

GENESIS 31 | Jacob's Flight from and Covenant with Laban

God Tells Jacob to Return to Canaan (vv. 1-2)

1 Now Jacob heard that the sons of Laban were saying,

Jacob has taken all that was our father's, and from what was our father's he has gained all this wealth.

2 And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him with favour as before. 3 Then Yahweh said to Jacob, Return to the land of your fathers and to your kindred, and I will be with you.

Rachel and Leah Agree to Go (vv. 4-16)

4 So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was 5 and said to them,

I see that your father does not regard me with favour as he did before. But the God of my father has been with me. 6 You know that I have served your father with all my strength, 7 yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times. But God did not permit him to harm me. 8 If he said, The spotted shall be your wages, then all the flock bore spotted. And if he said, The striped shall be your wages, then all the flock bore striped. 9 Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father and given them to me. 10 In the breeding season of the flock I lifted up my eyes and saw in a dream that the goats that mated with the flock were striped, spotted, and mottled. 11 Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, Jacob! And I said, Here I am! 12 And he said,

Lift up your eyes and see, all the goats that mate with the flock are striped, spotted, and mottled, for I have seen all that Laban is doing to you. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and made a vow to me. Now arise, go out from this land and return to the land of your kindred.

14 Then Rachel and Leah answered and said to him,

Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? 15 Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has indeed devoured our money. 16 All the wealth that God has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children. Now then, whatever God has said to you, do.

Jacob Flees across the Euphrates (vv. 17-21)

17 So Jacob arose and set his sons and his wives on camels. 18 He drove away all his livestock, all his property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. 19 Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's household gods. 20 And Jacob tricked Laban

the Aramean, by not telling him that he intended to flee. 21 He fled with all that he had, arose and crossed the Euphrates, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.

Laban Pursues, God Rebukes (vv. 22-24)

22 When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, 23 he took his kinsmen with him, pursued him for seven days, and followed close after him into the hill country of Gilead. 24 But God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream by night and said to him, Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad.

Laban Overtakes Jacob (vv. 25-32)

25 And Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen pitched tents in the hill country of Gilead. 26 And Laban said to Jacob,

What have you done, that you have tricked me and driven away my daughters like captives of the sword? 27 Why did you flee secretly and trick me, and did not tell me, so that I might have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre? 28 And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? Now you have done foolishly. 29 It is in my power to do you harm. But the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either good or bad. 30 And now you have gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house. But why did you steal my gods?

31 Jacob answered and said to Laban,

Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. 32 Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live. In the presence of our kinsmen point out what I have that is yours, and take it.

Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

Search for the Household Gods (vv. 33-35)

33 So Laban went into Jacob's tent, into Leah's tent, and into the tent of the two female servants, but he did not find them. And he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's. 34 Now Rachel had taken the household gods and put them in the camel's saddle and sat on them. Laban felt all about the tent, but did not find them. 35 And she said to her father,

Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the way of women is upon me.

So he searched but did not find the household gods.

Jacob Rebukes Laban (vv. 36-42)

36 Then Jacob became angry and berated Laban. Jacob said to Laban,

What is my offense? What is my sin, that you have hotly pursued me? 37 For you have felt through all my goods. What have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. 38 These twenty years I have been with you. Your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, and I have not eaten the rams of your flocks. 39 What was torn by wild beasts I did not bring to you. I bore the loss of it myself. From my hand you required it, whether stolen by day or stolen by night. 40 There I was. By day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. 41 These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. 42 If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labour of my hands and rebuked you last night.

Laban's Covenant with Jacob (vv. 43-50)

43 Then Laban answered and said to Jacob,

The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, the flocks are my flocks, and all that you see is mine. But what can I do this day for these my daughters or for their children whom they have borne? 44 Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I. And let it be a witness between you and me.

45 So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. 46 And Jacob said to his kinsmen, Gather stones. And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. 47 Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. 48 Laban said, This heap is a witness between you and me today. Therefore he named it Galeed 49 and Mizpah, for he said,

Yahweh watch between you and me, when we are out of one another's sight. 50 If you oppress my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no one is with us, see, God is witness between you and me.

Border between Laban and Jacob (vv. 51-54)

51 Then Laban said to Jacob,

See this heap and the pillar, which I have set between you and me. 52 This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass over this heap to you, and you will not pass over this heap and this pillar to me, to do harm. 53 The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us.

So Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac (פֶּחַד יִצְחָק), 54 and Jacob offered a sacrifice in the hill country and called his kinsmen to eat bread. They ate bread and spent the night in the hill country.

Laban's Farewell Blessing (v. 55)

55 Early in the morning Laban arose, kissed his grandchildren and his daughters, and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned home.

Biblical Worldview

1. Introduction.

a. Image.

(1) The statements of faith of CCCNZ and Pathways Bible College make no mention of Israel:

(a) “The salvation which God has planned for His people, is not yet complete.

The Lord Jesus Christ will soon return to this world as King of kings. Evil is yet to be finally put down in a process of judgement and, in this process, God’s people are vindicated. God’s promises to His covenant people will be fulfilled in a way that demonstrates God’s faithfulness. God’s wise justice will be vindicated and His people’s salvation perfected. The dead will be raised—those who have been born of God to eternal joy, and the unrepentant to eternal sorrow. Creation will be renewed, and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. All creatures will sing God’s praise.”

(b) In seminaries and Bible colleges, premillennialism has lost respectability.

(2) John Nelson Darby, the founder of the Brethren movement and premillennial dispensationalism, was a foremost supporter of Israel in the 19th century.

(a) In 1840, he distinguished the hopes of the remnant of Israel and that of the Church in a series of 11 evening lectures in Geneva. His lectures were immediately published in French, English, German, and Dutch.

(b) His work culminated in the Niagara Bible Conference (1878), which issued a 14-point proclamation, including: “Jesus will come in person to introduce the millennial age, when Israel shall be restored to her own land, and the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord.”

(c) The Scofield Reference Bible (1909) was also a major force.

(3) Do we believe Israel is distinct from the Church? Are we premillennialism our eschatology? If so, why aren’t we mentioning it in our doctrinal statement.

b. Subject. Loving and Respecting the Jewish People

c. Text. Genesis 31

2. God insists on blessing Israel. Don’t get in his way (Ge 30:43-31:1).

a. Jacob carries the Abrahamic covenant blessing:

(1) Abraham (Ge 12:2-3).

(2) Isaac (Ge 26:24).

(3) Jacob (Ge 27:27-28).

(4) The key word of Genesis is “blessing,” used 72 times in the book.

b. Jacob left Beersheba and went to Haran with only the shirt on his back (Ge 28:10-11).

(1) At Bethel, in a dream, God had promised land, seed, and blessing to Jacob (Ge 28:12-15).

c. Now Jacob has:

(1) Two wives (Ge 29:21-30).

(2) Eleven sons and one daughter (Ge 29:31-30:24).

(3) Large flocks of sheep and goats, servants, camels, and donkeys (Ge 30:32-43).

(4) Jacob has also been a blessing to Laban (Ge 30:27-30).

d. Throughout history, Israel has been blessed.

(1) See *Israel*.

3. Gentile nations often grow jealous of Israel and bully her (Ge 31:1-2).

- a. God's blessing on Israel has incited jealousy toward her throughout history.
 - (1) Here, Laban and his sons are jealous of Jacob's wealth (vv. 1-2).
 - (a) Jacob's wealth has increased at Laban's expense because of Laban's mistreatment of Jacob (v. 12).
 - (2) Isaac experienced a similar jealousy (Ge 26:12-14).
 - (3) Israel in Egypt experienced a similar jealousy (Ex 1:12).
- b. This jealousy has often resulted in anti-Semitism and severe mistreatment of the Jews.
 - (1) Laban and his sons have severely mistreated Jacob (vv. 7, 38-42).
 - (2) Israel in Egypt experienced similar mistreatment (Ex 1:13-16).
- c. History records countless examples of Gentile nations bullying the Jewish people out of envy.
 - (1) See *Anti-Semitism*.

4. God rebukes nations who bully Israel (Ge 31:24, 42).

- a. God won't let Laban bully Jacob.
 - (1) God promised Jacob he would guard him in Haran (Ge 28:15).
 - (2) God is fulfilling that promise (v. 5).
 - (3) God does not permit Laban and his sons to harm Jacob (v. 7).
 - (4) God sees all that Laban is doing to Jacob (v. 12).
 - (5) God sees Jacob's affliction and labour and personally rebukes Laban (v. 42).
- b. Today, God won't let Gentile nations bully Israel.
 - (1) God has promised Israel he will guard her, and he will fulfil that promise.
 - (2) God will not permit Gentile nations to harm Israel.
 - (3) God sees all that the Gentile nations do to Israel—good and evil.
 - (4) God sees Israel's affliction and labour and rebukes nations who harm her.
 - (a) Nations that have received God's rebuke include: Nazi Germany, Russia, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt.

5. Israel always escapes a bad situation with lots of stuff (Ge 30:43; 31:9, 18, 43).

- a. Jacob has large flocks, servants, camels, and donkeys (Ge 30:43).
 - (1) He is driving away his property from Paddan-aram to Canaan (v. 18).
 - (2) God ensures Jacob won't return to Canaan empty-handed (v. 42).
- b. This continues a pattern.
 - (1) Abram escaped a bad situation with lots of stuff (Ge 12:16-20; 13:2; 20:14).
 - (2) Isaac escaped a bad situation with lots of stuff (Ge 26:12-14).
 - (3) Israel left Egypt and returned to Canaan with lots of stuff (Ex 12:35-36).
 - (4) Israel returned from the Babylonian exile with lots of stuff (Ezr 1:3-11).
 - (5) After the Tribulation, Israel will return to Israel with lots of stuff (Is 60:1-9).

6. Ultimately, God intends Israel to be in her own land, the land of Israel.

- a. Jacob.
 - (1) At Bethel, God promises Jacob to bring him safely back to Canaan (Ge 28:15).
 - (2) Now, 20 years later, God tells Jacob to return to Canaan (Ge 31:3, 13).

- (3) Still later, God tells Jacob not to be afraid to go down to Egypt (Ge 46:3).
 - (4) But again, God promises to bring Jacob back to Canaan (Ge 46:4).
 - (5) Jacob is eventually buried in Canaan, not Egypt (Ge 50:13).
- b. Israel.
- (1) Israel was deported out of the land by the Assyrians.
 - (2) Judah was deported out of the land by the Babylonians.
 - (3) But God brought them back (Ezra-Nehemiah).
 - (4) Today, many Jews live outside the land of Israel.
 - (5) God is bringing them back now, though in unbelief.
 - (6) After the Tribulation, all Jews will be restored to the land of Israel.
 - (a) See *Regathering of Israel*.
- c. As Gentile believers, we are to support the Jewish people's return to the land of Israel.

7. Ultimately, every Gentile must choose for or against Israel and her Messiah.

- a. Rachel, Leah, and Laban must decide how they will relate to Jacob.
- (1) Rachel and Leah, Gentiles, wisely decide to go with Jacob (vv. 14-16).
 - (a) Rahab makes a similar decision (Jos 2:12-13).
 - (b) Ruth makes a similar decision (Ru 1:16).
 - (c) Throughout the OT, Gentiles who go with Israel are richly rewarded.
 - (2) Laban wisely decides not to harm Jacob and instead make a covenant with him.
 - (a) Laban is ticked off Jacob fled with no warning (vv. 23, 26-28). He pursues Jacob for seven days (v. 23), his anger no doubt increasing with every step. He is determined to harm Jacob (v. 29). But God rebukes him in a dream (vv. 24, 29, 42). He tells Laban to say nothing to Jacob (vv. 24-29).
 - (b) After confirming Jacob has stolen nothing, Laban initiates a covenant with Jacob (v. 44), signified by a heap and pillar (vv. 45-52). Two promises are made:
 - 1) Jacob will not oppress Rachel and Leah or take additional wives (v. 50).
 - 2) The heap and pillar will be the border between the land of Jacob's descendants (Israel) and the land of Laban's descendants (Aram)(vv. 51-52; cf. Dt 19:14).
 - (c) Yahweh is the God of Abraham, Nahor, Terah, Jacob, Isaac, and probably Laban (v. 53, but see v. 29).
- b. Throughout the Bible, we see numerous examples of Gentiles decide how they will relate to Israel.
- (1) Abimelech of Gerar was warned in a dream not to touch Sarah (Ge 20:3).
 - (2) Abimelech made a covenant with Isaac, recognising God's blessing upon him (Ge 26:26-31).
- c. Israel and the Nations.
- (1) Israel is a flashpoint. Gentile nations can't be neutral about Israel.
 - (2) God invites every Gentile nation to live at peace with Israel.
 - (3) How a nation treats Israel shows how much of a biblical worldview it has.
 - (a) To its credit, the United States has agreed to pay 20% of Israel's defense budget ever year from 2018-28 (\$3.8 billion/year).
 - (4) Gentile nations who make and keep covenants with Israel are very wise.
 - (5) Israel's neighbours are to respect her borders (Dt 19:14).

(6) God will bless every nation who chooses to live at peace with Israel (Ge 12:3).

8. It is never wise to bring our idols along in our new lives as believers.

- a. Rachel's folly.
 - (1) Rachel steals her father's household gods (v. 19), showing she is not fully committed to sole worship of Yahweh. She hides the gods in her camel's saddle and sits on them (v. 34). She tells her father she cannot rise off her camel because she is menstruating (v. 35). Laban doesn't find the gods (v. 35). The gods continue to travel with Jacob's entourage to the land of Canaan.
 - (2) At Jacob's command, these gods are later buried under an oak near Shechem (Ge 35:1-4).
- b. There are two lessons to be learned here:
 - (1) It is comical and tragic that people worship gods they can sit upon. There's humour going on here. Rachel is sitting on her gods during her menstrual period, which means those gods are unclean (Lev 15:19-24).
 - (2) We are tempted to bring along our old "household gods" into the promised land, where only sole worship of Yahweh is allowed. Those household gods become a huge snare.

9. Application.

- a. Ally yourself with Israel by believing in her Messiah, the Lord Jesus.
- b. Don't be jealous of God's blessing on Israel.
- c. Don't try to stop God from regathering Israel to the land of Israel.
- d. Make your church's support of Israel clear by mentioning Israel in your online doctrinal statement.
 - (1) Considering using the doctrinal statement of Dallas Theological Seminary: <https://www.dts.edu/about/doctrinal-statement/>.