

Genesis 31

Jacob Flees from Laban

Jacob had been in Laban's hire for twenty years. He had spent fourteen years working for Rachel, to be his wife. During that time he also received Leah for a wife, when he was deceived by Laban. He had Laban's two daughters and their servants, which gave him four women in his life. Due to the rivalry, between the two sisters he had married, the sisters also had him go into their slaves and marry them. He now had four wives, eleven sons and at least one daughter. His family now was getting large and he had no personal assets, to support them. If he left, at that time, he would leave with only his family. He would have to depend on God to care for him and his family. There was another problem at that time, because Rachel had not bore him any children. It was the custom, in that area, for a man's daughter to stay close to home, until she was pregnant with a child, which made them a family. Laban could use this custom to keep Rachel in the land, until she was able to give Jacob a child.

Jacob had accepted an agreement to stay with Laban. He had agreed to an unusual agreement for the division of cattle, sheep and goats. Laban thought the agreement was a good one and accepted it.

1 And he heard the words of Laban's sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father's; and of that which was our father's hath he gotten all this glory.

2 And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before.

As it turned out, the agreement, which seemed to favor Laban, actually favored Jacob. Over the next few years, Laban's riches grew slowly, but Jacob's went from nothing to having many cattle, sheep, goats, asses, camels and servants. Genesis 30:43.

It got to the point where Laban's sons believed Jacob was cheating their father Laban. They would talk about it and didn't care if Jacob or Jacob's servants heard their negative discussions. They believed Jacob had cheated their father Laban, which would affect their own inheritance. Jacob was starting to think it might be a good time to leave.

Jacob not only heard Laban's sons talking against him, he had noticed Laban was no longer friendly toward him. Laban was good to him and treated him kindly when Laban was receiving blessing and riches, because God was blessing Jacob. Now Jacob was being blessed by his God, but Laban was not getting richer as before. Laban was now angry toward Jacob, because Jacob was the only one getting greatly blessed. Jacob had a fear that Laban might take everything away from him by force and Jacob would have nothing. Jacob was thinking it might be a good time to leave.

When Jacob left the land of his father Isaac, he knew he had to leave, but never wanted to leave the land of his youth. He liked his home, he loved his parents and he loved the land. In the land of his father, God had promised to bless him and to give him the blessing that were originally given to his grandfather, Abraham. When Jacob had left his home, it was because he had deceived his father and cheated his brother Esau. Esau was angry and had planned to kill him. Jacob was not ready to return to the land of Esau, without knowing it was God's plan.

3 And the LORD said unto Jacob, Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee.

Jacob got his answer. The Lord told Jacob, it's time to return home. Jacob was growing and learning how to wait upon the Lord and to listen to the Lord. He like every Christian today, must learn to live by faith. You don't wake up one day full of faith, you start with little steps of faith. After you walk by faith in small things you learn to depend on the Lord for bigger things. Jacob had been walking by faith since the night the Lord came to him, in a dream in Bethel, some twenty years earlier. Jacob now will call for his wives Rachel and Leah to meet with him in the field, where he kept his livestock. I'm sure the field was the one furthest west in their land. Jacob didn't want to talk to his wives in their home tents, because some of their other relatives might hear and inform Laban.

4 And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field unto his flock, 5 And said unto them, I see your father's countenance, that it is not toward me as before; but the God of my father hath been with me. 6 And ye know that with all my power I have served your father. 7 And your father hath deceived me, and changed my wages ten times; but God suffered him not to hurt me. 8 If he said thus, The speckled shall be thy wages; then all the cattle bare speckled: and

if he said thus, The ringstraked shall be thy hire; then bare all the cattle ringstraked. 9 Thus God hath taken away the cattle of your father, and given them to me. 10 And it came to pass at the time that the cattle conceived, that I lifted up mine eyes, and saw in a dream, and, behold, the rams which leaped upon the cattle were ringstraked, speckled, and grisled. 11 And the angel of God spake unto me in a dream, saying, Jacob: And I said, Here am I. 12 And he said, Lift up now thine eyes, and see, all the rams which leap upon the cattle are ringstraked, speckled, and grisled: for I have seen all that Laban doeth unto thee. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto me: now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred.

Now we see the Lord came to Jacob, in a dream. Jacob was shown the speckled and ringstraked were breeding with the other livestock. Jacob didn't just decide to ask for something crazy and hope God would honor it. That would be foolish. The Lord had shown Jacob what to ask for his wages. Jacob had enough faith to place him in a situation that would make Laban think he was foolish.

Many times God uses what seems to be foolishness to overcome the supposed wisdom of men. Paul wrote in a letter to a church-

1 Corinthians 1: 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.

18 For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

19 For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE."

20 Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not [come to] know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. 22 For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; 23 but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, 24 but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God

and the wisdom of God. 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

God had led Jacob to ask for a wage that Laban thought was foolish. Laban thought there was no way he could loose on the deal offered by Jacob. Laban soon discovered that he was foolish to try to trick Jacob, when Jacob was being blessed by his God.

14 And Rachel and Leah answered and said unto him, Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? 15 Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money. 16 For all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that is ours, and our children's: now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do.

The daughters of Laban are upset, because their father has treated them like slaves, to be sold as property. Jacob had given Laban seven years of labor for each of Laban's daughters. Normally the father would have put away the bride price and held it for his daughters. In case the marriage did not work out, Laban could no longer offer his daughters to any man as a maiden, because they had laid with Jacob. They would support themselves with the bride price paid for them. Laban had given each daughter a slave girl, which he had not charged Jacob for. He could have sold the two slave girls to Jacob, for a very modest price and kept the money, because the slave girls were simple property. Leah and Rachel realize their father had taken everything Jacob had given him for seven years of labor paid for each of them and kept it. There was no bride price put back for them. It was as if they had been sold to Jacob as slaves.

They agree Jacob was right to leave. They agreed God had taken all the livestock from their father and given it to Jacob. They believed God was not only blessing Jacob, but was taking their bride price from Laban, which belonged to Leah, Rachel and their children.

17 Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels; 18 And he carried away all his cattle, and all his goods which he had gotten, the cattle of his getting, which he had gotten in Padanaram, for to go to Isaac his father in the land of Canaan. 19 And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father's. 20 And Jacob stole away unawares to Laban the Syrian, in that he told him not that he fled. 21 So he fled with all that

he had; and he rose up, and passed over the river, and set his face toward the mount Gilead.

Jacob is now going to move by faith. Not great faith, but never the less, faith. He is fearful of Laban. He believes Laban will try to stop him by force, but he believes God wants him to return home and the God of his father's Isaac and Abraham will protect him. Jacob places his wives and children upon camels. Camels were the fastest means of transportation over the desert, in Jacob's time.

Jacob, along with his family and servants take down all the tents and personal items to start their journey. They wait until Laban and his servants have left the living compound and journeyed away to shear the sheep. The King James bible says Jacob stole away. Like he would sneak away in the night, like a thief. While Laban was away, Jacob broke camp to start the journey, before Laban could know they were gone. Unknown to Jacob, his wife Rachel entered Laban's home tent and stole his idols. Jacob takes all he has and leaves the land of Laban and heads west and cross the first river. He is on he is on his way to mount Gilead.

Why would Rachel take her father's idols? The bible doesn't clearly say why. It could be any of several reasons.

- *She believed her father had cheated her and believed the idols were of value.*
- *The idols were a symbol of authority. Laban had them, because he was the leader of his clan. It was not uncommon for the child who received the blessing, such as the first born, would receive the idols as a symbol of being head of the family. She believed her husband Jacob should have that honor.*
- *She knew her father was involved in divination and might have used the idols to track them down. By taking the idols it would make it more difficult to locate Jacob.*
- *She grew up as an idol worshipper, in the home of Laban, and believed she needed them.*

22 And it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob was fled. 23 And he took his brethren with him, and pursued after him seven days' journey; and they overtook him in the mount Gilead. 24 And God came to Laban the Syrian in a

dream by night, and said unto him, Take heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad.

Three days went by, before Laban was informed Jacob had fled the land. Laban gathered all his kinfolk, friends and servants and pursued after Jacob. The word pursued, doesn't mean to simply follow. It means to go after with a vengeance, to chase after with intent on catching someone. Laban was angry. Jacob had gotten the best of him and no one was supposed to be able to get the best of him. He would chase down Jacob and make him pay dearly. Laban and his men arrive at mount Gilead and are very near Jacob. That night Jacob's God comes to Laban, in a dream. The God of Jacob tells Laban, you will not harm Jacob or any of his family. God tells Laban, you will not even speak to Jacob, good or bad.

25 Then Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mount: and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mount of Gilead.

Laban now catches up with Jacob. He doesn't come at Jacob with weapons of any type of violence. Up to the previous night Laban probably had thoughts of possibly killing Jacob. At a minimum he had thoughts of taking away all of Jacob's property, including his wives and children. He wanted to send Jacob home to Canaan with nothing to show for the last twenty years. Now the evening before overtaking Jacob, Laban finds out that Jacob is protected by his God and Laban is fearful of Him.

26 And Laban said to Jacob, What hast thou done, that thou hast stolen away unawares to me, and carried away my daughters, as captives taken with the sword? 27 Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away from me; and didst not tell me, that I might have sent thee away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret, and with harp?

Laban ask Jacob, why did you leave as a thief in the night. If you wanted to leave, why didn't come to me and I could send you away with gifts and music. We could have had a celebration.

28 And hast not suffered me to kiss my sons and my daughters? thou hast now done foolishly in so doing. 29 It is in the power of my hand to do you hurt: but the God of your father spake unto me yesternight, saying, Take thou heed that thou speak not to Jacob either good or bad. 30 And now, though thou wouldest

needs be gone, because thou sore longedst after thy father's house, yet wherefore hast thou stolen my gods?

Laban tells Jacob, he was wrong to leave the way he did. Laban lets Jacob know he had the power to greatly hurt Jacob, but Jacob's God had come to him last night. Laban was told not to harm Jacob. Laban's doesn't come to Jacob with anger. He appeals to Jacob and agrees he can understand why Jacob longed to return to the home of his youth and his family. Laban now changes his approach. He agrees he can understand Jacob leaving as he did but wants to know why Jacob stole Laban's gods.

31 And Jacob answered and said to Laban, Because I was afraid: for I said, Peradventure thou wouldest take by force thy daughters from me. 32 With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live: before our brethren discern thou what is thine with me, and take it to thee. For Jacob knew not that Rachel had stolen them.

Jacob answers the first question. He left the way he did, because he was afraid Laban would stop him and take everything, he had away from him. Jacob denies he stole the gods of Laban. He tells Laban, if you find your gods in this camp, let whoever stole them be put to death. Jacob had no idea Rachel had taken them and has placed her in a dangerous position.

33 And Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the two maidservants' tents; but he found them not. Then went he out of Leah's tent, and entered into Rachel's tent.

Laban was told not to speak against Jacob. Laban brought up that someone had stolen his gods and they were taken about the time Jacob and his family left the area. Laban is not going against what God told him. Jacob has given Laban permission to look for the stolen gods. Laban believes Jacob is aware of the stolen gods and starts his search. Laban searches Jacob's tent, Leah's tent, the tents of the two maidservants whom bore Jacob children. Laban probably started with the tents of the maidservants before going through his own daughter's tents. After searching Leah's tent, Laban enters Rachel's.

34 Now Rachel had taken the images, and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not. 35 And she

said to her father, Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched, but found not the images.

Laban has come to the tent of the thief, Rachel. Rachel must devise a plan to escape being caught. Even though she has greatly sinned against her father, the God of Jacob protects her for Jacob's sake. She is sitting on her camel's saddle. Since they are traveling as quickly as possible, they wouldn't unload the regular home furniture. They would take the saddles off the camels each night, so the camels could rest. They would take the saddles into their tents to use as temporary seating. Rachel sat on her camel saddle, where the idols were hidden underneath. How did she know her father would not have her arise and tip the saddle over, to look under it?

Rachel informs her father she cannot stand, because it is the time of the month, when a woman is considered unclean. When a woman had her monthly bleeding, she was considered unclean and if anyone touched her or the saddle she sat on, they would become unclean. This was part of the culture of her land and she was familiar with it and used it to prevent her father from searching under the saddle. Laban had given up the search. He hated that he was not able to prove Jacob to be a thief, who had stolen his gods.

36 And Jacob was wroth, and chode with Laban: and Jacob answered and said to Laban, What is my trespass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me? 37 Whereas thou hast searched all my stuff, what hast thou found of all thy household stuff? set it here before my brethren and thy brethren, that they may judge betwixt us both.

Now that Laban has completed searching Jacob's belongings, looking for stolen idols, Jacob has had enough. The word translated to wroth is a word that means to burn or be kindled with anger. Jacob confronts Laban in front of the witnesses Laban brought, plus Jacobs family and workers. Jacob demands to know what he has done that Laban would hotly pursue him as a thief. Jacob pleads his case before the witnesses. Jacob acknowledges Laban had searched and found nothing to show Jacob has done anything wrong. He challenges Laban to bring forth the evidence any evidence of wrongdoing.

38 This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. 39 That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. 40 Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. 41 Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. 42 Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labour of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight.

Jacob continues to make his case before the witnesses. He will now show why everything he has, including his family, he has earned. The high points are

- *He proclaims he worked for Laban twenty years.*
- *He served fourteen years to pay for Leah and Rachel, paid in full.*
- *He worked six years for the livestock according to a mutual agreement and Laban kept changing the agreement, changed it ten times in six years. Claims he met the terms of the agreement and all he has he earned.*
- *Claims even though he kept the agreements and earned what he has, the only thing that keeps Laban from breaking the agreement and taking all his possessions away is Laban fears the God of Jacob.*

43 And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they have born?

Laban, trying to look good, proclaims Jacob's wives, children and livestock are his. Laban agrees there is nothing he can do about, because he fears the God of Jacob.

44 Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee.

Laban realizes he can't beat Jacob, because God is blessing Jacob. He now realizes Jacob has a God who looks out and cares for him. Laban would be better to be on

Jacob's good side than seen as an enemy. He wants to make a covenant with Jacob.

45 And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. 46 And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap.

Jacob agrees, there should be peace between them. Jacob picks up a stone and sets it down. This is the first stone of a marker. He tells his brethren (wives, sons and servants) to gather stones and place them on top of his to make a heap (pile) of stones. This is how people made agreements in the day. The pile of stones is a marker.

47 And Laban called it Jegarsahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. 48 And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed; 49 And Mizpah; for he said, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another.

Laban recognizes the pile and calls it Jegarsahadutha, which means the pile is a witness in Laban's language. Jacob calls the same pile Galeed. Jacob's word is easier to say so the pile is called Galeed (witness). They also call it a Mizpah, a watch tower. Here is the covenant. It starts out, The LORD watch between me and thee, when we are absent one from another. Many friends and lovers have used this phrase when they were to be separated from each other. They usually mean it as a phrase of affection, but that is not the way it is used here.

50 If thou shalt afflict my daughters, or if thou shalt take other wives beside my daughters, no man is with us; see, God is witness betwixt me and thee. 51 And Laban said to Jacob, Behold this heap, and behold this pillar, which I have cast betwixt me and thee; 52 This heap be witness, and this pillar be witness, that I will not pass over this heap to thee, and that thou shalt not pass over this heap and this pillar unto me, for harm.

Laban starts the agreement with if Jacob afflicts Laban's daughters or takes other wives that God will be a witness against Jacob. Laban and Jacob agree that they will not go past this pile of witness to the land or home of the other, to do harm or God will be a witness against the violator.

53 The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. 54 Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. 55 And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his sons and his daughters, and blessed them: and Laban departed, and returned unto his place.

Laban proclaims the God of Abraham and Nahor and their father Terra judge between Laban and Jacob. Laban doesn't realize the God of Abraham is not the god of Nahor and Terra, who worshipped idols. Joshua 24:1,2.

Jacob swore, by the God of his father Isaac. Jacob still didn't feel worthy to call the LORD his God, but proclaimed him to be the God of Isaac. An animal was sacrificed, shed it's blood and called all his brothers to eat of it. The celebration lasted all night. The next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them and left in peace. Jacob was now ready to continue his journey to the land of his father's. He would start off the remainder of the journey, knowing he was under the protection of almighty God.