

## Introduction

On a Wednesday night in 1992 in Orlando, Florida, Karen and I sat about 2/3 of the way back on the west side of the auditorium at the Discovery Church. We had been a member of that church for eleven years, and had helped it grow from about thirty people to over five hundred. I had been ordained and served as an elder there for six years. This was our church family and I loved the people in our church. At the same time I was beginning to struggle with my health. I was a Life Group leader, part of the Men's Group, served as an Elder, and was over the publications. I put out a monthly newsletter/magazine that had grown to about 12-16 pages. The presbytery, that is the group of elders, had asked me to take over the children's ministry. They wanted me to write the curriculum for all the age groups, write weekly dramas, and for us to play the roles of king and queen of the Kingdom Kids. I prayed about it and the answer I got was no. But the presbytery said that I needed to do this. I submitted to the other elders and faithfully added that to my responsibilities. At my regular job, I was the General Manager of a Golf Club, which was a 60-hour a week job. Consequently, I was working 20-22 hours per day, which meant I was only getting 2-3 hours of sleep a night. I did this for many months and my health began to deteriorate. I was also fasting a lot and my weight had dropped to 150 pounds. As we sat in that Wednesday night service, I had a strong feeling that I was a stranger here, and did not belong there any longer. Then, I heard the Lord say to me loud and clear, "Go To Metro Life." Metro Life was another church in town and I knew nothing about it. Karen and I got up from our pew and left that night. I resigned from all my responsibilities and I met with the Senior Pastor. He was not in agreement with us leaving. He gave me three points of counsel, and I was not in agreement with any of them. First, he told me to get a vasectomy. He said my large family was preventing me from some ministry. Second, he told me to take some time off and read some books to get refreshed. Third, he appealed to my pride, saying I was a champion and belonged to a championship team. He said Metro Life was not a championship team, and that our church was a championship team. None of these things agreed with my spirit. Instead, they were a confirmation that I was not to be there any longer. Karen and I were obedient to the word of the Lord and began to go to Metro Life. The Lord gave further instructions, saying that we would be there for a season, and that it was a hospital stay for me. I was not to get very involved, and He was going to send me out after I had rested.

In our text today, Jacob had been working day and night for twenty years. His wages had been changed ten times and he had not been treated fairly. Then, Laban's face, countenance, and attitude changed and he was no longer friendly. Jacob and his daughters felt like strangers. Then, the Lord spoke to Jacob and told him to arise and go back to the land of his father. So, Jacob arose and departed to the land. When Laban heard of it, he pursued Jacob and overtook him after seven days. They met and Laban rebuked Jacob for fleeing without telling Laban that he was leaving. Then, Laban brought charges against Jacob for stealing his gods, or idols. Jacob tells him to search his possessions, which Laban did. Afterwards, Jacob unloaded on Laban about the way he had cheated him and changed his wages ten times. Then, at Laban's request they made a covenant. They vowed not to harm one another. It was a covenant of peace. Their covenant did not change the fact that Jacob was returning to his homeland. Their covenant just established peace between the two of them.

Our text today is about Jacob's departure. We will look at 1) Jacob's Fleeing, 2) Laban's Pursuit, 3) Laban's charges, 4) Jacob's Response, and 5) Laban and Jacob's Covenant.

## 1. Jacob's Fleeing (Gen 31:17-21)

(Gen 31:17-21) "Then Jacob arose and put his children and his wives upon camels; {18} and he drove away all his livestock and all his property which he had gathered, his acquired livestock which he had gathered in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. {19} When Laban had gone to shear his flock, then Rachel stole the household idols that were her father's. {20} And Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing. {21} So he fled with all that he had; and he arose and crossed the Euphrates River, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilead.

Jacob did not go the land of Haran to spend the next twenty years. He went there to escape his brother and to find a wife. But, he fell in love with Rachel and agreed to work for seven years for the dowry to pay Laban. He worked seven years, only to marry Leah by mistake. He agreed to work another seven years to marry Rachel. Laban has already deceived him and changed his agreement with him once. After serving his fourteen years for Leah and Rachel, Jacob was ready to move back to his own place and his own country. He asked Laban to give him his wives and children and let him depart. Laban asked him to stay and name his wages. They worked out an agreement and Jacob stayed another six years. During that time, Laban continually tried to cheat Jacob, and changed his wages ten times. Now, his attitude and his son's attitude were not friendly towards Jacob, Leah and Rachel. They feel like foreigners and not family. So, they are ready to move on. In confirmation that it is time to move on, the Lord tells Jacob to return to his home land. So, Jacob is obedient to the word of the Lord, and he and his wives and his children head toward the land of Jacob's birth.

When God speaks to you and I, are we instantly obedient? I think that Jacob had a little help in his obedience. He and his wives were ready to leave. They felt like foreigners and their own family was not friendly towards them any longer. So, when the Lord tells Jacob to leave, he was ready to leave, and he left immediately. The word flee is used several times in the text. The Hebrew word is *barach* (Strong's H1272), which means to flee, bolt, make haste, or to run away. I think it is accurate to say that Jacob and his family bolted. But, I think they timed their bolt. They did not flee until Laban had gone to shear his sheep. Jacob knew that they would get a pretty good head start on Laban if they left while he was gone.

Since Laban was away shearing his sheep, his tent was left unattended. Rachel took advantage of that and stole his household idols or gods. The word is "elohim," which is the plural of "el." These were idols that he had. Laban worshipped other gods. Jacob was unaware that Rachel stole Laban's idols.

This was a pretty big caravan. Jacob had two wives, two concubines, and twelve children. Jacob put all of them on camels, which makes 16 camels. They probably had another ten or fifteen camels loaded with their belongings. This was a fairly large caravan. On top of that, Jacob had lots of donkeys, camels, goats, and sheep. This was a large caravan of people and livestock.

We read that "*Jacob deceived Laban by not telling him that he was fleeing.*" The King James says that he stole away unawares to Laban. The English Standard Version says that he tricked Laban. The Hebrew word is *ganab* (Strong's H1589), which means to steal, thief, deceive, secretly bring or steal away. Twenty-nine times out of the thirty-eight places it is used, it is translated as steal. I don't think he stole anything, but he did leave secretly as a thief would do.

## 2. Laban's Pursuit (Gen 31:22-25)

(Gen 31:22-25) "When it was told Laban on the third day that Jacob had fled, {23} then he took his kinsmen with him and pursued him a distance of seven days' journey, and he overtook him in the hill country of Gilead. {24} God came to Laban the Aramean in a dream of the night and said to him, "Be careful that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad." {25} Laban caught up with Jacob. Now Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country, and Laban with his kinsmen camped in the hill country of Gilead.

It takes three days for Laban to find out that Jacob had fled. Laban has just lost his main workers. God has blessed him on account of Jacob. Laban is obviously very upset and he took his relatives and pursued Jacob for seven days until they overtook him in the hill country of Gilead. The Hebrew word is *radaph* (Strong's H7291) and it is used 146 times. Most of the time it is used of an army or king pursuing its enemy. For example, in Exodus 14, Pharaoh pursued Israel when they left Egypt. In Gen 14:14, Abraham had pursued the four kings from the north as far as Dan. Laban pursued Jacob like he was an enemy that he wanted to destroy.

God saw everything, and He has promised to protect Jacob. So, God intervened and appeared to Laban in a dream. Laban may have worshipped false gods, but that does not mean that God cannot or will not speak to him. God can speak to anyone that He wants to, and He can do it in many different ways. God warned Laban in this dream to be careful not to speak to Jacob either good or bad. Most commentaries say that he was intending to do evil to Jacob and they interpret this as saying, "hands off."

The other word that I want to briefly mention is that after pursuing Jacob, he overtook him. That word is one of my favorite words about marriage. It is the Hebrew word, *dabaq*, which means to cleave, to become joined to, or to overtake. In Genesis 2:24, God says that a man shall leave his mother and father and cleave or be joined to his wife. It is that same word *dabaq*. Husbands need to pursue and overtake their wives so that they become one. It is not a pre-marital pursuit. This is a lifetime pursuit. We have to continually pursue and overtake our wives. In our text, Laban and his kinsmen are chasing after Jacob and they finally join up with them in the hill country of Gilead.

## 3. Laban's Charges (Gen 31:26-35)

(Gen 31:26-35) "Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done by deceiving me and carrying away my daughters like captives of the sword? {27} "Why did you flee secretly and deceive me, and did not tell me so that I might have sent you away with joy and with songs, with timbrel and with lyre; {28} and did not allow me to kiss my sons and my daughters? Now you have done foolishly. {29} "It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night, saying, 'Be careful not to speak either good or bad to Jacob.' {30} "Now you have indeed gone away because you longed greatly for your father's house; but why did you steal my gods?" {31} Then Jacob replied to Laban, "Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. {32} "The one with whom you find your gods shall not live; in the presence of our kinsmen point out what is yours among my belongings and take it for yourself." For Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them. {33} So Laban went into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two maids, but he did not find them. Then he went out of Leah's tent and entered Rachel's tent. {34} Now Rachel had taken the household idols and put them in the camel's

saddle, and she sat on them. And Laban felt through all the tent but did not find them. {35} She said to her father, "Let not my lord be angry that I cannot rise before you, for the manner of women is upon me." So he searched but did not find the household idols."

Laban uses the same words in his charges against Jacob. He asks why he deceived him by not telling him that he was fleeing. He also accuses Jacob with stealing his gods. Jacob tells him that he did not allow him to kiss his sons or daughters, or to send them out with a celebration. Jacob answers these charges by saying that he thought that Laban would take his daughters by force. Jacob knows Laban very well, and that is probably what Laban would have done. Laban makes himself look very good and accuses Jacob of acting foolishly. Laban is a deceiver and a cheat. He has been dishonest with Jacob, and he was not acting friendly towards him. He would not have sent them out with a celebration. He would have probably sent Jacob away empty handed.

Jacob says two other things. He tells Laban to search his possessions and take whatever is his. In Jacob's mind, he has not taken anything that belongs to Laban. He has a clear conscience and is walking in integrity. The second thing he says is the one that has taken his idols shall not live. It says that he did not know that Rachel had taken them. Soon after this, Rachel dies giving birth to Benjamin, so his curse upon the one that stole Laban's idols was fulfilled.

Laban searched through Jacob's tent, and then through everyone else's tents, and he did not find them. Rachel took them and put them under the camel saddle that she was sitting on. To keep him from looking there, she told Laban that the manner of women is upon me. She knew that her father would not search under something she was sitting on.

#### 4. **Jacob's Response** (Gen 31:36-42)

(Gen 31:36-42) "Then Jacob became angry and contended with Laban; and Jacob said to Laban, "What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me? {37} "Though you have felt through all my goods, what have you found of all your household goods? Set it here before my kinsmen and your kinsmen, that they may decide between us two. {38} "These twenty years I have been with you; your ewes and your female goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten the rams of your flocks. {39} "That which was torn of beasts I did not bring to you; I bore the loss of it myself. You required it of my hand whether stolen by day or stolen by night. {40} "Thus I was: by day the heat consumed me and the frost by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. {41} "These twenty years I have been in your house; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flock, and you changed my wages ten times. {42} "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had not been for me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has seen my affliction and the toil of my hands, so He rendered judgment last night."

After Laban had searched through all of Jacob's possessions and had not found anything, Jacob became angry. Laban had pursued him like an enemy. Laban had called him foolish. Laban had accused him of stealing his household idols. And Laban had searched through all of their possessions, and found nothing. Jacob had all of this that he could take. The Hebrew word is charah (Strong's H2734), which means to burn or kindle with anger. His anger had been kindled and he contended with Laban. He asks two questions? "What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me?"

Then, Jacob lays into Laban. He confronts him about searching through all their possessions and not finding anything. He tells Laban to set what he has found before his kinsmen and let them judge between the two. There was nothing to show.

Then Jacob defends his work and character for the last twenty years. He tells him that Laban had required him to bore all the losses from wild beasts or that had been stolen. He tells Laban he had worked in the heat in the day and the frost at night. He tells him that he has served him fourteen years for his two daughters and six years for the flocks that he now has. Then, he confronts Laban about changing his wages ten times. He summed it up by saying that if God had not been for him, Laban would have sent him away empty-handed. He said that God saw his affliction and rendered judgment.

Earlier, before they fled, he had told Rachel and Leah that Laban had cheated him and changed his wages ten times. Jacob has been offended and his anger has been kindling over a span of many years. He had been wronged many times, and yet had worked hard and served faithfully. But, he had had enough. I think that Jacob got some things off his chest.

#### 5. **Laban and Jacob's Covenant** (Gen 31:43-55)

(Gen 31:43-55) "Then Laban replied to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, and the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks, and 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? {44} "So now come, let us make a covenant, you and I, and let it be a witness between you and me." {45} Then Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. {46} Jacob said to his kinsmen, "Gather stones." So they took stones and made a heap, and they ate there by the heap. {47} Now Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, but Jacob called it Galeed. {48} Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me this day." Therefore it was named Galeed, {49} and Mizpah, for he said, "May the LORD watch between you and me when we are absent one from the other. {50} "If you mistreat my daughters, or if you take wives besides my daughters, although no man is with us, see, God is witness between you and me." {51} Laban said to Jacob, "Behold this heap and behold the pillar which I have set between you and me. {52} "This heap is a witness, and the pillar is a witness, that I will not pass by this heap to you for harm, and you will not pass by this heap and this pillar to me, for harm. {53} "The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge between us." So Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac. {54} Then Jacob offered a sacrifice on the mountain, and called his kinsmen to the meal; and they ate the meal and spent the night on the mountain. {55} Early in the morning Laban arose, and kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them. Then Laban departed and returned to his place."

After Jacob has laid into Laban, you would expect him to apologize and repent. Laban shows no remorse at all for cheating Jacob. He does not even respond to anything that Jacob has said. Instead, he tells Jacob that his daughters are still his daughters and the children are his children. He continues by saying the flocks are his flocks. Everything that they see belongs to him. The truth is that Rachel and Leah will always be his daughters and the children will always be his grandchildren. But, they do not belong to Laban. His daughters belong to Jacob. The children are Jacob's children and do not belong to Laban. The flocks do not belong to Laban. Jacob has worked hard and these flocks belong to Jacob, not Laban.

Next, Laban tells Jacob to make a covenant with him. There are different types of covenants. We saw in Genesis 2 a covenant between a man and a wife. We saw in Genesis 9 a covenant between God and Noah. We saw in Genesis 15 a covenant between God and Abraham. Covenants were agreements between two parties. Each party made oaths or vows of things that they agreed to do. There was a blessing on both parties, and there was also a curse if they did not keep the agreement. There were witnesses to covenants. There was a sacrifice because the covenant required blood. There was also a covenant meal. There was also a sign of the covenant. This was more or less a covenant of peace. Laban wanted Jacob to vow that he would not take any other wives and that he would not mistreat his wives. Third, Laban said that he would not cross over and do Jacob any harm, Jacob would not cross over and harm him. Jacob had no problem with any of these terms. He loved his wives and was certainly not going to mistreat them. Furthermore, he had no intentions of harming Laban. Laban was the one that had pursued Jacob like an enemy and boasted of his power to hurt Jacob. This was simply a covenant of peace and Jacob had no problem cutting this covenant.

So Jacob told the kinsmen to gather stones and then he heaped them together to make a pillar. The pillar was going to be the sign of the covenant that they had made. Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, which was Aramaic for "heap of witness." However, Jacob called it Galeed, which is Hebrew for "heap of witness." They ate a covenant meal together by the heap. Then, they made their vows before God, who would watch over this covenant to make sure that both parties lived up to their vows.

Laban made the vow before the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor. There are two men by the name of Nahor. Nahor was the father of Terah. Terah was the father of Abraham, Nahor, and Haran. Abraham's brother, Nahor, was named after his grandfather. (Gen 24:15, 24). Nahor had a son named Bethuel. Rebecca and Laban were Bethuel's children. Laban is going back into their family lineage and their descendants were brothers. (Some theologians have said that the God of Abraham was the true God and the god of Nahor was a pagan god that Laban is worshipping. Our text clearly states that Laban had household idols or gods, but we have no indication that Nahor was worshipping false gods. To me, it seems that Laban is referring back to the fact that they come from the same family and they had the same God.

After they offered the blood sacrifice, they called the kinsmen together and ate the covenant meal. Then, in the morning, Laban arose, kissed his sons and daughters and blessed them. Then, he departed and returned to his place.

### **Conclusion and Applications**

As I prayed about our passage, I asked the Lord about what we were to glean from it. We are reading the story of Jacob right now. It is a historical record of his life. It is good to know about Abraham, the father of our faith. It is good to know about Israel and the origination of the twelve tribes. But, the word of God is more than a story. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, we find that "*all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*" I asked the Lord about the profit that we were to receive from the passage. I asked, "What is the teaching, the reproof, the correction, or the training that we were to receive?" So, here is the answer that I believe the Holy Spirit revealed to me about our passage. Here are the applications for our lives.

First, in Romans 12:18, God tells us to be at peace with all men. Paul wrote, *"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."* In Hebrews 12:14, God tells us to *"Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."* We may not serve the same God. We may not have the same vision. We may not have the same mission statement. We may not share the same core values. We may not walk with them. We may not work with them. We may not live with them. We may not build with them. But, we can pursue and try to be at peace with all men. Jacob served the God of Abraham and Laban had household idols. Jacob was honest and lived by a different set of core values than Laban. Jacob could not continue working in this kind of relationship, where he was continually cheated. Jacob was going to go his separate way, but he was willing to make a covenant of peace with Laban. I have to learn to live in peace with those who have wronged me. I have to live at peace with those that don't share the same vision, mission, purpose, and core values. All of us have to learn to do our part to be at peace with all men. We must pursue peace with the Labans of the world.

Isaac made a covenant of peace with Abimelech. (Genesis 26:26-33) Paul and Barnabas had slightly different missions and core values. Paul required faithfulness to be on his team. Barnabas was willing to work with John Mark and help him become a faithful man. Paul would preach the gospel and work with men and help them to become faithful, but they could not join his team until they had proven to be faithful. Barnabas was willing to let someone who was not faithful serve on the team and learn to be faithful. Paul and Barnabas could not walk and build together, but they could be at peace with one another.

Second, God had a plan for Jacob. He was going to give the Promised Land to Jacob, so God's hand was in this move. God directs our paths. Jacob and his wives sensed it was time to move on, and God confirmed it to Jacob in a dream. In the difficult times in life, we need to seek God's leading and confirmation of our plans.

Third, in Genesis 16:13, Hagar discovered that God is a God who sees, or Elroi. God was watching over Jacob and was protecting him. He was not going to allow Laban to take advantage of him. When Laban changed his wages, God changed the type of animals that were born. When Laban pursued Jacob like an enemy, God intervened and warned him not to speak good or bad. In 2 Chronicles 16:9, we read, *"For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly protect those whose heart is completely His."* Give thanks to God for watching over your life. We need to do our part and make sure that our heart is completely His.

Perhaps this morning you feel that God has directed you to us. You like our vision. You like our mission. You like our core values. You want to build with us. You want to become a part of this body of believers. If God has led you to join our body, let this group of witnesses know this morning that you want to be in a covenant relationship with us.

## **Introduction**

1. **Jacob's Fleeing** (Gen 31:17-21)
2. **Laban's Pursuit** (Gen 31:22-25, Ex 14, Gen 14:14, Gen 2:24)
3. **Laban's Charges** (Gen 31:26-35)
4. **Jacob's Response** (Gen 31:36-42)
5. **Laban and Jacob's Covenant** (Gen 31:43-55, Gen 24:15, 24)

**Conclusion and Applications** (2 Tim 3:16-17, Rom 12:18, Heb 12:14, Gen 26:26-33, Gen 16:13, 2 Chron 16:9)