of his fathers** and he could go safely.

- While **Laban** claimed all of **Jacob's** family and possessions, God had warned him and he was listening. Instead of treating **Jacob** as a son-in-law, he considered **Jacob** to be like an indentured servant and the servant's family belonged to the master, not the husband and father. However, **Laban's** only option was to make an **agreement**.

(45) So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a monument. **(46)** Then he told his family members, "Gather some stones." So they gathered stones and piled them in a heap. Then Jacob and Laban sat down beside the pile of stones to eat a covenant meal. **(47)** To commemorate the event, Laban called the place Jegar-sahadutha (which means "witness pile" in Aramaic), and Jacob called it Galeed (which means "witness pile" in Hebrew). **(48)** Then Laban declared, "This pile of stones will stand as a witness to remind us of the covenant we have made today." This explains why it was called Galeed—"Witness Pile." **(49)** But it was also called Mizpah (which means "watchtower"), for Laban said, "May the LORD keep watch between us to make sure that we keep this covenant when we are out of each other's sight. **(50)** If you mistreat my daughters or if you marry other wives, God will see it even if no one else does. He is a witness to this covenant between us.

- The two parties had a ceremonial meal by the **stones**. **Laban** named the monument *Witness Heap* in Aramaic. **Jacob** called it **Galeed**, a Hebrew word meaning the same thing. This detail shows that the record here was written by an eye-witness. An additional name was used: **Mizpah**, meaning *watchtower*.
- **Laban** also spoke the now-famous **Mizpah** benediction, invoking the **Lord's** name. He was a worshiper of the God of Heaven even though he had household idols.
- **Laban** wanted it to be clear that **Jacob** would not mistreat his **daughters**. This may have applied especially to Leah. The **agreement** also prohibited **Jacob** from marrying any more **wives**.

taken in broad daylight or in the dark of night. (40) "I worked for you through the scorching heat of the day and through cold and sleepless nights. (41) Yes, for twenty years I slaved in your house! I worked for fourteen years earning your two daughters, and then six more years for your flock. And you changed my wages ten times! (42) In fact, if the God of my father had not been on my side—the God of Abraham and the fearsome God of Isaac—you would have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen your abuse and my hard work. That is why He appeared to you last night and rebuked you!"

- Jacob continues the attack with a list of how he has been wronged over a 20-year period.
 - I have guarded your animals and not **eaten** any rams.
 - When your animals were killed, **I took the loss**.
 - You demanded that I insure your flocks.
 - I experienced **hot days** and **cold, sleepless nights**.
 - Jacob worked **fourteen years** for his wives and **six years** for his **flocks**.
 - Laban kept **changing** the wage contract.
 - It has been the Lord who kept him from being **sent away empty-handed**.
- God has appeared to you (Laban) and **rebuked you**.
- **Prager** says, "This is the real reason Jacob left without saying goodbye: he knew that Laban would have tried to prevent not only Jacob's family from leaving but his livestock as well. God's "judgment last night" refers to God's revelation to Laban to do Jacob no harm." Prager, Dennis. *The Rational Bible: Genesis* (p. 400). Regnery Faith. Kindle Edition.

LABAN PROPOSES AN AGREEMENT

(43) Then Laban replied to Jacob, "These women are my daughters, these children are my grandchildren, and these flocks are my flocks—in fact, everything you see is mine. But what can I do now about my daughters and their children? (44) So come, let's make a covenant, you and I, and it will be a witness to our commitment."

Jacob's life was not in danger from his brother Esau if he returned. Jacob's first hurdle was to convince his wives. Vs. 4:

(4) So Jacob called Rachel and Leah out to the field where he was watching his flock.

- Notice that **Rachel**, the second wife, is named first. He needed to have a private discussion with Laban's daughters. The other wives worked for these two. The opinion of his wives was to be very important to **Jacob**. **Jacob** then describes his ill treatment at the hands of Laban: Also see how God had been at work: Verses 5, 7, 9, 11, 12
- **Bradford** observes: "Jacob consults with his wives. They are MORE than ready to leave. In fact, here they reveal their hurt and anger with their father, Laban, for (in their eyes) he had shown them the greatest disrespect by virtually selling them to Jacob, instead of following the usual betrothal customs. I'd also like to point out something else here: there can be no doubt that Hebrew society was male-dominated. However, Hebrew society greatly revered women, and any notion that the Bible promotes the idea that women were then, or are now, of less value than men is just uninformed. Notice here that the Holy Scriptures show that the first thing Jacob did after God told him it was time to leave, was to consult with his wives. And, it's obvious by the way they responded that Jacob greatly considered their feelings and thoughts on the matter."

(5) He said to them, "I have noticed that your father's attitude toward me has changed. But the God of my father has been with me. (6) You know how hard I have worked for your father, (7) but he has cheated me, changing my wages ten times. But God has not allowed him to do me any harm. (8) For if he said, 'The speckled animals will be your wages,' the whole flock began to produce speckled young. And when he changed his mind and said, 'The striped

animals will be your wages,' then the whole flock produced striped young. (9) In this way, God has taken your father's animals and given them to me.

- **Prager** writes: “By this, Jacob did not mean what Laban’s sons meant when they grumbled about Jacob getting wealthy by “taking away” what had belonged to their father. Jacob began his own flock with only a very few animals — the spotted and speckled specimens that Laban hadn’t been able to hide from him. But thereafter, far greater numbers of the flock than would ordinarily be expected to give birth to speckled and spotted young, greatly increasing Jacob’s livestock.” Prager, Dennis. *The Rational Bible: Genesis* (p. 390). Regnery Faith. Kindle Edition.

Burton Coffman sees more: “Here is supplementary information to that given in Genesis 30, and it appears that the parti-colored cattle were due to a providential act of God, and not in any way connected with the peeled rods (except, possibly, by their being some kind of test of Jacob's faith). The key thing in his enrichment was the fore-knowledge afforded by the divine dream that lay behind his choice of wages.”

JACOB TELLS HIS DREAM

(10) "One time during the mating season, I had a dream and saw that the male goats mating with the females were streaked, speckled, and spotted. (11) Then in my dream, the angel of God said to me, 'Jacob!' And I replied, 'Yes, here I am.' (12) "The angel said, 'Look up, and you will see that only the streaked, speckled, and spotted males are mating with the females of your flock. For I have seen how Laban has treated you.

- The experiences of the previous chapters are rehearsed for Leah and Rachel so they could see the whole picture. Notice that the **angel of God** in verse 11 is clearly *God himself* in verse 13:

that I cannot rise in front of you. For the way of women is upon me.” So he looked, but could not find the gods.

- **Rachel** now lies her way out of being found. These are the people the Lord will use to build the nation of promise! The grace of God!
- **Prager** observers: “Why didn’t Laban believe Jacob’s categorical denial that neither he nor anyone with him had stolen the idols? Because Laban regularly deceived people. People who lie assume everyone else does, too. People who cheat in business, for example, assume everyone else cheats; it’s part of how they justify what they do: “If I don’t, everyone else will take advantage of me.” This is the built-in punishment of the dishonest: they go through life convinced they are constantly being deceived. Or, as George Bernard Shaw put it: “The liar’s punishment is not in the least that he is not believed, but that he cannot believe anyone else.”” Prager, Dennis. *The Rational Bible: Genesis* (p. 398). Regnery Faith. Kindle Edition.

JACOB ARGUES WITH LABAN

(36) Then Jacob became very angry, and he challenged Laban. "What's my crime?" he demanded. "What have I done wrong to make you chase after me as though I were a criminal? (37) You have rummaged through everything I own. Now show me what you found that belongs to you! Set it out here in front of us, before our relatives, for all to see. Let them judge between us!

- Now **Jacob** verbally attacks **Laban**. What have you found? Nothing!!

(36) "For twenty years I have been with you, caring for your flocks. In all that time your sheep and goats never miscarried. In all those years I never used a single ram of yours for food. (39) If any were attacked and killed by wild animals, I never showed you the carcass and asked you to reduce the count of your flock. No, I took the loss myself! You made me pay for every stolen animal, whether it was

- **Jacob** had to listen to charges that he had deceived **Laban** by **slipping away secretly**, that he had kidnapped **Laban's daughters** and grandchildren.
- **Laban** was denied a party to send them away, but that party was probably total fiction when we review the way he was treating his **daughters**. He repeats the warning that he had received directly from the Lord.
- Lastly, **Laban** asks about the **stolen** idols. These may have been his first concern.

LABAN SEARCHES FOR HIS IDOLS

(31) "I rushed away because I was afraid," Jacob answered. "I thought you would take your daughters from me by force. (32) But as for your gods, see if you can find them, and let the person who has taken them die! And if you find anything else that belongs to you, identify it before all these relatives of ours, and I will give it back!" But Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the household idols.

- **Jacob** expressed his **fear** his wives would be kidnapped. He denies having the idols, even pronouncing the death penalty on the thief. **Rachel** must have been frightened when she heard the penalty for being caught was death (verse 32).
- **Rachel** had deceived **Jacob**. Deception is a reoccurring theme here.



(33) So Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two women who served Rachel and Leah. But he did not find his gods. Then he went from Leah's tent into Rachel's tent. (34) Now Rachel had taken the gods of Laban's house and put them in the seat that was used on the camel's back. And she sat upon them. Laban looked through the whole tent, but did not find them. (35) She said to her father, "My lord, do not be angry

(13) I am the God who appeared to you at Bethel, the place where you anointed the pillar of stone and made your vow to Me. Now get ready and leave this country and return to the land of your birth."

- **God** identified himself and cited something from Jacob's memory to prove who he was. Jacob is taking his family and returning to his native **land**. The sisters would be leaving their family and native **land** forever.

RACHEL AND LEAH ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THEIR ESTATE

(14) Rachel and Leah responded, "That's fine with us! We won't inherit any of our father's wealth anyway. (15) He has reduced our rights to those of foreign women. And after he sold us, he wasted the money you paid him for us. (16) All the wealth God has given you from our father legally belongs to us and our children. So go ahead and do whatever God has told you."

- The sisters already had complaints about how they had been treated by their brothers (verse 14). Plus their dad was treating them like **foreigners**. He had used up their bride price already instead of sharing with them. The sisters recognized the hand of **God** in taking wealth from Laban and giving it to Jacob and his family (verse 16). The sisters did not have trouble with the quick departure.

(17) So Jacob put his wives and children on camels, (18) and he drove all his livestock in front of him. He packed all the belongings he had acquired in Paddan-aram and set out for the land of Canaan, where his father, Isaac, lived. (19) At the time they left, Laban was some distance away, shearing his sheep. Rachel stole her father's household idols and took them with her. (20) Jacob outwitted Laban the Aramean, for they set out secretly and never told Laban they were leaving.

- **Jacob** deceived **Laban** by his quick departure. Verse 20. Deception is still prominent in their family dealings.

- **Tom Bradford** (Jewish) comments:

“Jacob plans their escape and executes it. He puts his family on camels, separates his property from Laban’s, and in an opportune moment while Laban is off shearing some sheep, they leave; but not before Rachel steals her father’s set of household gods to take with her on their journey. Why would she do that? The verses just before this answer that question: in vs.14, the two sisters said to Jacob “do we still have any portion or inheritance in our father’s house?” This was a rhetorical question . . . in other words, they knew full well that their father had no intention of caring for them. Even more, this is an indication that they are breaking allegiance with their father; for in verse 16, they say all that Jacob’s God took from Laban now belongs to “us and our children.””

“In Mesopotamia, it was the tradition that he who possessed the family gods was the owner of the family wealth and authority. By Rachel stealing these gods, it was her intent to assure a family inheritance for herself after her father died. Apparently, she planned on keeping them until Laban went to the grave, and then appearing before her family with what amounted to the will, the keys to the safety deposit box, and the right to be executor of the estate . . . all rolled into one. This was a MOST serious matter that went WAY above petty theft. But, even more, Laban and his family . . .and likely Rachel as well . . . believed these idols were real. That they actually represented real gods. And, those who adhered to this system prayed to these idols for rain, for healing, for children, for protection, and so on. Without his gods, Laban was in a fix.”

(Burton Coffman agrees with the view presented in this paragraph)

LABAN PURSUES JACOB'S FAMILY

(21) So Jacob took all his possessions with him and crossed the Euphrates River, heading for the hill country of Gilead. (22) Three days later, Laban was told that Jacob had fled. (23) So he gathered a group of his relatives and set out in hot pursuit. He caught up with Jacob seven days later in the hill country of Gilead.

- Laban pursued and overtook the slower moving household in seven days.

(24) But the previous night God had appeared to Laban the Aramean in a dream and told him, "I'm warning you—leave Jacob alone!" (25) Laban caught up with Jacob as he was camped in the hill country of Gilead, and he set up his camp not far from Jacob's.

- The Lord intervened directly by warning Laban not to deter Jacob. This was an important step in accomplishing the Lord's purposes. But even the dream did not keep Laban from a verbal attack on Jacob:

(25) Laban caught up with Jacob as he was camped in the hill country of Gilead, and he set up his camp not far from Jacob's. (26) "What do you mean by deceiving me like this?" Laban demanded. "How dare you drag my daughters away like prisoners of war? (27) Why did you slip away secretly? Why did you deceive me? And why didn't you say you wanted to leave? I would have given you a farewell feast, with singing and music, accompanied by tambourines and harps. (28) Why didn't you let me kiss my daughters and grandchildren and tell them good-bye? You have acted very foolishly! (29) I could destroy you, but the God of your father appeared to me last night and warned me, 'Leave Jacob alone!' (30) I can understand your feeling that you must go, and your intense longing for your father's home. But why have you stolen my gods?"