

## Genesis 31 – God’s Protection in Jacob’s Escape

### I. God Continues To Protect the Inconsistent Jacob (1-24)

#### A. Jacob Timidly Obeys God (1-21)

##### 1. Jacob is Divinely Directed to Leave (1-3)

###### a. Jacob hears Laban’s sons grumbling (1)

- i. Jacob realizes he is in danger. The tide is turning
- ii. Jacob has grown stronger as Laban grows weaker and his sons recognize it.

###### b. Jacob sees Laban’s countenance change (2)

- i. Laban is also aware of his weakening flocks
- ii. Laban may want to get rid of Jacob soon

###### c. Jacob receives a word from God (3)

- i. Laban and his family have changed in how they see Jacob, but God has not
- ii. God commands Jacob to return to his homeland
- iii. God reminds him of the promise of 28:15 – I will be with you
  - this would be a huge risk – telling Laban he is leaving could bring his wrath
  - going home would be risky too – he had to run from there for his life
  - none of Jacob’s options are very good

##### 2. Jacob Tries To Convince His Wives To Leave (4-16)

NOTE: Is Jacob showing his weakness of faith here? Should he simply declare to his wives that God has told them to leave? Should he declare it boldly to Laban? Some think Jacob is showing his faith by trying to convince his wives to come willingly. Others say he is not fully trusting God but seeking the approval of his wives.

###### a. Jacob presents his case to his wives (4-9)

###### i. Jacob calls his wives to himself (4)

- notice that the flocks are called “his” not Laban’s
- Jacob seeks approval from his wives

###### ii. Jacob’s has endured Laban’s deceit (5-7)

- Laban’s attitude has changed (5a)
- God has been with me (5b)
- Laban has continually cheated me (6-7a)

~ This is explained in v. 8-9

- God did not let him hurt me (7b)

###### iii. God has worked for Jacob’s favor (8-9)

- God protected me from Laban’s treachery (8)
  - ~ Laban switched which animals would be Jacob’s wages when more and more were born
  - ~ Whichever animals Laban changed Jacob’s wages to, God produced that type
- God has blessed me and judged Laban (9)

b. Jacob presents his vision from God (10-13)

i. The vision of the animals (10)

- from this it is safe to assume that God Himself instructed Jacob in choosing his wages
- Did God instruct Jacob to use the striped rods?

ii. God says he has stopped Laban from cheating Jacob (11-12)

- God agrees that Laban has cheated Jacob
- God has provided for Jacob despite Laban's treachery

iii. God has kept His word from Bethel (13a)

- God reaffirms his promise from Bethel
- God is still the same after 20 years
- God says "I am the God of Bethel" rather than the God of your fathers, to remind Jacob of the promise He made (and perhaps to remind him of the promise Jacob made)

iv. God has commanded Jacob to return home (13b)

c. Jacob's Wives Finally Agree on Something (14-16)

i. Rachel and Leah Assess Their Situation (14-16a)

- They have no portion with their father
  - ~ Jacob has been cheated – so have they
- They have been counted as strangers with their father
  - ~ Counted as non-relatives
- They have been sold by their father – for Jacob's labor
- They have been cheated by their father
  - ~ Laban has devoured their money
- They agree that God has done justly to their father

ii. Rachel and Leah Agree that Jacob Should Leave (16b)

3. Jacob Sneaks Away In Secret (17-21)

NOTE: Once again, many see Jacob's act as a lack of faith. Should he have stood boldly in faith and told Laban he was leaving with the blessing of God? Or is he taking a God-given opportunity to leave?

a. Jacob prepares to leave (17-18)

- Notice again they are called "his"
- Jacob is taking what is rightfully his

b. Rachel steals Laban's "teraphim" (19)

a "teraphim" is a household idol that is worshiped

- Why did Rachel steal the idol?
- Is it because it was valuable?
- Is it because she is a secret idolater?
- Is it just to hurt her father?

c. Jacob and his family leave in secret (20-21)

- v. 20 gives us an interesting word play.
- The text says "Jacob stole his heart" (speaking of Laban)
- Many take this to mean that he left deceitfully in secret

B. God Protects Jacob From Laban (22-24)

1. Laban chases after Jacob and overtakes him (22-23)
  - a. The language used here is militaristic
  - b. Laban intends to do Jacob harm
2. God appears to Laban (24)
  - a. Like Abimelech, God appears to Laban to warn him
  - b. Take heed = watch yourself
  - c. To say “nothing either good or bad” doesn’t mean be silent. It is an idiom that means don’t overstep your authority. You have no authority to say anything to Jacob. (See Num. 24:13)

## II. The Confrontation of Laban and Jacob (25-42)

### A. Laban Calls Jacob To Account (25-35)

1. Laban catches up with Jacob (25)
  - a. A standoff ensues
  - b. Remember that Jacob doesn’t yet know that God appeared to Laban
2. Laban Explains His Charges Against Jacob (26-30)
  - a. Jacob has “kidnapped” Laban’s daughters (26)
    - i. This is no true – the daughters went willingly
  - b. Jacob left secretly (27)
    - i. Laban claims that this was a deceitful act on Jacob’s part
    - ii. Laban claims that he would have thrown a party for Jacob
  - c. Jacob gave no chance for Laban to say goodbye (28)
    - i. Laban says he desired to kiss his family goodbye
    - ii. Laban’s next statement makes this unlikely
  - d. Laban Reluctantly Recognizes God’s Protection of Jacob (29)
    - i. Laban says that he has power to hurt “you”
    - ii. The “you” here is plural – he is referring to them all
    - iii. Laban admits that the only thing stopping him is God’s warning
  - e. Laban Asks Why Jacob Stole His god (30)
    - i. Laban understands Jacob wanting to leave
    - ii. Laban doesn’t understand why Jacob would steal his god
3. Jacob Rebuts The Charges Against Him (31-32)
  - a. Jacob explains his secret escape (31)
  - b. Jacob rashly denies stealing Laban’s god (32)
    - Jacob didn’t know Rachel stole the idol
    - Jacob is putting his beloved wife in mortal danger by making this vow
    - Did God protect Jacob and Rachel from being discovered?
4. Laban Finds No Proof Of His Claim (33-35)
  - a. Laban searches all Jacob’s belongings (33)
  - b. Rachel successfully hides her theft (34-35)
    - Rachel hides the idol under her as she sits on the camel
    - Rachel claims to have “the way of women” (i.e. menstruating)
    - Such an action would seem to show that Rachel didn’t worship or honor the idol (such would make it unclean)

- Laban doesn't press her to search her saddle because anything she sits on is unclean during this time. He wouldn't want to touch any of it.

- Question: Was she lying just to hide her sinful theft?

NOTICE: It wasn't their leaving that brought the harshest accusation from Laban, it was the theft of his idol. Rachel's sin brought consequences that she never intended.

#### B. Jacob Calls Laban To Account (36-42)

- Jacob finally lets loose and unloads on Laban

##### 1. Jacob Calls Laban to Prove His Accusations (36-37)

a. "What sin have I committed?" (36)

b. "Produce the evidence of theft" (37)

c. Jacob is indignant that Laban would falsely accuse him of theft (although Jacob is unaware that Rachel actually did take Laban's idol)

##### 2. Jacob Recounts His Faithful Service (38-40)

a. "I faithfully cared for your flocks" (38)

b. "I took loss when you lost an animal" (39)

c. "I suffered greatly in my service" (40)

i. Jacob had undergone much toil and suffering in the service of Laban

##### 3. Jacob Charges Laban With Deceit (41-42)

a. "For twenty years I served you" (41a)

b. "You changed my wages ten times" (41b)

c. "God alone has provided for me" (42)

i. Jacob rightfully calls Laban a cheat

ii. Jacob rightfully says that Laban cared more about himself than Jacob and his family's well being

iii. Notice the name of God Jacob uses – "The God of Abraham and the fear of Isaac"

- why does He call God the fear of Isaac?

- His God commands reverence, fear, and awe – Laban's god is helplessly stuffed under Rachel's saddle

#### III. God's Will In Jacob's Departure Is Accomplished (43-55)

##### A. A Covenant of Witness Is Made (43-53)

##### 1. Laban Reluctantly Gives In (43)

a. Laban continues to claim all Jacob's possessions

i. Does Laban have a point?

ii. He did arrive at Laban's door twenty years earlier with nothing

b. Laban recognizes he can't do anything about it

i. The fear of Isaac has appeared to Laban and he knows that he really can't do anything to Jacob

ii. Now the Lord is also the fear of Laban

##### 2. The Terms of The Covenant Are Given (44-52)

a. A covenant memorial is made (44-47)

- i. Laban offers to make a covenant (44)
  - ii. They eat a covenant meal and erect a heap (45-46)
- b. The covenant memorial is named (47)
  - i. Both name it “a heap of witness”
  - ii. Jegar Sahadutha is Aramaic for “heap of witness”
  - iii. Gileed is Hebrew for “heap of witness”
- c. The Witness of the Covenant (48-52)
  - i. A witness that Jacob will not wrong his wives (48-50)
    - Laban invokes the Lord as a witness (48)
      - ~ he also calls the place Mizpah – (“watchpost”)
    - The Lord will see if Jacob wrongs them (49-50)
      - ~ Laban says that even though he will not be with them, the Lord Himself will be witness if any wrong comes to his daughters
  - ii. A witness that the two will not cross the heap (51-52)
    - Laban also states that the heap is a monument to signify that neither he nor Jacob will cross again to do the other harm
    - Laban has the strength but Jacob has his God – Laban want to make sure Jacob doesn’t return with an army

### 3. The Oath is Sworn (53)

- a. Laban swears by several gods (including the true God)
  - i. This demonstrates Laban’s thinking – He swears by the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor (Abraham’s brother) and Terah (Abraham’s father)
  - ii. Remember that it was from Terah’s house that God called Abraham out.
  - iii. Laban is swearing his oath by the “family” gods
- b. Jacob swears by the true God (the fear of Isaac)
  - i. Jacob does not such thing
  - ii. Jacob swears only by the “fear of his father Isaac”
  - iii. Is Jacob coming to a deeper faith? Is he finally seeing the faithfulness and power of the Lord?
    - This event will springboard Jacob into a head to head confrontation with God that leaves Jacob forever changed.

### B. The Two Separate For Good (54-55)

- 1. Jacob and his brethren eat together all night (54)
- 2. Laban departs for his home (55)