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Jacob Flees from Laban

31: 1-21

Jacob flees from Laban DIG: Why were Laban and his sons becoming increasingly distressed? How had Laban cheated Jacob? What did ADONAI do about it? How did Ya'akov know when to leave Laban and where to go? What did Leah and Rachel think of Jacob's plan to return to Canaan? Why did Rachel take her father's household gods? How did God's past faithfulness influence the decision made by Rachel and Leah?

REFLECT: How do you know when it's time to leave a relationship? When was the last time the Lord reminded you of a vow or a promise that you made to Him? What things of the world, like Rachel's household gods, are you holding onto? Observe how God remembered Jacob's commitment (31:13). What lessons about commitment can believers learn from this? How has God demonstrated His faithfulness in your life?

Jacob's prosperity could not go unnoticed for long. He had heard what Laban's sons were saying: Jacob (Hebrew: Ya'akov) has taken everything our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our father. This was simply not true, in fact, quite the opposite; **Jacob had added to their father's wealth. And Ya'akov noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what it had been (31:1-2). He** knew **he** couldn't live much longer in **Haran**, but **he** had made an agreement to keep **Laban's flocks** and **he** hesitated to be the first to break it. **He** no doubt suspected that **his uncle** did not intend to honor it and would probably take **his flocks** from **him** by force, but the deceitful **Laban** had not yet made any overt move to do this, and **he** could not discern the intent of **Laban's** heart. However, **God** could.⁴⁸⁸

Then ADONAI spoke to Ya'akov a second time. The first time was at Bethel twenty years previously. At that time God commanded: Go back to the Land of your fathers and to your relatives. Now as far as **his** distant family history went, **Jacob was in the land of his fathers, the land of Haran.** But here, it does not refer to the land of Haran. At this time, **the land of his fathers was the land of Canaan, the Land of his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham. And once again the LORD makes the promise: I will be with you**

(31:3). It was time for **Ya'akov** to return to **Bethel**.

In obedience, **Jacob** prepared to depart. But beforehand, **he** thought **he** needed to first explain everything to **Rachel and Leah**. If **they** did not understand the situation, **they** might be reluctant to leave **their** home. **He** had said little about **his** problems with **their father**, but now they need to see the whole picture. **So Ya'akov sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were.** **Jacob** didn't want anyone to hear what **he** was going to say. **He** said to them: **I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before.** This is because in **his** self-deception, **Laban** believed that **Jacob** had **taken his wealth** away. **He** had been convinced of this by **his sons**. **But Jacob** replied: **The God of my father has been with me.** And this very point was about to be explained to **his wives**. **He** explains **his** own faithfulness. **You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength.** This was something **his** wives had seen with **their** own eyes. **Ya'akov** had fully kept **his** part of the agreement despite **their father's** deception. **Yet, your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me financially (31:4-7).** Then **he** gave **his wives** an example.

If he said, "The speckled ones will be your wages," then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young, but **then** when **Laban** saw that more **speckled** kids were being borne, **he** changed the agreement and **said, "The streaked ones will be your wages," then all the flocks bore streaked young.** First of all, that was not the original agreement. The original agreement was that **Ya'akov** was supposed to get **every speckled or spotted** kid born. But for each change **Laban** proposed, **Elohim** protected and prospered **Jacob**. During this time, **Jacob** upheld **his** end of the agreement and was blameless. In the final analysis, **Jacob** took none of the credit. **He** concluded: **So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me (31:8-9).** **Jacob** then explained to **his wives** that **God** had shown all this to **him** in a dream.

In the breeding season, when **Ya'akov** would normally use **the peeled** and striped **branches (30:37-39), he once had a dream in which he looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted (31:10).** The actual **goats** that were mating were dark brown or black, but **God** could look into **their** gene structure (though **Jacob** could not) and make sure a huge number of **streaked, speckled or spotted goats** were being produced. So **God** showed **Ya'akov** that **He**, not the **peeled branches**, was responsible for the increase in **his flocks**.

The Angel of God was the same **One** who heard Ishmael crying in the desert **(21:17).** *He*

is the second Person of the Trinity, the preincarnate Messiah. **He said to me in the dream. "Jacob," and I answered, "Here I am." And He said: Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you (31:11-12).** Once again, Ya'akov is blameless, and Laban's actions put him under the cursing aspect of God's covenant with Abraham: **Whoever curses you I will curse (12:3b).** Previously Laban was under the blessing aspect, and he was blessed materially. But now because of his changed attitude, he was under the curse of God. Laban cursed, or tried to financially harm Jacob by trying to decrease his flocks, so now, because of the curse, his own flocks were being decreased.

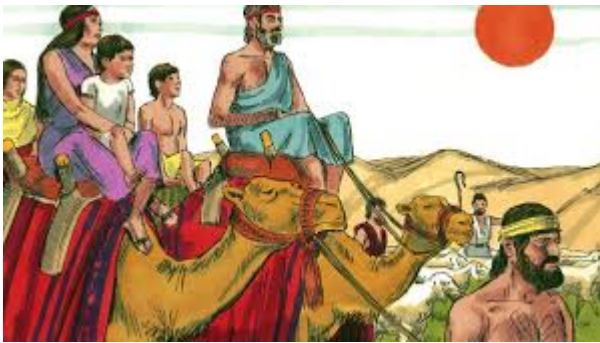
Ya'akov continued to tell Rachel and Leah of his call to return to Canaan. First ADONAI said to him, **"I AM the God of Bethel."** Twenty years earlier, Jacob had made a vow to God at Bethel. Jacob had said, since **God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then ADONAI will be my God (28:20-21).** Then God reminded him that it was time to fulfill that **vow and leave that far away land at once and go back to His native land, and back to Bethel (31:13).**

Then Rachel and Leah answered Jacob and they raised a rhetorical question: **Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate?** The answer was no. Now that Laban had sons, the daughters would inherit nothing. Furthermore, Laban had not only cheated Jacob, he had cheated his own daughters. Again they raised a rhetorical question: **Does he not regard us as foreigners?** This time the answer was yes. **Not only has he sold us for fourteen years of labor, but he has also used up what he was paid for us (31:14-15).** The custom of their time was that the bride price paid by the husband or his family was supposed to be held in trust in the event it was needed to provide for the wife if she were abandoned or widowed.⁴⁸⁹ But Ya'akov did not pay a bride price to Laban, he gave him seven years of service for each wife. However, no part of the fruits of Jacob's service was set aside for his daughters as it should have been. Laban had built up his own holdings. He would use local custom only if it benefited him. Earlier he had said: **It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one (29:26),** but here, he would also go against local custom if it served his financial purposes.

Jacob's wives continued to say: **Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children (31:16a).** They rightly felt that since their husband had been responsible for the great prosperity of their father, and since this was in effect what Jacob had given in order to marry them, these possessions by all rights

should have come to **them**. **So they** both said: **Do whatever Elohim has told you (31:16b)**. In other words, they were ready to go.⁴⁹⁰

Therefore, if **Ya'akov** thought **he** had to convince **his** wives, **he** was wrong. **They** already believed in **him** and were prepared to support **his** leaving, not necessarily because of what **their father** had done to **Jacob** (although that was bad enough), but because of what **he** had done to **them**.⁴⁹¹ Unfortunately, **their father** was no longer concerned about **their** future; whatever inheritance **they** might once have had would now go to **their** brothers. **They** had watched closely, though silently, the actions of **their father** and brothers in contrast with those of **Jacob**, and **they** could well understand why **God** had blessed **him**. **They** both loved **him**, and **they** realized it was to **their** advantage, as well as **their children**, for **them** to leave **their father's** home and go with **Jacob** to **his** own Land.⁴⁹²



Then Ya'akov lost no time getting ready to leave. Like **his** mother, **Jacob** could think fast on **his** feet. **He** had been thinking and praying about this for some time. Once **he** decided to go, **he** acted decisively and **put his** eleven **children** (Benjamin would be born later) **and his** four **wives** on camels. **He** drove all **his** livestock ahead of **him**, along with all the goods **he** had accumulated by trade in **Paddan Aram**. In contrast to when **he** came to **Haran** empty handed, when **he** left it must have been quite a large caravan. **He** left to go to **his** father **Isaac**, whom **he** had heard might still be alive, in the land of **Canaan (31:17-18)**. The time had come for **him** to take over the patriarchal responsibility associated with **God's** promises. **He** possessed both the birthright and the blessing. They both entailed great privileges and responsibilities. It was now time to fulfill them.⁴⁹³

Jacob had sensed that there was nothing **Laban** wouldn't do if **he** tried to leave with **his** flocks, and **Ya'akov** was responsible for the welfare of **his** wives and children. Therefore, when **Laban** was three days journey away shearing **his** sheep, **Jacob** used wisdom and left **Laban the Aramean** by not telling **him** he was running away. **So he fled with all he**

had, and crossing the Euphrates River he headed to Mount Gilead far to the southwest (31:20-21). This phrase: **crossing the River (NIV)** or **on the other side of the River (NKJ)** is significant in **Joshua 24:2-3, 14-15**. The word in Hebrew was first used of Abraham and means *those who have passed over (14:13)*. Mount **Gilead** is in a mountainous region east of the Jordan **River**, and was the last place **they** would pass through before entering **the land** of Canaan. Once they started on **their** way, it would probably have taken them ten days or so to reach **their** destination.

But, **when Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father's household gods (31:19)**. Although **Rachel** trusted **God**, **she** was also reluctant to completely give up **her** previous superstitions. These little **household gods**, or *teraphim*, were associated with the inheritance and property rights of the owner. So **Rachel** probably took **them** thinking that **they** would validate the legitimacy of **her husband's** title to **the flocks he** had acquired while serving **Laban** and represented the inheritance **she** had a right to expect.⁴⁹⁴ When **Laban** found out that **Jacob** had left unannounced, **he** was undoubtedly furious. But the loss of **his household gods** gave him a good excuse to chase down what **he** considered to be **his** stolen property. But **he** was going after much more than **his household gods**. **He** was going after what **he** considered to be **his flocks** and herds.