

Genesis 31: Jacob Departs

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This chapter begins at the point where Jacob has completed twenty years of service to Laban.

Jacob is now about 97 years old.

What circumstances makes it clear that it's time for Jacob to leave Haran? (Gen 31:1-3)

In addition to these circumstance, Jacob had already expressed the desire to leave. (Gen 30:25)

Jacob's experience in Haran demonstrates the principle of unequal outcomes—and how envy inevitably leads to strife.

Laban's sons were particularly indignant because they saw Jacob's gain as their loss. (Gen 31:1)

Laban's animosity toward Jacob had probably been stewing for years.

Laban was content when the material blessings were going his way, but grew increasingly discontent as Jacob's wealth began to multiply.

Laban's real problem was with God, not Jacob.

Jacob demonstrates prudence by calling his wives and making the case to leave. They will probably never see their father's family again.

How does Jacob make his appeal to Rachel and Leah?

Notice that Jacob describes the conflict as if it were between Laban and God. (Gen 31:5, 7, 9)

Jacob saves the ultimate appeal for last. He wants his wives to recognize the ultimate source of authority. (Gen 31:11-13)

Jacob's wives speak in one voice: we have no inheritance, we're regarded as foreigners, the wealth belongs to us. (Gen 31:14-16)

Jacob is already positioned for a hasty exit, while Laban is several days' journey in the other direction.

The text includes two warning signs in regard to Jacob's departure: the stolen idols and the deceptive manner of departure. (Gen 31:19-20)

How do we again see the theme of distrust and deception within Jacob's family?

When Laban pursues Jacob, it appears that he is prepared to take Jacob's family and livestock by force. (Gen 31:23-24)

What is God's warning to Laban? (Gen 31:24)

Laban confronts Jacob with a tone of **righteous indignation**—as if he is the more severely wounded party. (Gen 31:26-30)

Laban appeals to **custom** as his reason for protesting Jacob's hasty departure. (Gen 31:27)

Jacob's rationale for deceiving Laban was **fear**. (Gen 31:31)

Rachel's deception places her **life** in jeopardy. (Gen 31:32)

After Laban makes his search and finds nothing, Jacob unleashes twenty years of pent-up frustration. He knows that Laban wants to send him away **empty-handed**. (Gen 31:36-42)

Laban makes the absurd claim that all of Jacob's possessions **belong** to him. (Gen 31:43)

Laban has just enough **fear** of **God** not to overpower Jacob. Instead, he proposes a **covenant**. (Gen 31:29, 44)

The "mound of witness" represents God's **presence** which will watch out for Jacob and Laban after they part company. (Gen 31:48)

The occasion of the oath is commemorated with a **sacrifice** and a **feast** (in addition to the actual mound of rocks). (Gen 31:54)

The following morning, Laban went **home** and Jacob **continued** on his journey to Canaan. (Gen 31:55)

Over a period of twenty years, Jacob has learned that God is **protecting** him—through acts of divine providence, as well as by direct revelation.

Jacob's troubles are not yet over—after making peace with a ruthless father-in-law, Jacob must now face **Esau** on his return trip to Canaan. (Gen 32:3)