



Living Hope Ministries Bible Study

Genesis 31

This study is longer because there are 55 verses to consider.

A. Jacob's disputes with Laban and his sons.

1. (1-2) Contention with Laban's sons causes Laban to look differently at Jacob.

The problem wasn't that Jacob stole; it was that **Laban's sons** were filled with envy. Envy distorts the truth. Jacob had not taken anything of Laban's, but envy makes people lie. Therefore, Laban's sons said, "**Jacob has taken away all that was our father's.**" Their envy poisoned their hearts against Jacob.

2. (3) God tells Jacob to return to the Promised Land.

God gave him the desire to go back home (Genesis 30:25). His present circumstances became unbearable. God promised to be with Jacob, even though his brother had vowed to kill him (Genesis 27:41). Jacob could return to where Esau lived, trusting in God's protection.

3. (4-9) Jacob explains the situation and his plan to his wives.

Though Laban tried to cheat Jacob, God protected him. God showed Jacob that He was greater and able to overcome whatever man might do against him. God's presence was with Jacob, just as He had promised (Genesis 28:15). Jacob believed he had acted properly toward Laban and that his wives knew of his righteous conduct and Laban's unfair treatment.

4. (10-16) Jacob's dream of the flocks.

"The Angel of God spoke to me in a dream": The blessing of the abundant production of sheep and goats described in Genesis 30:37-43

was revealed to Jacob in a dream. Jacob used clever agricultural methods, but more importantly, he had God's blessing.

"I am the God of Bethel": God told Jacob to return to Bethel, the place where he first encountered the Lord personally (Genesis 28:10–19). This was Jacob's way of returning to his first love and first works (as later recommended to believers in Revelation 2:4–5).

5. Leah and Rachel support Jacob in his desire to move back to Canaan.

"Is there still any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house?": Rachel and Leah note that their father Laban has already used up any potential inheritance they might have received.

"Whatever God has said to you, do it": Their support of Jacob in a costly and perhaps dangerous move is significant. It was a huge undertaking to move such a large family so far.

B. Jacob's departure from Laban.

1. (17-21) Jacob leaves without saying goodbye.

Jacob rose and set his sons and wives on camels: Jacob intended a quick departure, traveling as fast as possible. Jacob was wealthy enough so that his entire family could travel **on camels**.

Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's: There are many possible reasons why Rachel took these idols (*teraphim*). Perhaps she worshipped them and didn't want to be without them. Perhaps she didn't want her father to use them for divination to catch them (as he may have done before, Genesis 30:27). Perhaps such idols were used as property deeds, and she thought that by taking them, she secured any remaining inheritance. Or perhaps she simply wanted to get back at her father, whom she felt had mistreated her and her family.

He headed toward the mountains of Gilead: It was nearly 300 miles (482 kilometres) from Haran to Gilead, with many dangerous enemies along the way—such as his brother Esau, who had sworn to kill him (Genesis 27:41).

2. (22-30) Laban pursues and catches Jacob.

God came to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night: Apparently, Laban had evil intentions against Jacob. Yet God protected Jacob through this **dream by night**, warning Laban to be careful in his dealings.

Why did you steal my gods? Laban ended his words to Jacob with an accusing question. He knew his *teraphim* were missing and suspected Jacob.

3. (31-32) Jacob proclaims his innocence.

“With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live”: Jacob, unaware that his beloved wife, Rachel stole the household idols, proclaimed his innocence and pronounced a harsh curse on the thief —unintentionally inviting judgment on his own wife.

4. (33-35) Laban searches for his household idols.

Laban went into Jacob’s tent: Confident that his idols had been stolen, Laban made a thorough search.

Rachel had hidden the idols in the camel’s saddle and sat on them: When Laban couldn’t find them, Jacob became angry and rebuked him

C. Laban and Jacob make a covenant.

1. (43-50) They build the pillar of Mizpah.

“All that you see is mine”: Laban boldly claimed that everything Jacob had belonged to him. Yet in a supposed act of generosity, he said, “It is **mine**, but out of the kindness of my heart, I’ll let you have it.”

“May the Lord watch between you and me when we are absent one from another”: Laban expressed his suspicion of Jacob. The idea of **Mizpah** (watch) is, “If you do wrong, God will see it and may He punish.”

2. (51-55) A pillar of separation and a parting of their ways.

The best solution for Jacob’s in-law problems.

Then Laban departed and returned to his place: After a proper goodbye, Laban saw his daughters and grandchildren for the last time. Jacob took his family to Canaan and never returned to Laban’s home.

“This is the last we hear of Laban in the Bible, and it is good that this is the end of him. Laban is of the world, and Jacob needed to be freed from this world in order to live wholeheartedly for the God of his fathers.”

Points to consider

- How do you handle jealousy and misunderstanding?
- Why do you think Jacob decided to leave Laban? Why was it such a big step?
- How significant was the decision of Jacob's wives to leave with him?
- Why do think Rachel stole her father's gods
- What agreement did Jacob and Laban make?