

# GENESIS 31

## LEAVE YOUR BAGGAGE BEHIND

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I'm sure that we have all gone through the moving process at least one time in our lives. When you are little moving is sort of fun. You don't have that many responsibilities. All you have to do is make sure you have all your favorite toys. When you get older it isn't so much fun. You have to do all that packing and you have to account for everything. Of course there is always the danger of leaving something behind. Most people leave something behind and others leave things on purpose just so they no longer have to keep up with them.

There is however the situation where we *should* leave something behind but just can't seem to do it. That thing that should be left still holds a vital place in our lives. We know we should leave it, we may in some ways want to leave it, but we just can't seem to part with it. We have all been there. Some of us may be in that situation here today.

There is a time in which we just have to part ways with people, places and things. That is where we find ourselves today. Jacob is leaving his Father-in-law's house and going back to the Promised Land. On his journey home however he has some stowaways of which he isn't aware. As we go through today's text we need to check ourselves for stowaways because they can hinder our walk with God.

Gen. 31:1-16

Now we see how Jacob and his family really feel. Laban has squandered the money left for Leah and Rachel. He has changed Jacob's wages and God has countered every move Laban made. There is tension

everywhere. Jacob and his wives agree that it is time to get out of Dodge.

Jacob doesn't like being on the receiving end of all this chicanery. The reversal has come almost full circle.

**Gen 31:17** Then Jacob rose and set his sons and his wives on camels.

**Gen 31:18** And he carried away all his livestock and all his possessions which he had gained, his acquired livestock which he had gained in Padan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

**Gen 31:19** Now Laban had gone to shear his sheep, and Rachel had stolen the household idols that were her father's.

**Gen 31:20** And Jacob stole away, unknown to Laban the Syrian, in that he did not tell him that he intended to flee.

**Gen 31:21** So he fled with all that he had. He arose and crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead.

You may have noticed this already, but Jacob is not exactly a confrontational person. He prefers to do things in secret or behind people's backs. This shouldn't come as a surprise to us. This has been his tendency his entire life. That is why he has his name, heel-catcher or supplanter.

He fears his father-in-law so he slides out the back door while Laban is away in the fields shearing sheep. I don't blame him for doing it this way. It was probably the prudent thing to do.

The only thing wrong with the plan is that Jacob's wife Rachel had stolen the gods of her father. The word translated gods or images here is teraphim. Tera means earth or natural. So we see that these were little idol images.

You may recall that Jacob was sent to the family of Abraham in order to find a wife. He was not to marry from among the Canaanite women. The

Canaanites were pagan to the bone. They regularly participated in fertility rites and the sacrificing of children.

If that is the case, we then have to ask ourselves if Jacob did any better leaving the country and finding a wife from Abraham's kin.

We have to understand that the family of Nahor that was eventually ruled by Laban had some knowledge of the one true God. They were however, like many people today. Though they had some knowledge of God they still dabbled in idolatry. Church folks do this all the time. I don't mean they have little statues they worship, but many do have a tendency to pay more attention to *tera*, that is natural things than we do God.

Laban's family feared God and they knew about Him, but they didn't worship Him alone. They had a shotgun approach to faith. They prayed to several deities and hoped something would stick. This was common then and is still common in places steeped in polytheism, or the worship of many gods.

One of the saddest things is that Laban passed this legacy on to his children. Rachel is now leaving the pagan home and just can't seem to leave her family idols behind so she hides them in her luggage. She can't make the separation. Even though she has prayed to God and has seen Him work in her life, she just can't leave the little statues behind.

It is a shame when you have to carry your god and he can't carry you.

At any rate they leave town and have a 3 day head start.

**Gen 31:21** So he fled with all that he had. He arose and crossed the river, and headed toward the mountains of Gilead.

**Gen 31:22** And Laban was told on the third day that Jacob had fled.

**Gen 31:23** Then he took his brethren with him and pursued him for seven days' journey, and he overtook him in the mountains of Gilead.

**Gen 31:24** But God had come to Laban the Syrian in a dream by night, and said to him, "Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad."

**Gen 31:25** So Laban overtook Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the mountains, and Laban with his brethren pitched in the mountains of Gilead.

Jacob had a 3 day head start, but it still took a week to catch up to him. The night before he caught them god spoke to Laban in a dream and told him neither to speak to Jacob too good or too bad.

Why is that? God knows how many hairs we have on our heads. He knows us better than we know ourselves. God knows both the characters of Jacob and Laban. Laban can be a bully and Jacob can be weak. If Laban bullies Jacob he could convince him to go back home with him. If Laban is flattering he may appeal to Jacob's more sensitive side and persuade him yet again to go back home with him in order that he may be able to see his grandchildren grow.

Either way Jacob is vulnerable. That could mess up God's plan and Jacob's life. This is amazing to me! God intervenes in some of the strangest ways. He could have struck Laban with lightning. He could have just told him to turn around stop his pursuit, but He didn't. Instead He told him what to say and what not to say. I'm afraid that God is constantly intervening on our behalves and we don't see it. We just want God to strike down our enemies and be done with it but God sees further than we do. His ways are not our ways the Bible says. We will see later why God did it this way.

Now Laban confronts Jacob.

**Gen 31:26** And Laban said to Jacob: "What have you done, that you have stolen away unknown to me, and carried away my daughters like captives *taken* with the sword?"

**Gen 31:27** Why did you flee away secretly, and steal away from me, and not tell me; for I might have sent you away with joy and songs, with timbrel and harp?

**Gen 31:28** And you did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now you have done foolishly in *so* doing.

**Gen 31:29** It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful that you speak to Jacob neither good nor bad.'

**Gen 31:30** And now you have surely gone because you greatly long for your father's house, *but* why did you steal my gods?"

**Gen 31:31** Then Jacob answered and said to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I said, 'Perhaps you would take your daughters from me by force.'

**Gen 31:32** With whomever you find your gods, do not let him live. In the presence of our brethren, identify what I have of yours and take *it* with you." For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

So they confronted each other and Jacob admitted that he was afraid. He didn't trust Laban any further than he could throw him.

Laban goes into his tirade, exaggerating about how Jacob had abducted his daughters. He even goes so far as to say that he would have sent them off with a big party. We all know that was probably a lie.

Laban then goes into his bullying mode telling Jacob that he has acted foolishly and it is within his power to do harm to Jacob if he so desires. Eventually he levels the charge of stealing the idols at Jacob. Jacob didn't know Rachel had stolen them so he told Laban to search the camp. That is what he does next.

**Gen 31:33** And Laban went into Jacob's tent, into Leah's tent, and into the two maids' tents, but he did not find *them*. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent.

- Gen 31:34** Now Rachel had taken the household idols, put them in the camel's saddle, and sat on them. And Laban searched all about the tent but did not find *them*.
- Gen 31:35** And she said to her father, "Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women *is* with me." And he searched but did not find the household idols.
- Gen 31:36** Then Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: "What *is* my trespass? What *is* my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me?"
- Gen 31:37** Although you have searched all my things, what part of your household things have you found? Set *it* here before my brethren and your brethren, that they may judge between us both!
- Gen 31:38** These twenty years I *have been* with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried their young, and I have not eaten the rams of your flock.
- Gen 31:39** That which was torn *by beasts* I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it. You required it from my hand, *whether* stolen by day or stolen by night.
- Gen 31:40** There I was! In the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night, and my sleep departed from my eyes.
- Gen 31:41** Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times.
- Gen 31:42** Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked *you* last night."

Laban didn't find anything because Rachel was hiding the idols under the saddle on which she was sitting.

Jacob then became emboldened and began to "share his heart" or vent. He lets out 20 years of pent up frustration. All those years he served in the heat and cold. All those years he took the loss for the animals that were lost to predators.

As Jacob recounts the last 20 years, we can see that it was by no means a rosy relationship. Laban constantly changed the parameters of the relationship. Jacob felt slighted at every turn. This has been a long-term lesson.

Very rarely do we part with bad habits after one short lesson. Those besetting sins that are so deeply ingrained in us usually take longer to purge. If we look back at our lives since God came into them we can see that some of those bad habits seemed to go away instantly. Others took longer to go away and there are some that still haunt us. Those that are still with us are the ones that are the most deeply ingrained in us. They form a large percentage of who we are. That's why we cling to them. I have heard some say, "God made me this way!" Well, not necessarily. If it sin, then God cannot be held responsible. We all have rough edges that need honing.

So get ready for the sanding process. We can yield and make it easy or we can fight God and spend 20 years with Laban.

Laban then responds typically and atypically.

**Gen 31:43** And Laban answered and said to Jacob, "*These* daughters *are* my daughters, and *these* children *are* my children, and *this* flock *is* my flock; all that you see *is* mine. But what can I do this day to these my daughters or to their children whom they have borne?"

**Gen 31:44** Now therefore, come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me."

**Gen 31:45** So Jacob took a stone and set it up *as* a pillar.

**Gen 31:46** Then Jacob said to his brethren, "Gather stones." And they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there on the heap.

**Gen 31:47** Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed.

**Gen 31:48** And Laban said, "This heap *is* a witness between you and me this day." Therefore its name was called Galeed,

**Gen 31:49** also Mizpah, because he said, "May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from another.

**Gen 31:50** If you afflict my daughters, or if you take *other* wives besides my daughters, *although* no man *is* with us—see, God *is* witness between you and me!"

**Gen 31:51** Then Laban said to Jacob, "Here is this heap and here is *this* pillar, which I have placed between you and me.

**Gen 31:52** This heap *is* a witness, and *this* pillar *is* a witness, that I will not pass beyond this heap to you, and you will not pass beyond this heap and this pillar to me, for harm.

**Gen 31:53** The God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father judge between us." And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.

**Gen 31:54** Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his brethren to eat bread. And they ate bread and stayed all night on the mountain.

**Gen 31:55** And early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place.

Laban started out claiming that all Jacob had was his. That may be the way he saw it but that wasn't the case. Once again it just revealed the heart of Laban. That was typical of Laban. Then he changes gears and wants to reconcile. Laban suggests that they make a covenant, an agreement that there would be no more hostilities between them.

They placed a stone and piled up more rocks as a boundary and a memorial between them. They agreed that they would be accountable to each other and to God. This place serves as a reminder and a boundary marker.

Now we can see why God allowed Laban to catch up with Jacob and didn't just send him back home or even strike him down with lightning. God's whole plan is one of reconciliation. God wants people to reconcile both to Him and each other. God let Laban catch Jacob for this purpose.



Now they have a peace between them. God is the one that is to keep them accountable, as it ultimately is anyhow.

The marker represented a physical boundary that neither would cross. This gave Jacob some security and Laban a border where he realized he no longer he any authority.

It also represented a spiritual boundary and a marker on the timeline of their lives. It was at this time that Jacob came out from under the yoke of his father-in-law. The paganism of Laban would not cross that line. Rachel would have to leave her baggage back home.

There is a time in our lives, after we have been born again, that we have to cut our ties to all that is unholy. Our new life, by definition means that our lives change and have to change. We can't bring the dirty baggage of our past into our new life with Jesus. God has cast our sins into the sea of forgetfulness. Why then do we insist on fishing them back out of the water and carrying them on the journey?

God is working on our behalves to get us to where we need to be. We don't understand that all the time, but we need to believe it and live in that peace.

If we give those idols to God, He will take them away. We don't have to dispose of them ourselves.

God will fill the vacuum on our lives that is there due to anything we give to Him. So, we can be filled with tera, the natural things of this life or we can be filled with the Spirit and the things God wants for us. The choice is yours. We can make it hard on ourselves or we can allow God to make it easy.

Don't force God to place you under the thumb of a "Laban" for 20 years. No one wants to be in school that long.