

GENESIS 31: JACOB DEPARTS FROM LABAN

I. INTRO

- A. Most of us have had an employer treat us very poorly
 - i. This chapter will show us what happens when Jacob's employer treats him poorly
 - ii. We will see how he responds and how he leads his family
 - iii. We can learn from both his good and bad responses

II. OVERVIEW

- A. Jacob recognized it was time to leave Laban's house
- B. He called Rachel and Leah to him to let them know
 - i. He told them of the times Laban has changed his wages
 - ii. He told them of the dream he received from God
 - iii. Rachel and Leah tell Jacob that Laban has squandered their money
- C. Jacob gathered his flocks while Laban was away and fled
 - i. Rachel stole Laban's idols
- D. Laban pursued Jacob
 - i. But God appeared to him in a dream and warned him about doing anything to Jacob
- E. Laban caught up with Jacob after seven days
 - i. He and Jacob argued for a while
 - ii. But they made a covenant of peace
 - a. Neither would encroach on the other's land
 - iii. Laban departed and went home

III. TAKEN ALL THAT WAS OUR FATHER'S – V. 1

- A. Jacob did not steal from Laban
 - i. He only followed the terms of their agreement
 - ii. Although he manipulated the results through selective breeding
- B. Laban's sons' envy affected their perception

IV. LABAN DID NOT REGARD HIM WITH FAVOR – V. 2

- A. He appreciated Jacob as long as his wealth was increasing
- B. But now he is jealous of Jacob's wealth
 - i. It was increasing while his own wealth was decreasing
- C. Like the Philistines were jealous of Isaac's wealth

- i. Genesis 26:14 ***He had possessions of flocks and herds and many servants, so that the Philistines envied him.***

V. THE LORD SAID TO JACOB – V. 3

- A. We don't know how God spoke to Jacob
- B. But it was confirmed in several ways
 - i. He already had the desire to leave
 - a. Genesis 30:25-26 ***As soon as Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, “Send me away, that I may go to my own home and country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, that I may go, for you know the service that I have given you.”***
 - ii. He received a dream from the Lord
 - iii. He could see Laban and his sons were treating him differently
 - iv. He sought counsel from his wives¹

VI. RETURN TO THE LAND OF YOUR FATHERS – V. 3

- A. Jacob had built up his flocks enough
- B. Now it was time to return home

VII. CALLED RACHEL AND LEAH – V. 4

- A. Jacob shows a good example of how to be a godly husband when making decisions
 - i. He pulled them aside and talked to the situation
 - a. He listened to their input and valued their opinions
 - ii. He explained how his concern was for his family, not for his wealth
 - a. He doesn't force them to go along with the plan just because he said so
 - iii. He shows that his plan is centered on God's word
 - a. He tells them the dream to show that this didn't come from him

VIII. SAID TO THEM – V. 5

- A. Jacob will retell the preceding story from his perspective
 - i. Helps clear up some details for the reader²

IX. GOD OF MY FATHER HAS BEEN WITH ME – V. 5

- A. Jacob is recognizing God's hand in everything that has happened

X. THE GOATS THAT MATED WITH THE FLOCK – V. 10

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (2010). *Be Authentic: Exhibiting Real Faith in the Real World: OT Commentary, Genesis 25-50*. David C. Cook.

² Sailhamer, J. H. (2008). *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (T. Longman & D. E. Garland, Eds.; Revised Edition). Zondervan.

- A. The goats that mated in chapter 30 were spotless white
 - i. But in the dream they were striped, spotted and mottled
- B. God was showing Jacob the recessive traits of the goats
 - i. No matter what Laban changed, the flock had the traits that were required³
- C. This is how God works through people's actions
 - i. Proverbs 16:9 ***The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.***

XI. I HAVE SEEN ALL THAT LABAN IS DOING TO YOU – V. 12

- A. Like He saw how Sarah was oppressing Hagar

XII. I AM THE GOD OF BETHEL – V. 13

- A. Jacob didn't understand that God would leave Bethel and go with him
 - i. But God is showing Jacob He has been with him the whole time
- B. Now God is asking Jacob to go back to where he first encountered God
 - i. Just like Abraham did after returning from Egypt
 - a. Genesis 13:3-4 ***And he journeyed on from the Negeb as far as Bethel to the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Bethel and Ai, to the place where he had made an altar at the first. And there Abram called upon the name of the LORD.***
 - ii. Just like we are called to do when we stray
 - a. Revelation 2:4-5 ***But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.***

XIII. PORTION OR INHERITANCE – V. 14

- A. Laban had squandered their inheritance
- B. Jacob was not entitled to anything because he wasn't Laban's son

XIV. WHATEVER GOD HAS SAID TO YOU – V. 16

- A. Rachel and Leah are willing to leave their home just like Rebekah
- B. They are placing their faith in Jacob's God

XV. HOUSEHOLD GODS – V. 19

- A. Usually held by the patriarch of the family

³ Armstrong, S. (2012, August 20). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 31A*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_31a

- B. Represented authority over the family and the inheritance
- C. Whoever possessed them would have claim to family inheritance⁴

XVI. A DREAM BY NIGHT – V. 24

- A. Like God appeared to all of Jacob’s family’s enemies

XVII. GOOD OR BAD – V. 24

- A. Don’t try to convince Jacob to return
- B. But don’t try to harm him either
- C. We would expect God to tell Laban not to touch Jacob or something similar
 - i. But God wants Jacob to learn to rely on Him⁵
- D. Same response he gave the servant regarding Rebekah
 - i. Genesis 24:50-51 ***Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, “The thing has come from the LORD; we cannot speak to you bad or good. Behold, Rebekah is before you; take her and go, and let her be the wife of your master’s son, as the LORD has spoken.”***

XVIII. YOU HAVE TRICKED ME – V. 26

- A. As if Laban had never tried to deceive Jacob

XIX. WHY DID YOU STEAL MY GODS – V. 30

- A. Shows Laban’s true intent
 - i. He didn’t truly trust in Jacob’s God even though He spoke to him the previous night
 - ii. He was more concerned that a good luck charm and his best employee were gone
- B. The idea that a god can be stolen is ridiculous
 - i. Shows the inferiority of Laban’s gods

XX. I WAS AFRAID - V. 31

- A. Even though God promised to be with him
- B. Jacob was still having a hard time trusting God
 - i. The ends do not justify the means
 - ii. This kind of thinking can lead to dangerous actions in God’s name⁶

XXI. RACHEL HAD STOLEN THEM – V. 32

⁴ Armstrong, S. (2012, September 3). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 31B*. Verse By Verse Ministry International. https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_31b

⁵ Armstrong, S. (2012, September 3). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 31B*. Verse By Verse Ministry International. https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_31b

⁶ Armstrong, S. (2012, September 9). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 31C*. Verse By Verse Ministry International. https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_31c

- A. Several possibilities why she did this⁷
 - i. She still worshipped them
 - ii. She didn't want Laban to use them to determine their location through divination
 - iii. They may have been part of the inheritance that she had lost
 - iv. To get revenge for Laban's mistreatment of her family
 - v. To keep her father from idolatry

XXII. I CANNOT RISE BEFORE YOU – V. 35

- A. Women were required to stand when a man entered
 - i. Except during menstruation⁸
- B. Not clear if she was lying or not

XXIII. JACOB BECAME ANGRY – V. 36

- A. Twenty years of mistreatment came to the surface

XXIV. JACOB LISTS HIS GRIEVANCES – V. 37-41

- A. You have felt through all my goods – v. 37
 - i. Laban didn't find what he accused Jacob of stealing
 - ii. Jacob didn't know Rachel had stolen Laban's gods
- B. These twenty years I have been with you – v. 38
 - i. Jacob highlights his diligence, hard work, faithfulness
- C. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried – v. 38
 - i. Jacob was a good shepherd who improved the condition of Laban's flock
- D. I have not eaten the rams of your flocks – v. 38
 - i. Jacob took nothing for himself
- E. What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you – v. 39
 - i. Shepherds would bring sheep carcasses to the owner when it was attacked
 - a. Proof that the shepherd refused to allow the animal to eat the carcass or take it away
 - b. Shows the shepherd's bravery
 - c. The shepherd would be excused by the owner because of his bravery⁹

⁷ Guzik, D. (2018d). *Genesis 31 - Jacob Flees from Laban to Canaan*. Enduring Word. <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/genesis-31/>

⁸ Armstrong, S. (2012, September 9). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 31C*. Verse By Verse Ministry International. https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_31c

⁹ Guzik

- d. Jacob did not do this
- F. I bore the loss of it myself – v. 39
 - i. Instead, Jacob replaced the dead sheep with one from his own flock
- G. From my hand you required it – v. 39
 - i. Even stolen sheep would be replaced by Jacob
- H. By day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes – v. 40
 - i. Jacob endured very difficult living conditions for Laban
- I. These twenty years I have been in your house – v. 41
 - i. Fourteen years for Leah and Rachel
 - ii. Another six years to build up his flocks
- J. You have changed my wages ten times – v. 41
 - i. Laban did not treat Jacob fairly regarding compensation

XXV. EMPTY-HANDED – V. 42

- A. Laban was not the source of Jacob's wealth
 - i. He would have taken everything from Jacob if it weren't for God's protection
- B. Jacob recognized God's protection over him
 - i. But still wouldn't claim God as his own¹⁰

XXVI. REBUKED YOU – V. 42

- A. God has judged in favor of Jacob
- B. But Jacob assumes it's because of his own righteousness
 - i. He doesn't understand who God is yet
 - ii. He is forgetting all his unrighteous acts
 - iii. God showed him favor because of His grace and His faithfulness to His own promises¹¹

XXVII. ALL THAT YOU SEE IS MINE – V. 43

- A. Laban still claimed everything Jacob had belonged to him
- B. He is putting on a generous front

XXVIII. LET US MAKE A COVENANT – V. 44

- A. Jacob and Laban separate by making a covenant

¹⁰ Guzik

¹¹ Armstrong, S. (2012, September 9). *Genesis 2011 - Lesson 31C*. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_31c

- i. Just like Isaac and Abimelech parted ways by making a covenant
 - a. Genesis 26:28-31 ***They said, “We see plainly that the LORD has been with you. So we said, let there be a sworn pact between us, between you and us, and let us make a covenant with you, that you will do us no harm, just as we have not touched you and have done to you nothing but good and have sent you away in peace. You are now the blessed of the LORD.” So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank. In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths. And Isaac sent them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.***

XXIX. MIZPAH – V. 49

- A. Means watchpost
- B. If Jacob crosses that line, he will need God’s protection because Laban will kill him¹²

XXX. I WILL NOT PASS OVER THIS HEAP TO YOU – V. 52

- A. The separation of the two families is the only way they will get along
 - i. Like Abraham and Lot had to separate
- B. Laban is also afraid Jacob will return with the idols to claim his property¹³

XXXI. LABAN DEPARTED – V. 55

- A. We never see him again in the Bible
- B. Laban and his family were a representation of the world
 - i. Jacob had to be separated from Laban in order to serve God
 - ii. We need to be separated from the world in order to serve God¹⁴

XXXII. POINTS TO JESUS

- A. Leah and Rachel looked to Laban for their inheritance
 - i. But Jacob was now responsible for their inheritance
 - ii. We must look to Jesus for our inheritance rather than the world
- B. Jacob represents the future nation of Israel
 - i. Chosen by God to be a light and blessing to the nations
 - ii. Sometimes they do this well but most of the time it’s a struggle just like Jacob’s life
 - iii. Shows the need for one to come who can fulfill the destiny of Israel
 - a. Jesus is the true Israel

¹² Guzik

¹³ Armstrong, S. (2012r, September 9). Genesis 2011 - Lesson 31C. Verse By Verse Ministry International.
https://versebyverseministry.org/lessons/genesis_2011_lesson_31c

¹⁴ Guzik

XXXIII. QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- A. What was wrong with the way Laban treated Jacob? What did Jesus say about how we should treat people who don't directly benefit us? See Luke 6:32-35.

- B. Was it right for Jacob to leave Laban without telling him? Why or why not?

- C. Have you ever had an employer mistreat you? How have you responded?

- D. Have you ever had to return to your first love like Abraham and Jacob? What did that look like?

- E. Why do you think this is something that we need to be reminded of regularly?

- F. How would you describe God's temperament during this time that Jacob is learning to trust Him? How would you describe His process? For example, is He patient or impatient? Is He active or passive?

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- G. In what ways has God fulfilled His promise to be with Jacob wherever he goes?

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- H. If Laban represents the world, list some worldly actions by Laban that we should avoid.

XXXIV. FURTHER STUDY

- A. Notice the similarity in language between verse 2 and Genesis 4:5. How does Jacob's response compare and contrast to Cain's? What difference does Jacob notice regarding God's favor in verse 5?

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- B. What does envy accomplish? See 1 Corinthians 3:3; James 3:16.

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- C. List the ways this chapter foreshadows the exodus of Israel from Egypt in Exodus 1-3.

D. What is the significance of Jacob crossing the Euphrates in verse 21? What is this a picture of?

E. What would James say about a man like Laban who encountered God but didn't respond in faith? See James 2:19.
